
Mapping Perceptions in America

March 2025



CONTENTS

03 Introduction, methods, research questions

06 Key takeaways

07 Detailed findings

44 Incorporating into future research



Introduction.

Perception Institute and the ACLU commissioned PerryUndem to collaborate on research to better understand racial ideology – how people think and feel about race – in America.

Over the past several years, PerryUndem has found that views toward racial issues, such as impressions of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, are highly correlated with policy and political attitudes. In fact, some of our research suggests that opinions on racial issues are just as, if not more, predictive of views than party affiliation.

Until now, polling hasn't been able to answer, why? Why do a person's feelings associated with racial views undergird such a range of other, seemingly unrelated, beliefs? Why was sentiment toward BLM among the top predictors of voting for Biden or Trump in 2020?

And, what exactly is racial ideology? How might we measure it? Which components of racial ideology might be most relevant to policy views?

The team set out to answer these big questions. The end goal is to use the findings to develop more effective messages and narrative strategies on a variety of social justice issues.

NOTE: All learnings from this research project are for 501(c)(3)-compliant purposes only. They are *not* to be used for any partisan, political, or electioneering activities by any organization. You should consult with your counsel prior to and in connection with your use of the learnings from this research project.

Methods.

Our methodological approach included three steps:

- 1) Scans of academic literature, theories, and metrics related to racial ideology
- 2) In-depth interviews with 61 diverse adults across the country (March 2024) – to inform the development of new metrics
- 3) A national survey among $n = 3,490$ adults nationwide conducted August 1 through 21, 2024 using YouGov's online panel. The survey included oversamples for totals of:
 - $N = 452$ Black adults
 - $N = 403$ Latina/o/x adults
 - $N = 404$ AAPI adults
 - $N = 105$ indigenous adults

We crafted the survey instrument based on the academic scan and the qualitative research. The instrument includes 98 questions related to:

- Issue policy areas
- Racial / ethnic identity
- Experiences with discrimination
- Perceived power and privilege of racial groups
- Perceived state of equality in the US
- Racial threat
- Exclusion, resentment
- Zero-sum mentality on government support
- Preferences for a meritocracy v. collective society
- The Black Lives Matter movement

Our research questions.

These were our key research questions:

- What are the key dimensions of racial ideology right now? Which aspects are most relevant?
- How does the population break out – attitudinally – on racial ideology? Who are racial progressives and what do they think? How big of a segment of the population are they? And racial conservatives? Those in the middle?
- What aspects of racial ideology might be driving policy attitudes right now?



Takeaways.



1

More than 10 dimensions of racial ideology emerged.

2

These three dimensions are most powerful:

- Feeling unseen and excluded on racial matters
- Recognizing systemic racism and the link between race and perceived status
- BLM as a reflection of positive social change

3

Seven segments of the population emerge from the data. Three are fairly progressive on racial views (35%). Two are in the middle (34%). Two are racially conservative (31%).

4

Respondents of every race and ethnicity fall into every segment - perspectives on race vary within racial groups, not just between them.

(Details on [Slide 20](#))

5

There are shared values across the seven profile segments.

(Details on [Slide 30](#))

Following are more details...

Detailed findings.



SECTIONS

- 09 Racial ideology index
- 16 Mapping racial ideology
- 20 Racial ideology profiles

Racial ideology index.

A racial ideology index.

One of the first things we did was create a single variable based on responses to all of the survey questions.

We're calling this the "racial ideology index."

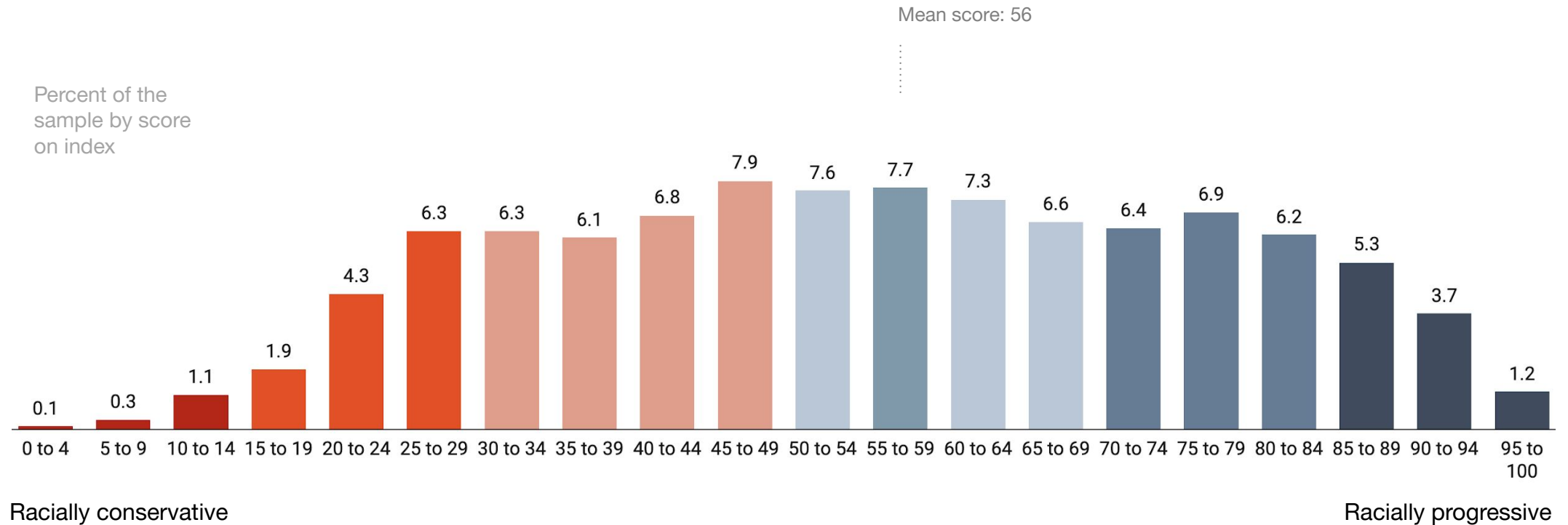
Each respondent has a score on the index that ranges from 0 to 100 – from the most racially conservative responses to the most racially progressive responses.

The purpose of the index is to gain an initial glimpse at the variation of views across the public and to explore how correlated racial ideology is with policy and political views.

Here's what we found...

