

THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF SENSE OF NATIONAL BELONGING

by

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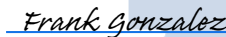
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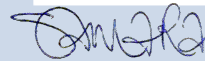
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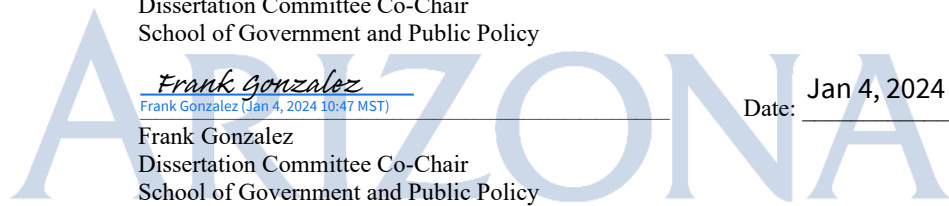
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I respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout this decade, America has experienced ongoing and inevitable waves of conversation surrounding issues related to racial justice and immigration. The goal of this dissertation is to discuss the potential political effects, particularly on issues that challenge the current social and racial system and hierarchy, of a sense of national belonging—a relatively understudied form of national attachment in the field of political science. It is argued that due to the boundary-maintaining nature of national belonging, it should be associated with negative views on issues that potentially challenge the current system. This dissertation comprises one observational study, one experimental study, and one qualitative study.

In Chapter 1, a preliminary view of the potential effect of a sense of national belonging on shifting system-challenging issues is provided by analyzing data from the Collaborative Multiracial, Post-Election Survey (CMPS) 2016. It is found that, in general, a higher sense of belonging is associated with pro-current racial system attitudes, such as a decrease in support for Black Lives Matter and a decreased perception of the severity of racial discrimination. Additionally, this relationship holds true across racial groups.

Chapter 2 attempts to identify the causal relationship between a sense of national belonging and the shaping of racial reform issue attitudes. A survey experiment was conducted on Connect via CloudResearch with 279 participants. Due to weak treatment effects, the experiment failed to demonstrate a causal effect of a sense of national belonging on issue attitudes. However, additional observational examinations yielded results similar to Chapter 1—indicating that a sense of national belonging is related to negative views on racial reform. Therefore, it can be concluded that national belonging is one of the factors that shape attitudes but may not be the most essential one.

Finally, Chapter 3 delves into the meaning of national belonging among students from the University of Arizona, School of Government and Public Policy. Thirty-nine students shared their definitions of a sense of national belonging and identified obstacles to feeling a sense of belonging. The results reveal that the construction of national belonging is reciprocal, requiring mutual commitment from both the government and citizens. Additionally, identity conflict emerges as a primary obstacle to experiencing belonging, a challenge not limited to students from minority groups.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In the field of political science, experts have widely studied how different kinds of national attachments affect people's political views and actions. The influence of ideas like patriotism, nationalism, and national identity on political opinions has been explored in various studies (for example, Theiss-Morse 2009; Huddy and Khatib 2007; Hoyt and Goldin 2016). Each concept contributes in its own way to specific political outcomes. Patriotism, for instance, is linked to feelings of pride, affection, and care. National identity is typically developed and measured within the context of social identity, which involves self-identification or others identifying you as belonging to a nation and a sense of connection to that nation. Nationalism is characterized by a deep, unquestioned loyalty to the nation and an idealization of it, often coupled with a belief that one's nation is superior to others (Green et al 2011). It's evident that these forms of national attachment are frequently shaped by individuals in a one-dimensional way, focusing on the love, care, and loyalty citizens feel towards their country. However, the concept of national belonging as a type of attachment has not been widely discussed or measured in political studies. Belonging is reciprocal. It's not just about identifying oneself as a part of the country. It also encompasses feelings of entitlement and influence, like believing "I have a say in who belongs to our nation." Being recognized and accepted by the national community is another aspect of national belonging (Jones and Krzyanowski 2008), and the most crucial part of feeling like you belong is having a sense of 'home'.

Due to the characteristics of national belonging mentioned earlier, maintaining social boundaries becomes a common reaction. It is a fundamental aspect of human nature to seek a place of belonging, and individuals often take actions to protect their sense of belonging, along with their familiarity and concept of home. If systematic changes threaten to disturb the comfort zone of those who feel a strong sense of belonging, these individuals would likely oppose such policies or political issues. As a result, this study posits that a sense of national belonging correlates with resistance to systemic change. To explore this theory, the paper utilizes data from the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS<sup>1</sup>) 2016. Various variables are examined to test the theory, including support for the Black Lives Matter movement, endorsement of a pathway to citizenship, and

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<sup>1</sup> Barreto, M., Frasure-Yokley, L., Vargas, E. D., & Wong, J. (2017). The Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), 2016. CMPS.

perceptions of racial discrimination. Additionally, political engagement actions that could lead to changes in the current system, such as political interest and voting behaviors, are considered.

Analysis using linear regression models shows that a strong sense of belonging is often significantly and inversely related to support for the Black Lives Matter movement and perceptions of the severity of racial discrimination, particularly among Latino, Asian American, and black American populations. Beyond exploring connections between political attitudes and national belonging, this study also sheds light on what influences national belonging itself. For example, holding conservative beliefs and identifying as a Republican tend to be associated with a stronger sense of national belonging. Conversely, those who self-identify as having a darker skin tone and who have faced discrimination tend to report a lower sense of belonging.

In conclusion, this study investigates the link between feelings of national belonging and political attitudes, especially in the context of issues that challenge the status quo, like the Black Lives Matter movement and perceptions of racial discrimination severity. By deepening our comprehension of how a sense of national belonging intersects with political attitudes, this paper adds to the discourse on the complexities of national attachment and belonging and their impact on political behaviors and sentiments.

## **Literature Review**

### **Sense of National Belonging**

The concept of belonging is recognized as a fundamental human need, a notion supported by scholars for many years. Maslow, in his 1943 hierarchy of needs, ranked the need for social belonging just after basic physiological (like water and food) and safety requirements. Baumeister and Leary in 1995 posited that humans inherently seek close, enduring relationships, suggesting that the need for belonging and social bonds is as vital as the need for survival itself. Belonging provides a way for people to find meaning in their lives, as noted by Skey in 2013. This applies to national belonging as well, which is crucial in people's everyday experiences as it provides ontological significance by offering a sense of purpose and security for the future (Sime 2018; Lambert et al. 2013). This prevents individuals from experiencing existential crises. According to Jones and Krzyanowski (2008), national belonging arises when individuals feel that their status and value are recognized and validated by their fellow nationals.

The sense of belonging highlights the subjective feeling of mutual acceptance and connection between individuals and their groups. This concept extends beyond simple identification or categorization to include a deeper emotional attachment and relational ties. It entails feeling welcomed, appreciated, and regarded within a group, fostering a perception among individuals that they are essential components of a larger entity. Such a sense of connection stems from shared objectives, beliefs, values, and experiences. It revolves around the mutual acceptance and reinforcement individuals experience within their own circles, nurturing a deep sense of being understood, valued, and embraced. Thus, belonging is intrinsically linked to interpersonal relationships and the creation of a nurturing community that bolsters individual well-being and purposefulness.

Creating a sense of belonging involves more than just identifying with a group or being labeled as part of it. There are cases when social identity disconnects with a sense of belonging (e.g., LGBT Christians; Yip 1999). While group identification plays a role, further research has pinpointed additional vital factors. Material conditions—such as citizenship status, housing, employment, and access to healthcare—are closely linked to the feeling of belonging (Skey 2014; Cassidy 2018). Psychological aspects, like a sense of empowerment and entitlement, are also crucial (Clarke 2019). Beyond social identities, belonging hinges on how individuals perceive their setting and their relational ties with other group members.

In addition, individuals need to feel empowered and capable of assessing the behavior of others who may not adhere to the norms of their national group (Skey 2013). A further pivotal element in the development of a sense of belonging is the notion of feeling at home (Antonsich 2010), which encompasses three dimensions: familiarity, haven, and heaven, as outlined by Duyvendak in 2011. For instance, Daylesford in Australia illustrates these concepts well. It has become a sought-after locale for gay men and lesbians because of its open and accepting environment, where members of the LGBT community can experience pride, security, and a sense of ownership (Gorman-Murray et al. 2008).

### **The Political Effects of a Sense of Belonging**

National belonging effectively fosters a sense of unity among members of a nation, while simultaneously distinguishing those perceived as outsiders (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The feeling of belonging is dynamic; it evolves through interactions among individuals, groups, and the broader society (May 2011). Consequently, the effort to secure a place of belonging is perpetual, involving

continual adjustments and reaffirmations to preserve one's place within the social fabric and to keep their status within the hierarchy of belonging secure and stable (Skey 2014). People are innately driven to seek belonging, and this drive influences their attitudes and actions. The concept of belonging is frequently explored within educational contexts, where it has been linked to enhanced academic performance. For instance, students who feel a stronger sense of belonging at their schools often achieve higher grade point averages (GPAs; Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni 2012). A robust sense of belonging is associated not only with active participation in school activities but also with emotional investment. That is, students tend to have more positive feelings towards their school system when they experience a high sense of belonging (Gillen-O'Neel 2019). Further examples include alumni who possess a strong sense of belonging to their former schools; they are often more inclined to donate to their alma maters (Drenznner and Pizmony-Levy 2021). Although these scenarios fall outside the realm of political science, they illustrate the broader principle that individuals with a heightened sense of belonging tend to support the institutions and adhere to the norms of their communities.

This conclusion aligns with findings from the existing political science literature. In the domain, psychological constructs related to national belonging, such as national loyalty, national pride (contrasted between patriotism and nationalism), and national identity, are of particular interest. These constructs are characterized by a profound love and attachment to one's nation, encapsulating a sense of belonging. The literature reveals that in some instances, a strong bond with one's country correlates with support for the status quo and a tendency to resist changes that could disrupt the established system. For instance, national identity is linked to reduced support for economic redistribution. Research across democratic nations has found an inverse relationship between the strength of national identity and the extent of redistribution (Shayo 2009). Huddy and Khatib (2007) describe national identity as 'a personal sense of belonging to the nation.' Within the scope of social identity theory, their findings suggest that individuals with a pronounced national identity are likely to adhere more closely to the norms of their group, such as those of Americans, leading to higher political involvement. Moreover, strong national ties are associated with a higher propensity to contribute to the public good, comply with laws (Dražanová and Roberts 2023), and fulfill tax obligations (Thess-Morse 2009). Furthermore, strong national identification is connected to symbolic forms of political engagement. For example, individuals might feel distressed by the sight of the United States flag touching the ground, indicating a deep emotional connection to national symbols (Shatz and Lavine 2007). Conversely, certain types of attachment can foster

negative attitudes toward out-groups (Wright and Reeskens 2013) and lead to group comparisons rooted in collective narcissism (Cichocka and Cislak 2020) and feelings of national superiority (Dekker et al., 2003). This suggests that regardless of the specific nature of one's attachment to their country, individuals often exhibit greater acceptance of and agreement with the existing system, showing reluctance, and sometimes even hostility, toward those outside of it. Similarly, due to its inherent boundary-setting characteristic, a sense of belonging is likely to affect how individuals perceive and engage with the status quo. A sense of belonging is associated with resistance to expanding systemic boundaries. Evidence shows that a yearning for continuity within one's group and national nostalgia, which are intrinsically linked to a sense of belonging, correlate with support for conservative politics and a preference for a more exclusionary racial system (Behler et al. 2021; Smeekes et al. 2021).

Although group attachment often steers people towards a preference for the status quo, it does not inherently dampen political engagement or participation. As previously discussed, a sense of belonging to a school can drive students to improve their grades, contribute donations, and volunteer post-graduation. Additionally, research indicates that a stronger sense of belonging can predict behaviors like knowledge-sharing among contributors on Wikipedia (Cho et al., 2010). Belonging fosters engagement and participation when individuals believe their actions benefit the community's or system's continuity (Schütze 2017). Conversely, belonging could be inversely related to political engagement if individuals fear that such involvement might disrupt their 'belonging' by modifying the community boundaries, thus affecting their sense of 'home' (Yuval-Davis 2006).

In a similar context, a deficient sense of belonging often stems from experiences of social exclusion. Numerous factors can lead individuals in America to feel marginalized, such as belonging to a minority group (e.g., Huynh et al. 2011), experiencing a loss of status (Hochschild 2018), holding certain political beliefs (Van Duyn 2020), or practicing a particular religion (Braunstein 2019). When people's needs for belonging are not met, they tend to feel less connected to the country. This lack of belonging may result in a diminished desire to maintain the status quo, leading to a lower likelihood of endorsing the country and its established systems. The consequences of an insufficient sense of belonging reach beyond personal relationships and extend to perspectives on national governance. Even those with a strong identification as Americans might feel alienated from the nation's cultural and psychological milieu. Such a rift can lead to a sense of defiance and discontent with national authorities. In certain instances, expressions of protest, such as declining to recite the pledge of allegiance (Bondy 2004) or choosing to kneel during the national anthem (Forst

2017), stem from a repudiation of the dominant societal structures, and this is particularly evident among people of color. Research in social psychology has explored the reactions of individuals who feel ostracized. These individuals often become more vigilant in seeking opportunities for acceptance. Driven by the desire to belong, they are likely to align themselves with new groups where they feel included to regain social acceptance and fulfill their belonging needs. For example, a study by Knapton et al. (2015) revealed that participants who were spurned by one organization but welcomed by another showed a readiness to engage in political action against the group that rejected them, as a means of addressing their thwarted need for inclusion. This suggests that those who face social exclusion may be more amenable to shifting their allegiances (e.g., joining a new group) and are more inclined to critique, disavow, or actively challenge the established order.

Social exclusion has been associated with a heightened propensity to engage in protest activities against established systems, especially among those who have a strong need to belong and who feel rejected (Bäck et al. 2015). A similar observation was made by Renström et al. (2020), who found that young people's likelihood of protesting is influenced by their need for belonging. The underlying motive is that participation in social movements can address their deficit in belonging. This underscores the role of the need for belonging as a driving force for political engagement. Consequently, individuals with a diminished sense of belonging might be more inclined to partake in or endorse actions that challenge and potentially expand the current social boundaries and systemic constraints.

In conclusion, the need to belong is intrinsic to human nature. It necessitates the establishment of boundaries to delineate insiders from outsiders (Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging confers a sense of entitlement and the agency to identify oneself as part of a group. It also embodies a feeling of 'home' and familiarity, where individuals perceive themselves as valued and acknowledged by their group. Typically, those with a strong sense of belonging are likely to endorse the existing system and adhere to its rules and norms. Conversely, those who face exclusion, resulting in a weakened sense of belonging, tend to be discontented with the current system and may support changes that could broaden societal boundaries and provide opportunities to satisfy their need for belonging.

### **Current Racial System**

The United States is predominantly seen as a white-dominant nation. Anderson (2006) describes a nation as an imagined community formed by people's perceptions and imaginations,

since it's not feasible for one to personally know every member of a national community. The prevailing cultural narratives shape the boundaries that define the 'typical American,' often to the exclusion of minority groups. Research has shown that certain demographics are not perceived as 'American' as others, with white Americans frequently viewed as the default national archetype (Davidio et al. 2010). Such a viewpoint reinforces the notion that whiteness is often deemed an implicit criterion of American identity (Theiss-Morse 2009). Even though they face systemic disadvantages, minority group members are nonetheless integrated into the broader system. These individuals are acutely aware of discriminatory behavior within the national community. In an effort to cultivate a sense of belonging in their country, they may be particularly conscious of actions that differentiate them from the prototypical American image, as a means to affirm and solidify their place within the national fabric. Their seemingly paradoxical reactions to racial prejudice and discrimination can also be motivated by the fear of being stereotyped according to their minority status and the potential for consequent exclusion. Those who are determined to assert their membership in the dominant society might, as observed in the Queen Bee Phenomenon, distinguish themselves from other members of minority groups to validate and perpetuate the existing social hierarchies (Derks et al. 2015).

Moreover, minority individuals might adopt behaviors that align with American archetypes to affirm their sense of belonging. Members of minority groups who feel marginalized or rejected by the dominant social group may overcompensate by adhering even more strongly to mainstream norms than those in the majority. For instance, Cheryan and Monin (2005; Study 5) found that U.S.-born Asian Americans, when faced with the threat of being seen as foreigners (identity denial), displayed increased engagement with American culture. They reported greater knowledge of and participation in activities considered quintessentially American, such as playing American sports and listening to American music. This behavior illustrates how the desire for inclusion can influence one's actions and self-perceptions.

Furthermore, the desire for belongingness can drive changes in political viewpoints. For example, embracing conservative values among Latinos is seen as an affirmation of their commitment to American life and identity (Naumann et al. 2016). In a broader context, a study by Politi and colleagues (2020) in Switzerland found that the need for belongingness is linked to a willingness to adopt the cultural norms and indirectly leads to naturalized immigrants' support for restrictive immigration policies. Such findings suggest that as individuals' sense of belonging to a national community strengthens, so too does their inclination to define and enforce boundaries

between 'us' and 'them' (e.g., debates on who is sufficiently 'American'). This can result in greater support for the existing social order. The concept of being a 'proper' American often entails a denial of discrimination, as experiencing discrimination is deemed an 'un-American' narrative.

Consequently, people of color may feel compelled to forgo recognition of their own experiences to assimilate more fully into 'American' identity. This can lead them to minimize the extent of racism and place blame on the victims (O'Brien 2008), as a way to rationalize the sacrifices made for acceptance.

In essence, the pervasive influence of a white-dominated society, coupled with historical oppression and artificially constructed divisions, has led some minority group members to assimilate, consciously or subconsciously, into the prevailing system. This assimilation may involve aligning with norms and behaviors that marginalize others within their own racial or ethnic communities. For these individuals, 'Americanness' becomes a valuable asset that requires considerable effort to attain, particularly for those from minority backgrounds. When considering their sense of belonging, minorities with a strong connection to their American identity may resist changes to the societal order. They often choose to uphold the status quo, despite the potential benefits of change for other marginalized groups, to preserve the recognition and status they have strived to achieve.

## **Hypotheses**

*Hypothesis 1:* A strong sense of national belonging is associated with decreased support for boundary-challenging social issues, policies, and movements.

*Hypothesis 2:* A strong sense of national belonging has a positive correlation with political engagement.

*Hypothesis 2a:* A strong sense of national belonging is negatively correlated with political interest and political participation.

*Hypothesis 3:* The impact of national belonging on attitudes and behaviors manifests only among minority groups.

## **Method**

To test the proposed hypotheses, the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) 2016 (CMPS) dataset from 2016 is utilized. The dataset comprises responses from 1,024 white, 2,950 Latino, 3,055 black, and 2,994 Asian American participants. The robust sample size enhances the

validity of the results by providing substantial statistical power. The focus of this study is on the political attitudes of white, black, Asian, and Latino Americans; therefore, data from participants identifying as Middle Eastern or Arab, American Indian/Native American, and Other, totaling 125 individuals, are excluded from the analysis. A variety of variables are considered in the examination of the hypotheses, with descriptive statistics provided in **Appendix A**. This study investigates the research hypotheses by analyzing a range of independent and dependent variables. The primary independent variable, which measures the sense of belonging, is drawn from the CMPS 2016 dataset and reflects individuals' perceptions of inclusion and exclusion. These belongingness variables demonstrate a certain degree of intercorrelation.

1. *How strongly do you feel like you belong in the United States?* (Belong)
2. *Most Americans value and respect your individual presence in the United States. Do you?* (Agree or disagree; Respect)
3. *How much do you feel like an outsider in the United States?* (Outsider)
4. *How often do you think that other people try to exclude you from U.S. society?* (Exclusion)

Initially, an index for the sense of belonging was created. A Cronbach's alpha test was employed to evaluate its reliability, resulting in an alpha coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, exploratory factor analysis was utilized to assess the contribution of each item. The analysis indicated significant loadings for 'belong' (0.70), 'respect' (0.61), 'outsider' (0.65), and 'exclusion' (0.53). Nonetheless, the relatively small number of items included in this index (four in total) should be noted, as it may influence the robustness of the factor analysis outcomes. The challenge lies in distinguishing discrete factors and capturing enough variance to accurately reflect the intended constructs. Therefore, the four items—belong, respect, outsider, and exclusion—were combined to form a singular, composite measure of the sense of belonging.

