

“Stop the Steal”: Racial Resentment, Affective Partisanship, and Investigating the January 6th Insurrection

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Our analysis of data from a nationally representative survey of adults shows that beliefs in whether the January 6th insurrection was justifiable and whether it required investigation through the creation of the U.S. House Select Committee are inexorably steeped in affective partisanship and racial resentment. It is easy to attribute the insurrection to partisan machinations, but evidence shows that racial resentment is the dominant explanation: this includes the fact that allegations of election fraud were centered on districts with large African American and Latino populations; that many of the insurrectionists were white nationalists, racists, and members of radical right-wing groups; and that a large proportion of the electorate had voted to retain a president who fueled whites' sense of victimization by African Americans and other minorities. We argue that reactions to the legitimacy of the January 6th insurrection have become an example of how racial resentment fuels affective partisanship.

Keywords: January 6th; Select Committee; racial resentment; affective partisanship; political polarization; insurrection; racial prejudice

Rarely observed in politics, whites' rage and indignation were on full display on January 6, 2021. Under the pretense of election fraud in

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the 2020 election, many of President Trump's supporters, including white supremacists, white nationalists, and members of the radical right, rallied and subsequently invaded the U.S. Capitol building—breaking windows, destroying barricades, and overpowering Capitol police—as Congress met to certify the 2020 electoral votes. Not since the British attack in the War of 1812 had the Capitol witnessed such violence. Inside, members of Congress and staffers scurried for safety, narrowly escaping angry mobs of Trump supporters pillaging and ransacking the floor of the House and congressional offices, including the office of the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. Gallows were erected as rioters chanted, “Hang Mike Pence,” who many thought had the power to reject Electoral College votes supporting President-Elect Joe Biden.

Normally a mundane and peaceful process, the certification of Electoral College votes provided the impetus for this violent attempt to overthrow the U.S. government that threatened American democracy by thwarting legitimate constitutional and electoral processes. As Trump supporters attempted to disavow various states' elections (i.e., battleground states that Biden had won), respect for constitutional and democratic rules appeared subordinate to retaining a losing president who fueled racial prejudice and resentment toward African Americans and other minorities (Davis and Wilson 2021). It is possible that many of Donald Trump's supporters believed the fabrications about election fraud and, taking cues from political elites, saw themselves and the rioters as “patriots” defending the integrity of elections (Salvanto et al. 2021).

While the FBI investigated and eventually prosecuted many individual rioters in the months following the insurrection, attempts to uncover the complicity of political leaders in its planning received mixed reactions among an increasingly divided and polarized Congress and electorate. A proposal to establish a bicameral and independent commission to investigate January 6th failed in the Senate,¹ though the House approved a committee: the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (hereafter referred to as the “Select Committee”). The stated purpose of the committee was to uncover the conspiracy to obstruct democracy and constitutional practices and to bring those responsible to justice and prevent a future occurrence. However, some in Congress and the public dismissed the committee's proposal as a partisan attempt to embarrass former president Trump and Republicans. Predicated on the belief that only serious legal offenses and threats to democracy deserve investigation and accountability, a person's attitude toward the Select Committee partially reflects how one rates the legitimacy of the January 6th insurrection. Reactions to the Select Committee, like reactions to election fraud lies and other conspiracy theories, are likely grounded in the same motivations that elected Trump in 2016: a desire to implement Trump's vision. While affective partisanship and traditional partisan identities certainly bolstered and influenced reactions to the Select Committee and to the people's willingness to uncover the conspiracy through congressional action, we examine whether racial resentment and affective feelings toward African Americans are equally powerful factors influencing support for the committee. As opposed to differences in issue positions, “affective partisanship” refers to the positive feelings individuals feel

toward their partisan in-group and the negative feelings individuals feel toward their partisan out-group.

We argue that independent of negative racial affect (a common indicator of racial prejudice), whites were also motivated by racial resentment—a belief that undeserving African Americans are unfairly using race as a form of merit, thereby threatening traditional norms and values that determine “who gets what” in society. The January 6th insurrection and subsequent reactions to the Select Committee (i.e., beliefs about whether the attack was justifiable) were steeped in racial considerations—either racial prejudice or racial resentment—as much as anything else. As evidence of this, we point to the fact that allegations of election fraud centered around districts with large African American and Latino populations; that white nationalists, racists, and radical right-wing groups comprised many of the insurrectionists; and that the goal of the insurrection was to retain a president who fueled whites’ sense of victimization by African Americans and other minorities, abetted by liberals and Democrats (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019). “Stop the Steal,” the slogan used in billboards and placards to promote the theory of election fraud, was also a metaphor for what was at stake for the country. The January 6th insurrection and the subsequent creation of the House committee to investigate it were about more than affective partisanship (Kalmoe and Mason 2022) and fears of voting irregularity: the insurrection was also a reaction to whites’ sense of threat to their power and privilege (Davis and Wilson 2021), and the formation of the committee was a response to what white grievance had wrought.