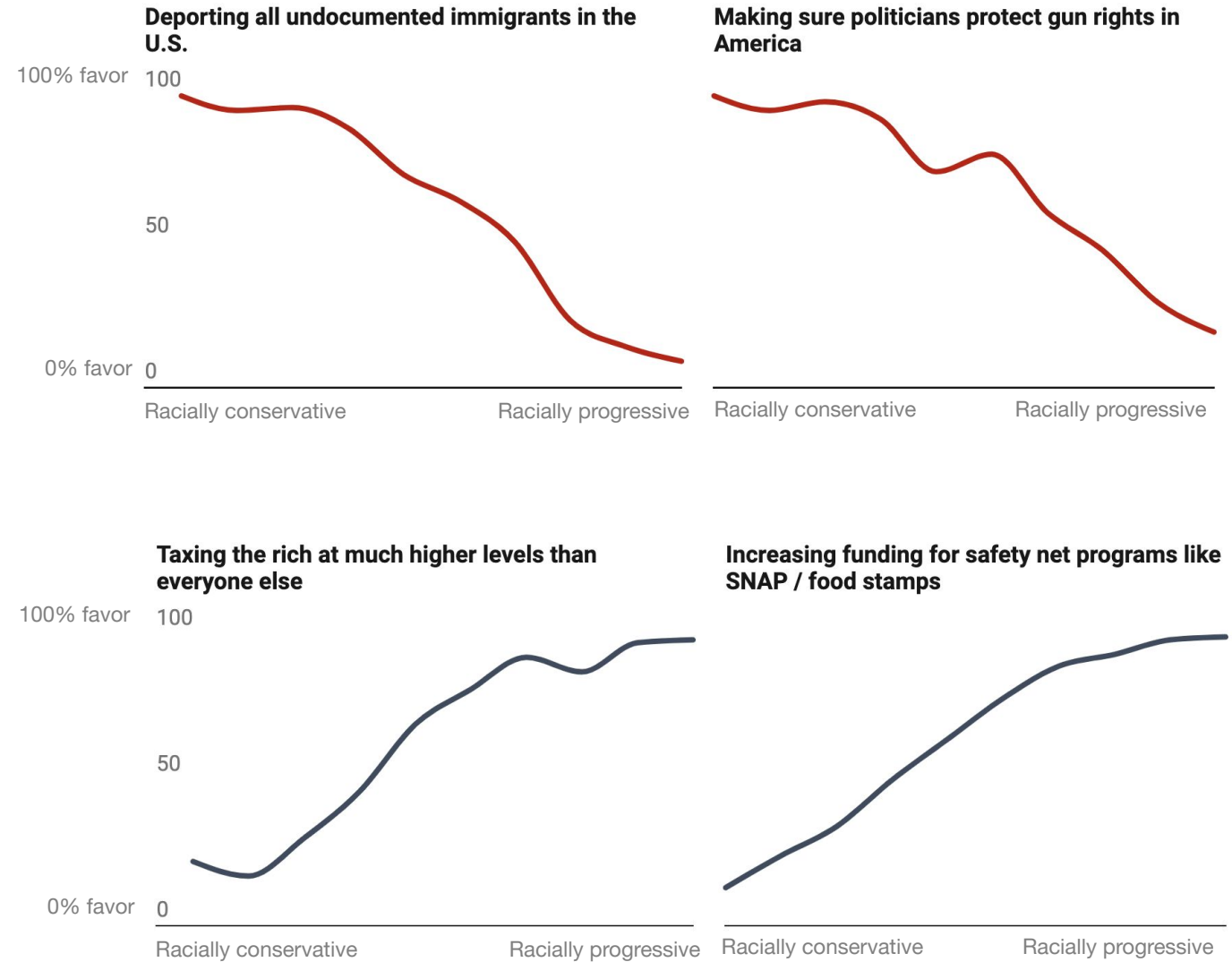
Racial ideology index

Respondents are fairly evenly distributed across the index, with a mean score of 56.



The index is strongly correlated with support for various policies.

% Favor policy



Mapping racial ideology.

Dimensions of racial ideology.

We used factor analysis to help identify the various dimensions of racial ideology.

Factor analysis is a tool used to reveal underlying patterns or themes in people's responses across questions. It tells us which specific survey questions tend to “group together.” In other words, it uncovers sets of questions respondents tend to answer similarly.

This is an organic way of identifying dimensions of opinion.

Factor analysis reveals 10 different dimensions of racial ideology (identified in blue on [page 19](#)). One of the 10 dimensions – “Mega dimension” – includes many questions in the survey. We conducted an additional factor analysis among just these questions, which reveals six sub-dimensions.

The map on [page 19](#) shows each dimension defined by the attitudes that cluster within that dimension.

Each dimension is given a score of 0 to 1.0 which indicates how correlated the dimension is with the overall racial ideology index. 0 means there is no correlation and 1.0 means there is a perfect correlation.

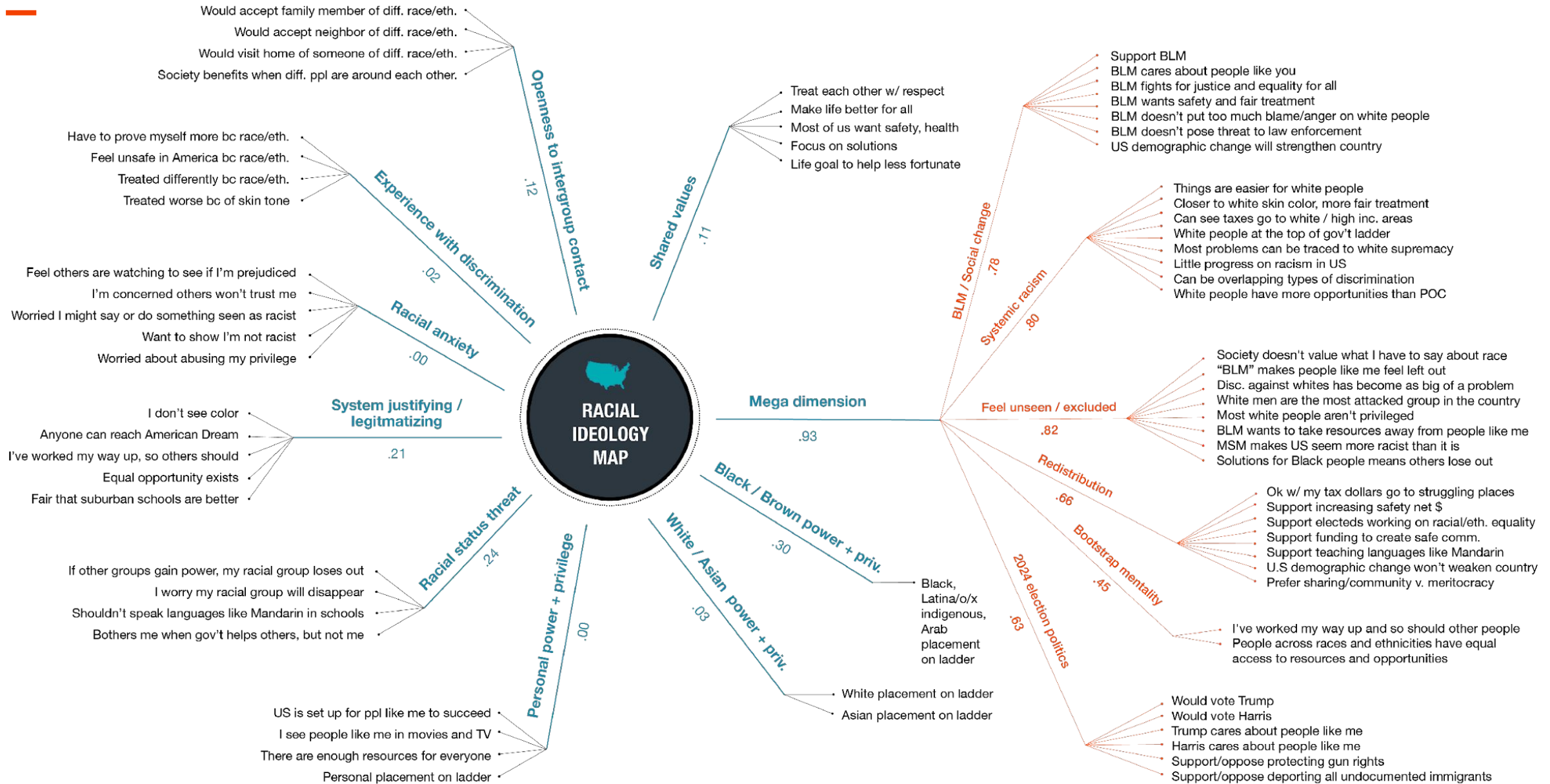
There's a lot on the next page.

