

## The Role of Race in Political Attitudes Among the Religiously Unaffiliated

Jé St Sume

University of Maryland

Janelle S. Wong

University of Maryland

---

*The growth of religiously unaffiliated voters has been noted for some time, but the political consequences of this trend are much less certain. Extant scholarship makes clear that in terms of vote choice, partisanship, and ideology, the group as a whole tends to diverge from those who affiliate with a religious tradition. This article examines whether the politics of the religiously unaffiliated differ across racial groups as it does among the religious. To investigate the role of race among the nonreligious, we analyze racial differences in vote choice and political attitudes among the nonreligious. Relying on the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, as well as other survey data, we demonstrate that there are important variations across race when it comes to the politics of the religiously unaffiliated. When it comes to vote choice, partisanship, and certain deeply racialized policy issues Whites who are religiously unaffiliated demonstrate more conservative positions. But, on other policy issues that are racialized, but less obviously so, Whites tend to be more progressive than their religiously unaffiliated non-White counterparts. As such, we argue that one cannot understand the political impact of the growing religiously unaffiliated in the United States without attention to race.*

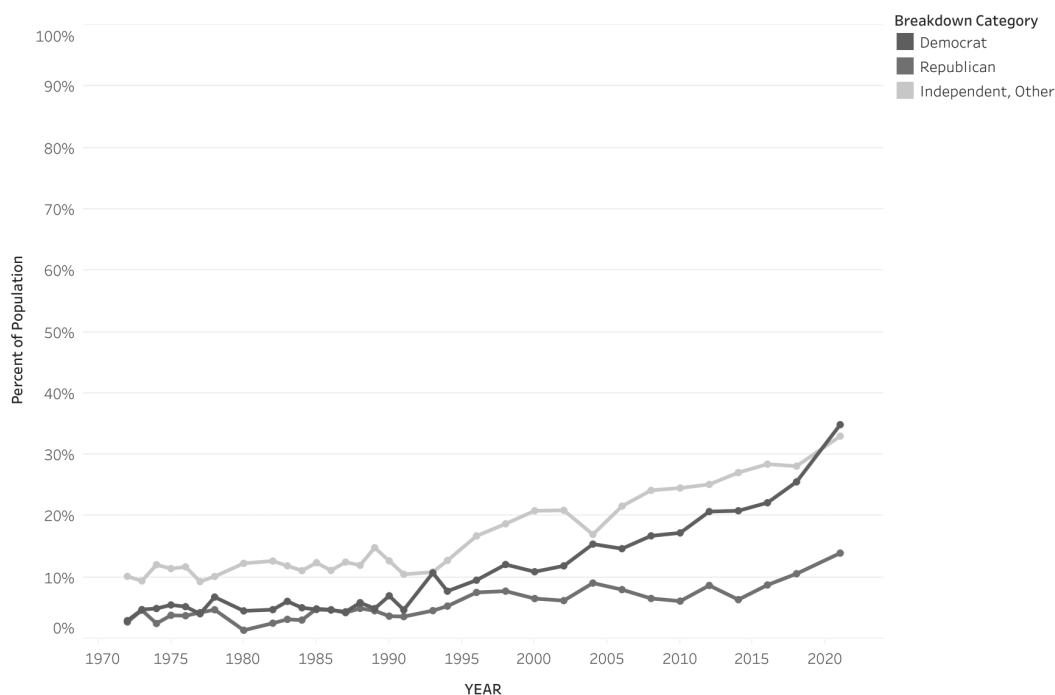
---

**KEY WORDS:** religiously unaffiliated, nones, secular, race, political attitudes, politics, voters

---

White evangelicals dominated coverage of religious voters over the course of the 2020 Presidential Election. Exit polls show this group made-up more than a quarter of all voters, 76% of whom voted for Donald Trump. According to the same exit polls, religiously unaffiliated voters provided a near mirror-image of White evangelical voters. Religiously unaffiliated voters made up 22% of all voters, 68% of whom voted for Biden (CNN, 2020). The latter group, religiously unaffiliated voters, might be seen as a political counterforce to White evangelicals. As such, scholars of religion and politics are increasingly turning their attention to the unique political trends embodied by this growing “religious” category (cf. Burge, 2021; Djupe et al., 2018; Schwadel, 2020) as well as those who researchers categorize as “nonreligious” or “secular” (Campbell et al., 2020).

The growth of religiously unaffiliated voters has been noted for some time (Brian and Smith 2009; Brockway 2017; c.f. Cooper et al. 2016; Edgell et al. 2016; Green 2017; Zwilling 2018) Paul Djupe and his colleagues (Djupe et al., 2018) describe the rapid increase in this group as the “marquee religious trend in the United States over the last thirty years” (p. 910), but the political



**Figure 1.** Growth of religiously unidentified by party. *Source:* General Social Survey 1972–2018. This table demonstrates the growth of religiously unidentified respondents (defined here as those who respond “no religion,” “atheist,” or “agnostic” when asked “What is your religious preference?”) by party identification over time. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12849)]

consequences of this trend are much less certain, as captured by a headline that ran in the *Washington Post* in the recent past: “Religiously unaffiliated voters are leading U.S. politics into uncharted waters” (Byler, 2019).

Extant scholarship on the political orientations of religiously unaffiliated people makes clear that in terms of vote choice, partisanship, and ideology, the group as a whole tends to diverge from those who affiliate with a religious tradition (Condran & Tamney, 1985; Hout & Fischer, 2002; Pew, 2018a; Schwadel, 2018). In particular, exit polls show that those who do not identify with a religious tradition are much more likely than those who do to identify with the Democratic Party, vote for Democratic candidates, and describe themselves as liberal in terms of ideology (Condran & Tamney, 1985; Hout & Fischer, 2002; Pew, 2018b, 2018c; Schwadel, 2018). As seen in Figure 1, religiously unaffiliated voters (defined here as those who respond “no religion,” “atheist,” or “agnostic” when asked “What is your religious preference?”) have grown fastest among Democrats and those who identify as Independents.

Despite these broad patterns, we show that when it comes to politics and the religiously unaffiliated, there are important variations across race. Namely, when it comes to vote choice, partisanship, and certain deeply racialized policy issues, Whites who are religiously unaffiliated demonstrate more conservative positions than religiously unaffiliated Blacks, Latinx, and Asian Americans. But, on other policy issues that are racialized, but less obviously so, Whites tend to be more progressive than their religiously unaffiliated non-White counterparts. As such, we argue that one cannot understand the political impact of the growing religiously unaffiliated in the United States without attention to race. Thus, the focus of this article is on variations associated with racial identity in vote choice and political attitudes across racial groups among the religiously unaffiliated.

## A Religious Divide

Scholars have observed a divide with regard to religious identity and affiliation in U.S. politics (Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2014). Castle and Stepp (2021) make the case that the religious-affiliation divide in U.S. politics is anchored by Evangelical identifiers on the one hand and the religiously unaffiliated on the other (p. 1327).<sup>1</sup> Many contend that the social movements of the 1960s triggered a “religio-political earthquake” in U.S. politics that led evangelical identifiers to increasingly affiliate with the Republican Party (Du Mez, 2020; Layman, 2001). The backlash of this “Republicanization” of Evangelicals prompted the religiously unaffiliated to leave the Republican party (Schwadel 2017; Hout & Fischer, 2002). Hout and Fischer (2014) conclude that as the U.S. public began to associate organized religion with a right-wing political agenda, the causal relationship between religion and politics became more dynamic, such that “religious preferences are now as much an outcome of political identities as political identities once were an expression of religious tradition” (p. 444). This assertion is reinforced by Michele Margolis’ (2017, 2018) research. Margolis (2017, 2018) demonstrates that during certain periods of the life cycle, partisan identities influence whether individuals adopt a religious identity or not.

The “Republicanization” of evangelical Protestants intensified in the 1980s (Schwadel 2017; 2018). Castle and Stepp (2021) present evidence that religious affiliation continues to represent an axis of polarization in U.S. politics, particularly when it comes to “cultural” issues. They find “wide gaps between evangelicals and the unaffiliated” in terms of policy support for abortion, same-sex marriage, teaching Intelligent Design in public schools, displaying the Ten Commandments on government property, and antitransgender bathroom bills (Castle & Stepp, 2021, p. 1327). The impact of religious tradition is uniformly weaker with regard to “noncultural issues,” such as the economy and healthcare, than with regard to cultural issues.

Attention to the role of religious affiliation in U.S. politics intensified with the election of Donald Trump in 2016. The decisive role that White evangelicals played in securing the former President’s victory was both indisputable and hard to explain initially. What attraction did a twice-divorced playboy with minimal exposure to Biblical teachings present to White evangelical voters? Early speculation assumed that White Evangelicals were willing to dismiss Trump’s seeming lack of personal religious devotion and crass misogyny in exchange for a conservative Supreme court appointment(s) and the potential to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (cf. Lucado, 2019). More systematic research revealed that racial resentment and anxieties about White status in the face of demographic change were as or more critical to White Evangelical political attitudes as any other factor (including economic and religious considerations) (Guth, 2019; Martí, 2019; PRRI, 2019, 2021; Sides et al., 2019; Wong, 2018).

