

Does Perceived Discrimination Shape PoC Identity OR Does PoC Identity Shape Perceived Discrimination? Yes, with Evidence From a 3-Wave Panel of Asian, Black, and Latino Adults

U.S. inter-minority relations are generally conflictual, with cooperation being sporadic and fleeting. However, two variables compactly explain when racially stigmatized groups effectively galvanize around common goals—perceived discrimination (PD) and self-identification as a person of color (PoC ID). Published experiments establish that PD heightens one's sense of PoC ID when racially stigmatized individuals view prejudiced actions as broadly shared by distinct groups. Yet these one-shot studies cannot rule out other viable pathways, including whether self-identification as a person of color also sharpens perceptions of discrimination. I consider three pre-registered hypotheses about this interface: 1) PD promotes stronger PoC ID; 2) PoC ID boosts PD; and 3) PD and PoC ID are reciprocally related. I evaluate these predictions using a unique 3-wave panel of 3,627 African American, Asian American, and Latino adults that straddled the 2024 presidential election. A suite of cross-lagged panel models indicate that *reciprocal* relations over time best characterize this interface between PD and PoC ID, with PoC identity yielding larger effects on perceived discrimination across racially stigmatized populations and (non-)electoral contexts. These dynamics encourage closer attention to a more complex interplay between these two crucial variables among *people of color* than prior research has found.

As the U.S. continues to racially diversify, obtaining deeper knowledge of political relations between various *people of color* (PoC) is increasingly urgent (Pérez 2021). The Census Bureau (2024) projects that by 2050, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and other non-Whites will become a majority of our nation's population. But as American history teaches us, demography rarely translates into power for these groups due to the unique forms of racism they endure (Masuoka and Junn 2013), including discrimination steeped in slavery's legacies for Black Americans and bigotry steeped in the aftermaths of (un)documented immigration for Latinos and Asian Americans (Omi and Winant 1986; Ngai 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008). These and other distinct forms of racial oppression put PoC in positions of varying disadvantage with respect to Whites (Zou and Cheryan 2017), preserving the latter's command of America's racial order and the prestige and resources attending it (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). These varied modalities of oppression also make it harder, not easier, for PoC to find common ground since their respective experiences can imply an *apples to oranges* comparison (Zou and Cheryan 2017). Alas, more than thirty years of research shows that U.S. inter-minority relations are generally conflictual (McClain and Karnig 1990; McClain 1993; Meier et al. 2004; McClain et al. 2007), with cooperation being fleeting (Kaufmann 2004; Wilkinson 2015; Benjamin 2017).

Under what conditions, then, does inter-minority conflict turn into sustained cooperation? Mounting research suggests one reliable answer is a heightened sense of identity as a *person of color* (Pérez 2021). Like other superordinate identities (Gaetner and Dovidio 2014), this mega-category accommodates multiple "minority" groups

under a single identity banner as PoC (see also Crowder 2025). This occurs via a *similarity principle*, where racially stigmatized adults, who share familiar (but not identical) forms of discrimination sense more commonalities between themselves, including a shared *person of color* identity (Cortland et al. 2017). Studies show that when Black and Latino adults believe they are discriminated against due to their alleged *inferiority* (e.g., poor, uneducated, criminal) (Zou and Cheryan 2017), their PoC identity is catalyzed (Rogbeer et al. 2026). Also, when Asian and Latino adults believe they are discriminated against for their alleged *foreignness* (e.g., culturally and linguistically alien), it boosts their identity as PoC (Pérez et al. 2023a).

This research program's cutting edge suggests that manipulating perceived discrimination (PD) heightens self-identification with the superordinate group, *people of color*, which then yields downstream political effects (Pérez et al. 2024). The latter include more unified support for policies that implicate racially stigmatized groups who are not one's own (e.g., harsher penalties for anti-Black hate crimes) (Rogbeer et al. 2025) and stronger turnout for presidential candidates deemed "friendlier" to PoC's interests (Rogbeer and Perez 2026; Pérez et al. 2026). These patterns replicate across Black (Rogbeer et al. 2025), Asian (Pérez et al. 2023a), Latino (Chin et al. 2023), Middle Eastern and North African (Eidgahy and Pérez 2023), and Multiracial adults (Pérez et al. 2025)(see also Cortland et al. 2017; Crowder 2025; Zou 2026).

Still, two methodological features of these solidarity experiments leave open questions about the link between PD and PoC identity. First, these one-shot experiments synchronously appraise the link between these variables within single

cross-sections. Thus, while these studies support the claim that PD catalyzes PoC ID (Pérez et al. 2024), they cannot yield evidence *against* alternative patterns between these variables, including that PoC ID sharpens PD (Ellemers et al. 1997) or that relations between PD and PoC ID are reciprocal (Doosje et al. 2002). Moreover, if taken at face value, experimental evidence on this existing PD → PoC ID pathway implies that it materializes instantaneously, thus overlooking that it can sometimes unfold gradually over time (Cole and Maxwell 2003), including across political contexts.

I throw new empirical light on these theoretical blind spots. Using social identity theory (Tajfel 1981) and its branches (Turner et al. 1987) – the hub of research informing prior PD experiments with PoC (Pérez et al. 2024) – I derive three dynamic hypotheses about this PD | PoC ID interface. Specifically, I hypothesize that while PD does heighten PoC ID (as published experiments show), it also durably elevates its mean levels going forward (Jasinskaga-Lahti et al. 2009; Badea et al. 2009). I also predict that elevated PoC identity levels can feed back to subsequently sharpen PD (Doosje et al. 2002).