The first dependent variable assesses support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, a campaign that challenges societal boundaries by addressing systemic racism and inequality. Participants rated their level of support from 'strongly support' to 'strongly oppose,' based on their perception of the movement. The second dependent variable concerns perceptions of discrimination against minority groups. Respondents evaluated the extent of discrimination in the United States against specific groups such as Black individuals, Asian Americans, and Latinos. This measure offers insight into participants' views on societal inequalities and the discrimination faced by

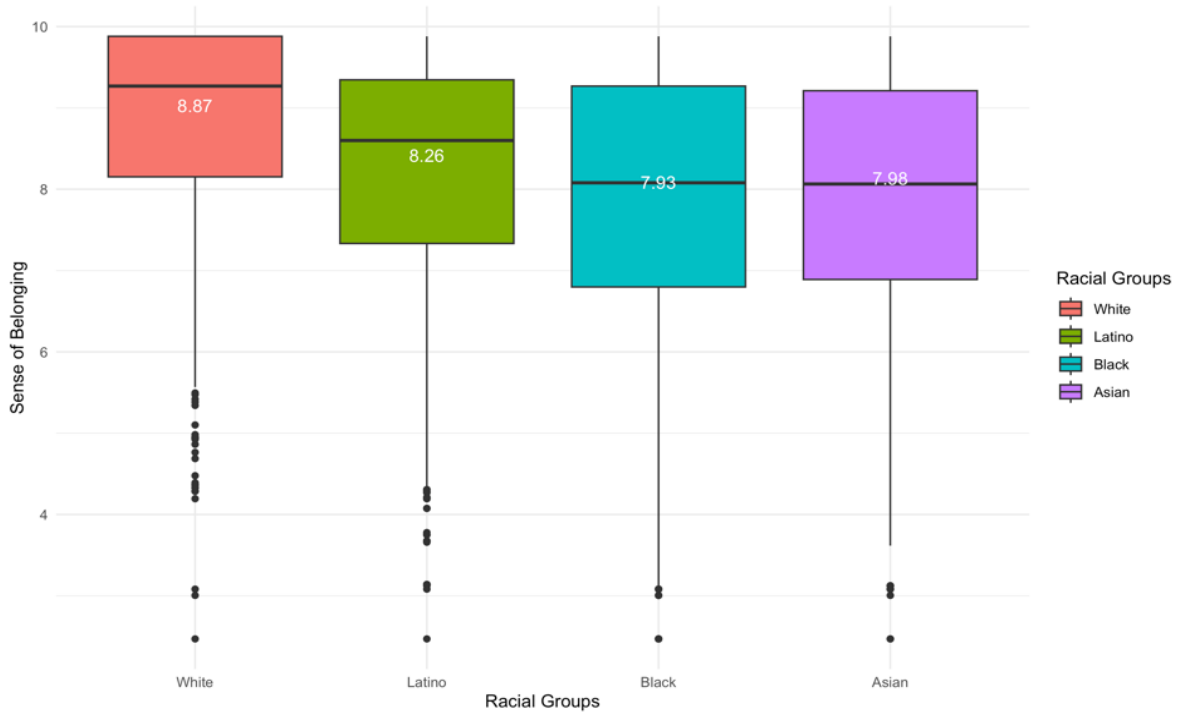
these communities. The third dependent variable investigates attitudes toward a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Participants responded to a statement about the criteria that undocumented immigrants should fulfill, rating their level of agreement from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' This variable reflects individuals' opinions on the pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

Lastly, the study examines political interest and voting behavior. Respondents indicated their interest in politics on a scale from 'very interested' to 'not at all interested' and reported their voting habits in state or local elections, ranging from 'never voting in state/local elections' to 'always voting in every state/local election.' These variables provide a window into the participants' political engagement and interest. Through the analysis of these dependent variables, the study seeks to thoroughly understand the dynamics of individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and participation regarding critical social issues, political involvement, and the constructs of national identity.

Alongside the dependent variables and measures concerning national belonging, the analysis incorporated several control variables to account for additional influences. These included gender, age, income, education, race, a positive connection within one's own racial or ethnic group, the perceived significance of American identity, personal experiences of discrimination, self-reported skin tone, and whether one is foreign-born. For geographical comparisons, states were grouped into regions: Northeast (ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE), Midwest (OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS), South (KY, WV, VA, TN, NC, SC, GA, FL, AL, MS, AR, LA, TX), and West (MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV, WA, OR, CA, AK, HI). The inclusion of these controls was based on their theoretical importance and the empirical evidence indicating their potential influence on attitudes and behaviors pertinent to national belonging. By adjusting for these factors, the analysis mitigates confounding effects, thereby clarifying the specific impact of national belonging on the investigated outcomes.

## **Result**

Figure 1. 1 Comparison of Sense of National Belonging across Racial Groups



### Determinants of Individuals' Sense of National Belonging

Prior to delving into the relationships between the key variables, it is crucial to understand what factors contribute to an individual's sense of belonging within the U.S. national community. As indicated by the bar chart in Figure 1.1, there is a relatively high average sense of belonging reported (mean 8.14). An ANOVA test was performed to detect any racial or ethnic disparities in this regard. The findings from the Tukey post-hoc test (presented in Table 1.1) show statistically significant differences among the groups. These variances are displayed in the rank order shown in Figure 4: Black respondents reported the lowest sense of belonging (mean: 7.93), followed by Asians (mean: 7.98). Latino respondents had a higher sense of belonging (mean: 8.26), with white Americans reporting the highest level. This pattern suggests that white Americans are least likely to question their belonging in the United States, while African Americans show the greatest level of uncertainty about their sense of belonging to the American national community.

White Americans report the highest average sense of belonging (mean: 8.87), yet the presence of outliers within this group indicates that the experience of belonging is not uniform. Although the average suggests a strong sense of national belonging, certain individuals may have a more complex or ambivalent relationship with the national community. Among White Americans, some may grapple with internal conflicts or hesitations regarding their national attachment,

potentially influenced by phenomena such as white guilt. White guilt is characterized by discomfort, regret, or a sense of responsibility that some white individuals may feel due to historical injustices and privileges linked to their racial identity (Swim and Miller 1999).

Table 1. 1 Racial difference in the sense of belonging

<b>Racial Groups</b>	<b>Mean Diff.</b>	<b>p-Value</b>
Latino - White	-0.61	0.00
Black - White	-0.94	0.00
Asian - White	-0.90	0.00
Black - Latino	-0.33	0.00
Asian - Latino	-0.28	0.00
Asian - Black	0.05	0.59

Both Asian Americans and Black Americans exhibit the lowest sense of belonging within the national community, with means of 7.93 and 7.98, respectively. This finding is reflective of the racial hierarchy's structure in the United States. Despite Asian Americans typically having the highest median household income among ethnic groups, their sense of belonging is comparable to that of African Americans, who also rank lowest. This suggests that while socioeconomic factors contribute to the development of a sense of belonging, they do not solely dictate it. The experience of racialization as 'perpetual foreigners' for Asian Americans and the ongoing discrimination and social injustices faced by African Americans underscore why both groups might feel less belonging to the national community. It appears that the experiences of exclusion and perceived otherness have a more substantial influence on feelings of belonging than does economic status, as evidenced by the perceptions of belonging among Asian Americans.

The relationship between a sense of national belonging and racial group affiliation is further elucidated by the results of a linear regression model (Table 1.2). The data indicate significant associations: alignment with the Republican Party ( $\beta = 0.035$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and conservative ideologies ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) correlate with an increased sense of belonging to the national community. Additionally, female respondents ( $\beta = 0.062$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and those in older age brackets ( $\beta = 0.013$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrate a stronger sense of belonging. It is interesting to observe that income and education exert opposing influences on the sense of belonging. Higher income levels ( $\beta = 0.014$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) correspond to a stronger sense of national belonging, whereas higher educational attainment ( $\beta = -0.070$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is negatively related to it. The study also uncovers a robust positive relationship.

Table 1. 2 Determinants of a Sense of Belonging

	Sense of Belonging
(Intercept)	5.647*** (0.112)
Partisan Identity	0.035*** (0.008)
Ideology	0.047** (0.015)
Female	0.062* (0.031)
Age	0.013*** (0.001)
Income	0.014** (0.005)
Education	-0.070*** (0.015)
Importance of American ID	0.676*** (0.020)
Experienced Discrimination	-0.568*** (0.029)
Darker Skin Tone	-0.093*** (0.009)
Foreign Born	0.421*** (0.035)
Northeast States	-0.059 (0.041)
Midwest States	-0.114* (0.045)
South States	-0.093** (0.035)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.246
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.245
Num. obs.	8060

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

between the value placed on American identity ( $\beta = 0.676, p < 0.001$ ) and feelings of national belonging. The regression analysis further reveals a notable relationship between self-reported skin tone and the sense of belonging, with a coefficient of  $-0.093$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that individuals with darker skin tones report a reduced sense of belonging to the national community. Intriguingly, being foreign-born has a significant positive association with the sense of belonging, evidenced by a coefficient of  $0.421$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). This implies that foreign-born individuals may experience a stronger sense of belonging compared to their native-born counterparts.

In the analysis of regional differences, the coefficients suggest that residents of the Northeast ( $\beta = -0.059, p > 0.05$ ), Midwest ( $\beta = -0.114, p < 0.05$ ), and South ( $\beta = -0.093, p < 0.01$ ) report lower levels of perceived belonging compared to those from the West, which serves as the reference group. It is essential to highlight that only the Midwest's coefficient indicates a statistically significant difference, suggesting a notably lower sense of belonging in comparison to the West. While the coefficients for the Northeast and South point to a pattern of lower belonging, they do not achieve statistical significance. Consequently, the data implies that individuals from the Midwest are significantly more likely to report a diminished sense of belonging than those in the West, whereas the perceived differences for the Northeast and South compared to the West are not substantiated by the data.

### **Influential Factors Across Racial Groups**

**Table 1.3** highlights various factors that significantly affect the sense of belonging among different racial groups. These factors include age, the perceived importance of American identity, experiences of discrimination, and self-reported skin tones. Consistent with the overall findings from the linear regression model, age is positively correlated with a stronger sense of belonging across all racial groups. Furthermore, the value placed on American identity is critically linked to feelings of belonging; individuals who regard their American identity as important are likely to report a heightened sense of national belonging. This underscores the idea that one's attachment to the broader American identity fosters a greater sense of connection and inclusion within the national community. The influence of skin tone on the sense of belonging is also reaffirmed, with lighter skin tones associated with a stronger sense of belonging, echoing earlier regression results. Education level typically shows an inverse relationship with belonging, though this trend does not hold for Latino Americans, for whom the data suggest a different pattern.

Table 1. 3 Determinants of a Sense of Belonging across Racial Groups

	Black	White	Asian	Latino
(Intercept)	5.337*** (0.276)	5.927*** (0.358)	5.600*** (0.214)	5.210*** (0.223)
Partisan ID	0.010 (0.020)	-0.002 (0.023)	0.043** (0.015)	0.042** (0.015)
Ideology	0.079** (0.027)	0.103* (0.043)	-0.010 (0.029)	0.062* (0.027)
Female	0.055 (0.062)	0.172* (0.082)	0.079 (0.051)	0.012 (0.057)
Age	0.011*** (0.002)	0.017*** (0.003)	0.012*** (0.002)	0.013*** (0.002)
Income	0.005 (0.010)	0.050*** (0.013)	0.015 (0.008)	0.014 (0.009)
Education	-0.071* (0.030)	-0.109** (0.039)	-0.090*** (0.027)	-0.027 (0.027)
Importance of American ID	0.706*** (0.037)	0.578*** (0.061)	0.609*** (0.034)	0.667*** (0.038)
Experienced Discrimination	-0.516*** (0.061)	-0.203* (0.080)	-0.653*** (0.050)	-0.589*** (0.054)
Positive Ingroup	0.070 (0.044)	0.029 (0.066)	0.195*** (0.038)	0.130** (0.042)
Skin Tone	-0.045* (0.018)	-0.118*** (0.035)	-0.062** (0.021)	-0.097*** (0.021)
Foreign Born	0.198 (0.118)	0.186 (0.185)	0.346*** (0.052)	0.446*** (0.065)
Northeast States	0.106 (0.097)	-0.116 (0.110)	-0.142* (0.066)	-0.064 (0.090)
Midwest States	-0.144 (0.095)	-0.027 (0.104)	-0.119 (0.081)	-0.155 (0.099)
Southern States	-0.111 (0.080)	-0.188 (0.106)	-0.134* (0.068)	0.018 (0.065)
Southeast Asian			0.009 (0.065)	
South Asian			-0.076 (0.074)	
South American				-0.245* (0.102)
Central American				0.004 (0.115)
Caribbean				-0.104 (0.076)
Other				0.155 (0.094)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.202	0.287	0.248	0.241
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.198	0.275	0.243	0.235
Num. obs.	2473	832	2390	2365

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

An in-depth analysis of the groups individually sheds light on distinct influences on the sense of belonging. Among white Americans, gender and income emerge as significant factors, with women and those with higher incomes feeling a stronger connection to the community. One potential explanation for this gender difference could relate to the socialization of women to be more community-oriented and cooperative, leading to a stronger engagement with and support within their communities (Charness & Rustichini 2010). This communal orientation might enable white women to establish positive community relationships and a robust sense of belonging. However, this trend is not as pronounced among minority women, who face additional challenges. Due to intersectional factors, women of color may encounter barriers that impede their ability to connect with the broader community. They often face underrepresentation and may need to devote significant effort to support their racial or ethnic communities. This can result in a less intense attachment to the national community compared to white women (Settles & Buchanan 2014).

### **Commonality between Asian Americans and Latinos**

Both Asian Americans and Latino Americans share similarities in the factors influencing their sense of belonging. These include partisan identity, positive interactions within their co-ethnic in-group, and being foreign-born. A plausible explanation for these commonalities might be that both Asian Americans and Latinos have higher proportions of recent immigrants or naturalized citizens in the United States. Interestingly, the correlation between partisan identity and sense of belonging is statistically significant solely for Asian Americans and Latinos, with a Republican leaning positively related to a stronger sense of belonging in these communities. It is important to highlight, however, that for Asian Americans, political ideology itself does not demonstrate a statistically significant connection to their sense of belonging. In contrast, the influence of partisan identity on feelings of national belonging may manifest differently among Black and White Americans. These observations imply that the interplay between partisan identity and sense of belonging is distinct across various racial and ethnic groups, indicating that political ideology alone may not be sufficient to account for the nuances of partisan identity's effects.

Within Asian American and Latino populations, the relationship between partisan identity and political ideology may exhibit more variability. Given the higher proportion of foreign-born individuals in these groups compared to Black and White Americans, their integration into communities and the formation of social networks could account for this variance. As Tsang (2015) explains, Asian American immigrants often participate in ethnic churches not just for worship but

also to engage in social networking, seek support, and share information. Similarly, an immigrant's alignment with a particular political party may reflect not only their political convictions but also their social milieu and the networks they are part of (Raychaudhuri 2018). Such dynamics could elucidate the observed divergence between the influence of political ideology and partisan identity on the sense of belonging, particularly among Asian Americans.

Positive ingroup interaction stands out as another statistically significant factor influencing national belongingness perceptions. Among Asian Americans and Latinos, engaging in favorable interactions with co-ethnic peers is positively correlated with a stronger sense of national belonging. Immigrants and members of minority groups may often feel isolated or marginalized within the larger society. Supportive encounters within their own racial or ethnic communities can mitigate these feelings by fostering a sense of connectedness and inclusion. This reinforced bond with their own community, in turn, bolsters their overall sense of belonging to and identification with the nation. As highlighted in the literature review, the idea of a national community is largely an imagined construct. For Asian Americans and Latino Americans, their social networks, centered around co-ethnic ties, shape a distinctive perception of 'nationhood' that may differ from the experiences of more insular groups. Their national belonging is cultivated through the affirmation and solidarity found within their own communities.

Being foreign-born emerges as another significant correlate of the sense of belonging, particularly for Asian Americans and Latinos. These foreign-born individuals often grapple with preserving their 'Americanness,' confronting challenges like language barriers and cultural distinctions, which frequently prompt introspection and external questioning of their identity. The necessity to assert their 'Americanness' to counteract such scrutiny may contribute to the statistically significant link observed between foreign-born status and the sense of belonging. The overlapping factors influencing the sense of belonging among Asian Americans and Latinos deserve further exploration. Understanding these shared determinants provides insight into how the sense of national belonging is formed and evolves, particularly among minority and immigrant populations. Such analysis reveals the dynamic and intrinsic nature of belonging within these communities.

### **The Political Effect of the Sense of Belonging without Considering Race**

In this analysis, the connections between the sense of belonging and various dependent variables are explored. Linear regression models are used to assess the relationship between the

perceived sense of belongingness and attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement, the pathway to citizenship, and perceptions of discrimination against minority groups. According to the linear regression results (Table 1.4), holding all other variables constant, each additional unit of measured sense of belonging to the national community is associated with a decrease of 0.071 on the scale measuring support for BLM ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting less support. Moreover, the stronger reported importance of American identity is positively and significantly associated with supporting BLM, indicating that those who place higher importance on American identity are more likely to support BLM. This finding suggests a divergence between social identity and the sense of belonging. The model further reveals a significant and positive relationship between the extent of national belonging and self-reported skin tone, which is associated with the tendency to have a lower sense of national belonging (Table 1.3); specifically, each increase by one category in self-reported skin tone correlates with a 0.072 increase on the BLM support scale ( $p < 0.001$ ), implying that individuals with darker skin tones tend to show more support for BLM. Similarly, a statistical connection can be found between experienced discrimination and support for BLM ( $\beta = 0.268, p < 0.001$ ). An extended model incorporating interaction terms between racial groups and the sense of belonging (referenced in Appendix A) does not show a statistically significant impact on the sense of belonging across racial groups, suggesting that the propensity of white Americans to support the movement is not influenced by their level of belonging in contrast to minority groups.

The second dependent variable examined is the support for a policy providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. According to the findings, there is a statistically significant and positive link between the sense of national belonging and support for this policy ( $\beta = 0.030, p < 0.001$ ). This association might be due to different public sentiments towards the groups primarily affected by these issues—Black Americans in the case of BLM and undocumented immigrants. Moreover, society has given less attention to two key issues. Since 2012, the Black Lives Matter movement has captivated the public, shaping strong opinions and engagements. On the other hand, the policy proposing citizenship for undocumented immigrants hasn't been seen as a direct challenge to the existing system for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there isn't currently an official route for undocumented immigrants to gain citizenship in the U.S. Secondly, the suggested pathway to citizenship involves compliance with specific 'good citizen' guidelines, which essentially would integrate the immigrants into the established social order.

Table 1. 4 Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Dependent Variables

	<b>BLM</b>	<b>Pathway</b>	<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Political Interest</b>	<b>Vote Local</b>
(Intercept)	4.247*** (0.107)	3.978*** (0.103)	5.900*** (0.123)	1.814*** (0.082)	-0.319** (0.106)
Belong	-0.071*** (0.009)	0.030*** (0.009)	-0.064*** (0.010)	-0.011 (0.007)	0.002 (0.009)
Ideology	-0.244*** (0.012)	-0.087*** (0.012)	-0.136*** (0.014)	-0.090*** (0.009)	-0.039** (0.012)
Partisan ID	-0.194*** (0.007)	-0.058*** (0.007)	-0.131*** (0.008)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.035*** (0.007)
Female	0.143*** (0.025)	-0.023 (0.024)	-0.146*** (0.028)	0.203*** (0.019)	0.137*** (0.025)
Age	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)	0.026*** (0.001)
Income	-0.017*** (0.004)	-0.012** (0.004)	-0.007 (0.004)	0.018*** (0.003)	0.041*** (0.004)
Education	0.008 (0.012)	-0.051*** (0.012)	-0.027* (0.014)	0.055*** (0.009)	0.135*** (0.012)
Positive Ingroup	0.199*** (0.018)	0.082*** (0.018)	0.104*** (0.021)	0.084*** (0.014)	0.054** (0.018)
Importance of American ID	0.100*** (0.017)	0.111*** (0.017)	0.138*** (0.020)	0.138*** (0.013)	0.122*** (0.017)
Experienced Discrimination	0.268*** (0.024)	0.118*** (0.024)	0.506*** (0.028)	0.108*** (0.019)	0.051* (0.024)
Skin Tone	0.072*** (0.007)	-0.007 (0.007)	0.012 (0.008)	0.006 (0.006)	0.019** (0.007)
Foreign Born	0.054 (0.028)	-0.050 (0.027)	0.189*** (0.033)	0.041 (0.022)	0.495*** (0.028)
Northeast	0.095** (0.034)	-0.015 (0.032)	-0.120** (0.038)	-0.009 (0.026)	-0.221*** (0.033)
Midwest	0.044 (0.037)	-0.024 (0.036)	-0.162*** (0.042)	0.056* (0.028)	0.011 (0.036)
South	0.041 (0.029)	0.025 (0.028)	-0.155*** (0.033)	0.038 (0.022)	-0.140*** (0.028)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.310	0.057	0.185	0.096	0.269
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.309	0.055	0.183	0.094	0.267
Num. obs.	8060	8060	7320	8060	8060

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

The importance of these issues may also vary among individuals. It is noteworthy that the relationship between the perceived importance of American identity and support for the pathway to citizenship is statistically significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.082$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), similar to the relationship between it and support for BLM. In analyzing the link between the sense of belonging and perceived discrimination—the third dependent variable—a linear regression was performed. The negative coefficient of  $-0.064$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that an increase in the sense of belonging is correlated with a decrease in perceived discrimination against minority groups by 0.064 units, with other variables held constant. Moreover, a strong American identity ( $\beta = 0.143$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is positively associated with higher levels of perceived discrimination against minority groups, presenting an inverse effect relative to the sense of belonging, consistent with earlier model observations.

In the analysis across three models, additional factors have consistently shown a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variables—support for BLM, endorsement of a pathway to citizenship, and perceived discrimination. These factors include having a strong ingroup identification, placing high importance on American identity, and having experienced discrimination. As expected, holding a conservative ideology is negatively associated with support for BLM, the pathway to citizenship, and lower perceived discrimination, aligning with common expectations. Variables capturing positive ingroup interaction and the importance placed on American identity are positively associated with the dependent variables, reflecting more progressive stances on immigration and racial justice issues. Furthermore, female respondents generally exhibit more liberal attitudes towards these issues, yet being female shows a negative correlation with support for citizenship pathway policies.

The dependent variables of political interest and voting behavior in state/local elections were both assessed using a 1-4 scale, with (1) signifying 'not at all interested' and (4) 'very interested' for political interest, and (1) indicating 'I usually skip state/local elections' and (4) 'I vote in every single state/local election' for voting behavior. Linear regression models were employed to investigate significant associations between the sense of national belonging and these variables. The results demonstrate a statistically significant negative association between the sense of belonging and political interest; specifically, the log-odds of being politically interested decrease by 0.034 ( $p < 0.05$ ), translating to a 3.4% reduction in the odds of being interested in politics when controlling for other factors. However, the relationship between voting in local/state elections and the sense of national belonging, while negative, does not reach statistical significance, preventing a conclusive

interpretation. The perceived importance of American identity is once again positively correlated with both political interest (Coeff: 0.189,  $p < 0.001$ ) and voting at the local and state levels (Coeff: 0.129,  $p < 0.001$ ). Individuals who have experienced discrimination or positive ingroup interactions are more inclined to engage in politics and vote. In contrast, foreign-born individuals show less interest in politics but are more likely to vote in local elections.

