Racialization of Stereotypically Immigrant Groups:

Evidence from the United States and Britain

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Abstract

Recent evidence indicates that anti-immigration attitudes in white-majority societies have a "racial hue" as they at least partially derive from aversion toward prevalent immigrant groups. Building upon this result, I argue that there is variation in the degree to which natives think of stereotypically immigrant groups in racial terms, and that this variation has implications for attitudes toward immigration. To test these conjectures, I propose a novel instrument to measure racialized images of social groups based on the implicit association test (IAT) architecture. Using original survey studies in the United States and Britain, I demonstrate that respondents in the two countries indeed tend to think of the stereotypically immigrant groups—Hispanics/Latinos and Muslims respectively—in racial terms. Further, individual differences in these racialized images are related to group-specific prejudice, opinions about immigration, and partisan affect. Altogether, this study is the first focused attempt to measure individual-level variation in racialization of stereotypically immigrant groups and show its political relevance.

Keywords: Hispanics/Latinos, immigration, implicit association test, Muslims, prejudice, race, skin color, stereotypes

A recurring topic in both scholarly and public debate about the contemporary anti-immigrant backlash in the United States and Western Europe concerns the role of racial animosity. The argument that racist sentiments underlie preferences for strict immigration policy and enforcement among natives is commonly expressed by left-leaning political figures, activist groups, and media outlets. Existing social scientific evidence indeed shows strong correlation between public opposition to immigration and individual-level orientations responsible for racial prejudice, such as ethnocentrism (for a review, see Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).

At the same time, survey experiments that manipulate the race of individual immigrants find that it has little to no effect on readiness to admit them or immigration policy opinions more generally—especially when compared to other relevant characteristics, such as language proficiency, level of assimilation, and skills (Hopkins 2015; Ostfeld 2017; Valentino et al. 2019). Specific immigrant groups, however, are found to face greater opposition: examples include Hispanic/Latinx immigrants in the United States (Newman and Malhotra 2018), and Muslim immigrants in Europe (Ford and Mellon 2020). Therefore, racial prejudice seems to operate mostly on the group level: when stereotypically immigrant groups—that is, ones whose members are stereotypically marked as foreign-born—are also seen as racially different from the white majority, immigration faces more opposition.

This interpretation rests on two important assumptions. First, natives hold racialized images of groups stereotypically marked as immigrants: even groups defined on ostensibly non-racial bases are perceived as physically (phenotypically) distinct from white majorities. Second, these images are politically relevant: they are relatively broadly shared but vary across individuals—and this variance is related to group prejudice and political attitudes.

Following the literature on the psychology of stereotyping (Hilton and Von Hippel 1996), I suggest that individuals imagine groups by thinking about them in more concrete social and demographic attributes. Given that humans primarily rely on visual stimuli when collecting and storing information (Stokes and Biggs 2015), racialized physical traits should play an important role in popular images of social groups—even ones that are not originally defined on the basis of phenotype. However, up to now individual differences in propensity to ascribe racialized traits to stereotypically immigrant groups has never been measured.

Drawing upon these insights, I propose a method to measure the racialized images of stereotypically immigrant groups on the individual level: the direction and strength of the cognitive associations between these groups and racialized physical traits. In two original survey studies carried out in the United States and Britain, I investigate how these images relate to group-specific prejudice, attitudes toward immigration, and partisan affect. Results demonstrate that racialized images of stereotypically immigrant groups in the two countries vary in content, and that this variation is politically relevant.

Measuring Racialized Images of Social Groups

To measure the racialized images of stereotypically immigrant groups, I rely on the implicit association test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998). The IAT is a computer-based task that requires users to rapidly classify stimuli representing two target categories (e.g., "insect" and "flower") and a bipolar attribute (e.g., pleasant vs. unpleasant feelings). Most existing applications of the IAT, including in politics of immigration (Perez 2010), have been focused on measuring implicit attitudes. However, the key measurement principle of the IAT is more general: fast pairings (low response latencies) are interpreted as more strongly associated in memory than slow pairings (high response latencies). Therefore, the IAT architecture makes an

almost perfect tool to measure cognitive associations by recording reaction times to association-consistent (fast) versus association-inconsistent (slow) pairs. This tool can be used to measure associations between social groups (stereotypically immigrant vs. stereotypically native) and almost any unidimensional attribute (including racialized phenotypic traits), not necessarily an affectively charged one.