Public Approval of the Select Committee

The January 6th insurrection challenged established constitutional processes, the integrity of national elections, the peaceful transition of power, and more generally, the viability of democratic governance. As the FBI began to identify and prosecute individuals involved in the Capitol riots, many called for a formal investigation into the conspiracy to disrupt the transition of power. Ultimately, this committee would implicate President Trump, members of his administration, and members of Congress. As indicated by the survey questions and results in Table 1, American citizens did not approach the congressional investigation into the January 6th insurrection with a single mind—far from it. Polarization is the rule. Polls conducted by Monmouth University (February–March 2021 and June 2021), the Economist/YouGov poll (May 2021), and the Morning Consult and Politico National Tracking poll (October 2021) range from 56 percent to 48 percent in support of an investigation. At the low end of approval of a congressional investigation, a Yahoo! News COVID-19 Vaccination Survey showed 44 percent in favor of a January 6th investigation, with 34 percent opposed and 22 percent unsure. An Axios/SurveyMonkey poll in March 2021 reflected the highest level of support for a congressional investigation, with 65 percent of respondents supporting a bipartisan congressional commission and 29 percent opposed. While it

TABLE 1
Public Opinion Polling on Investigation of January 6th Events

1. Monmouth University Poll, February 25–March 1, 2021, <i>N</i> = 802 (U.S. Adults)							
Do you think an independent commission should be set up to examine what happened at the Capitol or can this be accomplished through internal investigations?							
	Total	Rep	Ind	Dem	White	Non-white	
Independent commission	53%	49%	47%	62%			
Internal investigation	37	41	42	30			
Don't know	10	10	11	8			
2. Axios/Survey Monkey Poll, March 21, 2021, <i>N</i> = 2,695							
Would you support or oppose the formation of a bipartisan congressional commission to investigate the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol?							
	Total	Rep	Ind	Dem	White	Black	Hispanic
Strongly/somewhat support	65%	42%	72	91	64%	74%	67
Strongly/somewhat oppose	29	56	25	8	32	19	25
No response	6	3	3	1	4	7	8
3. Yahoo! News COVID-19 Vaccination Survey, May 24–26, <i>N</i> = 1,588							
Would you favor or oppose the creation of an independent commission, modeled after 9/11 commission, to investigate the January 6th attack on the U.S.?							
	Total	Rep	Ind	Dem	White	Black	Hispanic
Favor	44%	23%	39%	74%	41%	61	42%
Oppose	34	61	40	12	40	12	25
Not sure	22	16	21	14	19	28	33
4. The Economist/YouGov Poll, May 22–25, 2021, <i>N</i> = 1,500							
Last Wednesday, the House voted to approve legislation to establish an independent commission to investigate the takeover of the Capitol on January 6th. Do you approve or disapprove of this decision?							
	Total	Rep	Ind	Dem	White	Black	Hispanic
Strongly/somewhat approve	56%	28%	52%	84%		66%	62%
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	29	38	20	12		12	26
Not sure	14	14	13	6		22	12

(continued)

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

5. Monmouth University Poll, June 9–14, 2021, <i>N</i> = 810							
Do you think an independent commission should be set up to examine what happened at the Capitol or can this be accomplished through internal investigations?							
	Total	Rep	Ind	Dem	White	Non-white	
Independent commission	50%	34%	43%	73%	51%	48%	
Internal investigation	39	59	39	24	39	39	
Don't know	11	7	18	3	10	13	
6. MorningConsult + Politico National Tracking Poll, October 16–18, 2021, <i>N</i> = 1,998 (Registered Voters)							
As you know, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) appointed seven Democrats and two Republicans to serve on a special committee to investigate the events that occurred at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th. Based on what you know, do you approve or disapprove of the special congressional committee investigating the events that occurred at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th?							
	Total	Rep	Ind	Dem	White	Black	Hispanic
Strongly/somewhat approve	48%	18%	44%	81%	45%	67%	48%
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	37	70	33	9	42	14	28
Don't know	14	13	23	10	14	19	19

NOTE: Rep = Republican; Ind = Independent; Dem = Democrat.

is not immediately clear why this question produced such high approval, we can only speculate that, with 91 percent of Democrats approving of the committee, liberal sampling bias may inflate the approval rate—though this is just supposition. On the whole, however, the polls signify an almost even divide within the American public.

Additional information gleaned from these polls suggests that partisanship and racial identities are likely driving this polarized view of the congressional committee. In every instance, vast majorities of Democratic identifiers are more supportive of an investigation of the January 6th insurrection while vast majorities of Republican identifiers are opposed. Except for the Monmouth University February–March poll, Independents are usually in the middle. Such diverging partisan views have come to be expected.

