The Psychology of Backlash Against Critical Race Theory

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Abstract

Teaching about race and racism is essential for creating a more just and equitable society; yet recently lawmakers have worked to censor this material from American classrooms. Historical evidence shows that these efforts are not unprecedented, but rather reflect a pattern of backlash as a response to dramatic instances of social change. I examined whether priming nostalgia for a time when political parties were less polarized made conservatives more supportive of teaching about racism, and whether using the term "CRT" undermined that support. Participants (N = 524, 60.5% Republican, 30.7% Independent) were presented with profiles of five fictional candidates for school board, ranging from liberal to conservative, who gave responses to questions about teaching racism in schools. Participants first received a manipulation of either personal or collective nostalgia, then read candidate profiles that either specifically mentioned "Critical Race Theory" or left that phrase out. Contrary to my hypotheses, participants overwhelmingly voted for the two most liberal candidates, regardless of condition or political affiliation. Participants assigned to the "Critical Race Theory" condition were more likely to support "policies that restrict the teaching of race and racism in schools." These results indicate that including the phrase "Critical Race Theory" in political arguments could encourage participants to want to enact educational bans generally; however, when faced with the actual reasoning of each candidate, they still overwhelmingly supported the liberal argument over the conservative.

Introduction

The term "Critical Race Theory" is currently one of the political world's most hot-button issues. Despite its prominence, Critical Race Theory was not familiar to the majority of the American public until a few years ago, when right wing politicians began attacking the term.

Many scholars of Critical Race Theory claim that conservative media is misusing the concept to serve their own purposes. Familiarity with the term "Critical Race Theory" has grown exponentially in the past few years, expanding from the niche academic sphere that it was once confined to, and now, for the majority of the American population, represents a vague overarching term for a culture war pitting the left against the right. Originally designed to critically examine the presence and perpetuation of racism in the US, CRT has become an umbrella term used by conservatives to describe and attack any rhetoric they deem as "anti-White" or "un-American". In short, the way the term Critical Race Theory is used is now a far cry from the complex academic framework that it was originally designed to represent.

Critical Race Theory was first coined in the late 1980's by law professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in response to the academic framework established by Derrick Bell, whose work centered on the implications of understanding racism as an inherent fixture in American life. At its core, Critical Race Theory is based on the premise that race is not a "biologically grounded feature … but a socially constructed … category," as well as that racism is inherent in the United States' legal structures (Duignan, 2023).

While Critical Race Theory has proved to be a groundbreaking theory and useful in many regards, it has also been the subject of extensive questioning and critique from both internal and external sources. One of the original critiques of CRT when it was first posited was its bias towards Black-White discrimination, which largely omitted the struggles of women and other POC. These critics argued that by not acknowledging the complex ways that marginalized identities can coexist, the theory was by and large catering towards a racialized contextualization of patriarchy (Hutchinson, 2004). As a result of this critique, CRT was adapted to become one of the primary frameworks for backing issues of intersectionality across gender identity, sexual

orientation, and religion, in addition to its backing of its original concerns of affirmative action, voting rights, and school desegregation. Another internal critique of Critical Race Theory is that its almost-exclusive focus on race promotes the internalization of stereotypes, and that it should abandon racialized language. This idea is known as "progressive race blindness" (Hutchinson, 2004).

These internal critiques of CRT are based on extensive critical analysis, which often result in strengthening the articulation of the theory. However, there have been many more external than internal critiques of CRT, overwhelmingly from conservatives with the goal of delegitimizing rather than improving upon it. One of the most common criticisms of CRT is that it disrespects existing legal institutions by criticizing their ability to bring about social change for minority groups. This argument chooses to ignore how Critical Race Theorists are actively trying to improve the law with their work, rather than creating a system of upheaval. Another criticism is the theory's acceptance of personal experiences as a tool for research. This would be problematic if Critical Race Theorists did not also employ established theories and policy analysis in their work. This argument also ignores the fact that personal experiences are more often excluded than included in CRT work (Hutchinson, 2004).

Despite the often biased nature of conservative critiques against Critical Race Theory, most of them do, to some extent, attempt to critique the theory itself – something that can't be said about current anti-CRT rhetoric. Since it originated as its own school of thought, Critical Race Theory has been studied in law schools and universities, but not in institutions below the undergraduate level (Duignan, 2023).

It was a relatively obscure theory with the American public, until the conservative party successfully transformed it into a well-known buzzword for educational censorship. Much of this

success is due to one conservative activist – Christopher Rufo – who saw the opportunity to use the phrase to encompass a wide range of "woke" ideologies. "The goal," he tweeted, "is to have the public read something in the paper and immediately think 'Critical Race Theory.' We have decodified the term and recodified it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans" (Beauchamp 2023). The new bans around CRT are not reflective of the academic theory – something Chris Rufo, one of the most influential conservatives behind these bans, is readily willing to admit.

Instead, anti-CRT policies aim to restrict topics of race, racism and diversity being taught in schools (Duignan, 2021). Most of these anti-CRT bills are vague in their wording, leaving room for selective interpretation and enforcement. For example, Alabama's SB 129, which was passed on March 19 of 2024, bans the teaching of "divisive concepts" in a 7-item list. This list does not ban any specific lessons from classrooms, but rather aims to eliminate certain messages from being promoted in classroom settings. Among other things, the list bans the teaching of the ideas that people are "inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously" and that "fault, blame, or bias should be assigned … on the basis of race" (AL Legislature 2024). This language also raises the concerns that teachers might not know what is safe to teach, and will feel pressured to self-censor to avoid punishment (Sawchuck, 2021).

As of 2025, only six state legislatures,[1] as well as the District of Columbia, have not proposed a CRT ban. In eighteen states, some iteration of this ban is already in effect (World Population Review, 2025). The battle to remove so-called CRT from school classrooms is disheartening when looking at its potential implications for education in the United States. These laws would promote inaccurate teachings of history, which could have a disproportionately negative impact on minority communities who continue to face the consequences of past

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[1] California, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont

instances of injustice and discrimination. In a poll of 2,000 teachers interviewed nationwide,

37% said they were more likely to leave the profession if they experienced a push for laws that

would "prevent honest teaching and conversations" (Stand for Children, 2022).

The "Lost Cause"

Many scholars have interpreted the current attack on education through the scapegoat of

Critical Race Theory as a backlash response to the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests. Mirriam

Webster defines backlash as "a strong adverse reaction (as to a recent political or social

development)." The Black Lives Matter movement has existed since 2014 but experienced a

drastic increase in membership and publicity in 2020, when protests against the violent murder

of George Floyd erupted throughout the country. A central message of these protests called for

institutional reform efforts, in the police department and elsewhere, that would begin to

acknowledge and abate the oppressive legacy of racism in the United States (Hamilton 2021).

These calls for reform were clearly in opposition to conservative ideology, which prefers

upholding tradition and the implementation of slow, moderate reforms when necessary. It is not a

coincidence, scholars argue, that the first propositions that aimed to ban Critical Race Theory

from schools were introduced immediately in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests

(Hamilton 2021).

Many other moments of progress in US history have also been met with intense backlash

in the education system. Efforts to prevent children from becoming "indoctrinated" with new and

controversial beliefs is exemplified now through curriculum policing and book banning, neither

of which are new tactics. Some topics that are now widely accepted and taught in public schools

were once seen as controversial and met with intense efforts to ban them from classrooms.

Nearly a century ago, the rising popularity of Darwinism caused conservatives to engage in

efforts to ban the theory of evolution from public schools. The rise of socialism and the Red Scare in the 1950's resulted in another book ban, when conservatives tried to censor books that discussed economic inequality in schools (Sawchuck, 2021; Greene, 2021).