This measurement strategy involves choosing the attributes that are both central to the racialized images of stereotypically immigrant groups and can be represented in terms of the IAT stimuli. In the most general sense, the term "race" can refer to any social grouping as soon as it is based on members' physical similarities (Barnshaw 2008). Practically, race in social research is usually defined through closed sets of categories borrowed from national statistics (such as the U.S. Census) or existing surveys. However, these classifications are not exhaustive and ignore potential divisions within the categories as well as fluidity of racial boundaries across time and space (Davenport 2020). Here, I use the "bundle of sticks" definition: race is a socially and politically constructed phenomenon consisting of multiple interrelated dimensions that can be disaggregated and analyzed separately (Sen and Wasow 2016).

Among several dimensions that constitute race as a social category, I specifically concentrate on light vs. dark skin color. I do so for several reasons. First, I follow the recent survey-experimental studies that have manipulated race of potential immigrants specifically using skin color. Second, skin color has been demonstrated to serve as possibly the single most powerful criterion for racial categorization (Maddox and Gray 2002). Third, unlike some other traits linked to race in the "bundle of sticks" model, like dialect or neighborhood, skin color a is purely phenotypic trait devoid of any inherent social meaning. Finally, due to its unidimensional character, light vs. dark skin color can be represented in terms of the IAT stimuli.

In the empirical part of the paper, I use the method based on the IAT architecture to measure racialized images of two specific groups—Hispanics in the United States and Muslims in Britain—that are (a) often seen as stereotypical immigrants in the respective countries and (b) defined on ostensibly non-racial bases such as place of origin, language, or religion. Since bias against dark complexion is well documented in the discipline (Messing, Jabon, and Plaut 2016; Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012), I expect that perceptions of stereotypically immigrant groups as darker-skinned are related to prejudice and anti-immigration attitudes.

Study 1: United States

In Study 1, I measured racialized images of Hispanics/Latinos the United States. This choice was based on two considerations. First, Americans' preferences with regard to immigration are known to be heavily influenced by prejudice against Latinos (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Second, U.S. respondents perceive the same face as darker-skinned when it is assigned with a distinctively Hispanic name vs. a non-Hispanic one (Garcia and Abascal 2016); in other words, the category "Hispanic" is currently racialized even though it has been originally defined in terms of culture, language, and origin. My goals in Study 1 were to replicate these findings using the IAT-based measure and extend them by testing whether racialized images of Hispanics are related to individual-level political attitudes.

Data and Method

I recruited the study participants using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Respondents answered questions that assessed their anti-Hispanic prejudice, opinions on immigration, feelings toward the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, direction and strength of partisan identity, the 7-point ideology scale, and standard demographics. The IAT component of the

survey was administered using Inquisit Web software.[1] The IAT target categories were

represented by Hispanic vs. Anglo sounding names.[2] Face stimuli for light vs. dark skin color

were validated in previous IAT studies (Nosek et al. 2007). See Supplementary Material for

sample characteristics, survey items, a detailed description of the IAT procedure, IAT stimuli,

and a sample IAT screen.

Results

Figure 1 presents empirical distributions of racialized images of Hispanics, measured via IAT D-

scores. Theoretically, they can range from −2 (fastest association of Hispanic names with light-

skinned faces and Anglo names with dark-skinned faces) to 2 (fastest association of Hispanic

names with dark-skinned faces and Anglo names with light-skinned faces). The D-score of 0

indicates no difference in speed of associating Hispanic names with light-skinned faces and

Anglo names with dark-skinned faces. The distribution is unimodal, with the mode situated close

to the D-score of 1 indicating a moderately strong pro-stereotypical racialized image—that is,