The research summarized above has been critical to understanding how religious affiliation matters for politics. At the same time, many scholars have identified important variations within broad religious categories like “Evangelical Protestants.” It is widely noted that Black Americans are the most likely of all racial groups in the United States to identify as “Evangelical” or “born-again” but, in contrast to White Evangelicals, the least likely to affiliate with the Republican Party or to vote for Republican candidates (Emerson & Smith, 2001, p. 3; Kellstedt & Smidt, 1991; McDaniel & Ellison, 2008; Noll, 2001, p. 13). The Black-White political divide within the evangelical community is attributed by Kenneth Wald to the “historical situation, social role, and organizational independence” of Black Protestant churches (Wald, 2003, pp. 171–172). Janelle Wong’s (2018) book *Immigrants, Evangelicals and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change* extends the focus to show that Asian American and Latinx evangelicals, similar to Black evangelicals, diverge politically from their White evangelical counterparts.

<sup>1</sup> Mentions of the political divide between those who score highest on religiosity measures and those who score lowest on those measures, often referred to as “the God gap,” were numerous far before Trump’s election (cf. Putnam & Campbell, 2012, despite warnings from scholars that the religiosity divide is often overstated (Claassen et al., 2021, p. 616).

An enduring feature of White Evangelicalism in particular is an “ambivalence” with regard to racism and civil rights (Du Mez, 2020, p. 39). In her influential history of White Evangelicalism in the United States, Du Mez (2020) observes that White evangelicals protested government efforts toward racial segregation even prior to taking on abortion as a major aspect of their agenda. Further, she provides evidence that a key feature of contemporary White Evangelical politics was that “family values politics were deeply entwined with racial politics, and both were connected to evangelicals’ understanding of the nation and its role on the global stage” (p. 39).

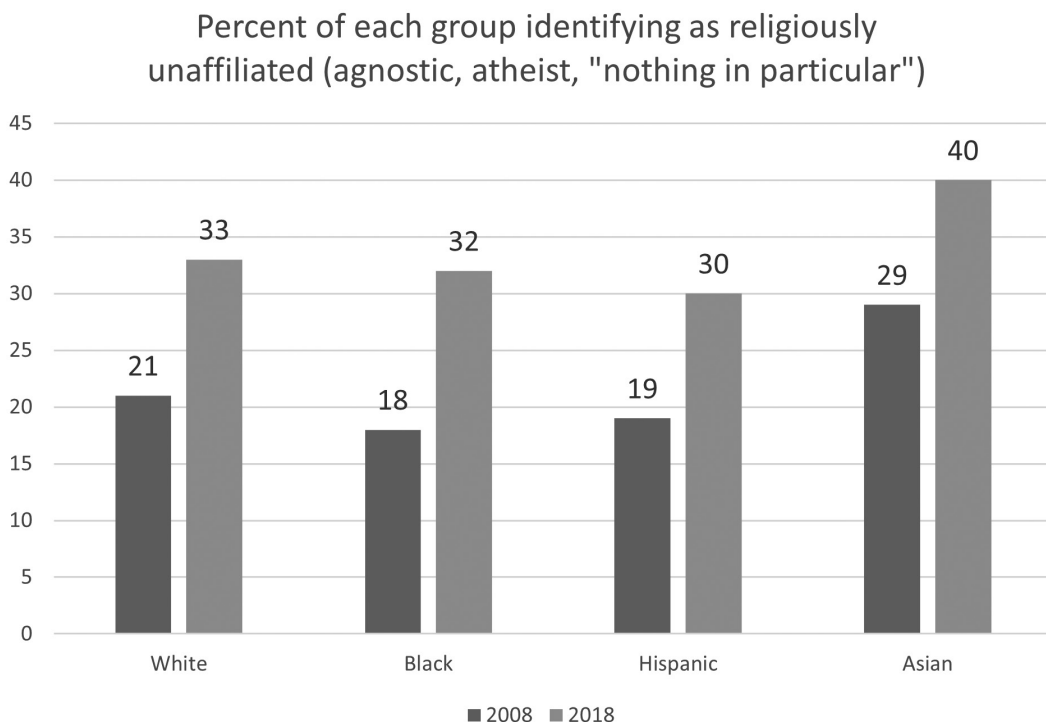
### *Defining the Religiously Unaffiliated*

Defining those who are “religiously unaffiliated” is not a perfect science (Burge, 2021). While the religiously unaffiliated are disenchanted with institutionalized religious traditions, particularly institutionalized forms of religion, this group is not entirely irreligious. A 2018 Pew Survey found that among the 29% of respondents who identified as religiously unaffiliated, beliefs in “a higher power” or “spiritual force” ranged widely (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Further, many religiously unaffiliated individuals report high levels of religiosity, acknowledge religious deities, and identify as “born-again” despite disengagement from religious institutions (Lipka, 2015).

Further, religiously unaffiliated identities are varied. We focus on several types of nonreligious identity. For the purposes of this research, we define the “religiously unaffiliated” as those that identify as (1) “agnostic” or “atheist” or (2) who identify with a religious tradition but never attend religious services. We also include (3) those who respond “None” to the question “When it comes to religion, do you consider yourself to be?”

Despite these limitations, data suggest some overarching patterns when it comes to nonreligious affiliation in the United States. In 1972, 5% of respondents in the General Social Survey did not affiliate with any religion. By 2018, this proportion had grown to 23%, nearly a quarter of all people in the United States (authors’ analysis of GSS, 2018).<sup>2</sup> The dramatic growth of the religiously unaffiliated cannot be understood apart from broader demographic change in the United States. For example, young adults are more likely than older Americans to be people of color, and young adults drive the growth of the unaffiliated (Bainbridge, 2005; Keysar & Kosmin, 2007). In fact, people of color are growing as a percent of the unaffiliated (Schaeffer, 2019). Data from PRRI’s American Values Survey show that in 2013, together, Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans made up about 30% of the unaffiliated population (PRRI, 2019). By 2019, non-Whites made up more than 35% of that group (PRRI, 2020; Yukich & Wong, 2020). These trends are consistent with data from other sources. The Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Surveys show that in 2007, 27% of religiously unaffiliated Americans identified as non-White, and by 2014, this proportion had grown to 32% (Pew Religious Landscape Survey, 2014). Thus, the trend of secularization seems to be growing alongside other demographic shifts in the United States.

<sup>2</sup>Experts offer three leading explanations for the rise of the religiously unaffiliated. First, the “secularization thesis” argues that the public is growing more secular over time. Some argue that increased secularization of public discourse offers an alternative rhetorical reality for individuals, motivating a growing number to dissociate from religious institutions (Edgell, 2012; Hout & Fischer, 2002; Marwell and Demerath, 2003). Next, proponents of culture shock theory argue that the cultural revolution of the 1960s and associated changes in ideas about sex and drug consumption—each fundamental to religion and religious text—led to a rise in religious nonidentifiers. As a result, for those with more liberal ideas about sex in particular, religion became a less prominent feature of day-to-day life (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). Last, scholars acknowledge the importance of autonomy in religious affiliation. According to autonomy theory, increased reliance on individualism, such as those identified in religious texts, social myths, and neoliberal work ethics, motivate individuals to act independently.



**Figure 2.** The religiously unaffiliated by racial group; bars represent percent of each group identifying as religiously unaffiliated. Figure adopted from Burge (2021, p. 90, figure 3.9). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pop.12849)]

### *Racial Divides Within the Religiously Unaffiliated?*

Scholars have explored the diversity of beliefs among the religiously unaffiliated (Baker & Smith, 2009; Lim et al., 2010), variations in political participation (Schwadel, 2020), and specific type of nonreligious identity (i.e., among those who respond “Atheist” versus “Agnostic” versus “Nothing in particular” when asked about religious identity) (cf. Burge, 2020). Ryan Burge (2021, Chap. 4) provides a deep dive into the demographic make-up of the religiously unaffiliated. Burge shows that the religiously unaffiliated tend to be young (p. 204) and that more men identify as religiously unaffiliated than women (although the gender gap is only present among atheists and agnostics and not those who answer “nothing in particular” to questions about religious identity) (p. 105). Burge, using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), also shows that the proportion of people identifying as religiously unaffiliated has grown across all racial groups. For instance, the proportion of Latinx and Asian American respondents in the CCES who identified as religiously unaffiliated grew by more than 10 percentage points between 2008 and 2018. Among Black respondents, 18% identified as religiously unaffiliated in 2008, compared to 32% in 2018 (Figure 2).

While the proportion of religiously unaffiliated identifiers is growing across all racial groups, the drivers of this growth likely vary across race. Harris (1994) locates the Black church as a fundamental site for political organizing around civil rights issues but also attributes the rise in “apostasy,” or abandonment of religion, among Black Americans to economic mobility that was in part facilitated by Black church leadership. During the Civil Rights Era, many members of Black communities became pastors to facilitate community learning, engagement, and development. Service in these positions permitted a critical mass of Black religious leaders access to upward mobility. As Black

people become more economically established, he contends, some abandoned church leadership (and perhaps the church) as a pathway toward economic mobility.