Arguably the most influential case of educational backlash in United States history was the Lost Cause ideology, which emerged shortly after the end of the Civil War. It was perpetuated by the former states of the Confederacy as a way to "preserve the honor of the South" after a devastating defeat (Blight 2023). The Union's victory and abolishment of slavery completely eviscerated the pride of the South, and resentment grew during the Reconstruction era. Eventually, the states of the former Confederacy created a new narrative that painted their loss and humiliation in a more favorable light. This narrative reassured White Southerners that the war was a "lost cause" from the beginning due to the Union's superior resources. The narrative also claimed that, while it was inevitable that the Confederacy would be overpowered physically, it did not have to lose its ideology (Blight 2023).

The only books allowed in Southern schools were those that depicted the Antebellum South in a specific favorable way. There was a particular emphasis on the myth of the benevolent slave owner, and on states' rights instead of slavery as the cause of the Civil War. This led to a new narrative, one that portrayed the Confederate States as the valiant underdog, fighting for their rights against a more tyrannical power that wanted to take away their livelihood for no good reason. Groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy campaigned to have any textbooks that did not align with their views banned from schools, and were successful in doing so (Blight 2023).

The success of the Lost Cause ideology ultimately came from its integration into Northern states. In the years after the Civil War ended, American leaders became more interested

in reconciliation with the former Confederacy than continuing Reconstruction efforts. The government's decision to delegate civil rights legislation to individual states clearly illustrates their shift in priorities. Many Northern states began adopting the Lost Cause narrative into their own classrooms, as well. This acceptance of the Lost Cause as the truth paved the way for the Redemption era, when African American civil and political rights were systematically taken away (Blight 2023). This period gave birth to the Jim Crow laws, and terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan formed to enforce them.

Even though the South lost the Civil War, the success of its fictional narrative made it victorious in the years that followed. The mission of the Lost Cause was to rewrite the history of slavery and the Civil War, and it was largely successful in doing so. Even today, though the term "Lost Cause" is not widely known, its effects in education are still present. In 2011, according to a poll by Pew Research Center, only 38% of people thought that the Civil War was fought to abolish slavery, and 48% thought it was fought due to states' rights. This statistic alone demonstrates the enormous power that false narratives have to rewrite history and shape a culture.

Psychological concepts

Backlash in education is clearly not a new concept, but a prevailing pattern that occurs in the aftermath of social progress and change. Events such as emancipation, the emergence of socialism and evolutionary theory, and most recently the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement have all inspired intense backlash, manifesting in a series of attacks on school curricula.

This type of backlash is dominated by conservatives, which, like most other ideologies, is characterized by several dominant thinking patterns. Understanding the general psychological concepts behind conservative thinking is necessary to mitigate backlash responses through

educational censorship. Understanding the psychology of conservatism can provide insight into why voters may gravitate towards politicians who promote censorship, as well as potential ways to appeal to conservative voters that do not threaten their core social values.

Conservatism is an ideology that was founded upon the justification of pre-existing systems and resistance to change. The roots of conservatism can be traced to philosopher Edmund Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution (Lammers 2023). Burke was critical of the revolutionary call to overthrow the monarchy because he believed that the mere existence of an institution was indicative of its usefulness. Revolution was, in Burke's view, inherently harmful because social change was more likely to bring about chaos than beneficial reform. Conservatism is therefore primarily concerned with preserving the status quo, and has been consistently resistant towards new policies that aim to bring about social change (Lammers 2023).

Schwabe et al. (2016) define conservatism as "a generalized resistance to change and ambiguity which is expressed as a preference for safe, traditional and conventional forms of institutions and behavior" p. 516. It makes ideological sense that when faced with instances of dramatic social progress, such as the Reconstruction era or the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, conservatives feel threatened and motivated to resist that change. When threats are sudden and unanticipated, responses to those threats are stronger (Goodman et al., 2018). Psychologically, threats to the status quo result in an increased conservative effort to restore core social motives. The core social motives are those that underlie all social human behavior, and "determine the nature of the situation, filtered through the person's interpretations" (Fiske, 2018). The five core social motives are the motives to belong, understand, trust, control, and improve esteem.

Maintaining the core social motives is more important to people when a threat to the future is perceived, particularly maintaining a sense of control (Kashima et al., 2022).

Specifically, conservatives demonstrate a greater need for structure and are more threatened by stimuli that represent risk than liberals (Carney et al., 2008, Malka et al., 2014, Schreiber et al., 2013). The conservative need for security and predictability, paired with an increased threat response during instances of uncertainty or risk, can lead to increased feelings of loss of control when their sense of stability is challenged. One possible explanation for the prevalence of censorship in schools is that it appeals to the conservative ideal of using children to maintain the status quo, whose opinions are largely shaped by what they learn in the classroom. Deciding what children can or can't learn in the classroom directly appeals to maintaining the core social motive of control (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997).

Additionally, several studies have shown that loss of control within the conservative party can predict an increase in conspiracy perceptions, especially in the face of "a salient threatening outgroup" (Dow et al., 2022). The association between perceived lack of control and belief in conspiracies can partially be explained by the fact that people who are predisposed to conservatism are more likely to take cues from the outside environment about what beliefs to adopt as their own (Schwabe et al., 2016). This means that the most commonly believed conspiracies are the ones that are "easily constructed and readily available" to the public (Dow et al., 2022). The current attacks against Critical Race Theory are not commonly thought of as conspiracies. However, the idea of a perceived system threat (ie, the 2020 BLM protests) prompting a loss of perceived control in conservatives, and in turn leading to an effort to censor "salient threatening outgroups" through education, matches the prevailing pattern of threat and backlash that has existed within conservatism since its inception (Dow et al., 2022).

Another core characteristic of conservatism is its reliance on system justification (Nilsson and Jost, 2020). System justification refers to the idea that people justify existing institutions

even when they are harmful. Everyone engages in system justification to some extent, even those who are disadvantaged by these systems. An example of this is the denial of gender discrimination among women, including those who have experienced its effects directly (Napier et al., 2020). The prevalence of system justification is overlooked, however, because most people justify systems simply through acceptance of the status quo (Jost and Van der Toorn, 2012). Active system justification is much more likely to occur when the systems in question are being threatened (Jost and Van der Toorn, 2012). This is one reason that system-challenging efforts such as the Black Lives Matter Movement are often met with such intense backlash, particularly through censorship.

The prevalence of system justification is due to the short-term psychological benefits that it provides. Engaging in system justification is thought to satisfy people's epistemic needs for consistency and meaning in the world, their existential needs to mitigate threat and distress, as well as the need to achieve a shared reality within one's relationships (Jost and Van der Toorn, 2012). In short, system justification fulfills the core social motives and makes people happier, at least temporarily. The denial of gender discrimination among women is associated with greater life satisfaction (Napier et al., 2020). Consistent with this idea, conservatives have reported overall greater life satisfaction than liberals (Napier and Jost, 2008). However, only those who benefit from existing systems benefit long term from engaging in system justification. People who engage in system justification despite being disadvantaged by the systems in place only experience temporary psychological benefits, because in the long run, these institutions still harm them (Jost and Van der Toorn, 2012).

While conservatism is inherently system-justifying, liberalism, on the other hand, is system-challenging (Jost and Van der Toorn, 2012). In other words, when movements that

criticize existing social systems emerge, they do not challenge the core values of liberalism like they do conservatism. This results in a lack of cognitive dissonance within liberal individual ideology, and an effort to contribute to the change, rather than to hinder its progress.

Another important aspect of conservatism is nostalgia, which Mirriam Webster defines as a "yearning … of some past period or irrevocable condition." Collective nostalgia refers to an experience of nostalgia that is contingent upon thinking about oneself in terms of a specific group or social identity. It refers to the desire to return to a shared ideological past, even when that past has not been experienced directly by those who share this nostalgia (Lammers, 2023). Collective nostalgia prevails, for example, in aspects of the Lost Cause ideology, such as the romanticization of the Antebellum South, that have persisted more than a century after the Civil War's end. The strength and persistence of collective nostalgia in conservatism is indicative of just how important preserving the past is to the ideology, even when the "past" in this case is based more on abstract idealizations than it is grounded in the reality of historical fact.