Table 1. 5 White Americans: Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Dependent Variables

	<b>BLM</b>	<b>Pathway</b>	<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Political Interest</b>	<b>Vote Local</b>
(Intercept)	5.288*** (0.417)	4.041*** (0.384)	6.456*** (0.445)	1.465*** (0.287)	-0.481 (0.369)
Belong	-0.080* (0.036)	0.027 (0.033)	-0.001 (0.040)	-0.001 (0.025)	-0.010 (0.032)
Ideology	-0.362*** (0.045)	-0.114** (0.041)	-0.278*** (0.047)	-0.085** (0.031)	0.011 (0.040)
Partisan ID	-0.176*** (0.024)	-0.060** (0.022)	-0.109*** (0.025)	0.014 (0.016)	-0.020 (0.021)
Female	0.195* (0.084)	-0.215** (0.078)	-0.316*** (0.090)	0.221*** (0.058)	0.276*** (0.075)
Age	-0.003 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.004 (0.003)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.024*** (0.002)
Income	0.007 (0.013)	0.010 (0.012)	0.009 (0.014)	0.013 (0.009)	0.060*** (0.012)
Education	0.083* (0.040)	-0.050 (0.037)	-0.052 (0.043)	0.112*** (0.028)	0.186*** (0.036)
Positive Ingroup	0.153* (0.068)	0.067 (0.063)	-0.039 (0.072)	0.073 (0.047)	0.059 (0.060)
Importance of American ID	-0.025 (0.066)	0.022 (0.061)	-0.063 (0.071)	0.148** (0.046)	0.143* (0.059)
Experienced Discrimination	-0.126 (0.083)	0.028 (0.076)	0.265** (0.088)	0.186** (0.057)	0.108 (0.073)
Skin Tone	-0.001 (0.036)	0.021 (0.033)	0.011 (0.038)	-0.022 (0.025)	-0.008 (0.032)
Foreign Born	-0.273 (0.190)	0.073 (0.175)	0.357 (0.199)	0.086 (0.131)	0.303 (0.168)
Northeast	0.028 (0.113)	-0.032 (0.104)	-0.239* (0.120)	-0.014 (0.078)	-0.127 (0.100)
Midwest	-0.076 (0.107)	-0.126 (0.099)	-0.137 (0.113)	-0.121 (0.074)	-0.034 (0.095)
South	-0.311** (0.109)	0.008 (0.100)	-0.267* (0.116)	-0.117 (0.075)	-0.176 (0.097)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.362	0.067	0.219	0.149	0.318
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.350	0.050	0.204	0.133	0.305
Num. obs.	832	832	781	832	832

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

## Summary

The outcomes of the statistical analyses suggest that the sense of belonging may influence attitudes towards racial inequality issues that challenge the existing racial hierarchy in the United States. Specifically, there is a statistically significant and negative correlation between the sense of belonging and support for the Black Lives Matter movement as well as perceptions of discrimination against minority groups. However, this association does not extend to support for pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. The differential relationships between perceived national belongingness and issues of racial justice, as opposed to belongingness and immigration policies, suggest that the public may perceive these issues differently within the U.S. context.

## Result: Variations between/within Racial Groups

In this section, the potential effects of the sense of belonging on social issues and political participation are compared across racial groups. The third hypothesis suggests that the impact of a sense of national belonging is only significant for minorities' attitudes and actions, and that white Americans should not exhibit these effects. The following analysis examines the relationships between the sense of belonging and three dependent variables—support for BLM, perceptions of discrimination, and support for a pathway to citizenship—for each of the four racial groups. Ultimately, the results show mixed support for this hypothesis.

### White Americans

(Table 1.5) In the models exploring the relationship between white respondents' sense of belonging and their perception of discrimination against minority groups, the sense of belonging has a negative but non-significant coefficient ( $\beta = -0.001$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). On the other hand, a sense of belonging is negatively and statistically significantly associated with support for BLM ( $\beta = -0.080$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), where the negative coefficient suggests white individuals who are high in a sense of national belonging are less likely to support the movement. Associated with a decreased sense of national belonging, White individuals who have experienced discrimination are more likely to perceive widespread discrimination against minority groups ( $\beta = 0.265$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ) in the United States, yet this does not necessarily correlate with support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Additionally, within this racial group, the sense of belonging does not have statistically significant associations with support for the pathway to citizenship, voting in local elections, or political interest. Other

demographic factors exhibit their own potential influences. For instance, white female respondents tend to favor policies offering a pathway to citizenship but are less likely to participate in local or state elections. Positive experiences within one's ethnic group are associated with a higher probability of voting locally. In general, white Americans' sense of national belonging does not significantly correlate with support for system-challenging issues or political engagement, with the notable exception of BLM. Support for this movement, which profoundly challenges the position of white people within the country, is an outlier in this trend.

### **Asian Americans**

(Table 1.6) Among Asian Americans, the analysis using linear regression models reveals that the sense of belonging is negatively and statistically significantly related to the perception of discrimination ( $\beta = -0.109$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and support for BLM ( $\beta = -0.065$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) controlling for other variables. This suggests that an increase in the sense of belonging is associated with a 0.065 decrease in the BLM support scale. The perceived importance of American identity also plays a role; Asian Americans who place greater importance on their American identity report an increased perception of discrimination but do not necessarily show increased support for BLM. Furthermore, South Asians, compared to their East Asian counterparts, are less likely to perceive discrimination but have a higher opportunity to support BLM. This could indicate that South Asians' support for BLM may be influenced by political reasons, such as partisanship or political ideology, despite experiencing lower levels of racial discrimination. The social circles of Asian American immigrants, often comprised of co-ethnic individuals, may reduce their exposure to racial conflict, supporting the idea that recognition of racial discrimination severity does not automatically correspond with support for movements like BLM. Regarding the pathway to citizenship, while there is a negative coefficient (0.020,  $p > 0.05$ ), indicating a positive relationship between the sense of belonging and support for a pathway to citizenship, this relationship is not statistically significant. Lastly, the sense of belonging among Asian Americans is not significantly related to individuals' political interest or the likelihood of voting in local elections.

Table 1. 6 Asian Americans: Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Dependent Variables

	<b>BLM</b>	<b>Pathway</b>	<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Political Interest</b>	<b>Vote Local</b>
(Intercept)	4.576*** (0.194)	4.111*** (0.201)	3.362*** (0.143)	1.656*** (0.150)	-0.757*** (0.201)
Belong	-0.065*** (0.017)	0.020 (0.018)	-0.109*** (0.013)	-0.002 (0.013)	0.051** (0.018)
Ideology	-0.284*** (0.024)	-0.154*** (0.025)	-0.067*** (0.017)	-0.101*** (0.018)	-0.020 (0.024)
Partisan ID	-0.156*** (0.012)	-0.059*** (0.012)	-0.027** (0.009)	0.020* (0.009)	-0.035** (0.012)
Female	0.137** (0.042)	-0.064 (0.044)	-0.032 (0.031)	0.226*** (0.033)	0.180*** (0.044)
Age	-0.004** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.004** (0.001)	0.028*** (0.002)
Income	-0.015* (0.007)	-0.003 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.005)	0.021*** (0.005)	0.039*** (0.007)
Education	-0.011 (0.022)	-0.067** (0.023)	0.003 (0.016)	0.041* (0.017)	0.082*** (0.023)
Positive Ingroup	0.172*** (0.032)	0.096** (0.033)	0.045 (0.023)	0.080** (0.025)	0.003 (0.033)
Importance of American ID	0.090** (0.030)	0.092** (0.031)	0.099*** (0.023)	0.137*** (0.023)	0.112*** (0.031)
Experienced Discrimination	0.263*** (0.043)	0.131** (0.045)	0.370*** (0.032)	0.141*** (0.033)	0.058 (0.045)
Skin Tone	0.010 (0.017)	-0.016 (0.018)	-0.027* (0.013)	-0.008 (0.013)	0.060*** (0.018)
Foreign Born	-0.023 (0.043)	0.088* (0.045)	0.005 (0.031)	-0.036 (0.033)	0.370*** (0.045)
Southeast Asian	-0.032 (0.054)	0.172** (0.056)	-0.063 (0.039)	0.169*** (0.041)	0.062 (0.055)
South Asian	0.193** (0.060)	0.011 (0.063)	-0.165*** (0.045)	0.297*** (0.047)	-0.082 (0.062)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.289	0.089	0.161	0.110	0.273
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.285	0.084	0.156	0.104	0.269
Num. obs.	2390	2390	2262	2390	2390

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

### Black Americans

(Table 1.7) Among Black Americans, a stronger sense of belonging is linked with a lower perception of racial discrimination against minority groups ( $\beta = -0.039$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The linear regression model shows a negative coefficient for support for BLM, suggesting that a heightened sense of belonging may correspond with less support for the movement; this relationship is statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.061$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, a sense of belonging is significantly and

negatively correlated with support for the policy providing a pathway to citizenship ( $\beta = -0.030$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, a sense of belonging among Black Americans has a significant negative association with local voting behavior ( $\beta = -0.036$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), yet it shows no significant correlation with political interest. A sense of belonging emerges as a consistent predictor of political attitudes and engagement among Black Americans. Interestingly, a stronger American identity is positively correlated with an increased perception of discrimination, support for BLM, support for a pathway to citizenship, political interest, and local voting behavior. This suggests that individuals who place a high value on their American identity are more inclined towards liberal perspectives on systematic reform, which is contrary to the effects associated with a sense of belonging

### **Latino Americans**

(Table 1.8) Within the Latino American demographic, a linear regression model indicates that a stronger sense of belonging is associated with a reduced perception of discrimination against minority groups ( $\beta = -0.081$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting a perception of less severe discrimination. Furthermore, Latino Americans with a greater sense of belonging tend to be less supportive of BLM; a one-unit increase in the sense of belonging corresponds to a 0.069 decrease in support for BLM. In terms of the policy offering a pathway to citizenship, although a positive coefficient implies that a higher sense of belonging could lead to more support, this association is not statistically significant.

The same is true for local voting behavior; a negative coefficient implies that a stronger sense of belonging might be linked with a lower likelihood of voting locally, yet this relationship is not statistically significant. Similarly, political interest among Latino Americans shows a negative association with the sense of belonging, but this too is not statistically significant. These results suggest that while a sense of belonging may demotivate political participation among Latino individuals, it is likely that other, more critical factors are at play in determining their political engagement.

### **General Discussion**

This paper contributes to our comprehension of how a sense of national belonging might influence political attitudes and actions. The human need for belonging—to be part of something larger like a nation—imbues life with meaning. Driven by this need, individuals often tailor their

behaviors and attitudes to sustain their sense of belonging. Stemming from a sense of familiarity and 'home,' people are naturally inclined to preserve the status quo.

Table 1. 7 Black Americans: Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Dependent Variables

	<b>BLM</b>	<b>Pathway</b>	<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Political Interest</b>	<b>Vote Local</b>
(Intercept)	4.120*** (0.200)	3.557*** (0.205)	5.885*** (0.236)	1.908*** (0.166)	-0.052 (0.208)
Belong	-0.061*** (0.014)	0.028* (0.014)	-0.039* (0.016)	-0.028* (0.012)	-0.036* (0.014)
Ideology	-0.137*** (0.014)	-0.030* (0.014)	-0.064*** (0.017)	-0.012 (0.012)	-0.077*** (0.014)
Partisan ID	-0.156*** (0.019)	-0.023 (0.019)	-0.064** (0.022)	-0.107*** (0.016)	-0.087*** (0.019)
Female	0.143*** (0.043)	0.076 (0.044)	-0.057 (0.050)	0.166*** (0.036)	0.047 (0.045)
Age	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)	0.008*** (0.001)	0.024*** (0.001)
Income	-0.000 (0.007)	-0.009 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.008)	0.026*** (0.006)	0.063*** (0.007)
Education	-0.021 (0.021)	0.031 (0.021)	-0.013 (0.024)	0.074*** (0.017)	0.181*** (0.022)
Positive Ingroup	0.200*** (0.027)	0.101*** (0.028)	0.097** (0.033)	0.127*** (0.023)	0.116*** (0.028)
Importance of American ID	0.249*** (0.043)	0.030 (0.044)	0.335*** (0.051)	0.071* (0.036)	0.024 (0.044)
Experienced Discrimination	0.206*** (0.030)	0.074* (0.031)	0.095** (0.035)	0.104*** (0.025)	0.053 (0.032)
Skin Tone	-0.004 (0.013)	0.013 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.001 (0.010)	0.011 (0.013)
Foreign Born	0.119 (0.082)	-0.257** (0.084)	-0.022 (0.099)	0.004 (0.068)	0.638*** (0.085)
Northeast	0.098 (0.067)	0.034 (0.068)	-0.099 (0.078)	0.052 (0.055)	-0.141* (0.069)
Midwest	0.015 (0.066)	0.063 (0.067)	-0.203** (0.077)	0.036 (0.055)	0.168* (0.068)
South	0.014 (0.055)	-0.008 (0.057)	-0.163* (0.065)	0.003 (0.046)	-0.055 (0.057)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.160	0.024	0.054	0.134	0.301
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.155	0.018	0.048	0.129	0.297
Num. obs.	2473	2473	2204	2473	2473

\*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

Politically, it is anticipated that individuals with a strong sense of belonging would favor policies or issues that protect their 'home' from change, hence being less inclined to endorse policies or issues that pose a challenge to the established system. This research employs five dependent variables to examine the validity of this notion: support for the Black Lives Matter movement, endorsement of a pathway to citizenship, perceptions of racial discrimination against minority groups, political interest, and voting behaviors.

The statistical findings suggest that a heightened sense of belonging generally correlates with diminished support for issues that challenge established boundaries, notably the Black Lives Matter movement and the recognition of racial discrimination against minority groups. On the contrary, a sense of belonging is positively associated with support for a pathway to citizenship when all race groups are examined together. One reason for this may be the relative prominence of the issue. Black Lives Matter has become one of the most extensive protests in U.S. history, with an estimated 26 million people participating since its inception in 2013, which was a reaction to the persistent, fatal racial injustices Black Americans face. The movement has received extensive media coverage, which has amplified public attention and stirred strong emotional responses. On the other hand, the issue of a pathway to citizenship hasn't gained as much prominence in public conversations, lacking the impact of large-scale protests or memorable campaigns. Consequently, public opinions on this matter tend to be less polarized and more favorable. Moreover, since there isn't an established policy for a pathway to citizenship, the concept aligns somewhat with the pursuit of the 'American Dream.' It is presumed that immigrants would need to adopt certain American values and abide by American laws to become citizens, which wouldn't fundamentally disrupt the fabric of the current social system. Additionally, due to their historical and persistent struggles against racism, Black Americans are often seen leading the charge against entrenched societal norms, positioning them at the center of debates surrounding the maintenance of the status quo. The reasons listed above may explain why there is a variation in the potential effect of a sense of belonging on BLM and a pathway to citizenship.

Table 1. 8 Latino Americans: Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Dependent Variables

	<b>BLM</b>	<b>Pathway</b>	<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Political Interest</b>	<b>Vote Local</b>
(Intercept)	4.302*** (0.203)	4.214*** (0.181)	3.784*** (0.140)	2.094*** (0.148)	-0.176 (0.196)
Belong	-0.069*** (0.017)	0.025 (0.016)	-0.081*** (0.012)	-0.018 (0.013)	-0.003 (0.017)
Ideology	-0.279*** (0.023)	-0.083*** (0.020)	-0.068*** (0.016)	-0.049** (0.016)	-0.019 (0.022)
Partisan ID	-0.165*** (0.012)	-0.046*** (0.011)	-0.086*** (0.008)	-0.006 (0.009)	-0.023 (0.012)
Female	0.059 (0.048)	0.007 (0.043)	-0.127*** (0.033)	0.242*** (0.035)	0.186*** (0.046)
Age	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.003* (0.001)	0.025*** (0.002)
Income	-0.021** (0.008)	-0.016* (0.007)	-0.009 (0.005)	0.030*** (0.006)	0.042*** (0.007)
Education	0.031 (0.023)	-0.039 (0.020)	-0.009 (0.016)	0.090*** (0.017)	0.203*** (0.022)
Positive Ingroup	0.273*** (0.035)	0.082** (0.031)	0.085*** (0.024)	0.056* (0.026)	0.077* (0.034)
American ID	0.066 (0.034)	0.143*** (0.031)	0.119*** (0.024)	0.092*** (0.025)	0.081* (0.033)
Experienced Discrimination	0.305*** (0.047)	0.137** (0.042)	0.366*** (0.032)	0.096** (0.034)	0.055 (0.045)
Skin Tone	0.001 (0.017)	-0.034* (0.016)	-0.020 (0.012)	0.016 (0.013)	-0.008 (0.017)
Foreign Born	0.007 (0.055)	-0.271*** (0.049)	-0.119** (0.038)	-0.021 (0.040)	0.326*** (0.053)
South American	0.018 (0.083)	-0.238** (0.074)	-0.220*** (0.057)	-0.108 (0.061)	-0.273*** (0.080)
North and Central American	-0.024 (0.097)	-0.103 (0.086)	-0.060 (0.066)	-0.087 (0.071)	-0.066 (0.093)
Caribbean	0.115* (0.055)	-0.066 (0.049)	-0.115** (0.038)	-0.148*** (0.040)	-0.139** (0.053)
Other	-0.040 (0.079)	-0.052 (0.071)	-0.108* (0.054)	-0.087 (0.058)	-0.220** (0.076)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.292	0.074	0.223	0.102	0.233
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.287	0.068	0.217	0.096	0.228
Num. obs.	2365	2365	2286	2365	2365

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

The potential influence of a sense of belonging extends to public perceptions of racial discrimination. Equality, a foundational cultural value in the United States, is often misshaped into a 'color-blind' ideology. Forman (2004) argues that 'color-blind racism has achieved normative status in U.S. society...' This aligns with the core assertion of this paper: individuals with a stronger sense

of national belonging may be inclined to maintain the prevailing 'color-blind' approach to race, which could lead to less acknowledgment of discrimination within the United States. Regarding political engagement, a sense of belonging does not have a statistically significant association with either political interest or voting behaviors. It is plausible that individuals with a heightened sense of belonging may still take an interest in political matters that reinforce the status quo and, consequently, engage in political activities.

The examination of the effect of a sense of national belonging by race reveals that, among Asian Americans, Latinos, and black Americans, there is a negative association between support for BLM and the perceived severity of racial discrimination against minority groups. This suggests that the prevailing white-dominant system and racial structure are influential, even for minority groups, where current racial ideologies are deeply embedded. A heightened sense of belonging can be associated with a denial of systemic defects and pro-status-quo attitudes. For Black respondents, a stronger sense of national belonging also correlates with a reduced willingness to support for the policy of a pathway to citizenship. This pattern does not hold among White Americans, who typically do not experience challenges to their sense of belonging. However, for White individuals, a pronounced sense of belonging is inversely related to support for BLM, a movement that profoundly questions the established position of White people within the national hierarchy. This suggests that a sense of belonging among White people may be influential particularly when their place in the social hierarchy is perceived to be directly contested. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is only partially supported; a sense of belonging does not consistently predict political attitudes and behaviors in White people as it does in other racial groups. Regarding political engagement, a strong sense of national belonging is associated with a decreased tendency of voting locally among Black Americans. This finding does not extend to political interest, where no significant effect is observed. Thus, the effect of a sense of national belonging on political engagement is only partially evident, offering some support for Hypothesis 2a, though it warrants further investigation.

This paper not only discusses the potential political implications of a sense of national belonging but also investigates demographic factors that influence one's sense of belonging. Findings suggest that minority groups generally exhibit a weaker sense of belonging compared to white individuals. Among whites, there is a notable variation, reflecting a diversity of views on belonging. Universal factors affecting the sense of national belonging across all racial groups include age, the importance placed on American identity, experiences of discrimination, and skin tone. However, factors such as partisan identity, positive ingroup interaction, and being foreign-born are

particularly significant among Asian Americans and Latinos, possibly due to a higher proportion of recent immigrants within these communities (Budiman et al., 2020)<sup>2</sup>. Their daily lives are often deeply embedded within co-ethnic social networks, affecting their choice of religious congregation and political affiliation, potentially leading to a distinct perception of the nation compared to more isolated groups. The sense of belonging for these groups is fostered by support within their own communities. Without the lens of race, a Republican-leaning partisan identity and conservative ideology are positively associated with a strong sense of belonging, possibly reflecting the tendency of Republicans and conservatives to demonstrate a deeper attachment to the country (Schatz et al., 1999). Individuals who regard their American identities as significant are likely to feel a stronger connection to the nation. The experience of discrimination typically dampens the sense of belonging, while being foreign-born has complex implications for this connection to the national community.

Experiences of discrimination are found to diminish individuals' sense of belonging to the national community, a result that aligns with intuition. However, foreign-born individuals paradoxically report an increased sense of belonging to the United States. This phenomenon might be attributed to 'identity denial,' where minority individuals, when perceived or implied to be 'not American enough,' undertake actions to assert their 'Americanness' (Cheryan and Monin 2005). Similarly, foreign-born American citizens frequently face scrutiny regarding their loyalty to the United States. As a coping strategy, they may respond by affirming their belonging to the country more vigorously.