I evaluate these hypotheses with three waves of panel data on African American ($n = 1,292$), Asian American ($n = 1,039$), and Latino ($n=1,296$) adults from the Survey Panel of People of Color (SPPoC), which started during 2024's presidential campaign and ended six months into the second Trump administration in 2025, after it unleashed visible political attacks against African Americans (e.g., firing of Black federal workers), Latinos (e.g., ICE deportation raids), and other racially stigmatized individuals (e.g., Peñaloza & Wang, 2025; Sullivan, 2025; Aleaziz, 2026; Garcia, 2026). These features make this panel ideal for studying the role of perceived discrimination, placing

researchers in a strong position to carefully study dynamic political relations between these key variables over time among *people of color* (e.g., Engelhardt et al. 2026).

Using cross-lagged panel models, I find that *reciprocal* relations over time best characterize the temporal flow between perceived discrimination and PoC identity. Although I replicate the established finding that perceived discrimination informs one's sense of PoC identity (Cortland et al. 2017; Pérez et al. 2024), I also find that stronger identity as a *person of color* sharpens one's discrimination perceptions, with this latter pathway being substantively larger. Moreover, the reciprocal relations between these variables are consistent across both political periods encapsulated by this panel: 1) an electoral period (August–December 2024) when Republican Donald Trump competed for the presidency against Democrat Kamala Harris; and 2) a governing period (January–July 2025) when the Trump administration visibly discriminated against African Americans, Latinos, and other PoC through various policies (e.g., federal workforce cuts; ICE raids). Finally, hewing to previous work, these observed dynamics are uniformly displayed by Asian, Black, and Latino adults, further reaffirming the coherence of the mega-group, *people of color* (Engelhardt et al. 2025). I discuss how these results introduce a new theoretical angle to our understanding about how – and on what grounds – racially stigmatized individuals form a sense of “we” as *people of color*.

Two New Twists to the Current Understanding About the PD | PoC ID Connection

What is the nature of relation(s) between perceived discrimination and self-identification as a *person of color*? Drawing on social identity theory and its offshoots (Tajfel 1981; Turner et al. 1987), conventional wisdom stipulates that perceptions of

discrimination activate one's sense of identity as a PoC, a pattern widely supported by experimental work done independently by political (Rogbeer et al. 2025) and social psychologists (Cortland et al. 2017; Zou 2026) (see Pérez et al.'s 2024 meta-analysis).

Matching the thickness of evidence on this pathway is the conceptual detail about the mechanism behind it (e.g., Leach et al. 2008; Cortland et al. 2017). This literature stipulates that all racially stigmatized individuals in the U.S. experience discrimination across their life courses (Masuoka and Junn 2013). Yet the modality of this discrimination varies from group-to-group (Dawson 1994; Kim 2000; García Bedolla 2005). For example, Black people are treated as *inferior* (Zou and Cheryan 2017), a condition rooted in the enslavement of African peoples forcibly brought to the U.S. In turn, Asian people are treated as perpetually *foreign* (Tuan 1998), stemming from the late 1800s arrival of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and other Asian immigrants – and their replenishment from 1965 onwards (Takaki 1989; Ngai 2004). This variance in discrimination foments invidious comparisons between racial outgroups (Tajfel 1981), hindering a sense of commonality between them. For example, whereas Black people's alleged *inferiority* locates them in the racial order's lowest station (Masuoka and Junn 2013), Asians are situated as a *model minority*, i.e., as less impertinent and more respectable than Black and Latino people, but not good enough to occupy the hierarchy's top position, despite their aggregate socio-economic successes (Kim 2000).

How can a sense of commonality and camaraderie possibly arise in these complicated situations? The answer starts with a *similarity principle* (Cortland et al. 2017). This is the psychological notion that when different individuals share comparable

experiences, perspectives, and tastes, they tend to like each other more, with this likeability encouraging closer affiliation between individuals. If America's racial order encourages people to see their own ingroup as patently distinct from other stigmatized outgroups (Sidanius and Pratto 1999), then a *similarity principle* defuses this *apples to oranges* comparison by stressing that both are *fruits*. Consequently, a high-skilled Asian immigrant and an undocumented Latino immigrant can, in principle, recognize they are both discriminated as perpetual *foreigners*, i.e., never *American* enough. Similarly, Black and Latino job applicants who do not receive callbacks from employers can also, in principle, infer they are discriminated against as *inferior* (e.g., uneducated, poor).

Furthermore, although not a part of current theorizing, it is important to note that rich variance exists *within* the relative stations occupied by racial "minorities" in the U.S. racial order (e.g., Zou and Cheryan 2017; Pérez et al. 2023b; Wong and Ramakrishnan 2023; Kim 2024). Consider America's organization of racial groups from dominant (Whites) to in-between (Asian Americans) to subordinate (African Americans) (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Kim 2003). This configuration heuristically teaches us that Asian American's position is estranged from that of Black Americans because White people treat Asians as a *model minority* with respect to Black folks (Tuan 1998). Yet this relative valorization of Asian people draws on an undifferentiated view of them, hiding meaningful socio-economic and political variation within this ingroup. For example, not all Asian Americans are college-educated, high-wage earners (Wong and Ramakrishnan 2023), which means some of them possess attributes that structurally place them closer to Black and Latino people as *inferior* (e.g., impoverished).