Like system justification, collective nostalgia has been associated with numerous psychological benefits. It allows people to create a shared understanding of their history within their chosen ingroup, which fosters a sense of belonging. It also provides a sense of continuity and connection from the past to the present, which creates feelings of security looking towards the future – something that is especially important given how conservatism is founded on resisting change. Collective nostalgia is also more salient in the face of threat, especially from an outgroup. Outgroup threat can create feelings of discontinuity within the ingroup, and feelings of collective nostalgia are more strongly activated in order to restore that sense of continuity (Lammers, 2023).

System justification and collective nostalgia are both examples of ambivalence, which in this context refers to the idea of simultaneously justifying and condemning the current American system. It is characterized by a desire to keep the systems that ensure White supremacy in place, while at the same time returning to the oppressive systems of the past. This kind of ambivalence, which at its core focuses on a desire to return to past greatness in the face of perceived victimization and loss, is essential to many conservative narratives, including White Nationalism. These ambivalent narratives are characterized by the denial of the perpetration of past and present injustices against POC, which ensures that the perceived virtuous nature of the ingroup remains intact (Reyna et al., 2022).

Both the Lost Cause movement and the current pushback against Critical Race Theory have been fueled by ambivalent rhetoric. The Lost Cause was more overt in its efforts to deny the history of slavery and racism and romanticize life in the Antebellum South, which set a precedent for the perpetuation of White supremacy narratives in American education (Reyna et al., 2022). Politicians advocating for CRT bans are also perpetuating ambivalent rhetoric by claiming that teaching about the US's history of racism in schools must mean an increase in discrimination against White people. By attempting to control the narratives of perpetration and victimization that are taught in schools, conservative politicians ensure that "the valorization of Whiteness can be passed on unabated" (Reyna et al., 2022).

In addition to rhetoric that perpetuates ambivalence narratives, efforts to ban CRT also perpetuate symbolic racism. Symbolic racism refers to a more modern form of racism that is not so explicit in nature, but that still results in the derogation of minority groups, primarily through referring to these groups in abstract and dehumanizing terms. In the United States, beliefs that Black people no longer face discrimination and that structural inequalities do not exist are

examples of symbolic racism (Sears and Henry, 2003). The current attacks against CRT are perpetuating symbolic racism through the bans that aim to eliminate the teaching of racism as an ongoing issue that is often perpetuated through societal systems. This is especially harmful due to the studies that have found that symbolic racism serves as a link between political conservatism and racial prejudice (Sears and Henry, 2003).

CRT bans also have implications for increasing our society's tolerance of racism (TOR), which refers to the belief that racist acts are acceptable, or at least not condemnable. Like symbolic racism, TOR has been associated with prejudice and support for social hierarchy, as well as the perpetuation of racial inequality (Hunt et al., 2021). It is reasonable to assume that educating people about the realities of racism could reduce TOR. However, efforts to ban the teaching of present-day racism have the potential to do the opposite. By preventing children from learning about the realities of racism and the ways it is implicitly condoned in our society, CRT bans are paving the way for a society that is fueled by ignorance and prejudice.

Solutions

Backlash in education has occurred repeatedly in response to new instances of progress and change. Current efforts to ban CRT from classrooms are only the most recent instance of this; historical patterns give good reason to assume that educational backlash will persist in the future. And, as the Lost Cause ideology exemplified, this kind of backlash has the potential to bring consequences that persist long after the initial frenzy abates. It has the potential to affect not only the quality of education, but also to perpetuate ignorance and the acceptance of racist or otherwise discriminatory policies and actions.

While it is inevitable that right-wing politicians and extremists will engage in efforts to ban topics in education in the future, it may be possible to change the minds of voters. Previous

studies have demonstrated the importance of knowing the differences between conservative and liberal mindsets when thinking about ways of changing voters' minds. Conservatives are more prone to feelings of nostalgia, whereas liberal rhetoric is predominantly future-focused. Conservatives also conceptualize risk differently from liberals. While there has been no difference in conservative and liberal risk-taking behaviors, conservatives do have a greater fear response to perceived risks (Schreiber et al. 2013). A 2018 study found that framing traditionally liberal policies in a conservative way (ie, with more emphasis on the past) significantly increased conservative support for these policies. This was true across a variety of issues, including criminal justice leniency, gun control, immigration, and social diversity (Lammers and Baldwin, 2018). Conservatives deeply value tradition, and tend to see new future-oriented policy proposals as high-risk. Therefore, it makes sense that they are more likely to support liberal policies when they are framed in a way that seems to uphold past values.

Deep canvassing is another intervention point that uses various psychological concepts to engage in personal, non-confrontational conversations with voters who support discriminatory policies. It has proven to have a high success rate in changing voters' minds, in a large part due to the non-judgemental nature of the discussions. Several of the most powerful psychological processes activated during deep canvassing are active processing, self persuasion, cognitive dissonance, and perspective-taking. In other words, participants' minds are changed through actively thinking about the issue at hand. By taking the perspective of a person who has been previously harmed by the issue, they experience cognitive dissonance as they realize that their prejudices are fundamentally in conflict with their core values. Since people's core values are often more deeply embedded than their prejudices, they persuade themselves that they need to change their prejudices in order to maintain these core values and relieve any cognitive

dissonance. This act of self-persuasion is what makes deep canvassing so effective and long-lasting (Brennan and Jackson, 2022). While deep canvassing is not a scalable intervention method due to its time-consuming and individualistic nature, the psychological processes that it engages have implications for other, more widely applicable, intervention methods.

The current study examined whether collective nostalgia, one of the core facets of conservatism, can be employed in a way that would make conservatives more open to electing officials who support teaching about racism in schools. A 2020 study conducted by Wohl et al. found that priming a sense of openness-based collective nostalgia in conservatives led to a decrease in anti-immigrant sentiments against Muslim immigrants. Openness-based collective nostalgia refers to the idea of longing for a past that was more accepting – in Wohl et al.'s case, in terms of religious diversity – instead of one that was closed-off and hostile towards outsiders. The current study has adopted language from the Wohl et al. manipulation, but instead of priming nostalgia for increased religious diversity, it primed nostalgia for an America that was more open "in terms of a greater exchange of ideas and less hostility between political parties." This study invoked a sense of longing for the past, which is inherent to the conservative ideology, anticipating that doing so would prevent conservative core values from becoming threatened, as they often are when faced with liberal rhetoric. Since collective nostalgia is an important phenomenon in conservatism, priming it could cause a decrease in cognitive dissonance – also seen in deep canvassing processes – and encourage conservatives to see certain issues in a new light.

This study also examined whether the inclusion of the phrase "Critical Race Theory" affected how participants voted for candidates. Participants read statements from school board candidates who either did or did not specifically mention the phrase "CRT." "CRT" is a highly

politicized phrase and previous studies – including deep canvassing – have shown that conservatives are more likely to change their minds in a depoliticized environment.

I hypothesized that if the inclusion of this phrase impacted voting behavior, it would demonstrate the importance of triggering phrases in the conservative agenda, as well as emphasize the importance of avoiding these phrases in liberal rhetoric.

Encouraging people to think critically about their beliefs in a non-politicized manner is important

The study had a two by two design, and recruited mostly conservative and independent voters. The primary dependent variable measured whether participants voted "yes" or "no" (defined as approval voting) on the candidates that they read about. They were also asked to answer several questions on a scale ranging from 1-100 about their feelings towards members of the Democratic Party, members of the Republican Party, Independent voters, the approval voting method, stricter absentee policies to address the COVID achievement gap, and policies that restrict what schools teach about race and racism in the US. Participant responses to these questions acted as secondary dependent variables.

