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Solidarity between U.S. people of color: Synthesizing evidence, highlighting challenges, and proposing actionable solutions

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Abstract

Mounting research establishes that solidarity between U.S. people of color (PoC) is triggered when a racially stigmatized ingroup believes they are discriminated similarly to another outgroup based on their alleged *inferiority* or *foreignness*. This heightened solidarity then produces political opinions and behaviors that benefit stigmatized outgroups who are not one's own—for example, Black adults become more pro-Latino, Asian adults become more pro-Black, and Latino adults become more pro-Asian. This essay organizes, discusses, and synthesizes the overflowing evidence on this solidarity mechanism, paying special attention to its generality across stigmatized groups and political settings. The essay then highlights major pending challenges and opportunities to learn more about U.S. inter-minority solidarity, emphasizing rival explanations, complementary pathways, and methodological pluralism. In parallel, this latter discussion illustrates the advantages of creating greater conceptual and theoretical synergy with comparativist research on ethnic identities and political conflict in nations across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Western Europe. Finally, the article outlines new research agendas to deepen our understanding about U.S. inter-minority politics, paying special attention to *intra*-group processes that regulate solidarity's vitality in an uncertain, complex, and threatening polity.

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> Perhaps the turning point in one's life is realizing that to be treated like a victim is not necessarily to become one.
>
> —James Baldwin.

Since its birth in 1776, the U.S. has been a multiracial polity—a fact boldly underlined by the presence of Indigenous peoples before European arrival and the forced transplanting of African slaves to the original 13 colonies by many of these same Europeans (Marx, 1998). As the U.S. grew westward, European settlers legally and extra-legally subjugated other non-White peoples, appending them, but never fully incorporating them, to the fledgling nation. This included Mexican families stranded when their own country ceded its northern territories to the U.S. in its war of expansion (Acuña, 1972); and it included Chinese and other Asian immigrants who industrialists recruited to build U.S. infrastructure (Takaki, 1989). Of course, protagonists from other distant lands exist in this flow of U.S. racial history, including Middle Easterners and North Africans (Lajevardi, 2020; d'Urso, 2026). But a major throughline across this span is that non-White populations have been comparatively small, regionally concentrated, and often strangers to each other, allowing Whites to tightly command America's racial hierarchy for over 250 years (Masuoka & Junn, 2013).

This reality is now rapidly transforming—and it is unclear whether we will return to the earlier *status quo*. In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau heralded an impending demographic shift in America's racial composition. For the first time, various people of color—African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and many others—would comprise a demographic majority, eclipsing non-Hispanic Whites by 2042 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Almost as dramatically as this news, a convoy of carefully controlled experiments by social psychologists documented how exposure to this forecast caused White Americans to react in politically exclusionary ways. News of this *racial shift*, we soon learned, caused Whites to feel threatened (Brown et al., 2022; Craig & Richeson, 2014a), with anger and fear driving their exclusionary reactions (Outten et al., 2012). News of this *racial shift* also heightened Whites' prejudice toward Black, Asian, and Latino people; increased pro-White biases; and triggered ideologically conservative and politically extreme attitudes among White adults (Bai & Federico, 2021; Craig & Richeson, 2014a, 2014b). In turn, political scientists have corroborated many of these trends at scale in the U.S. mass public, with Whites viewing themselves as an aggrieved racial group, actively engaged in backlash against people of color through (non-)electoral means and hostile attitudes (Kinder & Kam, 2009; Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Jardina, 2019). Consider here the first election of Republican Donald J. Trump as U.S. president (Sides et al., 2018): an outcome driven by simmering White anxiety over a destabilized racial hierarchy and their place in it. Alas, it is no coincidence that Trump's reactionary brand of racial politics found fertile ground immediately following Barack Obama's two terms as the United States' first Black president (Tesler, 2016).

Within this avalanche of findings, however, one major question received sparser attention. If White people reacted with alarm and resentment to the demographic tide of people of color (PoC), what did African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and other PoC think about this *racial shift*? A common assumption is that PoC are already politically unified in lockstep, colluding to unseat White people from their loosening perch in the racial order (Knowles et al., 2022). But this view of PoC as allies engaged in sustained collective action to reach shared goals is the exception, not the rule. A panoramic view of more than 30 years of political science research teaches us that the most common outcomes in U.S. inter-minority relations are tension, conflict, and occasional violence—with cooperation being sporadic (e.g., Gay, 2004; Kim, 2003; Krupnikov & Piston, 2016; McClain, 1993; McClain et al., 2006; Pérez, Vicuña, et al., 2024).

This essay narrates the remarkable interdisciplinary effort between social and political psychologists to grasp the conditions under which U.S. people of color build coalitions to reach mutual goals. This knowledge is steeped in a firm understanding of PoC's psychology as members of distinctive subgroups with shared experiences as racially stigmatized populations. One

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defining feature of this literature is its rootedness in a compact set of psychological principles from social identity theory (SIT) and its offshoots to explain, not only why PoC do not "naturally" get along, but also how they form alliances under key conditions (Ellemers et al., 1997; Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1987).

By this essay's end, I hope that readers will (a) better appreciate the social and political psychology of coalition-building between U.S. people of color; (b) feel more informed about the varied empirical approaches used to evaluate this psychology; (c) become more sensitized to the psychological and structural obstacles working against PoC solidarity; (d) learn about major conceptual, theoretical, and methodological blinds spots in this work; and (e) leave excited about the synergistic prospects between this research and cross-national insights to invigorate the study of coalition-building between stigmatized outgroups in the U.S. and beyond.

STIGMATIZATION: THE BACKGROUND CONCEPT TO SOLIDARITY-BASED POLITICS

My essay's focus is a solidarity-based process that drives political coalitions between non-White individuals in the U.S. Key to understanding it is the generic concept of *stigmatization*: the *raison d'être* of these cross-racial alliances. Stigmatization is the social devaluation of attribute(s) possessed by outgroup members. These attributes do not have to be widely prevalent to stigmatize an outgroup(s). They do, however, need to be credibly linked to them.[1] Consider the stigmatization of Muslims, a religious outgroup in the U.S. (Lajevardi, 2020), Europe (Adida et al., 2016), and other parts of the globe (Horowitz, 1985; Wilkinson, 2005). Two attributes tagged to this outgroup are *terrorist* and *violent*. Although the number of violent terrorists who are Muslim is miniscule as a fraction of this religious outgroup, this trivially low incidence has not stopped the stigmatization of Muslims along these and related lines in (non-)U.S. settings (e.g., Dancygier, 2017; Maxwell, 2012; Oskooii, 2020).

Stigmatization operates by publicly highlighting the salience of a real category (*Muslim*) and socially undermining its worth through attribute(s) that are traced to some Muslims but applied to all their co-religionists. A similar stigmatization process occurs for Asian Americans, where the attribute, *foreigner*, undermines the public worth of the category, *Asian* (note: only 54% of all Asian Americans are immigrants) (Krogstad & Im, 2025; see also Kim, 1999; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Even though an outgroup's devaluation is alleged by dominant ingroup members, stigmatization operates as if this devaluation is, in fact, real and objective. This shapes perceptions about stigmatized individuals—perceptions that are held by ingroup *and* outgroup members. It also structures the life chances of stigmatized outgroups (Lee et al., 2024).[2]

TWO MAJOR TRIBUTARIES: THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF PEOPLE OF COLOR

The category, *people of color*, is the basis of a stable superordinate identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014), complete with measurable differences in strength from low to high

[1]For further insight into the psychology of stigma, see Crocker and Major (1989). For evidence of stigmatization's political effects, see Pérez (2015a) and (Pérez, 2015b).

[2]Stigmas range from visible (e.g., skin tone) to invisible (e.g., sexual orientation). The visible type is harder to conceal or eliminate. For additional insight into the (in)visibility of stigmas and their psychological effects, see Major and O'Brien (2005) and Quinn and Earnshaw (2013).

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(Engelhardt et al., 2026a; Pérez, 2021), which draws on the shared stigmatization of U.S. racial outgroups.[3] This *person of color* identity (PoC ID) is not just a momentary affinity between members of different racially stigmatized outgroups. It is a major entry in the long-term memories of racially stigmatized individuals in the U.S., capable of being primed by political stimuli, just like other durable ingroup attachments, racial or not (Lodge & Taber, 2013).

This superordinate PoC identity is an ideal vehicle for coalition-building because it psychologically threads together multiple racially stigmatized outgroups into one larger but politically coherent ingroup (Cortland et al., 2017). This unity and perceived similarity between outgroups is facilitated by this superordinate category's ability to accommodate various racial subgroup identities (e.g., as *Black*, *Latino*, *Asian*), which is accomplished through a nesting mechanism (Pérez, 2021). When the category, *person of color*, is made politically salient, one's subgroup identity collapses under the broader umbrella that is this superordinate ingroup. This "nesting" is facilitated by basic social identity principles (Tajfel, 1981), whereby members of a salient ingroup self-stereotype themselves as *people of color* (Turner et al., 1987), thereby reducing perceived differences between ingroup members (e.g., *Black Americans*, *Latinos*, *Asian Americans*), while sharpening this ingroup's perceived distance from an outgroup (e.g., *Whites*).

Prior to the formal study of PoC ID, systematic knowledge about U.S. racially stigmatized outgroups had accumulated in divergent fashion, with political scientists formulating bespoke theories for specific outgroups. This manifested most clearly in the emergence of exciting subfields, such as Black politics, Asian American politics, Latino politics, and others (e.g., Dawson, 2011; Masuoka & O'Brien, 2026; McClain & Garcia, 1993; Pérez & Cobian, 2024; Wong & Ramakrishnan, 2023). The upshot to this burgeoning nuance is that political scientists have a highly granular understanding of the politics of these assorted populations. But one major cost to these unique frameworks is that we have fewer unified theories that can explain the political behaviors of assorted outgroups with the *same* principles and mechanisms. Hence, the study of *people of color* can be understood as a truly interdisciplinary effort between social and political psychologists, who have developed a new framework that anticipates when political unity is achieved amidst racial and ethnic heterogeneity.

People of color from social psychology's vantage point

Beginning in the early 2010s, two pioneering social psychologists—Maureen Craig and Jennifer Richeson—began grappling in earnest with the implications of the impending *racial shift* for African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other racially stigmatized outgroups in the U.S.—the drivers of this demographic phenomenon (Craig & Richeson, 2014b, 2016; Richeson & Craig, 2011; for a conceptual review, see Zou, 2026). Drawing on social identity theory and its branches, this pair of psychological scientists made two related and spirited claims. The first is that this *racial shift* foreshadowed some of the "right" ingredients for ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (Brewer, 1999; Hogg, 2005; Horowitz, 1985), which would produce fragmentation rather than unity of any kind between racially stigmatized outgroups (Craig & Richeson, 2016). In this destabilized racial order, where various stigmatized groups are uniquely stationed and discriminated against (Masuoka & Junn, 2013;

[3]A superordinate identity is produced by re-categorizing outgroups as members of a shared, higher-order ingroup. One example involves *Americans*, which re-categorizes racial outgroups (e.g., *Blacks*, *Whites*) as members of a larger ingroup held in common (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014). Superordinate identities are often successful at minimizing intergroup conflicts, but not always (Wenzel et al., 2007).