One implication here is that some overlap exists in the attributes that stigmatize different racial outgroups. And, under some conditions, this overlap solidifies. Consider here how the COVID-19 pandemic re-positioned Asian Americans (at least temporarily) from *model minorities* to a space closer to their *inferior* Black and Latino peers. During this public health crisis, some discourse – drawing on well-worn, racialized tropes about Asian people (Shah 2021) – stereotyped them as vectors of the coronavirus (Reny and Barreto 2021). This led to many Asians being treated as *inferior*, like Black and Latino people (Shah 2021), as evidenced by surges in anti-Asian violence and hate crimes (Han et al. 2023). My first hypothesis, then, is that distinct forms of PD increase one's self-identification as a *person of color* (H1) (the default prediction in this literature).

Nevertheless, there is an alternative perspective that is theoretically plausible but has not been fully developed until now. This is the idea that PD *follows from* one's sense of PoC identity – the opposite flow of influence proposed by (H1). The roots of this perspective are also in social identity theory but focus more on the *nature* of identities (e.g., Luhtanen and Crocker 1992; Ethier and Deaux 1994; Oakes et al. 1994; Sellers and Shelton 2003; for overviews, see Ashmore et al. 2004; Leach et al. 2008). Here, social identity theory research finds that the degree to which a category (e.g., *Latino*) is central to a person's sense of self matters for how one interprets the information environment and group-targeted stimuli in it. This variance in identity strength means most identities are stable, akin to deep-seated dispositions that structure one's postures toward the world (Ellemers et al. 1997). As but one example, consider that while xenophobic rhetoric regularly targets Latinos (e.g., Pantoja et al. 2001; Garcia Bedolla

2005; Gutierrez et al. 2019), only those Latinos who deem their pan-ethnic identity central to their self-definition will react strongly politically against these affronts (Pérez 2015, 2016)(see also Ethier and Deaux 1994). This dispositional nature of identities means that an elevated sense of self-identification as a *person of color* can cause one to detect more discrimination toward this superordinate group and its members, which is a chronic feature of PoC's environs (Masuoka and Junn 2013; Zou and Cheryan 2017). Thus, my second hypothesis (H2) is that stronger identity as a *person of color* generates more acute perceptions of discrimination.

Finally, a third theoretical perspective suggests that the pathway between PD and PoC identity is *reciprocal*. That is to say, PD and PoC ID mutually influence each other, with each variable serving as both cause and effect across time. This prospect starts by first recognizing that, although identities are generally stable, they are not impervious to change (Tajfel and Turner 1986). This means that even if an identity's test-retest correlations over time are high ($\geq .50$), they rarely reach 1.0. If they did, then it would indicate that one's ingroup identity is static and unyielding to changes in meaning and membership, which published work suggests is generally *not* the case (Leach et al. 2008; Egan 2020). Instead, comparable to how we understand U.S. partisanship, most identities are durable but can meaningfully shift in response to major changes in one's surroundings (e.g., Mackuen et al. 1989; Green and Yoon 2002; Dyck and Johnson 2022)(but see McCann and Jones-Correa 2020; Hopkins et al. 2023).

One major reason why identities are "sticky" and usually do not change dramatically is because they play fundamental roles in governing common challenges

in human life. All identities serve basic psychological needs for *certainty* (e.g., Hogg 2007) and *affiliation* (e.g., Brewer 1991). In a complex and confusing world, ingroup identities provide *certainty* by answering for individuals major questions like “who am I?”, “what do I believe?”, and “how should I behave?” Moreover, since humans are social animals, ingroup identities also satisfy *affiliative* needs by enhancing one’s sense of belonging with like-minded others, thus minimizing social isolation.

And yet, identities are still known to change (e.g., Egan 2020). We can trace these shifts to a process of *social categorization* (Tajfel 1981) and its definition of ingroup(s) and outgroup(s) (Turner et al. 1987). As Henri Tajfel’s pioneering experiments taught us long ago (Tajfel et al. 1971), the salience of ingroup identity hinges on the attributes (e.g., dot-counting) defining the relevant ingroup and outgroup(s) in a particular context (e.g., “dot counters” vs. “dot under-counters”). In U.S. mass politics, this categorization process is structured by institutions (2004; Mora 2014) and elites (Chandra 2012), which regularly expose racially stigmatized people to messages and actions that stress their inequality (Pérez and Vicuña 2023). These insights are consistent with Branscombe et al.’s (1999) rejection-identification model, which shows that racialized identities buffer people against discrimination’s threats to personal well-being (e.g., reduced self-esteem, helplessness) (see also Doosje et al. 2002).

Taken together, these insights imply that there is a give-and-take between identity and the downstream perceptions it influences, especially perceptions about racial discrimination. Accordingly, perceived discrimination increases one’s identification with a stigmatized group (Turner et al. 1984; Ellemers et al. 1997), while

these elevated identity levels subsequently guard against threats to a person's well-being produced by later discriminatory words and actions (Schmitt et al. 2002; Ramos et al. 2012). Thus, my third hypothesis (H3) is that one's self-identification as a *person of color* will increase one's perceptions of discrimination, with these sharpened perceptions of discrimination subsequently increasing the strength of one's identity as a *person of color*. Table 1 displays these three predictions. My pre-registration for these hypotheses is in section 1 of the supplementary material (SM.1).