The most important takeaway is that three dimensions emerge as most correlated with our racial ideology index.

THREE MOST CORRELATED DIMENSIONS

- Feeling unseen and excluded on racial matters (.82 correlation)
- Recognizing systemic racism and the link between race and perceived status (.80)
- Views toward Black Lives Matter as a reflection of positive social change (.78)

See upper right dimensions in orange on the next page.



Racial ideology profiles.

How the public breaks out on racial ideology.

Racial ideology profiles of Americans.

We conducted segmentation analysis to better understand how the public breaks out on racial ideology.

We use a statistical tool called cluster analysis, which identifies segments based on how closely associated respondents are on key attitudinal measures.

Seven segments emerge. The next page shows a brief snapshot, followed by detailed profiles of each group.

Snapshot of profiles.

Most racially progressive



Disenfranchised Disrupters
Racially-diverse, low resourced racial progressives who see themselves at the bottom of the power and privilege ladder. They see systemic racism and want collective, redistributive change.



Privileged Progressives
Very similar ideologically to DD. The main difference is these are mostly white progressives who acknowledge their own power and privilege - sitting on the upper rungs of the ladder.



Diverse & Most Impacted Democrats
Majority are Black and Brown and Democrats who are the most likely to have faced racial discrimination. They are less progressive than DD and PP (and less likely to vote), but still generally support Dem. policies.



Collectivist American Dreamers
Racially diverse optimists. They see everyone in the upper rungs of the power and privilege ladder. They believe the American Dream exists, and they like it. Many have a bootstrap mentality. Almost half are Democrats. Most support progressive policies and also conservative policies like gun rights.



Unengaged & Apolitical Moderates
Racially, they mirror the US. On racial views, they're moderate. They see most racial groups, and themselves, in the middle of the ladder. They don't think the US is set up to help people like them and don't think the American Dream exists. They are the least politically engaged.



Post-Racial Republicans
Majority white Republicans who think people across race and ethnicity have equal access to opportunities. They are among the least likely to interact with people of other races and ethnicities. Most say they "don't see color" and that mainstream news makes the US seem more racist than it really is. They hold racial resentment. They value competition and a meritocracy.

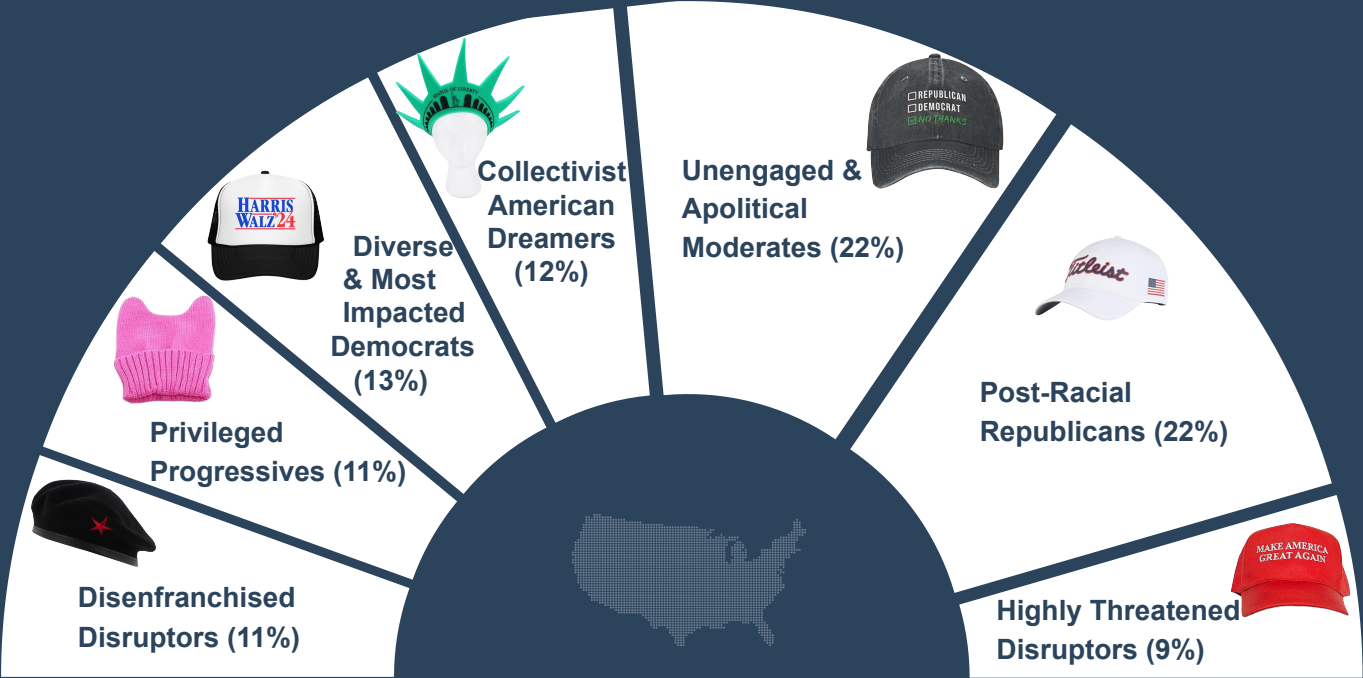


Highly Threatened Disrupters
Majority white Republicans who feel they've faced racial discrimination. They believe society gives people of color more opportunities than white people. They place themselves and white people below Black / African Americans on the power and privilege ladder. They are steeped in resentment and racial threat, with a zero sum mindset.

Most racially conservative

Racial Ideology Segments

Most racially progressive

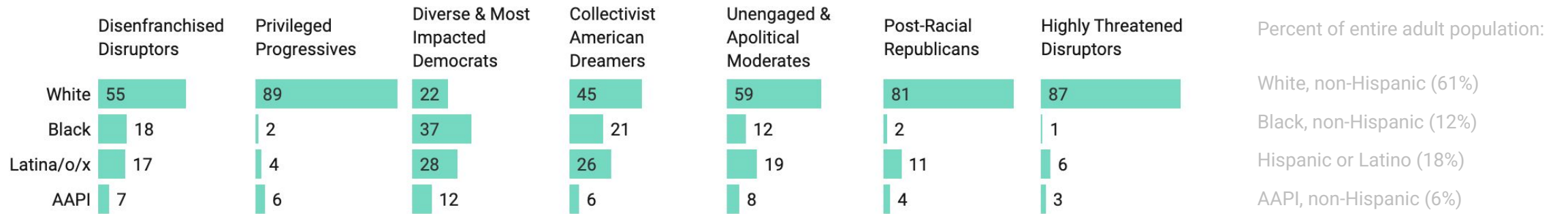


Most racially conservative

Note that respondents of every race and ethnicity fall into every segment. In other words, people's perspectives on race vary within racial / ethnic groups.