Hypotheses

1. I hypothesized that including the phrase "Critical Race Theory" would make people less receptive to supporting school board candidates who advocated for teaching about racism in public schools, regardless of nostalgia condition.

2. I hypothesized that priming openness-based collective nostalgia would make people more receptive to supporting school board candidates who advocated for teaching about racism in schools, but only if Critical Race Theory was not mentioned.

Two pilot studies were conducted to ensure the manipulations were effective and made logical sense to participants. Below I report the methods and results from these two pilot studies before reporting the methods and results for the main study.
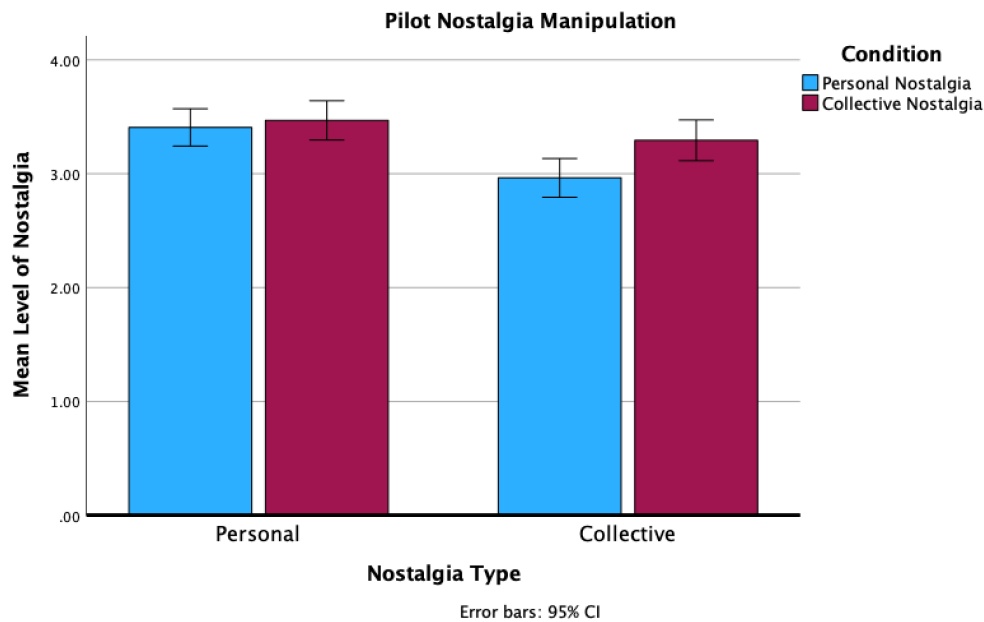
Pilot Study 1

This pilot study was designed to test whether the personal and collective nostalgia manipulations that were adapted from Wohl et al., 2020 were effective. I recruited 90 participants on Prolific, all of whom listed either "conservative" or "moderate" for their political affiliation. After giving informed consent, they were then randomly assigned to either the personal or collective nostalgia condition, where they were instructed to respond to a prompt designed to elicit greater feelings of either personal or collective nostalgia. On average, participants wrote 38 words, and took on average 42 seconds to respond. Participants could advance in the survey after a minimum of 30 seconds passed, and were asked 10 questions designed to measure their feelings of collective and personal nostalgia on a 5 point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. They were then asked to indicate their age, gender, and political affiliation. Despite only recruiting Republican and independent participants in Prolific, 32% of participants indicated that they were liberal, 27% indicated moderate, and 42% indicated conservative.

The personal nostalgia ($\alpha = 0.73$) and collective nostalgia ($\alpha = 0.77$) items were found from reliable subscales, and were averaged together. I ran a 2 (nostalgia type) by 2 (condition) mixed model ANOVA and found that the effect of the Nostalgia Condition on the type of nostalgia experienced was marginally significant, $F(1, 76) = 2.96$, $p = 0.09$, *eta squared* $= 0.04$. On average, participants in both conditions experienced greater feelings of personal than collective nostalgia, $F(1,76) = 4.37$, $p = 0.04$, *eta squared* $= 0.05$. Participants assigned to the collective nostalgia condition (N = 37) experienced marginally higher feelings of collective

nostalgia ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.55$) than did participants (N = 41) in the personal nostalgia condition ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.54$), $t(76) = -2.66$, $p = 0.01$. There was not a difference in feelings of personal nostalgia between the two conditions.

Figure 1

Pilot Study 2

This pilot study was designed to test whether the responses drafted for each school board candidate seemed reasonable and plausible. This was because while each response was inspired by real arguments, the language of these arguments was edited to best fit the purposes of the study. 28 Republican and independent-identifying participants were recruited using Prolific's screen tools. In reality, 60% participants identified as Republican, 20% identified as independent, and 20% identified as Democrats. All participants read responses to questions about academic achievement and how to handle building renovations that ostensibly came from 5 different school board candidates. They then indicated whether the arguments seemed

reasonable and plausible and whether each candidate seemed liberal or conservative on a 5 point scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." See Tables 1 and 2 for descriptive statistics.

All responses were rated above the midpoint on reasonableness and plausibility, meaning they were reported to be generally reasonable and plausible. An analysis of response means revealed that the academic achievement responses were more reasonable than the building renovation responses, $t(24) = 2.56$, $p = 0.02$, as well as more plausible, $t(24) = 2.20$, $p = 0.04$. The academic achievement responses were therefore chosen to be included in the main study. Overall, the responses were rated as politically neutral, ranging from $M = 3.00$ to $M = 3.58$. R5 was the only exception to this, which participants overwhelmingly rated as more liberal ($M = 4.23$) than conservative ($M = 2.31$). The phrasing of R5 was then changed to become more politically neutral for the main study.

After participants read the academic achievement and building renovation responses, they were randomly assigned to read responses that either did or did not include the phrase "CRT," keeping all other language the same. These responses were presented randomly. See Tables 3 & 4 for descriptive statistics. All answers, with the exception of R2 in the Curriculum condition, were above the midpoint, meaning they were reported to be generally reasonable and plausible. They also generally aligned with the intended political affiliation. There were several exceptions to this, however. For the CRT condition, the response that was intended to be "somewhat liberal" was reported to be more liberal than the response that was intended to be "very liberal." I therefore adopted the empirical assessment of liberalness over my *a priori* categorization, and the "somewhat liberal" and "very liberal" responses were swapped for the main study.

As indicated in Tables 3 and 4, R1 is the "somewhat liberal" response (switched from my previous categorization of "very liberal"), R2 is the "neutral response," R3 is the "somewhat

conservative" response, R4 is the "very conservative" response, and R5 is the "very liberal"
response (switched from my previous categorization of "somewhat liberal"). Any discrepancies
between each response (plausible, reasonable, conservative, liberal) for the CRT and Curriculum
conditions were nonsignificant. Post-hoc tests were run to investigate whether intended political
affiliation aligned with participant responses for "Curriculum" and "CRT" measures. None of the
results were significant, and participants rated all candidate statements as more politically
neutral, with all values above $p = 0.481$.