In conclusion, this study posits that the sense of national belonging is an integral part of human existence, influencing everything from daily rituals to significant life events. Despite its theorized pervasiveness, the actual impact of a sense of nation and belonging is complex and often intangible. Real-world factors, such as ethnic identity or cultural ties, may play a more critical role than national belonging. This is particularly true for minority groups, who may have nuanced relationships with the notion of nationhood and national community due to their varied experiences and the multiplicity of identities they navigate. The degree to which national belonging affects individuals' lives and attitudes is a multifaceted question that warrants further exploration, especially in the context of the diverse experiences of minority populations.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/>

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

This paper investigates how a feeling of national belonging influences views on race-related challenges in the U.S., a society historically shaped by white dominance. In recent years, America has grappled with calls for significant changes in racial justice. Through experimental research, this paper aims to understand whether the inclination to preserve societal norms affects attitudes towards these transformative issues. The focus is on how deeply embedded notions of belonging—often associated with maintaining the status quo—might affect opinions across all races within the American populace.

The Black Lives Matter movement has significantly shaped social and political dialogue in the United States since its emergence. Catalyzed by the high-profile cases of racial injustice and police brutality, the movement has maintained a steady presence in the public consciousness. Originating with the tragic death of Trayvon Martin in 2013, it has persistently advocated for justice for Black and Brown individuals who have been victims of systemic violence. The movement saw a surge in attention following the harrowing deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020, which prompted widespread public engagement and soul-searching within American society. Moreover, the issue of racial discrimination continues to be a pressing concern that demands attention and action within the country. In 2016, data revealed that 71% of Black Americans reported experiencing racial discrimination occasionally or more frequently. Similarly, 52% of Latino Americans reported the same. Asian Americans often face the persistent stereotype of being 'forever foreigners' in their own country. Additionally, the economic status of minority groups is concerning, with Latino (\$58,015) and Black Americans (\$48,175) typically at the lower end of median household incomes. This economic inequality extends beyond mere financial metrics, profoundly impacting the lived experiences of these communities. For instance, African Americans and U.S.-born Latinos are subject to heightened psychosocial stressors and a compounded burden of such pressures, more so than their White counterparts (Sternthal et al., 2011).

Yet, support for policies aimed at addressing these disparities, such as preferential college admissions and hiring practices, remains relatively low. Only about 33% of Americans support preferential college admissions, and a mere 26% are in favor of preferential hiring. Notably, even within minority communities, there is a lukewarm reception to Affirmative Action policies. Against this backdrop, this research will explore the influence of an individual's sense of national belonging

on their attitudes toward these critical issues. The study aims to uncover if and how the feeling of being part of a nation shapes perceptions of racial discrimination and resource disparities.

Immigration stands as a pivotal topic in the United States. In 2016, the country was home to 43.7 million immigrants. Data from the Pew Research Center (2020) reveals that the workforce comprised 17.2 million legal immigrants in 2007, a number that increased to 21.2 million by 2017. Public sentiment toward immigrants can be skeptical; 24% of Americans believe the number of legal immigrants should be reduced, while 38% feel the current numbers should stay the same. Cultural conflicts and resource competition often exacerbate tensions, particularly when fueled by the politically charged rhetoric and agendas of certain politicians (Sanchez and Gomez-Aguinaga, 2017). This project will delve into how a sense of national belonging correlates with attitudes toward immigration. It will investigate whether a strong sense of belonging within the national community influences support for pro-immigrant policies and perspectives.

A sense of belonging is recognized as a core human necessity, with national belonging forming an essential component of this need (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). National belonging provides a sense of purpose and underpins a fundamental ontological security for the future. Cross-disciplinary literature suggests a link between a sense of belonging and an affinity for the status quo. Individuals with a pronounced sense of belonging tend to adhere to established norms and maintain the current system's operation. In a political context, those deeply connected to a nation are inclined to align with societal norms, including political participation. The concept of national belonging is intertwined with the idea of "home," involving continuous negotiation of both one's inclusion within the national "family" and their role within it. It is hypothesized that a strong sense of belonging correlates with less support for transformative societal issues, while a diminished sense of belonging may align with attitudes that challenge established boundaries. The empirical findings lend partial support to the notion that a sense of belonging inclines individuals toward conservative views on issues that disrupt existing racial structures. However, the influence of a sense of exclusion, or a diminished sense of belonging, warrants further exploration.

## **Literature Review**

### **Sense of Belonging and Sense of National Belonging**

The concept of "belonging" has been extensively examined in social psychology and is acknowledged as a fundamental human need. Humans have an intrinsic desire to be recognized as

distinct individuals while also seeking to be valued, accepted, and supported through meaningful connections with others—a phenomenon referred to as the 'need to belong,' as delineated by Baumeister and Leary (1995). Research indicates that a heightened sense of belonging is positively linked to mental well-being and an enhanced quality of life. For instance, individuals with a strong sense of belonging tend to find greater meaning in life (Lambert et al., 2013) and exhibit a lower propensity for suicide (Silva et al., 2015). In educational environments, a robust sense of belonging is positively correlated with students' social and academic outcomes, such as resilience and buoyancy (Arslan and Coşkun, 2023). Belonging to a group, community, or society is not just a comfort—it's a critical component of human survival. This intrinsic motivation to achieve a "sense of belonging" is what makes individuals feel whole and integrated within their social milieu.

Belonging is more than just self-identification or being part of a group. It involves how individuals perceive and evaluate their connections with their environment and the people around them, shaped by mutual interactions. This sense of belonging extends to being part of something larger than oneself, like a community or a nation. It's not limited to physical spaces; it can be a symbolic or emotional connection that provides familiarity, comfort, and a sense of safety (Antonsich, 2010). This concept of belonging applies to various aspects of life, from being part of a social group to identifying with a country. Belonging is shaped by various social factors like nationality, gender, race/ethnicity, and class. Simonsen's 2017 study on second-generation Middle Eastern immigrants in Denmark exemplifies this. Despite assimilating into Danish culture, these individuals often grapple with a mismatch between their identities and their sense of national belonging, largely due to their immigrant status and societal categorization. Essentially, belonging isn't just about feeling part of a group; it's also about feeling entitled and empowered to claim membership in that group (Skey, 2013). Another vital aspect of belonging is the sensation of being 'at home,' which Duyvendak (2011) describes as encompassing familiarity, safety, and an idealized sense of peace and contentment. These layers collectively shape one's experience of belonging within a community or society.

The concept of a sense of national belonging resonates deeply with Viktor Frankl's (1969) theory of the "will to meaning," which posits that humans have an intrinsic desire to find meaning in life. Being part of a larger entity, such as a nation, satisfies this quest for meaning and helps individuals confront existential fears. To be effectively considered a member of a nation, one must not only have legal status but also engage in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, all while fostering a sense of belonging to that nation. This sense of belonging is multifaceted—it's about

feeling integrated into the community, sharing a collective identity ("we-ness"), and feeling protected and valued by the national community (Clarke, 2019). In political science, national belonging and national identity are often used interchangeably, yet they are distinct concepts within the social identity theory framework (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Esses et al., 2006). While national identity and a sense of belonging overlap in some aspects, like feeling part of the country, they are distinct constructs. National identity includes additional dimensions and factors that may not be encapsulated solely by the sense of belonging.

### **Belongingness and the Status Quo**

The current academic literature on the sense of belonging's influence on political attitudes might be limited, but by extrapolating from research in social psychology and education, one can infer its significant attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Strayhorn, 2019). While there isn't direct evidence of how individuals with a satisfied need to belong react to outgroups, related studies suggest that a strong sense of belonging often correlates with participation in prosocial behaviors, which may align with supporting the existing social system and its norms. For example, Drezner and Pizmony-Levy (2021) found that alumni with a strong connection to their alma mater were more likely to donate and engage with the institution. Similarly, Cho and colleagues (2010) highlighted that a sense of belonging within the Wikipedian community fosters knowledge sharing, thereby contributing to the platform's maintenance. This sense of belonging is also intertwined with self-stereotyping behaviors, where individuals align themselves with perceived group norms. The concept of belonging, particularly within the context of academia, often manifests in behaviors that align with the social norms of a group, such as college students drinking alcohol to fit in (Neighbors et al., 2021). Political science research echoes this, indicating that strong national ties can lead to a greater acceptance of the existing societal structure. For instance, those with a deep sense of national attachment are typically more compliant with laws (Dražanová & Roberts, 2023) and willing to contribute through tax payments (Thess-Morse, 2009). Belongingness has been linked to a reluctance to change systemic boundaries, supported by findings that a nostalgic longing for in-group continuity—rooted in belonging—often correlates with preferences for conservative political candidates and restrictive racial policies (Smeeke et al., 2018; Behler et al., 2021). This evidence suggests that the inherent human need to belong can drive individuals to support and uphold the established system.

*Hypothesis 1: Compared to participants in other groups, participants in the Belong group are **less likely** to show supportive attitudes toward the issues and policies.*

Experiencing social exclusion and a resultant lack of a sense of belonging can significantly diminish an individual's engagement with national issues and adherence to societal norms. This detachment can sometimes manifest as outright resistance to national authorities, as seen in instances of refusal to pledge allegiance to the flag or to stand for the national anthem (Bondy, 2004; Forst, 2017). Additionally, feelings of exclusion can motivate participation in protests as a means of seeking inclusion, thereby indirectly questioning the status quo (Bäck et al., 2015; Renström et al., 2020). In the field of social psychology, studies have found that the need to belong can prompt individuals to pursue new social affiliations after being rejected by their initial group, suggesting an inherent adaptability in seeking connections (Maner et al., 2007; Narayanan et al., 2013). Knapton et al. (2014) also noted that individuals are prone to take action against organizations that have excluded them, particularly when they find acceptance elsewhere. These findings underscore the profound impact that the need for belongingness can have on behavior, potentially fostering a more open and inclusive disposition. In the context of politics and intergroup relations, a diminished sense of belonging might lead to a favorable view of policies or movements that seek to reform or challenge the existing racial hierarchies and systems.

*Hypothesis 2: Compared to participants in other groups, participants in the Exclusion group are **more likely** to show supportive attitudes toward the issues and policies.*

Research in various academic fields indicates that individuals who feel insecure about their sense of belonging may exhibit behaviors aimed at maintaining the status quo, such as showing favoritism towards their ingroup while derogating outgroups. This reaction can be particularly pronounced in individuals who perceive their group membership as not fully recognized or accepted. When faced with uncertainty about their inclusion within a group or community, they may engage in behaviors that reinforce their position and sense of belonging.

For example, Aydin et al. (2013) found that Germans who felt socially excluded were more supportive of stringent naturalization regulations for immigrants, held more prejudice against Muslims, and were more likely to view immigrants as a burden. This tendency to bolster one's sense of belonging through increased ingroup favoritism is further supported by Park and Jin (2022). The

'Queen bee' phenomenon illustrates this concept within the workplace, where individuals who are part of a marginalized group but have attained a higher status may distance themselves from other group members to uphold and justify the existing social hierarchy (Derks et al., 2015). Such behaviors reveal the lengths to which individuals may go to affirm their belonging, often resulting in conservative attitudes towards intergroup dynamics and resistance to social change that could disrupt established structures.

*Hypothesis 2a: Compared to participants in other groups, participants in the Exclusion group are **less likely** to show supportive attitudes toward the issues and policies.*

In summary, a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need. It not only influences people's psychological and physical well-being but also affects how they interact with and respond to their environment. Beyond being merely categorized as a group member, maintaining a sense of belonging requires an individual to feel embraced, entitled, and empowered. This innate desire influences people's attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups. Three potential outcomes, inferred from previous literature, are as follows: Firstly, those who are accepted by their national group are more likely to adhere strictly to the status quo because they wish to protect what they consider 'home' and their privilege of belonging. Secondly, a diminished sense of belonging is associated with an openness to new systems and potentially broader boundaries. Finally, exclusion from mainstream society may amplify the desire for belonging, leading to advocacy for the existing hierarchy. These actions are manifestations of a deep-seated yearning for a sense of belonging and acceptance within the community.

### **What is the Status Quo? What is the Challenge?**

This paper critically explores the causal link between an individual's sense of national belonging and their stance on political issues that challenge established systems or policies. To effectively engage with this inquiry, it is imperative to define the concepts of 'national boundary' or 'status quo' and identify what constitutes a challenge. Herein, 'boundary' refers specifically to the predominant white-centric racial and social system within the United States.

Anderson (1991) conceptualizes the nation as an imagined construct, built on the shared perceptions and imaginations of its people, as direct personal knowledge of every community member is not feasible. The prevailing culture forms boundaries that craft the archetypal

"American" identity, frequently sidelining minority groups. Research illustrates that not all demographic groups are deemed equally "American"; white Americans often typify the quintessential American identity (Davidio et al., 2010). Whiteness is frequently viewed as an inherent aspect of this identity (Theiss-Morse, 2009). The national community's boundaries are often drawn along racial and ethnic lines. Minority groups are subjected to stereotypes that cast them as perpetually un-American. Such categorizations can lead to the perpetual perception of Asians and Latinos/Hispanics as outsiders or foreigners (Armenta et al., 2003), and African Americans are disparaged for not aligning with supposed American cultural norms, or worse, being labeled as inherently criminal (Sniderman & Piazza, 2004). Devos and Banaji (2005) demonstrate that both Asian and African Americans are often seen as less American. Minority group members frequently face exclusion from significant events, whether in educational settings or professional environments (Miminoshvili & Černe, 2021; Biggart et al., 2013). This boundary is not just a societal construct but one that even minority members can internalize, making the social structure resistant to change due to the mutual constraints imposed by an entrenched racial hierarchy (Masuoka & Junn, 2013).

It is significant to recognize that minority individuals are acutely aware of the injustices and discrimination directed at them. However, this awareness does not necessarily deter their aspirations to assimilate into the dominant society. The drive for belongingness spurs minority individuals to align their thoughts and actions with those of the dominant group. This can manifest in various ways, such as minimizing the impact of racism, endorsing more stringent immigration policies, or engaging in activities seen as quintessentially part of the dominant culture. Even the adoption of conservative ideologies can be seen as a commitment to the perceived ideals of American life and identity (Naumann et al., 2017). Thus, in the pursuit of belonging, minority group members may exhibit responses akin to those of individuals from the dominant group.

In the context of the United States, the entrenched racial hierarchy presents an unyielding boundary within the societal structure. For the purposes of this study, policies and issues that advocate for systemic transformation across racial or group lines are considered challenges to the status quo, potentially perceived as undermining the interests of "true" Americans to the benefit of "lesser" Americans. The challenges under scrutiny in this research include the Black Lives Matter Movement, policies facilitating a pathway to citizenship, Affirmative Action (specifically preferential hiring practices), perceptions of racial discrimination, and perceptions of police violence.

## **Method**

## Participant and Procedure

The study's hypotheses were evaluated through a survey experiment, chosen for its efficiency in execution and cost-effectiveness compared to traditional survey methods. On October 27, 2023, the experiment engaged 280 participants through CloudResearch's Connect platform, offering a diverse group: 171 White Americans, 28 Black Americans, 30 Latino Americans, and 32 Asian Americans. Participation was incentivized with a \$2 reward. The Connect platform's rating system, with scales from 1 to 5 stars, reflected positively on the survey's design and administration, with an overall rating of 4.9 stars. The survey's completion times averaged at 15 minutes and 29 seconds, with a median of 12 minutes and 48 seconds. One incomplete response was discarded, resulting in data from 158 male, 112 female, and 8 non-binary individuals, averaging 36.17 years in age ( $SD = 10.37$ ). All participants had completed at least high school, with a majority holding college degrees. Political affiliations of participants were also noted, with 56% identifying as liberal (57% Democrats), 21% as moderate (20% Independent), and 23% as conservative (23% Republicans).

This research employed a 1 by 4 factorial design, discreetly investigating the interplay between question-answering proficiency and political attitudes. Participants were equally and randomly distributed into four distinct groups, each representing different experimental conditions: "Belonging" ( $n = 72$ ), "Exclusion" ( $n = 68$ ), "Ambivalence" ( $n = 70$ ), and a "Control" group ( $n = 69$ ). The demographic makeup was carefully balanced across these conditions, ensuring no demographic category was unevenly placed in any single group.

In the Positive Belonging condition, participants were asked to answer an open-ended question:

"As a resident of the United States, you belong in this country as much as anyone else. What are some experiences, activities, or places that come to mind where you feel especially included in American society? For example, it could be certain national events, visiting places that reinforce feelings of belonging, or engaging in activities that make you feel part of the wider community. Please briefly describe an experience that makes you feel like you belong."

On the other hand, in the Exclusion condition, participants were requested to answer the questions as below:

“Some residents of the United States feel like they belong in this country less than others do. What are some experiences, activities, or places that come to mind that might make you feel especially excluded from American society? For example, it could be certain national events, visiting places that make you feel like an outsider, or engaging in activities that make you feel disconnected from the wider community. Please briefly describe an experience that makes you feel like you do not belong.”

To evaluate the impact of exposure to belonging and exclusion treatments, the "Ambivalence" condition was introduced. This condition seeks to examine whether the effects of belonging and exclusion counterbalance each other or if one effect predominates. Participants in the Ambivalence group responded to questions from both the Belonging and Exclusion sets. Meanwhile, those in the Control group answered questions parallel to the other conditions, with the focus shifted from national belonging to belonging at their place of work or educational institution. This adjustment allows the study to maintain a comparative baseline while exploring the specific influence of national belonging.

*Hypothesis 3: The effect of belonging will dominate the ambivalent group (so the same result as the Belong Group)*

*Hypothesis 3a: The effect of exclusion will dominate the ambivalence group (so the same result as the Exclusion Group)*

*Hypothesis 3b: The effect of belonging and exclusion will be canceled out.*

## Manipulation Check

### Measures

As one of the manipulation checks, individuals' sense of national belonging is measured by 12 items including positively worded items ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and negatively worded items ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The included items are as below:

1. I feel like other Americans **accept/exclude** me as a national fellow.
2. When I talk about Americans, I usually say "**we**"/"**they**" rather than "**they**"/"**we**".
3. I feel **respected/disrespected** by other Americans.
4. I feel like I am **at home/not at home** in the United States
5. I feel like a **valued/ignored member** of American society.

6. I feel like I am a **part**/not of the American community.

Table 2. 1 Linear Regression Result of Manipulation Check

	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>Ambivalence</b>
(Intercept)	12.92 <sup>***</sup> (0.42)	7.97 <sup>***</sup> (0.42)	0.69 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Baseline: Control Group			
Group Ambivalence	0.22 (0.59)	0.31 (0.60)	-0.03 (0.04)
Group Belong	0.61 (0.58)	0.41 (0.59)	-0.08* (0.04)
Group Exclusion	-1.09 <sup>°</sup> (0.59)	1.25* (0.60)	0.00 (0.04)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.02	0.02
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.01	0.01

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>p < 0.001; <sup>\*\*</sup>p < 0.01; <sup>\*</sup>p < 0.05; <sup>°</sup>p < 0.1

### National Belonging

The examination of the manipulation effects via linear regression revealed differential impacts on participants' sense of national belonging (Table 2.1). The Belonging group, when compared to the baseline, reported a significantly higher sense of belonging than the Exclusion group (Coeff: -1.69, p = 0.004). Using the Control group as a reference, the sense of belonging in the Exclusion group was marginally lower (Coeff: -1.09, p = 0.07), with no significant differences noted between the Control, Belonging, and Ambivalence groups. These results suggest that the manipulations did not fully achieve the expected effects. Nevertheless, the data indicates that the manipulations did influence the sense of national belonging in the desired direction, either through the exclusion or the belonging stimuli.

(See Appendix B) An examination of the mean sense of belonging for each group revealed that white participants in the Belonging group had the highest sense of belonging (mean: 14.44), while non-white participants in the same group had a lower mean (12.09). In comparison, white participants in the Control group reported a lower sense of belonging (mean: 13.08), but non-white participants experienced a slight increase in their sense of belonging (0.51 higher than the baseline). The control group exhibited more variability in the sense of belonging scores.

In the Exclusion group, the sense of belonging for white participants decreased to 12.58, and for minority groups, it decreased further to 11.05. The Ambivalence group, which encountered both the belonging and exclusion treatments, showed a large standard error, indicating potential polarization in participants' sense of national belonging, making the data less definitive. Despite the absence of statistical testing, observable trends suggest that the belonging treatment may enhance the sense of belonging, while the exclusion treatment seems to diminish it.

### **National Exclusion**

The efficacy of the Exclusion treatment was assessed using another linear regression model. The results did not show a statistically significant difference in feelings of national exclusion between the Control group and the Belonging or Ambivalence groups. Nevertheless, those in the Exclusion condition exhibited a higher sense of exclusion (Coeff: 1.25,  $p = 0.04$ ) compared to the Control group. An isolated evaluation of the Exclusion treatment's effect reveals that members of minority groups generally report a greater perception of exclusion than their white counterparts. Notably, white participants in the Exclusion group reported the highest sense of exclusion (mean: 8.52), followed closely by minority group members (mean: 9.95). White participants in the Ambivalence condition also experienced a substantial sense of exclusion (mean: 8.3), with minority groups reporting a similar mean (8.22). The Control group participants, both white (mean: 7.92) and from minority groups (mean: 8.06), exhibited less perception of exclusion, albeit with larger standard errors, suggesting varied experiences among participants. As anticipated, white individuals in the Belonging group felt the least excluded. However, non-white participants still reported a significant sense of exclusion, underscoring the nuanced and complex nature of perceived belonging and exclusion within the national context.

### **Manipulation check: Summary**

The manipulation check confirms that the experimental treatments affected participants' senses of belonging and exclusion. Generally, non-white participants demonstrated a lower sense of belonging and a higher sense of exclusion, with considerable individual variation within minority groups, as suggested by the large standard errors in their responses. The Ambivalence group did not clarify whether the effects of belonging outweighed those of exclusion; rather, their pattern of responses more closely resembled the Control group. To summarize, the belonging treatment

successfully reinforced individuals' affirmation of belonging to the national community. Concurrently, the exclusion treatment effectively evoked feelings of national exclusion.