Racial/ethnic composition of each segment

% of each segment that identifies as...



The following pages provide a profile of each segment, including:

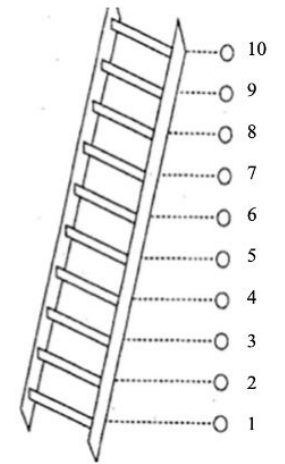
- Their defining characteristics
- Key demographics / identity
- Their perceived levels of privilege and power related to racial / ethnic groups (based on responses to the question at right)
- Key perceptions related to racial ideology
- Support for various policies
- Intention to vote in 2024

Perceived power and privilege analysis is based on responses related to this survey Q:

Now imagine that this ladder is a picture of how the United States government and laws are set up.

- At the top are people who get the most attention from the government. These people benefit the most from our laws and policies. They have the most opportunities.
- At the bottom are people who are most overlooked. These people benefit the least from our laws and policies. They have the fewest opportunities.

Where do you think you would be on this ladder?
Don't think too hard - just whatever comes to mind first.



Progressive Profiles



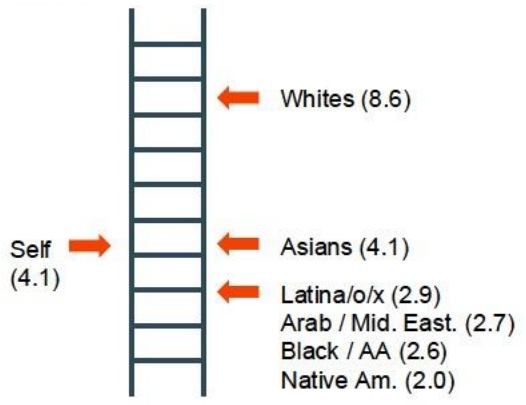
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- See self and POC low on the ladder
- Likely to see systemic issues
- Don't feel represented or set up for success
- Collective, positive sum mindset
- Tied for the most progressive segment

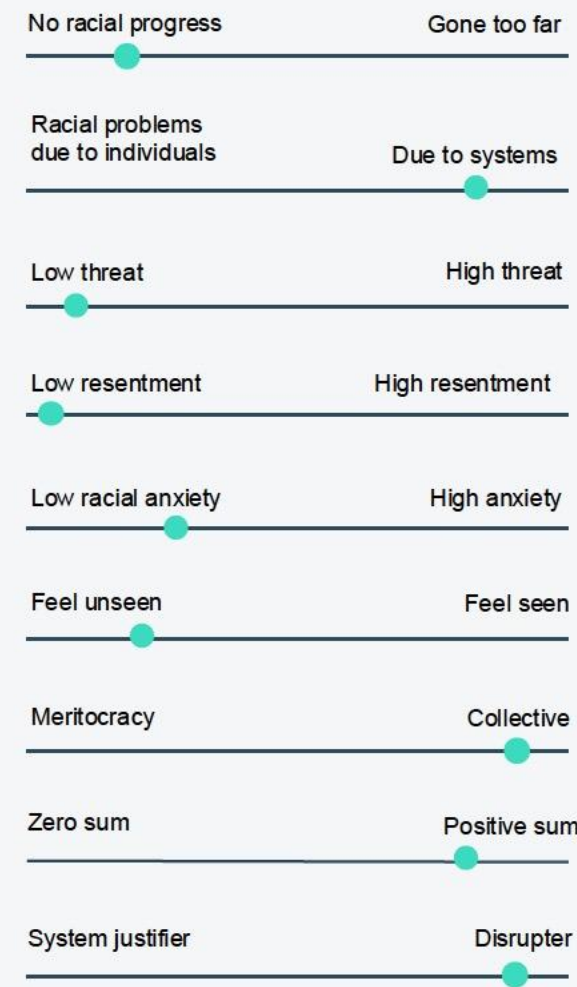
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (55%), Black (18%), Latina/o/x (17%), AAPI (7%)
- Democrats (63%), independents (36%), Rep. (1%)
- Under 50 (61%)
- Less than college (66%)
- < \$60K (51%)
- Race important to identity (51%)
- 30% to 40% experience racial / eth. bias

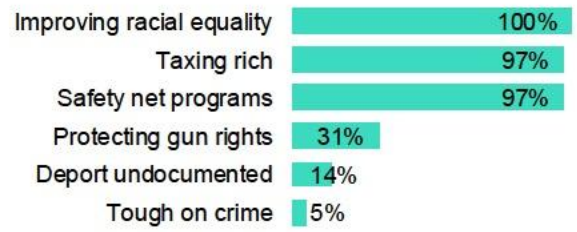
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



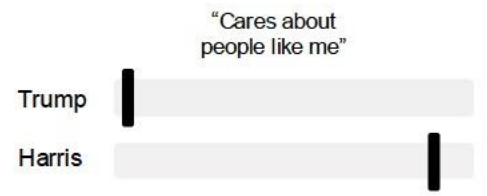
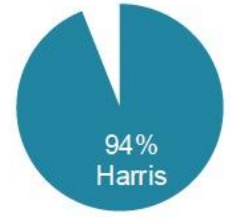
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE



87% almost certain to vote



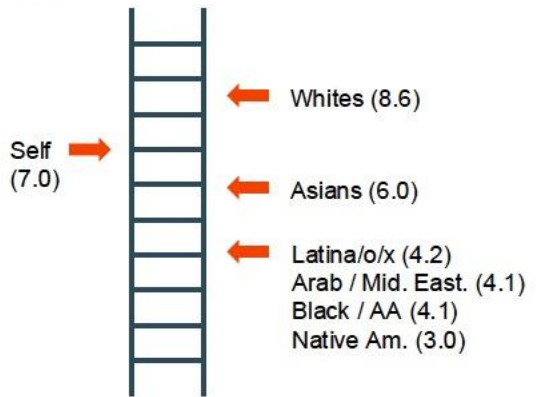
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- Tied for most progressive segment
- Large majority are white
- See their own privilege and power
- See systemic issues
- Collective, positive sum mindset