Equally important, but less often considered, racial identities offer another clue to what might be driving approval of a congressional investigation. While whites are overwhelmingly opposed to a January 6th investigation, African Americans are overwhelmingly supportive. These differences probably reflect the strong overlap between racial identities and partisanship, but they also likely

mask other attitudes and sentiments on which African Americans and whites differ, such as attitudes toward President Trump.

While we can imagine a variety of motivations are at work, such as partisanship, ideology, racial prejudice, gender, and region, we also believe that racial resentment is extremely relevant to the extent that individuals saw a racial implication of wanting to overturn the 2020 election. We are not suggesting that individuals who disapprove of the Select Committee are necessarily racists, though there is plenty of evidence that the rioters included racists, white supremacists, and white nationalists. We are suggesting, rather, that these individuals simply need to feel resentment toward African Americans and other minorities. Racial motivations do not need to contain racial prejudice or hatred toward African Americans to have the same consequences. Racial motivations are more complex than simple racial hatred, and such complexity seems to have been ignored in discussions of the January 6th insurrection and the politics surrounding the Select Committee. Thus, while acknowledging the obvious role of partisan polarization, we ask, to what extent does racial resentment explain approval of the Select Committee?

Interestingly, while the Select Committee did not explicitly examine the racial origins of the January 6th insurrection, racial parallels abound. The Select Committee Chair, Bennie Thompson, drew a parallel between the Lost Cause myth and the Big Lie in his opening statement,² but the Select Committee was silent on the matter of race in its hearings and testimony. Thompson, who is African American, stated, “I’m from a part of the country where people justify the actions of slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and lynching. I’m reminded of that dark history as I hear voices today try and justify the actions of the insurrectionists on January 6, 2021.”

The failure to explore the racial motivations of the January 6th insurrection “spoke volumes,” because “like many things involving history, laws, and founding principles of our nation, it has everything to do with race” (Stohr 2022).

The very same Confederate flags that waved in opposition to Reconstruction efforts then were unfurled during an insurrection less than two years ago. The very votes contested that day were from places where the turnout of Black and Brown people made the difference: Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. Racial slurs were hurled at U.S. Capitol Police officers. And the insignias of white nationalist groups were proudly displayed on many of the rioters’ clothing. (Stohr 2022)

Thus, although the committee did not pursue the racial impetus for allegations of election fraud and the January 6th insurrection, both implicit and explicit racial appeals tainted the Select Committee’s investigation.

Whites’ Sense of Victimization

Many of President Trump’s supporters believed they were being victimized by election fraud in the 2020 election, but they also believed that whites were being

victimized more generally—the American way of life for them was changing and they were being disadvantaged by African Americans and other minorities.³ To them, the January 6th insurrection was about invalidating the 2020 election in order to retain President Trump for a second term and protect and defend that status quo. Simply put, reactions to the Select Committee, and by extension to the January 6th insurrection itself, boil down to the motivations for voting for Trump in the first place.⁴ The questions for us are, How far were his supporters willing to go to retain him in office? Were they willing to thwart the U.S. Constitution and established electoral processes? And what were their motivations?

President Trump tapped into a growing angst among whites that they were being victimized and left behind (Davis and Wilson 2021; Haney López 2014; Hochschild 2016; Metzl 2019). This sense of grievance stems from a perception that, as a group, whites are being cut in line, displaced, and disadvantaged by the federal government and that, abetted by liberals, Democrats, and radical left groups, undeserving African Americans and other minorities are the beneficiaries. In this view, whites’ grip over American society and the status quo is being threatened by African Americans and other minorities, immigrants, and counter-cultural groups (e.g., feminists and LGBTQ individuals). Exacerbated by racial stereotypes and misinformation that minorities are benefiting at their expense, many whites come to believe that such groups are skirting the rules of the game and violating values of fairness and justice. Hochschild (2016) describes many whites as feeling like a “besieged minority.” Whites have begun to feel like a stranger in their own land and left behind as others are perceived to move forward. Via lost jobs, governmental regulation, and taxes, many whites feel their fair share is being taken away and given to others. Metzl (2019) observes that such angst and beliefs become self-destructive to the point that whites even disavow policies that would benefit them if they would also benefit African Americans and other minorities.

We posit that this angst produces racial resentment. Whites become resentful toward African Americans and other minorities because they are perceived as undeserving and taking advantage of unearned resources. Liberals and Democrats, and Democratic politicians in particular, are seen as the enemy (literally) because they advocate these policies and assist minorities.

Assessments of justice and fairness underlie these perceptions. That is, because whites believe they have done nothing wrong (i.e., played by the rules of the game, worked hard, and persevered through their own challenges, including racial victimization) and African Americans are perceived as skirting their responsibilities (i.e., not playing by the rules, not working hard and persevering, and being unpatriotic), whites believe it is unfair and unjust that African Americans get to benefit. In other words, African Americans and other minorities are perceived to be rewarded for bad and immoral behavior—a state of affairs wholly inconsistent with how whites believe the American way of life thrives.