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Zou & Cheryan, 2017), the prospects for inter-minority cooperation are dimly low, with members of these groups facing strong incentives to "take care of one's own" (Goh & Douglas, 2025; Richeson & Craig, 2011).

Second, this duo claimed that there existed a handful of mechanisms, also within SIT's wheelhouse, that could prevent, blunt, or surpass some of these thornier inter-minority challenges (Craig & Richeson, 2012; Richeson & Craig, 2011; see also Zou, 2026). Principal among these was making explicit connections between one's ingroup and other stigmatized outgroups (Craig & Richeson, 2016). This recommendation leveraged a *similarity principle*, the notion that when two or more individuals share similar tastes, memories, experiences, etc., they tend to like and favor each other more (e.g., Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007; Heider, 1958; Maner et al., 2002; see also Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Schwarz, 1994). Thus, for example, highlighting how discrimination against one's ingroup is comparable (though not identical) to discrimination against another stigmatized outgroup prompts the former to express more favorable attitudes and feelings toward the latter (Cortland et al., 2017). This yielded the early conclusion that perceived *similarity* was a key trigger behind a generic identity as "disadvantaged racial minorities," capable of minimizing conflict between racially stigmatized outgroups.

PoC identity and political science

Roughly at the same time as social psychology, political scientists reignited their own scholarly interest in coalition-building between Black, Latino, and Asian Americans (e.g., Benjamin, 2017; Sirin et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2015). Since the early 1990s, Paula McClain and her collaborators have firmly established that across various municipal and regional U.S. contexts, inter-minority relations are generally characterized by tension, conflict, and sometimes violence, with cooperation being relatively sporadic (e.g., McClain, 1993; McClain et al., 2007, 2011; McClain & Karnig, 1990; Meier et al., 2004). Against this backdrop, new scholarship revisited the question of inter-minority coalitions from a political psychology perspective (Pérez, 2021). Seizing on some of the previously discussed insights (e.g., Cortland et al., 2017), this work firmly established that the superordinate identity which social psychologists described as "disadvantaged minorities" actually has a more specific name, with unique content and directives that can unify the politics of groups as variegated as African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos (Pérez, 2021; see also Sirin et al., 2021). This is a superordinate identity as *people of color* (PoC ID).

PoC ID is conceptualized as a mega-category (cf. Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014; Transue, 2007) that collapses various subgroups and which, when activated (e.g., via political appeals to this category), can mobilize large swaths of Black, Asian, and Latino Americans. As a label originating among Black people and for Black people (Pérez, 2021), African Americans gradually extended this PoC banner to other non-White populations in the U.S. and in third world contexts (Pérez, 2021). Specifically, Black journalists applied this PoC label to populations who are racially oppressed and discriminated against, either currently or in the past; who believed in the existence and active dismantling of structural racism; and who appeared to share progressive political views with Black adults, primarily in the form of Democratic partisanship (Pérez, 2021; Starr, 2023). Thus, just like other groups, the category *people of color* has a clear central tendency or prototype (i.e., Black people), accompanied by dispersion around this "mean" (i.e., Latinos, Asian Americans), a point we will further discuss later (cf. Danbold & Huo, 2015; Hogg & Hardie, 1992; Ocampo-Roland, 2025; Turner et al., 1987). Like other ingroup attachments, PoC identity is also characterized by a normative belief system among its members, which can be broadly characterized as *anti-racist*, that is, political outlooks and actions aimed at dismantling racial and ethnic disparities and power imbalances (Pérez, 2021;

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see also Abdelal et al., 2006; Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Anoll, 2022; Haslam et al., 1996; Oakes et al., 1994).

Two major lessons emerged from this sustained effort. First, a trove of survey and experimental data established that stronger levels of PoC identity are robustly associated with PoC support for policy proposals that favor specific people of color (e.g., Black and Latino people), underlining the political utility of PoC ID (Pérez, 2021). Second, despite being able to unify the political power of various racially stigmatized outgroups under a common banner of identity, the strength of this mega-group in political settings is vulnerable to the unique experiences, histories, and aspirations of its component groups (cf. Wenzel et al., 2007). That is, when *people of color* seek to maneuver through politics in a coherent and unified way, they feel pressure to set aside their distinctive needs as African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, etc. for the sake of the shared "team" (e.g., Goh & Douglas, 2025; Pérez, 2021; Pérez, Lee, et al., 2024; Rogbeer et al., 2026). This dynamic is one Achilles heel of a mega-group like *people of color* due to the loose correlations between each subgroup's varied position in the U.S. racial order and experience with discrimination (Zou & Cheryan, 2017).

Interdisciplinary synthesis through PoC solidarity

With two lanes of research on people of color running side by side, it was perhaps only a matter of time before both merged to produce truly interdisciplinary insights, with social and political psychologists synthesizing and extending each other's work (Zou, 2026). This is best reflected in ongoing efforts to study solidarity between PoC as a key pathway behind inter-minority coalitions in U.S. politics.

To understand this pathway, we must distinguish PoC identity from PoC solidarity. PoC ID captures the degree to which the category, *people of color*, is central or crucial to one's sense of self. Accordingly, greater identity strength leads individuals "to be sensitive to ingroup events and intergroup events (Leach et al., 2008, p. 147)." Indeed, as Ellemers and team (Ellemers et al., 1997, p. 618) observe, "strength of ingroup identification can be seen as an important cause of people's inclination to engage in…intergroup behavior." Consequently, PoC ID is—in conceptual and empirical terms—a relatively stable disposition that sharpens attention toward downstream attitudes and actions involving an ingroup. Table 1 displays validated self-reported measures to appraise the strength of PoC ID (Pérez et al., 2025).

Solidarity, in turn, is a byproduct of identity strength (Ellemers et al., 2002). It entails behavioral commitment to an ingroup, which involves coordination with fellow ingroup members. Solidarity is "associated with approaching the ingroup and group-based activity" (Leach et al., 2008, p. 147). This emphasis on personal investment in behavioral coordination with

TABLE 1 Validated self-reported measures of PoC identification and PoC solidarity.

PoC identification	PoC solidarity
1. The fact that I am a person of color is an important part of my identity (*Important ID*)	4. I feel solidarity with people of color, which include Black, Asian, and Latino people (*Feel bond*)
2. Being a person of color is an important part of how I see myself (*See myself*)	5. The problems of Black, Latino, Asian, and other people of color are similar enough for them to be allies (*See allies*)
3. I often think about the fact that I am a person of color (*Think about*)	6. What happens to people of color in this country has something to do with what happens in my life as a [Black, Asian, Latino, Multiracial] person (*linked fate*)

Note: All items are answered on a scale from 1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree. For convenience, brief item labels are provided parenthetically in italics. See Pérez et al. (2025) for item validation.

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fellow ingroup members means solidarity is more malleable than identity strength because it is highly dependent on the intergroup context: who is the outgroup (Tajfel, 1981); how are they a threat to the ingroup (Branscombe et al., 1999); and what menu of options exists to minimize or eliminate that threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)? Characterized this way, solidarity is informed by perceptions of common (Campbell, 1958) or linked fate (Dawson, 1994), which is reflected in validated self-reports of PoC solidarity (e.g., *linked fate* item in Table 1). If and when PoC solidarity is catalyzed by identity and generates downstream *political* effects on attitudes and behavior, we can think of this camaraderie as manifesting group consciousness, since it encourages racially stigmatized outgroups to infer that "collective action is the best means by which the group can improve its status and realize its interests" (McClain et al., 2009, p. 476) (e.g., item *see allies* in Table 1).

The original point of departure for the research connecting PoC identity and solidarity as a coalition-building process involves two specific articles. First, Richeson and Craig (2011) reasoned in detail about the many pressures and challenges that complicate the production of inter-minority coalition-building in a context characterized by demographic growth and a destabilized racial order with widespread uncertainty over the current and future position of one's own racial ingroup. Second, Zou and Cheryan (2017) formulated a new framework to clarify the fundamental nature of America's racial order, dubbed the Racial Position Model (RPM).

The RPM's power is its ability to account for the distinct positions of (non-) Whites in the U.S. racial order (see also Kim, 2003; Masuoka & Junn, 2013). The RPM stipulates that the unique positions of White people and PoC in America's racial order depend on how *foreign* and *inferior* an ingroup is perceived to be. As Figure 1 reveals, Whites are perceived as the most *superior* and *American* group in the U.S. racial hierarchy. However, although Asian and Latino people are each stereotyped as *foreign*, Asians are considered a more *superior* group than Latino and Black individuals. Moreover, although Black people are stereotyped as a more *American* minority than Latinos and Asians (Carter, 2019), both Black and Latino people are deemed more *inferior* than Asians, as highlighted by the *model minority* myth—the view of Asians as "well-to-do" and less impertinent than Blacks and Latinos (Kim, 2003). Thus, the RPM teaches us why, perceptually, various racial outgroups may feel divided, while also hinting at possible pathways to bring various people of color together.

This latter implication became a launching pad for a series of national, large-scale experiments on the triggers and political consequences of PoC solidarity (Chin et al., 2023; Eidgahy & Pérez, 2023; Kim et al., 2025; Pérez, Robertson, et al., 2023; Pérez, Lee, et al., 2024; Pérez et al., 2025; Rogbeer & Pérez, 2026). The structure of these studies is broadly similar except for the specific populations they sampled. First, each experiment contained a brief pre-treatment module with demographic variables to characterize each sample. Second, after exposure to a

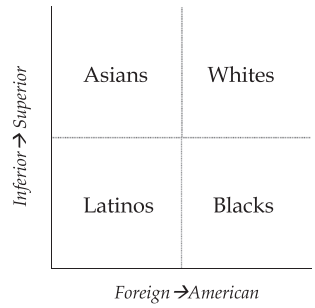

FIGURE 1 Two axes of subordination. *Source*: Adapted from Zou and Cheryan's (2017) Racial Position Model (RPM).