Table 1

Academic Achievement

Measure	Plausible	Reasonable	Conservative	Liberal
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
R1	4.62 (0.50)	4.65 (0.56)	3.23 (1.18)	3.35 (1.16)
R2	4.12 (1.07)	4.08 (1.16)	3.04 (1.34)	3.35 (1.02)
R3	4.23 (0.95)	4.00 (1.10)	3.38 (0.98)	3.00 (1.27)
R4	4.27 (1.15)	4.15 (1.12)	3.27 (1.34)	3.58 (1.07)
R5	4.12 (0.95)	3.81 (1.17)	2.31 (1.16)	4.23 (0.84)
ResponseAVG	4.27 (0.93)	4.12 (1.02)	3.05 (1.20)	3.50 (1.07)

Table 2

Building Renovation

| Measure | Plausible | Reasonable | Conservative | Liberal |
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
R1	4.20 (0.81)	4.24 (1.01)	3.12 (0.92)	3.12 (0.97)
R2	3.80 (1.19)	3.92 (1.38)	3.48 (1.09)	2.64 (1.19)
R3	4.12 (1.06)	4.08 (1.12)	3.32 (1.07)	3.00 (1.08)
R4	3.92 (0.10)	3.88 (1.09)	2.88 (1.27)	3.36 (0.95)
R5	3.76 (0.88)	3.56 (1.16)	3.48 (1.19)	2.68 (1.25)
ResponseAVG	3.96 (0.99)	3.94 (1.15)	3.26 (1.11)	2.96 (1.09)

Table 3

Critical Race Theory

| Measure | Plausible | Reasonable | Conservative | Liberal |
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
R1	4.23 (0.73)	4.23 (0.93)	3.31 (1.44)	3.31 (1.38)
R2	3.46 (1.33)	3.54 (1.33)	3.46 (1.51)	3.08 (1.50)
R3	3.46 (0.97)	3.46 (0.88)	3.38 (1.50)	3.15 (1.21)

R4	3.54 (1.27)	3.54 (1.33)	3.38 (1.61)	3.15 (1.57)
R5	3.69 (0.86)	3.38 (1.26)	2.92 (1.55)	3.92 (1.12)
ResponseAVG	3.68 (1.03)	3.63 (1.15)	3.29 (1.52)	3.32 (1.36)

Table 4

Curriculum

Measure	Plausible	Reasonable	Conservative	Liberal
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
R1	4.25 (1.06)	4.75 (0.45)	3.42 (1.68)	3.50 (1.51)
R2	3.50 (1.45)	2.83 (1.34)	2.83 (1.34)	3.33 (1.37)
R3	3.67 (1.37)	3.17 (1.34)	3.00 (1.21)	3.58 (1.68)
R4	3.83 (1.34)	3.17 (1.64)	3.25 (1.36)	3.33 (1.50)
R5	4.42 (0.80)	4.33 (1.16)	3.92 (1.44)	2.67 (1.37)
ResponseAVG	3.93 (1.20)	3.65 (1.19)	3.28 (1.40)	3.28 (1.49)

Main Study

Methods

Participants

520 participants were recruited for this study using the online platform Prolific. Only Republican and independent-identifying participants were recruited using Prolific's screen tools. In reality, 62.5% of participants identified as Republican, 29.9% identified as independent, and 5.4% identified as Democrats.

Procedures

Participants were given a brief description of the study and a consent form confirming they were 18 or older. The study description stated that the main purpose was to investigate the "impact of different methods of voting on local election outcomes." Participants were then randomly assigned to the collective nostalgia or personal nostalgia condition, both of which used the same language from the pilot studies (see Appendix for the full survey). After completing the nostalgia writing task, all participants answered four nostalgia manipulation check questions on a 5 point scale (2 personal, 2 collective).

Participants then read that they had been assigned to the "approval voting" condition with a brief description of approval voting (participants were asked to respond "yes" or "no" about whether they approved of each candidate; in reality all everyone used approval voting). They were then randomly assigned to read either the candidate responses that mentioned "Critical Race Theory", or the responses that did not include this phrase specifically, but kept all other language the same. All five candidates were presented randomly. After reading each candidate's responses, participants were asked to indicate "yes" or "no" in response to the prompt "I approve of this candidate." After voting for the candidates, participants were asked to answer several

questions asking them to indicate on a sliding scale their feelings about consent voting, stricter absentee policies, teaching about racism in schools, Republicans, Democrats, and Independent voters. Participants in both conditions also responded to a question about academic achievement post-COVID to divert attention from the CRT question. They were also asked several demographic questions about their age, gender, political party (Republican, Democrat, Independent), and political orientation (very liberal – very conservative). Finally, participants had the option to give feedback about their experience taking the survey, were debriefed, and redirected to Prolific to receive their payment.

Results

The following analyses were run with all participants, then I singled out self-identifying Republican participants to see if results differed. There were no significant differences between the analyses that included all participants vs those that included only Republicans, so the results presented below include all participants who finished the survey, regardless of political orientation. To control for baseline differences, I used political orientation as a covariate for each analysis.

Manipulation Check

I ran a 2 (nostalgia condition: personal vs. collective) by 2 (nostalgia type: personal and collective) mixed model ANOVA to determine whether this nostalgia manipulation was effective. Results indicated that there was a significant interaction between the nostalgia condition primed and the type of nostalgia felt, F (1, 507) = 14.55, $p < .001$, *eta squared = .028*. On the measure of collective nostalgia, participants primed with collective nostalgia reported greater feelings of collective nostalgia (M = 3.82, SD = 0.99) than those primed with personal nostalgia (M = 3.66, SD = 0.87). Participants primed with personal nostalgia reported greater

feelings of personal nostalgia ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.91$) than those primed with collective nostalgia ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.03$). Participants experienced significantly stronger feelings of personal nostalgia than collective nostalgia in the personal nostalgia condition, $t(509) = 2.53$, $p = 0.01$. Participants who were assigned to the collective nostalgia condition experienced marginally stronger feelings of collective nostalgia, $t(509) = -1.96$, $p = 0.05$, than personal nostalgia.

Figure 2
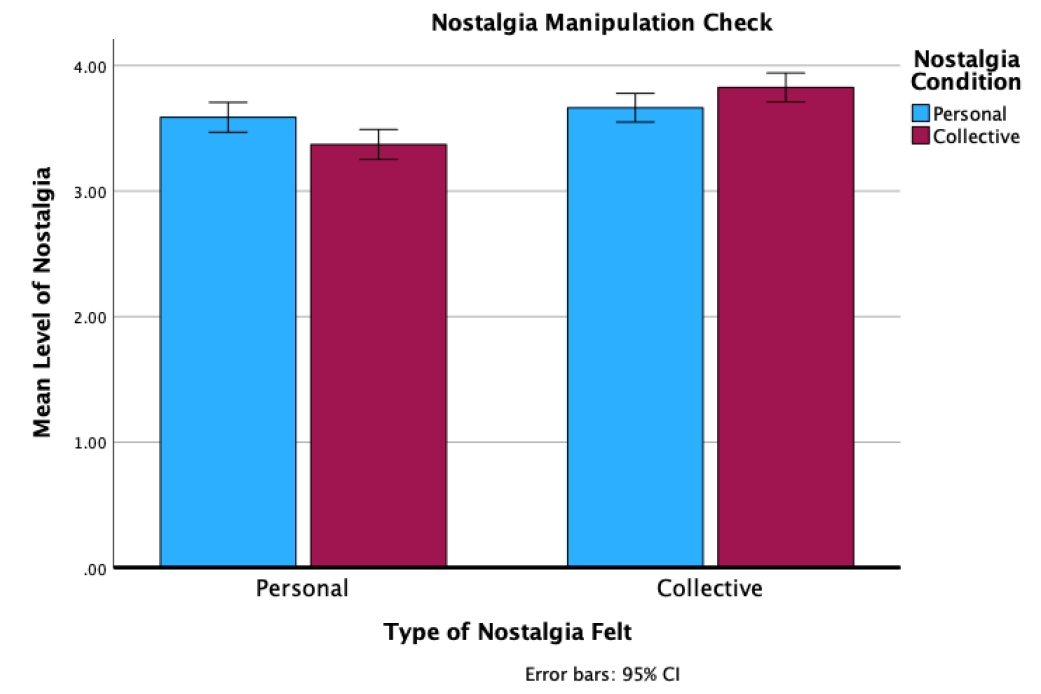
Significant Main Effects & Interactions

I then ran a 2 (nostalgia: personal vs. collective) by 2 (condition: CRT vs. Curriculum) by 5 (number of candidates) mixed-model ANCOVA on voting behavior. Political orientation was included as a covariate.

