As Racial Attitudes Go, So Goes Approval: Why White Democrats Favor Representatives of Color*

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Latest Draft: July 2025

Abstract

Recent research shows that white Democrats have become more approving of politicians of color compared to white politicians in the last decade, in contrast with past research indicating that white voters typically prefer white representatives. White voters' support for politicians of color has long been linked to their racial attitudes, implying that this change could be a result of white Democrats' increasing racial liberalism. This mechanism deserves more than speculation, since understanding the cause of this shift influences expectations about its likely durability and broader implications for racial politics. This paper provides evidence of the persistence of this shift and evaluates the most plausible potential mechanisms behind it. We find that racial attitudes are strongly associated with white Democrats' greater approval of representatives of color at the individual level and over time, while there is little evidence that either ideological stereotyping or differences in legislator quality are responsible. These results provide evidence that white Democrats' increasing racial liberalism influences consequential political opinions like approval of representatives of color.

*We are grateful for feedback and advice from participants of the Lenz-Broockman lab, discussants at SPSA and MPSA 2022 conferences, Alexander Agadjanian, David Broockman, Love Christensen, Leah Christiani, Elizabeth Mitchell Elder, Andrew Engelhardt, Gabriel Lenz, Cecilia Mo, Deborah Schildkraut, Alexander Stephenson, and Alan Yan.

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Introduction

In the wake of Donald Trump's first presidency and Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, white Americans' racial attitudes shifted and polarized to an unprecedented degree (Engelhardt 2021b). White Democrats' racial liberalism reached new heights during the Trump years and has regressed only slightly post-2020 as enthusiasm for Black Lives Matter declined and political attention shifted elsewhere (Sides and Tesler 2024). White Democrats have become significantly more supportive of racially egalitarian policies as a result of this shift (Jardina and Ollerenshaw 2022). However, the potential effects of white Democrats' changing racial attitudes beyond policy preferences remain underexplored. This paper investigates one such effect, asking: in an era of polarization in racial attitudes and growing diversity in government, how do racial attitudes shape white Americans' evaluations of their elected representatives?

The shift in white Democrats' racial attitudes may help to explain a parallel shift in their approval of representatives of color. In contrast with past work indicating that white voters typically prefer white representatives (e.g., Gay 2002; Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016), recent research finds that white Democrats have become more approving of politicians of color compared to white politicians over the last decade (Weissman 2025). Experimental work has found that racially liberal white voters prefer Black candidate profiles to otherwise-identical white profiles (Agadjanian et al. 2023; Mikkelborg 2025). This study builds on insights from this newer literature, investigating how white Democrats' increasingly liberal racial attitudes shape their evaluations of their congressional representatives — individuals with significant legislative and political power.

Understanding the relationship between racial attitudes and politician evaluations in the real world is particularly important given that candidates of color continue to face strategic discrimination from party elites. Doherty, Dowling, and Miller (2022) find that Democratic party leaders doubt the prospects of potential candidates of color even in districts where Democratic voters will decide the outcome of the general election. To dissuade political actors from writing off prospective candidates based on anticipated racial discrimination, scholars should specify the mechanism underpinning white Democrats' growing approval of politicians of color and clarify the scope of

this approval. In this paper, we set out to do just that.

We use data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) to demonstrate that white Democrats' higher approval of congressional representatives of color persists through 2024, and we then evaluate the role of changing racial attitudes as a potential mechanism behind this shift. Our descriptive analyses build directly on the existing literature, demonstrating that this shift extends two election cycles beyond the findings presented in Weissman (2025). This is an important contribution because it indicates that this reversal in preferences has outlasted both the first Trump administration and the immediate aftermath of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. To understand the mechanisms driving this shift, we then leverage two measures of racial attitudes, perceptions of ideological congruence with one's member of Congress (MC), and legislative effectiveness. We find that racial attitudes are strongly associated with white Democrats' greater approval of representatives of color at both the individual level and over time, while there is little evidence that either ideological stereotyping or differences in legislator quality are responsible.

Our findings contribute to several literatures. First, we add to the literature on voting behavior by showing how attitudes about identity shape evaluations of incumbent officials, many of whom are seeking reelection. Second, the results refine understandings of partisan polarization by revealing that race factors into political preferences differently across the two major parties. Finally, in an update to the conventional wisdom of the descriptive representation literature, our findings suggest that rather than dividing the party along racial lines, the growing approval of politicians of color among white Democrats could help solidify a multiracial party coalition.

Theory: as racial attitudes go, so goes approval

Pitkin (1967) defines three discrete forms of representation: substantive, descriptive, and symbolic. She emphasizes the importance of substantive representation — representatives "acting for" those whom they represent — over and above descriptive and symbolic representation — what representatives "stand for" in the eyes of their constituents. However, Mansbridge (1999) complicates this clear demarcation between forms of representation, pointing out that descriptive representation, that is, having a representative who shares particular ascriptive characteristics with those they

represent, may produce both substantive and symbolic benefits to historically underrepresented groups. Subsequent empirical research on the effects of descriptive representation of Americans of color provides considerable support for this expectation, and reveals that voters of color tend to prefer co-racial representatives, all else equal (Barreto 2007; Gay 2002; Pantoja and Segura 2003; Schildkraut 2013; Tate 2004).

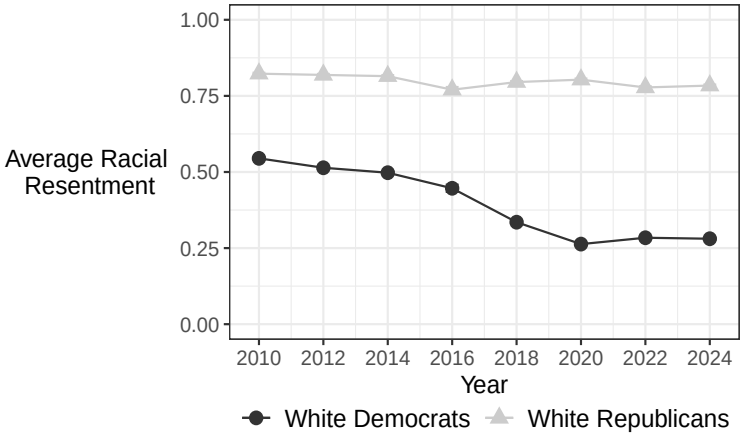
Despite their dominant group status, white Americans have also historically preferred descriptive representation. In the 1980s and 1990s, politicians of color received less support from white voters in real-world election returns (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990), survey experiments (Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993), and public opinion polls (Gay 2002). More recently, Ansolabehere and Fraga (2016) find that even after accounting for representatives' partisanship, white constituents expressed lower approval of Black co-partisan members of Congress than of white members as recently as 2010. Visalvanich (2017) uses 2010 and 2012 CCES data to show that white voters perceive Black and Latino congressional candidates to be less competent and more ideologically extreme than white candidates. Other considerations, especially partisanship, influence voting behavior above and beyond race (Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016; Juenke and Shah 2016), but in study designs that account for representatives' partisanship, white Democrats and Republicans alike have seemed to prefer white representatives, all else equal (Henderson et al. 2022; Nelson 2021).

Scholars have long observed that white Americans' preference for white representatives is conditioned by their outgroup attitudes. For example, Tesler and Sears (2010) find that although Obama lost support chiefly among the most racially resentful white voters. Visalvanich (2017) also makes this connection between racial attitudes and white voters' preference for white representatives in 2010 and 2012, reflecting that "the bias that afflicts minority Democrats is likely driven by the sheer number of those who hold negative racial attitudes" (636). Tesler and Sears (2010) also call attention to a "second side" of racialization, however: the least-racially resentful white voters supported Obama's first candidacy in part *because* of his race, not in spite of it. Agadjanian et al. (2023) find parallel results in white survey participants' preferences for Black and white job

candidates, with the least-resentful preferring Black candidates, all else equal. These authors go so far as to argue that the racial resentment scale "captures favoring of Blacks substantially more than disfavoring" (76).

Over the last decade, white Americans' racial attitudes have become increasingly polarized on the basis of partisanship, with white Democrats' growing liberalism driving this shift. This asymmetrical polarization reflects both long-term sorting on the basis of racial attitudes (Zingher 2018) and genuine attitude change among white Democrats (Engelhardt 2021a;b). Figure 1 illustrates this shift, which is already well-documented in the literature (Hopkins and Washington 2020; Jardina, Kalmoe, and Gross 2021; Jardina and Ollerenshaw 2022): Although white Americans were already polarized about race in 2010, this polarization increased significantly after Trump's campaign and election in 2016. As noted by Sides and Tesler (2024), there is some regression to higher levels of racial resentment post-2020, but a majority of white Democrats continued to reject the premises of the racial resentment scale more often than they agreed through 2024 — in other words, to fall on the "favoring" side of the scale more than the "disfavoring" side.[1]

Figure 1: **Average Racial Resentment Over Time by Respondent Party (White Respondents)**



Note: We present average levels of racial resentment over time among Democratic and Republican respondents, using survey-provided sampling weights. Racial resentment is scaled from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest).

[1] Although we have fewer years of data that include the items in the FIRE scale, in Appendix Figure A2 we plot average responses to these items over time and find similar patterns of partisan polarization and liberalization among white Democrats between 2016 and 2020.

Over the same period, politicians of color have found growing support, including among their white Democratic constituents. Weissman (2025) shows that in the 116th and 117th Congresses (those elected in 2018 and 2020), white Democrats approved more highly of MCs of color (POC MCs) than of same-party white MCs, a reversal from just a few Congresses prior. Mikkelborg (2025) demonstrates that more Black congressional candidates have won elections in majority-white districts during this same period, and also that white Democratic study participants became more likely to select a Black candidate profile over a white opponent in hypothetical electoral matchups.

This paper contributes to this literature by investigating whether the trends in white Democrats' racial attitudes and approval of MCs of color are not only parallel, but linked. Racial resentment has been a stronger predictor of intra-party differences in policy preferences and political behavior among Democrats than among Republicans (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). White Democrats' growing racial liberalism may therefore be distinctively influential on their collective evaluations of their representatives.

This influence could be transmitted through multiple mechanisms. Mansbridge (1999) argues that the descriptive representation of disadvantaged groups signals the sensitivity of government to the injustices the group has suffered. As white Americans become more cognizant of the discrimination and systemic barriers Americans of color face, they may come to place a positive value on the descriptive representation of people of color. Consistent with this theory, Mikkelborg (2025) finds that white Democratic survey participants who perceive a great deal of anti-Black discrimination are the most likely to select Black candidate profiles in a conjoint task. Alternatively or in tandem, expressing approval of politicians of color may assuage feelings of white guilt (Chudy, Piston, and Shipper 2019) or be a means of expressing racial sympathy (Chudy 2021) or empathy (Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021). In any of these cases, we would expect to find the greatest difference in white versus non-white MC approval among the most racially liberal.

Additionally, this racial liberalism can be measured in several ways. We focus on two measures of racial liberalism in this paper. First, we rely on two items in the widely-used racial resentment

scale. We do this for both practical and theoretical reasons. In the methods section, we discuss the practical reasons. Here, we describe our theoretical grounding. Although this scale was developed to measure a "blend of anti-Black affect and conservative values" (Sears and Henry 2003), recent scholarship suggests that racial resentment reflects racial liberalism and conservatism more broadly. Despite its explicit focus on Black Americans, racial resentment is correlated with attitudes towards other racial groups as well (Carney and Enos 2017; Reny, Valenzuela, and Collingwood 2020). Additionally, in analyzing racial resentment among both Black and white respondents, Kam and Burge (2018) find that low racial resentment is grounded less in beliefs about "the character of Black Americans" than in "identifying structural features of discrimination that undercut the promise of individualism" (319). The debate in the literature about the underlying concept this scale measures is ongoing (Davis and Wilson 2021; DeSante and Smith 2020), but we argue that past research provides a basis for using this scale as a proxy for white people's racial conservatism or liberalism.

We complement these analyses with two additional questions drawn from the FIRE scale (DeSante and Smith 2020). These items are designed to measure awareness of white privilege and acknowledgment of institutional racism. They are useful to us because they are not limited to attitudes towards a single racial group, and they more explicitly tap the cognitive component of white Americans' racial attitudes in which we are most interested: the awareness of the "structural features of discrimination" that some have argued racial resentment also measures. Thus, although we expect to find similar interactions between MC race and both racial resentment and the FIRE items in predicting MC approval, the inclusion of these items allows us to interpret our results with greater confidence.

We also evaluate evidence for two alternative explanations. First, politicians of color tend to be perceived as more liberal than similar white politicians (Lerman and Sadin 2016; Visalvanich 2017), and in an increasingly polarized political climate, white Democrats might now increasingly prefer them because they are using their race to infer liberal policy positions. Given the correlation between racial resentment and political ideology (Carmines, Sniderman, and Easter 2011), ide-

ological stereotyping could thus be a confounding variable in any observed relationship between racial attitudes and approval of MCs of color. We account for this potential confounding by directly estimating the relationship between MC race and the degree of ideological congruence constituents perceive with them.

Second, we analyze whether differences in MC approval by race are explained by differences in legislator quality. If prospective candidates of color believe — or are told — that they must be exceptionally well-qualified to be competitive (Anzia and Berry 2011), then those who go on to seek and achieve a seat in Congress may be more effective on average than their white colleagues. Constituents represented by POC MCs may thus receive more effective representation on average and approve more highly of their representatives as a result.