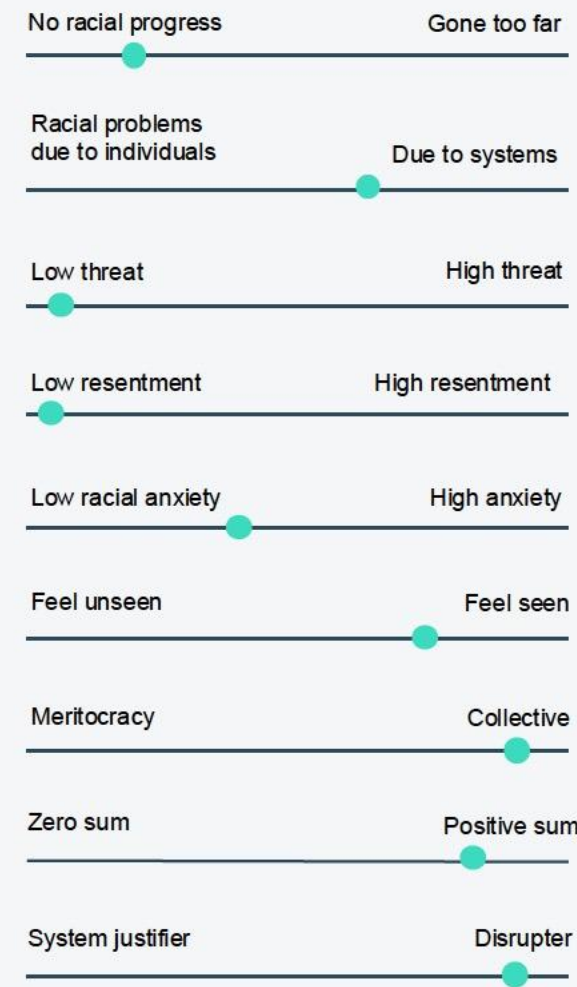
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (89%), Black (2%), Latina/o/x (4%), AAPI (6%)
- White women (47%) v. men (38%)
- College educated (63%)
- \$60K+ (68%)
- Democrats (69%), independents (30%), Rep. (1%)
- Race/eth. not important to identity (62%)

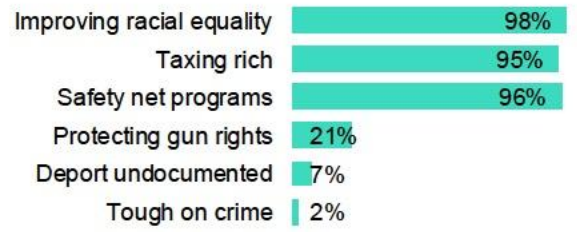
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



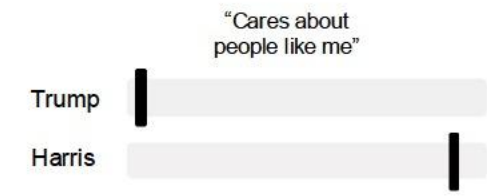
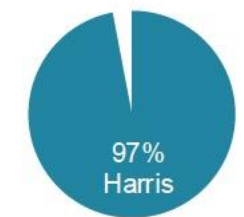
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE



93% almost certain to vote



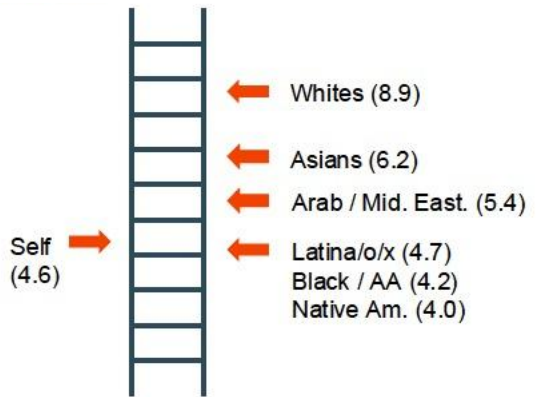
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- Most likely to face racial / ethnic bias
- Highest proportion of people of color
- Mix of assigning racial problems to individuals and systems
- Support Dem. policies, but also gun rights

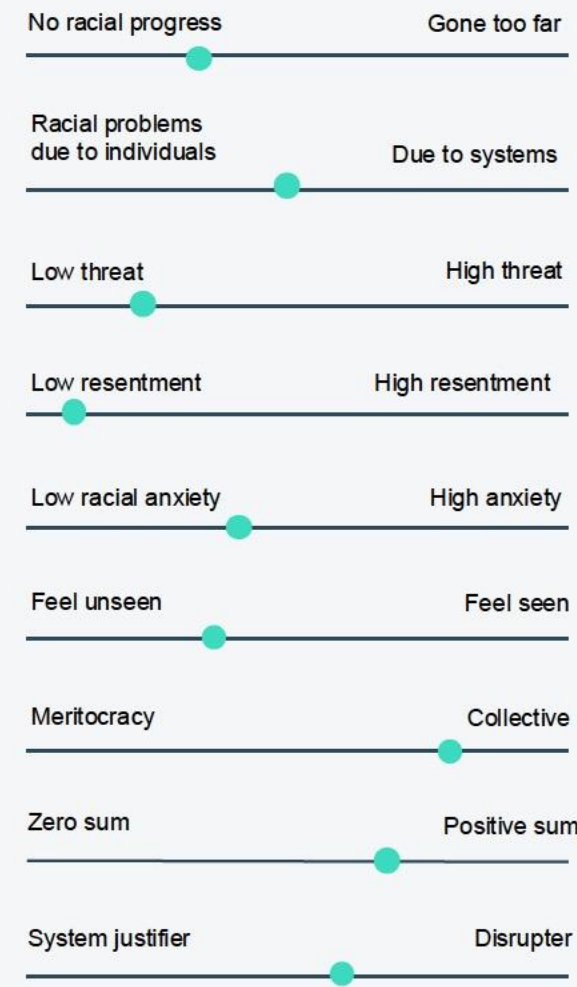
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (22%), Black (37%), Latina/o/x (28%), AAPI (12%)
- Women (59%)
- Less than college (73%)
- < \$60K (54%)
- Democrats (55%), independents (36%), Rep. (9%)
- Race/eth. important to identity (81%)
- 45% to 60% experience racial / eth. bias

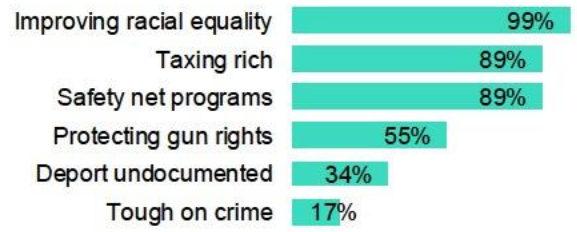
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



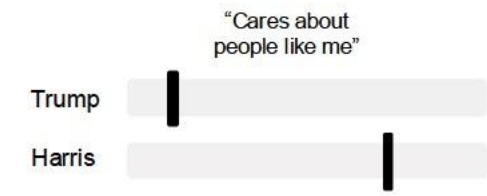
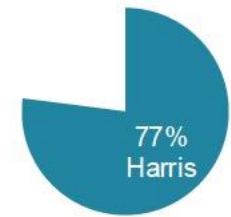
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE



67% almost certain to vote

Moderate Profiles



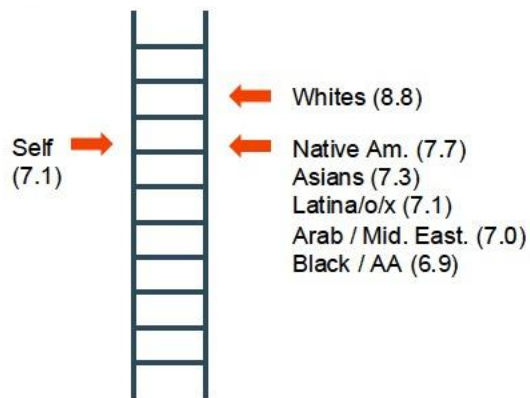
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- Think everyone is set up to succeed in the US
- See themselves in gov't policies and culture
- Segment most likely to believe in Am. Dream
- But sees inequality when probed
- Supports BLM
- Collective and positive sum mindset