Table 1. Three Pre-Registered Hypotheses about the PD | PoC ID Interface

H1: PD Heightens PoC ID (<i>default</i>)	H2: PoC ID Increases PD (<i>alternative</i>)	H3: PD and PoC ID are mutually related (<i>reciprocal</i>)
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Research Design

I evaluate my hypotheses with all three waves of the 2024-25 Survey Panel of People of Color (SPPoC), which interviewed Black, Latino, and Asian adults (N = 3,267). SPPoC was produced in partnership with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), which manages AmeriSpeak – a probability-based panel of respondents selected via stratified random sampling to enhance representativeness of targeted population(s). SPPoC interviews occurred in June 2024 (Wave 1), December 2024 (Wave 2), and July 2025 (Wave 3). I organize this structure into an electoral (W1-W2) and governing (W2-W3) period, per my pre-registration (SM.1).

Participants

After consenting to participate in Wave 1, NORC interviewed 1,292 Black, 1,296 Latino, and 1,039 Asian adults (N = 3,627). This sample is powered at 80% to detect

effect sizes of $d \sim .10$ or higher. Each wave fielded a 12-minute interview asking about *people of color* and their politics. Within this brief questionnaire, participants completed items measuring their perceptions of discrimination in both theorized domains, i.e., as *inferior* and *foreign*. Additionally, participants completed items about their self-identification as a *person of color*. Wave 1 also gathered data on participants' race/ethnicity, their identification with their racial/ethnic subgroup (i.e., identity centrality), partisanship, nativity, education, gender, and age. I use these covariates to gauge my results' sensitivity. I describe their coding in the next section. I note here that 36%, 29%, 36% of the sample is Black, Asian, and Latino, respectively. 60% of them self-identified as Democrats (19% as Republicans), with a mean age of 49 years. About 49% of participants are college-educated, 40% are male, and 70% are U.S.-born.

Measures

Each wave measured participants' self-identity as a *person of color* with two previously validated items ($r = .639, p < .001$) (Pérez, 2021; Leach et al. 2008). The first one asked participants to use a 7-point strongly (dis)agree scale to complete the statements, "The fact that I am a person of color is an important part of my identity" and "I often think of myself as a person of color." I combine replies into an averaged index ($M_{w1: pocID} = 5.044, SD = 1.704; M_{w2: pocID} = 4.885, SD = 1.756; M_{w3: pocID} = 5.001, SD = 1.729$).

I measured perceived discrimination as *inferior* and *foreign* (Zou and Cheryan 2017). I measured these perceptions, per domain, with two items each. Item order was randomized within each pair. The order of pairs was also randomized. Using a 7-point strongly (dis)agree scale, participants reported how often their own racial group is

discriminated against because they are perceived to be a) poor and b) uneducated. I scale these items ($r_{avg}=.854$) with higher values reflecting stronger PD-*inferior* ($M_{w1: inferior}=4.590$, $SD=1.769$; $M_{w2: inferior}=4.560$, $SD=1.737$; $M_{w3: inferior}=4.618$, $SD=1.738$). I repeated this to for PD-*foreign*, with participants using the same 7-point scale to report the extent to which their own racial group is frequently discriminated for c) having a different culture than most Americans; and d) speaking another language that is not English. I scale these items ($r_{avg}=.854$) so that higher values reflect stronger PD-*foreign* ($M_{w1: foreign}=4.750$, $SD=1.532$; $M_{w2: foreign}=4.744$, $SD=1.495$; $M_{w3: foreign}=4.795$, $SD=1.509$).

Crucially, I observe high convergent and discriminant validity between these two PD scales (Brown 2012). The correlation between these scales is robust but not redundant ($r_{w1}=.483$; $r_{w2}=.502$; $r_{w3}=.544$), suggesting each scale reflects a cousin concept (*convergent validity*) with clear empirical separation (*discriminant validity*). Faith in these scales is increased by their observed variation by race/ethnicity. Compared to Asian American adults ($M_{w1: Asian}=3.196$), levels of PD-*inferior* (Wave 1) are significantly higher among Black ($M_{w1: Black}=5.512$) and Latino ($M_{w1: Latino}=4.797$) adults, who are primarily discriminated against in this way (Zou and Cheryan 2017). Also, compared to Black adults ($M_{Black}=4.614$), levels of PD-*foreign* are higher among Asian ($M_{Asian}=4.833$) and Latino ($M_{Latino}=4.818$) adults, who are mainly discriminated on this basis (Zou and Cheryan 2017). These patterns also emerge in Waves 2-3.¹

¹ Wave 2 (PD-*inferior*): $M_{Asian}=3.191$, $M_{Latino}=4.753$, $M_{Black}=5.328$. Wave 2 (PD-*foreign*): $M_{Asian}=4.826$, $M_{Latino}=4.801$, $M_{Black}=4.617$. Wave 3 (PD-*inferior*): $M_{Asian}=3.282$, $M_{Latino}=4.801$, $M_{Black}=5.507$. Wave 3 (PD-*foreign*): $M_{Asian}=4.784$, $M_{Latino}=4.918$, $M_{Black}=4.681$.