Hispanics being perceived as darker-skinned than Anglos. The mean is significantly different

from zero ($m = 0.74$, $p < .001$). Positive D-scores indicating faster associations of Hispanic

names with dark-skinned faces and Anglo names with light-skinned faces, rather than vice versa,

are observed for 96% of respondents, meaning that the pro-stereotypical racialized image of

Hispanics is almost universally shared within the sample.[3]

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[1]   https://www.millisecond.com/products/inquisit5/weboverview.aspx

[2]   In the IAT screens, I use the term "English" rather than "Anglo" since it is likely more familiar to the
participants. The term "Hispanic" is used because the IAT design cannot incorporate gender as the third
dimension in variation of the stimuli (i.e., display "Latina" for female names/faces and "Latino" for male ones).

[3]   Since counter-stereotypical racialized images—Hispanics being perceived as lighter-skinned than Anglos—are
effectively absent in the studied sample, I use the term "racialized images" throughout the paper only referring
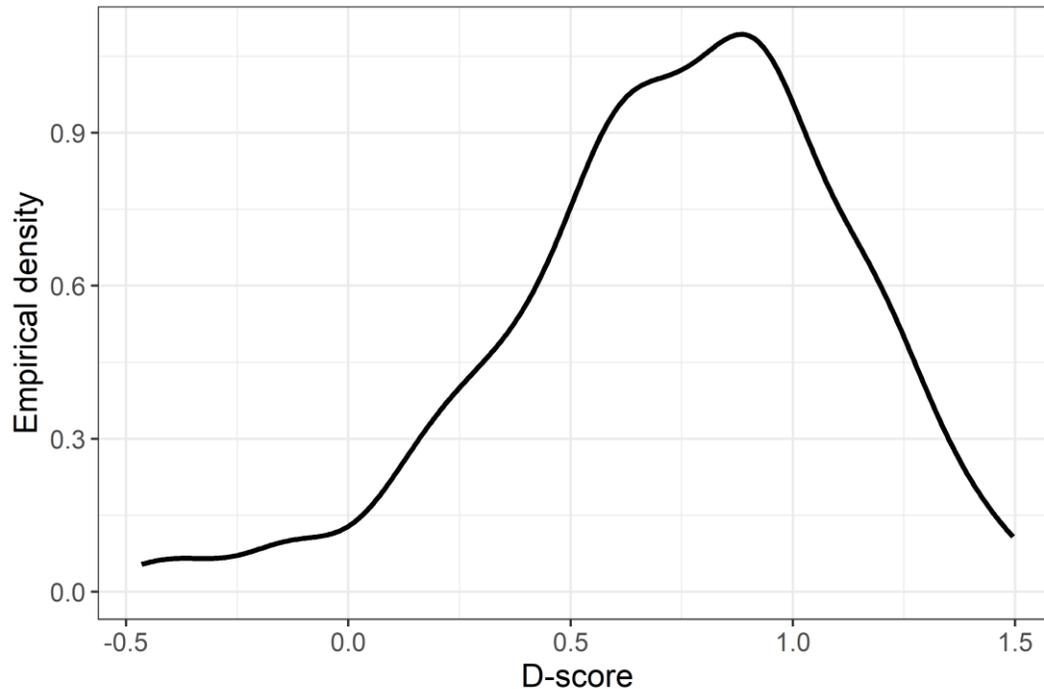to the pro-stereotypical ones.

Figure 1. Distribution of racialized images of Hispanics. Greater D-score = faster association of Hispanic names with dark-skinned faces and Anglo names with light-skinned faces

Attitudinal and ideological covariates of racialized images of Hispanics are presented in