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treatment (vs. control) that heightens shared discrimination between a participant's ingroup and another racially stigmatized outgroup, a manipulation check (dis)confirmed whether this stimulus succeeded. Finally, participants completed brief items tapping solidarity with Black, Asian, Latino, and other PoC (Kim et al., 2025), followed by self-reported support for policies that strongly implicate specific outgroups (Winter, 2008). For example, when Black adults participated in an experiment, they reported their support for, say, Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals—a flexible policy toward undocumented immigrants, primarily associated with Latinos.

These *measurement-of-mediator* experiments (Imai & Yamamoto, 2013) have generated consistent evidence supporting solidarity as a key mechanism behind coalition-building between sundry PoC. Across African American, Asian American, Latino, and Middle Eastern and North African adults, a heightened sense of shared discrimination (which activates PoC ID) catalyzes inter-minority solidarity, which is then reliably associated with downstream support for pro-outgroup policies. This pathway is depicted in Figure 2.

Meta-analytic evidence affirms this solidarity-based process across a still growing number of these experiments (Alhambra et al., 2025; Pérez, Lee, et al., 2024; Rogbeer et al., 2026). Moreover, a smaller set of correlational studies (Pérez et al., 2025) and quasi-experimental studies (Engelhardt et al., 2026a, 2026b) corroborate this pattern among Multiracial adults. Independently of these studies, social psychologists have also amassed evidence supporting the RPM's implications for PoC solidarity and coalition-building in social, economic, and political settings (Cortland et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2022; Pope et al., 2026; Vinluan et al., 2026; Zou, 2026; Zou & Ngum, 2025).

Given this avalanche of findings and the still piling number of studies in this realm, one might imagine there is little left to say about PoC solidarity. Yet one would be wrong. Like all social science, each solidarity study, whether in isolation or in combination with others, raises new conceptual, theoretical, and methodological questions and concerns. Therefore, in this essay's remainder, I will discuss what these blind spots are, why they matter scientifically, and, most importantly, how political and social psychologists might think about resolving them.

In the spirit of greater interdisciplinarity, this discussion will integrate insights from comparativist research on ethnic identities in politics in nations throughout sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Western Europe—a broad field that has made enormous strides in refining the conceptualization of ethnic categories at a cognitive level (e.g., Barth, 1969; Chandra, 2005, 2012; Posner, 2017; Robinson, 2024), but whose lessons generally remain siloed from the study of U.S. inter-minority politics. This comparativist research teaches us quite a bit about how political and social institutions incentivize and discourage conflict between members of these categories (Adida, 2011; Horowitz, 1985; Nobles, 2000; Posner, 2004; Robinson, 2024; Wilkinson, 2005), which speaks to one major limitation in the literature on PoC solidarity.

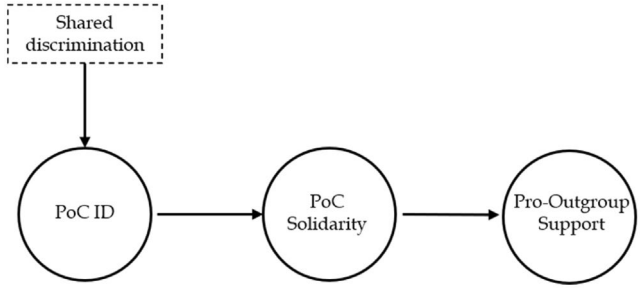

FIGURE 2 Solidarity-based politics among people of color. For simplicity, PoC ID's direct path to Pro-Outgroup Support is left out.

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Mindful of these points, let us turn our attention to some key conceptual uncertainties in this field.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY OF SOLIDARITY BETWEEN U.S. PEOPLE OF COLOR

Although research on PoC solidarity is teeming with new findings and insights, it is also the case that several conceptual blind spots remain unresolved. In this section, I speak directly to three of them: (a) the invisibility of some populations of color in this research program; (b) a dim understanding of the attitudinal and normative content of being a person of color; and (c) the boundaries and limits of solidarity between PoC.

The invisibility of some populations of color

Looking out over the published record on PoC identity and solidarity, the breadth of populations these constructs cover is remarkable. We know these concepts are expressed by Black Americans (Cortland et al., 2017; Rogbeer et al., 2026), Asian Americans (Chin & Mártir Luna, 2023; Merseth, 2018), Latinos (Pérez, Vicuña, et al., 2023), Middle Easterners and North Africans (Eidgahy & Pérez, 2023), and Multiracial adults (Engelhardt et al., 2026a; see also Chan & Jasso, 2023; Chong & Rogers, 2005; Sirin et al., 2021). Still, if we believe all non-White people are, in principle, eligible to be deemed PoC, then this range of cases is incomplete. Fundamentally, no research examines these concepts among Native Americans: a major population of color that is internally diverse and exists in lay understandings of the U.S. racial order (Zou & Cheryan, 2017).

This omission is understandable, but not excusable. Native Americans, like Asian Americans and Latinos, are composed of several subgroups, often regionally and spatially isolated from one another (McClain & Johnson, 2018; Nagel, 1995; Wilkins, 2001), which makes sampling them difficult. Yet readers will recognize that these were precisely the same challenges that kept high-quality, political surveys of Asian Americans and Latino from materializing, with scholars gradually investing money and time to reduce these barriers (de la Garza et al., 1989; Lien et al., 2004; Wong et al., 2008). Something similar must occur with Native Americans and PoC research. Of all racially stigmatized outgroups in the U.S., Native Americans are the only truly indigenous ones to this nation, which may uniquely affect how they view other non-White peoples (Wilkins, 2001; Zou & Cheryan, 2017).

Bringing Native Americans into this fold of research might start with in-depth interviews (e.g., Cortez, 2021; García Bedolla, 2005; Parker, 2009), which can provide insight into how (if at all) Native Americans reason about this *people of color* category and its meaning (see Pérez, 2021, Chapter 3). One advantage of in-depth interviews with Native Americans is their ability to work around the limited access to this population by online survey providers. In-depth interviews are not probability-based, but researchers can still purposefully recruit interviewees based on conceptually or theoretically defined criteria to yield systematic variation between participants (King et al., 1994). Consequently, in-depth interviews with Native Americans can establish, rather than presume, that they recognize this mega-category, can articulate its essence, and apply it to themselves at least in some instances.

Once researchers possess enough confidence in their knowledge of Native Americans, perhaps quantitatively measuring their political attitudes through well-designed surveys could eventually fit this bill. While the aspiration might be to survey all Native American populations, it is more practical to consider generating reliable opinion surveys that are regional in scope, akin to the way pioneering studies of Latinos and Asian Americans focused on major

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and accessible subgroups within these pan-ethnic categories (e.g., Mexican Americans; see Grebler et al., 1970). Of course, unlike these earlier studies, when sampling principles were probabilistically-based and easier to achieve (Groves, 2011), any survey of a hard-to-reach population like Native Americans must contend with a new polling terrain fraught with complex issues about the generalizability of survey results in a world where the people who agree to participate in them are systematically different from those who decline to do so (Bailey, 2024).

Finally, once scholars acquire deeper knowledge about the political psychology of Native American adults, scholars can heed lessons from comparative politics research by employing "lab-in-the-field" experiments (Eckel & Londono, 2021), where researchers, their stimuli, and questionnaires go to where participants are located (Kim, 2025). While these studies often display lower generalizability to larger populations, this "lab-in-the-field" approach can further break down barriers to a more careful study of Native Americans vis-à-vis the mega-category, *people of color*.

In the end, although I highlight how these methods can teach us about Native Americans vis-à-vis other PoC, researchers can harness this same approach to further incorporate the systematic study of other populations of color who also receive less scientific scrutiny, including Multiracial individuals (Davenport, 2018)—who defy simple categorization as PoC—and Muslim Americans, a religious group that is increasingly stigmatized as a racial one (Dana et al., 2019; Lajevardi, 2020; Oskooii, 2016).

The content of PoC identity

Another conceptual matter that can benefit from closer attention is the content or meaning of PoC ID to its membership (Pérez, 2021; cf. Abrams et al., 1990; McGarty et al., 1992; Hogg, 2005). SIT-inspired research reveals that all identity categories imply specific beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that bona fide ingroup members follow (Danbold & Huo, 2015; Turner et al., 1987; Wenzel et al., 2007). This normative content gives an ingroup its essence, while differentiating true members from outsiders. In complex and uncertain settings, such as U.S. racial politics, these contents infuse ingroup members with clarity, motivation, and direction (Grant & Hogg, 2012; Hogg, 2009; Hogg & Deborah, 2000). Here, it is useful to signpost these key contents more precisely by following Abdelal et al. (2006), who teach us that the contents of any identity rest on (a) *constitutive norms* or the collective expectations that ingroup members face; (b) *social purposes*, which are the obligation(s) that enable an ingroup to achieve its goal(s); (c) *relational comparisons* or the references to outgroups that clarify and distinguish one's ingroup; and (d) *cognitive models*, which are the worldviews that equip ingroup members to interpret their social and political realities.

In terms of *people of color*, the sheer size of this mega-category gives some researchers pause in terms of whether any of these shared contents exist under such a capacious identity banner. People of color vary dramatically by skin color, history, languages, experiences with discrimination, regional residence, and other attributes. But a major lesson from SIT-inspired research is that there are clear affective and cognitive processes that perceptually shrink this heterogeneity into a relatively more homogenous whole—a perceived ingroup—that is distinguishable from outgroups (Turner et al., 1987), which reflects Abdelal et al.'s (2006) point about *relational comparisons*. Yet one missing step in the study of PoC identity is a fuller cataloguing of its *constitutive norms*, *social purposes*, and *cognitive models* (Abdelal et al., 2006).

Consider early work on the meaning of being a *person of color*. Using in-depth interviews with Black, Asian, Latino, and Multiracial adults, Pérez (2021; Chapter 3) describes PoC who define this category less in terms of outward attributes (e.g., skin color) and more in terms of whether a person is from an outgroup that has been racially oppressed and whether said person believes in structural racism. In other words, one major *constitutive norm* binding PoC involves

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a belief that racial oppression remains pervasive and rooted in individual- and system-level biases. From this angle, then, one *social purpose* of an activated sense of PoC ID is the obligation to help other stigmatized outgroups nested under this superordinate category—even if those outgroups are not one's own—which manifests most clearly in the solidarity they feel among each other after their PoC ID is heightened. This investment in, and political coordination with, racially stigmatized outgroups is facilitated by a particular *cognitive model* that capitalizes on the acute sensitivity to racial and ethnic inequities that members of these subgroups chronically experience (Pérez & Vicuña, 2023), which generally motivates their perceptions and behaviors (e.g., Rogbeer & Pérez, 2026; Sirin et al., 2020).