There was a significant main effect of Candidate, $F(3.08, 1525.86) = 46.51$, $p < .001$, *eta squared* $= 0.09$. Contrary to my hypothesis, participants overwhelmingly voted for the two most liberal candidates more than they did the conservative or neutral candidates (see Table 1 for

Means and SDs, and Figure 3). Post-hoc tests revealed that participants significantly preferred Candidate 1 ("somewhat liberal") over all other candidates, p <0.001. Candidate 5 ("very liberal") was preferred over all candidates besides Candidate 1, p <0.001. This was true regardless of nostalgia or CRT condition. Further post-hoc testing revealed that participants were significantly more likely to vote "yes" on both liberal candidates (1 and 5) than they were to vote "yes" on both conservative candidates (2 and 4), p <0.001, d = 1.16. There was also a marginally significant interaction between CRT condition and candidate, F (3.08, 1525.86) = 2.13, p = 0.09, *eta squared* = 0.004. Participants were marginally less likely to vote for candidate 5, the "very liberal" candidate, in the CRT condition (M = 0.73, SD = 0.44) than in the Curriculum Condition (M = 0.87, SD = 0.34), t(505) = -3.84, p < .001 (see Figure 3). No other effects were statistically significant.

Table 5

Means and Standard Errors of Candidate Ratings by Condition

Candidate	CRT / Personal Nostalgia Mean (SE)	CRT / Collective Nostalgia Mean (SE)	Curriculum / Personal Nostalgia Mean (SE)	Curriculum / Collective Nostalgia Mean (SE)
1	0.88 (0.02)	0.94 (0.03)	0.93 (0.03)	0.93 (0.02)
2	0.48 (0.04)	0.41 (0.05)	0.44 (0.05)	0.46 (0.04)
3	0.37 (0.04)	0.43 (0.05)	0.44 (0.05)	0.35 (0.04)

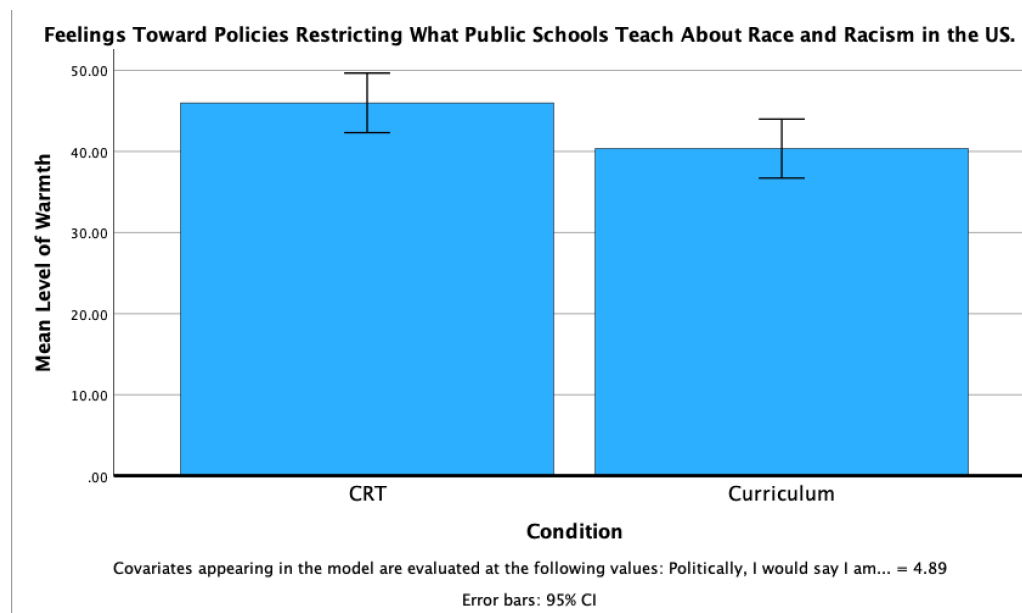| 4 | 0.41 (0.04) | 0.49 (0.05) | 0.49 (0.05) | 0.45 (0.04) |
| 5 | 0.70 (0.03) | 0.78 (0.03) | 0.86 (0.04) | 0.87 (0.03) |

Figure 3
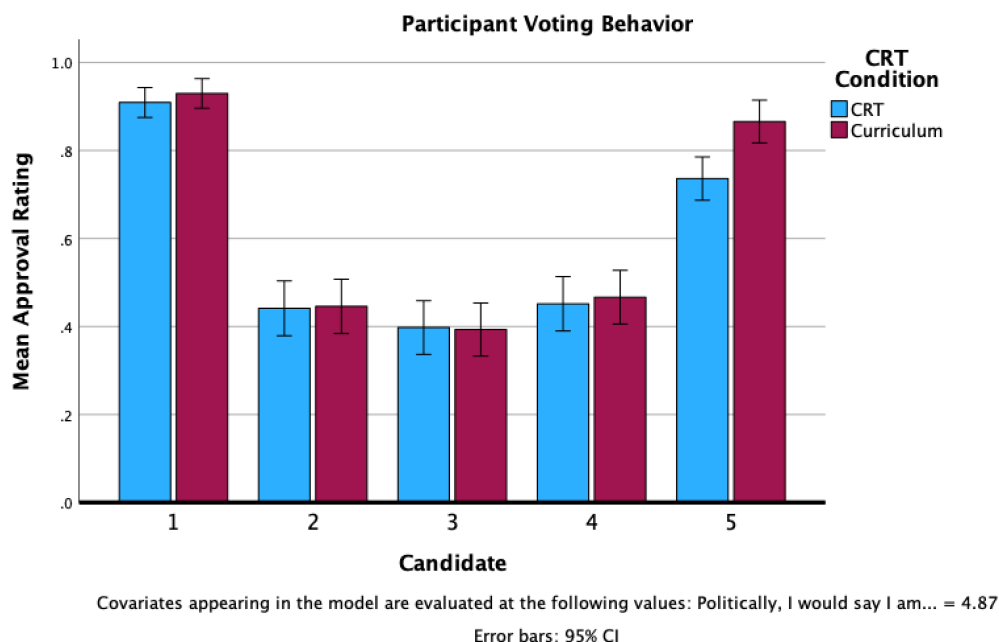
I then ran a series 2 (nostalgia condition) by 2 (CRT Condition) between- subjects ANCOVAS on feeling thermometer variables. For the question about attitudes towards restricting the teaching of race and racism in the US, there was a significant main effect of political orientation, $F (1, 504) = 51.34$, $p < 0.001$, *eta squared* = 0.09. The more conservative the participant, the more likely they were to support policies that restrict the teaching of racism in schools. There was also a significant main effect of the CRT condition, $F (1, 504) = 4.59$, $p = 0.03$, *eta squared* = 0.009. Participants were more likely to favor restricting what schools teach about racism in the CRT condition ($M = 46.05$, $SD = 31.35$) than those in the curriculum

condition ($M = 40.44$, $SD = 30.83$), $t(506) = 2.04$, $p = 0.04$, aligning with the hypothesis (see

Figure 4). It's also important to note that the mean level of warmth for both conditions was less

than 50, indicating generally colder feelings towards these restrictive policies. No other effects

were statistically significant.

Figure 4

Feelings Toward Policies Restricting What Public Schools Teach About Race and Racism in the US.

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Politically, I would say I am... = 4.89

Error bars: 95% CI

There was a significant effect of political orientation for the feelings thermometer

question towards members of the Republican party, $F(1, 501) = 368.63$, $p < 0.001$, *eta squared*

$= 0.42$. The more conservative the participant, the more they supported the Republican party. No

other effects were statistically significant.