Lastly, in terms of covariates (all measured in Wave 1), I created dichotomous variables for respondents who are Asian or Latino (with Black respondents as the contrast). In turn, I operationalize racial identity strength (Leach et al. 2008) with two scaled items completed on a 7-point strongly (dis)agree scale, namely, “I consider being [one’s racial/ethnic group] central to who I am as a person” and “When I refer to [one’s racial/ethnic group] people, I say *we* instead of *they*” ($M_{\text{racial ID}} = 5.315$, $SD = 1.503$). I leave partisanship in its raw 7-point scale, with higher values reflecting stronger Democratic identification ($M_{\text{Democrat}} = 4.967$, $SD = 1.821$). College education is coded 1 = bachelor’s degree or higher, 0 = all others. Female is coded 1 = female, 0 = all others. Foreign born is coded 1 = born outside the U.S., 0 = U.S.-born. I code age in years.

Analysis Plan

With three waves of data, on three populations, and two key variables (i.e., PD, PoC ID), I build a longitudinal structural equation model (SEM) that directly tests the dynamics between PD and PoC identity (Cole & Maxwell 2003). I use all available survey responses (i.e., no data exclusions) in a full information maximum likelihood (FIML) framework (Osborne & Sibley 2020), which yields estimates comparable to multiple imputation (MI) methods (Enders 2022). FIML treats attrition in my panel as missing at random (MAR), which implies that this missingness is a measured process (Little 2024), captured by the covariates I described above. This auxiliary data lets me predict missingness, while using all available survey responses to estimate model parameters in the presence of attrition. Thus, I assume my auxiliary variables capture the main sources of missingness in my panel.

In this FIML context, I estimate a three-wave model with single lags of each variable to account for the confounding effects of each construct's baseline levels (Georgeson et al. 2025), which puts causal inferences about these variables on sturdier ground. My model's structure (i.e., following the same people over time) also lessens concerns about confounding from time-invariant factors (i.e., quantities unlikely to change over time). I proceed by first assessing a core model that includes only my two main variables and their lags and then assess its sensitivity to covariate inclusion.

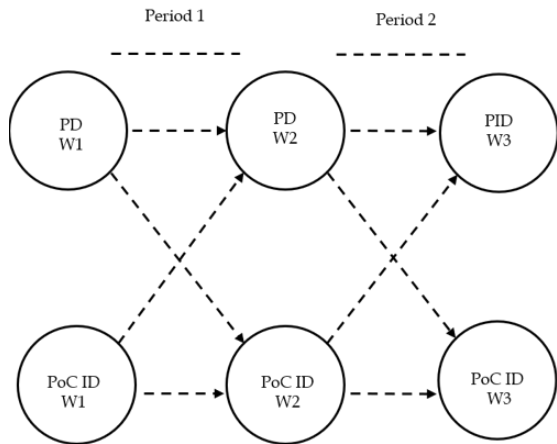
My model's most essential quantities are the regression coefficients capturing the paths from each form of PD (Wave 1) to PoC identity (Wave 2) – and from PD (Wave 2) to PoC identity (Wave 3). My model also includes pathways from PoC ID (Wave 1) to PD (Wave 2), and again from PoC ID (Wave 2) to PD (Wave 3). These proposed dynamics unfold across a period bracketed by the 2024 presidential campaign and President Trump's first six months in office, as described earlier.

Result 1: Racially Uniform and Stationary Dynamics Across Periods

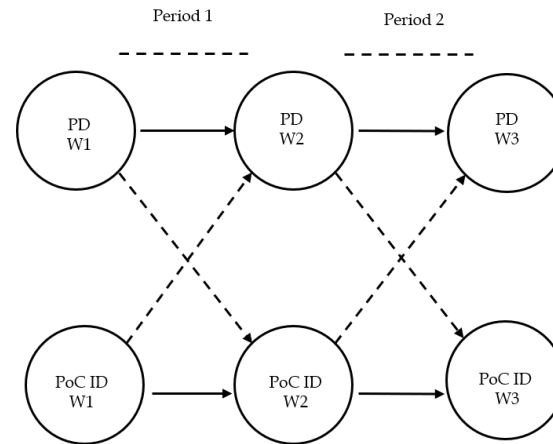
When estimating structural equation models in heterogenous contexts like mine, it is strongly advised to test for moderation by key variables (Little 2024). I consider here moderation by participants' race and period under analysis. To this end, I run a series of "bottom-up" models depicted in figure 1. The first model freely estimates its parameters across race and period. This initial model assumes its parameter estimates vary significantly by race and/or period: an assumption I then formally evaluate.

Figure 1. Nested Models Testing for Moderation by Race/Ethnicity and Period (Solid Paths are Constrained)

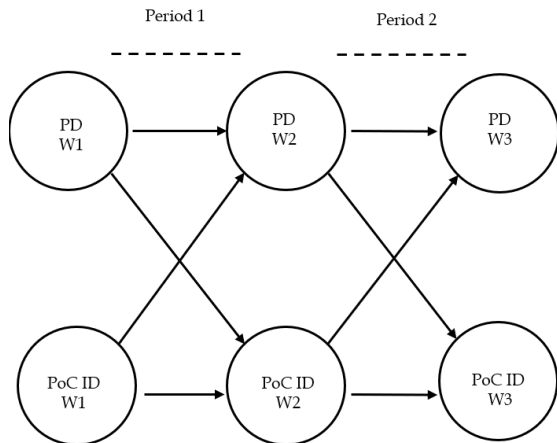
Model 1. Freely estimated across race and period