These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, and the reality could involve an interplay between them. Nevertheless, disentangling the relative importance of changing racial attitudes, ideological stereotyping, and legislator quality in explaining white Democrats' increased approval of politicians of color is essential because each carries different implications for electoral strategy and the likelihood that this preference will persist. If this change is shaped by shifts in racial attitudes, it implies a durable and normatively meaningful change in white Democrats' preferences and values regarding representation, one that may persist even as national attention to race fluctuates. If, instead, approval reflects ideological stereotyping, then it may be contingent on the belief that politicians of color are reliably liberal. If differences in approval are due to legislator quality, the implication is that politicians of color must continue to outperform their peers to maintain positive evaluations, placing an unequal burden on candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. In sum, both electoral strategy and the durability of descriptive representation depend on which mechanism is most salient.

Data and Methods

To evaluate the effects of MC race on MC approval ratings, we merge pre-election CCES data from 2008 through 2024 with district-level data on MCs from the 110th Congress (elected 2006) to the

118th Congress (elected 2022).[2] We use even-numbered years (election years).[3] We gather data on MC characteristics from Carnes's (2016) Congressional Leadership and Social Class (CLASS) Dataset, Daily Kos Comprehensive Congressional Guides for the 113th-118th Congresses, MC websites, and the Congressional Biographical Directory.[4] Appendix A presents descriptive statistics.

Our main dependent variable is MC approval rating. The CCES asks, "Do you approve of the way each is doing their job... [Incumbent Representative's Name]," with responses that range from "strongly disapprove" to "strongly approve" on a five-point scale.[5] We rescale responses from 0 to 1. Our main explanatory variable is a dummy variable for POC MC.

If white Democrats' increasing racial liberalism extends to greater approval for representatives of color, we should observe an upward trend in relative approval of POC MCs between 2008 and 2024. To test this hypothesis, we specify a regression model with two-way fixed effects. In effect, we only estimate effects in districts that change from being represented by a white Democrat to a POC Democrat, or from a white Republican to a POC Republican.[6] The analyses presented in the paper are based on the following model estimating survey respondent i's approval Y_i for an MC representing district j in Congress t:

[2]This approach differs from some other studies of whites' preferences about politician race (e.g., Visalvanich 2017) in that we focus exclusively on evaluations of incumbents. However, our approach is consistent with other widely-cited studies in this literature (e.g., Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016; Gay 2002). We emphasize that we are chiefly interested in explaining how and why relative approval of POC incumbents has changed over time, rather than making predictions about the success of non-incumbent POC candidates.

[3]We use even years because 1) the survey takes place over the course of congressional campaigns when constituents might be most aware of MCs' identities, 2) in the pre-election wave, MCs have served in office longer than during the odd-year data, further increasing the probability that constituents know the race of their MC, and 3) there are more CCES respondents than in odd years, which provides additional power.

[4]To assign MCs' race, we matched MC race from Carnes (2016) and Daily Kos data to the MCs in our dataset. For any MCs not included in these datasets, we coded race by hand, checking multiple sources for each MC. Multiracial MCs were coded as each racial group with which they identify and also coded 1 for people of color. When analsyses are broken out by race, these MCs are coded as their minority racial group.

[5]We perform our main analyses with "don't know," "never heard of this person," or skipped responses as 0.5, but results are robust to alternative specifications (see Appendix B). We also show that the incidence of "don't know" or skipped responses does not vary systematically with MC race.

[6]Using traditional two-way fixed effects for analyzing DiDs can sometimes result in biased estimates. Recent literature recommends using alternative methods as a robustness check (e.g., Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021; Goodman-Bacon 2021). In Appendix Table H3, we present an analysis with alternative methods, demonstrating no significant differences from our main estimates.

$$Y_{ijt} = \alpha_j \times \text{MC Party}_{jt} + \delta_t + \sum_{t=110}^{118} \beta_t(\text{POC MC}_{jt} \times \delta_t) + \omega_1 X_{jt} + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

POC MC_{jt} is an indicator for whether an MC in district j and Congress t is a person of color. We interact this indicator with δ_t, a fixed effect for each Congress, so that β_t can be interpreted as the estimated effect of a POC MC compared to a white MC on approval in each Congress. β_t is our main estimand of interest. When we run the model for Black, Hispanic, and Asian MCs separately, this coefficient indicates the effect of an MC of a specific racial group relative to white MCs. $\alpha_j \times \text{Party MC}_{jt}$ are *district* $\times$ *MC party* fixed effects. We include the district fixed effect to account for systematic differences between districts that elect POC MCs at any point during this period and those that do not. The MC party fixed effect restricts comparisons to white and POC MCs of the same party. This combined fixed effect ensures that differences are not driven by changes in the partisanship of the MC in a given district in addition to a change in the race of the MC.[7] δ_t are *Congress* fixed effects to account for time-varying shocks. X_{jt} is a vector of controls for MC seniority (rescaled 0-1) and MC gender (0 for men, 1 for women). Finally, ε_{ijt} is a random error term.

Results

We first replicate and extend recent findings that white Democrats express more favorable attitudes towards politicians of color than similar white politicians. Figure 1 plots values of β_t for each year in our dataset. We estimate the model separately for white Democrats and white Republicans, including leaners.[8,9,10] In 2008 and 2010, consistent with Ansolabehere and Fraga (2016), we

[7]Our estimates are identified using only districts in which both white and POC MCs of the same party have served at different points in time. This within-district, within-party comparison ensures that we are not extrapolating to white Republicans who have never been represented by a POC MC. Relatively few Republican districts meet this criterion, as compared to Democratic districts (as shown in Appendix A), but our estimates rely on those that do.

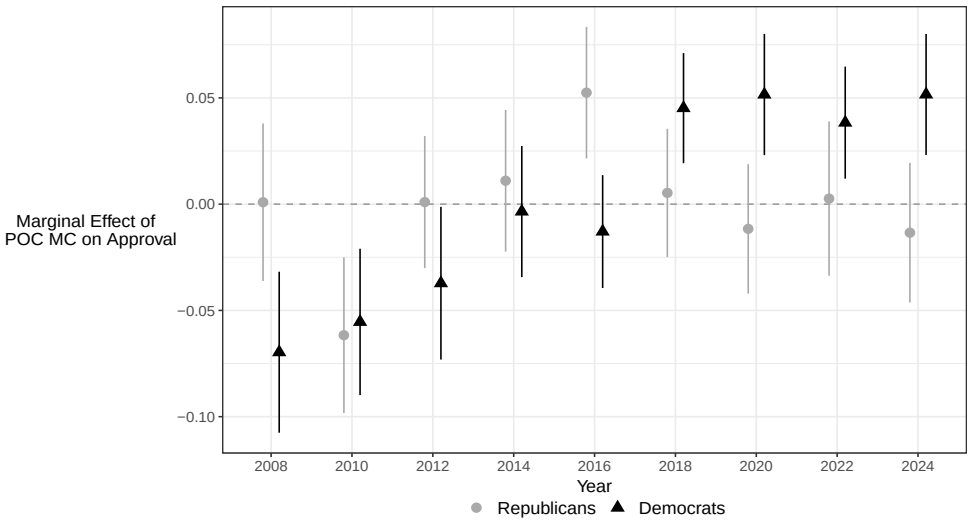
[8]Excluding leaners produces substantively identical results (Appendix C).

[9]During this period, there were more Democratic than Republican MCs of color (Appendix A). Consequently, our results over-represent Democratic constituents' approval of in-party MCs and Republican constituents' approval of out-party MCs. We expect this to depress estimates among Republicans, since they are more likely to disapprove of out-party representatives.

[10]Coding all MCs of color as a single group distinguishes between MCs who are and are not racially congruent with white constituents. In Appendix E, we re-estimate Equation 1 for white Democrats comparing approval of white

find that MCs of color received approval ratings that were significantly *lower* than white MCs' among their white Democratic constituents ($p < 0.01$). However, their relative approval ratings have since increased so that approval of POC MCs is significantly *higher* in 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024 ($\beta_{2018} = 0.045, p < 0.001$; $\beta_{2020} = 0.051, p < 0.001$; $\beta_{2022} = 0.038, p < 0.001$; $\beta_{2024} = 0.052, p < 0.001$). White Republicans' relative approval of MCs of color has not moved in a consistent direction over this period.[11]

Figure 2: **Effect of POC MC on MC Approval by Constituent Party & Year (White Respondents)**



Note: We present estimates for the interactions between each even year and MC race (using Equation 1). Standard errors are clustered at the district level and models include CCES survey weights. Corresponding coefficients are provided in Appendix D.

Higher approval of POC MCs does not appear to be a direct result of Obama's presidency, either via party sorting (Zingher 2018), individual attitude change resulting from having a Black representative (Hajnal 2001), or the information his presidential runs may have provided to prospective congressional candidates of color about the districts in which white voters are most likely to support them (Henderson, Sekhon, and Titiunik 2016). Under any of these explanations, we would

MCs to approval of Asian American, Hispanic, and Black MCs separately. All three display the same upward trend, with relative approval of all three groups significantly higher in 2020 than in 2008.

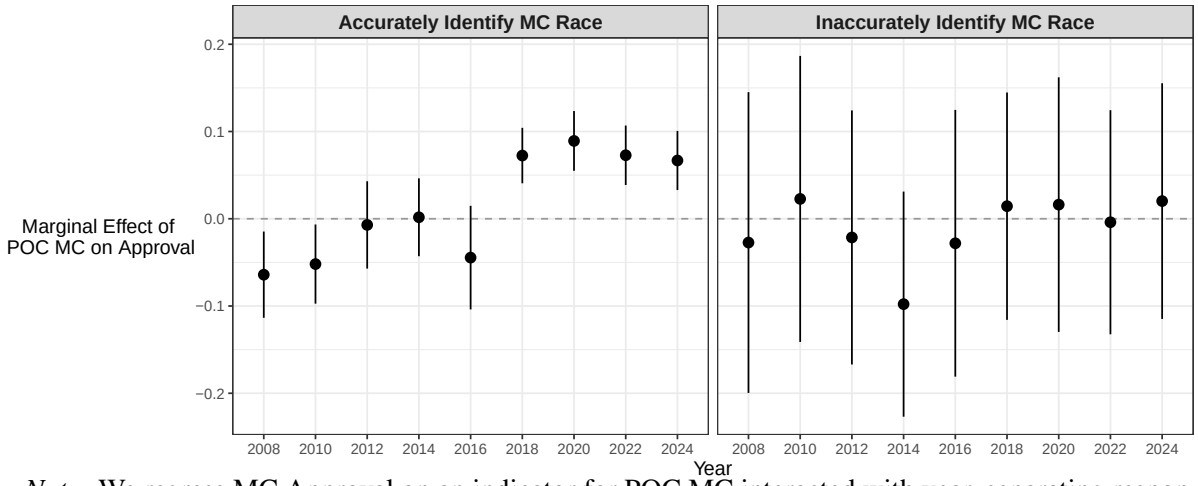
[11] In both 2012 and 2022, many districts underwent redistricting. While the main effects begin in 2016, one potential concern is that the persistent results observed in 2024 are driven by changes introduced in the 2022 redistricting cycle. Appendix Table H2 addresses this by presenting estimates separately for pre- and post-redistricting periods, demonstrating the robustness of the findings. Appendix Figure E2 further confirms that the results hold when using alternative data configurations that exclude districts affected by redistricting.

expect to estimate positive values for β_t during the Obama era. Instead, the marginal effect of POC MC on white Democrats' approval ratings is only significantly positive starting in 2018, consistent with the literature on shifts in white Americans' racial attitudes that connects these shifts to Democratic backlash against Trump (Hopkins and Washington 2020; Jardina and Ollerenshaw 2022).

These results, in part, replicate Weissman (2025), but also extend existing findings in a substantively meaningful way. Weissman (2025) shows that white Democrats' approval of POC MCs is significantly higher than their approval of white MCs in 2018 and 2020, but we further show that this reversal from earlier years persists for an additional two election cycles. Significantly higher approval of POC MCs is not entirely a product of the short-term racial politics of the first Trump administration, nor of the height of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. Rather, white Democrats remain more approving of POC MCs even under a Democratic president and in a period of declining support for Black Lives Matter (Jefferson 2021).

Effects hinge on voters' knowledge of MC race

Figure 3: **Marginal Effect of POC MC on MC Approval by Year and Knowledge of MC race (White Democratic Respondents)**



Note: We regress MC Approval on an indicator for POC MC interacted with year, separating respondents by whether they accurately identified their MC's race. Corresponding coefficients are provided in Appendix F.