Figure 2. Racialization of Hispanics is positively and significantly related to anti-Hispanic

prejudice and opposition to immigration. Respondents who see Hispanics as darker-skinned also

identify more strongly as Republicans. Finally, having racialized images of Hispanics is

negatively related to the Democratic feeling thermometer. The correlations with the Republican

feeling thermometer and symbolic ideology are in the expected direction but are not significant
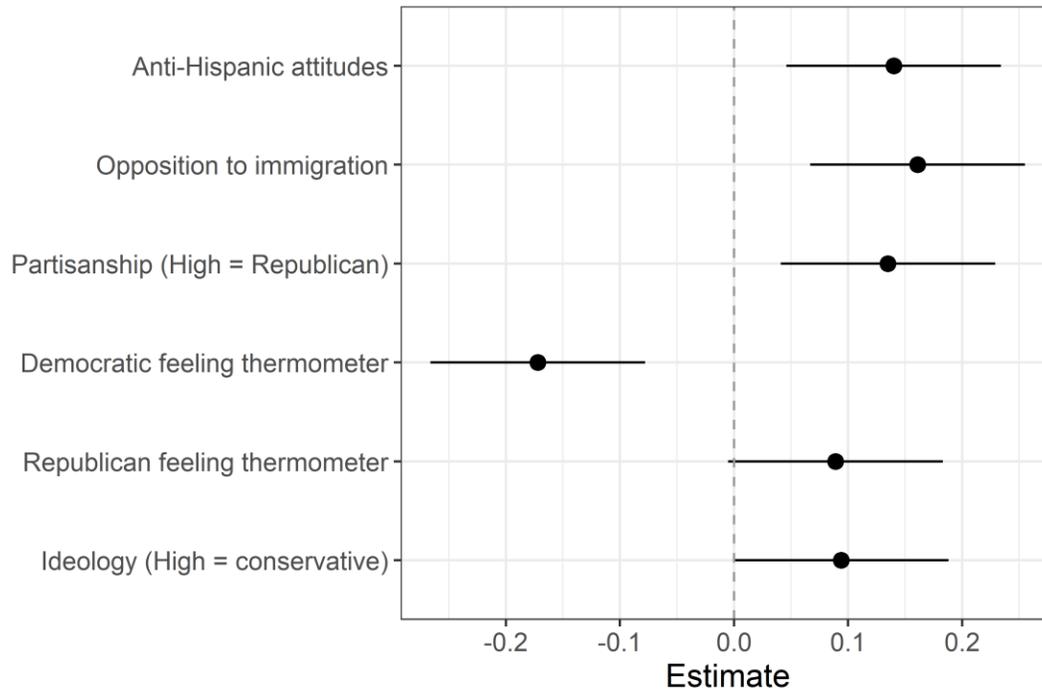
on the 95% confidence level.

Figure 2. Covariates of racialized images of Hispanics. Standardized bivariate OLS regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals

Study 2: Britain

In Study 2, I measured racialized images of Muslims in Britain. The choice of the stereotypically immigrant group again followed results reported in existing studies. Anti-immigration attitudes in Europe are well known to be largely driven by perceived threat associated specifically with Islam and Muslims (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016). Also, Muslims, despite being a social group defined by religion, are subject to racial prejudice and dehumanization (Lajevardi and Oskooii 2018). The goals of Study 2 were to replicate results of Study 1 in a different country and with a different stereotypically immigrant group.

Data and Method

I recruited the study participants using Prolific, a crowdsourcing platform similar to MTurk. The survey included questions about opinions on immigration, the 11-point left–right ideology scale, the IAT task, and standard demographics. Prejudice against Islam and Muslims were measured

using a shortened version of the Islamophobia scale (Imhoff and Recker 2012). Respondents were asked about their feelings toward the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). The IAT component of the survey was administered using the survey-based IAT tool (Carpenter et al. 2019). Target groups in the IAT were represented by Muslim vs. Christian sounding names. The overall IAT procedure and the stimuli for skin color were similar to Study 1. See Supplementary Material for survey items, IAT stimuli, and a sample IAT screen.