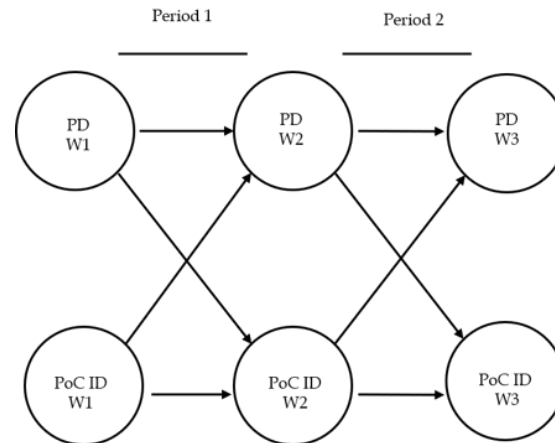
Model 2. Constrained AR paths across race



Model 3. Constrained AR and CL paths across race



Model 4. Constrained AR/CL paths across race and periods



To test this assumption, I estimate **model 2**, which adds one constraint to **model 1** – namely, that the auto-regressive (AR) paths between variables are statistically uniform across Black, Latino, and Asian participants (see figure 1, with constraints reflected by solid lines). If this constraint fails to significantly deteriorate my first model's fit, I keep **model 2** and proceed to estimate **model 3**, which constrains the AR *and* cross-lagged (CL) paths to equality across racial groups. If this constraint does not significantly reduce **model 2's** fit, I keep **model 3** and estimate **model 4**, which further constrains my main parameters to be stationary (i.e., similar over time). If **model 4** does not yield poor fit compared to **model 3**, I will have evidence that the longitudinal process reflected in my data is statistically similar across both periods under analysis.

Table 2 reports the fit statistics for the nested models I described above, allowing me to sequentially test model pairs against one another. My first model, which is freely estimated and has no constraints, yields a strong fit to my data. The CFI and TLI for this model approach the maximum of 1.00 (with values above .90 considered desirable).² In turn, the RMSEA, which favors simpler, more parsimonious models, also indicates excellent fit (values below .08 are deemed highly desirable). Finally, the SRMR, which reflects standardized residuals, falls below the recommended .10 range.

² In essence, a model's CFI/TLI compares one's model, which implies certain covariances between variables, to a model with no covariances between variables. Thus, the higher above .90 this fit statistic is, the better (Brown 2012).

Table 2. Model Fit for Bottom-Up Testing of Moderation by Race and Period

	1. Freely estimated	2. Equal AR paths	3. Equal AR + CL paths	4. Equal paths + Stationarity
CFI/TLI	.988/.943	.982/.944	.973/.945	.967/.942
RMSEA	.066 [.055, .078]	.065 [.057, .074]	.065 [.058, .072]	.067 [.060, .073]
SRMR	.034	.054	.070	.073
$\Delta X^2/df$	---	70.345/12*	100.177/17*	58.935/7*

Note: AR = auto-regressive or lagged parameter. CL = cross-lagged parameter.

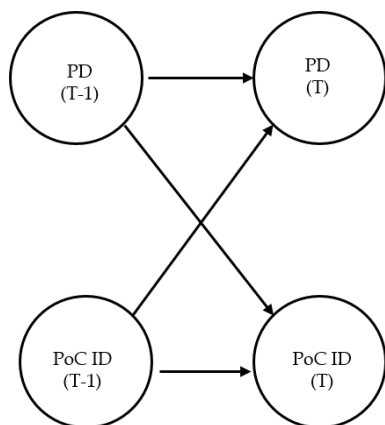
What happens to this model's quality when I place my first constraint by setting the AR paths to equality across racial/ethnic groups in my sample? Very little, actually. The CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR remain in highly desirable ranges, with the first three fit statistics failing to budge more than +/- .015 in either direction, per established recommendations for paired model comparisons (Cheung and Rensvold 2002). The only sign of some deterioration in model fit is the change in chi-square (ΔX^2), which is known to have an inflated Type 1 error rate in large samples like mine (>500) (Brown 2012). Thus, I do not draw inferences from it but report it for transparency's sake.

I observe more of the same when I set the AR *and* CL paths to equality across race/ethnicity in my third model, once again finding weak signs of deteriorated model fit. I therefore conclude that there is little meaningful moderation by race/ethnicity of respondents, which implies that my model operates in a statistically uniform way across race/ethnicity. Critically, this pattern aligns with other published research using

panel data with *people of color* (Engelhardt et al. 2025, 2026; Pérez et al. 2025), which further reaffirms this superordinate group's coherence.

My fourth nested model tests whether the relations between PD and PoC ID are stationary, which means that the dynamics between these variables are unchanging (i.e., similar) in the periods under analysis. Here, a look at relative changes in this model's CFI/TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR all suggest stationarity, with these fit statistics hardly shifting and remaining in their advised ranges compared to the model before it. My final model, then, estimates the relations between PD and PoC ID across racial groups and periods under analysis, which I examine in detail next. Figure 2 depicts this final parsimonious model. This model's simplicity is reflected in its estimation of dynamic relations between PD and PoC ID that are similar across racial/ethnic groups and across periods. These dynamics' similarity by race/ethnicity is captured by solid lines, while their stationarity is indicated by the presence of single pathways connecting present levels (T) of each variable with lags (T-1) of each one.