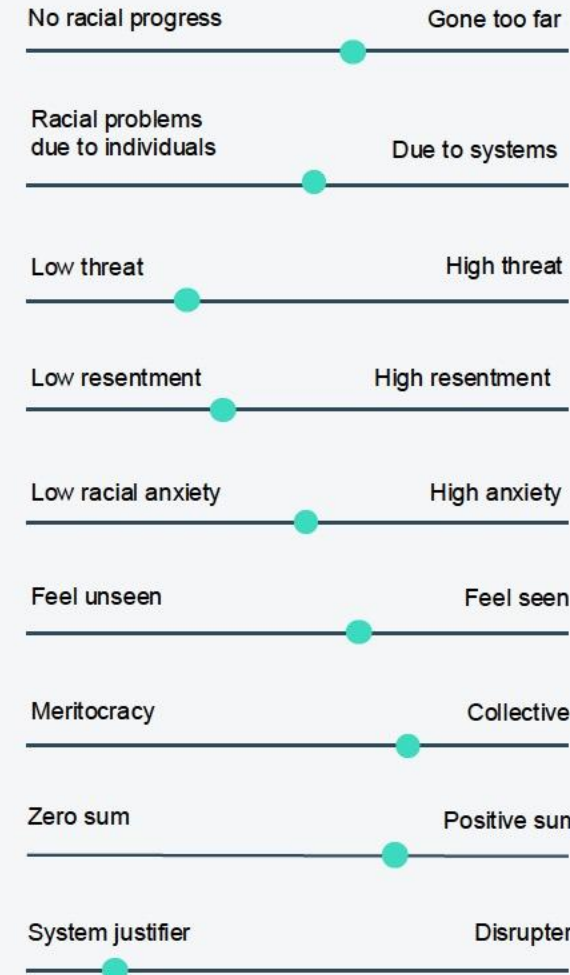
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (45%), Black (21%), Latina/o/x (26%), AAPI (6%)
- Men (54%)
- Less than college (68%)
- < \$60K (43%)
- Democrats (47%), independents (33%), Rep. (20%)
- Race/eth. important to identity (82%)
- 40% to 50% experience racial / eth. bias

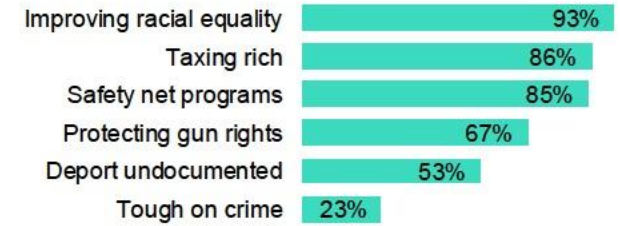
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



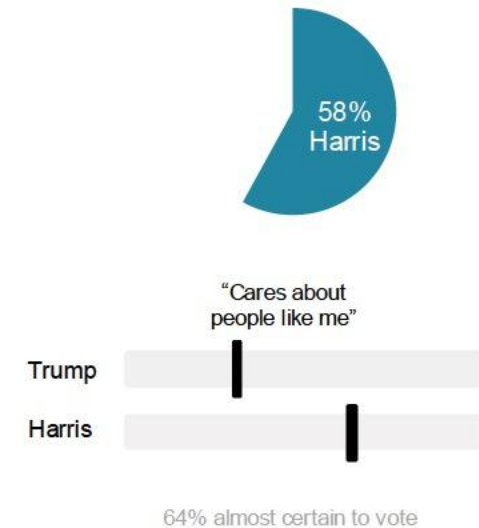
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE





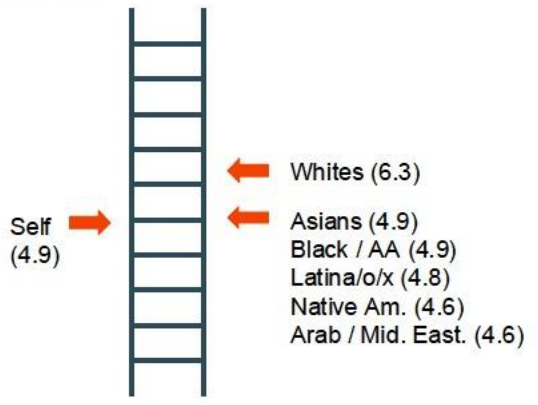
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- See themselves and people of color in the middle
- Are in the middle on many views
- Don't feel seen in our system
- Don't think the American Dream exists
- Don't feel strongly on policies and least likely to vote

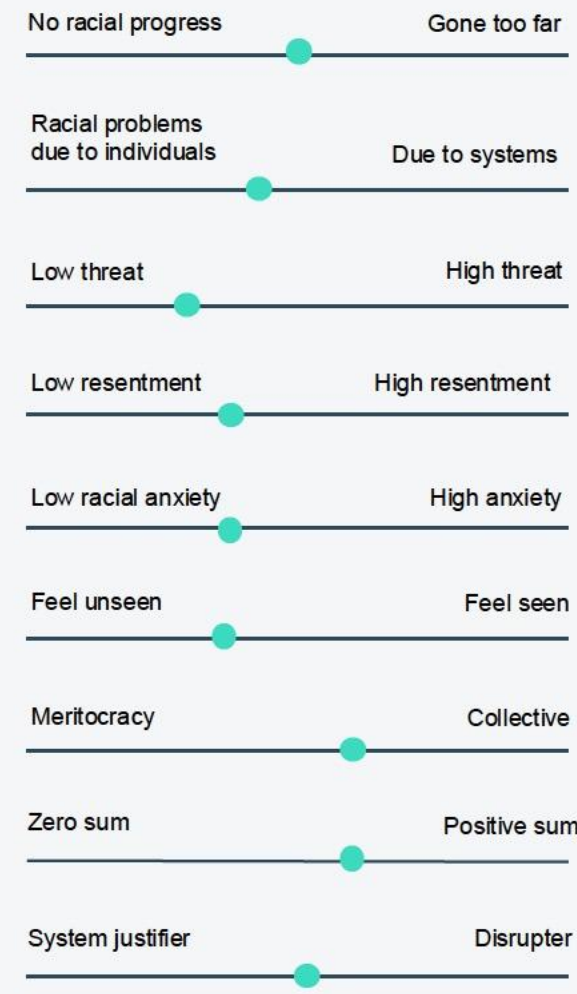
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (59%), Black (12%), Latina/o/x (19%), AAPI (8%)
- Men (50%)
- Less than college (78%)
- < \$60K (58%)
- Independents (43%), Democrats (29%), Rep. (29%)
- Race/eth. important to identity (70%)
- 30% to 40% experience racial / eth. bias

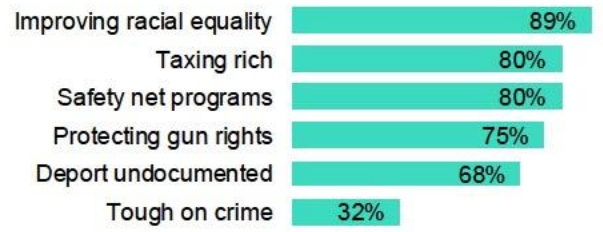
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