Results

Figure 3 presents empirical distributions of the racialized images of Muslims. Just as in the case of Hispanics in the United States, the distribution is unimodal, with the mode close to the D-score of 1 indicating a moderately strong pro-stereotypical racialized image—that is, Muslims perceived as darker-skinned than Christians. Mean is significantly different from zero ($m = 0.90$, $p < .001$). More than 99% of respondents have positive D-scores indicating faster associations of Muslim names with dark-skinned faces and Christian names with light-skinned faces.
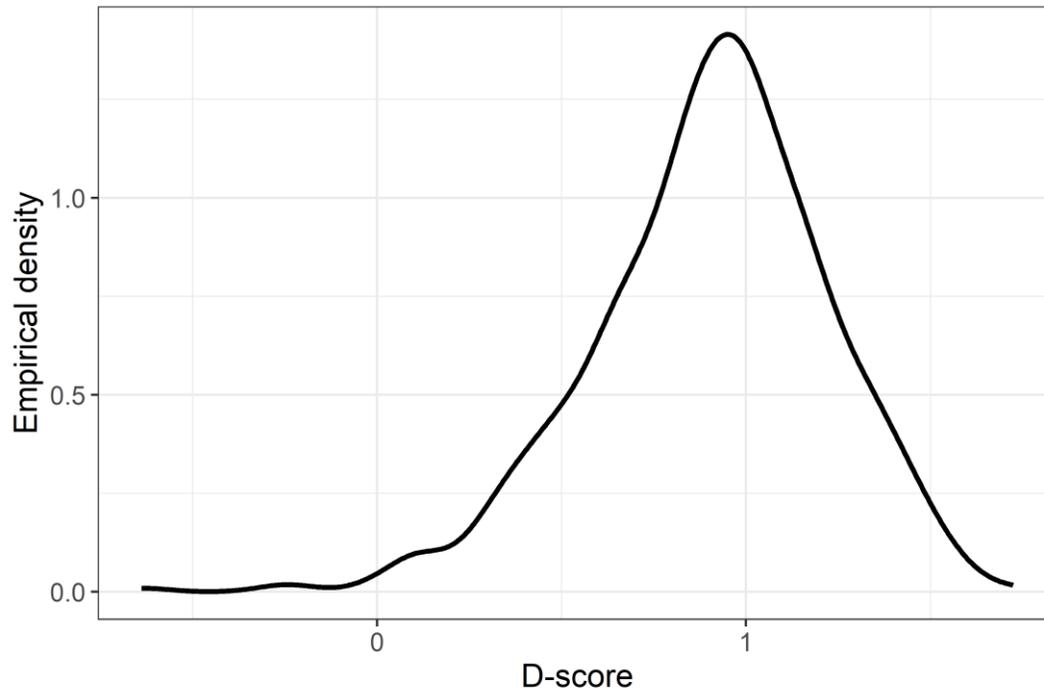
Figure 3. Distribution of racialized images of Muslims. Greater D-score = faster association of Muslim names with dark-skinned faces and Christian names with light-skinned faces

Figure 4 presents some political covariates for racialized images of Muslims. They are significantly related to Islamophobia, anti-immigration attitudes, and right-wing ideology. Racialized images of Muslims are also associated with positive affect toward UKIP, the major anti-immigrant party in Britain, and self-reported right-wing ideology. At the same time, these images are not significantly correlated with feelings towards the mainstream British parties: Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrats.
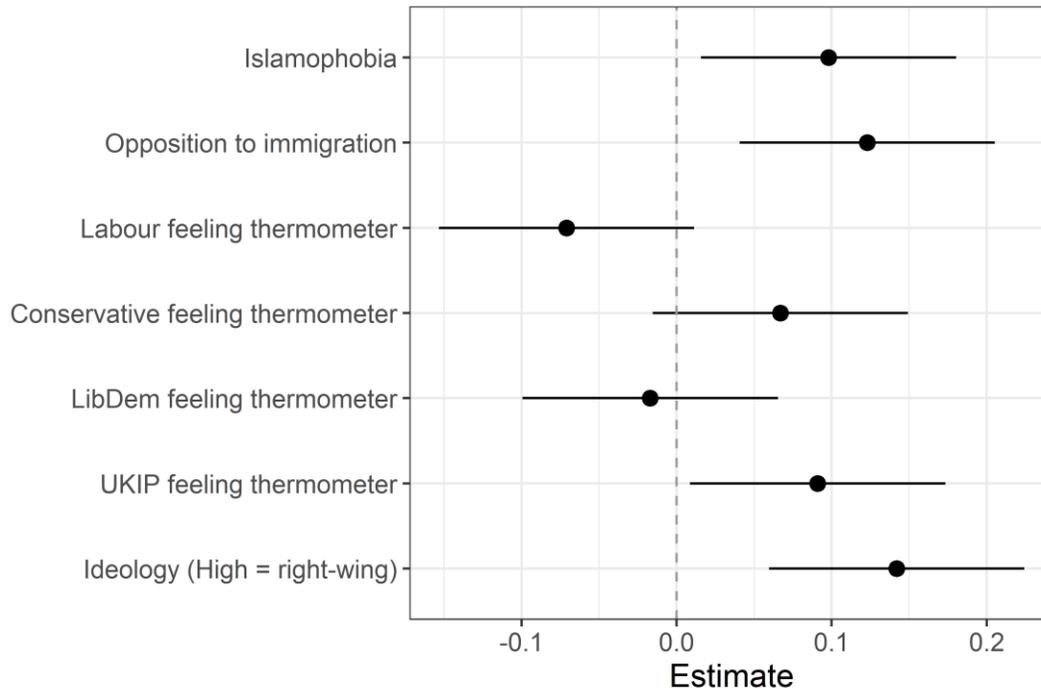
Figure 4. Covariates of racialized images of Muslims. Standardized bivariate OLS regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals

Conclusion

In this paper, I have proposed a strategy to measure racialized images of social groups building upon insights from the literature on social cognition. The measurement focuses on skin color: a racialized physical trait that serves as an important basis of racial categorizations, but at the same time is devoid of any inherent substantive meaning. Presented evidence from Studies 1 and 2 confirms that members of the public in the United States and Britain hold racialized images of the stereotypically immigrant groups in the two countries: Hispanics/Latinos and Muslims respectively. Moreover, I have demonstrated that individual differences in racialized images of these groups are significantly related to group-specific prejudice, opposition to immigration, and support for right-wing political parties.

Results presented in the paper have some limitations related to its methodology and scope—that can be potentially addressed in future research. First, I do not directly engage with

the question on whether racialized images of stereotypically immigrant groups are causally prior with respect to political attitudes. Second, the data used in the two studies, while being more diverse than most traditional convenience samples, is not perfectly representative of the U.S. or British populations. Third, it might be of interest to investigate the role of racialized physical traits other than skin color, such as physiognomy, or hair texture (Lemi and Brown 2019), in how stereotypically immigrant groups are imagined by natives.

Even considering these limitations, results reported in this paper bear direct relevance for understanding anti-immigration attitudes in industrial democracies. Recent experimental findings have demonstrated that natives' immigration opinions are only weakly, if at all, affected by immigrants' race. By applying a direct individual-level measure for racialized images of stereotypically immigrant groups, this study comes to a more pessimistic conclusion by showing that immigration preferences are not race-neutral. Its findings indicate that cultural and religious differences between social groups are injected with racial meanings—with important implications for politics of immigration. This result questions researchers' ability to separate "culture" and "race" as distinct components of anti-immigrant backlash in white-majority societies. Importantly, I also show that this conflation is not confined to the United States and can be found in other countries that experience political conflict around immigration.

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Supplementary Material

Study 1: United States

Sample characteristics

The online survey was implemented on the Qualtrics platform in June 2017. The analyzed sample included only respondents who answered the survey from the United States, had unique IP addresses, and showed acceptable error rates in the IAT component. This yielded 446 valid cases out of 503 submitted questionnaires. The sample was highly educated, with nearly half having Bachelor's degrees or higher (49.2%). The modal age was between 25 and 34 years. Ideologically, the sample was predominantly left-wing, with 48.6% of respondents being liberal.

Anti-immigration attitudes

"We have some questions about what you think would happen if the U.S. permits more immigrants to come to this country. Please rate how likely, in your opinion, each of the following effects would be."