Burge and Bacon Jr. (2021) provide a critical observation about Black Americans, social movements, and religion in the current era. They write

... unlike the civil rights movements of the 1950s and '60s, Black Lives Matter didn't emerge from Black Christian churches and is not principally led by Black pastors. Part of the story there is that some activists involved in BLM view Black churches as too conservative, particularly in terms of not being inclusive enough of women and LGBTQ people. But another part of the story is simply that the Black Lives Matter movement was largely started by Black people under age 50. Many Black Americans under 50, like their non-Black counterparts, are disengaged from religion. About a third of Black Millennials are religiously unaffiliated, compared to 11 percent of Black Baby Boomers, according to Pew.

While much attention has been paid to a rise in Protestant affiliation among Latinx, a group historically associated with Catholicism, the numbers of nonreligiously affiliated Latinx now rival the numbers of evangelical Christian Latinx in the United States (Winston, 2014). The source of this growth is in part a function of religious switching over the lifetime. A 2014 survey showed that many who had been raised Catholic no longer identified as Catholic as adults, and that those who had left the Catholic faith had moved toward either Protestant traditions or had stopped affiliating with a religious tradition (Pew Research Center, 2014). In contrast, data seem to suggest that those raised in households that were religiously unaffiliated remained religiously unaffiliated as adults (Pew Research Center, 2014). An analysis of the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Survey shows that Latinx who identify as religiously unaffiliated identify as Democrats at about the same rate as their White counterparts but are less likely to hold liberal views on abortion (Pew Religious Landscape Survey, 2014).

Asian Americans include the largest proportion of religiously unaffiliated people across racial groups (Burge, 2021). This is due in part to the fact that the majority of Asian Americans are immigrants, many of whom hail from countries in which levels of religious affiliation are lower than in the United States. Another reason that high levels of religious nonaffiliation characterize Asian Americans is that those who practice non-Judeo Christian religious traditions may find less support to sustain religious identity in a Christian-centric nation. An important source of data on this group is the 2012 Pew Survey of Asian Americans (Pew Research Center, 2012; Iwamura et al, 2014). From that study, we know that Asian Americans who are religiously unaffiliated indicate lower levels of interest in religion as measured by the survey and are less likely to believe in God than those who identify as unaffiliated among the general U.S. population. However, it should be noted that Russell Jeung et al. (2015) contend that many Asian Americans who do not identify with a religious tradition continue to engage in ancestor veneration and cultural festivals.

The importance of these key demographic changes and racial identity in shaping political attitudes among the religiously unaffiliated is still relatively unexplored. As such, our work aims to fill this gap. In line with past patterns, we expect religiously unaffiliated individuals to be more liberal than religious individuals across all racial groups. At the same time, we contend that racial identity will interact with identity as religiously unaffiliated in important ways.

Prior research on religious institutions among Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans raises questions about how lack of connection to religious institutions might lead to distinct attitudes among "religiously unaffiliated" people of color (Ellison and Sherkat 1990). Scholarship on Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans highlights that religious institutions provide an organizational location to mobilize group participation, increase group knowledge, and forge group politics (Ecklund, 2006; Harris, 1994; Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001). Contemporary work suggests

that religious institutions remain effective in terms of fostering political engagement among non-White constituents because of the strength of coethnic ties fostered in such settings (García-Castañón et al., 2019). Although we do not delve into political participation, engagement, or motivation here, we are intrigued by what the absence of such institutions might mean for non-Whites' political attitudes.

McKenzie and Rouse (2013) present one of the most fascinating treatments of racial differences in religious affiliations and the effects of these differences on political attitudes. They find that among Whites, self-described "religious conservatism" correlates with less tolerant attitudes. When queried about their religious views, however, Black and Latinx respondents who say they are "conservative" demonstrated more egalitarian attitudes on a range of social issues. Here again we see hints that connections to religion, and to use the same logic, lack of those connections, may vary by race.

Of course, American identity, race, and religion tend to be intermingled and interactions between these identities make it difficult to isolate each as a driving force in political attitudes. Data from the 2021 American Values Survey, for instance, show that more than a third of respondents in a nationally representative sample claimed that "being Christian" is somewhat or very important to "being truly American." And the strongest support for this belief was found among White evangelicals (PRRI, 2021).

That said, we believe it is possible to identify some distinct political orientations among the racial groups included in this study of the religiously unaffiliated. Our aim is not to detract from the well-documented importance of partisan or religious identification on political attitudes (Margolis, 2017, 2018; Mason, 2018; PRRI, 2021). Instead, we take up the question of whether racial differences in policy attitudes persist *within* partisan and religious groups. Our goal is to investigate: (1) To what extent is race associated with distinct political orientations among those who identify as religiously unaffiliated? (2) To what extent do racial differences in vote choice and political attitudes persist after taking into account potential intervening factors such as socioeconomic status and party identification?

## Methods

This article is based on analysis of the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) (Barreto et al., 2018). The 2016 CMPS includes more than 10,000 respondents, including (self-identified) 1,032 "Whites"; 3,102 "Black/African Americans"; 3,003 Latinx ("Latino/a"/"Hispanic"), and 3,006 "Asian"/"Asian Americans." The survey was conducted via a "random to web" method such that emails were selected randomly from registered voter and commercial vending lists and individuals associated with those emails were contacted and invited to participate in an online survey. Note that approximately 40% of the individuals on registered voter lists provided an email address. Approximately 60% of the sample were registered to vote. Invitations and surveys were provided in a multilingual format (English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese). The response rate was 9.9%.

While the CMPS is not a truly representative sample, the full data are weighted within each racial group to match the adult population in the 2015 Census ACS one-year data file for age, gender, education, nativity, ancestry, and voter registration status. A poststratification raking algorithm was used to balance each category within  $\pm 1\%$  of the ACS estimates.

There are some important limitations to the CMPS survey data. For example, the CMPS represents a single snapshot of public opinion in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 presidential election cycle.

Perhaps the most important limitation of the survey is the potential for systematic bias in who opts to take an online survey. However, if we assume that this bias is relatively consistent across racial

groups, the CMPS allows us to examine relative differences and similarities across groups, even as we must recognize that it will not allow for the kind of general population estimates associated with a truly random sample of the population. Such a sample of Asian Americans and Latinx would be cost and time prohibitive. To address these limitations, we support our findings with additional analysis of the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election survey.

Despite its limitations, the 2016 CMPS survey is quite useful because it provides data on key questions related to the project. One major benefit of the survey for the current study is that it includes questions about respondents' nativity, religious affiliation, political orientations, attitudes toward social issues, and political participation. Further, it represents one of the best available contemporary multiracial surveys offered in multiple languages that includes large enough numbers of Latinx, Asian Americans, Blacks, and Whites to allow for meaningful statistical comparisons across both racial and religious groups. We note that while the majority of Latinx (88%) and Asian (97%) respondents opted to take the survey in English, we are not only capturing those socialized in English-only households. Among Latinx respondents, a little more than half claimed they watched news via at least some Spanish-language sources. And among Asian Americans, almost 40% said they engaged with some Asian/Asian American ethnic media. Finally, the CMPS allows for limited (not comprehensive) disaggregation of the Asian American and Latinx samples (Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central American). Although we examined these differences, sample-size limitations prohibit confidence in the estimates produced when the groups are further restricted to the religiously unaffiliated.

Controversies over measurement of those who do not identify as religious abound (Barreto & Bozonelos, 2009; Burge, 2021; Francis, 2007; Hackett, 2014). The proper measurement of religious identity continues to be debated among scholars of religious identity (Park & Davidson, 2020). While we cannot resolve the measurement issues related to lack of religious affiliation here, we present our definitions below.

**Religious “Nones”:** This group includes those who answered “none” when asked “When it comes to religion, do you consider yourself to be...?” **Atheist/Agnostic:** This group includes only those who selected “Atheist or Agnostic” when asked “When it comes to religion, do you consider yourself to be?” **Noninstitutionally Religious/Unchurched:** This group includes those who identify with a religious tradition but “Never” attend religious services (those who indicated “none” or “atheist or agnostic” when asked about religion were not asked about attendance)

Descriptive statistics associated with each of these measures for the White, Latinx, Black, Asian American, and Latinx samples in the CMPS are in Table 1.

The data in Table 1 show that although a majority of each racial group indicates that they are identified with a religious tradition, close to one-third of each group identifies as atheist or agnostic, answered “none” when asked about their religious affiliation, or identifies with a religious tradition but “never” attends religious services. We refer to the latter as the “noninstitutionally religious/unchurched.” Together, we label these three groups the “religiously unaffiliated/religiously noninstitutionalized,” hereafter “religiously unaffiliated.”