## Result

The dependent variables of interest include support for Black Lives Matter (BLM), perceptions of law enforcement's targeting of black people, support for a pathway to citizenship, immigrant positivity, and preferential hiring for minorities. These variables are considered in relation to the sense of national belonging and its impact on the maintenance or challenge of the racial hierarchy.

Table 2. 2 Linear Regression: Relationships Between Treatments and Dependent Variables

	<b>Support BLM</b>	<b>Police Violence</b>	<b>Support Pathway</b>	<b>Preferential Hiring</b>
(Intercept)	3.65*** (0.16)	3.97*** (0.16)	3.97*** (0.16)	3.12*** (0.16)
Group Ambivalence	-0.27 (0.23)	-0.07 (0.22)	-0.23 (0.22)	-0.19 (0.23)
Group Belong	-0.36 (0.23)	-0.26 (0.22)	-0.22 (0.22)	-0.35 (0.23)
Group Exclusion	-0.06 (0.23)	-0.06 (0.22)	0.03 (0.22)	-0.13 (0.23)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

(Table 2.2) Support for BLM was assessed on a scale from 1 to 5, with options ranging from strong opposition to strong support. A linear regression model was used to evaluate the potential negative impact of an increased sense of national belonging on support for BLM, a social movement that challenges the current racial system and hierarchy. The results from the linear model indicate that there is a tendency for individuals in the Ambivalence and Belonging groups to be less supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement compared to those in the Control group even though the result is statistically insignificant. Specifically, the coefficients suggest a negative relationship between being in these groups and the level of support for BLM. The p-values associated with these coefficients suggest that the results are not statistically significant, and they do not reach the conventional threshold of 0.05. This could be interpreted as a pattern that might warrant further investigation with a larger sample size or additional studies.

Similarly, for the variable measuring opinions on law enforcement violence against Black people, participants were asked, "In general, do you agree or disagree that the police in most communities are more likely to use deadly force against a Black person than against a White person?" Responses were measured on a scale from 1 to 5, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' To examine the effect of a sense of national belonging on perceptions of law enforcement violence, a linear regression model was utilized. The statistical analysis indicated that, relative to the control group, individuals in the Belonging group (Coeff: -0.26) were potentially more likely to disagree with the statement that police are more prone to use deadly force against Black people. No statistically significant attitudinal differences were observed between the other groups and the control group.

Attitudes towards a pathway to citizenship were assessed using a scale from 1 (strongly in favor of deporting undocumented immigrants) to 5 (strongly in favor of offering a pathway to citizenship). Relative to the Control group, participants in the Belonging group showed a tendency to favor deportation with a coefficient of -0.22, and yet, the effect is not statistically significant. Two other attitudinal questions related to immigration ("Immigrants who break the law should be forced to leave the U.S. and return to their countries of origin" and "Immigrants take jobs, housing, and healthcare away from people who were born in the U.S.") were measured on a scale from 1 to 5 (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) and combined to create an index of immigrant positivity ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ). A linear regression model (Table 2.3) revealed that individuals in the Belonging group were less likely to disagree with these statements, indicating less positive attitudes towards immigrants (Coeff: -0.55,  $p = 0.03$ ), compared to their counterparts in the Control group.

To assess perceptions of discrimination against minority groups, participants rated the level of discrimination against Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans in the United States on a scale from (1) 'not at all' to (5) 'a great deal'. The four items combined to form a discrimination index had a Cronbach alpha of 0.84, indicating a high internal consistency. A linear regression model with the treatment condition as the independent variable found no statistically significant differences between any of the treatment groups (Ambivalence, Belonging, and Exclusion) and the control group in terms of perceived discrimination against minority groups. Another variable, minority preferential hiring, gauged respondents' approval or disapproval of preferential hiring and promotion for minority groups due to past discrimination, with the scale ranging from 'disapprove a great deal' to 'approve a great deal'. This variable is based on the notion that some view preferential hiring as discriminatory against white Americans. A linear regression model showed that participants in the

Belonging condition (Coeff: -0.35) were more likely to oppose preferential hiring and promotion for minority groups compared to those in the Control group, yet again the result is not statistically significant. No significant racial differences (white vs. non-white) were found in the effects of belonging, exclusion, or ambivalence on this attitude (see Appendix B).

Table 2. 3 Linear Regression: Relationships Between Treatments and Dependent Variables

	<b>Immigrant Positivity</b>	<b>Discriminate Minority</b>
(Intercept)	4.84*** (0.18)	8.57*** (0.30)
Group Ambivalence	-0.38 (0.26)	-0.31 (0.42)
Group Belong	-0.55* (0.26)	-0.42 (0.42)
Group Exclusion	-0.24 (0.26)	-0.06 (0.43)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.00
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	-0.01

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05; °p < 0.1

## Result: Discussion

By examining the direction of the coefficients, the findings indicate a conservative shift in attitudes toward race-related policies and issues, such as support for Black Lives Matter (BLM), perceptions of police violence, attitudes toward a pathway to citizenship, preferential hiring, and immigrant positivity, when participants are exposed to the belonging treatment. However, drawing a definitive conclusion is complicated due to the statistically insignificant results. While the manipulation did produce some of the expected effects, the overall influence remains relatively minor. For the Belonging group, the treatment successfully reduced ambivalence, but their sense of belonging did not surpass that of the control group. This could indicate that participants' sense of belonging was already high prior to the experiment, suggesting a resilience in the perception of belongingness that is not easily altered without more impactful interventions.

Interestingly, the Exclusion group did not exhibit statistically significant attitudinal differences compared to the other groups across the variables examined. If a sense of belonging is a driving factor behind attitudinal changes, then we might expect to observe variations in attitude within the Exclusion group, given their notable shifts in the sense of belonging/exclusion.

The coefficients reveal a consistent negative direction across the three treatment groups, albeit not statistically significant. This pattern could imply that exposure to any treatments related to

a sense of national belonging, whether negative or positive, commonly affects participants by fostering a desire to protect the existing social system. Alternatively, the treatments might activate mechanisms that were not considered in the current study. Further research is needed to unravel these effects and explore the underlying processes more thoroughly.

This sample consisted primarily of white participants, who are less likely to struggle with feelings of belonging to the United States. Consequently, this could partly explain the ineffectiveness of the treatment, as they may not perceive the world through the lens of belongingness. Future studies should consider recruiting a more diverse sample, including a higher number of individuals from minority groups.

### **Additional Examination**

In order to further explore the potential effect of the sense of national belonging, statistical models were conducted. These models use the sense of belonging as the independent variable to examine the relationships between perceived belongingness and support for Black Lives Matter (BLM), a pathway to citizenship, and perceived discrimination against minority groups. Generally, the statistical results show negative correlations between a higher sense of belonging and variables that measure attitudes toward the maintenance of or challenges to group boundaries.

(Table 2.4) The sense of belonging is negatively associated with support for BLM when controlling for founding variables is not considered. The coefficient of -0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) suggests that for every unit increase in a sense of national belonging, the tendency of supporting BLM decreases. When control variables, including gender, education, income, age, and race, are held constant, the relationship between support for BLM and a sense of belonging remains unchanged ( $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, when the partisan identity variable is introduced into the model, the effect of the sense of belonging becomes statistically insignificant, suggesting that partisan identity may be a confounding factor in the relationship between a sense of belonging and support for BLM.

(Table 2.5) The sense of belonging is similarly negatively associated with support for a pathway to citizenship, and the relationship is statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The introduction of control variables does not alter the significance of this association, indicating a 0.06 decrease in the scale of supporting a pathway to citizenship for each unit increase in the sense of national belonging. However, the addition of the partisan identity variable to the model once again overrides this relationship.

(Table 2.6) Perceived discrimination against minority groups has a negative association with the sense of belonging, both with and without control variables, including the partisan variable in the model. With the sense of belonging as the sole independent variable, the coefficient is -0.19 with a p-value of 0.00. When other demographic variables are included, the coefficient slightly increases to -0.17 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Controlling for partisan identity, the coefficient is -0.13 ( $p < 0.01$ ), corresponding to a 0.13 decrease in the scale of perceived discrimination against minority groups with each unit increase in one's sense of national belonging.

## General Discussion

This study investigates the causal relationship between a sense of national belonging and exclusion. Previous studies suggest that a sense of national belonging offers individuals a sense of meaning, security about the future, and a feeling of "home." By nature, humans long for acceptance, which involves not only being part of a group but also maintaining one's status within it. Literature from various fields indicates that a strong sense of belonging is associated with support for the status quo, whereas a weaker sense of belonging is linked to system dissatisfaction and a desire for boundary expansion. Interestingly, evidence also indicates that social exclusion can amplify boundary protection behaviors. To test these theories, a survey experiment was conducted with 279 participants, including diverse racial backgrounds. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: belonging, exclusion, ambivalence, and control.

Across all treatment conditions, white participants generally exhibited a higher sense of belonging compared to minority groups. Additionally, there was a greater variance in the sense of belonging among non-white participants, indicating a wide spread of scores. For the sense of exclusion, minority group participants consistently perceived higher levels of exclusion, regardless of their treatment group. The control and ambivalence groups displayed large standard errors, suggesting that these treatments may introduce confusion or distraction from the concept of national belonging. Consequently, the ambivalence treatment seemingly neutralized the effects of belonging and exclusion. From the linear regression model results, it is evident that while the treatments did not produce statistically significant differences between groups, they were effective when comparing mean responses. It is possible that insufficient statistical power or the subtlety of experimental treatments resulted in the lack of significant differences.

Several dependent variables were utilized to test the hypotheses, including support for BLM, perceptions of police violence, attitudes toward a pathway to citizenship, preferential hiring for minority groups, immigrant positivity, and discrimination against minority groups. Linear regression models indicated that, with the control group as a reference, individuals in the belonging group tended to adopt more conservative attitudes toward these issues, as reflected by the negative coefficients. However, it is significant to note that none of the relationships between the treatments and variables of interest are statistically significant, suggesting that further study is required. This study provides some preliminary but not assertive evidence. Therefore hypotheses 1, 2, and 2a remain uncertain in this study, even though the additional examinations do support hypothesis 1 that a sense of belonging is negatively associated with support for boundary-challenging issues.

Although not statistically significant, the direction of the coefficients for the exclusion group was consistently negative (except for support for a pathway to citizenship), similar to the belonging group. This suggests that exposure to social exclusion might also lead to boundary-protection attitudes. Both low and high senses of belonging may be linked to pro-status-quo attitudes, albeit for different reasons: a low sense of belonging may drive individuals to demonstrate system loyalty as a way to affirm their belonging, while a high sense of belonging may prompt individuals to safeguard the status quo to protect their privileges. The ambivalent group also exhibited a tendency to support the existing racial structure, which raises the question of what element within the treatments could be causing this effect. Further investigation is required to understand this dynamic fully. Finally, additional non-causal tests confirmed the hypothesis that a sense of national belonging correlates with resistance to boundary expansion.

National belonging is a nuanced subject that has yet to gain the spotlight it deserves. Its significance lies in the profound psychological support and affirmation it provides to individuals, grounding them in a shared identity and collective narrative. The political dimensions of national belonging are particularly compelling, offering rich insights into how individuals' sense of belonging to a nation influences their political engagement and perspectives. The aim of this research is to ignite further scholarly exploration into the nexus between national belonging and political behavior. An additional contribution of this study is the innovative approach to experimental treatment. While the outcomes are not without their flaws, the visible effects suggest that national belonging can indeed be influenced through intentional manipulation. This study's design lays the groundwork for future enhancements in experimental treatments that promise a more profound understanding of the political implications of a sense of national belonging.

Table 2. 4 Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Support for BLM

	<b>Support BLM</b>	<b>with Controls</b>	<b>with Partisan ID</b>
(Intercept)	4.14*** (0.31)	3.98*** (0.52)	5.13*** (0.42)
Belong	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)
Female		0.10 (0.17)	0.11 (0.13)
Education		0.21* (0.10)	0.09 (0.08)
Income		-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.03)
Age		-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Black		0.04 (0.28)	0.03 (0.22)
Latino		-0.21 (0.28)	-0.12 (0.22)
Asian		0.17 (0.27)	-0.01 (0.21)
Other		-0.27 (0.34)	-0.07 (0.27)
Partisan ID			-0.48*** (0.04)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.05	0.41
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.02	0.39
Num. obs.	279	278	278

\*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

Table 2. 5 Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Support for Pathway

	<b>Support Pathway</b>	<b>with Controls</b>	<b>with Partisan ID</b>
(Intercept)	4.60*** (0.30)	4.89*** (0.49)	5.85*** (0.42)
Belong	-0.06* (0.02)	-0.06* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Female		0.03 (0.16)	0.03 (0.13)
Education		0.16 (0.10)	0.06 (0.08)
Income		0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)
Age		-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Black		-0.44 (0.27)	-0.45* (0.22)
Latino		0.02 (0.26)	0.10 (0.22)
Asian		-0.58* (0.26)	-0.74*** (0.22)
Other		-0.37 (0.32)	-0.20 (0.27)
Partisan ID			-0.40*** (0.04)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.07	0.36
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.04	0.33
Num. obs.	279	278	278

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

Table 2. 6 Relationships between Sense of Belonging and Perceived Discrimination

	<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>	<b>with Controls</b>	<b>with Partisan ID</b>
(Intercept)	10.78*** (0.56)	9.70*** (0.94)	10.88*** (0.90)
Belong	-0.19*** (0.04)	-0.17*** (0.04)	-0.13** (0.04)
Female		0.24 (0.30)	0.25 (0.28)
Education		0.16 (0.18)	0.04 (0.17)
Income		-0.04 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.07)
Age		0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Black		-0.33 (0.50)	-0.35 (0.47)
Latino		0.85 (0.50)	0.95* (0.47)
Asian		0.59 (0.49)	0.40 (0.46)
Other		-0.22 (0.60)	-0.03 (0.57)
Partisan ID			-0.47*** (0.08)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.09	0.20
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.06	0.17
Num. obs.	277	276	276

\*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

## Chapter 3

### Introduction

National Belonging is a nuanced concept that often lacks precise theoretical clarity and tends to be conflated with identity (May 2013; Knott 2017). Although related, belonging transcends identity or identification, encompassing an emotional attachment—such as loyalty and commitment—to a country, as well as a sense of home. It also implies boundary creation—determining who is a member and who is not. Given its complex and understudied nature, belongingness warrants further exploration. The insights garnered here will inform the design of future survey questionnaires and lay the groundwork for quantitative studies on belongingness.

This research delves into U.S. undergraduate students' perceptions and articulations of their sense of national belonging, examining its impact on their political intentions. National belonging profoundly shapes aspects of everyday life, from dietary choices to funeral practices, all of which are colored by where individuals feel they belong. The discourse on college students' national attachment, particularly among minority students within higher education, has been sparse. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the meaning of national belonging to college students. A comprehensive qualitative approach will shed light on how the younger generation in the United States perceives the country and their place within it. This paper aims to address the following research questions: How do undergraduate students articulate their sense of national belonging? How do they define it? What barriers impede their sense of belonging? And lastly, how does this sense of belonging influence their readiness to engage politically?

In this study, undergraduate students were recruited from the School of Government and Public Policy (SGPP) at the University of Arizona through the SONA system. A total of 39 students, aged 18 to 23, participated, with a predominance of female students. The racial composition of the respondent group included 22 White, 2 Native American, 1 Middle Eastern, 9 Hispanic/Latino, 2 Asian American, and 3 African American students. A survey comprising six open-ended questions was developed, drawing on existing literature on the sense of belonging, to probe the students' perceptions of what it means to belong to the United States.

Employing Skey's (2011) theoretical framework, it is anticipated that a sense of national belonging will intersect with themes such as political organization (including citizenship rights and duties), cultural values (such as freedom), and individual and communal identity. This research aims

to delve into undergraduate students' conceptions of belonging, as well as the barriers they encounter in feeling connected to the United States. The findings reveal racial disparities in experiences of belonging, highlighting the significance of self-categorization (like immigration history) and societal concerns (such as gun violence). Notably, the concept of a firm boundary was significant, with 11 participants underscoring "citizenship" as a critical element of belonging, indicating that a sense of inclusion requires reciprocal commitment from both the government and its citizens. Additionally, the appreciation of cultural diversity, akin to being part of a broad cultural canopy, was seen to nurture a sense of belonging among students. Racial dynamics, encompassing minority status and the sense of white guilt, were also observed to influence individuals' feelings of national belonging.

Employing qualitative methods, this study enhances our understanding of what a sense of belonging signifies, particularly for undergraduate students during a pivotal period of political orientation influenced by peer norms (Dey 1997) and social environments. The research strengthens the foundation for future studies on the sense of belonging by distinguishing it from mere identification. It reveals that belonging encompasses feelings of security, duties and rights, and cultural connection, and influences political perceptions.

## **Literature Review**

Belongingness is a fundamental human need extensively discussed in social and clinical psychology. Human beings are innately inclined to establish psychological connections with others. Maslow (1943) places belonging just after physiological and safety needs in his hierarchy. Moreover, belongingness plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's sense of purpose. Baumeister and Leary (1995) contend that humans are inherently motivated to create lasting, meaningful relationships. National belonging amplifies the importance of belonging by providing individuals with a sense of purpose, a defense against the anxiety of inevitable mortality, and a tool to address existential uncertainties by integrating them into something larger than themselves. The sense of belonging emphasizes reciprocal acceptance between an individual and their group. It transcends mere self-identification, distinguishing it from social identity. Belongingness involves profound emotional ties and interpersonal relationships. Individuals feel they belong in a community when they see themselves as integral to a larger whole, feeling included, valued, and recognized. This connectedness stems from shared goals, beliefs, values, and experiences.

Self-identification is indeed an integral component of belonging, but it's also essential to consider both material and mental aspects that contribute to the perception of belongingness. Materially, subjective belonging is moderated by the perception of being protected and supported by nations or social groups through tangible means such as citizenship, housing, employment, and healthcare. Psychologically, it relates to perceived membership and interpersonal relationships within the group, including feelings of empowerment and entitlement. An individual's sense of belonging within a group is largely shaped by their perceptions of the environment and their relationships with fellow group members, regardless of their identity.

Skey (2011) categorizes the factors of belonging into five primary dimensions: Territory, Temporal (history), Cultural, Political organization, and Self/other. These dimensions provide a framework for defining and capturing participants' sense of national belonging in the United States for this dissertation. Territory is particularly influential in constructing the national imagination and defining 'who belongs,' often based on the birthplace and citizenship. The temporal dimension considers the history and collective efforts in nation-building, such as the shared resilience post-9/11. Cultural dimensions, intertwined with customs and traditions, are cultivated over generations and are reflected in everyday practices from morning coffee to Thanksgiving dinners.

Cultural factors within a society offer a kind of symbolic immortality, allowing individuals to feel part of something enduring and larger than themselves, thus extending their sense of identity (Aron et al., 2003). This symbolic system underpins social norms and values, and those who deviate from these norms may be perceived as 'other', regardless of their citizenship status. For instance, in the United States, political participation is a normative aspect of citizenship, and failing to vote might result in being perceived as less American, which could lead to overreporting of voting behavior (Karp & Brockington, 2005). Similarly, those who do not follow religious traditions might feel marginalized (Rippy & Newman, 2006). The political organization dimension reflects the ability of political systems to mobilize and sustain national movements through education, law, finance, and territorial management, providing a sense of security and inclusion. Lastly, the self/other dimension encompasses the characteristics that individuals believe define their national identity, influenced by political and media portrayals as well as personal interactions and experiences (Wodak, 2009). These dimensions together form a multifaceted understanding of what it means to belong to a nation.

## **Racial Difference in Sense of Belonging**

While individuals may live amidst national symbols, active contemplation of belonging can be infrequent, particularly for those whose belonging has never been contested (Skey, 2011). Minority groups often have unique perspectives on community belonging, coupled with frustration stemming from treatment by their fellow Americans and a persistent sense of 'otherness'. For Asian and Latino Americans, particularly those born abroad, 'Americanness' is often questioned, leading to an internal conflict between cultural identity and American identity. This can prevent a full embrace of either heritage or American belonging. Externally, societal stereotypes challenge their sense of 'Americanness', regardless of legal status or cultural assimilation, reinforcing the dichotomy between being seen as 'American' or 'Non-American'.

For instance, in an interview from the book 'Vietnamese Immigrant Youth and Citizenship: How Race, Ethnicity, and Culture Shape Sense of Being' (D. T. Nguyen 2011), a Vietnamese American teenager named Hai expresses his concern about the impossibility of becoming a 'real' American due to the lack of recognition by other Americans. This stems from the fact that Vietnamese individuals are not white. Hai remarks, 'A Vietnamese person can be an American citizen but will not be recognized as a real American. America has many kinds of people, but only a certain kind of people is seen as real Americans' (D. T. Nguyen 2011).

While the sense of belonging for white Americans may not be as pronounced due to their status within the country, being in racially diverse environments, such as a university campus, can lead to introspection about white racial identity, the concept of 'belonging,' and its broader implications. This can manifest as protective in-group sentiments or empathetic out-group orientations. For example, white individuals in areas of greater racial diversity may experience heightened apprehension and perceive a sense of threat from racial out-groups (Jardina, 2019).

Research suggests that white guilt can motivate antiracist behaviors and attitudes among white individuals. Conversely, it can also provoke defensive reactions or a withdrawal from discussions around race (Grzanka et al., 2020). The impact of white guilt is evident in the context of affirmative action, where it has been shown to influence support for policies aimed at redressing racial injustices faced by African Americans (Iyer et al., 2003). Recognition of white privilege, conversely, may lead to avoidance of discussions that could evoke guilt (Knowles et al., 2014). White guilt is rooted in the recognition of undeserved racial advantages. As such, white individuals who understand their sense of belonging to the national community as an extension of 'white privilege'

may be reluctant to engage in candid conversations about this realization or their feelings of guilt concerning national belonging. Experiences of belonging can vary across racial backgrounds, potentially leading to differing emphases on the various facets of belonging. For instance, minority group members might focus more on personal identity ("self" dimension), while majority group members might give more weight to the systemic aspects of belonging due to their positions within the racial hierarchy.