Davis and Wilson (2021) maintain that white racial resentment toward African Americans stems from a belief that they unfairly and unjustly benefit from resources and advantages that come at whites’ expense. Based on racial myths,

such as African Americans cutting in line or not playing by the rules of the game, such perceptions violate whites' beliefs in justice and fairness (Lerner 1980). Believing in a just world (in itself a fallacy) (Lerner 1980), whites believe that it is unjust and unfair that they have had to work hard, persevere, and sacrifice (also myths) in order to succeed while African Americans skirt the rules of the game, shirk their responsibilities, and engage in unpatriotic behavior but still take advantage of resources. This scenario challenges whites' notion of a just world in which people deserve what they get and get what they deserve. Coming at their expense, it undermines what they see as the very foundation of the American system.

African Americans' violations and encroachments probably would not matter much if whites did not believe in a just world. A just world is one in which actions and conditions have predictable, appropriate consequences. These actions and conditions are typically individuals' behaviors or attributes. Belief in a just world functions as a sort of "contract" in which the consequences of behavior allow people to plan and engage in effective, goal-driven behavior. Though the idea of a just world is clearly a myth, Lerner (1980) theorized that there was a prevalent belief in a just world, and according to Gibson (2008), justice is a fundamental consideration. Ultimately, Davis and Wilson (2021) show that racial resentment toward African Americans' perceived violations of justice and fairness is a consequence of whites' belief in a just world.

Racial Resentment Is Not Black Affect (Racial Prejudice)

Racial resentment has traditionally been conceptualized as pure and simple racism, including symbolic racism, new racism, or racial prejudice (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997). In our conceptualization, racial resentment is theoretically (and from a measurement perspective) separate from racism and racial prejudice, though they are highly correlated (Davis and Wilson 2021). This distinction is incredibly important. First, because racial prejudice is grounded in racial hatred (Allport 1954) and racial resentment is grounded in beliefs about justice and deservingness (Davis and Wilson 2021), the theoretical explanations of the two are different (even though manifestations may be similar). Second, attributing all racial motivations to racial prejudice, even though this is generally the case in the literature, overgeneralizes. It is known that racial motivations can (and often do) emanate from a variety of sources. If prejudice were the only source, other values like resentment, authoritarianism, social dominance, and system justification would be rendered ineffective (when a voluminous literature suggests otherwise). Lastly, distinguishing racial affect from resentment is important because individuals who are not admittedly racist, such as liberals and Democrats, can (and often do) possess beliefs that have racist implications (Blum 2002). Thus, negative racial beliefs are not solely a feature of the political right.

As seen in Table 2, racial resentment and Black affect are negatively correlated ($r = .40$). As indicated in an analysis of variance in Table 2, there are significant

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics of Black Affect by Racial Resentment

Level of Racial Resentment	Mean Black Affect	SD	95% Confidence Interval
1 (Low)	87.61	1.49	84.69–90.53
2	74.59	2.23	70.21–78.98
3	71.90	1.44	69.07–74.73
4 (High)	64.73	1.45	61.89–67.57

NOTE: Overall mean = 74.51. *N* = 692.

differences in Black affect by different levels of racial resentment. To be sure, whites high in racial resentment tend to possess greater antipathy for African Americans than do whites low in racial resentment—a finding that is hardly surprising. But the mean level of Black affect for whites low in resentment is not as low as one might expect. Whites high in resentment do not seem to exhibit more negative Black affect.

In addition to partisan biases conditioning how people interpreted the events of January 6th, racial anxieties were pervasive in allegations of election fraud and the January 6th insurrection; and as a result, racial anxieties, manifested as either racial prejudice or racial resentment, should be an unequivocal set of motivations in how individuals view an investigation into the January 6th insurrection. Racial anxieties should be as clear as partisan anxieties.

First and foremost, allegations of election fraud were racialized in the sense that heavily populated African American areas were charged with election fraud and eventually targeted in lawsuits. Although many of these communities showed higher levels of voter turnout, the language used to depict and sustain fraud allegations played off traditional racial stereotypes of theft and corruption. Because of such widely held racial beliefs and stereotypes, allegations were not immediately discredited. Second, the groups and individuals called to the Capitol represented various racist, right-wing, and white nationalist ideologies. The banners, patches, and insignias of the rioters reflected a clear racial connection to the insurrection. Many individuals and groups, spurred on by President Trump and his advisors, descended on the Capitol as a clarion call to the beginning of a race war. Third, more generally, the January 6th insurrection triggered racial considerations because its goal was to retain President Trump, who stoked racial animosity and represented a defense of the status quo and the protection of white power and privilege.

More than a simple reference to the ambiguity of race, our exploration considers whether racial prejudice (affect toward Blacks) or racial resentment motivates the attitudes toward the Select Committee. That is, attributions to race do not mean much as those attributions can relate to many things. We argue for more precision in attributions of race.