- Immigration will increase economic growth for the nation as a whole (reverse)

- Immigration will decrease wages and the standards of living for the average American worker

- Immigrants will enrich the cultural life in the communities where they choose to live (reverse)

- Immigration will make it harder to keep the country united

- Immigration will lead to further terrorist attacks

- Immigration will cause crime to increase in many communities

Question order randomized.

Answers coded from 1 = *Extremely likely* to 7 = *Extremely unlikely*.

Anti-Hispanic prejudice

"Please indicate how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements."

- In general, Hispanics do not work hard enough to learn English and adapt to American culture

- People in the United States should be more welcoming to Hispanics (reversed)

- Hispanics in this country are not treated fairly for the contributions that they make (reversed)

- Violent crimes committed by Hispanics receive less attention in the media than they should

Question order randomized.

Answers coded from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*.

Partisan feeling thermometers

"Now we would like to get your feelings towards the two main political parties in the U.S. Please rate each party using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like."

- How do you feel about the Democratic Party?

- How do you feel about the Republican Party?

Question order randomized.

Partisanship

- Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an independent, or what?

- Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]?

- Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

Ideology

"We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?"

IAT procedure

Racialized images of Hispanics vis-a-vis Anglos are measured using an original modification of the IAT. It uses the standard IAT architecture that consists of seven blocks. In the first block, a respondent is asked to categorize names as either Hispanic or Anglo (English). Specifically, a participant sees a screen with the words "Hispanic name" in the top left corner and the words "English name" in the top right corner. Names belonging to the two categories randomly appear in the center of the screen and a respondent is asked to quickly sort them by pressing pre-defined left- or right-hand key. In the second block, the same sorting procedure is done for the face stimuli and the "Dark-skin face" and "Light-skin face" categories. In the third block, respondents are asked to perform a combined sorting task that includes both name and face stimuli appearing in the center of the screen. This time, task screen has the words "Hispanic name or Dark-skin face" in the left corner and the words "English name or Light-skin face" in the right corner. The fourth block repeats the combined sorting task from the third block but with more twice stimuli to be sorted. The fifth block repeats the task from the first block but the positions of the target categories in the screen are reversed: "Hispanic name" appears in the top right corner and "English name" appears in the top left corner. The sixth and seventh blocks repeat tasks from

blocks three and four respectively with changed pairings. Specifically, the words "Hispanic name or Light-skin face" appear in the top right corner and the words "English name or Dark-skin face" appear in the top left corner. Using recorded response latencies, the software calculates the IAT D-scores that reflect stronger associations between Hispanic names and dark-skinned faces for positive values, and vice versa.

IAT name stimuli

Hispanic names: Ximena, Mariana, Gabriela, Lucia, Ramona, Camila, Santiago, Diego, Miguel, Alejandro, Juan, Jose

Anglo names: Mary, Elizabeth, Jennifer, Susan, Emily, Margaret, James, John, Robert, Michael, William, David
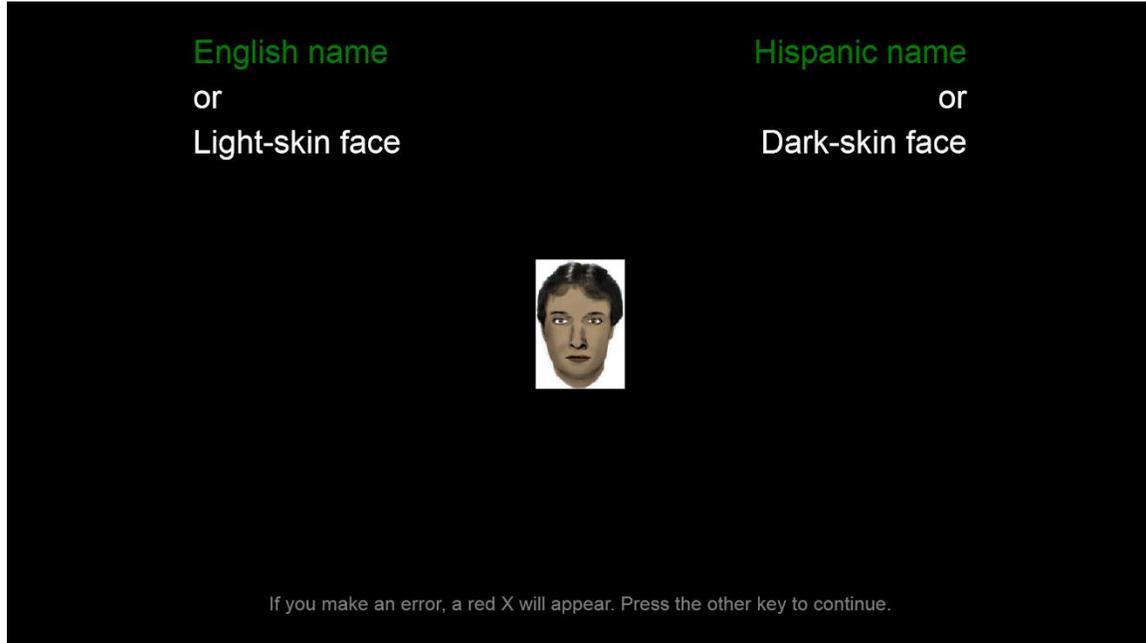
IAT face stimuli