Figure 2. Final Model With Hypothesized PD | PoC ID Dynamic Operating Similarly across Racial/Ethnic Groups and Periods



Result 2: The Interface Between PD and PoC ID is Reciprocal Across Time

Having cleared the important matter of possible moderation by race/ethnicity and period in my model, what do the parameters of interest suggest about my three hypotheses? Table 3 contains the relevant coefficients to answer this question. I start by examining the AR paths connecting present levels of each variable to lags of itself – a key diagnostic of any construct’s stability over time (Little 2024). Table 3 shows that each form of PD (i.e., as *inferior*, *foreign*) is robust, but not unyielding in terms of change over time. For instance, across periods, prior levels of PD-*inferior* are significantly associated with present levels of these perceptions (.408, SE=.011, $p<.001$). Ditto for PD-*foreign*, which shows a comparable degree of stability (.414, SE=.014, $p<.001$). Consistent with people of color’s chronic stigmatization (Masuoka and Junn 2013; Zou and Cheryan 2017), these patterns suggest that perceptions of discrimination are somewhat “sticky,” but also adaptive. The latter implies that members of this mega-group are inclined to update their outlook toward *both* forms of systematic oppression, and not just the variety that characterizes their own subgroup’s station in the racial hierarchy.

When I turn to the AR paths connecting PoC ID levels over time, I find relatively stronger evidence of construct stability. Across periods, past PoC ID levels are robustly correlated with current levels of this attachment (.489, SE=.013, $p<.001$), aligning with the conceptualization of identities as steady postures that structure downstream opinions (Ellemers et al. 1997). Indeed, compared to both forms of perceived discrimination, PoC ID’s stability is stronger (.489 vs. .414) – an initial clue that this superordinate identity might shape (not just absorb) one’s perceived discrimination.

Table 3. SEM Results Evaluating the PD | PoC Identity Interface

Outcome _t	Predictor _{t-1}	B(SE)
CL paths		
PoC identity	Perceived discrimination (<i>inferior</i>)	.051 (.015)
PoC identity	Perceived discrimination (<i>foreign</i>)	.058 (.014)
Perceived discrimination (<i>inferior</i>)	PoC identity	.119 (.011)
Perceived discrimination (<i>foreign</i>)	PoC identity	.131 (.011)
AR paths		
PoC identity	PoC identity	.489 (.013)
Perceived discrimination (<i>inferior</i>)	Perceived discrimination (<i>inferior</i>)	.408 (.011)
Perceived discrimination (<i>foreign</i>)	Perceived discrimination (<i>foreign</i>)	.414 (.014)
CFI/TLI	.967/.942	
RMSEA [90%CI]	.067 [.060, .073]	
SRMR	.073	

Note: Estimator is FIML. Entries are coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All coefficients are significant at the 1% level or better.

Once I account for these substantial auto-correlations, what do the cross-lagged (CL) paths between variables indicate about my three hypotheses? Well, we learn that prior work is correct (H1), insofar as PD heightens one's sense of PoC identity (Cortland et al. 2017; Pérez et al. 2024). Hewing to this published research, I find that lagged perceptions of discrimination (as *inferior*) inform one's subsequent levels of self-identification as a *person of color* (.051, SE=.015, $p<.001$), with a substantively comparable pathway between perceived discrimination (as *foreign*) and one's later levels of PoC ID (.058, SE=.014, $p<.001$). These CL coefficients reflect moderate effect sizes in panel models like mine (Orth et al. 2024), with conventional thresholds set as .03 (small), .07

(medium), and .12 (large). Indeed, these CL coefficients fall in the 40th percentile of a validated distribution of cross-lagged effects for CLPMs (Orth et al 2024), further underlining their relative modesty.

Nevertheless, independently of this established PD→PoC ID pathway, I also find evidence of reverse relations between these constructs. This pattern supersedes (H1) and (H2) and provides clear support for (H3). More specifically, previous PoC identity levels significantly increase one's perceptions of discrimination as *inferior* (.119, SE=.011, $p<.001$), with a comparable relationship between past PoC ID levels and later levels of PD as *foreign* (.131, SE=.011, $p<.001$). Both CL coefficients for PoC identity's downstream influence on PD (.119, .113) are relatively larger than those for PD's effects on self-identification as a *person of color* (.051, .058). Indeed, the CL coefficients for PoC ID's downstream effects on both PD forms are considered large (Orth et al. 2024), as they rank in the 70th percentile a validated distribution of cross-lagged effects for CLPMs (Orth et al 2024). Thus, while I observe reciprocal relations between PD and PoC ID, it is also the case that this reciprocity bends more in favor of PoC identity structuring one's perceptions of discrimination as *inferior* and *foreign*.

Result 3: The Observed PD | PoC ID Interface is Robust to Covariates

Before discussing my findings' implications, I address one remaining empirical question. For all the clarity in terms of my model's findings, it is still the case that the results I just discussed were generated by a panel model that errs on the side of parsimony. However, even if parsimonious models are methodologically prized by social scientists (e.g., Ockham's razor), it is still reasonable to wonder how sensitive

these results are to covariates that address panel attrition and account for the internal heterogeneity of the mega-group, *people of color*. Thus, I re-estimate table 3's model by including the suite of covariates discussed earlier: racial/ethnic status, racial identity strength, partisanship, nativity, college education, gender, and age. The first three are especially critical, since they provide a further test of heterogeneity in a model that pools across participants' race/ethnicity and period under analysis.