In the end, while the racial anxieties have received little attention in the explanation of the January 6th insurrection and investigation, racial motivations could rival (or even overpower) partisan explanations. Race might be nothing, but then again, race could be everything.

Data and Measures

The data upon which we rely for this analysis come from a nationally representative survey of adults from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) conducted by YouGov. Sample selection uses two-stage matching methodology. The first stage used a sampling frame of U.S. citizens from the 2021 American Community Survey, including data on age, race, gender, education, marital status, number of children under 18, family income, employment status, citizenship, state, and metropolitan area. The second step involves matching members from a pool of opt-in respondents. Matching is accomplished using a large set of variables that are available in consumer and voter databases for both the target population and the opt-in panel. “Matching” means finding an available respondent who is as similar as possible to the selected member of the target sample. The result is a sample of respondents who have the same measured characteristics as the target sample. In essence, the matched sample mimics the characteristics of the target sample. YouGov collected the 2021 CES survey data online.

Our primary empirical task is to examine the relationship between racial resentment and support for (or opposition to) the January 6th Select Committee. Our primary dependent variable is support for the Select Committee based on the following question: How strongly do you support a commission to investigate the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol? From a strict measurement standpoint, responses to the January 6th commission question do not directly tap into support for constitutional or electoral procedures. We view this measure as an initial step in holding those in power accountable for their unconstitutional and conspiratorial behavior. We also believe that support for a commission reflects a belief about the legitimacy of the insurrection as criminal. That is, one would seek to investigate unlawful or improper events, and one would not seek to scrutinize lawful and legitimate events.

In a statistical model accounting for the varied reactions to the January 6th commission (and indirectly to the insurrection), political partisanship is included because individual support for the Republican Party may make one more willing than Democrats to believe in the allegations of election fraud, to justify the invasion, and thus to minimize the need for an investigation. Individuals who identify with the Republican Party (and the political right more generally) are also more likely to possess racial and status quo beliefs that gave rise to President Trump’s election.

Racial resentment toward African Americans follows Davis and Wilson’s (2021) conceptualization. Seeking to avoid a resentment measure contaminated by ideology, antipathy, and government policies, Davis and Wilson’s measure is

very robust and powerful. Replicating their racial resentment measure in these data shows comparable high validity (Cronbach’s alpha = .930). Racial resentment toward African Americans was measured using the following five items:

1. Racial discrimination is no different from other everyday problems people have to deal with.
2. I resent any special considerations that African Americans receive because it’s unfair to other Americans.
3. For African Americans to succeed they need to stop using racism and slavery as excuses.
4. Special considerations for African Americans place me at an unfair disadvantage because I have done nothing to harm them.
5. African Americans bring up race only when they need to make an excuse for their failure.

Beyond the aspect of justice and deservingness underlying racial resentment, racist and intolerant sentiments promoted by President Trump resonated with racists and those antipathetic to African Americans and other minorities. The Select Committee was intended to scrutinize the behavior of many individuals and groups, including racists and groups representing white supremacists and white nationalists. Since the ultimate desire of the “Stop the Steal” movement was to retain a president who often espoused such views, delegitimizing the Select Committee should resonate with individuals who subscribe to those views as well. For the lack of a multidimensional indicator of racial prejudice, we use a feeling thermometer toward Blacks as a measure of antipathy. We argue that antipathy is an element underlying most indicators of racial prejudice (Allport 1954).

A powerful political motive for disapproving of the investigation of the January 6th insurrection is a shared political partisanship with President Trump. President Trump’s supporters or those who voted for him in 2020 may be willing to minimize the seriousness of the insurrection, which was intended to keep their candidate in office.

More than identifying with a political party, reactions to the commission likely reflect an aspect of affective polarization that we have come to expect on many issues (Iyengar et al. 2019). People react to the insurrection and the January 6th Commission based on how they feel about their in-party and the out-party. Grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), affective polarization is the extent to which individuals feel positive affect toward their in-party and negative affect toward the out-party and its supporters. In essence, affective partisanship captures the extent to which individuals possess an “us-versus-them” sentiment toward the political parties, as opposed to simply identifying with a party (as reflected in self-reported partisanship). Both measures should be highly related because one should feel positively toward a party with which one identifies, but individuals do not necessarily then reject the out-party.

Thus, reactions to the January 6th commission elicit positive affect toward the Republican Party because it is the party of former president Trump, defends and

legitimizes the insurrection, and demonizes Democrats who seek accountability. Negative affect toward Republicans results from the perception that many are sympathetic toward those who believed in election lies and sought to circumvent the Constitution and established democratic processes.

Partisan polarization is the difference between feeling thermometers of Democrats and Republicans. As expected, there is considerable overlap with the traditional seven-point, self-report party identification and party affect ($r = -.81$)—individuals should have more positive affect toward the party that more closely represent their views—but we believe this measure captures both of those sentiments.