Researchers can seize on these provisional insights by fusing them with two threads of research that have yet to be synthesized. The first string is from comparativist research on ethnic politics in cross-national settings (Horowitz, 1985). Political scientists in this area have long wrestled with two competing perspectives about the fundamental nature of ethnic groups, each capturing some kernels of truth about their identities. The *primordialist* view treats ethnic groups as composed of well-defined entities (Barth, 1969), whose boundaries and membership hardly change over time. This perspective treats ethnic groups as unitary actors who share core attributes that are generationally passed down to group members (Chandra, 2012). This stability is crucial if we wish to treat ethnic identities or groups as independent variables—that is, as *causes* of mass politics (Sen & Wasow, 2016).

The second perspective—*constructivism*—catapults us to the other end of this spectrum, where identity categories are relatively malleable, dynamic, and in a regular process of (re-) articulation (e.g., Brass, 1997; Laitin, 1998; Wilkinson, 2005). Here, the incentive is to treat identity categories as outcomes or dependent variables caused by other political forces (e.g., Agadjanian & Lacy, 2021; Egan, 2020). In the U.S., the category *American* fits this broad bill, as its meaning and membership have expanded and constricted over time, especially in light of new immigration waves (Abascal, 2020; Gerstle, 2001; Theiss-Morse, 2009). We can also say something similar about the racial category *White* (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2005), which was once delimited to individuals with Anglo-Saxon ancestry, but now accommodates Southern and European groups (e.g., Jews, Italians, Greeks, Hungarians, Slavs, etc.).

Lest we get too ahead of ourselves, it is important to recognize that *primordialism* and *constructivism* are ultimately abstractions and, in important ways, exaggerations that nonetheless contain useful analytic points. Indeed, the true nature of ethnic identities is likely located somewhere along the long arc connecting *primordialism* and *constructivism*. Fortunately, recent developments in this research area bode well for how we understand the boundaries and contents of PoC identity in the U.S.

Here, Kanchan Chandra (2012) has broken new ground in political science's understanding of ethnic identity, arguing that at a fundamental level, ethnic identities are little more than categories attended by specific attributes that define eligibility for membership in those categories. According to this perspective, which category out of the many in people's identity portfolios becomes salient—and which attributes are configured around that category to define membership—is determined by politics (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2017; Wilkinson, 2005). Specifically, they are determined by the actions of political elites and the pressures of political institutions. For instance, in clientelist societies where politics involves transactions of public service delivery for votes (Chandra, 2005), political leaders require a reliable way to identify *who* qualifies for these services, while also ensuring high compliance in terms of voter turnout. Ethnicity becomes an efficient way of achieving these goals through its observable correlates, including place of residence, language, religious attire, etc. Political institutions, such as electoral systems (Posner, 2004, 2017), party systems (Chandra, 2005), censuses (Nobles, 2000), and other civic structures (Horowitz, 1985) also incentivize coordination around ethnic categories defined by specific shared attributes.

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The implications of this work for the study of people of color and solidarity between them are many, but a crucial one is that who "counts" as a *person of color* is not a fixed, settled question, but rather, a matter that is responsive to political incentives that political leaders and lay people feel pressure to follow. One promising direction in this area is to better understand how the scale and configuration of electoral systems bear on whether PoC solidarity is prioritized and pursued by political elites. Consider U.S. presidential elections, which operate at a national scale but with contests generally limited to Democrats and Republicans. Here, candidates and their advisors are likely to feel pressure to mobilize *wide* swaths of voters, thus encouraging the formation of broad coalitions along party lines (e.g., Posner, 2004, 2017). The incentive here, then, is to use partisanship as a common attribute held by large shares of people of color, leading most Black, Latino, and Asian voters to understand themselves as Democrats, rather than members of their narrower racial/ethnic group (e.g., Pérez et al., 2025; Pérez, Rogbeer, et al., 2026). This set-up contrasts sharply with municipal elections in major cities, where many PoC reside. These contests are often non-partisan, but political seats (e.g., city councils) straddle multiple populations of color (e.g., Black, Latino residents). This layout incentivizes mobilization of specific groups, rather than mobilization *across* groups (Kaufmann, 2004; Sonenshein, 1993), which often fosters inter-minority conflict.

Boundaries of PoC identity and solidarity

A focus on political elites and institutions—and their bearing on PoC identity and solidarity—also opens the door to understanding the boundaries of these two constructs and how broadly they include various racially stigmatized groups across different social and political settings. Available research teaches us that, much like other ingroups, the superordinate category *people of color* can be thought of as a normal distribution of attributes, complete with an average that is accompanied by meaningful dispersion around this mean. In this stylized rendition, depicted in Figure 3, Black Americans are recognized as the "average" or prototype of the group (Pérez, 2021; more generally, Danbold & Huo, 2015, 2017; Turner et al., 1987; Wenzel et al., 2007). Thus, Black Americans embody the attitudes, beliefs, and norms that regulate what it means to be a bona fide person of color, including *belief in structural racism* and the motivation to address it (Pérez, 2021).

In turn, Latinos are construed as being a "standard deviation" away from this average position held by Black adults, which means Latinos still credibly reflect what it means to be a person of color but in a relatively weaker fashion than Black people. For example, like Black people, Latinos are generally discriminated against based on their alleged *inferiority* (e.g., low

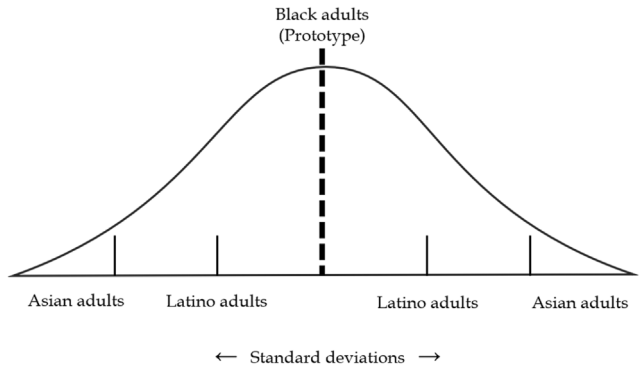

FIGURE 3 Distribution of people of color: Its prototype and standard deviations.

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education, prone to criminality, etc.) (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). However, although Latinos' progressive political orientation toward racial matters is strong, it is not as robust as African Americans', as evidenced by the non-trivial percentage of conservative Latinos in their panethnic group's ranks (e.g., Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Alamillo, 2019). Within *people of color*, Latinos are then followed by Asian Americans, who are viewed as more than a standard deviation away from PoC's Black average. This means Asian Americans are still deemed a person of color but are considered less emblematic of this superordinate category than Black and Latino people, respectively. This view aligns with society's treatment of Asians as racial "others," but different and even socially *superior* to Latinos and Blacks (e.g., *model minority myth*; Kim, 2024; Zou & Cheryan, 2017).

Figure 3's abstracted look at the category *people of color* is informative to a degree. But it also prompts new questions in terms of who is *not* included. What about Native Americans, whose presence in the U.S. predates that of Black Americans (Marx, 1998)? What about MENA individuals, who are increasingly racialized (Lajevardi, 2020)? What about Multiracial individuals—a growing demographic segment (Davenport, 2018)? These are pressing questions with currently incomplete answers to them. For example, existing work teaches us that in the U.S. racial order (Zou & Cheryan, 2017), Indigenous peoples are stationed in the vicinity of Black people—each deemed more American than other groups (i.e., Latinos, Asians), but not as American as White people—the racial order's dominant group. Similarly, MENAs are stationed in the vicinity of Latinos in the U.S. racial order, stereotyped as *inferior* and *foreign* (Eidgahy & Pérez, 2023). Finally, Multiracial folks are deemed peripheral PoC or borderline category members (Ellemers & Jetten, 2013), yet not much beyond that is known about how more prototypical PoC treat them in social and political settings.

To make strides toward better understanding who is included/excluded and who defines the group, *people of color*, I encourage researchers to revisit core tenets from SIT and its branches, as well as insights from the study of ethnic conflict in comparative perspective. The former instructs us that the boundaries of who defines "us" from "them" is conditional on the intergroup setting and primary axis that divides ingroup from outgroup (Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1987). In other words, these settings are not constant. In turn, comparative work on ethnic conflict informs us that the axis along which groups compete for distinction, power, and resources is often structured by elite discourse and rhetoric, as well as institutional arrangements and incentives (e.g., Arriola, 2012; Chandra, 2005; Grossman et al., 2020; Harding & Michelitch, 2021; Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2004; Robinson, 2024). When fused with SIT-based principles, these insights encourage us to consider how the inclusion of outgroups and the selection of a prototype among PoC varies predictably by *political* context. Synthesizing these streams of evidence into our theorizing about *people of color* can further clarify how the contents (e.g., traits, beliefs, values, norms) and boundaries of this superordinate category are a function of shifting political pressures (Chandra, 2012), which I explain in detail below.

THEORETICAL BLIND SPOTS IN PoC'S SOLIDARITY-BASED POLITICS

As we have seen so far, most research on inter-minority solidarity in the U.S. focuses on its triggers and downstream consequences (e.g., Cortland et al., 2017; Pérez, Lee, et al., 2024). This focus is important, but it also means social and political psychologists have learned less about the *barriers* to solidarity's emergence. Indeed, if PoC solidarity is an exception to a general rule of conflict between various U.S. people of color (e.g., Gay, 2004; Kim, 2003, 2024; McClain, 1993; McClain et al., 2006; McClain & Karnig, 1990), then what factors keep this pattern firmly in place? One set of forces here, as alluded to before, is structural, rather than psychological. In many inter-minority conflicts, a contributing factor is the institutional ensemble people of

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color are embedded in (McClain, 1993; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Sonenshein, 1993). These include the electoral systems that regulate local, state, and national politics, including both primary and general elections (Kaufmann, 2004; McClain & Karnig, 1990).

Consider how, many times, two or more populations of color reside shoulder to shoulder in specific neighborhoods due to economic considerations, such as affordable housing and job opportunities (e.g., Gay, 2004). This spatial concentration, in turn, often overlaps with electoral seats for city council (Benjamin, 2017), school boards (Meier et al., 2004), and congressional districts (Casellas, 2009). If the electoral rules of the game are "first-past-the-post," as they are in many of these U.S. settings, then a zero-sum dynamic is introduced into the psychology of *people of color* (Brewer, 1999; Goh & Douglas, 2025; Meier et al., 2004), which is further amplified by ingroup favoritism (Tajfel et al., 1971). Consequently, an electoral seat for "them" is interpreted as no electoral seat for "us." The key lesson here is that PoC's political psychology is *adaptive* to the institutional terrain they trod in. If you change how institutions operate, then you stand to change how *people of color* behave politically.