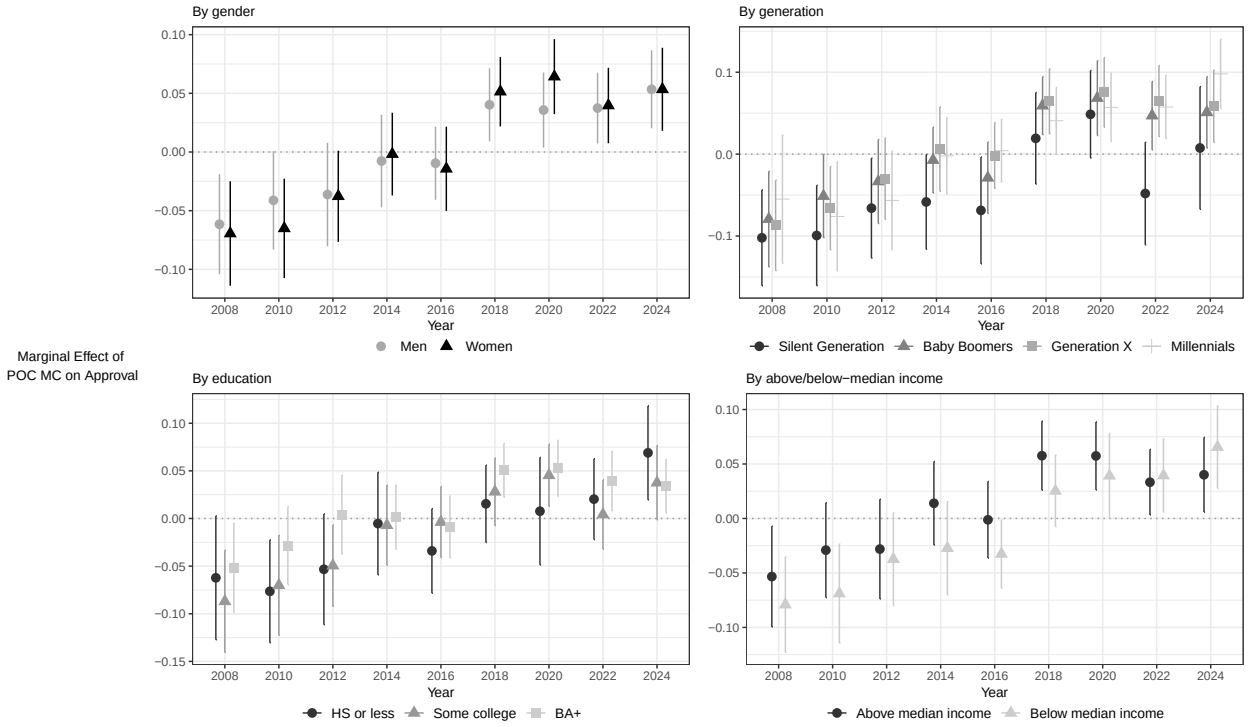
We also further validate this over-time trend by testing an assumption on which our substantive interpretation of these results rests: that the effect of MC race on approval is strongest among CCES respondents who know the race of their MCs. The CCES includes questions in each wave asking

respondents to identify the race of their representative. Approximately 76.82% of respondents provide an answer, and among these, 84.9% correctly identify their MC's race. Appendix Table F4 provides further detail on accuracy rates by racial group. These high rates of correct identification suggest that most respondents are not guessing the race of their MCs.

Figure 3 presents re-estimations of Model 1 among white Democratic respondents, estimated separately by whether respondents correctly identified their MC's race. The effects are concentrated among those who accurately perceive their MC's race. In other words, the observed increase in approval of POC MCs over time is driven primarily by white Democrats who are aware of their representative's racial identity.

Effects hold across demographic groups

Figure 4: **Effect of POC MC on MC Approval by Constituent Demographics & Year (White Democratic Respondents)**



Note: We present estimates for the interactions between each even year and MC race (using Equation 1). Standard errors are clustered at the district level and models include CCES survey weights.

We build further on existing research by investigating which types of white Democratic constituents are most approving of POC MCs. Figure 4 estimates Model 1 for demographic subgroups

among white Democrats. We find rising relative approval across the board, including among men and women and across multiple generations, levels of educational attainment, and both above- and below-median household income levels. Approval of POC MCs is not confined to white Democrats who hold other marginalized identities (*e.g.,* women and/or people of low socioeconomic status) or the most privileged (*e.g.,* the wealthy and/or highly educated). Rather, it appears that POC MCs now enjoy a wide base of approval among their white Democratic constituents.

Racial Attitudes and MC Approval

We now turn to evaluating evidence for potential mechanisms behind this change, starting with white Democrats' changing racial attitudes. We first use two items in the CCES common content that measure racial resentment: "The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors," and "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class."[12] These items are combined into a racial resentment index. We are chiefly interested in participants who fall below the midpoint on this index because, as discussed in the theory section, recent literature indicates that rather than signifying the absence of racial animosity, low racial resentment is associated with outcomes like increased support for President Obama (Tesler and Sears 2010) and a preference for hypothetical profiles of Black job candidates (Agadjanian et al. 2023) and politicians (Mikkelborg 2025). To highlight the interaction of MC race and low racial resentment among their constituents, in the following analyses we reverse the direction of the racial resentment scale so that our measure ranges from 0 (highest resentment) to 1 (lowest resentment).

We also use two additional CCES items from DeSante and Smith's (2020) FIRE scale for which we have data beginning in 2016: (1) "White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin," and (2) "Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations." DeSante and Smith (2020) instruct that these items should be analyzed separately rather than combined into

[12]There is less data for these analyses because these items were not included in 2008, and in 2016, they were included only in select modules (Agadjanian 2022).

a single scale. We recode each item so that higher values reflect more liberal racial attitudes on a scale from 0-1.

We specify the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{ijt} =& \beta_1 \text{POC MC}_{jt} + \beta_2 \text{Racial Liberalism} \\ &+ \beta_3 (\text{POC MC} \times \text{Racial Liberalism}) \\ &+ \alpha_j \times \text{Party MC}_{jt} + \delta_t + \omega_1 X_{jt} + \varepsilon_{ijt} \end{aligned}$$

Here, our main estimand of interest is β_3, the interaction term between POC MC and either reverse-coded racial resentment or the FIRE item. This quantity reflects whether racially liberal responses to the racial resentment scale or the FIRE items are associated with higher approval of POC (or Black) members of Congress relative to white members. As before, $\alpha_j \times \text{Party MC}_{jt}$ are *district* $\times$ *MC party* fixed effects, δ_t are *Congress* fixed effects, X_{jt} is a vector of controls for MC seniority (rescaled 0-1) and MC gender (0 for men, 1 for women), and ε_{ijt} is a random error term. Because the racial resentment scale focuses specifically on Black Americans, we also estimate this model subsetting our data to respondents with either Black or white MCs, replacing the dummy variable for POC MC in the model above with an indicator for Black MC.

If the increasing approval for POC MCs is linked to broader shifts in white Democrats' racial attitudes, then we should estimate the highest relative approval of POC MCs, and especially Black MCs, among their least-racially resentful white Democratic constituents.[13] In Table 1, we present estimates of the relationship between MC approval and the interaction between reverse-scaled racial resentment/FIRE and MC race. We find a negative and statistically significant $(p < 0.001)$ relationship between having a POC/Black MC and relative approval, indicating the most racially conservative white Democratic constituents express lower approval of their MC when they are a person of color. Importantly, the coefficients on all interaction terms are positive and significant $(p < 0.001)$, indicating that the most racially liberal white Democratic constituents approve more

[13] It is worth noting that our data do not allow us to determine whether white Democrats' increasing approval of POC MCs is due to partisan sorting or individual change in racial attitudes; without panel data, these two explanations are observationally equivalent. Existing work (Engelhardt 2021a; Zingher 2018) suggests that both mechanisms are likely at play.

highly of their MC when they are a person of color, especially when they are Black. Consistent with the racial resentment scale capturing attitudes towards Black Americans most closely, the interaction coefficient for Black MCs in Model 4 is significantly greater than the coefficient for POC MCs ($p < 0.001$).

Table 1: **Effects of POC/Black MC on MC Approval, Interacting MC Race with Racial Resentment and FIRE (White Respondents)**

	DV: MC Approval					
	POC MC			Black MC		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Reverse-scaled Racial Resentment	−0.093***			−0.092***		
	(0.012)			(0.011)		
FIRE 1		−0.109***			−0.108***	
		(0.013)			(0.013)	
Reverse-scaled FIRE 2			−0.123***			−0.122***
			(0.014)			(0.014)
POC MC	−0.125***	−0.177***	−0.135***			
	(0.016)	(0.024)	(0.025)			
Black MC				−0.155***	−0.211***	−0.148***
				(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.033)
POC MC x Reverse-scaled RR	0.221***					
	(0.021)					
POC MC x FIRE 1		0.242***				
		(0.028)				
POC MC x Reverse-scaled FIRE 2			0.186***			
			(0.027)			
Black MC x Reverse-scaled RR				0.288***		
				(0.018)		
Black MC x FIRE 1					0.313***	
					(0.030)	
Black MC x Reverse-scaled FIRE 2						0.238***
						(0.031)
District * MC Party FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Congressional session FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
No. districts w MC race change	92	52	52	33	15	15
N	110,664	82,525	81,392	102,001	75,163	74,140

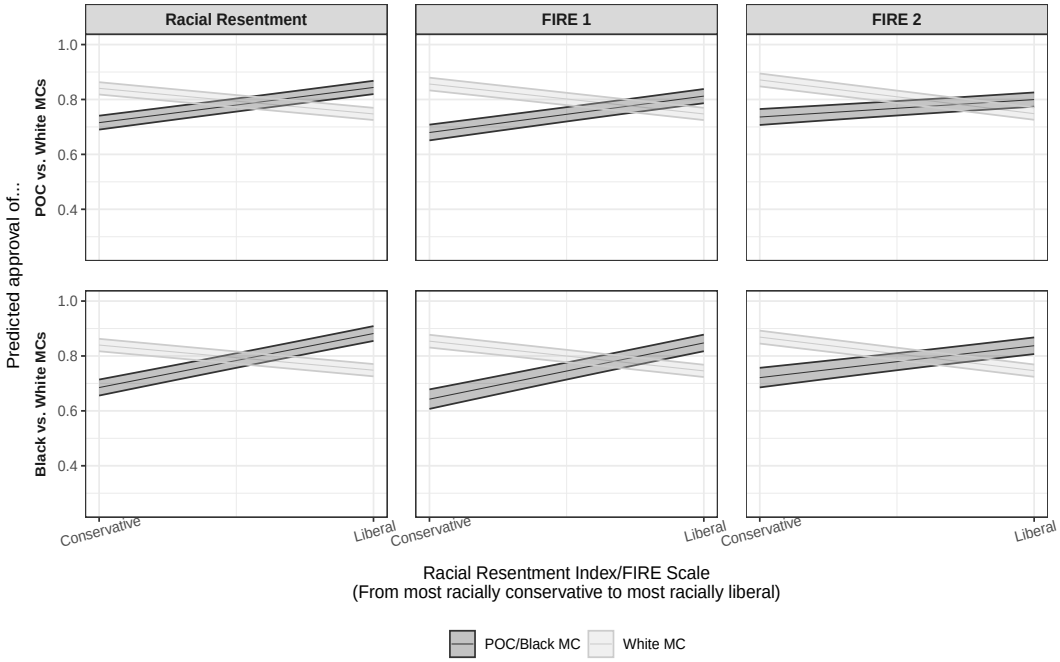
+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: We regress approval on the interaction between an indicator for POC MC (model 1)/Black MC (model 2) and racial resentment/the FIRE scale. FIRE 1 is "White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin." FIRE 2 is "Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations." Data for racial resentment are from CCES even years from 2010-2024, and for FIRE 2016-2024. These are scaled from 0 (racially conservative) to 1 (racially liberal). Models control for MC seniority and gender. All coefficients, as well as models split by year, are presented in Appendix H.

Figure 5 visually presents the interaction between MC race and white Democratic constituents'

racial attitudes.[14] This figure illustrates what Tesler and Sears (2010) term "the two sides of racialization:" the most racially conservative respondents are estimated to approve significantly more highly of white MCs than of POC/Black MCs on average, but the most racially liberal are estimated to approve significantly more highly of POC/Black MCs.

Figure 5: **Estimated Approval of POC/Black MC vs. White MC by Racial Attitudes**



Note: We use the estimates from the models in Table 1 to predict the effect of racial resentment/FIRE on MC approval for POC/Black MCs and white MCs. Upper panels include the POC-White MC comparison, and lower panels include the Black-White MC comparison.

As noted in the theory section, our analyses of the interaction between MC race and racial resentment should be interpreted with caution, given scholars continue to debate the conceptualization of racial resentment and its correspondence with attitudes towards groups beyond Black Americans. It is therefore reassuring that our results using the two FIRE scale items largely parallel our results using racial resentment because these items more precisely capture the mechanism that we argue underpins white Democrats' rising approval of MCs of color: growing awareness of systemic racial injustice.

In Appendix H, we also show that the relationship between racial resentment and approval of

[14] In Appendix H, we present all coefficients for these models with controls, as well as models with additional respondent-level controls.

POC compared to white MCs is stable over time, ruling out the possibility that our results are a product of a strengthening relationship between racial resentment and relative approval rather than shifts in average racial resentment. Figures 1 and 2 show similar timing in declining racial resentment and relative approval of POC MCs, lending further support to our central claim that as racial attitudes go, so goes approval.

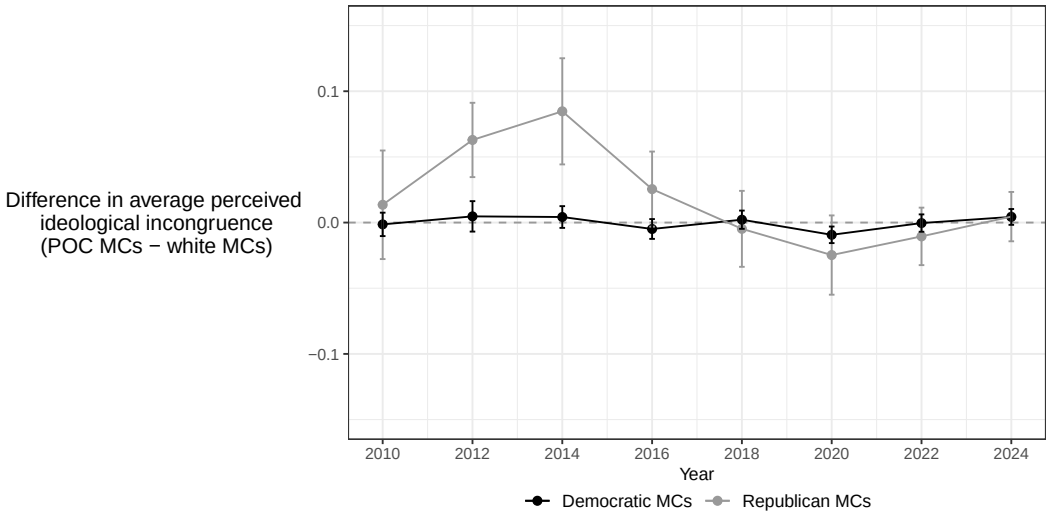
Alternative Explanation: Ideological Stereotyping

We next assess evidence for the alternative explanation that ideological stereotyping could be a confounding variable in the relationship between racial resentment and MC approval. An observable implication of this alternative hypothesis is that white Democrats represented by POC MCs would perceive their MC as ideologically closer to themselves than those represented by white MCs, and that this perception has developed over the last four election cycles. We operationalize ideological incongruence as the absolute distance between CCES respondents' self-placement on a 0-100 scale, where 0 is very liberal and 100 is very conservative, and respondents' placement of their representative on the same scale. We re-scale this difference from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the greatest incongruence and 0 indicating perfect congruence.[15]

Figure 6 plots the difference in means between POC and white MCs for perceived ideological incongruence among white Democratic respondents by MC party from 2010, the first year in which this measure is available, through 2024. Values above zero indicate greater ideological incongruence with POC MCs (closer to white MCs) and those below the line indicate greater incongruence with white MCs (closer to POC MCs). Points close to zero suggest minimal difference between POC and white MCs in average perceived ideological incongruence. Here, Democratic MCs' race has little relationship with the degree of ideological incongruence their white Democratic constituents perceive with them. Democratic MCs of color were perceived as slightly but significantly more congruent than white Democratic MCs in 2020, but the timing of this shift does not align with the steady upward trend in relative approval in earlier years. There is also a slight

[15]We rely on symbolic ideology rather than operational congruence because the CCES policy questions are inconsistent across years, and we are interested in how constituents view MC ideology, not their actual policy positions.

Figure 6: **Difference in Means (between POC and White MCs) for Perceived Ideological Incongruence by MC Party (White Democratic Respondents)**



Note: We present the difference in means (averages for POC and White MCs) for yearly perceived ideological incongruence for white Democratic respondents by MC party. Appendix Table J1 includes these estimates.

trend toward perceiving Republican POC MCs to be less incongruent, but the timing of this trend does not explain the greater approval of POC MCs overall in 2018, and white Democrats represented by Republican POC MCs compose a relatively small proportion of respondents (in 2020, Republican POC MCs accounted for less than 10% of all POC MCs). Changing perceptions of ideological congruence do not explain the upward trend in white Democrats' relative approval of POC MCs.[16]

Alternative Explanation: MC Effectiveness

An additional concern is that changes in MC quality could be occurring alongside changes in MC race, such that constituents appear more approving of POC MCs not because of their race, but because these MCs are more effective. In this section, we show that one measure of legislative effectiveness, which may be correlated with both race and approval, is not driving the results.

Building on theory from the gender literature, if POC MCs anticipate discrimination from white constituents, who make up the majority voting bloc in most districts, then only the most qualified

[16]Appendix Figure I2 also weighs against this possibility, since self-described ideological moderates in the Democratic party have shown the same over-time increase in relative approval of POC MCs as those who identify as "liberal" or "very liberal."

POC candidates may choose to run for office (Anzia and Berry 2011). Strategic discrimination by primary voters (Green, Schaffner, and Luks 2022) and party elites (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2022) could further narrow the pool of politicians of color to those with the clearest existing qualifications. Under this framework, white candidates are not subject to the same degree of selective pressure. As a result, the subset of potential and actual candidates who go on to win congressional elections may include more highly qualified POC MCs and relatively less qualified white MCs, on average. If POC politicians have greater average qualifications, qualifications translate into legislative effectiveness, and effectiveness translates into constituent approval, then POC MCs could receive higher approval ratings via a mechanism independent of their constituents' racial attitudes, referred to in the literature as the "Jackie Robinson" effect (Anzia and Berry 2011).

We can test two observable implications of this mechanism with our data. First, POC MCs would need to become more effective than white MCs over time. Second, this increase in effectiveness would need to align with the rise in approval among Democratic (but not Republican) white constituents.

To test these implications, we merge the CCES data with effectiveness scores from the Center for Effective Lawmaking (Volden and Wiseman 2014). Volden and Wiseman (2025) define legislative effectiveness as the "proven ability to advance a member's agenda items through the legislative process and into law." These scores combine information about the bills legislators sponsor and cosponsor with the stages these bills reach. All scores are normalized to have an average of 1.0 within each Congress, but the maximum score is 18.7 and the minimum is 0.0.[17]

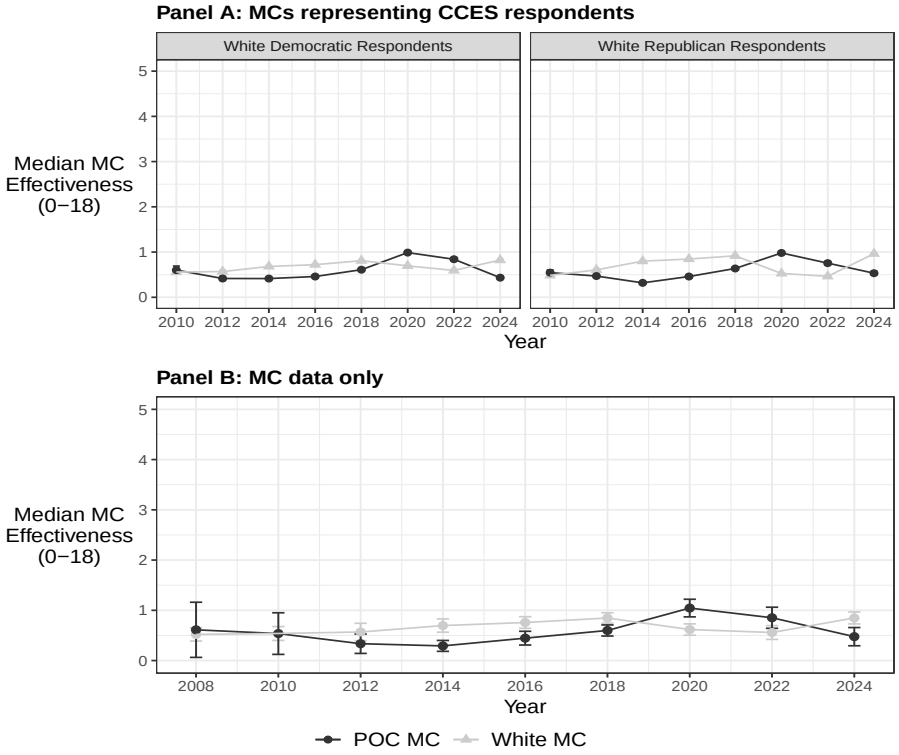
In Figure 7, Panel A, we present the median effectiveness scores of Members of Congress (MCs) serving white Democratic and Republican respondents in the CCES. Each respondent is assigned the effectiveness score of their district's MC, and we calculate the median across all respondents in each group and year. This approach ensures that the effectiveness scores reflect the distribution of MCs serving survey participants. Panel A shows that average effectiveness

[17] See Appendix K for analyses using MCs' educational attainment as an alternative measure of MC quality, which further supports our finding that differences in qualifications or effectiveness in office is not the mechanism driving the relationship between MC race and approval.

scores for both POC and white MCs remain relatively stable over time, regardless of whether they represent primarily Democratic or Republican respondents. Moreover, the years in which POC MCs receive higher approval are not years in which their effectiveness scores are notably higher than white MCs'. This suggests that rising approval of POC MCs among white Democrats is not driven by increasing relative effectiveness.

Panel B of Figure 7 further supports this interpretation. We present average effectiveness scores for POC and white MCs across all years using our MC dataset, independent of survey respondents. The results show limited variation across the study period. POC MCs are neither consistently more nor less effective than white MCs, nor do they become markedly more effective in recent years. These patterns suggest that the trend in relative approval observed among white Democrats is not driven by differential performance in POC MC effectiveness.

Figure 7: **Average MC Effectiveness Over Time**



Note: Panel A displays the median effectiveness scores of POC and White MCs, based on the MCs representing white Democratic and Republican CCES respondents. Each respondent is assigned the effectiveness score of their MC, and the median is calculated across all respondents in each group. Panel B displays the median effectiveness scores of all POC and White MCs in the MC dataset, not merged with the CCES responses.

Together, these results highlight the lack of change in legislative effectiveness over time for both POC and white MCs. This indicates that increasing approval for POC MCs among white Democrats is not simply a result of improved legislative performance among POC representatives. By ruling out the "Jackie Robinson effect" as a primary explanation, we strengthen our argument that the observed trends are shaped by changes in racial attitudes.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper demonstrates that white Democrats' increasingly positive evaluations of representatives of color are linked to their increasingly liberal racial attitudes. We also present evidence that weighs against the alternative explanations of ideological stereotyping and differences in legislator quality. We provide evidence extending through 2024 that the reversal in white Democrats' approval of POC versus white MCs has outlasted both the Trump presidency and the racial justice protests of 2020. The strong relationship between racial attitudes and approval ratings suggests these patterns reflect deep-seated changes in how white Democrats evaluate their representatives rather than expressive responses or short-term political dynamics.

Our findings advance understanding of both political representation and racial attitudes by showing that the relationship between racial attitudes and representative approval operates at both the individual and aggregate levels. Within-person variation in racial attitudes corresponds with differences in approval between white and POC representatives, while over-time shifts in average racial attitudes track closely with changes in relative approval. These parallel trends move in both directions — increasing through 2020 and diminishing slightly in 2022 and 2024 — although white Democrats remain substantially more racially liberal and more approving of POC MCs than they were a decade ago. This shift in evaluations of representatives is not driven by white Democratic constituents perceiving greater ideological closeness with POC MCs over time, nor is it accounted for by differences in legislative effectiveness.

Future research can address limitations of this work and build on it in important ways. First, using ratings of current MCs limits our analysis to approval of incumbent politicians near the end of their term, but the experience of having a POC MC itself might affect white constituents' racial

attitudes so that new candidates of color might not enjoy the same advantage that incumbents do (Hajnal 2001). More work is needed to characterize the experiences of candidates of color when they run in majority-white districts. Second, although we find strong evidence that racial attitudes shape representative evaluations, we cannot fully rule out other contributing factors. For example, perhaps expressing this preference helps to assuage feelings of white guilt (Chudy, Piston, and Shipper 2019). However, additional explanations need not be mutually exclusive with the role for outgroup racial attitudes we put forth here. Future scholarship might also explore how changing racial attitudes influence other aspects of democratic governance beyond representative approval, such as approval and legitimacy of representative institutions themselves.

Our findings about the durability of these attitudinal shifts raise important questions about their resilience to future political shocks. The documented pattern, where shifting racial attitudes and representational preferences coincide with a response to major political events, suggests that significant changes in the national political environment could again reshape these dynamics. Future research should examine how subsequent political developments affect whether white Democrats' increasingly positive evaluations of representatives of color represent a durable realignment or part of a more dynamic pattern of response and counter-response to the broader political context. Such work will be important for understanding the long-term trajectory of racial attitudes and descriptive representation in American democracy.

Despite these caveats, our findings illuminate important changes in American political representation. The patterns we observe do not align with expectations from most previous descriptive representation research, but correspond closely with shifting racial attitudes. While Democratic party elites still perceive candidates of color to be less appealing to white Democratic voters (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2022), our findings suggest this conventional wisdom is outdated. The likely durability of white Democrats' favorable attitudes towards representatives of color indicates a meaningful shift in how race shapes preferences about political representation. Although only one part of the electoral picture, white Democrats' changing attitudes could contribute to the election of future legislative bodies that better reflect the nation's diversity, potentially improving both

substantive representation of people of color and perceptions of democratic legitimacy.

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Supporting Information

Contents

A. Descriptive Statistics

Table A1: Number of white CES Respondents by Party

	N	Dem.	Pct D	Ind./Other	Pct I	Rep.	Pct R
110th Congress	27,569	11,310	41.12	3,380	12.29	12,816	46.59
111th Congress	41,388	15,869	38.54	4,927	11.97	20,378	49.49
112th Congress	40,335	15,951	40.20	5,558	14.01	18,170	45.79
113th Congress	41,419	16,492	39.88	8,110	19.61	16,749	40.50
114th Congress	46,443	19,349	41.69	8,954	19.29	18,108	39.02
115th Congress	45,011	18,515	41.18	7,309	16.26	19,133	42.56
116th Congress	44,128	19,222	43.56	7,419	16.81	17,487	39.63
117th Congress	41,504	18,228	43.92	6,443	15.52	16,833	40.56
118th Congress	41,443	18,218	43.96	5,462	13.18	17,763	42.86

Note: We present the number of respondents in the dataset for each party in each Congress. We show the total number of respondents for each Congress, the number of Democratic respondents, the percent of Democratic respondents, the number of Independent respondents, the percent of Independent respondents, the number of Republican respondents, and the percent of Republican respondents for surveys taken during each Congress. These only include even survey years.

Table A2: Number of white CES respondents by race of MC

	Black	Pct Black	Hisp.	Pct Hisp.	Asian	Pct Asian	White	Pct White
110th Congress	1,233	4.61	569	2.17	231	0.89	25,504	92.59
111th Congress	1,858	4.67	1,027	2.63	578	1.50	37,862	91.62
112th Congress	1,947	5.07	1,430	3.77	550	1.48	36,370	90.28
113th Congress	2,301	5.87	1,635	4.23	555	1.48	36,810	89.00
114th Congress	2,955	6.77	1,964	4.58	742	1.78	40,548	87.64
115th Congress	3,113	7.45	2,236	5.43	843	2.12	38,612	85.91
116th Congress	3,821	9.41	2,274	5.75	963	2.52	36,689	83.32
117th Congress	3,866	10.24	2,015	5.47	1,009	2.82	33,826	81.63
118th Congress	4,084	11.08	3,054	8.33	963	2.79	32,102	78.84

Note: We present the number of respondents represented by MCs of each race in each Congress. The columns show the number and percent of respondents with Black, Asian, Hispanic, and white MCs.