Table 4. Assessing Coefficient Sensitivity to Covariate Inclusion (with 95% CIs)

CL path	Original Coefficient (no covariates)	New Coefficient (covariate-adjusted)
PD _{inferior} → PoC ID	.051 [.022, .080]	.041 [.012, .071]
PD _{foreign} → PoC ID	.058 [.030, .087]	.038 [.009, .067]
PoC ID → PD _{inferior}	.119 [.098, .141]	.089 [.065, .113]
PoC ID → PD _{foreign}	.131 [.109, .152]	.097 [.073, .121]

Note: Estimator is FIML. Entries are coefficients with 95% confidence intervals in brackets.

Table 4 reports the CL coefficients from my parsimonious model, the new estimates from my covariate-adjusted model, and their corresponding 95% confidence intervals. Two clear patterns emerge to reassure us about my original inferences. That is, although there is slight attenuation in each coefficient's size, there is also substantial overlap between the confidence bands for each parsimonious and covariate-adjusted

estimate. Thus, I infer once again that the interface between PD and PoC identity is best characterized by reciprocity (i.e., they mutually influence each other over time).

Implications

In the study of U.S. interminority relations, two key variables have shaped how we understand the prospects for coalition-building between *people of color*, namely, perceived discrimination and self-identification as a *person of color*. In this literature, PD triggers one's sense of PoC identity –a construct known to have downstream effects on political attitudes and behavior (e.g., Pérez et al. 2024). Against this backdrop, my paper explored the extent to which PoC identity can also shape perceptions of discrimination, finding that there is substantial reciprocity between these variables. What are the implications of PD and PoC ID mutually reinforcing themselves over time?

One major implication is that this dynamic give-and-take between these variables deepens our understanding about the content of identifying as a *person of color*. If, as I explained earlier, all identities answer questions like “who am I?”, “what should I think?”, and “how should I behave?”, then my results suggest that one of the quintessential attributes of *people of color* is keen sensitivity to various forms of discrimination. Critically, my findings show that this sensitivity is broad rather than narrowly tied to only those modalities of discrimination that one's racial/ethnic subgroup experience (*inferior, foreign*). This is important for at least two reasons.

First, it suggests that the *similarity principle* responsible for heightened affiliation between diverse racially stigmatized individuals activates – not only a shared sense of identity, as prior work finds – but also shared perceptions and realities. This dynamism

between PD and PoC ID is critical because it shows one way that these motley groups and their experiences are fully accommodated and cemented with the superordinate group, *people of color*, without compromising its coherence. Indeed, my findings indicate that across Black, Latino, and Asian individuals, both manifestations of perceived discrimination (i.e., *inferior*, *foreign*) matter to them. This suggests that, notwithstanding the deeply rooted stations of Black, Latino, and Asian people in the U.S. racial hierarchy (Zou and Cheryan 2017), there is more overlap in the types of discrimination one perceives toward one's own racial ingroup.

Second, the observed reciprocity between PD and PoC identity illuminates how members of groups, who inhabit diametric positions in the racial order (e.g., African Americans and Asian Americans), can still see themselves as part of the same identity "team." This is an important insight because previous studies primarily show that political unity emerges among groups who are similarly discriminated against as either *inferior* or *foreign* (Pérez et al. 2024). By establishing that unity in U.S. interminority politics can occur *across* various domains of discrimination rather than just *within* them, my results help open a new theatre of theory-building to better understand the range of attributes and experiences that a *similarity principle* can capitalize on.

Before wrapping up, let me highlight one last implication from my results. In settling on a final model, a series of diagnostics demonstrated, quite clearly, that the give-and-take between PD and PoC identity is stationary across political contexts (i.e., similar across periods). This matters for how we understand the character of perceived discrimination among *people of color*. From one perspective, it is remarkable that

perceptions of discrimination did not peak even more in the period encompassing President Donald Trump's first six months in office as our 47th president – a period when his administration has governed based on publicly attacking various people of color (e.g., African Americans, Latinos), rolling back some of their hard-earned political gains (e.g., curbing civil rights), and unleashing literal violence against many of them (e.g., ICE deportation raids). Alas, one would not be faulted for expecting perceived discrimination to play an outsized role in this key period.

That is not what my results showed. Instead, my model revealed a continuity of a process that was already in play during the presidential campaign, a dynamic where PD was informing one's sense of PoC identity but also being shaped by it. I think this underlines the staying power of racial oppression in the U.S. during a time when many White adults believe race no longer matters for the life chances of racial “minorities” (e.g., Tesler 2016; Bonilla-Silva 2017). The chronicity of these perceptions underscores just how pervasive and multi-faceted racial discrimination continues to be. Indeed, my results imply that perceptions of discrimination are not recalled by individual people of color as distinct episodes that are stored in long-term memory and recalled as prompted by researchers. Instead, my findings suggest these perceptions have a character resembling an online tally (e.g., Lodge et al. 1989; Lodge et al. 1995; Lausten and Petersen 2020). That is, they consist of a running average based on the accumulation of regular experiences with discrimination – a number so extensive for PoC that they “discard” the details even as their minds continue to keep score. This is a vindication of *people of color* and their lived experiences in the present United States: a nation that,

despite its modernity, still struggles with furnishing racially stigmatized people with true equality.

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