Control variables, albeit variables with substantive and theoretical relevance as well, include ideology (self-report), education, income, and sex. Several have remarked how the support for Trump and a defense of his transgressions are sustained by older white males.

Analysis

The multivariate analyses in Table 3 show the important predictors associated with the approval of the January 6th Select Committee. Affective partisanship and racial resentment are consistently negative and significant across all the models. In Model 1, including partisan identity and affective polarization, affective polarization is significantly associated with the approval of the Select Committee, while partisan identity (based on the seven-point, self-reported partisanship measure) is unrelated. As expected, Republicans with higher levels of warmth toward Republicans and who feel greater coldness (disdain) toward Democrats are less likely to approve of the January 6th Committee than Democrats with higher levels of warmth toward Democrats and who feel greater coldness toward Republicans. Partisan identity does not achieve statistical significance in any of the models (model 1, model 3, or model 4).

Beyond affective partisanship, racial resentment is significant and negatively related to the approval of the January 6th Committee, while Black affect (i.e., the antipathy that one might find in racial prejudice) is unrelated to the approval of the January 6th Committee. We infer from this result that, when individuals consider the legitimacy and consequences of the January 6th insurrection itself, their level of racial resentment weighs heavily on their reactions to the Select Committee. Affective reactions toward African Americans are considerably less important, perhaps irrelevant, in how individuals view the legitimacy of the January 6th Committee. Whites high in racial resentment are more likely to disapprove of the January 6th Select Committee than are those low in racial resentment.

With the exception of gender, no other variables achieve statistical significance. Gender is statistically significant and negative in model 4—a finding that suggests that women were more supportive of the January 6th Committee than men were.

TABLE 3
 Logit Analysis: Predicting the Approval of the Select Committee to Investigate
 the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Racial resentment	—	-1.19** (0.10)	-0.45** (0.12)	-0.44** (0.14)
Black affect	—	0.001 (0.004)	0.006 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)
Democrat	0.52 (0.34)	—	0.40 (0.35)	0.36 (0.38)
Republican	0.04 (0.27)	—	0.03 (0.28)	0.19 (0.31)
Affective polarization	-0.04** (0.000)	—	-0.03 (0.004)	-0.03** (0.004)
Ideology (self-report)	—	—	—	-0.29 (0.15)
Education	—	—	—	-0.06 (0.08)
Age	—	—	—	0.01 (0.007)
Gender	—	—	—	-0.51* (0.25)
Income	—	—	—	-0.002 (0.004)
Constant	0.49** (0.15)	3.94** (0.52)	1.46* (0.64)	2.92** (1.007)
Pseudo R ²	.42	.27	.44	.42
Prob > χ^2	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	686	681	674	614

NOTE: Dependent variable is a dichotomy indicating approval (1) or disapproval (0) of the January 6th Select Committee investigating the attack on the Capitol. Sample of non-Hispanic white respondents in the 2020 CES (Team Content).

* $p > .05$. ** $p > .01$.

To give Black affect a more thorough hearing, we consider the extent to which it is more determinative among Republicans. Given the extent of racial prejudice and overall negative racial considerations among Republican identifiers, Black affect and racial resentment may be difficult to distinguish, and thus, Black affect may work together with racial resentment among Republicans. In other words, it may be more difficult for Republicans to distinguish between their feelings toward African Americans and their perceptions about how African Americans behave.

To this end, we separate the final model (model 4) by partisanship to examine the relative significance of Black affect and racial resentment among partisans.

TABLE 4
Logit Analysis: Explaining Support for the Select Committee by Political Partisanship

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Racial resentment	-0.30 (0.24)	-0.39 (0.20)	-0.47 [*] (0.21)
Black affect	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02 ^{**} (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)
Affective partisanship	-0.03 ^{**} (0.01)	-0.05 ^{**} (0.01)	-0.01 ^{**} (0.00)
Ideology (self-report)	-0.04 (0.28)	-0.03 (0.23)	-0.16 (0.20)
Education	0.09 (0.16)	-0.08 (0.13)	0.03 (0.11)
Age	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 [*] (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Gender	0.71 (0.51)	-0.14 (0.35)	0.23 (0.34)
Constant	0.76 (1.67)	-0.84 (1.25)	2.13 (1.29)
Pseudo R^2	.25	.43	.11
Prob > χ^2	.000	.000	.000
N	325	262	236

NOTE: Dependent variable is a dichotomy indicating approval (1) or disapproval (0) of the January 6th Select Committee investigating the attack on the Capitol.

^{*} $p > .05$. ^{**} $p > .01$.