Dispositional barriers to PoC solidarity

Political science has long taught us that institutions incentivize their own self-reinforcement once they are established (e.g., North, 1990). This includes one of America's most fundamental institutions, its racial hierarchy (Masuoka & Junn, 2013). Social psychologists have shown that despite marginalizing U.S. people of color, the U.S. racial order compels some PoC to support it. This counter-intuitive pattern rests on two key insights. First, as Sidanius and Pratto (1999) established—from a social dominance orientation (SDO) perspective—systems of oppression are partly sustained by the consensus of some of the oppressed. Although a grand majority of members of any oppressed group (e.g., African Americans) resists and pushes back against their unequal treatment, a small but non-trivial portion of an oppressed group endorses the racial hierarchy. This allows members of a majority group (e.g., White Americans) to justify the system of oppression as legitimate. Think here, for example, of Black, Asian, *and* Latino adults who enlisted to work as agents for U.S. Immigration, Customs, and Enforcement (ICE) as it ramped up apprehensions and deportations of suspected unauthorized immigrants, most of them Latino (e.g., Cortez, 2021; Vega, 2025).

Second, and consistent with this general insight, John Jost (2019) teaches us that beyond self-serving and group-serving biases, all people (including those of color) possess *system-justifying* biases to a measurable degree (Jost et al., 2004). These biases motivate all people, including racially stigmatized individuals, to bolster political systems, economic systems, and racial systems, like hierarchies that keep "minorities" in "their place." This outcome is greased via system justification's *palliative* effects. Insofar as PoC face chronic stressors due to their racial stigmatization, endorsement of the *status quo* lets them "feel that the social context is stable, understandable, predictable, consistent, meaningful, and just" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003, p. 147).

Third, the work of Bob Altemeyer (1996), Stanley Feldman (2003), and Karen Stenner (2005) alerts us to the existence of *authoritarianism* as a pillar of support for racial inequalities. As a durable preference for social conformity and submission to authority, this posture predisposes people—including *people of color* (e.g., Engelhardt et al., 2023; Ortiz et al., 2026)—to endorse traditional folkways and value social stability. This implies that higher levels of authoritarianism among PoC should discourage identification with an ingroup (*people of color*) that is organized around transforming a highly unequal racial status quo. In support of this view, Ortiz and collaborators (2026) report a reliable over time association between stronger Republican partisanship among PoC and greater expressions of authoritarian attitudes, which emerged during the 2024 presidential campaign and persisted into the first 7 months of a second Trump

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administration, after it unleashed visible political attacks against various people of color, including Latinos and African Americans (e.g., ICE deportation raids, reduced federal Black workforce) (American Civil Liberties Union, 2024; Sullivan, 2025).

Weaving these perspectives together, new research indicates that one major psychological barrier to solidarity between *people of color* is the influence of system-justifying biases (Chan & Goh, 2026). For example, one study (Pérez, Rogbeer, et al., 2026) shows that exposing Asian Americans to the *model minority myth*—that is, the view that their racial group is stigmatized as *foreign* but socially *superior* to Blacks and Latinos (Kim, 2003; Zou & Cheryan, 2017)—triggers a heightened sense of system justification. Once catalyzed, these system-justifying biases propel Asian adults, especially ideologically conservative ones, to express tepid levels of PoC solidarity, manifesting as weak support for pro-Black (e.g., harsher penalties against police brutality) and pro-Latino policies (e.g., pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants).

Additional evidence suggests that these system-justifying biases can also explain divisions *within* racially stigmatized groups, which frays the linkage between subgroup unity (e.g., intra-Latino unity) and unity at the superordinate level (i.e., PoC identity and solidarity) (i.e., identity nesting). Specifically, research establishes that affirmation of the *American Dream* triggers system justification among Latinos, which then drives them to support nativist policies that harm their co-ethnics (Pérez, Alhambra, et al., 2026).

Combined, this trickle of work suggests that one barrier to inter-minority solidarity is dispositional. That is, core individual differences within various populations of color exist that deeply structure how they perceive and react to racial politics. However, from where I sit, at least three aspects of this burgeoning research area merit closer and sustained attention from social and political psychologists. One objective is to simply test the influence of a disposition like SJT against the influence of SDO and authoritarianism—which are all robustly correlated and predict intolerance among people of color who score high in these traits (e.g., Henry, 2011; Ortiz et al., 2026; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

A second, more labor-intensive option than simply pitting these three dispositions in predictive heats against each other is to articulate *when* and *why* one of these dispositions may influence inter-minority solidarity more than others (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2007, 2009, 2010). For example, Ortiz and colleagues (2026) use panel data on Black, Latino, and Asian adults from the 2024 presidential campaign to show how this electoral context induced a stronger relationship between Republican partisanship and hierarchy- and system-justifying biases among members of these groups (Jost, 2019; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). However, after the new Trump administration entered office in January 2025 and began pursuing policies that visibly harmed some PoC (e.g., immigration raids and deportations), most of these associations declined statistically to zero by July 2025. This implies that some dispositional effects on PoC solidarity can fade when political information becomes more concrete, rather than simply aspirational (i.e., policy promises versus policy implementation).

The preceding discussion hints at two methodological innovations that can help clarify how long these dispositional obstacles to PoC solidarity last. First, researchers might consider whether, independently of *between-person* differences in these dispositions, temporary *within-person* deviations also exert durable, downstream consequences (Hamaker et al., 2015; Osborne & Little, 2024; Osborne & Sibley, 2020). Second, researchers should introduce two-way communication flows to current experimental designs to better reflect how political information actually pulses across the U.S. mass public. For example, although current research suggests that Asian Americans and Latinos respond dispositionally to political messages that activate these postures (e.g., Chan & Goh, 2026; Ortiz et al., 2026; Pérez, Rogbeer, et al., 2026; Perez, Alhambra, et al., 2026), such effects might be reduced via compelling counter-messages about the normative importance of PoC solidarity (e.g., Kim et al., 2025; Rogbeer et al., 2026).

I close out this section by considering one additional psychological barrier to PoC solidarity. We discussed earlier how non-Black PoC are seen as, and consider themselves to be, less

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emblematic of the mega-category, *people of color*. These prototypicality perceptions influence how efficacious and angry one feels as a person of color, which are key mechanisms that promote collective action among PoC (Chin & Mártir Luna, 2023; see also van Zomeren et al., 2008). This raises the prospect that one's perceived position within the mega-category, *people of color*, might play a role in promoting dis-identification with this mega-group. Clarifying this in theoretical terms requires grappling with whether (a) more peripheral group members want to be considered bona fide people of color; and (b) whether core PoC want to more fully incorporate these peripheral members. These two questions can be usefully informed by SIT research on intra-group dynamics (Ellemers & Jetten, 2013).

Psychologists can further speak to this prosect by considering how *individual*- and *group*-level processes relate to one another. Consider recent work by Sirin et al. (2016, 2020), which persuasively shows that trait differences in empathy encourage perceptions of commonality between various PoC. In Sirin et al.'s (2021) framework, what matters is whether one is more predisposed toward empathetic feelings toward disadvantaged groups—feelings that do not depend on one's identification as a *person of color*. By contrast, published work on PoC solidarity traces it to identity-based processes (e.g., Cortland et al., 2017; Pérez, 2021). Thus, one integrative opportunity here is to articulate conditions under which these affect- and identity-based processes are complementary or compensatory. A complementary process would indicate that individual differences in empathy promote PoC solidarity, revealing a new source of this camaraderie. By contrast, a compensatory process would show that even when racially stigmatized people fail to coalesce around their PoC identity, individual empathy can still incline them to support each other in moments of political crisis.

METHODOLOGICAL BLIND SPOTS IN PoC SOLIDARITY

Having focused on conceptual and theoretical blind spots in this literature, I now turn the discussion to no less thorny issues that are methodological in nature. I organize this conversation in terms of (1) challenges to solidarity's effects as a causal mediator; (2) an overreliance on controlled experiments for evidence; and (3) an unwavering focus on the political *attitudes* of people of color.

Measurement of mediator

The bulk of experiments on PoC solidarity employ a *measurement-of-mediator* design (Baron & Kenny, 1986), which manipulates shared discrimination with another racially stigmatized outgroup, observes and measures its positive effect on PoC solidarity, and then estimates solidarity's downstream association with pro-outgroup policies (Pérez, Vicuña, et al., 2024; see also Cortland et al., 2017). Although conceptually aligned with how solidarity is theorized to operate, this approach has known limitations from a causal inference perspective. Specifically, since the proposed mediator (i.e., PoC solidarity) is measured, not manipulated, its relationships are susceptible to (un-)observed confounders (Bullock & Green, 2021). Analysts have bolstered their inferences about PoC solidarity's downstream influence by adjusting this path for covariates (e.g., political ideology) and conducting sensitivity analyses (Imai & Yamamoto, 2013; Pérez, Vicuña, et al., 2024). But these adjustments do not establish causality, making causal interpretations about this pathway tenuous.

Besides this built-in design feature, most solidarity mechanisms operate in a setting with a one-way communication flow (Sniderman, 2011). These studies align neatly with claims about shared discrimination causing increases in solidarity, displaying a high degree of *experimental* realism (i.e., a study is absorbing and impactful on participants). Yet one-way communication

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experiments fall substantially shorter in terms of explaining solidarity's emergence and influence in more *mundanely* and *psychologically* realistic settings (i.e., settings that resemble the real world and reflect everyday psychological processes, respectively) (Wilson et al., 2025). Just like other Americans, people of color are bombarded with elite communications—usually composed of competing political messages—about why solidarity is a worthy goal between two or more racially stigmatized outgroups (cf. Chong & Druckman, 2013; Zaller, 1992). This suggests that solidarity effects from these *measurement-of-mediator* design are an upper-bound, reflecting their potency when they are unchallenged in information environments.

One way to innovate here is to harness alternate experimental designs that place more causal leverage over this putative mediator, PoC solidarity. For example, more recent solidarity experiments employ a *blockage* mediation design, which seeks to neutralize the downstream influence of an intervening variable (cf. Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2015). These designs address confounding in the path connecting solidarity and support for pro-outgroup policy by manipulating this mechanism's downstream influence once it has been energized via shared discrimination. If a *blockage* treatment reduces a mediator's downstream influence on an outcome (relative to a control), then we have relatively more conclusive evidence about this mediator's causality. Here, Rogbeer et al. (2026) and Kim et al. (2025) use this design in two pre-registered experiments with large samples of Black adults (N ~ 2692), the prototypical person of color. These studies find that after activating PoC solidarity via shared discrimination, exposure to a *distinctiveness threat* manipulation (i.e., Black and Latino experiences with discrimination are incommensurate) chips away at this solidarity ($d \sim .10$) yet leaves the original solidarity effect largely intact. Political psychologists can extend this design to other populations (i.e., less prototypical people of color, like Asian Americans and Latinos) and manipulate alternative threats (e.g., zero-sum perceptions) to further understand when and among whom solidarity "falls apart" in more complex political information environments (e.g., Benjamin, 2017; Goh & Douglas, 2025).