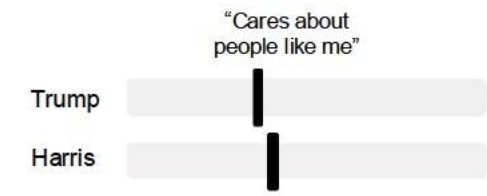
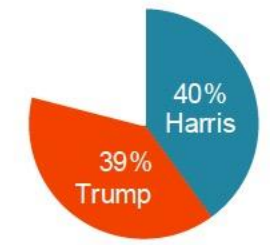
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE



44% almost certain to vote

Conservative Profiles



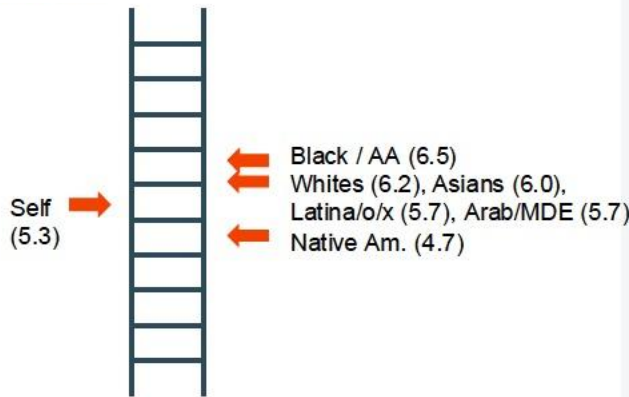
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- Majority white Republicans
- Put everyone in the middle rungs
- Believe equal access to opportunity exists
- Rejects colorism
- Rejects white privilege
- Holds some resentment

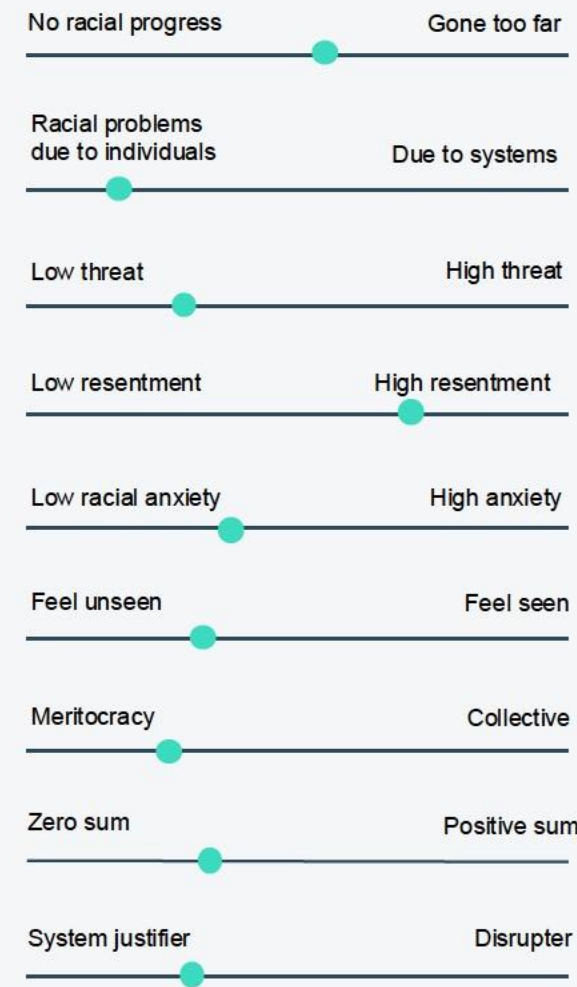
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (81%), Black (2%), Latina/o/x (11%), AAPI (4%)
- Men (51%)
- Less than college (66%)
- \$60K+ (49%)
- Republicans (67%), independents (32%), Dem. (2%)
- Race/eth. important to identity (44%)
- 20% to 30% experience racial / eth. bias

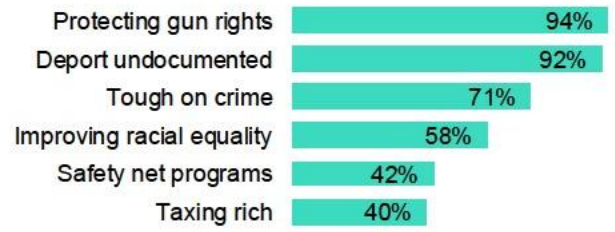
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



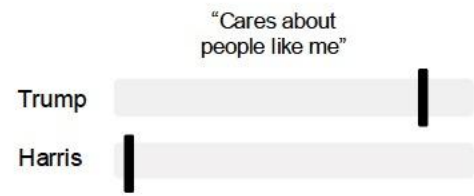
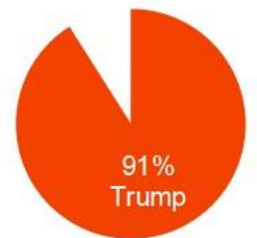
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE



88% almost certain to vote



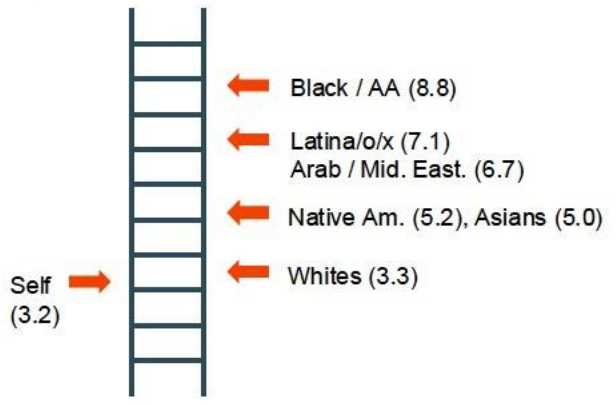
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES

- Majority white and Republican
- Believe they face racial discrimination
- Feel unsafe in America because of race
- High status threat, resentment, and feel unseen

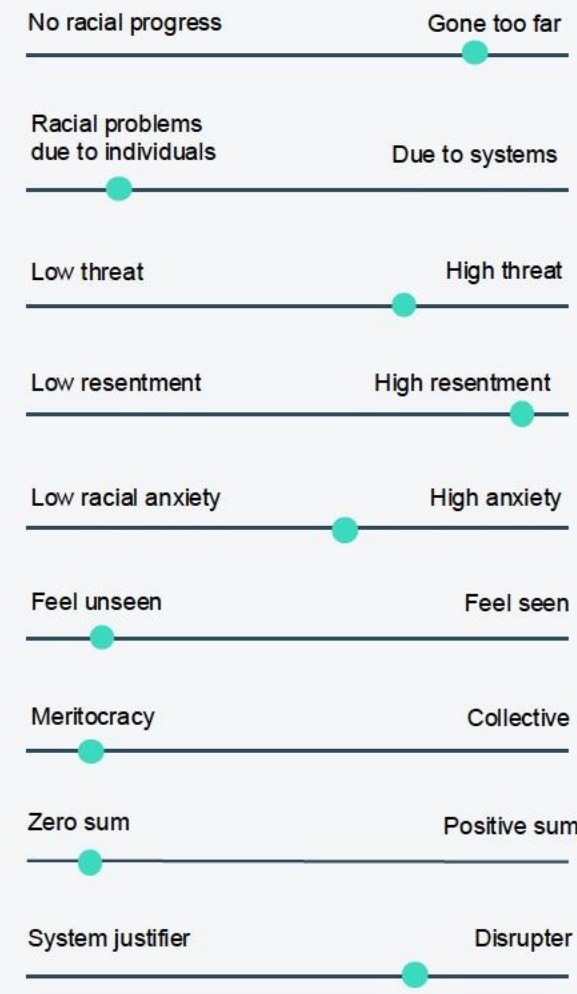
DEMOS + IDENTITY

- White (87%), Black (1%), Latina/o/x (6%), AAPI (3%)
- Men (54%)
- Less than college (62%)
- \$60K+ (49%)
- Republicans (59%), independents (39%), Dem. (1%)
- Race/eth. important to identity (44%)
- 50% to 70% experience racial / eth. bias