Our suspicions regarding Black affect are confirmed in Table 4. That is, feelings toward Blacks are not associated with reactions to the Select Committee among either Democrats or Republicans. However, racial resentment is significant and negative for Republican identifiers. We do not doubt that many Democrats possess racial resentment, but it is not related to their reactions to the January 6th Committee. Democrats' support for the January 6th Committee is not likely motivated out of a desire to restore a sense of justice for African Americans, though we speculate their support for the committee is probably rooted in the rule of law, respect for democracy, and party polarization.

Racial Resentment, Black Affect, and Affective Partisanship?

Approval of the Select Committee investigating the events of January 6th is likely a cause and consequence of affective partisanship—that is, how individuals feel toward their party in-group and toward the out-group. A growing body of research suggests that political attitudes are connected to such feelings and have

contributed to political polarization (Druckman et al. 2021). But an important question for us is, What is driving affective partisanship—racial resentment or Black affect? This question matters because the tendency to attribute racial motivations to Black affect ignores the complexity of race and the myriad ways race operates in American society. And it also asserts that political attitudes and partisan identities are driven primarily by racial prejudice.

Not only do affective partisans hold extreme policy positions, but they are also primed for political intolerance and antidemocratic norms (Druckman et al. 2021; Graham and Svobik 2020) and authoritarianism (Luttig 2017). Affectively engaged Democrats can be expected to feel threatened by groups associated with the political right, such as hate groups, white supremacists, and white nationalists; affectively engaged Republicans can be expected to feel threatened by groups associated with the political left, such as African Americans and other minority groups, immigrants, groups advocating social justice, and progressives. We argue that, beyond simple intolerance and limitations on democratic norms, affective partisans are likely to find challenges to their values and beliefs, such as deservingness and justice, particularly threatening; and for those on the political right, this partisan affect becomes associated with an already heightened sense of racial resentment. Ultimately, affective partisans want to limit the other party's power and even the groups they represent and to enact policies that protect and expand their groups' status quo and privilege. Just to be clear, Black affect (a common component in racial prejudice) may be an important factor for many on the political right, but Black affect does not have to be connected to affective partisanship. This is not to suggest that feelings toward African Americans are no longer important or determinative; it is just to say that affective partisanship does not have to be based on Black affect (racial prejudice) to produce the same outcomes as racial prejudice. Racial resentment is enough. Luttig (2017) argues that affective partisanship results from authoritarianism, a closely related construct.

Using a measure of racial resentment uncontaminated by ideology and partisan beliefs, we argue that individuals likely find it difficult to think of partisanship and affective polarization without thinking about how they align with race (Westwood and Peterson 2020). Is this based on how they feel about African Americans, or is it based on racial resentment? Such a question is not merely splitting hairs: affective partisanship based on racial resentment, as opposed to Black affect, implicates an entirely different set of values (i.e., justice, fairness, and deservingness).

The demonization of opposing partisans is likely driven by many issues, including abortion, immigration, climate change, the economy, law and order, reactions to former president Trump, and racial considerations. Because “racial considerations” may be seen as a catchall reference that encompasses many different opinions and motivations, we seek to clarify it. We have argued that reactions to the Select Committee reflect an aspect of affective polarization that we have come to expect on many issues. People can base their feelings toward the committee on feelings toward both their in-party and the out-party. But what is driving affective polarization? We have shown that racial resentment drives reactions to the January 6th committee. Does racial resentment also drive affective partisanship?

In short, yes. Affective partisanship stems more from racial resentment than from Black affect. Based on the time series data from the American National Election Studies (see the online appendix), individuals do not express extreme antipathy or affinity for African Americans, and, more important, partisans express similar levels of feelings toward African Americans. Despite what one might surmise from racial policies, neither political party can be described as especially hating or liking African Americans. Democratic identifiers do express greater affinity toward African Americans than Republican identifiers do, but only slightly: a matter of five to six points on a feeling thermometer scale. Thus, because of the minor partisan differences in the level of Black affect, Black affect should be a weak explanation of partisan differences. Simply put, Democratic identifiers and Republican identifiers are not very different in their feelings toward African Americans (see the online appendix). There is probably greater variation between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to beliefs about justice, fairness, and deservingness—that is, racial resentment.

Table 5 shows the ordinary least squares (OLS) analyses of racial resentment and Black affect on feelings toward the opposing political party and affective partisanship (i.e., Republicans were asked about their feelings toward Democrats, and Democrats were asked about their feelings toward Republicans). Feelings toward Democrats and Republicans are examined among self-identified Independents. The analyses largely confirm our expectations. Black affect is consistently insignificant in the expressed feelings toward the opposing parties and for affective partisanship. Individuals do not seem to consider their feelings toward African Americans in their feelings toward their out-party. This is especially important in how Republican identifiers and, to a lesser extent, self-identified Independents, feel toward Democrats. As we have argued, the significance of race plays out in a different way. Confirming our expectations, the coefficients for racial resentment are consistently significant across the board, though the sign reversals suggest different motivations for Republicans and Democrats. Higher levels of racial resentment among Republicans are associated with negative feelings toward Democrats.