Following Junn and Masuoka (2019), we analyze each racial group separately, allowing for comparison across groups and facilitating what they term “comparative relational modeling” (p. 155). The first step in our analytic strategy was to compare the religiously unaffiliated (as defined above) in terms of vote choice and partisanship across racial groups. First, we examine the extent to which the religiously unaffiliated identify as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents and whether the associations differ across racial groups. We then analyze racial differences in policy

**Table 1.** Percent Religiously Unaffiliated Across Racial Groups

	% White ( <i>n</i> = 1035)	% Latinx ( <i>n</i> = 3003)	% Black ( <i>n</i> = 3102)	% Asian ( <i>n</i> = 3006)	% All Re-spondents ( <i>n</i> = 10,146)
<b>Religiously Identified</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>69%</b>
Atheist/Agnostic	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%
Religious “Nones”	12%	13%	17%	17%	15%
Unchurched	16%	13%	10%	15%	13%
<b>Religiously Unaffiliated</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>31%</b>
<i>(sum of 3 rows above, percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding)</i>					

*Note:* Data are from the 2016 CMPS, weighted. The religiously unaffiliated category includes Atheist/Agnostic, “Nones,” and unchurched respondents.

attitudes among those who are religiously unaffiliated, taking into account party identification when appropriate.

The second step was to conduct a series of multivariate analyses to better understand the relative influence of religious nonaffiliation, racial identity, socioeconomic status, partisanship (except when analyzing partisanship), and a range of other potential influences on vote choice, partisanship, and five key policy positions (same-sex marriage, federal regulation of emissions, tax redistribution, immigration, and a government apology for slavery). Here our interest is in the degree to which non-Whites who are religiously unaffiliated compare to Whites who identify as religiously unaffiliated. Do racial differences in party identification, vote choice, and policy attitudes maintain when considering key demographic and other potential confounds?

Because our focus is on potential variations in political attitudes across racial groups, we selected a range of policies to include in our analysis with the intention of observing responses to policies that more explicitly invoke issues of race, such as agreement with a federal apology for slavery and support for a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and policies less directly associated with race, including support for same-sex marriage, government action on climate change, and tax increases on the rich. We expect that non-White respondents will exhibit more support for policies that are more explicitly racialized (immigration, government apology for slavery) compared to those that do not directly cue racial identity (same-sex marriage, emissions, taxes). The final step in our analysis was to conduct parallel analyses with data from the 2016 CCES and 2020 CMPS. A summary of these findings can be found in [Appendix A](#).

## Findings

A series of simple cross-tabulations highlights important patterns related to religious identity (or lack thereof) and race. The data in [Table 2](#), for example, show that across racial groups those who are religiously identified are much more likely to have voted for Trump in 2016 than those who are religiously unaffiliated. At the same time, these data provide a strong indication that racial gaps in political attitudes exist within religious categories, including among the religiously unaffiliated. Note that Whites who identify as religiously unaffiliated are more than twice as likely as any non-White group to have supported Trump in 2016. Further, among those under age 35, this racial gap between Whites and non-Whites is even more dramatic.

At the bivariate-level, we can break down the religiously unaffiliated a bit more to focus on only those who identified as “atheist/agnostic” and those who answered “none” when asked “When it comes to religion, do you consider yourself to be?” exclusive of those who identify with

**Table 2.** Vote for Trump by Race, Religious Affiliation, and Age

	ALL			UNDER 35	
	% Vote for Trump among Religious	% Vote for Trump among Nonreligious		% Vote for Trump among Religious	% Vote for Trump among Nonreligious
White ( <i>n</i> = 704)	63%	35%	White ( <i>n</i> = 101)	45%	36%
Latinx ( <i>n</i> = 1816)	20%	14%	Latinx ( <i>n</i> = 688)	17%	9%
Black ( <i>n</i> = 2002)	5%	4%	Black ( <i>n</i> = 491)	5%	3%
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 1503)	25	15%	Asian ( <i>n</i> = 356)	15%	6%

*Note:* Data are from CMPS 2016, weighted. The religiously unaffiliated category includes Atheist/Agnostic, “Nones,” and unchurched respondents.

**Table 3.** Vote for Trump Among More Restricted Group of Religiously Unaffiliated: Atheist/Agnostic and Religious “Nones” Included, Excluding “Unchurched”

% Vote for Trump Among Atheist/Agnostic/Religious “Nones”	
White ( <i>n</i> = 153)	29%
Latinx ( <i>n</i> = 381)	12%
Black ( <i>n</i> = 306)	4%
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 542)	15%

*Note:* Data are from CMPS 2016, weighted.

a religious tradition but do not attend services. In other words, we can examine this pattern using an alternative, and more limited, definition of “religiously unaffiliated.” Even with this more restricted categorization of religiously unaffiliated people, we see racial differences in support for Trump, with Whites at least twice as likely as any non-White group to have voted for Trump (Table 3).

Are these differences simply a matter of partisanship? It is clear from the data in Table 4 that those we define as religiously unaffiliated tend to lean Democrat. Only a minority of any racial group in this broad grouping of religiously unaffiliated people identifies with the Republican party. Note, also, however, that Whites who identify as religiously unaffiliated are slightly more likely to say they are Republican or lean toward the Republican party—and slightly less likely to identify as Democrats or lean Democrat—than non-Whites who share the same lack of religious identification. Could the gaps in vote choice (support for Trump) discussed above simply be a matter of party identification, rather than race?

The data in Table 5 suggest that while a strong association exists between party identification and support for Trump, racial gaps in support for Trump among religiously unaffiliated respondents persist even among partisans. Religiously unaffiliated Republicans tend to be rare among all racial groups, so one must exercise caution in drawing conclusions from the data in Table 5, but the data in the first column suggest that among the handful of religiously unaffiliated Republicans in our dataset, Whites were much more likely than non-Whites to say they supported Trump in 2016. We can increase the sample size slightly by grouping together all of those who did not identify as Democrats (column 2 includes Republicans, Independents, Other party supporters, and those who responded

**Table 4.** Religiously Unaffiliated More Likely to Lean Democrat, but Some Variation by Race

	%Democrat (Including Leaners)	%Independent/Other/Do Not Know	% Republican (Including Leaners)
White ( <i>n</i> = 338)	45%	30%	25%
Latinx ( <i>n</i> = 943)	51%	35%	16%
Black ( <i>n</i> = 790)	66%	27%	7%
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 1225)	55%	28%	17%

*Note:* Data are from CMPS 2016, weighted. The religiously unaffiliated category includes Atheist/Agnostic, “Nones,” and unchurched respondents. Democratic and Republican categories include Independent and nonpartisan leaners.

**Table 5.** Religiously Unaffiliated Support for Trump Varies Among Republicans

	% Vote for Trump among Religiously Unaffiliated Republicans	% Vote for Trump among Religiously Unaffiliated Republicans, Independents, “Other” Party Identifiers
White ( <i>n</i> = 320)	89% ( <i>n</i> = 39)	75% ( <i>n</i> = 281)
Latinx ( <i>n</i> = 426)	56% ( <i>n</i> = 79)	34% ( <i>n</i> = 347)
Black ( <i>n</i> = NA)	NA ( <i>n</i> = NA)	NA ( <i>n</i> = NA)
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 484)	60% ( <i>n</i> = 122)	35% ( <i>n</i> = 362)

*Note:* Data are from CMPS 2016, weighted. The religiously unaffiliated include Atheist/Agnostic, “Nones,” and unchurched respondents. Republican category includes Republican leaners among nonpartisans and Independents.

to the party identification question with “do not know”). As expected, across the racial groups the proportion supporting Trump decreases in comparison to a sample that includes only Republicans. It is also the case that within this group of religiously unaffiliated “non-Democrats,” support for Trump varies considerably by race.

Support for Trump may not be the most reliable indicator of political views among the religiously unaffiliated because in comparison to those who identify as religious, this group is very small and becomes even smaller when we limit the analysis to particular partisan identity categories (as above). We next examine a range of political attitudes beyond vote choice, including attitudes toward same-sex marriage, climate change, redistributive tax policies, whether the federal government should apologize for slavery, and beliefs about whether undocumented immigrants should be able to qualify to become citizens if they meet certain requirements. And, as a simple control for partisanship, we restrict the analysis to Democrats and Democratic “leaners”—those who lean Democrat among Independents and nonpartisans (Table 6).

Comparing Democrats who are religiously unaffiliated across race, some interesting patterns arise. First, it is clear that the vast majority of religiously unaffiliated respondents adopt a progressive position on all the issues described above. Second, there are some variations across race when it comes to these attitudes. With regard to same-sex marriage, climate change policy, and redistributive tax policy, religiously unaffiliated White Democrats are the most progressive racial group. But, when queried about whether they would support the federal government apologizing for slavery, religiously unaffiliated Whites (50%) are less supportive than religiously unaffiliated Blacks (64%), Latinx (57%), or Asian Americans (57%). The most progressive racial groups among religiously

**Table 6.** Racial Differences (Bivariate) in Policy Views Among Democrats Among the Religiously Unaffiliated

	Percent	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent	Percent
	Disagree	Federal Gov't	Middle-Class	Agree	Disagree that
	with Ban	Should do	Families should	Federal	Undocumented
	on Same-Sex Marriage	More to Combat Climate Change	get Tax Cut by Increasing Taxes on Rich	Gov't Should Apologize for Slavery	Immigrants Should Qualify to Become Citizens
White	88% (n = 150)	88% (n = 150)	82% (n = 139)	50% (n = 87)	76% (n = 131)
Latinx	74% (n = 420)	79% (n = 415)	82% (n = 432)	57% (n = 297)	82% (n = 421)
Black	55% (n = 313)	70% (n = 345)	76% (n = 390)	64% (n = 330)	80% (n = 400)
Asian	75% (n = 545)	79% (n = 544)	80% (n = 536)	57% (n = 345)	77% (n = 524)

*Note:* Data are from the CMPS 2016, weighted. The religiously unaffiliated include Atheist/Agnostic, no-religious affiliation, and unchurched. Democrats include leaners among Independents and nonpartisans.

unaffiliated Democrats in terms of policies to provide a path the citizenship for undocumented immigrants are Latinx (82%) and Black respondents (80%). Although Asian Americans (76%) and Whites (77%) support a path to citizenship at very high rates, their levels of support are a notch below Latinx and Black respondents. These first-cut comparisons suggest that race may shape political attitudes among the religiously unaffiliated, even among those who share party identification.