Table A3: White respondents with Democratic MCs in each racial group

	Black D	Pct. BD	Hisp. D	Pct. HD	Asian D	Pct. AD	White D	Pct. WD
110th Congress	1,233	9.95	502	4.31	231	2.03	11,158	85.41
111th Congress	1,858	8.97	901	4.56	380	1.97	18,864	86.08
112th Congress	1,659	12.24	651	5.19	460	3.72	11,897	81.76
113th Congress	2,301	15.18	1,103	7.87	555	4.12	12,862	76.81
114th Congress	2,805	17.97	1,131	8.09	742	5.46	12,803	73.81
115th Congress	2,930	20.27	1,333	10.33	843	6.79	11,524	69.49
116th Congress	3,777	21.06	1,432	8.99	963	6.23	14,156	69.23
117th Congress	3,623	22.86	1,144	8.38	930	6.92	12,226	67.86
118th Congress	3,680	26.48	1,787	14.59	795	7.06	10,268	62.34

Note: We present the number of respondents represented by Democratic MCs of each race in each Congress. The columns show the number and percent of respondents with Black, Asian, Hispanic, and white Democratic MCs.

Table A4: White respondents with Republican MCs in each racial group

	Black R	Pct. BR	Hisp. R	Pct. HR	Asian R	Pct. AR	White R	Pct. WR
110th Congress	0	0	67	0.46	0	0	14,346	99.07
111th Congress	0	0	126	0.66	198	1.03	18,998	97.89
112th Congress	288	1.16	779	3.07	90	0.36	24,473	95.10
113th Congress	0	0	532	2.16	0	0	23,948	97.29
114th Congress	150	0.54	833	2.90	0	0	27,745	95.93
115th Congress	183	0.67	903	3.20	0	0	27,088	95.51
116th Congress	44	0.19	842	3.58	0	0	22,533	95.54
117th Congress	243	1.11	871	3.77	79	0.35	21,600	92.23
118th Congress	404	1.82	1,267	5.35	168	0.74	21,834	90.06

Note: We present the number of respondents represented by Republican MCs of each race in each Congress. The columns show the number and percent of respondents with Black, Asian, Hispanic, and white Republican MCs.

Table A5: MC Race by Party and Congress, 2008-2024

Party	Congress	# POC MCs	# White MCs	% POC MCs
Democrat	110	63	172	26.81
Democrat	111	64	191	25.10
Democrat	112	63	130	32.64
Democrat	113	73	128	36.32
Democrat	114	74	114	39.36
Democrat	115	83	112	42.56
Democrat	116	100	134	42.74
Democrat	117	96	126	43.24
Democrat	118	99	110	47.37
Republican	110	4	198	1.98
Republican	111	7	173	3.89
Republican	112	12	230	4.96
Republican	113	8	226	3.42
Republican	114	12	235	4.86
Republican	115	13	227	5.42
Republican	116	11	190	5.47
Republican	117	22	191	10.33
Republican	118	27	192	12.33

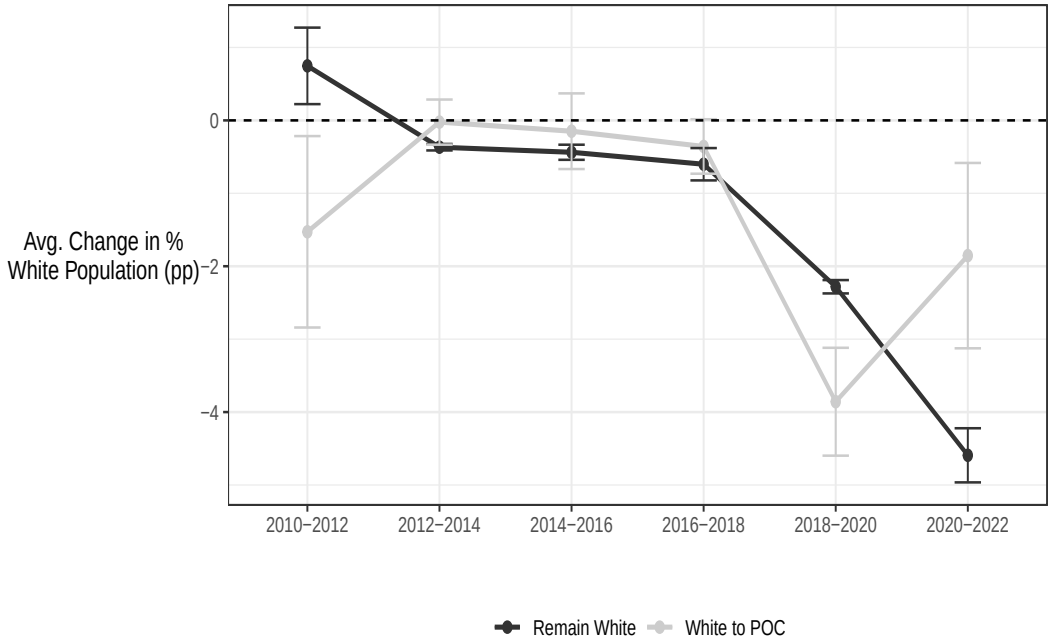
Note: We present the number of MCs in the dataset in each Congress from each party and whether they are POC or white. We also show the percent of POC MCs in each Congress.

Table A6: MC Race by Region, 2008-2024

Region	# POC MCs	# White MCs	% POC MCs
East North Central	109	485	18.35
East South Central	18	216	7.69
Middle Atlantic	104	416	20.00
Mountain West	54	216	20.00
New England	6	185	3.14
Pacific West	207	428	32.60
South Atlantic	179	564	24.09
West North Central	30	237	11.24
West South Central	124	328	27.43

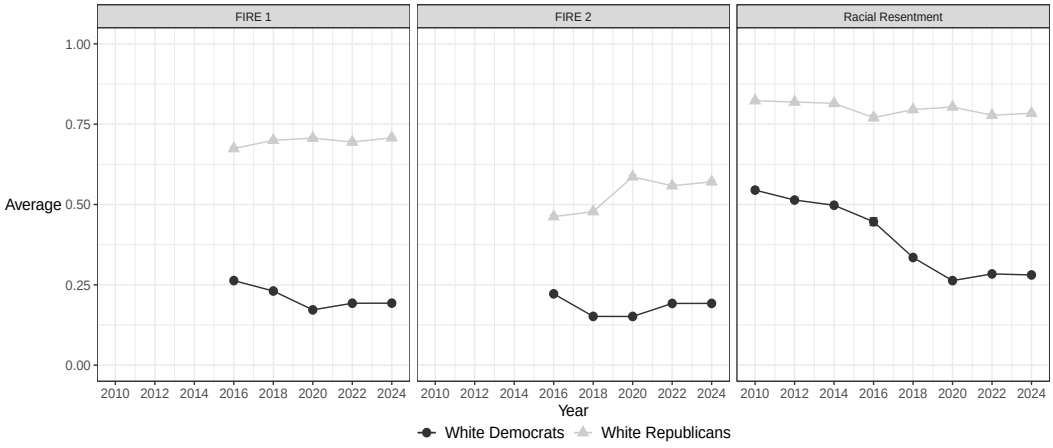
Note: We present the number of MCs in the dataset from 2008-2024 from each census region by MC race.

Figure A1: Average change in percent white population in districts that maintain white MCs vs. those that switch to POC MCs



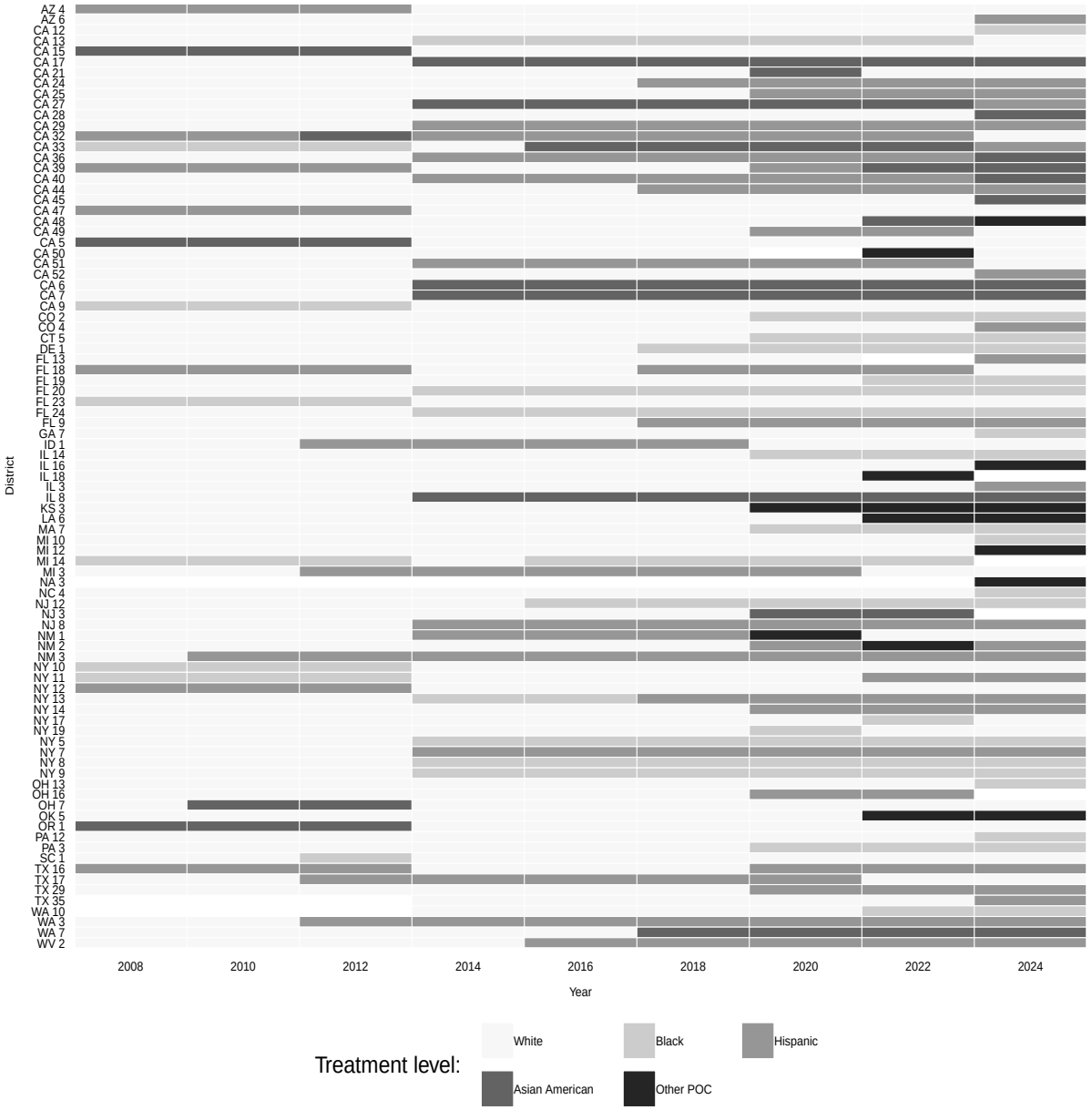
Note: We plot the average change in the percent white population in districts across five sets of two-year periods, comparing districts where the MC remained white (black line) to those where a white MC was replaced by a POC MC (gray line). Both groups of districts follow nearly parallel demographic trends over time. While the 2018–2020 period shows a slightly sharper decline in white population share in districts that transitioned to a POC MC, the trajectories are broadly similar throughout the decade.

Figure A2: Average Racial Resentment and FIRE Scores Over Time



Note: We extend Figure 1 in the main text to also include average FIRE scores. We only have data on these scores in the CCES from 2016 onward. However, even with more limited data, the increasing racial liberalism among White Democrats in the most recent years is apparent. FIRE 1 nearly replicates the pattern seen in racial resentment.

Figure A3: Treated Districts



Note: We present the treated districts used in our analyses. While redistricting did cause some shifting of MC race across districts, this shift does not explain most of the variation in our estimates. If we split the data into pre- and post-2012 redistricting, we find the significant positive effect of POC MCs in more recent years.

B. Assessing Missingness and Alternative Codings of "Don't Know"

Table B1: Effects of POC MC on Missing/DK Approval Rating

	Missing or DK MC approval		
	Full sample	Democrats	Republicans
POC MC	0.011	0.013	0.015
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.019)
MC Seniority	-0.126^{***}	-0.104^{**}	-0.150^{***}
	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.031)
MC Gender	-0.058^{***}	-0.056^{***}	-0.055^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)
District * Party FEs	Y	Y	Y
Congress FEs	Y	Y	Y
N	367,909	152,340	157,052
R^2	0.054	0.062	0.062
Adjusted R^2	0.052	0.058	0.058

$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$

Note: We regress an alternative variable for approval, coded 1 for any missing approval value and 0 for when the approval variable does not have missing data, on POC MC and controls. We run this model on the full sample, Democratic respondents, and Republican respondents. The effects on missingness do not significantly differ based on respondent subgroups.