There was also a significant effect of political orientation for the feelings thermometer

question towards members of the Democratic party, $F(1, 498) = 53.21$, $p = <0.001$, *eta squared*

$= 0.097$. The more liberal the participant, the more they supported the Democratic party. There

was also a significant interaction between nostalgia condition and CRT condition for the

Democratic feelings thermometer question, $F(1, 498) = 4.14$, $p = 0.04$, *eta squared* $= 0.008$.

Participants in the curriculum condition who received the collective nostalgia manipulation

displayed the least amount of warmth towards members of the Democratic party out of all conditions ($M = 39.61$, $SD = 2.17$) (see Figure 5). There were no differences between CRT and curriculum conditions for those who received the personal nostalgia manipulation. All other effects were statistically insignificant.

Figure 5
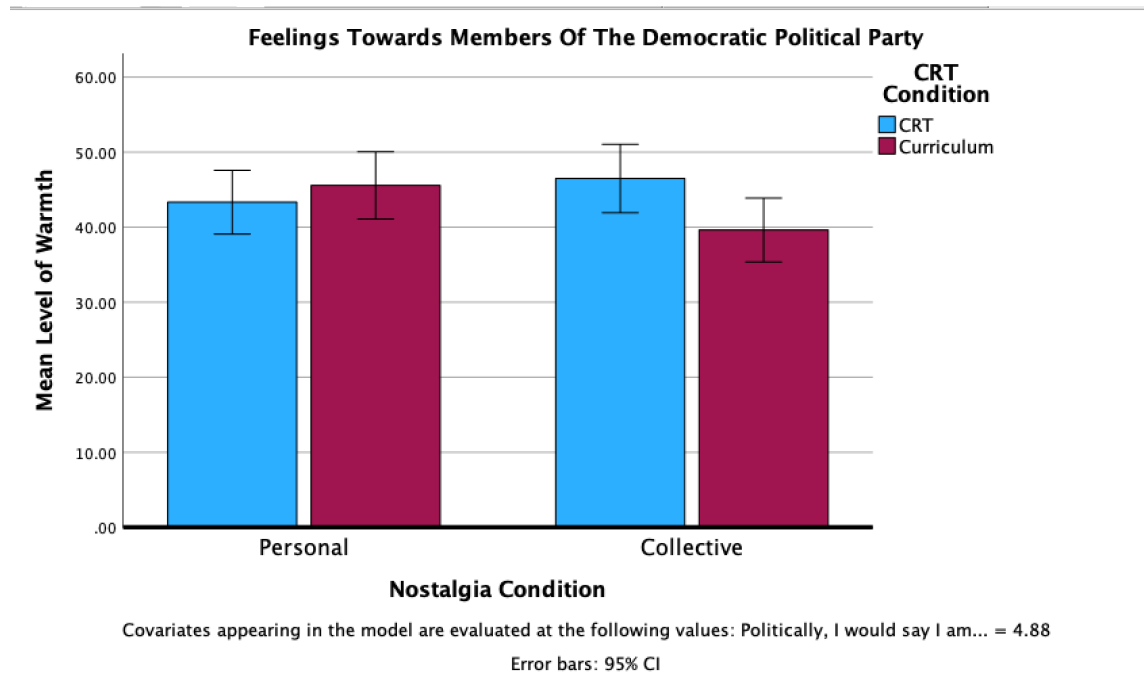
Because some of the results of this study did not align with the hypotheses, I ran analyses to ensure that participants' political orientation, measured on a 5 point scale from very liberal to very conservative, aligned with their party identity (eg, Republican, Democrat, or Independent). This was overwhelmingly true, with 85.8% of Republicans identifying somewhere between somewhat conservative - very conservative, 51.6% of Independents identifying as moderate with the rest evenly spread between conservative and liberal, and 79.2% of Democrats identifying somewhere between somewhat liberal - very liberal. These findings indicate that the unexpected results were not due to a discrepancy between party identity and political orientation.

I also ran post hoc correlations to further investigate the relationship between political orientation and voting behavior. There were several significant correlations between candidate and political orientation. Despite all participants overwhelmingly voting for the most liberal candidates, the liberal participants were significantly more likely to vote for the liberal candidates and the conservative participants were significantly more likely to vote for the conservative candidates. Additionally, the "very" liberal and "very" conservative correlations were significant at the 0.01 level, whereas the "somewhat" liberal and "somewhat" conservative correlations were significant at the 0.05 level (see Table 6). There was no significant correlation with political orientation for the neutral candidate. Despite the surprising results, political orientation still somewhat aligned with voting behavior, further supporting the idea that the surprising results were simply due to participants preferring the two most liberal candidates, rather than a discrepancy between political orientation and voting behavior. Potential explanations for these findings will be explored in the following section.

Table 6

Correlations Between Candidate Support and Political Orientation

Candidate	Political Orientation
1 = very liberal	−0.13**
2 = neutral	0.06
3 = somewhat conservative	0.10*
4 = very conservative	0.17**

5 = somewhat liberal	−0.10*

Note. *N* ranges from 504 to 508.

 * *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).*

** *Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).*

Discussion

In this study, I attempted to assess conservative attitudes towards policies that restrict the teaching of race and racism in schools. My first manipulation primed either collective or personal nostalgia; analysis of the manipulation check suggests that it was successful. I decided to manipulate collective nostalgia based on the results of a previous study, which found that priming collective nostalgia was a successful method of reducing anti-immigrant sentiments in conservative participants (Wohl et al. 2020). My second manipulation investigated whether including the phrase "Critical Race Theory" would impact voting behavior, as opposed to a "Curriculum" condition, which left CRT out of the candidate statements, keeping all other language the same. I hypothesized that including the phrase "Critical Race Theory" would make conservatives less likely to support liberal candidates. I also hypothesized that priming collective nostalgia would increase the likelihood that conservative participants would vote for liberal candidates, but only when CRT was not mentioned. My pilot studies indicated that the nostalgia manipulation was effective in priming the desired type of nostalgia. Additionally, the CRT, Curriculum, and Academic Achievement responses mostly aligned with intended political orientation – although the differences between conservative and liberal ratings were not significant – and they were all rated as generally plausible and reasonable. In the main study, participants voted for five candidates, whose responses about CRT/Curriculum issues ranged

from "very liberal" to "very conservative", and whose responses to the Academic Achievement question remained politically neutral.

Interestingly, in Pilot Study 2 the "very liberal" response in the Curriculum condition was rated much more conservative than in the CRT condition. There are several possible reasons for this. One is that the "very liberal" CRT response had the phrase "I oppose" in it, which was the only firm stance that any of the candidates took. This is a potential confound, and could have contributed to participants viewing the "very liberal" CRT response as much more liberal than the Curriculum condition. Another possible explanation is that the Curriculum condition mentions the phrase "historically accurate" information. This phrasing leaves room for participants to project their own views of what constitutes accurate information onto the candidate, and assume that their stance was more conservative than intended.

Nostalgia Manipulation

The nostalgia manipulations in Pilot 1 and the main study showed that priming collective nostalgia resulted in increased feelings of collective nostalgia; however, this did not affect voting behavior. This finding could suggest that while priming feelings of nostalgia in an online survey may result in successful manipulation check responses, those feelings were not strong enough to affect candidate preferences. Additionally, because most participants voted for the liberal candidates, it is possible that the effectiveness of the nostalgia manipulation couldn't be observed due to ceiling effects. My hypothesis hinged on the assumption that conservative participants would prefer conservative candidates, and priming collective nostalgia would make them more open to liberal ideas. Because conservative candidates overwhelmingly voted for liberal candidates regardless of nostalgia condition, it's impossible to know whether the nostalgia

manipulation would have worked if conservative participants had shown a preference for conservative candidates originally.