Link to face stimuli: https://www.projectimplicit.net/stimuli.html

IAT sample face stimuli

The same face is represented in light and dark skin.

IAT sample screen (pro-stereotypic sorting, face stimulus)

Study 2: Britain

Anti-immigration attitudes

The online survey was designed and implemented on the Qualtrics platform in December 2017. I used pre-screening allowed by Prolific so that only British nationals born in Britain whose first language was English could participate in the study. As in Study 1, only those who answered the survey from Britain, had unique IP addresses, and showed acceptable error rates in the IAT component were kept in the sample. In total, 571 respondents were included in the analyses. The analyzed sample, similar to the U.S. one, was highly educated, with nearly half having Bachelor's degrees or higher (49.7%). The mean age was approximately 38 years. Ideologically, the sample was predominantly left-wing, with 53.4% of respondents identifying as left-to-center.

Anti-immigration attitudes

"Please answer several questions about immigration to Britain from other countries."

- Would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain's economy that people come to live here from other countries?

Answers coded from 0 = *Bad for economy* to 10 = *Good for economy*.

- Would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?

Answers coded from 0 = *Cultural life undermined* to 10 = *Cultural life enriched*.

- Is Britain made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

Answers coded from 0 = *Worse place to live* to 10 = *Better place to live*.

Answers recoded to higher values denoting stronger anti-immigration attitudes.

Question order randomized.

Islamophobia

"Please answer the following questions about Islam and Muslims. There are no correct or incorrect answers – please just be honest in your responses."

- The Islamic world is backward and unresponsive to new realities.

- It is wrong to characterize the entire Islamic world as one single uniform formation. (reversed)

- Islam shares the same universal ethical principles as other major world religions. (reversed)

- Islam is an archaic, out-of-date religion that is unable to adjust to the present.

- Compared to other religious and philosophical approaches, Islam is rather primitive.

- It is wrong to claim that a clash of cultures exists between Islam and the West. (reversed)

- Islam has an aggressive side that predisposes it toward terrorism.

- Islam is a religion rather than a political ideology, and thus Islam itself has nothing to do with politics or war. (reversed)

Question order randomized.

Answers coded from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*.

Partisan feeling thermometers

"Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about the following political parties?"

- Labour

- Conservatives

- Liberal Democrats

- United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

Question order randomized.

Ideology

"In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right." Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?"

IAT procedure

Same as in Study 1, with different group categories and name stimuli

IAT name stimuli

Muslim names: Mohamed, Omar, Ahmed, Yousouf, Hamza, Khalid, Hussein, Usman, Fatima, Salma, Zeinab, Aisha

Christian names: Jack, Harry, George, William, Oscar, Michael, Charlie, Jacob, Amelia, Olivia, Emily, Grace

IAT face stimuli

Same as in Study 1

IAT sample screen (pro-stereotypic sorting, name stimulus)

Muslim name	Christian name
or	or
Dark-skin face	Light-skin face

Usman