Table B2: Effect of POC MC on MC Approval with 'Don't Know' as Median, Mean, and NA

	Median Democrats	NA Democrats	Mean Democrats
POC MC	-0.125^{***}	-0.135^{***}	-0.124^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.016)
POC MC x Racial Resentment	0.221^{***}	0.249^{***}	0.221^{***}
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Racial Resentment	-0.093^{***}	-0.101^{***}	-0.097^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)
MC Seniority	0.020	0.057^{*}	0.017
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.021)
MC Gender	0.014	0.022^{+}	0.013
	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.010)
District * MC Party FEs	Y	Y	Y
Congress FEs	Y	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	117	117	117
N	110,664	92,772	110,664
R^2	0.427	0.512	0.424
Adjusted R^2	0.423	0.509	0.421

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Note: We regress different versions of the approval variable on the indicator for POC MC interacted with our racial resentment index. Model 1 uses the main approval variable, Model 2 a variable where 'Don't know' responses are coded as NA, and Model 3 an approval variable where 'Don't know' responses are coded as the mean of approval.

C. Inclusion vs. Exclusion of Party Leaners

Table C1: Effects of POC MC on MC Approval among White Democrats With and Without Party Leaners

	MC approval	
	Leaners	No Leaners
POC MC	-0.125^{**}	-0.123^{**}
	(0.016)	(0.018)
POC MC x Racial Resentment	0.221^{**}	0.224^{**}
	(0.021)	(0.023)
Racial Resentment	-0.093^{**}	-0.093^{**}
	(0.012)	(0.012)
MC Seniority	0.020	0.020
	(0.021)	(0.021)
MC Gender	0.014	0.011
	(0.010)	(0.010)
District * MC Party FEs	Y	Y
Congress FEs	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	117	117
N	110,664	84,149
Adjusted R^2	0.423	0.436

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Note: We regress MC approval on the indicator for POC MC interacted with our racial resentment index. Respondents are grouped as white Democrats with Democratic leaners and Democrats excluding leaners. In the main paper, we include leaners.

D. Effects on Approval by Year

Table D1: Effects of POC MC on MC Approval by Year

	Democratic respondents	Republican respondents
Effect of White MC given...		
Year = 2010	−0.020**	−0.039***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Year = 2012	−0.010	−0.021***
	(0.007)	(0.006)
Year = 2014	−0.023**	−0.026***
	(0.007)	(0.006)
Year = 2016	−0.024***	−0.058***
	(0.007)	(0.007)
Year = 2018	−0.056***	−0.020**
	(0.008)	(0.006)
Year = 2020	−0.065***	−0.028***
	(0.009)	(0.006)
Year = 2022	−0.060***	−0.060***
	(0.009)	(0.008)
Year = 2024	−0.067***	−0.041***
	(0.009)	(0.007)
MC Seniority	0.026	−0.017
	(0.018)	(0.016)
MC Gender	0.012	−0.008
	(0.009)	(0.007)
Effect of POC MC given...		
Year = 2008	−0.070***	0.001
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Year = 2010	−0.055**	−0.062**
	(0.018)	(0.019)
Year = 2012	−0.037*	0.001
	(0.018)	(0.016)
Year = 2014	−0.003	0.011
	(0.016)	(0.017)
Year = 2016	−0.013	0.052***
	(0.014)	(0.016)
Year = 2018	0.045***	0.005
	(0.013)	(0.015)
Year = 2020	0.052***	−0.012
	(0.015)	(0.016)
Year = 2022	0.038**	0.003
	(0.013)	(0.019)
Year = 2024	0.052***	−0.013
	(0.015)	(0.017)
District * Party FEs	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	117	117
N	150,676	155,292

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: This table corresponds to Figure 2 in the paper. We regress MC Approval on the interaction between even survey years and an indicator for MC race, coded as white (0) or POC (1), for Democratic and Republican white respondents separately. Standard errors are clustered at the district level.

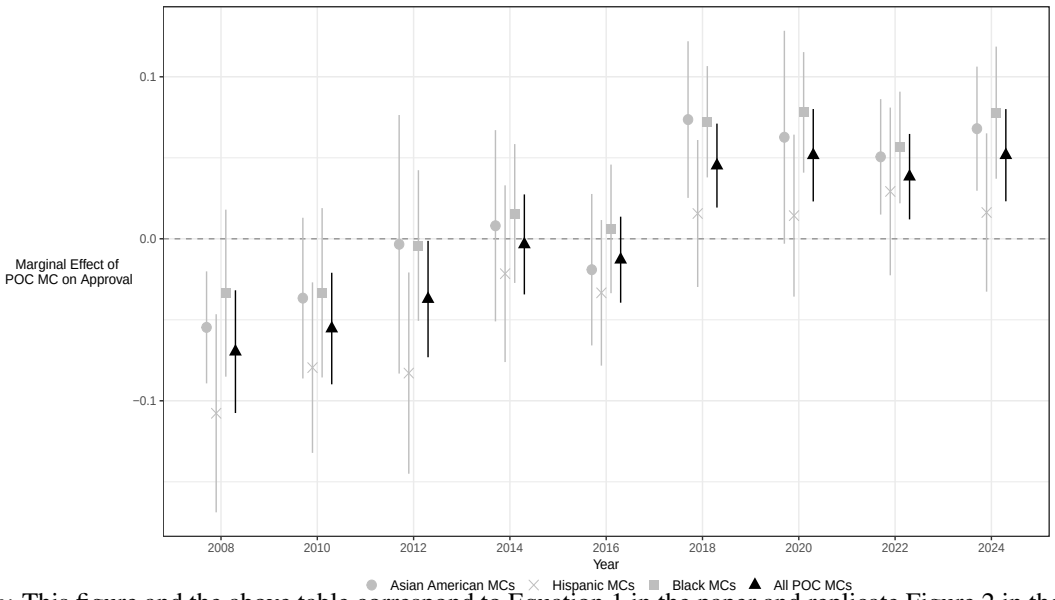
E. Effects on Approval by Race and Year

Table E1: Effects of MC Race on MC Approval by Year (Democratic Respondents)

	Black MC	Hispanic MC	Asian MC
Effect of Black/Hispanic/Asian MC given...			
year = 2008	−0.034		
	(0.026)		
year = 2010	−0.033		
	(0.027)		
year = 2012	−0.004		
	(0.024)		
year = 2014	0.016		
	(0.022)		
year = 2016	0.006		
	(0.020)		
year = 2018	0.072***		
	(0.018)		
year = 2020	0.078***		
	(0.019)		
year = 2022	0.056**		
	(0.018)		
year = 2024	0.078***		
	(0.021)		
year = 2008		−0.108***	
		(0.031)	
year = 2010		−0.080**	
		(0.027)	
year = 2012		−0.083**	
		(0.032)	
year = 2014		−0.022	
		(0.028)	
year = 2016		−0.033	
		(0.023)	
year = 2018		0.016	
		(0.023)	
year = 2020		0.014	
		(0.026)	
year = 2022		0.029	
		(0.026)	
year = 2024		0.016	
		(0.025)	
year = 2008			−0.055**
			(0.018)
year = 2010			−0.037
			(0.025)
year = 2012			−0.003
			(0.041)
year = 2014			0.008
			(0.030)
year = 2016			−0.019
			(0.024)
year = 2018			0.074**
			(0.025)
year = 2020			0.063+
			(0.034)
year = 2022			0.051**
			(0.018)
year = 2024			0.068***
			(0.020)
District * Party FEs	Y	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	44	54	27
N	139,617	135,701	131,734

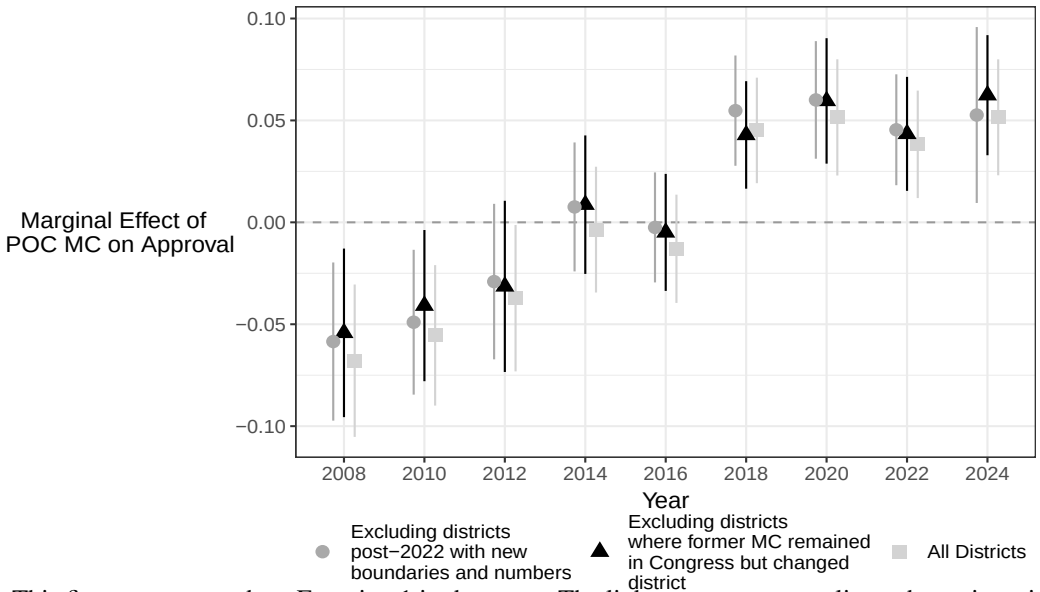
+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Figure E1: Effect of MC Race on MC Approval by Year (Democratic Respondents)



Note: This figure and the above table correspond to Equation 1 in the paper and replicate Figure 2 in the paper, but here we disaggregated POC MC into distinct racial groups for MCs.

Figure E2: Effect of MC Race on MC Approval by Year Accounting for Redistricting (Democratic Respondents)



Note: This figure corresponds to Equation 1 in the paper. The light gray squares replicate the main estimates from Figure 2, using all districts. The dark gray circles show estimates after excluding districts that did not retain at least 90% of their geographic boundaries or changed district numbers following the 2022 redistricting cycle. We obtained data on district boundary changes from DailyKos. This addresses cases where changes in MC race might reflect newly drawn districts or administrative reassignments. The black triangles exclude districts in which the previous MC remained in Congress but switched to a different district, as well as the districts they switched into. The positive effect of having a POC MC on constituent approval in more recent years is robust to each configuration.

F. I and Identification of MC Race

Table F1: Effects of POC MC on MC Approval by Year

	Inaccurately Identify MC Race	Accurately Identify MC Race
Effect of White MC given...		
Year = 2010	−0.052	−0.030***
	(0.054)	(0.007)
Year = 2012	0.001	−0.021*
	(0.064)	(0.008)
Year = 2014	0.071	−0.031***
	(0.054)	(0.009)
Year = 2016	0.094	−0.011
	(0.064)	(0.010)
Year = 2018	0.018	−0.072***
	(0.051)	(0.010)
Year = 2020	−0.016	−0.079***
	(0.056)	(0.010)
Year = 2022	0.018	−0.071***
	(0.056)	(0.011)
Year = 2024	0.001	−0.080***
	(0.064)	(0.010)
MC Seniority	0.032	0.049*
	(0.081)	(0.025)
MC Gender	0.072	0.013
	(0.049)	(0.012)
Effect of POC MC given...		
Year = 2008	−0.027	−0.064*
	(0.088)	(0.025)
Year = 2010	0.023	−0.052*
	(0.084)	(0.023)
Year = 2012	−0.021	−0.007
	(0.074)	(0.026)
Year = 2014	−0.098	0.002
	(0.066)	(0.023)
Year = 2016	−0.028	−0.045
	(0.078)	(0.030)
Year = 2018	0.014	0.072***
	(0.066)	(0.016)
Year = 2020	0.016	0.089***
	(0.074)	(0.017)
Year = 2022	−0.004	0.073***
	(0.066)	(0.017)
Year = 2024	0.020	0.067***
	(0.069)	(0.017)
District * Party FEs	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	116	72
N	3,731	99,696

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Our results rest on the assumption that respondents are able to correctly identify the race of their MCs, as outlined in the paper. Here, we present the effects among respondents able to identify the

race of their MC and among those unable to identify race, corresponding to Figure 4 in the paper.

Table F2: Effect of POC MC on MC Approval, Interacting MC Race with Racial Resentment (White Respondents who accurately/inaccurately identify MC Race)

	MC approval	
	Accurately Identify MC Race	Inaccurately Identify MC Race
POC MC	-0.151^{***}	0.023
	(0.018)	(0.070)
POC MC x Racial Resentment	0.276^{***}	-0.080
	(0.019)	(0.065)
Racial Resentment	-0.107^{***}	-0.041
	(0.012)	(0.048)
District * MC Party FEs	Y	Y
Congressional session FEs	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	90	37
N	83,137	3,253

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: Using the same model specifications as in Table 1, we present the effect of having a POC MC interacted with racial resentment on MC approval, but we split the sample into high- and low-knowledge respondents.

In Table F2, We also explore whether the relationship between attitudes towards POC MCs, racial resentment, and approval differ by knowledge of MC Race. Again, the relationship is strongest among individuals able to accurately identify the race of their MCs.

We also include a table to show the high rates at which respondents were able to identify the race of their MCs when they responded to this question. Table F3 shows the percent of respondents who accurately identify white MCs and those who accurately identify POC MCs. In Table F4, we then show accurately identification separated out by racial group of the MC. Constituents asked this question are able to identiy their MCs' race correctly more often than not for all racial groups (far better than a coin flip).

Table F3: Percentage of respondents who correctly identify their MC's Race (split by MC race)

MC Race	Pct. respondents who identify correctly
White	87.96
POC	67.44

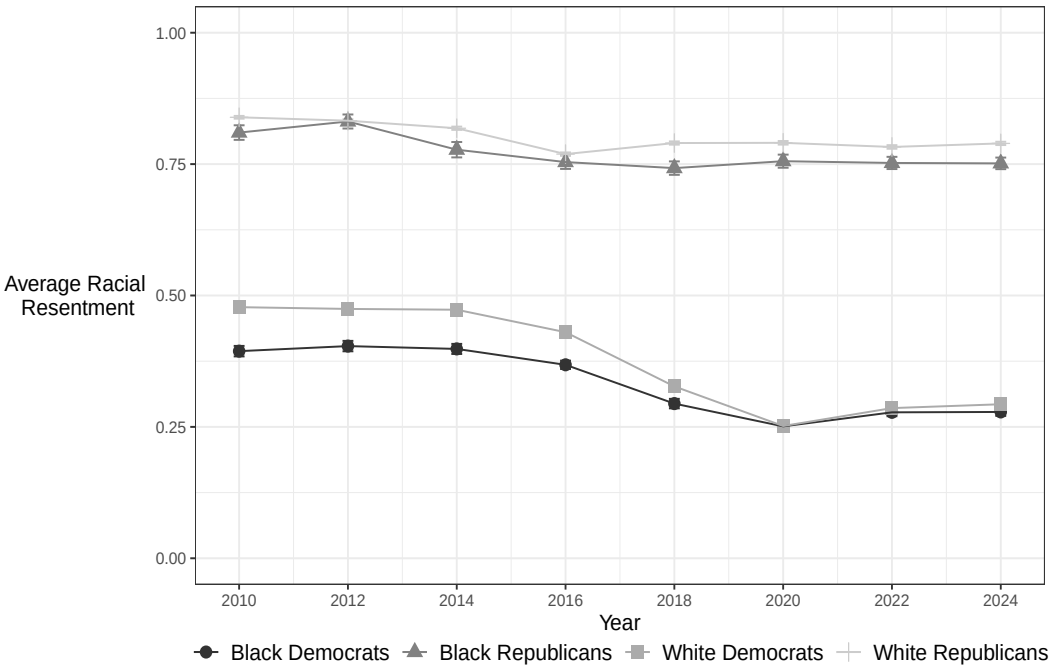
Note: We present the percentage of respondents who correctly identify the race of their MC. POC includes an average for all non-white racial groups. 76% of respondents answered this question.

Table F4: Percentage of respondents who correctly identify their MC's Race (split by MC race)

MC Race	Pct. respondents who identify correctly
Asian	60.41
Black	77.67
Hispanic	60.91
White	87.96

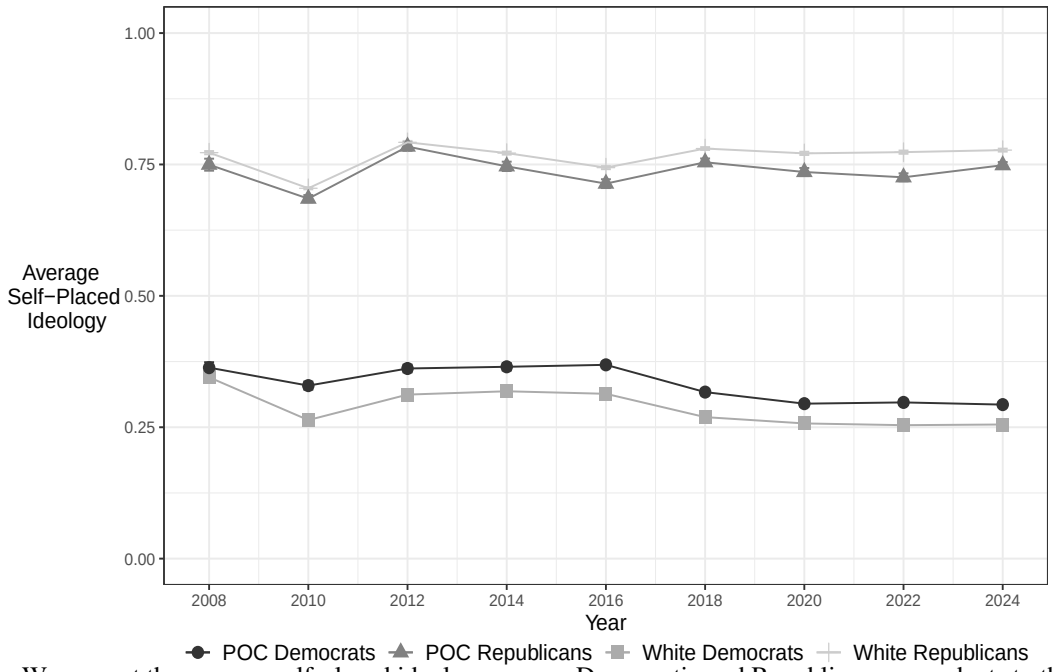
G. Racial Resentment and Ideology Over Time

Figure G1: Average Racial Resentment Over Time by Respondent Party



Note: We present average levels of racial resentment over time among both Black and White Democratic and Republican respondents, using our 0-1 racial resentment index.

Figure G2: Average Ideology Over Time



Note: We present the average self-placed ideology among Democratic and Republican respondents to the CCES over time.

H. Effect of POC/Black MC on Approval and by Racial Resentment

Table H1: Effects of POC/Black MC on MC Approval, Interacting MC Race with Racial Resentment and FIRE Scale + Controls (White Respondents)

	DV: MC Approval					
	POC MC			Black MC		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Reverse-scaled Racial Resentment	−0.093***			−0.092***		
	(0.012)			(0.011)		
FIRE 1		−0.109***			−0.108***	
		(0.013)			(0.013)	
Reverse-scaled FIRE 2			−0.123***			−0.122***
			(0.014)			(0.014)
POC MC	−0.125***	−0.177***	−0.135***			
	(0.016)	(0.024)	(0.025)			
Black MC				−0.155***	−0.211***	−0.148***
				(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.033)
MC Seniority	0.020	0.019	0.017	0.021	0.042	0.041
	(0.021)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Woman MC	0.014	−0.005	−0.007	0.012	−0.009	−0.012
	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.014)
POC MC x Reverse-scaled RR	0.221***					
	(0.021)					
POC MC x FIRE 1		0.242***				
		(0.028)				
POC MC x Reverse-scaled FIRE 2			0.186***			
			(0.027)			
Black MC x Reverse-scaled RR				0.288***		
				(0.018)		
Black MC x FIRE 1					0.313***	
					(0.030)	
Black MC x Reverse-scaled FIRE 2						0.238***
						(0.031)
District * MC Party FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Congressional session FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
No. districts w MC race change	92	52	52	33	15	15
N	110,664	82,525	81,392	102,001	75,163	74,140

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: We present the full set of coefficients, including those on controls, for the models presented in Table 1 in the main paper.

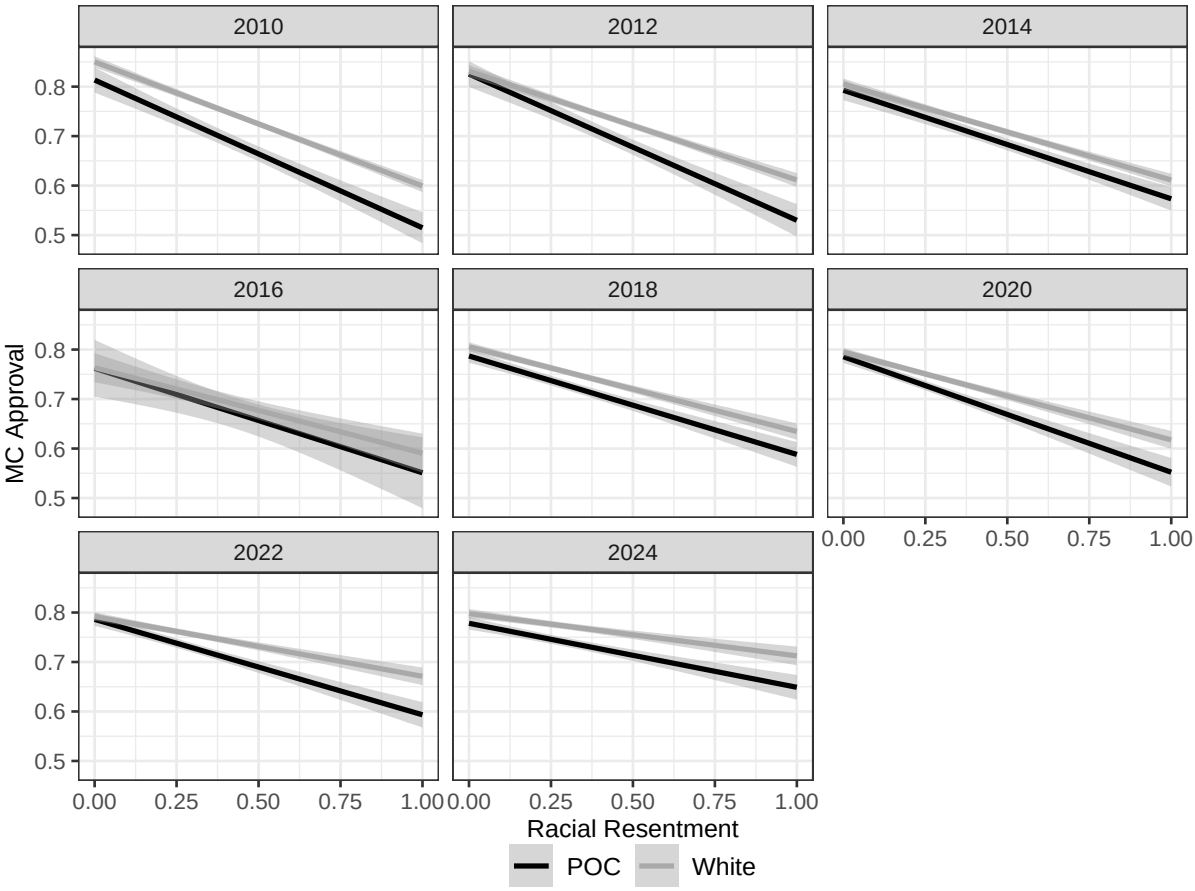
Table H2: Effects of POC/Black MC on MC Approval, Interacting MC Race with Racial Resentment and FIRE Scale + District Controls (White Respondents)

	DV: MC Approval					
	POC MC			Black MC		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Reverse-scaled Racial Resentment	−0.070***			−0.065***		
	(0.010)			(0.009)		
FIRE 1		−0.083***			−0.080***	
		(0.011)			(0.011)	
Reverse-scaled FIRE 2			−0.107***			−0.102***
			(0.011)			(0.011)
POC MC	−0.125***	−0.175***	−0.131***			
	(0.017)	(0.025)	(0.025)			
Black MC				−0.156***	−0.213***	−0.144***
				(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.033)
MC Seniority	0.021	0.019	0.017	0.023	0.044	0.043
	(0.021)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Woman MC	0.014	−0.006	−0.008	0.012	−0.009	−0.013
	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Gender	0.017***	0.019***	0.022***	0.019***	0.020***	0.023***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age	0.0003+	0.0004*	0.001**	0.0002	0.0004+	0.0005*
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Ideology	0.054***	0.074***	0.069***	0.064***	0.083***	0.079***
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Education	−0.002*	0.0002	−0.0001	−0.003*	−0.00000	−0.0005
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
POC MC x Reverse-scaled RR	0.223***					
	(0.021)					
POC MC x FIRE 1		0.243***				
		(0.028)				
POC MC x Reverse-scaled FIRE 2			0.184***			
			(0.027)			
Black MC x Reverse-scaled RR				0.292***		
				(0.018)		
Black MC x FIRE 1					0.318***	
					(0.030)	
Black MC x Reverse-scaled FIRE 2						0.238***
						(0.032)
District * MC Party FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Congressional session FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
No. districts w MC race change	92	52	52	33	15	15
N	110,122	82,127	80,995	101,518	74,814	73,791

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

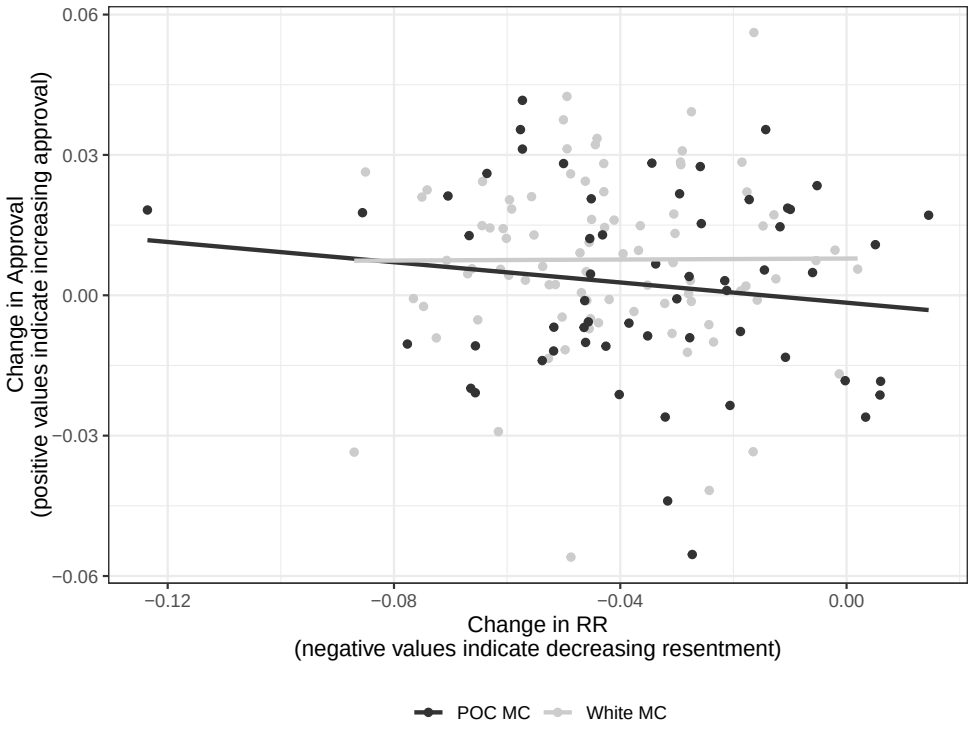
Note: We present models with additional controls for constituent-level characteristics.

Figure H1: Relationship Between Racial Resentment and Approval by Year for White Democrats with POC and White Democratic MCs



Note: The figure displays the relationship between racial resentment and approval of POC and white Democratic MCs in each year in our data. This relationship is stable over time, indicating that the shift in relative approval of POC MCs is a result of shifts in the average level of racial resentment among white Democrats rather than a increasingly strong relationship between racial resentment and relative approval of POC compared to white MCs.

Figure H2: Relationship Between Average Change in Racial Resentment and Average Change in Approval for White Democrats with POC and White Democratic MCs



Note: The figure displays the relationship between the average change in racial resentment and average change in approval of POC and white Democratic MCs. We take the mean of the change between each pair of years (e.g., 2012 to 2014, 2014 to 2016, etc.) for both approval and racial resentment to compare how the change is associated for both POC and White Democractic MCs. Available upon request are Z-test results showing significant differences between approval ratings for POC and White MCs at both the high and low resentment levels. This demonstrates that decreasing resentment is associated with increasing approval for POC MCs. Increasing resentment is associated with decreasing approval. We removed an outlier POC MC point from Alaska (maintained POC MC for all Congresses included here).

Table H3: Effects of POC/Black MC on MC Approval, Interacting MC Race with Racial Resentment (White Respondents) - Split by year

	MC approval			
	POC MC (12-20)	Black MC (12-20)	POC MC (22-24)	Black MC (22-24)
POC MC	−0.129***		−0.137***	
	(0.023)		(0.032)	
POC MC x Racial Resentment	0.249***		0.188***	
	(0.026)		(0.030)	
Black MC		−0.157***		−0.192***
		(0.027)		(0.040)
Black MC x Resentment		0.314***		0.274***
		(0.023)		(0.033)
Racial Resentment	−0.109***	−0.108***	−0.102***	−0.102***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.014)
MC Seniority	−0.032	−0.024	0.068	0.065
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.048)	(0.053)
MC Gender	0.022	0.017	0.018	0.020
	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.021)
District * MC Party FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Congressional session FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
No. districts w MC race change	47	17	18	5
N	64,351	59,804	32,752	29,212

+p < 0.1; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: This table replicates the marginal effects of racial resentment from Table 1, splitting the data into pre- and post-redistricting periods. Redistricting occurred in both 2012 and 2022. By separating the samples, we show that our main results are not driven by compositional changes in districts due to redistricting.

Table H4: Alternative models to compare with two-way fixed effects models

	Wtd. Avg.	Main Model
Racial Resentment	−0.102	−0.093
POC MC	−0.123	−0.125
RR x POC MC	0.214	0.221

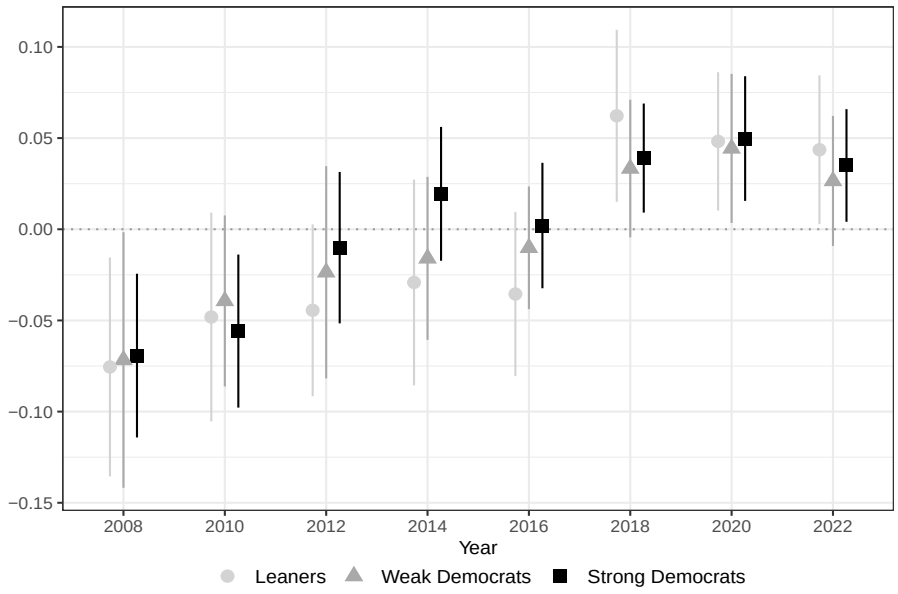
Two-way fixed effects provide a weighted average of every 2x2 DID setup, including those where treatment switches both on and off. In our main models for the racial resentment interaction, treatment turns off in districts where POC MCs lose their elections or leave office and a white MC replaces them. This could bias the estimates (Goodman-Bacon 2018), which highlights a limitation of using TWFEs. Scholars have suggested alternative methods (e.g., Goodman-Bacon 2018; **?**), but the corresponding R and Stata packages for these methods lack features necessary for our data. Therefore, the paper's analyses are conducted with classic TWFEs, but we approximate our main models by running the analyses on pairs of years with any switches from treatment to control coded as missing data. We exclude districts when there is a switch from POC/Black to White MC - when the treatment variable is coded as 0 after a year in which it was coded 1, it is recoded as NA for the two-year pair. We use a weighted average of these estimates for each coefficient of interest (weighted by the number of treated districts). The results from this alternative analysis are found in Table H3. We compare the estimates from the main models to those generated from this alternative method. This comparison reveals that estimates are similar for the main model and alternative method.

I. Alternative Explanation: Party Norms

An additional alternative explanation we considered is that Democratic party norms may have shifted in ways that influence approval of POC MCs. If stronger partisans are more motivated to conform to attitudes of other members of the party and a group norm has developed around increasing POC representation, we would expect a growing approval premium for POC MCs among white respondents who care deeply about their Democratic identity as a form of social identity. Rather than sincere attitude shifts, the patterns we observe would be a result of the strongest partisans adhering to changing party norms.

Ideally, we would test this possibility using a survey item or scale that measures partisan identity centrality like the one used by Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015). Existing research suggests that those for whom party identification as most central to their sense of self are the most sensitive to violations of party norms (Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2012). However, the CCES common content does not include a measure of this kind. As a rough proxy, we use the standard seven-point measure of partisan identity that distinguishes between Democratic leaners, "not very strong" Democrats, and "strong" Democrats. Although this measure almost certainly reflects both programmatic and social elements of partisan identity, Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015) note that it does correspond fairly closely with an exclusively identity-focused measure. Accordingly, the following should be viewed as a preliminary test of an additional explanation for white Democrats' growing approval of MCs of color that future research might explore in greater depth.

Figure I1: Effects of POC MC on Approval by Year, Split by Party Strength

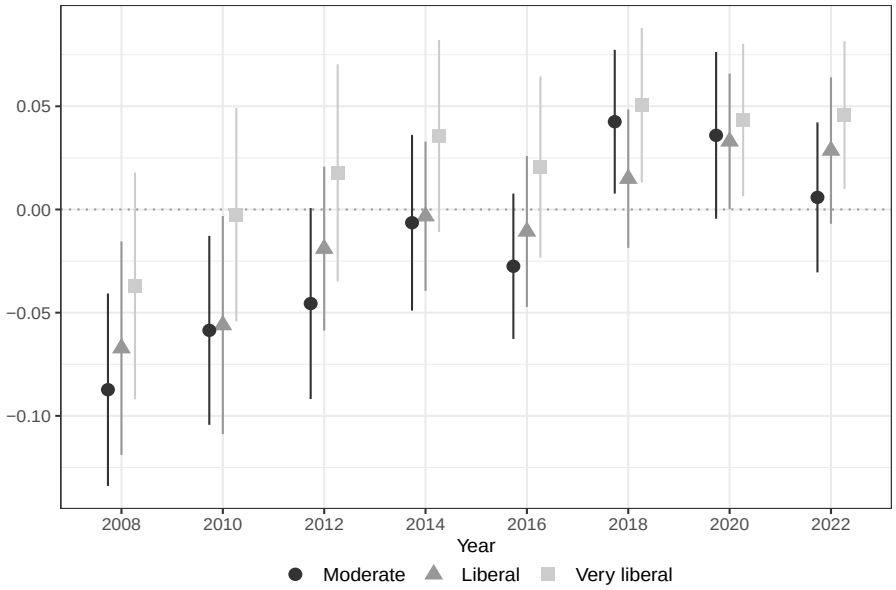


Note: We present estimates for the coefficient on the interactions between each even year and MC race. Separate models are shown for strong and weak Democrats and leaners. Other model specifications are identical to those in Figure 2.

To test the role of party norms, we use the seven-point measure of partisan identification on the CCES. Assuming that stronger identifiers are more motivated to conform to party norms, this measure provides a proxy for how much party norms are likely to matter to a given respondent.

We re-estimate Equation 1 for white Democrats disaggregated by the strength of their partisan identification. Figure 6 presents the results. Respondents at all three levels of Democratic identification display higher approval for white MCs in 2008. Although strong Democrats lead the shift through the mid-2010s, by 2018, white Democrats approved more highly of POC MCs on average, regardless of partisan identity strength. Motivation to conform to party norms about supporting politicians of color, operationalized as the strength of partisan identification, does not appear to explain the change in white Democrats' relative approval of POC MCs.

Figure I2: Effects of POC MC on Approval by Year, Split by Ideology



Note: We present estimates for the coefficient on the interactions between each even year and MC race. Separate models are shown for strong and weak Democrats and leaners. Other model specifications are identical to those in Figure 2.

J. Difference in Means for Perceived Ideological Congruence

Table J1: Difference in Means (between POC and White MCs) for Perceived Ideological Incongruence by MC Party (White Democratic Respondents)

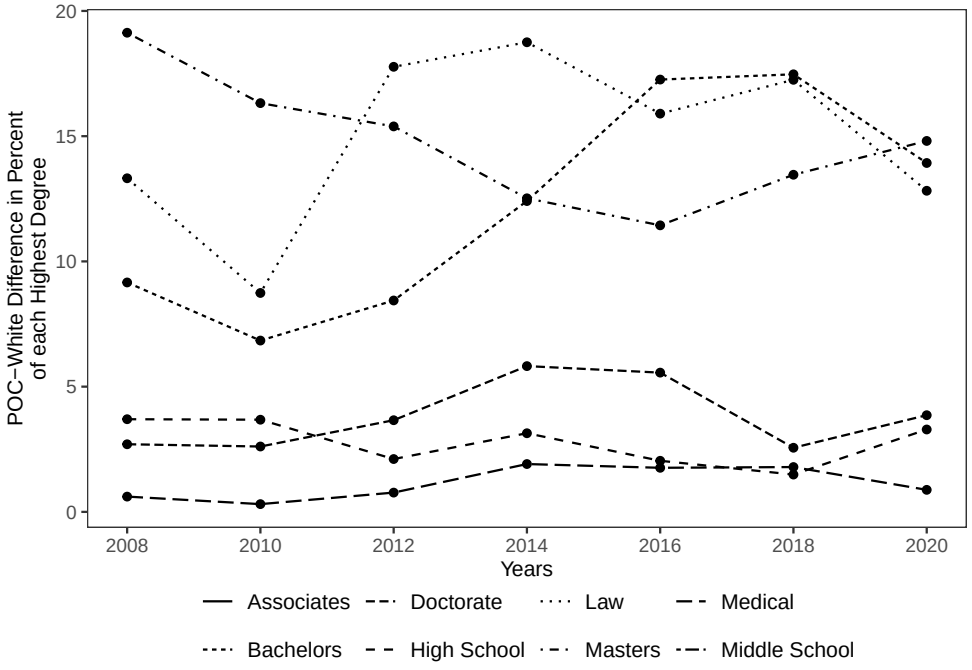
mc_party	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024
Republican MCs	0.014	0.063	0.085	0.025	-0.005	-0.025	-0.011	0.005
Democratic MCs	-0.001	0.005	0.004	-0.005	0.002	-0.009	0.000	0.004

Note: These estimates correspond to the values in Figure 7 in the main paper.

K. Education Difference Between White and POC MCs Over Time

For the Jackie Robinson effect to explain our results, POC MCs would need to be getting consistently more effective, or more qualified, over time. In the paper, we find no changes using Volden and Wiseman scores. Here, we find no significant changes over time in POC MCs' educational backgrounds, a commonly-used measure of qualification for office-holders. Average educational attainment of POC MCs relative to white MCs also does not change during the period in which the estimates in Figure 2 in the paper begin to change to positive for POC MCs. We collected MC education from Carnes (2016) and by hand, using MC websites, Wikipedia, campaign websites, news articles from 2008 to 2020.

Figure K1: Educational Difference Over Time



We also present a replication of Figure 7, but in Figure K2 we show the full distribution of effectiveness in each year for POC and White MCs. In the paper, we rescale effectiveness 0-1, but here we show that that maximum effectiveness values (max = 18.7) are outliers compared to the concentration of effectiveness scores (mean = 1.0).

Figure K2: MC Effectiveness Over Time – Full Distribution of Effectiveness Scores