### **Political Participation and the Influence of Sense of Belonging**

Previous studies suggest that social identities motivate individuals to engage in related movements. This effect is multifaceted: social identities reflect one's self-concept, prompting proactive measures to protect one's sense of self. For example, individuals may participate in LGBTQ+ justice campaigns as an expression of their gender identity. Social identity is also constructed through group comparison, driving actions that maintain a positive group image and a sense of pride. Furthermore, adherence to group norms linked to identity, such as national identity, can increase political engagement (Huddy and Khatib, 2007).

While social identity is a precursor to a sense of belonging, belonging itself involves a more complex relational dynamic. It depends on perceived acceptance and respect within the group. Thus, the impact of a sense of belonging on participation, especially political participation, may vary. If individuals fear that political engagement might harm their sense of belonging, they may hesitate to participate. Conversely, if political engagement is seen as a means to gain respect or integration within the community, it could enhance their willingness to engage. The hypothesis presented here is that the influence of a sense of belonging on political engagement hinges on whether individuals believe that their involvement will lead the national community to value them more.

## **Overview of the Current Study**

### **Design and Procedure**

A qualitative approach was utilized to delve into the psychological underpinnings of the sense of national belonging and its implications for political behavior. The method involved soliciting detailed responses from participants via an anonymous online questionnaire on Qualtrics, comprising six open-ended questions. This approach aligns with previous research that underscores

the value of qualitative surveys in eliciting candid reflections, emotions, and personal accounts, thereby reducing social desirability bias, and enhancing data integrity.

Participants were sourced from the student cohort of the School of Government and Public Policy (SGPP) at the University of Arizona, leveraging the Arizona Policy Lab's resources. Following ethical approval, the lab manager disseminated announcements through the SONA System—a platform for managing participant pools—to enlist SGPP students for the survey. Participation was voluntary, and students were incentivized with extra academic credits. Eligibility criteria stipulated that participants be at least 18 years old and proficient in English. The study specifically excluded international students to center the analysis on the sense of national belonging and political attitudes prevalent among the American populace.

## **Participants**

The study surveyed thirty-nine undergraduate students, with ages ranging from 18 to 23 years ( $M = 20.28$ ). Of these participants, the majority, numbering 31, identified as female, and the remaining 8 as male. The racial composition of the respondents included 22 Whites, 2 Native Americans, 1 individual of Middle Eastern descent, 9 Hispanic/Latino Americans, 2 Asian Americans, and 3 African Americans. Regarding political ideology, the cohort skewed towards liberalism: 26 participants identified as ranging from liberal to very liberal, 5 as conservative to very conservative, and 8 as moderate. Political party affiliations within the group were also reported, with 30 students aligning with the Democratic Party, 5 with the Republican Party, and 4 identifying as pure Independents.

## **Materials**

Recruitment materials for this study clearly outlined its goal: to investigate the interplay between one's sense of national belonging and their political attitudes. Participants were thus expected to reflect on their connection to the American national community and any political opinions tied to this sense of belonging. Access to the study was provided through a link to a Qualtrics survey, available on the SONA webpage. Participants had the option to complete the survey remotely or in person at the SGPP research lab; for this analysis, all participants chose the latter. The survey, which was informed by extant literature on belongingness, began with demographic queries and included six open-ended questions. One key question sought participants' personal definitions of belonging to the United States (e.g., "What does belonging to the United

States mean to you?"). Another probed the relationship between racial identity and national belonging (e.g., "What has influenced your sense of belongingness here as a member of [your racial group]?"), aiming to unearth potential racial variances in how belongingness is perceived and valued.

Further questions delved into participants' feelings of similarity or difference with the broader American community, their political engagement experiences, and motivations for participation or non-participation in political activities. Respondents were consistently prompted to frame their experiences within the context of their sense of belonging. Additional questions were included to counteract the inherent limitations of qualitative surveys by providing more depth (e.g., "When answering the question about obstacles to feeling a sense of belonging in the United States, please also consider the following sub-questions: ..."). Participant responses were systematically recorded and analyzed using Dedoose, a specialized software for qualitative data analysis.

## **Results: What does belonging to the United States mean?**

### **Theme I: Political Organization**

Citizenship and support for the political organization are necessary for a sense of belonging. Even though the sense of belonging is psychological, the mental aspects of a sense of national belonging are frequently built upon tangible elements. From citizenship to the history of physically being in the United States, the importance of the territorial dimension in defining the sense of national belonging is significant (see Appendix C for coding details). A key theme that consistently emerged was the necessity of American citizenship for a sense of belonging. Out of the 39 respondents, 11 mentioned this aspect, regardless of whether their racial/ethnic group was in the majority or minority. Multiple respondents emphasized that legal citizenship is a prerequisite for genuine belonging in the United States. In other words, a substantial portion of the respondents perceive the boundary between 'belonging' and 'not belonging' as firm and inflexible. That said, people who are not legally recognized as American citizens cannot be considered part of the United States. The connection between the land and the individual also appears to be a common theme when defining the sense of belonging—individuals need to reside in the country for a significant duration to be regarded as truly 'belonging.' For instance:

Participant #18 (20, Female, White): "Belonging to the United States means you have lived here for a long time and are a citizen."

Participant #8 (20, Female, White): “It means I was born here and this is where I live.”

While the territorial aspect is one dimension, constructing a sense of belonging to the national community typically involves additional prerequisites, as indicated by the respondents. For instance, the interaction between political organizations, the national community, and individual Americans. Developing this sense of belonging can often take a one-directional form, where individuals build it by passively receiving emotional or material support from the government or fellow Americans.

Participant #20 (20, Female, White): “Belonging to the United States means a sense of security and protection.”

Yet, in defining belonging to the United States, respondents more often view it as a two-way process. Individuals are not just recipients, being accepted by the country or local community and protected by the government; they are also contributors by actively participating in politics and understanding the culture. The importance of physical actions and mental dedication to sustain the functioning of political organizations (voting, civic duty, and the rights of citizenship) emerged as a recurring theme.

For instance, Respondent No. 25 specifically highlights that civic engagement (e.g., participating in national elections) is an aspect of belonging to the national community. This engagement also encompasses psychological contributions, such as loyalty to the country. Thus, fostering a sense of belonging to a country requires more than just taking from it; it also involves giving back. From this perspective, the sense of national belonging can be viewed as an intimate relationship between an individual and their country.

Participant #25 (20, Female, Black): “Belonging to the United States to me means you are a United States citizen. In addition, you participate in the countries voting and have an allegiance to the United States.”

Respondent No. 22 also mentions the aspect of participating in politics and adds another layer to the definition of a sense of national belonging: one must understand the culture. The

assumption is that the United States has a single primary culture that encompasses all Americans. To be truly included in the nation, one has a duty to appreciate the country's traditions, values, and customs.

**Participant #22** (19, Female, White): “Being a citizen, participating in politics, understanding the culture, being a part of a community(.)”

## **Theme II: Culturally Belong**

Another frequently mentioned theme revolves around the cultural aspect of belonging to the United States, and many of the respondents perceived the importance not only of being part of a culture composed of certain values but also of their capability and right to enact those beliefs within that system. Individualism stands as the enduring core value within the fabric of American culture, and equality of opportunity and freedom are fundamental components.

The concept of 'individualism' has been mentioned and/or implied several times by the respondents. Americans often perceive the world through the lens of self-reliance, emphasizing personal control and the freedom to make choices. Individuals are expected to achieve success through their own dedication and hard work, a principle deeply ingrained in the American work ethic. As a result, they are also held accountable for the challenges they face in life. The fundamental belief is that Americans highly value the freedom to make their own choices (Fischer 2008), and equality is an inborn right for everyone. The notion of 'equality' is intricately intertwined with individualism in the United States. Rather than solely focusing on achieving equal outcomes (e.g., equity), the belief in equality is deeply rooted in the concept that 'everyone possesses an equal opportunity to achieve success.' Some of the respondents believe that to belong to the United States, one must be embraced and protected by the cultural concept of equality and recognize the significance of exercising their rights. For instance:

Participant #23 (20, Female, Latino): “Belonging to the United States means that am I am citizen and I have the right to every opportunity that everyone else does and that I am perceived as an equal despite any stereotypes (religion, sex, etc). It means that I belong, I am welcome, and I am accepted.”

Participant No. 38 similarly provides a definition of belongingness intertwined with individualism. They connect belongingness with having equal opportunities and the right to freely express their opinions.

Participant #38 (22, Female, White): “It means having agency in political decisions at the local, state, and federal levels, voting my conscience, protesting, being able to freely speak my mind and hold to my values publicly. It means having equal opportunity in theory.”

Founded on the principle of equality, the United States has always celebrated a culture of diversity. America is frequently characterized as both a 'melting pot' and a 'salad bowl' due to its rich immigrant history. Waves of immigrants from various countries have shaped its demographics, making the U.S. a home for diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. While challenges like racial discrimination and injustice persist, there is an overarching sentiment of peaceful coexistence and a shared love for the nation. As Participant #3 mentions:

Participant #3 (20, Female, White): “... It also means being a part of the melting pot that is the US and being in a diverse environment at all times.”

As previous research points out, the culture of diversity plays an important role in shaping one's sense of belonging, and the effect differs for white Americans compared to minority groups. For instance, a study by Wu and colleagues (2011) examines the association between a diverse environment and a sense of national belonging. The results indicate that racial diversity reduces animosity between groups and fosters a sense of national belonging. Similarly, Haussin and Jones' study (2021) explores how cross-racial interactions mitigate the negative effects of discrimination on one's sense of belonging. Participant No.2's responses exemplify the research findings.

Participant #2 (19, Male, White): To me, belonging to the United States means being a part of a large collage of people and cultures. There are numerous ethnic groups and nationalities present, all with their own distinct cultures and customs. I think that is what makes the potential of the United States so great, because anyone from any background can succeed and contribute to the great tapestry that is our country.

Moreover, the relationship and dynamics between racial and ethnic groups frequently feature in political dialogues, underscoring the importance American society and its government place on diversity, equality, and inclusion. This commitment extends beyond just political spheres, influencing the daily lives of its citizens. In fact, this emphasis on diversity has become ingrained in American culture. As evidence, a 2019 study by Horowitz revealed that a significant majority (57%) of Americans perceive diversity, equity, and inclusion as beneficial.

### **Theme III: Self and Other**

Another theme that is mentioned by multiple respondents is related to self and other, in other words, how individuals define themselves and how they define others within or outside of this country. Participant No. 16 provides a succinct example of this theme:

Participant #16 (21, Male, White): Belonging to the United States to me means living in the United States and calling yourself an American, and being comfortable with that label.

Survey respondents also define the sense of belonging as "being a part of something bigger" and/or "being accepted by other Americans." They pointed out that to belong, not only does one have to identify as an American, but their presence needs to be approved or appreciated by other Americans within the country. For instance:

Participant #31(20, Female, Native American): Belonging in the United States means everyone or most people being accepting of your presence in this country and treating you equally.

Furthermore, receiving acceptance from other Americans does not necessitate compromising one's sense of self, as highlighted by participants No. 9 and 10.

Participant #9 (19, Female, Latino): Being accepted for who you are, no matter your background.

Participant #10 (21, Female, White): belonging means that I am able to be who I am and who I want to be. Belonging here is a sense of acceptance. I belong here because this is where I want to be.

Based on the participants' responses, it is important to understand that when evaluating one's attitudes towards countries or groups, social identity should not be confused with a sense of belonging. While identity is related to how one perceives themselves and their self-concept, belonging refers to the sense of being welcomed and accepted by a particular group.

## **Result: Obstacles for Feeling Belong**

This section explores the obstacles that respondents face in constructing a sense of belonging. Racial differences in the sense of national belonging will also be discussed. It is expected that students from the dominant group and those from minority groups will have varying narratives when it comes to defining the sense of national belonging and their experiences of it (see Appendix C for coding details).

### **Theme I: Self and Categorization**

#### ***Conflicted Identity and Immigration History***

Several students from minority groups mention being ridiculed by their peers because of their immigrant or minority status, which makes it challenging for them to feel a sense of belonging. They also noted that the clash between two cultures influences their perception of themselves as members of the United States.

Participant #30 (20, Female, Asian): "...I am Asian and was adopted by White Americans, which has caused me to feel a sense of belonging to America more so than I do to China. Culturally I am more American than Chinese. I am in a unique limbo where I am too White for the Asians and too Asian for the Whites. When I attended a White Christian Evangelical school, I felt that I did not belong due to being the only diverse student and due to their racial stereotypical jokes."

In this example, the student discusses their identity as both an American and a Chinese adoptee. This dual identity makes it difficult for them to feel like a full-fledged American, yet they do not feel entirely Chinese either. They also mention attending a White Christian school. They compare themselves, viewing their own American identity as somewhat incomplete, to the 'real' Americans, who are white Christians. This comparison suggests the perception that only whites can

be considered the prototype of Americans. The same participant also explicitly provides a description of 'who Americans are' that aligns with this argument.

Participant #30 (20, Female, Asian): Belonging to the United States means to be White. I am not White so I will never fully belong to the United States. Whites are the dominant group in American society and will always be due to institutions that perpetrate their power and privilege, such as the Criminal Justice System. They dominate culture too.

Participant No. 30 is not the only person whose sense of belonging has been impeded by the conflict between two identities or cultures. For instance, Participant No. 29 also discusses how her white-looking appearance hinders her from finding her place among her Latino friends, while her white-American friends cannot empathize with her due to a completely different upbringing environment.

Participant #29 (22, Female, Latino): “As a white-passing Hatina ... It can be frustrating to "play both parts" in the sense that, yes, I am white-passing, but I am Latina and grew up speaking another language with a totally different culture compared to my white-American born friends.”

Minority students who do not struggle with dual-identity issues are bothered by racism within this nation, which prevents them from developing a complete sense of national belonging. Participant No. 25 points out that racism is the primary issue preventing her from developing a sense of national belonging. She not only highlights the challenges faced by the Black community but also those encountered by other people of color, such as Asians and Latinos being told to go back to their countries.

Participant #25 (20, Female, Black): “The main thing that has impacted my sense of belonging in the United States is the ongoing racism and discrimination of black people. I feel as though a lot of us don't feel like we belong because we are constantly being told to "go back to your country" or that we are less than because of our skin color.”

Participant No. 31 highlights how racism and the political environment have influenced her sense of belonging to the national community, particularly feeling excluded and unwanted due to the anti-immigrant sentiment surrounding the 2016 elections.

Participant #31 (20, Female, Native American): “I think what has impacted my sense of belonging in this country is racism and discrimination I have faced and also getting asked what my race is in inappropriate ways. I also grew up hearing that my kind wasn't wanted especially during the 2016 elections, my mom was undocumented in the United States for a long time and I often heard a lot of bad things about undocumented immigrants and their children and how they are wanted out of this country. I often felt not wanted here and like I shouldn't be here, even though I was born here and have the right to live here.”

Students with immigrant backgrounds and history provide a different point of view. Besides the struggle of identity construction and adapting to a new language, becoming familiar with the culture and norms adds another layer of difficulty for them to perceive belongingness. The experiences of Participant No. 27 and Participant No. 7 exemplify the initial hardships faced by young immigrants when they arrived in the United States.

Participant #27 (20, Female, Black): “i (I) moved to the United States when I was 13 years old, I didn't know anything about the culture here, so it was really hard at first. All my years in this country I have struggled and i (I) have persevere(d)...”

Participant #7 (21, Female, Latino): “English is my second language and in my childhood this was a big struggle. Not only did I struggle with understanding it but also learning to write, speak and read. Another thing would be translating everything to my mother.”

Not only do minority students express concerns about their sense of belonging based on their racial identity, but white students also face challenges related to their whiteness. For example, Participant No. 17 discusses how white people are sometimes disliked solely because of their skin color, which can potentially prevent them from feeling a strong attachment to the national community.

Participant #17(21, Female, White): “Obstacles that I faced to feeling a sense of belonging to the United States are the need for society to have a divide between races and ethnic groups. White people are very disliked by almost every other race. Especially in Arizona, you hear "I hate white people" a lot.”

Participant #10 (21, Female, White): “Being a white, upper-middle class female, I have never really felt that I do not belong. I have always felt accepted, especially in school, work, and life. The obstacles I have faced have come up more in college than ever before. It often feels like a crime to be white. Many people seem to attack my privilege as if it is my fault.”

### ***White Guilt***

White students often associate their 'whiteness' with an inherent sense of belonging (e.g., they should feel like they belong). They acknowledge that due to their privileged position, it might seem inappropriate to discuss feelings of not belonging. This sentiment reinforces the prevalent but erroneous belief that 'American equals white.'

Participant #13 (19, Female, White): “As a white woman, I think it would be wrong to say that I have faced any obstacles within the United States due to my race.”

Participant #3 (20, Female, White): “As a white person, I feel like there is a sense of belonging being in the majority. I really have never felt what it's like to be a minority or to feel as if I'm not being represented. I feel as though that plays a large part in my sense of belonging to the United States.”

The responses from respondents No. 13 and No. 32 can be considered examples. Such a myth can overshadow the complex processes and challenges that white students might experience in shaping their identities. Taking it one step further, some white students may feel detached from or ashamed to belong to the country due to their white privilege and experiences of racial discrimination, as respondents No. 2 and No. 11 demonstrate.

Participant #2 (19, Male, White): “I often feel very detached from the national community, not because I am white, but because of how my race has perpetuated the power dynamics in this

country. When you have things like mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex, it is hard to be proud of your country.”

Participant #11 (19, Female, White): “I am very privileged in the way I am a white woman living in the United States in a modern era. I have never felt anything but accepted and heard because I am white...When I hear or witness discrimination in the media, in-person, through laws, or anywhere in the United States it makes me sad and ashamed to belong to a country that participates in these actions.”

While racial identity and self-categorization appear to significantly influence the formation of national belonging, other aspects can play a crucial role in shaping one’s sense of national belonging. Respondent 15 comments that as a white person, it is easy for her to feel that she belongs to the national community. Yet, as a female, she has been excluded from some social experiences, such as job searching or playing sports.

Participant #15 (21, Female, White): “As a white woman, I have faced more obstacles regarding my gender than my ethnic background. Applying for certain jobs or playing certain sports.”

In a similar fashion, respondent #24's response sheds light on a different perspective. It underscores the importance of other intersecting aspects of self that may play a crucial role in shaping the perception of belongingness. This, in turn, highlights the complexity of the concept of national belonging.

Participant #24 (20, Female, White): “Sole(l)y based on my white race, I have never faced obstacles to feeling a sense of belonging. However, based on my other identities as a fat, queer, financially unstable, woman, I have faced many obstacles to my sense of belonging.”

## **Theme II: Social Issue**

In addition to one's self-concept and social group categorization, another influential factor in the development of a sense of national belonging is external social issues. Participants highlighted specific issues that hinder their sense of belonging to the United States. For instance, participant No.

16 mentioned feeling disconnected when the government handles national crises, such as mass shootings, poorly.

Participant #16 (21, Male, White): “I feel most detached from the national community when national disasters are handled poorly (i.e. shootings etc.) by politicians who seem disconnected from the American public.”

What concerns Participant No. 20 the most are gender issues and gun violence. What Participant No. 20's response shares with Participant No. 16 is the focus on gun violence and the government's role in addressing social issues. This aligns with the political organization theme related to defining belongingness, as political organizations play a direct or indirect role in shaping citizens' perceptions of belonging to the country.

Participant #20 (20, Female, White): “I feel the most detached when there is gun violence or restrictions placed on women. Personally, I feel that gun violence needs to be addressed and that women should be free to do whatever they want with their bodies. When the government acts contrary to those beliefs, I feel the most detached and angry at what is being allowed to happen in the country.

In addition to the government, other political actors like regular citizens can also influence one's sense of belonging to the national community. Participant No. 14, for instance, mentions that the supportive attitudes of others toward wars and American militarization make her feel detached from the community.

Participant #14 (21, Female, White): ...I feel the most detached from Americans when I hear information from various individuals that are extremely supportive of war and American militarization.

## **Result: The Political Engagement and the Sense of Belonging**

This section explores the relationship between political engagement (e.g., political interest and political participation) and the sense of national belonging. Participants, in general, can be divided into two groups: those who engage for a sense of belonging and those who disengage for a

sense of belonging. For students who engage in politics for a sense of belonging, they tend to view politics as a means for them to become more involved in the national community. On the other hand, individuals who disengage for reasons related to belonging tend to see politics as an obstacle to further unity within the country.

### **Engage for Belonging**

Political engagement can be related to the construction of a sense of national belonging. For example, Participant No. 20 directly expresses that her participation makes her feel like she belongs.

Participant #20 (20, Female, White): “I feel the strongest sense of belonging when I vote.”

Participant No. 1 highlights that having an interest in politics leads to a deeper connection with the national community, as it is rooted in the shared fundamental rights and the collective power to shape the future of the country. Therefore, everyone is equal, with the choice of whether or not to exercise their rights being the only difference. In her argument, the basic political rights contribute to the integration of Americans.

Participant #1 (18, Female, Black): “Once I gained an interest in politics I did begin to feel more deeply involved with the American community. We all share the base right to vote in our country, the only difference is if we choose not to exercise it...”

In addition to emphasizing the impact of political engagement on the unity of the national community, another commonly discussed topic is the variation in one's position within the community and their sense of belonging due to political engagement. For example, Participant No. 10 addresses how her political actions inform the community about her political views and values, helping her become better known among her fellow Americans.