Voting Behavior

There were significant correlations between political orientation and voting behavior, meaning that liberal participants were more likely to support liberal candidates and conservative participants were more likely to support conservative candidates. Despite political orientation's small role in predicting voting behavior, participants still overwhelmingly voted for the two most liberal candidates, regardless of manipulation received or political orientation. This finding was surprising, especially because results from the Pilot Study 2 indicated that participants thought candidates 1 and 5 were the most liberal in the CRT condition. This indicates that participants voted for these candidates despite recognizing the liberal nature of their arguments.

There are several potential explanations for this finding. Potentially, conservatives found the liberal arguments more compelling when encouraged to think about each response critically. Although participants were asked to indicate each candidates' political affiliation in Pilot Study 2, they were not asked to do so in the main study. By removing political partisanship from candidate responses, participants could have been encouraged to think about each response without the haze of political partisanship, and found the liberal arguments more convincing of their own accord. While this finding was surprising at first, it can also be seen as a logical extension of the Lammers and Baldwin study referenced in the introduction, which found that conservatives overwhelmingly supported liberal policies when they were phrased in a way that focused more heavily on the past (Lammers & Baldwin 2018).

A survey conducted in 2022 further supports the idea that conservative participants supported liberal arguments because they were more compelled by the reasoning. The study examined how Republicans and Democrats actually want US history to be taught, as opposed to how they think the opposing political party wants US history to be taught. Predictably, it found that Republicans and Democrats think the other party wants vastly different things when it comes to education; however, results showed that Democrats and Republicans share significantly more common ground than they think (Hawkins et al., 2022). This finding adds evidence to support the idea that in the current study, conservatives found liberal results more compelling simply because they fundamentally agreed with the presented reasoning.

For the most part, the CRT condition did not have a significant impact on voting behavior. However, participants assigned to the CRT condition were marginally less likely to vote for candidate 5, who was the very liberal candidate. This result aligns with my original hypothesis, and could indicate that the inclusion of the phrase "Critical Race Theory" makes people less likely to support the most overtly liberal political arguments.

Feelings Thermometer: Policies Restricting Teaching About Race and Racism

In contrast to the voting results, participants who were assigned to the CRT condition were more likely to support policies that restrict the teaching of race and racism in the US. Even if participants voted for the liberal candidates, they were still likely to support restrictive educational policies generally – aligning with my original hypothesis that CRT acts as a buzzword in certain contexts. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that conservatives who see the phrase CRT are more likely to support restrictive educational policies generally, however; when faced with personal arguments and individual reasoning, they still support liberal arguments that are against censorship. This finding is also supported by previous research. A

2009 study found that the majority of the population is symbolically conservative – that is, they tend to support conservative policies that are framed more broadly, such as "tax cuts" or "against big government." When people are given the details and reasoning behind specific liberal policies, they are much more likely to support them – that is, most people tend to be "operationally liberal" (Ellis et al., 2009). This is in line with the findings of the current study – participants were much more likely to lean conservative when the question about censorship was phrased in a symbolic way, but overwhelmingly supported the liberal arguments that were specific and detailed.

Even though participants in the CRT condition were more supportive of restrictive educational policies, the average level of warmth for both conditions was less than 50, indicating cooler feelings towards these policies overall. This result once again aligns with the Hawkins et al. survey – even with CRT affecting voting behavior, conservatives hold less extreme attitudes on censorship than previously assumed. It is important to note that this study did not ask participants about their attitudes towards CRT bans initially to avoid making political partisanship salient; therefore, it is impossible to know whether participant attitudes changed over the course of the study. Future research should expand upon this finding by asking participants their attitudes towards certain issues initially and seeing if these attitudes change over the course of the study.

Feelings Thermometer: Democrat & Republican Political Parties

I also asked participants about their feelings towards members of the Republican and Democratic political parties. Unsurprisingly, liberal participants reported warmer feelings towards the Democratic party whereas conservative participants reported warmer feelings towards the Republican party. For the most part, the nostalgia and CRT manipulations did not

affect participants' feelings of warmth towards these political parties. However, participants who received the collective nostalgia manipulation and were assigned to the curriculum condition exhibited the least amount of warmth towards Democrats. This finding was contrary to my hypothesis, as I had predicted priming the phrase CRT would make conservatives view liberals more negatively. One possibility is that the collective nostalgia manipulation could have had the unintentional effect in priming a closed-minded type of nostalgia in some participants, despite efforts to prime openness-based nostalgia. If this were true, it could partially explain why participants who received the collective nostalgia manipulation and were assigned to the curriculum condition exhibited the least amount of warmth towards Democrats. I could not find any additional research that gave other explanations for this finding. Therefore, I will allow readers to draw their own conclusions about its possible implications.

Limitations & Future Directions

There were several limitations to this study. Firstly, despite only recruiting Republicans and Independents on Prolific, some participants did self-identify as Democrats. The number of Democratic participants was relatively low, and subsequent analyses indicated that this did not significantly impact the results. However, it is worth noting that the population of this study was different than originally intended. Future studies might ask participants to self-identify as Democrat, Republican, or Independent before data collection, or opt to recruit participants via some other method that will more efficiently ensure that all participants do self-identify as Republican or Independent. Additionally, the survey did not ask them to indicate the degree to which they were economically versus socially conservative. It is possible that in this sample, most of the participants who identified as conservative were actually economically conservative

and socially liberal – an important distinction to consider when interpreting the results of a socially conservative issue.

Another limitation of this study is its bias towards the liberal perspective. I identify as liberal, as do all of the faculty members who gave feedback on its design. While I gathered the information provided in each candidate statement from actual sources and previous political statements, it is possible that I made the liberal arguments inherently more compelling than the conservative arguments because I believe that the liberal arguments are correct. Obviously, a liberal perspective is important, since advocating against educational censorship encompasses a traditionally liberal perspective. However, future studies might improve upon this one-sidedness by encouraging conservative reviewers to look over each of the candidate responses, possibly even rewriting the conservative responses from a more authentic perspective.

In this survey, participants were not informed about the candidates' political orientation, which was intended to prevent them from automatically agreeing with members of their own party, and encourage them to think about each response critically. This was designed to reflect many states' school board elections, which often do not specify the candidates' political orientation. However, this does not completely align with the current polarized political climate; nowadays, voters presumably know each candidate's political affiliation, whether it's through their policy statements or because they make it known in other ways. Future studies might investigate whether affiliating a candidate with a specific political party would cause participant responses to significantly differ from candidates whose party is not specified. Future studies might also expand upon the current study's surprising findings – that is, that conservatives overwhelmingly voted for liberal candidates, but were also more supportive of educational censorship policies when primed with the phrase CRT, a current buzzword within the

conservative party. Would these findings be replicated in a similarly designed study examining different political issues?

This study included responses to a question about academic achievement in addition to responses about the main topic of interest, CRT. Each academic achievement response was rated politically neutral, and I chose to include responses to both questions to avoid making the study overtly politicized with CRT. However, it is reasonable to assume that the academic achievement and CRT responses both affected the way participants voted, and future research should use replication with other "politically neutral" issues to confirm this type of voting behavior is primarily due to the CRT responses. A final limitation worth noting is the fact that the nostalgia manipulation did not affect voting behavior as predicted. Future studies might use a stronger collective nostalgia manipulation, one that is either taken from previous research or developed specifically for the purpose of this study.

Conclusion

Ultimately, conservative thinking is complex and involves many different factors that are sometimes not accounted for in psychological research. For example, there is a difference between social and economic conservatism, as well as a difference between the thinking of conservative politicians and conservative voters. Further research should investigate the study's contradictory results, as well as the identities that influence conservative thinking. In this study, conservatives generally supported liberal candidates; however, support of a general educational ban increased significantly when the conservative buzzword "CRT" was introduced. Would these findings be replicated if political partisanship was made salient from the beginning? Would they be replicated with other conservative buzzwords? Further research should look into any existing discrepancies between conservative identities and their belief systems. Understanding this is

especially important in today's political climate, when restrictions on education are becoming

increasingly drastic and overt.

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Appendix

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