Beyond experiments

In the social sciences, the "law of the hammer" has long warned researchers of over-relying on familiar and popular methodologies, such as experiments (see Kinder, 2011). Indeed, as Maslow (1966) long ago quipped, "it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail." Exactly.

A look at the published record on PoC solidarity finds evidence largely generated by experimental hammers. This is understandable given increasing pressures to infer causality in the social sciences (Morgan & Winship, 2014), but it is a disservice when it comes to evaluating the external validity of this evidentiary record. This is not a critique of these experiments' generalizability to populations of interest—which is its own separate matter (Mutz, 2011). When I say external validity, I mean the degree to which researchers can reproduce observed effects across *different* settings, *different* populations, *different* operationalizations of treatment(s), and *different* outcome(s) (McDermott, 2013; Stanley & Campbell, 1963). Viewed from the vantage point of these criteria, evidence about solidarity's effects needs more breadth.

One way to innovate in this direction is to expand the type and modality of treatment delivery to trigger heightened solidarity between people of color. Published work primarily operationalizes shared discrimination through mock news briefs (cf. Pérez et al., 2024). This has the virtue of yielding scientifically conservative estimates, consistent with the small but meaningful effects uncovered in most experiments that activate solidarity for political purposes (e.g., Rogbeer et al., 2026). Broadening this narrow repertoire to treatments delivered through videos (e.g., Hopkins, 2014) or in-person (e.g., White et al., 2014) could inform researchers in this area about whether stronger treatment effects on solidarity are possible and what theoretical

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modifications are necessary to explain them (e.g., compared to text treatments, visual treatments could be more emotionally involving). This could, in turn, spark new research into dosages of shared discrimination treatments, which could be better calibrated to the unique parameters of specific communities of color (e.g., Latinos vs. Asian Americans vs. African Americans) (see Velez & Liu, 2025).

Notwithstanding this curiosity about alternative treatments to trigger solidarity, it also behooves researchers to be mindful of the *ecological* validity of experimental evidence on solidarity. Although the advantage of experiments is their ability to more definitively establish cause-and-effect, these patterns emerge from studies that are tightly controlled. But you know what is not tightly controlled? Mass politics. This means that if we want evidence about the degree to which solidarity emerges in more naturalistic settings, then it is in researchers' interest to consider collecting longitudinal data that overlaps with periods before, during, and after major political events (e.g., elections). For example, new research taking a temporal look at PoC solidarity finds that it is stable, but not impervious to change (Engelhardt et al., 2026a, 2026b; Pérez, Rogbeer, et al., 2026), and that in high-stakes elections, it emerges *and* unifies the political attitudes and behaviors of Asian, Black, and Latino voters (Pérez, Alhambra, et al., 2026).

But even in the absence of rich longitudinal data, political and social psychologists can still learn important lessons about solidarity through correlational analyses of high-quality survey data (e.g., Pérez et al., 2025). Yes, you heard me right. There is an automatic, knee-jerk response to this selection-on-observables design among many political and psychological methodologists, who attack it on causal inference grounds (i.e., this design is highly vulnerable to confounding). But I remind readers that analyses of cross-sectional surveys, while displaying less researcher control, do not mean no researcher control (Kinder, 2011). Carefully reasoned and executed correlational analyses of survey data are often convincing because they avail themselves of theory to sift through what variables (not) to control for (e.g., Tesler, 2016). With wider availability of sensitivity analysis tools for observational analyses like these (e.g., Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020), this regression-based approach to studying solidarity's political can yield new insights that can (should) be retested as better instrumentation, data, and methods become available.

One additional point before turning to solidarity's effects on political behavior. It is a marvel that we are awash in so much evidence about solidarity, its causes, and its consequences. But let us not forget that we are discussing a variable that coordinates the politics of highly internally diverse groups (with an emphasis on diverse). One way to better appreciate the risks here is to use a psychometric perspective. In this domain, researchers formulate theories about key concepts, develop measures for them (usually in the form of self-report), and then statistically appraise whether these items operate in equivalent fashion across multiple groups—that is, do these measures reflect the same variable, to the same degree, provided an individual has the requisite level of a trait? This is a crucial but often-ignored question. Yet without direct answers to it, researchers cannot confidently conclude that any differences (or lack thereof) on attitude self-reports are reflective of true variation in an underlying variable and not variation in a variable *plus* systematic variation that is unique to one's own racial/ethnic group (e.g., Davidov, 2009). If the latter occurs in the context of people of color, then the significantly higher solidarity levels expressed by Black adults than Latinos and Asian American adults is due, not to Black people's deeper sense of camaraderie, but because the self-reports tapping this variable are just relatively easier for them to answer, on average, than their Latino and Asian counterparts (i.e., differential item functioning or item bias) (e.g., Davidov, 2009; Pérez & Hetherington, 2014; Stegmueller, 2011).

Using this measurement equivalence approach, available research finds clear evidence that extensive self-reports of *self-identification* as a person of color and *solidarity* with people of color capture two and only two constructs, with the same meaning, and with equal sensitivity

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to these traits across Black, Latino, Asian, and Multiracial adults (Engelhardt et al., 2026a, 2026b; Pérez et al., 2025). This approach also suggests that most of these measures operate equivalently across English- and Spanish-speaking people of color, which is crucial to address given some PoC's linguistic heterogeneity (Tran & Pérez, 2025; see also Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; García & Sanchez, 2012; Pérez, 2011; Wong et al., 2008).[4]

Still, it is important to recognize what this research is ultimately testing. In essence, researchers are formulating questions to measure specific variables based on (1) *their* own understanding of a concept, and (2) the expectation that *their* understanding is the same as members of a sampled population. My emphasis on the researcher's perspective driving these hypotheses and their testing is intentional because nowhere in this process do the interpretations of these concepts from the perspective of members of sampled populations enter hypothesis formulation and testing. This is a missed opportunity, not only in terms of developing better self-reports free of biases, but also in having specific people of color teach us—the researchers—how they view themselves and the political terrains they travel through. No amount of self-reported data is going to give us clear and full access to this.

What *will* help unlock this trove of granular perspectives are in-depth interviews (e.g., Cadena, 2025; García Bedolla, 2005; Parker, 2009; Solís & Pérez, 2026; Vega, 2025; Zamora, 2022). This qualitative approach was once a key methodological tool in the arsenal of public opinion researchers (Lane, 1962) and it is regaining traction in light of a survey research enterprise marked by declining response rates (Groves, 2011), professionalized survey participants (Freese & Jin, 2025), AI threats to the integrity of survey responses (Westwood, 2025), and declining scientific faith in the representativeness of survey samples (Bailey, 2024), whether these are probabilistically produced or not.

In this thicket of challenges, some researchers have recovered and reenergized this qualitative approach to studying public opinion by talking directly, at length, with people themselves (Cortez, 2021; Cramer, 2016; García Bedolla, 2005; Parker, 2009; Solís & Pérez, 2026; Ternullo, 2024; Vega, 2025; Zamora, 2022). This in-depth interview approach is not designed to yield large, representative samples of anything. But when carefully executed—e.g., via meticulous choice of cases with significant and purposive variation on focal variables—this interview approach can spotlight and reveal to us the meaning-making processes that individuals use when thinking about and digesting specific aspects of society and politics. This leads to more unwieldy data, to be sure, but it yields a cornucopia of highly granular perspectives and processes—both of which lend themselves to sharper, more refined conceptualization, thus benefitting the traditional survey research enterprise more than we might care to admit. Two examples of this synergy and payoff should suffice to underscore this point.

The first comes from in-depth interviews with Black, Latino, and Asian adults in Los Angeles, California (Chapter 3 in Pérez, 2021). The goal of these conversations was to begin uncovering some of the contents—that is, norms, beliefs, attitudes—that distinguish a true person of color from those who are less emblematic of this category (cf. Danbold & Huo, 2015; Ellemers & Jetten, 2013; Turner et al., 1987; Wenzel et al., 2007). These were individuals ($N = 25$) from different racial groups across distinct neighborhoods in Los Angeles (south LA, east LA, the San Fernando Valley) and with varying levels of age and education (not just young, college-educated adults). The goal was not to generalize, but to obtain sharper insight into how individuals might make meaning of a mega-category like *people of color*. The lessons from these

[4]For practical purposes (i.e., using available data), the patchwork method of achieving *partial measurement equivalence* might satisfy some researchers. For instance, out of a battery of multiple items, partial equivalence is achieved when at least 2 items operate uniformly across groups. I rush to note, however, that when developing extensive, scalable measures, researchers do not design them with the goal of finding that only 2 of them work, which raises its own troubling questions about where in an underlying latent distribution those items tap and why for distinct groups.

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conversations were twofold, leading to better theorizing and testing of generative hypotheses about PoC and their politics. Specifically, these conversations produced early insights about Black Americans as *the* prototypical person of color (Rogbeer et al., 2026) and the role of a belief in structural racism as a major attribute defining "true" people of color from less genuine ones—both of which have been refined, extended, and further empirically tested with other methodologies.

A second example is provided by Rodolfo Solís' in-depth research with Latino Republicans (Solís, 2026; Solís & Pérez, 2026). Beginning in 2016, the Latino electorate witnessed a noticeable surge in the mobilization of Latino Republicans. The latter have consistently comprised roughly 33% of the Latino electorate since the advent of high-quality survey data on this pan-ethnic group in the 1980s (e.g., Arce, 1979; Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; de la Garza et al., 1992; McClain & Johnson, 2018). But this was different—it was a more intense galvanization of Latino Republicans on a broader scale, especially in south Texas, a traditional bastion of Latino support for Democrats.

Drawing on $N = 85$ in-depth interviews with Latino Republicans and Democrats in south Texas—an epicenter of President Trump's Latino support—Solís finds (Solís, 2026; Solís & Pérez, 2026) that Latino Republicans are not "race traitors" who are ashamed of their pan-ethnicity. Quite the contrary, many of the Latino Republicans he interviewed have a positive and highly valued sense of being Latino *and* maintain strong ties to the immigrant experience. This complicates our understanding of the meaning of Latino identity—and most racial/ethnic identities, really—in a polarizing system, with insights like these being reproduced by other qualitative researchers (Cadena, 2023, 2025) and extended and tested by other researchers. On this last point, emerging work—using experimental and panel data—finds that in the 2024 election, solidarity's downstream effects on voter turnout were significantly weaker among people of color who consider themselves Republicans, Latino, or otherwise (Pérez, Rogbeer, et al., 2026). In sum, studies of PoC solidarity can benefit further from a more synergistic use of qualitative and quantitative approaches to PoC's politics, allowing researchers to better understand how a destabilized racial hierarchy and polarizing political system are shaping the responses of racially stigmatized individuals toward each other.