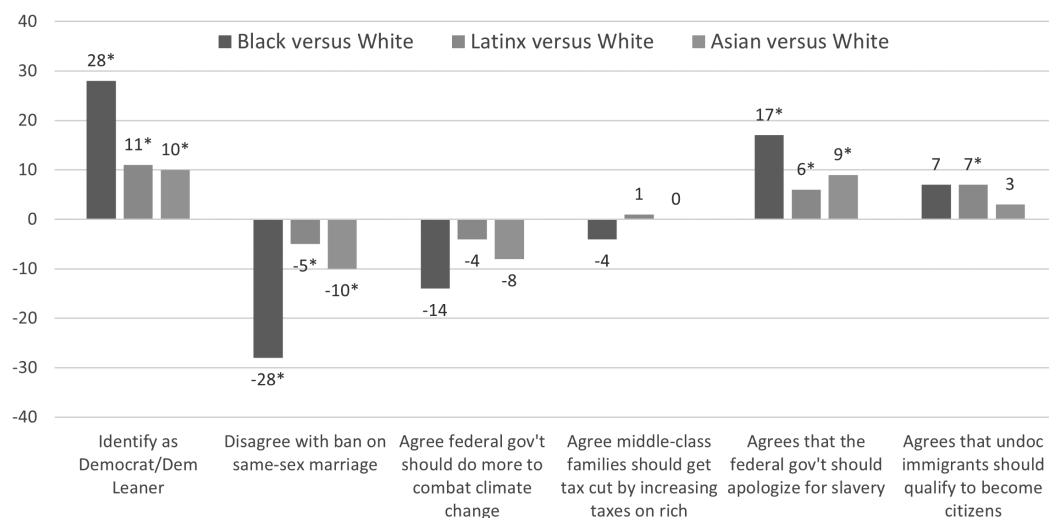
### Multivariate Analysis of the Religiously Unidentified

In fact, that is the pattern we observe when we turn to multivariate analysis of the 2016 CMPS samples. We conducted separate analyses of the religiously unaffiliated Black, Latinx, and Asian American samples that allowed us to compare each group's attitudes to their religiously unaffiliated White counterparts. We first examined partisanship, regressing Democratic identity on race, controlling for income, education, nativity, gender, age, economic anxiety, and trust in government (Figure 3, first set of bars). The results show that compared to their religiously unaffiliated White counterparts, religiously unaffiliated Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans (each group analyzed separately, in comparison to Whites) were more likely to identify as Democrat, all else being equal. The results in Figure 3 show, for example, that if one compared two religiously unaffiliated individuals that were similar in terms of the control variables above, but one identified as Black and the other White, the Black individual would be 28 percentage points more likely to identify as a Democrat or to lean Democrat as the White individual. Again, keep in mind that these are both religiously unaffiliated individuals. The probability of a similarly situated religiously unaffiliated Latinx or Asian American individual identifying with the Democratic party compared to a religiously unaffiliated White individual is in the same direction, but the probabilities are much lower.

Differences in policy attitudes among the religiously unaffiliated are not merely a function of partisanship, however. The analysis in Figure 3 shows another set of bars. These bars represent the percentage-point difference in the probability of taking the most progressive position on a range of policies among religiously unaffiliated respondents. The analyses were restricted to those who identified as Democrat or Democratic-leaners only.

The results suggest that beyond partisan differences, race matters when it comes to understanding the policy attitudes of the religiously unaffiliated. However, the role of race is not necessarily consistent across policy realms. Religiously unaffiliated (Democratic) Whites are more progressive in terms of their opposition to a ban on same-sex marriages and support for the federal government doing more to combat climate change than religiously unaffiliated Blacks, Latinx, and Asian Americans. For example, the results in Figure 3 show that comparing two similarly situated religiously unaffiliated individuals, both who share Democratic partisanship, one who identifies as Black will be 28 percentage points more likely than one who identifies as White to oppose same sex marriage. These differences are among those who exhibit relatively low levels of opposition to a same-sex marriage ban.<sup>3</sup> Recall that 55% of Democratic Black respondents who identified as religiously unidentified oppose a ban on same-sex marriage. At the same time, this finding aligns somewhat with Paul Frymer's (1999) seminal research on electoral capture, which contends that in the United States two-party-system Black voters will have little choice but to align with the party they see as least detrimental to their group interests, even if that party takes positions that may be inconsistent with their policy views. While Frymer was most

<sup>3</sup>Black people "have long been less supportive of same-sex marriage when compared with whites" (Pew Research Center, 2017). But it is also the case that support for same-sex marriage among Black people has increased dramatically over time (Pew Research Center, 2017), and we know of no other research that has focused on racial differences on this issue among the nonreligiously identified. It is also critical to acknowledge that conservative views on same-sex marriage and other nonracial social issues among Black people are not as important as among Whites in terms of determining party or vote choice (cf. Gay, 2014; Philpot, 2017).



**Figure 3.** Racial differences in party identification and policy views among the religiously unaffiliated. The bars labeled “Identify as Democrat/Dem Leaner” report the percentage-point difference in probability of each non-White group versus Whites identifying with Democratic party/leaning Democrat. The remaining bars report percentage-point differences between each non-White group versus Whites, in terms of probability of taking most progressive position on policy described—calculated among Democrats and Democratic leaners only; Covariates include income, education, nativity, gender, age, economic anxiety, and trust in government and are held at the mean for each analyses. Values with  $a^*$  indicate a  $p$ -value of .05. Data are from the CMPS 2016, weighted. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12849)]

concerned with the Democratic Party’s failure to represent more progressive elements of Black voter interests, Tasha Philpot (2017) argues that such a dynamic, along with unique ideological orientations that do not map on to the two-party dichotomy, constrain more conservative Black voters from joining the Republican coalition as well. And White and Laird (2020) bring survey experiments to bear to show that electoral capture may be reinforced by ingroup social pressures.

Turning to issues that have been explicitly racialized, whether the U.S. government should apologize for slavery and whether there should be a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, one observes that even when factors such as income, education, nativity, gender, age, economic anxiety, and trust in government are taken into account, religiously unaffiliated Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans who identify as Democrats are still more likely to take a progressive position on both issues than are Democratic Whites who are unaffiliated.

We also analyzed the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) to further support our findings. We select the 2016 sample to mirror the context of 2016 CMPS. The CCES was conducted through YouGov via the Internet. Surveys were conducted from October to November 2016 to capture pre- and postelection attitudes. YouGov selected respondents using matched sampling. All in all, the sample has 46,289 “Whites,” 7,926 “Blacks,” 5,238 “Hispanic/Latinx,” and 2,278 “Asian” respondents.

Similar to the CMPS, we conducted separate multivariate analyses of the Black, Latinx, and Asian American samples that allowed us to compare each group’s attitudes to their White counterparts. Indeed, our expectation that race is a meaningful predictor for the religiously unaffiliated is confirmed by our analysis of the 2016 CCES. Religiously unaffiliated Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans were more likely to identify as Democrats than religiously unaffiliated Whites, all else being equal. And, similar to the patterns we found with the 2016 CMPS, key policy differences persist among Democrats. Among Democrats, we find that Black, Latinx, and Asian American individuals

are, for the most part, more conservative than Whites on policies such as same-sex marriage and climate change that might be less likely to directly cue racial identity.

Note that in contrast to the 2016 CMPS, the 2016 CCES was not available in Asian languages; this may explain why there are some differences in the results associated with the Asian American samples across the two surveys. Most critically, however, we find again that racial identity is a distinct predictor of political attitudes for all racial groups, even when accounting for religious and controlling for partisanship ([Appendix A, Tables A1-A3](#)).

We also conducted additional multivariate analysis with the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey. The results (also included in [Appendix A, Tables A4-A6](#)) show that Whites who are religiously unaffiliated are less likely to be Democrats than non-Whites who are religiously unaffiliated, taking potential covariates into account. With this survey, we find that religiously unaffiliated Black and Latinx respondents are more likely than their White counterparts to oppose same-sex marriage, but this is not the case for Asian American respondents. Finally, we note that the 2020 CMPS included a question about support for addressing police brutality. Here we find that among religiously unaffiliated Democrats, only Black respondents exhibit more supportive attitudes than Whites. And, in fact, Asian American respondents who identified as religiously unaffiliated, and Democrats were less supportive than religiously unaffiliated Whites who were Democrats.