Participant #10 (21, Female, White): “I vote, I have political flags outside of my house, and I post plenty on social media about politics. I do this because I strongly believe in freedom of speech. My place in the national community is known because of the way I go about political activities. Other Americans can more easily identify my values because of my political activities.”

In a similar fashion, Participant No. 3 indicates that political engagement makes her feel valued and cared for by community members, which is a significant relational factor in building a sense of belonging to the nation.

Participant #3 (20, Female, White): “When other people find out I am interested in politics it always leads to them asking my opinion on a specific topic. People want to know what I think about the current state of the world and it seems that they value it more because it's my area of study.”

### **Disengage for a Sense of Belonging**

Participant No. 4 highlights a fundamental reason why individuals may discontinue their engagement in politics or distance themselves from other political actors. This occurs when they perceive that their sense of belonging has been violated, creating a distinction between "myself" and "others" who do not share aligned political views. Under these circumstances, political engagement does not contribute to integration; instead, it becomes a facilitator for division.

Participant #4 (20, Female, Latino): When I don't feel a sense of belonging to other Americans is when their political views do not align with mine and/or their political view I believe are harmful. It is embarrassing sometimes to view people with political fight for what they believe in ignorantly and without having proper facts.

Participant No. 16 explicitly stated that politics creates a division among community members, and he finds it easier to connect with people when not involved in politics. Similarly, Participant No. 23 also mentions that politics divides people, leading to her distrust of fellow nationals.

Participant #16 (21, Male, White): “I am not interested in politics. In my opinion, politics causes discord and divide between people, and is often taken very seriously. I used to be interested in politics when I was in high school, but I found after dropping my interest in politics that I have been better able to connect with people, and found less conflict in general.

Participant #23 (19, Female, Latino): “I think at time that politics is used to put people against each other. At the end of the day, I do think it's important that everyone has a voice and is up to date

with politics. Unfortunately, it does divide the national community and I have recognized who I can trust more or less.”

## **General Discussion**

This study explores how American undergraduate students define and experience national belonging. National belongingness is a multifaceted concept that involves not only the nationals but also the government governing the nation. The generation of a sense of belonging comprises an individual's commitment to the nation and the support from the government. This argument can be supported by the participants' responses. The definition provided by the respondents revolves around three primary themes: Political organization, culture, and self and others. In this section, respondents define belongingness through political, cultural, self-identity, and acceptance aspects. It involves active engagement within society, including citizenship and shared cultural values, extending beyond national identity.

Based on the participants' responses, a conclusion can be drawn that national identity alone does not fully define the sense of national belonging. Instead, this sense is derived from mutual interaction. Individuals are not only expected to seek acceptance within the governmental framework, such as through citizenship and the fulfillment of civil rights and duties, but also need to actively engage and contribute to the societal system and community, for instance, through participation. This is essential for experiencing a genuine sense of belonging. The territorial dimension is especially notable, emphasizing the unyielding boundaries that define who is deemed American. Many respondents put forth a stringent definition of belonging, asserting that citizenship is crucial. This implies that those without citizenship find themselves outside the national community's fold.

When it comes to the cultural aspect of belonging, a shared culture rooted in principles of equality and diversity plays a significant role. Many respondents feel that being under the umbrella of American cultural norms, especially the values of equality and diversity, reinforces their sense of belonging. Ultimately, feeling accepted by the national community without compromising one's individuality is considered an important factor for belongingness. To sum up, perceptions of belongingness extend beyond mere national identity. It encompasses both legal affiliations, like citizenship, and deeper psychological connections within the community.

Compared to white students, almost all students from minority groups question their belonging to the country or have experienced such doubts. While some White students discuss their concerns about being disliked by community members solely based on their race, they generally acknowledge their racial privilege and rarely question their belonging to the United States. At times, white students may feel a sense of not belonging for reasons unrelated to their racial identity, including issues related to appearance, sexuality, and political views. Additionally, some white students may question their belongingness due to feelings of white guilt stemming from the country's history of racial injustice.

For minority students, achieving a strong and wholehearted belief in their belonging to the nation can be relatively challenging. This difficulty arises from factors such as racial discrimination, conflicted identity, and cultural barriers. The extent to which these challenges affect their sense of belonging may also vary depending on whether they are immigrants or not. Social issues represent another factor that can influence one's sense of belonging to the United States, often tied to the government's role in meeting citizens' expectations, such as handling natural disasters and gun violence. The challenge of fostering a sense of belonging extends beyond individual conflicts of identity or loyalty to the country and encompasses systemic factors.

For the participants, political engagement is a double-edged sword. It can help cultivate a sense of national belonging, but it can also exacerbate divisions and lead to feelings of disconnection. Students who engage in politics, whether due to their interest in politics or their active participation in political affairs, often do so with the intention of becoming more involved in the national community. On the other hand, students who are not interested in or do not participate in politics may do so to avoid becoming victims of political divisions. The pursuit of belonging or the feeling of belonging can have varying effects, depending on the individual's perspective and engagement with politics.

## Chapter4

### Conclusion

#### Contribution

A sense of belonging is a fundamental human need that is extensively explored in fields such as social psychology and education. It has a significant impact on people's lives; for instance, those with a high sense of belonging are less likely to suffer from depression. Additionally, a sense of belonging is intertwined with a sense of meaning, serving as an ontological anchor and providing individuals with a purpose in life. In education, belonging is often linked with better academic performance and a greater willingness to commit. However, in political science, the concept of a sense of belonging has scarcely been addressed. National belonging, which is profoundly connected to citizens, remains underexplored. This form of belonging emerges as a feeling of acceptance by one's compatriots, a vision for a future within the country, and, most importantly, as the confirmation that individuals have a 'home' within their nation.

In this decade, the United States has faced unavoidable challenges that have forced its populace to reckon with historical and contemporary injustices. The issue of racial and criminal justice is prominent among these. Another persistent issue is the uneven distribution of resources, which is exacerbated by racial discrimination and remains unresolved. Additionally, the increasing number of immigrants has led to cultural clashes and intensified debates over resource allocation. All these issues challenge Americans' sense of belonging and their notion of home. Individuals are compelled to reevaluate their definition of 'family' and consider what changes are necessary. Who is included in the 'family'? What actions should the American 'family' undertake? This dissertation examines the influence of a sense of belonging on political attitudes, especially regarding issues that confront the existing racial and social system, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. I identify several contributions to this dissertation.

First, the concept of a sense of belonging is underexplored in political science. Existing literature tends to focus on aspects of national attachment such as patriotism, nationalism, and national identity, the latter often being used as a stand-in for belongingness. This dissertation delineates the differences between these ideas and independently examines the significance and impact of a sense of national belonging. It reveals that unlike other forms of national attachment, which may only require a unilateral commitment, the construct of belongingness necessitates a

reciprocal commitment and acceptance between the government and the citizens, as well as among the citizens themselves. Secondly, drawing on literature from fields such as social psychology and education, I formulated a new set of questionnaires. These instruments place greater emphasis on individuals' intimate feelings towards their country and compatriots, designed to gauge people's sense of belonging and exclusion within the national community. Subjected to the Cronbach's alpha test, both scales encompass six questions and have demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ). This provides scholars with a robust tool for effectively measuring national belonging in future research. Additionally, I have devised a tentative treatment manipulation involving open-ended questions about belonging and exclusion. While the manipulation check results are not yet strong, they exhibit a consistent trend, suggesting the possibility for further refinement to enhance experimental effectiveness.

Finally, a qualitative survey was conducted to delve into Americans' perceptions of national belonging. As previously mentioned, this concept has not been extensively studied, so the qualitative approach provides crucial insights into the psychological underpinnings of national belonging. The responses gathered offer a richer understanding of its multidimensional nature and will aid in the development of more refined measures for future research on national belonging.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 has dual objectives. The first is to investigate the factors that contribute to a sense of national belonging among both white populations and minority groups. The second is to address the question of whether a sense of belonging correlates with attitudinal shifts on issues and policies that challenge established boundaries (Black Lives Matter, a pathway to citizenship, perception of severity of racial discrimination). Furthermore, this chapter will examine if a sense of belonging is linked to political engagement (political interest and voting behavior). which could, in turn, precipitate systemic change. The hypotheses include a sense of belonging will decrease people's support for issues and policies that challenge established boundaries, and a sense of national belonging may decrease/increase people's political engagement. Finally, the effect of a sense of belonging may only happen among members from minority groups. To summarize the result, a sense of belonging is in general negatively related to support for boundary-challenging issues, except a pathway to citizenship.

Chapter 2 expands upon the theoretical framework established in the first chapter. A survey experiment was carried out using Connect (CloudResearch) with 279 participants to explore the causal link between a sense of national belonging and shifts in attitudes regarding racial reform issues. These issues encompass the Black Lives Matter movement, pathways to citizenship, police violence, preferential hiring for minority groups, the perceived severity of discrimination, and views on immigrants. While the manipulation checks indicated weak effects, they generally support the notion that the treatments had an impact. The statistical results regarding the treatment effects were not significant. However, further analysis based on survey responses reinforces the initial chapter's findings: a sense of belonging potentially carries a negative influence on attitudes towards challenges to the established order. Nonetheless, this chapter did not uncover any racial differences in attitudes.

Chapter 3 delves into how Americans perceive "belongingness" and the barriers to achieving this sentiment. Additionally, whether the sense of belonging influences their willingness to participate in politics. Utilizing a qualitative survey method allowed for the efficient and cost-effective collection of data. Thirty-nine participants were recruited from the School of Government and Public Policy through the SONA system, each receiving two study credits for their participation. Analysis of their responses reveals discernible patterns regarding "the definition of belonging." Primarily, citizenship is seen as a prerequisite for belonging, creating a firm boundary that excludes non-American citizens. Belonging is characterized by a reciprocal relationship of giving and taking, underpinned by mutual commitment. A recurring theme is the individual's contribution to the country, which should be met with governmental protection of its citizens. Beyond the relationship between individuals and the state, belonging also encompasses mutual acceptance among citizens, where being respected and valued by one's fellow nationals is essential. When it comes to obstacles to belonging, not only members of minority groups, but white respondents also have their racial struggle in belonging. For example, the phenomenon of white guilt is notable. Several white students have expressed feelings of guilt regarding historical injustices perpetrated by whites against other races in the country. This guilt fosters feelings of shame and a sense of detachment from the national community. Among members of minority groups, whiteness is still perceived as the default identity in the United States. The fundamental criterion for a sense of belonging is whether one aligns with or is accepted by the white-dominated system or individuals. Finally, a sense of belonging has a two-directional effect on political participation. Some participants indicate that their engagement in political activities is driven by a desire to demonstrate their stance within the

community to their fellow citizens. Conversely, some refrain from participating, as they believe that political engagement creates divisions within the national community.

### **Limitation and Discussion**

This dissertation in general finds a conservative effect of a sense of belonging. However, there are still puzzles that are worth discussing. For instance, the results in racial differences from Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. For the first chapter, the argument behind the hypothesis “a sense of belonging will only work on minority” is that white people are the default group in the United States, and they do not have to fight for it, and in turn, they do not have to think through their “Americanness”. Therefore, belongingness should not influence how they see the world. It is different for members of minority groups, they struggle for their “Americanness” since born or since they came to this land, and thus, “how to be a proper American” to be accepted is rooted in their minds. Because of this, the idea of belonging is stationed in their mind and makes them see the world through the glass of “belongingness”.

In the first chapter, we get some confirmation of this inference. However, in the second chapter, the results show no racial differences between white and non-white. There are two possible explanations. First, the composition of the participants. In the second chapter, 171 white Americans, 28 black Americans, 30 Latino Americans, and 32 Asian Americans. The primary participants are white, and members from each minority group make up 18% of the total participants. Because of the small proportion of each group, it is difficult for them to generate their specific statistical power. In the first chapter, the composition of participants is 1,024 white, 2,950 Latino, 3,055 black, and 2,994 Asian American participants. The population is large enough for each group to manifest their power. Another potential explanation is that a sense of belonging does work on white Americans too. The reason why it does not show an effect in the first chapter is that simply answering the questionnaire may not be able to trigger their attitudinal reaction. Yet, in the second chapter, no matter whether white or non-white participants are asked to think about and answer questions regarding the experience of belonging and exclusion, which means the triggered effect can be universal across racial groups.

In this dissertation, although the sense of national belonging was effectively influenced, the impact was relatively modest. When analyzing the effect of each treatment condition on the dependent variable, it was found that only the belonging treatment had a statistically significant effect when compared to the control group. However, the direction of the effect in each condition

was negative, suggesting that all treatments could potentially have a politically conservative impact on the dependent variables. One interpretation could be that treatments related to one's sense of national belonging, whether they focus on inclusion or exclusion, may shift political attitudes towards conservatism. Alternatively, the treatments might trigger reactions beyond the sense of belonging. The interventions consisted of three sets of open-ended questions that asked participants to reflect on their experiences of belonging, exclusion, and their connection to their workplace or school. The downside of soliciting reminiscent accounts is that experiences of belonging are subjective. For instance, a person who holds unfavorable views of the U.S. may focus only on negative aspects when prompted to consider their sense of belonging to the country, potentially leading to an increased sense of detachment. Conversely, someone with a strong affinity for the U.S. might struggle to articulate experiences of exclusion, as they may not resonate with such sentiments. Additionally, the findings from Chapter 1 indicate that Americans, regardless of racial background, possess a strong sense of belonging to the United States. This pervasive sense of affiliation may render it particularly challenging to manipulate feelings of national belonging. Generating thoughts of exclusion is likely difficult, except perhaps for individuals from minority groups, who may have more tangible experiences with exclusion. Future studies that use this method should consider analyzing the content of the respondents' open-ended answers as well. After appropriate categorization of the content, the effect of the treatments may increase. Finally, the ambivalence treatment does not work as expected but only adds more uncertainty to the experiment. If future researchers are curious about the effect of ambivalence belonging should try other ways of manipulations.

Finally, Chapter 3 did not effectively elucidate the relationship between individuals' sense of belonging and their willingness to engage in politics, which can be attributed to the phrasing of the questions. The questions directly inquired about the participants' interest in politics and their past political activities. Given the focus of this dissertation, the questions could have been better constructed. Although participants were prompted to consider their sense of belonging when responding, the answers did not facilitate a clear understanding of the exact relationship. The advantage of employing a qualitative survey is the ability to recruit participants and gather necessary data in an efficient manner. However, a drawback is the lack of organic interaction between the researcher and the participants. Future studies might improve by asking more relevant questions (this dissertation included only six open-ended questions) or by clarifying the intent of each question without leading the respondents.

# Appendix A

## Supplementary Material for Chapter 1

### Participant Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

#### States as Regions

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
1835	1423	3374	3037

#### Asian Groups

East Asian	Southeast Asian	South Asian
1646	718	534

#### Latino Groups

South American	North and Central American	Caribbean	Mexican	Other
262	173	745	1480	290

Table A. 1 Dependent Variable Distribution

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Histogram
Support BLM	10023	3.44	1.25	1	5	
Support Pathway	10023	3.96	1.04	1	5	
Perceived Discrimination	8789	5.52	1.25	1.798	7.736	
Political Interest	10023	2.77	0.91	1	4	
Vote Local	10023	2.28	1.21	1	4	

Table A. 2 White Americans: Dependent Variable Distribution

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Histogram
Support BLM	1024	2.79	1.36	1	5	
Support Pathway	921	3.81	1.09	1	5	
Perceived Discrimination	1024	5.12	1.29	1.798	7.736	
Political Interest	1024	2.87	0.93	1	4	
Vote Local	1024	2.65	1.23	1	4	

Table A. 3 Asian Americans: Dependent Variable Distribution

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Histogram
Support BLM	2994	3.22	1.15	1	5	
Support Pathway	2994	3.79	1.07	1	5	
Perceived Discrimination	2622	5.37	1.29	1.798	7.736	
Political Interest	2994	2.67	0.87	1	4	
Vote Local	2994	2.12	1.19	1	4	

Table A. 4 Black Americans: Dependent Variable Distribution






Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Histogram
Support BLM	3055	3.99	1.08	1	5	
Support Pathway	3055	4.02	1.01	1	5	
Perceived Discrimination	2639	5.85	1.11	1.798	7.736	
Political Interest	3055	2.80	0.93	1	4	
Vote Local	3055	2.36	1.21	1	4	

Table A. 5 Latino Americans: Dependent Variable Distribution






Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Histogram
Support BLM	2950	3.30	1.26	1	5	
Support Pathway	2950	4.11	1.02	1	5	
Perceived Discrimination	2607	5.48	1.26	1.798	7.736	
Political Interest	2950	2.82	0.92	1	4	
Vote Local	2950	2.23	1.19	1	4	

Table A. 6 Descriptive Statistics for Independent & Control Variables

Variables		Counts	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Histogram
Gender	Male	3476					
	Female	6530					
Foreign Born	Yes	7704					
	No	2319					
Experienced Discrimination	Yes	5349					
	No	4674					
Ingroup Interaction	Negatively	852					
	Neither	4646					
	Positively	4525					
Age			40.7	15.5	98	18	
American ID			3.4	0.8	4	1	
Income			5.2	3.5	12	1	
Skin Tone			3.7	1.7	10	1	
Ideology			2.8	1.1	5	1	
Party Identity			2.9	2	7	1	

# Figures and Statistical Models

Figure A. 1 Distribution of the Sense of National Belonging

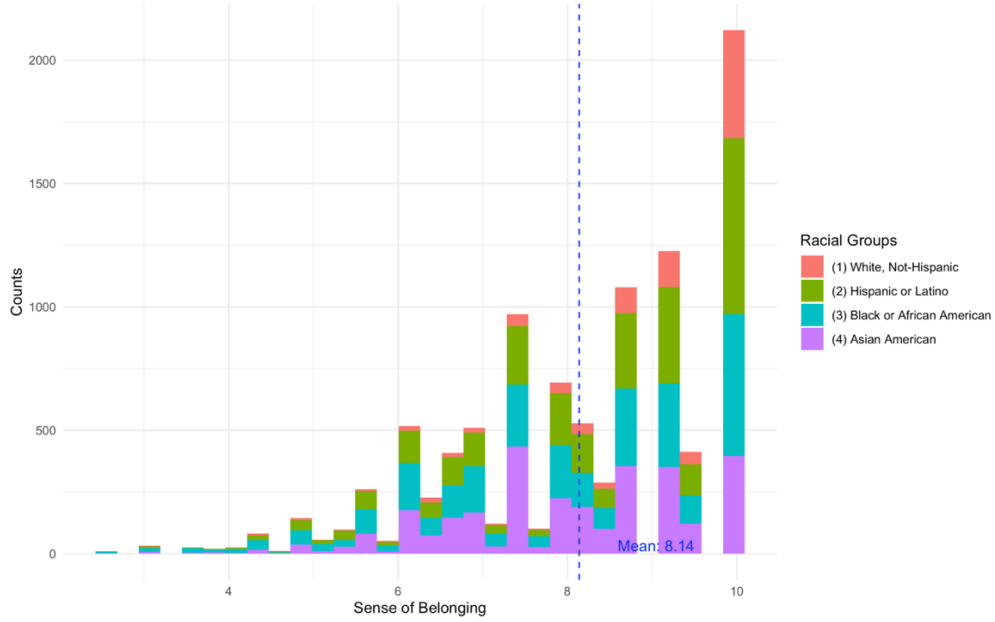


Table A. 7 Models with interaction terms between racial groups and a sense of belonging

	<b>BLM</b>	<b>Pathway to Citizenship</b>	<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>
(Intercept)	4.357*** (0.264)	3.898*** (0.257)	5.359*** (0.304)
Other control variables not shown.			
<b>Reference Group: White</b>			
Latino*Belong	0.008 (0.032)	-0.003 (0.031)	-0.049 (0.036)
Black*Belong	0.058 (0.031)	-0.003 (0.030)	-0.003 (0.036)
Asian*Belong	0.017 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.031)	-0.032 (0.037)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.331	0.063	0.186
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.330	0.060	0.184
Num. obs.	8060	8060	7320

\*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

## Appendix B

### *Supplementary Material for Chapter 2*

#### Participant Characteristics and Distribution

##### Age

Ranged from 18 to 76 years old (mean: 36.17; SD= 10.37)

##### Race

White	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian or Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaska Native	Arab American	Other
171	28	30	32	1	3	14

##### Gender

Male	Female
158	120

##### Partisan Identity

Strong Democrat	Democrat	Independent, Lean Democrat	Independent	Independent, Lean Republican	Republican	Strong Republican
60	63	36	57	21	30	12

##### Political Ideology

Very Liberal	Liberal	Slightly Liberal	Moderate	Slightly Conservative	Conservative	Very Conservative
64	58	35	58	30	25	9

##### Education

High school incomplete	High school graduate	Some college, associate degree	College graduate	Post-graduate training
3	33	86	121	36

##### Household Income

Up to \$20,000	\$20,000 - \$35,000	\$35,000- \$50,000	\$50,000- \$75,000	\$75,000- \$100,000	\$100,000- \$125,000	\$125,000- \$150,000	\$150,000 and over
41	38	32	62	43	24	15	24

## Figures and Statistical Models

Table B. 1 Relationships between Treatment Groups and Dependent Variables with Interaction Terms

	<b>Support BLM</b>	<b>Police Violence</b>	<b>Support Pathway</b>	<b>Preferential Hiring</b>
(Intercept)	3.62*** (0.20)	3.89*** (0.19)	3.96*** (0.19)	2.89*** (0.20)
Group Ambivalence	-0.24 (0.29)	-0.05 (0.27)	-0.00 (0.27)	-0.07 (0.28)
Group Belong	-0.34 (0.29)	-0.42 (0.27)	-0.18 (0.28)	-0.44 (0.28)
Group Exclusion	-0.16 (0.31)	-0.35 (0.29)	0.07 (0.29)	-0.18 (0.30)
White	0.11 (0.36)	0.24 (0.33)	0.04 (0.34)	0.70* (0.35)
Ambivalence*Non-white	-0.09 (0.49)	-0.09 (0.46)	-0.64 (0.47)	-0.40 (0.48)
Belong*Non-white	-0.06 (0.49)	0.35 (0.46)	-0.10 (0.46)	0.10 (0.47)
Exclusion*Non-white	0.16 (0.49)	0.52 (0.46)	-0.10 (0.47)	-0.14 (0.47)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.06
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	-0.01	0.02	-0.00	0.03
Num. obs.	279	279	279	279