Solidarity's effects on political behavior

One last point before discussing the generalizability of solidarity-based politics beyond racially stigmatized outgroups in the U.S. One of the more robust themes in social and political psychologists' efforts to understand PoC solidarity is their laser-focus on the affective and cognitive processes and outputs related to this mega-category (e.g., Cortland et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2022; Goh & Douglas, 2025; Zou & Ngum, 2025; Pérez et al., 2025). We have learned substantially from these efforts, but one could say that this knowledge largely reflects an understanding of PoC's attitudes, not their behavior—and certainly not their *political* behavior. This matters for several reasons, but I will focus my discussion on one.

One of political science's major contributions is the well-established insight that for most individuals, politics is boring, costly, and hard to feel motivated about. Two considerations are key to making sense of this. First, any one person's individual vote is exceedingly unlikely to tilt the outcome of an election (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968), which means that boosting political participation entails (1) *reducing* the costs of voting (e.g., offering more convenient ways to register to vote) (Gronke et al., 2008); and (2) activating some intrinsic value(s) tied to voting (e.g., framing it is as one's duty as an American) (Fowler & Kam, 2007). One implication is that collective action is crucial to pressuring our electoral system and helping to translate shared preferences into political representation (e.g., Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1990; see also Stimson

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et al., 1995; Stimson, 1999). Viewed from this angle, collective political participation is quite difficult to achieve, which makes the galvanization of PoC solidarity more impressive, but also worrying since what we've seen thus far involves political attitudes—which are significantly easier to express than political behavior.

So, does PoC solidarity have reliable effects on political actions? The early returns on this question are promising, though substantially more work must be done. Here, experimental and panel survey evidence from the 2024 presidential election highlight three things. First, exposure to the light-touch manipulations of shared discrimination in prior research significantly heightened solidarity between PoC among Black, Latino, and Asian adults, which was associated with downstream voter turnout, with this mobilization being higher among those who voted for Democrat Kamala Harris (Pérez, Engelhardt, et al., 2026). This turnout was validated, not self-reported. That is, it is based on public administrative voting data. This is consistent with and anticipated by related work showing that this same solidarity dynamic also shaped downstream vote intentions (Rogbeer & Pérez, 2026). Second, independently of these experiments, earlier solidarity levels in the 2024 campaigns also significantly predicted validated voter turnout for Kamala Harris among PoC in a panel of Black ($n = 1292$), Latino ($n = 1296$), and Asian adults ($n = 1039$). Third, and finally, both solidarity-driven effects were significantly more pronounced among PoC who more strongly identified as Democrats.

On one hand, these insights reassure us that solidarity can generate what is otherwise costly collective behavior, establishing the broad range of political effects this one mechanism can have. On the other hand, important questions remain about how unique or prevailing these solidarity-to-political behavior effects are given that they are derived from only one election, which uniquely featured a Democratic candidate who is Black and Asian American. Indeed, with so much coalition-building between people of color often happening at state and local levels (Benjamin, 2017; Kaufmann, 2004; Krochmal & Moye, 2021; Sonenshein, 1993), it behooves researchers in this space to keep extending these solidarity-to-political behavior effects to sub-national electoral settings.

ONLY IN AMERICA? PROBING THE TRANSFER OF SOLIDARITY POLITICS OUTSIDE THE U.S. CASE

As we have seen, the evidence that has coalesced behind solidarity-based politics among racially stigmatized individuals is extensive. The number of groups sustaining this process is also expansive. And, the number of political settings within the U.S. where this phenomenon operates keeps growing. A natural question to ask, then, is whether this solidarity mechanism travels to, and operates in, the political life of polities that are not the United States? Before answering this question empirically, I think it is useful to ponder more deeply what makes this solidarity mechanism "run" in the U.S. In other words, notwithstanding my focus on proper nouns (i.e., *people of color*, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, etc.), what generic features make solidarity-based politics viable here, in America, that can make them a plausible theoretical prospect in other nations? I see at least four boundary conditions that political psychologists should entertain when considering extending and testing this solidarity-based process in comparative perspective. I discuss each of these in turn.

The first boundary condition is the persistence of *deep inequalities between stigmatized groups*. Stigmatization refers to the social devaluation of attribute(s) associated with an outgroup(s) (Crocker & Major, 1989). Although these attributes can be visible (e.g., skin color, religious garb) or invisible to outsiders (e.g., immigration status, sexual orientation) (Pachankis, 2007), stigmatization occurs when the devaluation of a group's trait(s) are publicly highlighted and widely recognized by society (Horowitz, 1985), including the very people who are stigmatized (e.g., Hagendoorn, 1995; Jost, 2019; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Although awareness of this

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stigmatization does not entail its endorsement, its recognition does structure how members of (non-) stigmatized operate vis-à-vis each other by setting expectations with wide consensus (e.g., Staerklé, 2013; Staerklé et al., 2010). Thus, when thinking about grafting current U.S.-based insights about solidarity-based politics of stigmatized to other heterogenous democracies, a key consideration is whether stigma-based inequalities are relatively durable and slow to improve in lasting ways, as this feature provides a shared mental map for (non-) stigmatized groups to follow (Denzau & North, 2000).

In the U.S., this stigmatization is racially inflected, but it need not be. More important than the specific modality of stigma (e.g., race, religion, tribe, etc.) is whether the inequalities it reflects are *politically* rooted and sustained. Consider America's national founding. For all its aspirations about equality among peers (Jefferson, 1776), the United States' creation was strongly motivated by the twin goals of obtaining and preserving political power for White men *at the expense of* Black people, Indigenous people, and women (Marx, 1998). From the outset, then, race and racial differences have served as one major axis of political conflict to (re-)negotiate who gets what, when, and how in the U.S. (Katznelson, 2005; Laswell, 1936). To be sure, this axis of racial conflict is not always politically relevant, as other cleavages might predominate based on elite priorities and decision-making (e.g., the economy, international relations) (e.g., Vavreck, 2009). But when it is activated and structures political conflict, its rhythm is generally one of racially stigmatized individuals engaged in politics to reduce racial inequalities and improve, if not eliminate, their own stigmatized status. Hence, the operation of stigma-based solidarity (Craig & Richeson, 2016) in other socially diverse democracies is more likely, in theory, if political competition between (non-)stigmatized groups is a viable and legitimate path to resolving conflicts over inequality and redistribution.

A second boundary condition is the arrangement of racial groups—both dominant and stigmatized—in *a widely recognized hierarchy* or pecking order (Horowitz, 1985). This structural arrangement in the U.S. is relatively slow to change in lasting ways (Masuoka & Junn, 2013), with this "stickiness" being aided and abetted by stereotypes and legitimizing myths (Jost, 2019; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These stereotypes capitalize on the stigmatized attributes of racial outgroups, a process spearheaded by members of the dominant ingroup to define themselves and reinforce their own advantageous position. Accordingly, dominant ingroup members highlight an attribute(s) displayed by some outgroup members, attach it to the entire outgroup, and devalue the trait (Allport, 1954). None of this requires that stigmatized attributes be widespread or prevalent within an outgroup. For example, U.S. Latinos are widely stereotyped as "illegal" or undocumented immigrants (e.g., Ngai, 2004), even though 3 out 5 Latinos in the U.S. today are native-born (Pérez & Cobian, 2024)—which is to say, they are no longer immigrants, much less unauthorized to be here. Ultimately, the goal of these stereotypes is not accuracy. Rather, they are actively formulated to justify in simple, plausible, and public terms why an outgroup is undeserving of fairer treatment and more political power (Jost, 2019). Thus, by design, these justifications operate as a "velvet glove" (Jackman, 1994), minimizing the chances of open and violent conflict between groups (Horowitz, 1985), while ensuring compliance among members of (non-)stigmatized individuals (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The effectiveness of this web of stereotypes is further sharpened by the development and dissemination of legitimizing myths: intuitive narratives that rationalize the unequal hierarchy between groups. Two examples here include the notion of the *American Dream* (Suhay, 2025) and the *Model Minority Myth* (Kim, 1999). The *American Dream* compactly explains when and why individuals will experience socioeconomic mobility. By enshrining effort and merit as fundamental principles, the *American Dream* treats continued racial inequalities in the U.S. as a function of poor work ethic. That is, if certain individuals fail to experience improvement in their own lowly station, then we can trace it to the fact that they did not try or work hard

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enough. This focus on personal shortcomings discourages a closer look at the structural reasons behind this outcome (e.g., racial hierarchy).

Unlike the *American Dream*, which soft-pedals the role of race in structuring social disparities, the *Model Minority Myth* puts race front and center in explaining why we observe intergroup inequalities (Kim, 1999, 2024). Capitalizing on the varied positions between racial groups in the U.S. hierarchy (Zou & Cheryan, 2017), the *Model Minority Myth* explains the continued inequalities separating Black and Latino people from Asian Americans as a function of culture. That is, if Asian Americans are generally and visibly performing better than other racially stigmatized groups—for example, in terms of education, skills, wages—it is because they keep their heads down, work harder, and do not complain about their station in life. That is, Asian Americans are *model minorities* because they are less impertinent than their Black and Latino peers. Accordingly, this myth spotlights conflict between racially stigmatized groups to preserve the dominant ingroup's station, power, and resources. Thus, as researchers consider applying a stigma-based solidarity framework in non-U.S. settings, close attention to the stability and clarity of hierarchal relations between (non-) stigmatized groups in society is key.

A third boundary condition involves *electoral rules and the configuration of political parties.* After all, the solidarity-based process I have described in this essay is harnessed by racially stigmatized individuals in the service of political objectives, with elections and parties playing a fundamental role here. In the U.S., elections are primarily undertaken using a *first-past-the-post* (FPTP) rule, which enshrines pluralities of voters (Blais, 2008). That is, a bloc of voters can determine electoral outcomes without representing a majority of voters, so long as their support for a candidate (or proposal) is larger than other voter blocs. From this angle, it is easy to see how a focus on pluralities incentivizes the formation of broad-based alliances. The question is why these coalitions sometimes emerge between stigmatized groups, who regularly vie against each other for prestige, resources, and power.