## Conclusions

Those who identify as religiously unaffiliated are growing among all racial groups in the United States. And racial identity is associated with considerable differences in the political attitudes of the religiously unaffiliated. These differences suggest that race remains a central organizing feature of American politics with meaningful implications within religious categories, including the religiously unaffiliated.

Our work examines the role of race in influencing political attitudes among those who we define as religiously unaffiliated. We conducted separate analyses of Black, Latinx, and Asian American samples in three different surveys that allowed us to compare each group's attitudes to their White counterparts. Results across three datasets show that compared to their White counterparts, religiously unaffiliated Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans were all more likely to identify as Democrat, all else being equal.

There is no doubt that party identification and religion are deeply entwined in U.S. politics (Margolis, 2018), even to the point that politics can shape religious identities and other religious choices (Margolis, 2022). But the link between religion, especially evangelical identity, and party identification is especially strong among Whites (Butler, 2021; Jones, 2021; Martí, 2019; Wong, 2018) shows that religion, again with a focus on evangelical identity, operates quite differently when it comes to the political attitudes of non-Whites versus Whites. Scholars have also shown that the determinants of non-Whites' partisanship may vary from that of Whites. For example, social exclusion may exert a unique effect on Asian Americans' partisan leanings toward the Democratic party (Kuo et al., 2017). Chan et al. (2021) suggest that COVID-19-related anti-Asian political rhetoric, also tied to social exclusion, served as a unique push factor toward the Democrats among Asian Americans compared to other racial groups during the pandemic (Chan et al., 2021, p. 12). Similarly, perceived anti-Latinx discrimination, reactions to anti-immigrant rhetoric, and strong Latinx-identity are associated with Democratic party loyalty among Latinx (Barreto & Segura, 2014; Cisneros, 2016; Huddy et al., 2016, p. 217). We add to this body of research by examining racial and religious variations among those who share the same party identification.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Note, however, that Iris Hui and David Sears' (Hui & Sears, 2018) study of the role of anti-immigrant propositions cautions against attributing shifts in Democratic partisanship among Latinx to high-profile political rhetoric and threats. Rather, they argue that shifts can be traced to more bread-and-butter issues and generational change.

Burge (2021, p. 121) makes a forceful argument for exercising extreme caution when generalizing about the broad category of religiously unaffiliated people due to internal variations within the group. Sample-size restrictions prevented us from conducting a deep dive into whether there are racial differences in political attitudes among certain distinct segments of the religiously unaffiliated, particularly in terms of differentiating between those who identify as “agnostic” versus “atheist” versus those who answer “none” when replying to a survey question about their religious affiliation or compared to those who identify with a religious tradition but never attend religious services. We were also unable to disaggregate national-origin groups within broad racial categories. These comprise two of the weakest aspects of the current study, but we believe our findings in this area suggest a fruitful line of research to apply to future data with larger samples. We do take Burge’s work as a point of encouragement in our attempts to disaggregate religiously unaffiliated people along a key source of attitudinal variation in society and in politics, racial identity.

What are the political implications of this research? The religiously unaffiliated appear to be a Democratic bloc at first glance, with mainstream exit polls showing 67% of religious “nones” supporting Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016 and 68% supporting Democratic candidate Joe Biden in 2020 (CNN, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2016). But this analysis reveals what is missed in exit polls—there are important racial distinctions among those who are religiously unaffiliated. For example, although Whites who identify as religiously unaffiliated are considered among the most politically progressive groups in the nation (Thompson, 2019), Whites who are religiously unaffiliated were more likely to vote for Trump in 2016 than religiously unaffiliated non-Whites. Further, attention to racial differences within the broad category of religiously unaffiliated people uncovers the complex ways in which race interacts with lack of religious affiliation. It is not that Whites who are religiously unaffiliated (and Democrats) are simply more conservative on every policy issue. Issue area matters. We find that religiously unaffiliated Whites who are Democrats are more progressive than religiously unaffiliated non-Whites when it comes to same-sex marriage and the environment, but more conservative when it comes to the government issuing an official apology for slavery and creating a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

Here we must acknowledge again the potential that electoral “capture” by the Democratic party accounts for the fact that in some cases Blacks, Latinx, and Asian Americans who are religiously unaffiliated exhibit more conservative attitudes than their White counterparts, yet still show greater allegiance to the Democratic Party (Frymer, 1999). That is, religiously unaffiliated Blacks, Latinx, and Asian Americans who are more conservative than Whites may not see the Republican party as a viable option compared to Whites who are unaffiliated and hold similar views. Junn and Masuoka (2019) make a similar argument in their study of race and the partisan gender gap in Presidential elections when they underscore lack of partisan variation among women of color: “Women of color are predominantly Democratic, which means that it is difficult to identify key sources of individual-level variation across these women in partisan voting. On the one hand, this could indicate that women of color are politically homogeneous. But qualitative data, along with an assessment of different ideologies present within minority groups ... show that women of color hold a variety of worldviews” (p. 1141). A “heavily racialized political context,” they contend, restricts the ability of women of color to position themselves as partisan swing voters (p. 1141). And it is also true that as each party is increasingly aligned with particular racial policies, views on those policies will also vary between Whites and non-Whites (Valentino & Zhirkov, 2018).

This analysis shows that there are multiple dimensions to progressive political attitudes and that one of these dimensions is the extent to which race is a salient feature of a policy or the debate around that policy. The racial identities of the religiously unaffiliated map on to different levels of support for progressive policies, with Whites more supportive of LGBT rights and issues related to the environment, and Black people, as well as sometimes Latinx and Asian Americans, often demonstrating a more progressive position when it comes to advocacy for Black communities (a federal

apology for slavery, a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and the need to address police brutality). These dynamics illustrate the diversity among those who fall under the Democratic “Big Tent” and highlight distinct policy priorities along racial lines. In fact, within the loose category of the “religiously unaffiliated,” there have also been challenges around unity and politics related to race (cf. Hutchinson, 2020). For example, Black nonbelievers have noted a lack of inclusion among mainstream secular humanist organizations (Hutchinson, 2014; Welch 1978 ).

And, while there is no doubt that partisanship is a major driver in U.S. politics, this article provides strong evidence that religion is indeed “raced” (Yukich & Edgell, 2020) and that race matters within even a progressive segment of the Democratic voting bloc—the religiously unaffiliated.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Juhem Navarro-Rivera for his work inspiring this paper.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Janelle S. Wong, Departments of American Studies and Government and Politics, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA. E-mail: janellew@umd.edu Open access funding enabled and organized by ProjektDEAL.

### REFERENCES

- Baker, J. O., & Smith, B. G. (2009). The Nones: Social characteristics of the religiously unaffiliated. *Social Forces*, 87(3), 1251–1263 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40345160>
- Bainbridge, W. S. (2005). Atheism. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 1–26. <http://www.religjournal.com/pdf/ijrr01002.pdf>.
- Barreto, M., & Segura, G. (2014). *Latino America: How America's most dynamic population is poised to transform the politics of the nation*. Public Affairs.
- Barreto, M. A., & Bozonelos, D. N. (2009). Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The role of religiosity in Muslim American party identification. *Politics and Religion*, 2(2) 200–229. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048309000200>
- Barreto, M. A., Frasure-Yokley, L., Vargas, E. D., & Wong, J. (2018). Best practices in collecting online data with Asian, Black, Latino, and White respondents: Evidence from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-election Survey. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 6(1), 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2017.1419433>
- Brian, J. O., & Smith, B. (2009). None too simple: Examining issues of religious nonbelief and nonbelonging in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48(4), 719–733.
- Brockway, M. (2017). Home on Sunday, home on Tuesday ? Secular political participation in the United States. *Politics and Religion*, 11(2), 334–363. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175504831700061X>
- Burge, R. P. (2020). How many “Nones” are there? Explaining the discrepancies in survey estimates. *Review of Religious Research*, 62(1), 173–190.
- Burge, R. P. (2021). *The Nones: Where they came from, who they are, and where they are going*. Fortress Press.
- Burge, R. P., & Bacon, Jr., P. (2021, April 16). It's not just young white liberals who are leaving religion. *FiveThirtyEight.com* <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/its-not-just-young-White-liberals-who-are-leaving-religion/>
- Butler, A. (2021). *White evangelical racism: The politics of morality in America*. UNC Press Books.
- Byler, D. (2019, May 15). Religiously unaffiliated voters are leading U.S. politics into uncharted waters. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/14/religiouslyunaffiliated-voters-are-leading-us-politics-into-uncharted-waters/>
- Cable News Network. (2020). *National results 2020 president Exit Polls*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/election/2020/exit-polls/president/national-results>
- Campbell, D. E., Layman, G. C., & Green, J. C. (2020). *Secular surge: a new fault line in American politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Castle, J., & Stepp, K. (2021). Religion, partisanship, and polarization on cultural issues in the United States: A reassessment. *Political Behavior*, 43(1), 1311–1335.
- Chan, N. K. M., Kim, J. Y., & Leung, V. (2021). COVID-19 and Asian Americans: How elite messaging and social exclusion shape partisan attitudes. *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721003091>