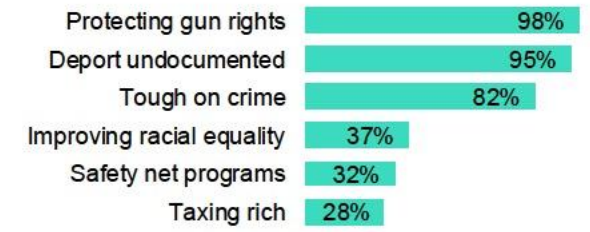
PERCEIVED POWER & PRIVILEGE



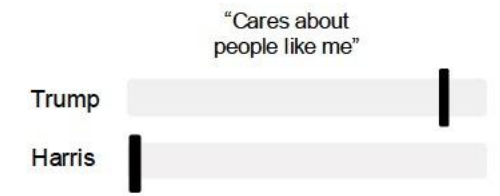
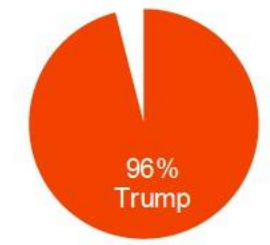
KEY PERCEPTIONS



POLICY SUPPORT



2024 VOTE

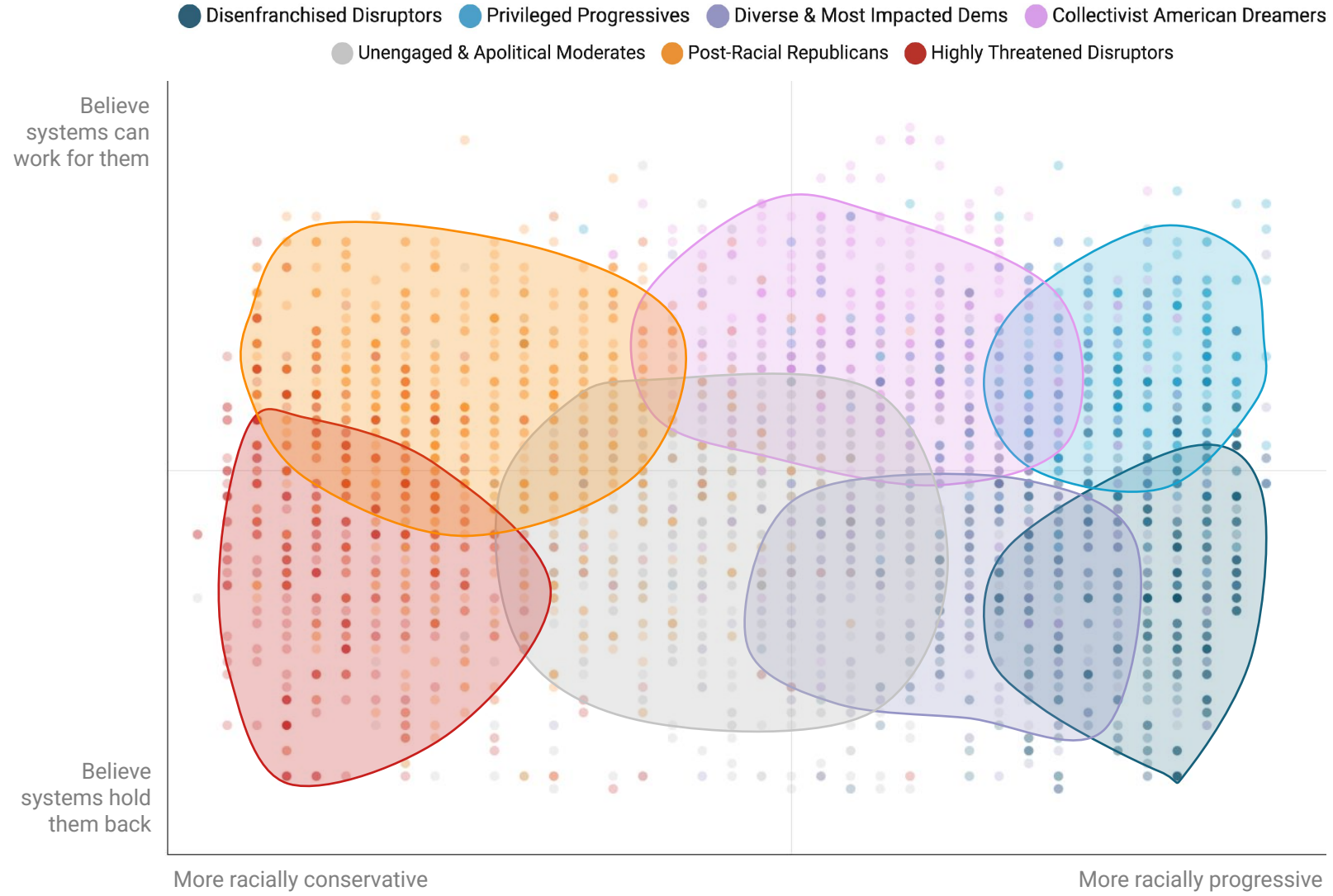


84% almost certain to vote



The following two pages summarize differences across groups.

| | Segment | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Disenfranchised Disruptors | Privileged Progressives | Diverse & Most Impacted Democrats | Collectivist American Dreamers | Unengaged + Apolitical Moderates | Post-Racial Republicans | Highly Threatened Disruptors |
| Shared values: respecting each other, improving lives across race, focusing on solutions | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Want society based on sharing resources and working together vs. competitive individualism | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Don't think racial equality has been achieved | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Positive-sum beliefs on policy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Actively want more progress on racial equality | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| View racial issues through systemic lens | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Believe current systems set them up for success | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Place self toward top of ladder | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Optimistic about opportunity / American Dream | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Subscribe to "bootstraps" mentality | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | | | | | | | |
| Place self toward bottom part of ladder | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Place other racial groups higher than self | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Say they experience discrimination regularly | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| | | | | | | | |
| Say they don't see color when it comes to race | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| View race through individual lens | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Racism not as big of issue as media suggests | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| High racial resentment | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| High racial threat | | | | | | | ✓ |





PERCEPTION INSTITUTE
Research. Representation. Reality.

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**PERRY
UNDEM**