One answer here is that there are regular circumstances when even maximal mobilization of a narrower, specific, and stigmatized ingroup is insufficient to have a shot at an electoral plurality. It therefore pays to widen coalitions of potential voters. Consider the case of Black-Latino politics in a city like Los Angeles, California, where the municipality is divided into city council districts. These council seats overlap with varied proportions of Black, Latino, and White voters, with all three groups having strong preferences for elected representatives who are "one of their own" (Kaufmann, 2004; Sonenshein, 1993). The development of cross-racial alliances increases the chances that this default impulse toward ingroup favoritism (Tajfel, 1981) is overridden in favor of a broader coalition that can obtain victory in this thicket of competition.

Enter political parties, which are the very institutions that channel, organize, and coordinate various liberal versus conservative preferences into coherent blocs (Aldrich, 1995)—all in the interest of winning elections. Most nations that practice some degree of democracy, like the U.S., are multi-party systems. By contrast, the United States is a two-party system and has been for some time (Azari, 2025). This parsimony allows us to see why solidarity-based politics are so relevant in the U.S. One major and often recurring issue dimension that Democrats and Republicans use to channel and organize mass preferences is inequality and redistribution (e.g., Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Schickler, 2016; Tesler, 2016), with Democrats in the current era championing a variety of society's underdogs, very much including those who are racially stigmatized (O'Brian, 2024).

With only two major parties in a system regulated by FPTP, elite incentives to amass broad voter coalitions are quite strong. The challenge is picking an issue "bundle" that cuts across a variety of social strata. Here, the issue of racial inequality is often a top candidate to service this goal, as this issue generally implicates multiple racially stigmatized groups whose partisan center of gravity is, today, primarily pro-Democrat (e.g., Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010;

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Pérez & Cobian, 2024; White & Laird, 2020; Wong et al., 2011). Thus, I think solidarity-based politics are more likely in multi-ethnic democracies where the number of major parties, their internal demographic composition, and the electoral incentives they face align well enough so that stigmatized adults have regular opportunities to rehearse the building of solidarity-based coalitions for expressly political purposes (Engelhardt et al., 2026b; see also Arriola, 2012; Chandra, 2005; Posner, 2004; Robinson, 2025).

But wait a minute. If America's electoral and party systems are so parsimonious and tightly overlaid with its (racial) hierarchy, to what degree can we really expect this solidarity-based mechanism to operate among stigmatized individuals in other polities with more complexity in party offerings and electoral rules? Answering this question requires that we calibrate expectations more finely. The difference between the compactness of America's electoral rules and party system and their relative complexity in other non-U.S. settings is one of *degree*, not kind. It is the case that beyond the U.S., there are multi-ethnic democracies with multiple vigorous parties, and different electoral rules (i.e., multi-member districts, with proportional representation) (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2004; Wilkinson, 2005). Formulating hypotheses about whether we see solidarity's emergence in those settings is a matter of being attuned to the (dis)incentives that such contexts provide for alliance building among stigmatized individuals. It also involves placing less emphasis on coarse expectations (i.e., whether solidarity emerges or not) and stipulating more precisely *when*, among *whom*, and *to what extent* this solidarity-based process emerges.

A last boundary condition I speak to involves the presence and active participation of *identity entrepreneurs* in mass politics (Chandra, 2005, 2012). While it is true that the category, *people of color*, is a coherent superordinate group with unique content and directives (much like other superordinate groups) (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014; Wenzel et al., 2007), the crispness and meaningfulness of this mega-group emerged organically from the bottom up, in part, through the imaginative efforts of identity entrepreneurs, who developed the narratives and justifications for why various racially stigmatized individuals belong on the same identity team (Pérez, 2021). Who these identity entrepreneurs were (are) and how they justified the organic creation of this superordinate ingroup matters for whether we might expect a comparable phenomenon in non-U.S. settings.

As briefly alluded to earlier in this essay, it was Black opinion leaders—a broad category that includes journalists and activists—who initially discerned connections between the varied social stations of racially stigmatized groups and articulated the reason(s) for why, some of their particularities aside, it made sense in a given political moment to identify and coordinate as one shared ingroup (Pérez, 2021; see also Starr, 2023). These narratives and sound bites often found expression and audiences through well-developed ethnic media eco-systems—that is, media channels outside of the traditional, White mainstream (Pérez, 2021). This is crucial to appreciate because it means there was minimal contestation of this plausible but untested narrative, at least initially, from outside opinion leaders (i.e., White journalists and activists). It is also important to note that the original purveyors of this logic for an alliance-based identity (*people of color*) were racially Black: a stigmatized group that has long been pushed into the hierarchy's most subordinate station and who is used by the dominant group to measure the worth of other racially stigmatized individuals (Davies, 2022; Kim, 2024). These opinion leaders intuitively understood that their own highly stigmatized, but demographically small ingroup could not achieve many of its political goals without obtaining the support of other racially stigmatized individuals. Thus began the effort to highlight shared similarities, especially in terms of discrimination and life chances, to piece together larger and more effectives coalitions of non-Whites.

The ultimate lesson here for researchers interested in exploring the existence of stigma-based solidarity in nations beyond the U.S. is that the development and activation of a superordinate identity like *people of color* depends on intuitive, resonant, and well-worn narratives about why "we" belong together and what "our" political objectives should be. That is the job

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of identity entrepreneurs and their track record on this front should be straightforward to verify (e.g., media discourse) (Pérez, 2021).

STIGMATIZATION, MARGINALIZATION, AND SHARED DISCRIMINATION: HOW ARE THEY CONNECTED?

Across this essay, we have read about stigmatization, marginalization, and shared discrimination. How should we understand them and their relations with each other, going forward? The bedrock principle connecting these concepts is deep intergroup inequality (Pérez & Vicuña, 2023). As depicted in Figure 4, there are two dynamic processes that matter for this inequality's emergence and maintenance: stigmatization and marginalization. These processes contribute to inequality but are also shaped by it in turn—that is, they are dynamically related—which is reflected by the dashed lines linking them.

Stigmatization captures how, psychologically, the devaluation of racial outgroups occurs (which I described earlier). In turn, marginalization reflects the unique, unequal, and steady positions that different outgroups occupy in a racial hierarchy. While both processes are psychologically perceived, they are also sociologically produced—that is, they are the distillation of micro-level (e.g., *ingroup favoritism*, *SDO*, *SJT*), meso-level (e.g., *segregation*), and macro-level (e.g., *capitalist economy*, *democratic politics*) forces that reinforce each other. Stigmatization is relatively subjective because groups are not organically "better" or "worse"—instead, they are constructed that way by intergroup dynamics. And, because they are subjective, perceptions about them can be re-casted (e.g., Cortland et al., 2017; Perez, Lee, et al., 2024). By contrast, marginalization is relatively objective because, empirically, racial outgroups do possess lower levels of power, prestige, and resources among themselves and in relation to a dominant

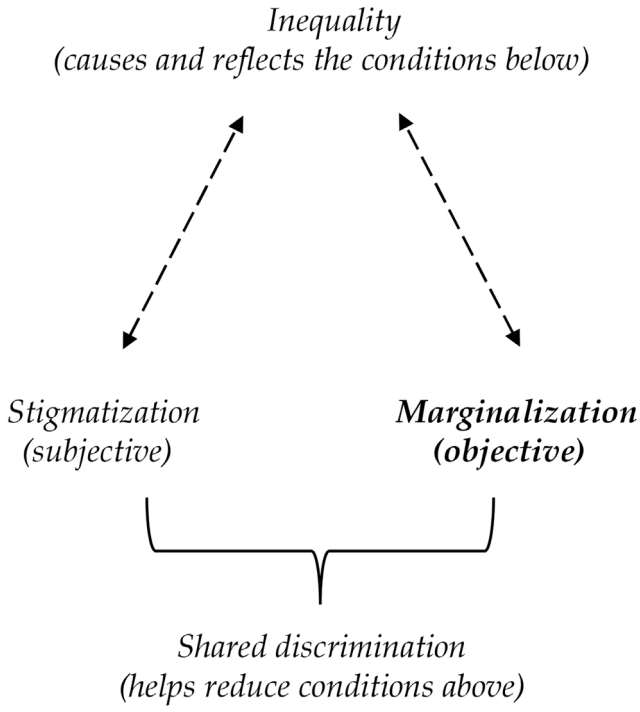

FIGURE 4 Relations between inequality, stigmatization, marginalization, and shared discrimination.

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ingroup. And, because marginalization is objective, it is "sticky," which implies that marginalization is harder to change than stigmatization (thus, **bolded** = more challenging to shift). Capping this process is shared discrimination, which draws on cognitive and affective processes that allow stigmatized groups to harness their stigmatization and marginalization toward collective action that reduces intergroup disparities (Pérez & Vicuña, 2023).

Given this conceptualization, one actionable research path, going forward, is to identify the psychological conditions under which marginalization can be reduced to catalyze coalition-building between stigmatized groups. If, as solidarity-based research indicates, stigmatization can be reduced in favor of this goal by re-casting devalued attributes and their meaning (e.g., *inferiority*, *foreignness*), then what cognitive and affective processes can be harnessed to do the same with marginalization, which is a "stickier," more durable phenomenon? At minimum, theoretical extensions that can better anticipate *when* and *why* lasting change(s) in marginalization occur are needed and will likely require research designs that can confidently establish these parameters (e.g., soft-touch experimental treatments are unlikely to accomplish this).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Having reached this essay's end, I wish to provide readers with a panoramic view of what I think are the key takeaways. I organize these conclusions in bullet-point form to make these big-picture items accessible and easy to reference long after you may have browsed this essay.

1. PoC identity and solidarity are meaningful constructs that apply to many racially stigmatized groups in the U.S. These concepts are highly relevant to African American, Asian American, Latino, Multiracial, and Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) adults. We can also be quite confident that shared discrimination reliably activates PoC identity (since it is part of this identity's content). A heightened sense of PoC identity triggers solidarity between people of color, which then produces downstream consequences for political attitudes and behaviors. Political and social psychologists can enrich this evidence by integrating new populations into our research, including Native Americans and Muslim Americans.
2. PoC solidarity is a major driver of political unity among the racially stigmatized in the U.S., as manifested in their political attitudes and behavior. Researchers can further innovate by testing additional mechanisms (i.e., mediators) besides solidarity—and these mechanisms can be complements to or substitutes for solidarity itself. Here, scholars should consider leveraging insights from the comparative study of ethnic conflict in Western Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia to increase the correspondence between psychological mechanisms and their adaptability to political institutions and actors.
3. Experiments dominate research into the social and political psychology of PoC solidarity. For the sake of breadth, nuance, and persuasiveness, researchers should expand our horizons by deploying, meticulously and judiciously, non-experimental tools that yield deeper conceptual insights (e.g., in-depth interviews), more realistic assessments of solidarity's political effects (e.g., panel surveys), and stronger proof of concepts before more precise and exacting experimental tests come along (e.g., correlational analyses with high-quality survey data).

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