- Cisneros, A. S. (2016). *Latino identity and political attitudes: Why are Latinos not Republican?* Springer.
- Claassen, R. L., Djupe, P. A., Lewis, A. R., & Neiheisel, J. R. (2021). Which party represents my group? The group foundations of partisan choice and polarization. *Political Behavior*, 43(2), 615–636.
- Condran, J. G., & Tamney, J. (1985). Religious “Nones”: 1957 to 1982. *Sociological Analysis*, 46(4), 415–423. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711157>
- Cooper, B., Cox, D., & Lienesch, R. (2016). Exodus: Why Americans are leaving religion—and why they’re unlikely to come back. *Public Religion Research Institute*. <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-rms-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>
- Djupe, P. A., Neiheisel, J. R., & Conger, K. H. (2018). Are the politics of the christian right linked to state rates of the non-religious? The importance of salient controversy. *Political Research Quarterly*, 71(4), 910–922.
- Du Mez, K. K. (2020). *Jesus and John Wayne: How white evangelicals corrupted a faith and fractured a nation*. Liveright Publishing.
- Ecklund, E. H. (2006). *Korean American evangelicals new models for civic life*. Oxford University Press.
- Edgell, P. (2012). A cultural sociology of religion: New directions. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38(1), 247–265. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145424>
- Edgell, P., Douglas, H., Stewart, E., & Gerteis, J. (2016). Atheists and other cultural outsiders: Moral boundaries and the non-religious in the United States. *Social Forces*, 95(2), 607–638. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sow063>
- Ellison, C. G., & Sherkat, D. E. (1990). Patterns of religious mobility among Black Americans. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 31(4), 551–568 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4121359>
- Emerson, M. O., & Smith, C. (2001). *Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America*. Oxford University Press.
- Francis, L. J. (2007). Introducing the new indices of religious orientation (NIRO): Conceptualization and measurement. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10(6), 585–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670601035510>
- Frasure-Yokley, L., Wong, J., Vargas, E., & Bareto, M. (2016). *Collaborative Multi-racial Post-election Survey (CMPS), United States, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2022-05-03*. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR38040.v2>
- Frymer, P. (1999). *Uneasy alliances: Race and party competition in America*. Princeton University Press.
- García-Castañón, M., Walker, H. L., & Chong, C. (2019). Democracy’s deficit: The role of institutional contact in shaping non-White political behavior. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*, 4, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2018.24>
- Gay, C. (2014). Knowledge matters: Policy cross-pressures and Black partisanship. *Political Behavior*, 36(1), 99–124 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43653394>
- Green, E. (2017, September 6). The non-religious states of America. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/09/no-religion-states-prri/538821/>
- Guth, J. L. (2019). Are White evangelicals populists? The view from the 2016 American National Election Study. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 17(3), 20–35.
- Hackett, C. (2014). Seven things to consider when measuring religious identity. *Religion*, 44(3), 396–413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2014.903647>
- Harris, F. C. (1994). Something within: Religion as a mobilizer of African–American political activism. *Journal of Politics*, 56(1), 42–68.
- Hout, M., & Fischer, C. S. (2002). Why more Americans have no religious preference: Politics and generations. *American Sociological Review*, 67(2), 165–190.
- Hout, M., & Fischer, C. S. (2014). Explaining why more Americans have no religious preference: Political backlash and generational succession. *Sociological Science*, 1(1), 423–447. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2132345>
- Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Horwitz, S. N. (2016). Political identity convergence: On being Latino, becoming a Democrat, and getting active. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(3), 205–228.
- Hui, I., & Sears, D. O. (2018). Reexamining the effect of racial propositions on Latinos’ partisanship in California. *Political Behavior*, 40(1), 149–174. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9400-1>
- Hutchinson, S. (2014). Atheism has a big race problem that no one’s talking about. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/06/16/blacks-are-even-discriminated-against-by-atheists/>
- Hutchinson, G. T., Patock-Peckham, J. A., Cheong, J. W., & Nagoshi, C. T. (1998). Personality predictors of religious orientation among Protestant, Catholic, and non-religious college students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 24(2), 145–151. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(97\)00164-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(97)00164-5)
- Hutchinson, S. (2020). Intersectional politics among atheists and humanists of color. In G. Yukich & P. Edgell (Eds.), *Religion is raced: Understanding American religion in the twenty-first century* (pp. 58–73). NYU Press <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1sjwnt5.6>

- Iwamura, J. N., Joshi, K. Y., Suh, S., & Wong, J. (2014). Reflections on the Pew Forum on religion and public life's Asian Americans: A mosaic of faiths data and report. *Amerasia Journal*, 40(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.40.1.t1nt4407v3120734>
- Jeung, R., Esaki, B., & Liu, A. (2015). Redefining religious nones: Lessons from Chinese and Japanese American young adults. *Religions*, 6(3), 891–911. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel6030891>
- Jones, R. P. (2021). *White too long: The legacy of White supremacy in American Christianity*. Simon and Schuster.
- Jones-Correa, M. A., & Leal, D. L. (2001). Political participation: Does religion matter? *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(4), 751–770. <https://doi.org/10.2307/449233>
- Junn, J., & Masuoka, N. (2019). The gender gap is a race gap: Women voters in US presidential elections. *Perspectives on Politics*, 18(4), 1135–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719003876>
- Kellstedt, L., & Smidt, C. (1991). Measuring fundamentalism: An analysis of different operational strategies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30(3), 259–278. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386972>
- Keysar, A., & Kosmin, B. A. (2007). *Secularism & secularity: Contemporary international perspectives*. Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture.
- Kuo, A., Malhotra, N., & Mo, C. H. (2017). Social exclusion and political identity: The case of Asian American partisanship. *Journal of Politics*, 79(1), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687570>
- Layman, G. (2001). *The great divide: Religious and cultural conflict in American party politics. (power, conflict, and democracy: American politics into the twenty-first century)*. Columbia University Press.
- Lim, C., Macgregor, C. A., & Putnam, R. D. (2010). Secular and liminal: Discovering heterogeneity among religious nones. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49(4), 596–618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2010.01533.x>
- Lipka, M. (2015, May 3). *A closer look at America's rapidly growing religious "Nones"*. Pew Research Center <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidlygrowing-religious-nones/>
- Lucado, A. (2019, August 29). How the female body became a scapegoat for White evangelicals. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/08/29/how-female-body-became-scapegoat-white-evangelicals/>
- Margolis, M. F. (2017). How politics affects religion: Partisanship, socialization, and religiosity in America. *Journal of Politics*, 80(1), 30–43. <https://doi.org/10.1086/694688>
- Margolis, M. F. (2018). *From politics to the pews how partisanship and the political environment shape religious identity*. University of Chicago Press.
- Margolis, M. F. (2022). Reversing the causal arrow politics' influence on religious choices. *Advances in Political Psychology*, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12829>
- Martí, G. (2019). *American blindspot: Race, class, religion, and the Trump presidency*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Marwell, G., & Demerath, N. J. (2003). "Secularization" by any other name. *American Sociological Review*, 68(2), 314–316.
- Mason, L. (2018). *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press.
- McDaniel, E. L., & Ellison, C. G. (2008). God's party? Race, religion, and partisanship over time. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), 180–191 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20299724>
- McKenzie, B. D., & Rouse, S. M. (2013). Shades of faith: religious foundations of political attitudes among African Americans, Latinos, and Whites. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57, 218–235. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00611.x>
- Noll, M. (2001). *The old religion in a new world: The history of North American Christianity*. Erdmans.
- Park, J. Z., & Davidson, J. C. (2020). Decentering Whiteness in survey research on American religion. In G. Yukich & P. Edgell (Eds.), *Religion is raced: Understanding American religion in the twenty-first century* (pp. 251–274). NYU Press <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1sjwnt5.15>
- Pew Religious Landscape Survey. (2014). *The Religious Landscape Study*. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
- Pew Research Center (2012). Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/>
- Pew Research Center. (2014). *The shifting religious identity of Latinos in the United States*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latinos-in-the-united-states/#:~:text=The decline in Catholic affiliation among Latinos is due,at,in religious affiliations since childhood.&text=Three-quarters of Latino adults, currently describe themselves as Catholics>
- Pew Research Center. (2016, July 13). *Evangelicals Rally to Trump, religious "Nones" back Clinton*. Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/07/13/evangelicals-rally-to-trump-religious-nones-back-clinton/>
- Pew Research Center. (2017). *Support for same-sex marriage grows, even among groups that had been skeptical*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/06/26/support-for-same-sex-marriage-grows-even-among-groups-that-had-been-skeptical/>
- Pew Research Center. (2018a, November 7). *How religious groups voted in the 2018 midterm elections*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/07/how-religious-groups-voted-in-the-midterm-elections/>