The converse is supported for Democrats at higher levels of racial resentment who express greater affinity toward Republicans. Perhaps a sense of cross-pressure for Democrats with a stronger sense of justice (and perhaps a more jaundiced view of African Americans) and greater affinity for Republicans may capture greater understanding toward Republicans. Without switching parties, these Democrats may be more sympathetic toward protecting their privilege and sensitive to violations of fairness and deservingness. So, Democrats with higher levels of racial resentment might sympathize with Republicans.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether one sees the January 6th insurrection as an attack on the rule of law and established democratic processes or as a “patriotic” fight to

TABLE 5
OLS Regression: Predicting Feelings toward Political Parties and Affective Polarization

	Feel toward Democrats		Feel toward Republicans		Affective Partisanship
	Rep	Ind	Ind	Dem	
Racial resentment	-9.51** (2.08)	-4.75** (2.18)	10.58° (1.88)	3.55** (1.69)	16.86** (1.58)
Black affect	0.10 (0.07)	0.14 (0.10)	0.19° (0.09)	-0.05 (0.08)	0.03 (0.07)
Ideology (self-report)	-7.74** (2.05)	-6.29** (2.62)	10.33** (2.34)	9.09** (1.96)	23.84** (1.51)
Education	-0.16 (1.11)	-0.55 (1.34)	1.73 (1.20)	0.83 (1.05)	1.94° (0.99)
Age	0.06 (0.10)	0.07 (0.12)	0.05 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.27** (0.09)
Gender	4.95 (3.38)	5.97 (3.94)	4.14 (3.52)	-4.17 (2.94)	2.04 (2.92)
Income	0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)
Constant	76.83** (15.08)	53.18** (15.01)	-51.00 (13.41)	5.14 (12.40)	-120.01** (10.93)
R ²	.23	.17	.39	.21	.64
Prob > χ^2	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	204	184	184	195	614

NOTE: Dependent variable is a dichotomy indicating approval (1) or disapproval (0) of the January 6th Select Committee investigating the attack on the Capitol.

° $p > .05$. ** $p > .01$.

defend election integrity, it was an event that attacked important aspects of American democracy, particularly the peaceful transfer of power and constitutional processes. The goal of the Select Committee was to expose the extent of complicity and planning, and it revealed a coordinated effort by Trump and his advisors, members of Congress, and right-wing groups. The Department of Justice and the legal system are now determining if and how those complicit will be held accountable for their behavior. We argue that individual reactions to the Select Committee expose dangerous attitudes and beliefs involved in disrupting the rule of law and American democracy. In addition to affective polarization, which is quite dangerous, this research shows that an equally, if not more, dangerous and disrupting factor involves aspects of race, but in a different way—through racial resentment.

Resentment toward African Americans and other minorities was a critical factor motivating support for Trump in 2016 and one he continued to stoke while he was in office. Thus, it should come as no surprise that racial resentment might motivate his supporters, and Republican identifiers in general, to acquiesce to

claims of election fraud in the 2020 election and to object to the January 6th Select Committee investigating the attacks on the U.S. Capitol (and possibly to rationalize the January 6th insurrection itself). Negative opinions toward the Select Committee were not associated with how people felt toward African Americans (sentiments associated with racial prejudice) but rather to their sense that African Americans and other minorities threatened the status quo.

In addition to racial resentment, affective partisanship played an important role in how people viewed the Select Committee. Objections to the Select Committee reflected a disaffection toward Democrats and greater affinity toward Republicans. Simply identifying with either political party was not a sufficient motivator; rather, how people felt toward *both* political parties determined their approval of the Select Committee.

How should we think about race and racial prejudice today? We are not suggesting that racial prejudice, steeped in antipathy and hatred, is no longer relevant and operational. Racial prejudice was on full display on January 6th. We are simply reasserting Sniderman and Piazza's (1993, 5) observation more than 25 years ago that it is "simply wrong to suppose that the primary factor driving the contemporary arguments over the politics of race is white racism."

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Mostly due to a filibuster in the Senate.

2. Among its many assertions, the Lost Cause myth suggested that Southern secession had little or nothing to do with the institution of slavery. Instead, Southern states seceded to protect their rights and their homes and to throw off the shackles of a tyrannical government. The Lost Cause myth portrayed slavery as a positive good; submissive, happy, and faithful slaves were better off in a system of chattel slavery that offered them protection. Confederate soldiers were depicted as heroic, gallant, and saintly. Even after the surrender, they retained their honor.

3. Trump and his allies filed 62 lawsuits in state and federal courts seeking to overturn election results in states the president lost. Except for one, all legal challenges to election fraud were proven false.

4. Many individuals could also take cues from Republican representatives and right-wing political commentators who defended and downplayed the January 6th insurrection and violence, comparing the mob to "a normal tourist visit."

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