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

Table B. 2 Relationships between Treatment Groups and Dependent Variables with Interaction Terms

	<b>Immigrant Positivity</b>	<b>Perception of Discrimination</b>
(Intercept)	5.11*** (0.32)	8.28*** (0.53)
Group Ambivalence	-0.42 (0.44)	0.29 (0.73)
Group Belong	-0.75 (0.43)	0.36 (0.71)
Group Exclusion	-0.37 (0.42)	0.66 (0.69)
White	-0.40 (0.39)	0.43 (0.65)
Ambivalence*Non-white	-0.04 (0.55)	0.91 (0.90)
Belong*Non-White	-0.28 (0.54)	1.23 (0.89)
Exclusion*Non-White	-0.13 (0.54)	1.25 (0.89)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.02
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	-0.00
Num. obs.	279	277

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

Figure B. 1 Coefficient Plot for Perception of Police Violence against Black Americans<sup>3</sup>

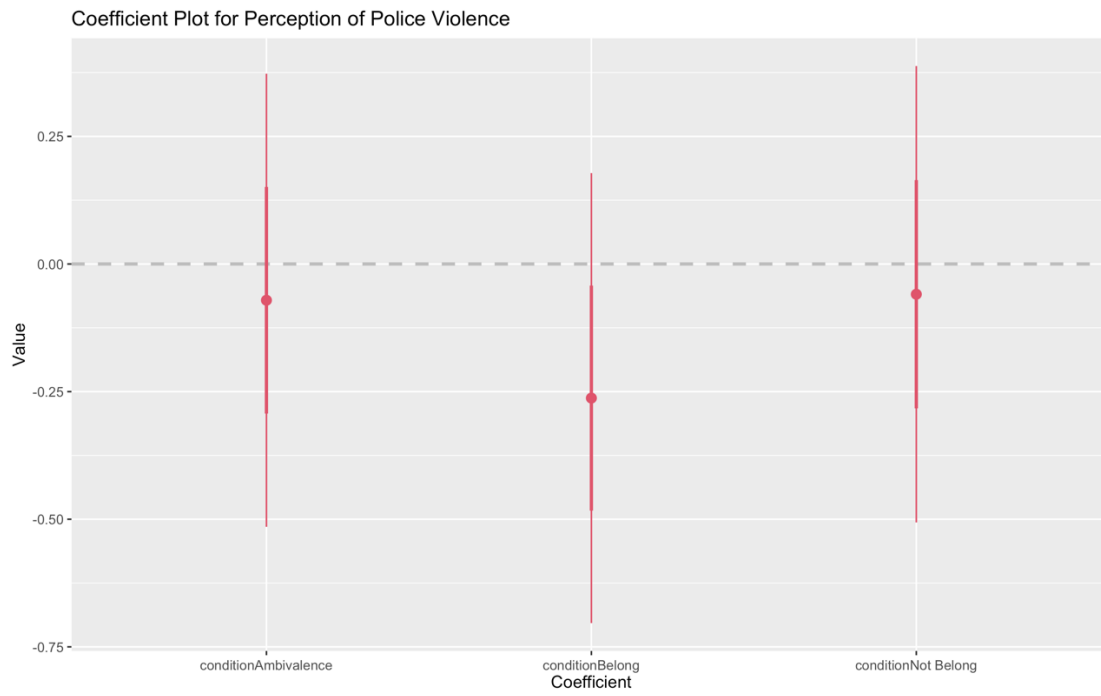
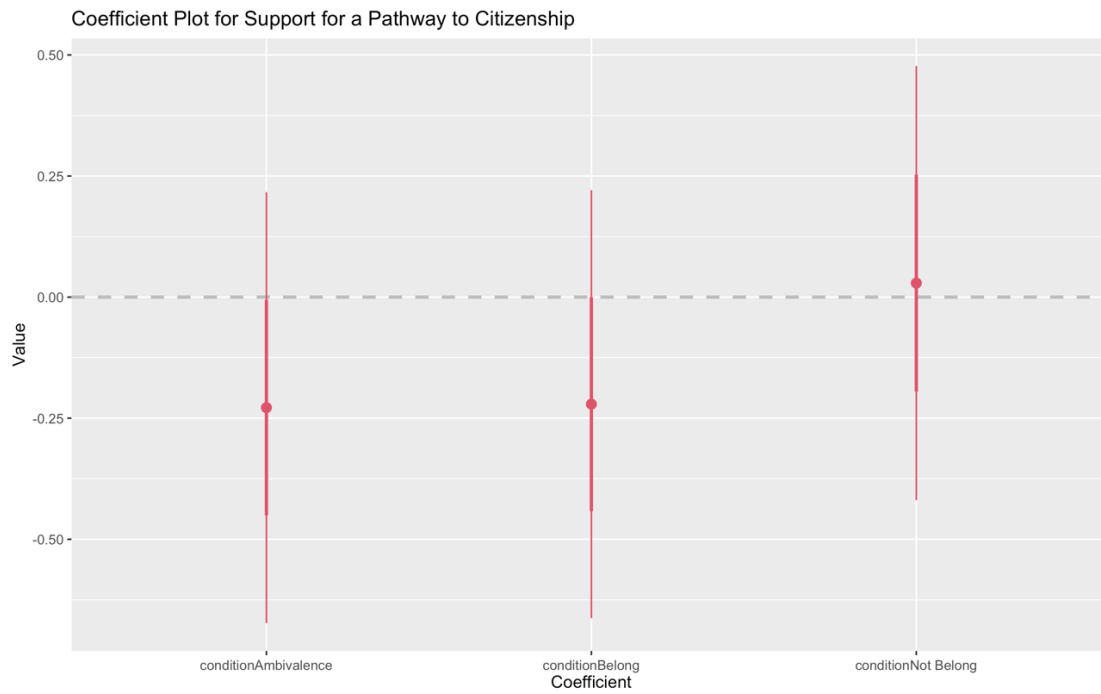


Figure B. 2 Coefficient Plot for Support for a Pathway to Citizenship



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<sup>3</sup> Condition Not Belong is equal to Exclusion Group.

Figure B. 3 Coefficient Plot for Support for Black Lives Matter<sup>4</sup>

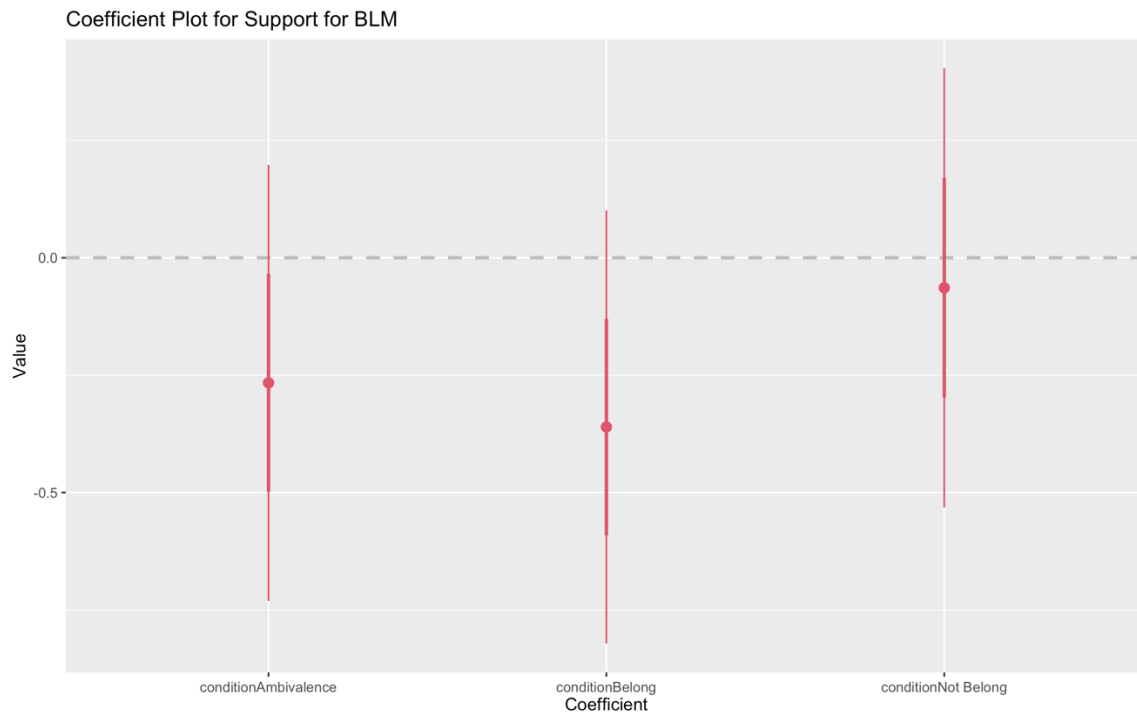
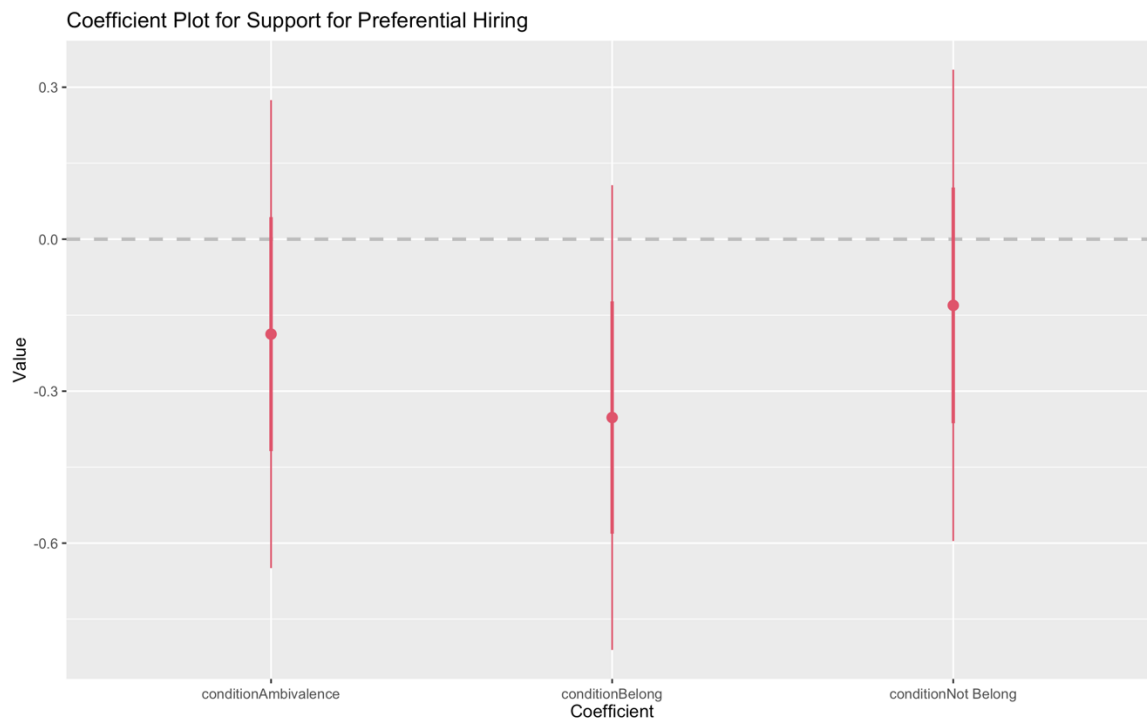


Figure B. 4 Coefficient Plot for Support for Preferential Hiring Minority Groups



<sup>4</sup> Condition Not Belong is equal to Exclusion Group.

Figure B. 5 Means of Perception of Severity of Discrimination against Minority Groups by Conditions

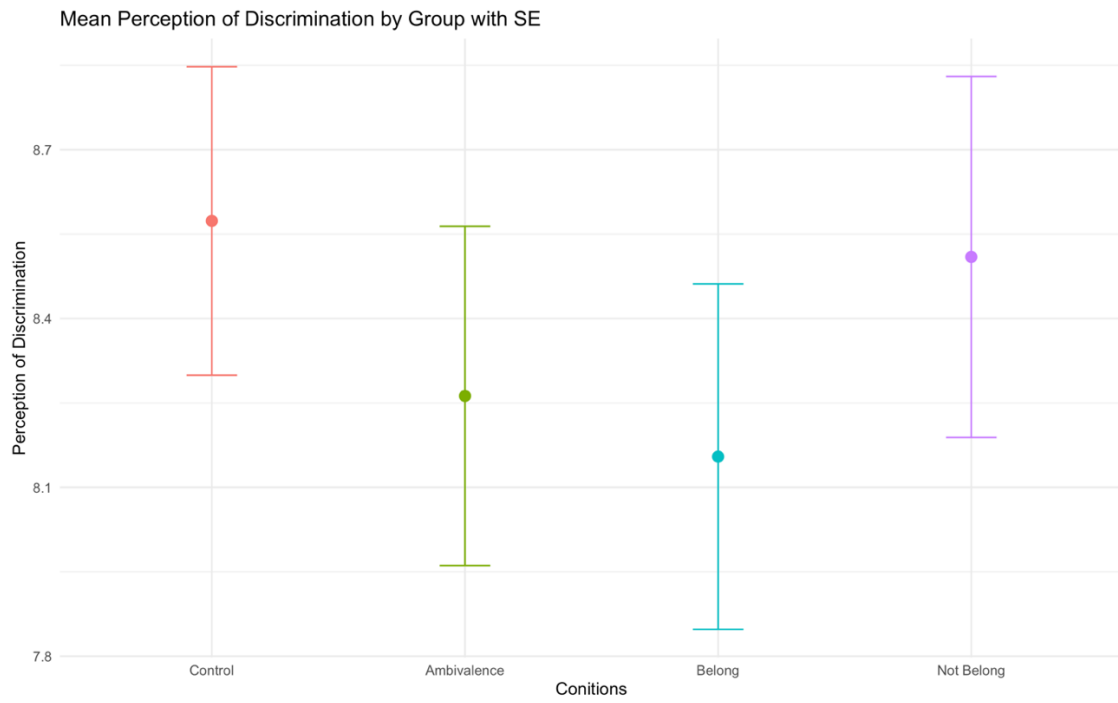
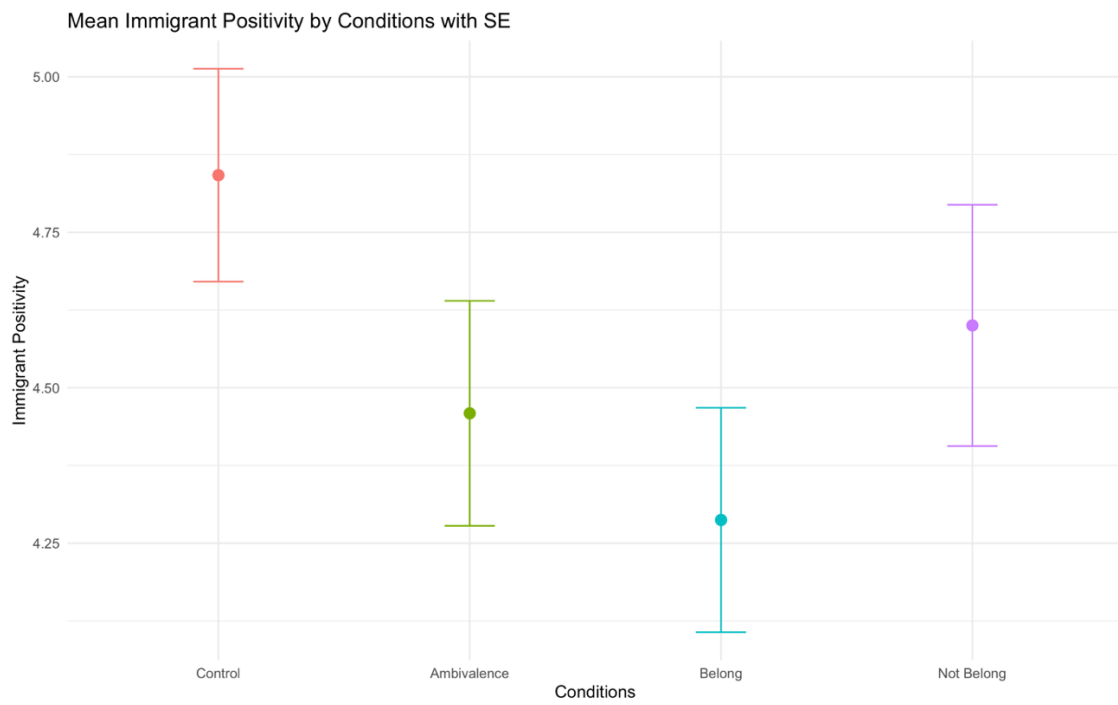


Figure B. 6 Means of Perception of Immigrant Positivity by Conditions



## Appendix C

### *Supplementary Material for Chapter 3*

#### Participant Characteristics and Distribution

##### Age

Ranged from 18 to 23 years old (mean: 20.18; SD: 1.21)

18 years old	19 years old	20 years old	21 years old	22 years old	23 years old
3	8	13	11	2	2

##### Race

White	Black	Latino	Asian or Pacific Islander	Middle Eastern	Native American
22	3	9	2	1	2

##### Gender

Female	Male
31	8

##### Partisan Identity

Strong Democrat	Democrat	Independent, Lean Democrat	Independent	Independent, Lean Republican	Republican	Strong Republican
5	10	15	4	2	1	2

##### Political Ideology

Very Liberal	Liberal	Slightly Liberal	Moderate	Slightly Conservative	Conservative	Very Conservative
6	11	9	8	2	1	2

##### Household Income

Up to \$20,000	\$20,000 - \$35,000	\$35,000- \$50,000	\$50,000- \$75,000	\$75,000- \$100,000	\$100,000- \$125,000	\$125,000- \$150,000	\$150,000 and over
2	1	4	5	8	7	5	7

## Qualitative Questionnaires

1. What does belonging to the United States mean to you?
2. What has impacted your sense of belongingness here as an/a [your racial group]?  
**Please take the sub-questions listed below into consideration when answering the question.**
  - What obstacles have you faced to feeling a sense of belonging (to the United States)?
  - What, if anything, has helped you feel a sense of belonging?
  - When do you feel the most attached/detached from the national community (Americans)?
3. In what ways do you feel similar/dissimilar to the national community members?  
**Please take the sub-questions listed below into consideration when answering the question.**
  - What types/groups of people do you feel similar to?
  - Describe how you do or don't feel a sense of belonging to other Americans.
  - How have other Americans influenced your sense of belonging in the United States?
  - How have your political values or beliefs influenced your ability or intention to connect with fellow Americans socially?
4. Are you interested in politics?  
**Please take the sub-questions listed below into consideration when answering the question.**
  - Why and why not? Please describe what drives you to be (un)interested in political matters.
  - Can you describe any changes in your perceptions of other Americans or your place in the national community after becoming interested or uninterested in political activities?
  - Have you noticed any changes in how other Americans perceive you based on your interest or lack of interest in political activities?
5. Have you ever participated in political activities, such as voting, protesting, or displaying political messages on your vehicle (e.g., bumper stickers)?  
**Please take the sub-questions listed below into consideration when answering the question.**
  - Why/Why not? Describe what motivates you to be (un)involved in political activities.
  - Can you describe any changes in your perceptions of other Americans or your place in the national community after becoming involved or uninvolved in political activities?
  - Have you noticed any changes in how other Americans perceive you based on your involvement or lack of involvement in political activities?
6. What do you think about race in the United States?  
**Please take the sub-questions listed below into consideration when answering the question.**
  - What, if any, in your opinion, are some of the biggest challenges facing Americans concerning race?
  - Do you support the use of government policies, like Affirmative Action, affordable housing, and police reform, to address issues of racial inequality? Why/Why not?
  - How do you think your attitudes toward these social issues affect your connection to other Americans who may have different views?"

## Coding Details

Table C. 1 Coding Details: What is National Belonging

Theme	Code	Example
Political Organization	Protection	“Belonging to the United States means a sense of security and protection.”
	Citizen right and duty	“Participating in US mid-term and primary elections. Conducting civil duty (i.e. Jury Duty).”
	Citizenship	“It simply means being a citizen of this country.”
	(Temporal) Land connection	“... there is something unique about it considering the history of many here is not my history...”
Culture	Diversity	“...that I am perceived as an equal despite any stereotypes”
	Equality	“Belonging to the United States means being treated equally...”
	Freedom	“Freedom at the broadest level.”
Self and other	Community connection	“...I am a part of something greater than myself, a culture and community of millions of individuals.”
	Social group and identity	“Belonging to the United States means to be White. I am not White ...”

Table C. 2: Coding Details: What are the Obstacles to Feeling Belonging?

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Example</b>
Self and categorization	Conflicted identity	“Culturally I am more American than Chinese. I am in a unique limbo where I am too White for the Asians and too Asian for the Whites.”
	Immigration history	“i (I) moved to the United States when I was 13 years old, I didn't know anything about the culture here...”
	Personal traits	“...based on my other identities as a fat, queer, financially unstable, woman, I have faced many obstacles to my sense of belonging.”
	White guilt	“... but because of how my race has perpetuated the power dynamics in this country.”
Social issues	Racism/ Racial divide	“I feel like there are a lot of racial issues within the country which can make it feel tough to belong...”
	Other issues (e.g., gun violence, wars)	“I feel the most detached from Americans when I hear information from various individuals that are extremely supportive of war and American militarization.”

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