- Pew Research Center. (2018b, April 25). *When Americans say they believe in god, what do they mean?* <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean>
- Pew Research Center. (2018c, August 8). *Why America's "Nones" don't identify with a religion.* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>
- Philpot, T. S. (2017). *Conservative but not Republican*. Cambridge University Press.
- PRRI. (2019, October 20). *Fractured Nation: Widening partisan polarization and key issues in 2020 presidential elections.* <https://www.prii.org/research/fractured-nation-widening-partisan-polarization-and-key-issues-in-2020-presidential-elections/>
- PRRI. (2020, October 19). *Dueling realities: Amid multiple crises, Trump and Biden supporters see different priorities and futures for the nation.* <https://www.prii.org/research/amid-multiple-crises-trump-and-biden-supporters-see-different-realities-and-futures-for-the-nation/>
- PRRI. (2021, November 1). *Competing visions of America: An evolving identity or a culture under attack?* <https://www.prii.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/>
- Putnam, R. D., & Campbell, D. E. (2012). *American grace: How religion divides and unites us*. Simon and Schuster.
- Schaeffer, K. (2019, July 30). *The most common age among Whites in U.S. is 58—More than double that of racial and ethnic minorities.* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/30/most-common-age-among-us-racial-ethnic-groups/#:~:text=Themostcommonageamong,ofracialandethnminorities&text=Thereweremore27-year,analysisofCensusBureau-data>
- Schwadel, P. (2017). The Republicanization of evangelical protestants in the United States: An examination of the sources of political realignment. *Social Science Research*, 62(1), 238–254.
- Schwadel, P. (2018). The political implications of religious non-affiliation in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Religion & Society Supplement*, 17, 149–166.
- Schwadel, P. (2020). The politics of religious nones. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 59(1), 180–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12640>
- Sides, J., Tesler, M., & Vavreck, L. (2019). *Identity crisis*. Princeton University Press.
- Thompson, D. (2019). Three decades ago America lost its religion. Why? *The Atlantic*.
- Valentino, N. A., & Zhirkov, K. (2018) Blue is black and red is White? Affective polarization and the racialized schemas of US Party coalitions. *Midwest Political Science Association Conference 2018*, Chicago, IL.
- Wald, K. D., & Calhoun-Brown, A. (2014). *Religion and politics in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Wald, K. D. (2003). *Religion and politics in the United States* (4th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Welch, M. R. (1978). Review of the polls the unchurched: Black religious non-affiliates. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17(3), 289–293. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386323>
- White, I. K., & Laird, C. N. (2020). *Steadfast democrats*. Princeton University Press.
- Winston, K. M. (2014, May 17). Hispanics increasingly identify as “Nones.” <https://religionnews.com/2013/10/17/hispanics-increasinglyidentify-nones/>
- Wong, J. S. (2018). *Immigrants, evangelicals, and politics in an era of demographic change*. Russell Sage Foundation. <https://doi.org/10.7758/9781610448741>
- Yukich, G., & Edgell, P. (2020). Introduction: Recognizing raced religion. In G. Yukich & P. Edgell (Eds.), *Religion is raced: Understanding American religion in the twenty-first century* (pp. 1–16). NYU Press <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1sjwnt5.3>
- Yukich, G., & Wong, J. (2020). *More people of color identifying as religiously unaffiliated—What does it mean for politics?* Unpublished manuscript.
- Zwilling, A. L. (2018, October 25). *Are the “non-religious” becoming the new religion?* <https://theconversation.com/are-the-non-religious-becoming-the-new-religion-105446>

## Appendix A

## PARALLEL ANALYSES

## CCES 2016

**Table A1.** The Role of Race in Democratic Partisanship Among the Religiously Unaffiliated (CCES 2016)

	Dependent Variable		
	Democratic Party Identification		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Latinx	0.36*** (0.08)		
Black		1.24*** (0.06)	
Asian			0.05 (0.10)
Income	−0.28*** (0.08)	−0.35*** (0.08)	−0.23** (0.08)
Age	−0.01 (0.10)	0.13 (0.10)	−0.08 (0.10)
Gender	0.46*** (0.04)	0.48*** (0.04)	0.45*** (0.04)
Believes economy “worse” over past year	−3.71*** (0.10)	−3.38*** (0.09)	−3.80*** (0.10)
Education	0.44*** (0.07)	0.45*** (0.07)	0.45*** (0.07)
Nativity (U.S. born = 1)	0.31 (0.20)	0.40 (0.24)	0.55* (0.23)
Constant	0.13 (0.22)	−0.17 (0.25)	−0.07 (0.24)
Observations	12,653	12,952	12,374
Akaike Inf. Crit.	13,932.63	15,064.35	13,406.42

Note: \* $p$ ; \*\* $p$ ; \*\*\* $p$  < .001.

**Table A2.** Race and Support for Same-Sex Marriage Among Religiously Unaffiliated Democrats (CCES 2016)

	Dependent Variable		
	Same-Sex Marriage Support		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Latinx	−0.93*** (0.11)		
Black		−1.31*** (0.08)	
Asian			−0.55** (0.21)
Income	0.17 (0.18)	0.33* (0.15)	0.28 (0.22)
Age	−1.10*** (0.21)	−1.56*** (0.18)	−1.23*** (0.22)
Gender	0.28** (0.09)	0.08 (0.08)	0.48*** (0.10)
Believes economy “worse” over past year	−2.09*** (0.20)	−1.33*** (0.16)	−2.06*** (0.21)
Education	0.97*** (0.16)	0.84*** (0.14)	1.14*** (0.18)
Nativity (U.S. born = 1)	0.05 (0.42)	0.93* (0.37)	0.14 (0.42)
Constant	2.10*** (0.46)	1.33*** (0.40)	1.59*** (0.46)
Observations	4264	4781	3997
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3330.39	4504.99	2843.85

Note: \* $p$ ; \*\* $p$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table A3.** Race and Support for Policy Body Cameras Among Religiously Unaffiliated Democrats (CCES 2016)

	Dependent Variable		
	Support for Police Cameras		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Latinx	−0.35* (0.16)		
Black		0.77*** (0.17)	
Asian			−0.22 (0.24)
Income	−0.56* (0.24)	−0.24 (0.24)	−0.50* (0.25)
Age	−1.33*** (0.30)	−0.44 (0.29)	−0.98** (0.31)
Gender	0.54*** (0.13)	0.27* (0.12)	0.36** (0.13)
Belief that economy “worse” over past year	−0.72* (0.30)	−0.65* (0.29)	−1.23*** (0.29)
Education	−0.14 (0.21)	−0.57** (0.21)	−0.43* (0.22)
Nativity (U.S. born = 1)	−0.14 (0.56)	0.39 (0.62)	0.53 (0.43)
Constant	3.31*** (0.66)	2.62*** (0.70)	2.91*** (0.55)
Observations	4370	4905	4107
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2089.02	2173.08	1969.42

Note: \* $p$ ; \*\* $p$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## CMPS 2020

**Table A4.** The Role of Race in Democratic Partisanship Among the Religiously Unaffiliated (CMPS 2020)

	Dependent Variable		
	Democratic Party Identification		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Latinx	0.64*** (0.11)		
Black		1.12*** (0.10)	
Asian			0.69*** (0.12)
Income	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Age	−0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	−0.18*** (0.03)
Gender	0.50*** (0.10)	0.65*** (0.10)	0.56*** (0.10)
Trust in Government	1.50*** (0.23)	1.44*** (0.20)	1.85*** (0.23)
More “hopeful” about economy over past year	1.17*** (0.19)	1.25*** (0.19)	0.99*** (0.19)
Education	0.86*** (0.23)	0.64** (0.23)	0.34 (0.20)
Nativity (U.S. born = 1)	0.04 (0.13)	0.05 (0.17)	0.27* (0.11)
Constant	−2.64*** (0.27)	−3.01*** (0.28)	−2.12*** (0.24)
Observations	12,653	12,952	12,374
Akaike Inf. Crit.	13,932.63	15,064.35	13,406.42

Note: \* $p$ , \*\* $p$ , \*\*\* $p$  < .001.

**Table A5.** Race and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage Among Religiously Unaffiliated Democrats (CMPS 2020)

	Dependent Variable		
	Same-sex Marriage Opposition		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Latinx	0.08*** (0.02)		
Black		0.16*** (0.02)	
Asian			0.03 (0.02)
Income	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Gender	0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Trust in Government	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.11** (0.04)
More “hopeful” about economy over past year	0.01 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)
Education	0.07 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)
Nativity	0.02 (0.02)	0.08** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)
Constant	0.71*** (0.05)	0.61*** (0.05)	0.90*** (0.04)
Observations	815	950	1070
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.06	0.06

Note: \* $p$ ; \*\* $p$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table A6.** Race and Support for Addressing Policy Brutality Among Religiously Unaffiliated Democrats (CMPS 2020)

	Dependent Variable		
	Support for Addressing Police Brutality		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Latinx	−0.03 (0.02)		
Black		0.04* (0.02)	
Asian			−0.10*** (0.02)
Income	−0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	−0.01** (0.00)
Age	0.00 (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Gender	0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Trust in Government	−0.04 (0.04)	−0.13*** (0.04)	−0.11** (0.04)
More “hopeful” about economy over past year	0.01 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)
Education	0.07 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)
Nativity (U.S. born = 1)	0.02 (0.02)	0.08** (0.03)	−0.01 (0.02)
Constant	0.71*** (0.05)	0.61*** (0.05)	0.90*** (0.04)
Observations	815	950	1070
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.06	0.06

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .