


Vicarious Justifications for Prejudice in the Application of Democratic Values

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Abstract

Democratic values are widely endorsed principles including commitments to protect individual freedoms. Paradoxically, the widespread normativity of these ideas can be used to justify prejudice. With two nationally representative U.S. samples, we find that prejudiced respondents defend another's prejudiced speech, using democratic values as justification. This vicarious defense occurs primarily among those who share the prejudice and only when the relevant prejudice is expressed. Several different democratic values (e.g., due process, double jeopardy) can serve as justifications—the issue is more about *when* something can be used as a justification for prejudice and less about *what* can be used as one. Endorsing democratic values can be a common rhetorical device to expand what is acceptable and protect what is otherwise unacceptable to express in public.

Keywords

prejudice/stereotyping, norms, racism

Democratic values are widely endorsed principles meant to guide individual actions and institutional procedures in a society. When and how these values should be applied to specific situations, though, is contested. Traditionally, values are conceptualized as fundamental standards; they “guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. People decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding, based on possible consequences for their cherished values” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 4).

However, values are neither permanent nor all-powerful bases of behavior. They are *prioritized*: The test of their relative importance is how they are expressed in choice, behavior, or endorsement when pitted against one other. Democratic values may be widely endorsed in liberal societies, but they must be understood in competition with other values (Schwartz, 1996), such as loyalty, conformity, or tradition.

In two studies with nationally representative samples of U.S. voters, we offer participants the opportunity to endorse democratic values (e.g., due process, freedom of association) in situations where the values might protect the expression of racism, which are sentiments that undercut the pluralism necessary to sustain democracy in multiethnic societies.

We measure the relevance of the values, consider the correlations between prejudice and value endorsement, and look for consistency in their value across situations where racist and nonracist sentiments are expressed. We suggest that democratic values can be deployed as *justifications* for prejudice. Endorsement of democratic values can appeal to people with negative racial attitudes as a “legitimate” process to make prejudice expression acceptable, hard to punish, and even “principled.”

Prejudice may drive the deployment of democratic values as a way to justify the expression of a shared prejudice.

Justifications for Prejudice

The justification-suppression model (JSM) of prejudice expression (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) is a framework for understanding both how people admit their prejudices to themselves and when they are willing to express these prejudices publicly. It also provides a format to study how democratic values might be deployed to undermine “cancel culture”—by creating “safe spaces” for the expression of prejudice.

The JSM treats prejudice as a negative evaluation of a group or of an individual based primarily on their group membership. This is a broad definition that theoretically includes even groups that are disliked for normatively justifiable reasons: For example, disliking murderers, drunk drivers, or Nazis is prejudice by this definition. This allows one to study how prejudices are more or less normatively acceptable to express at certain times or in specific circumstances (Crandall et al., 2013; Crandall et al., 2018). The JSM largely concerns nonnormative (or

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contested) prejudices, as prescriptively normative prejudices are not suppressed and do not require justification.

Many overt prejudices, however, are suppressed by norms, audiences, empathy, and so on but can be released by a justification that allows for expression without punishment or guilt. Justifications are varied, including stereotypes (Crandall et al., 2011), attributions (Crandall et al., 2001), and licensing (Miller & Effron, 2010). The content of the justification, however, is not central; the question is less of “*what* is a justification?” and more “*when* is something a justification?” Anything can be used as a justification for prejudice when it helps an individual express prejudice expecting they will not face punishments from others (or themselves).

In democracy, individuals certainly have the freedom to express prejudicial views. In the post-Civil Rights era, however, social norms regarding the expression of negative racial sentiments changed the way in which Americans expressed negative sentiments toward minorities (Shuman et al., 1997; but see Valentino et al., 2018). Although blatant sentiments of prejudice have increasingly been viewed with disfavor (Kinder & Sanders, 1996), a more subtle form of symbolic racism, rooted in cultural rather than biological differences, remains (Sears & Henry, 2003). If most citizens view the expression of prejudice as taboo, then how might prejudiced persons justify prejudiced sentiments? We argue that specific democratic values, which are usually conceptualized as special commitments to liberalism, *can* be used as justifications for prejudice like other, more mundane values—in part because they supply a plausible, socially acceptable claim to legitimate, democratic processes.

Vicarious justification. While the JSM is proposed largely as an intrapsychic model—how one justifies one’s own prejudices—people also are willing to justify someone else’s expression of prejudice. The strategic deployment of democratic values for another’s racist speech or actions are a *vicarious justification for prejudice*.

People justify another’s expression of prejudice as a straightforward function of one’s own prejudice (White & Crandall, 2017). When reading about fraternity members being expelled for participating in explicit anti-Black singing and chanting, people high in anti-Black prejudice agreed that the expulsion violated free speech rights more than people low in prejudice. This positive correlation between anti-Black prejudice and free speech relevance was not present when reading about a variety of control stories. Prejudice does not correlate with freedom of speech concern *generally*—only when that democratic value serves to justify someone else’s expression of prejudice. A sense that society was limiting their freedom to be who they are or to say the things they believe (White & Crandall, 2017) played an important role in the justification of another’s racist speech. Perceived authenticity—that one is nobly living in accordance with their true feelings—is another self-directed value that can operate as a vicarious justification for prejudice (White & Crandall, 2021). White and Crandall (2017, 2021) also found people low in prejudice notably

backed away from values that could justify prejudice, suggesting that the ability of free speech and authenticity values to justify a prejudice was recognizable.

Free speech is nothing “special” when it comes to justifying prejudice. All kinds of democratic values—due process, double jeopardy, prohibition of excessive punishment, reasonable privacy, and freedom of association—can serve to vicariously justify someone’s prejudice or discrimination. When a person is in any way punished for expressing prejudice, then prejudice should predict the deployment of these values. When one is punished for something unrelated to prejudice, there should be no such correlation.

This dynamic becomes an experimental analogue to the *cancel culture* debate. Cancel culture refers to actions taken against a person, a company, or an organization in response to a perceived offense (Bakhtiari, 2020; Romano, 2020). Social media sites may remove someone from their platform, a company might fire an employee, people might boycott a company, and a target might be publicly shamed (Mishan, 2020) when some norm is perceived to have been violated.

Expressing prejudice is the paradigmatic reason for “cancelation.” Many political commentators refer to this “cancel culture” as fundamentally undemocratic and a threat to democratic values. It is said to trample on constitutional rights (Dershowitz, 2020), make people “less capable of democratic participation” (Ackerman et al., 2020), be totalitarian (Greenhut, 2020), be “extrajudicial punishment” that turns society into a battleground where “free men cannot voice their minds” (Yang, 2020), threaten “what it means to sustain the habits of a free society” (Stephens, 2020), threaten constitutional democracy via mob rule (Lipson, 2020), fuel dissatisfaction with democracy (Furedi, 2020), and to be a “recipe for illiberalism and regression” (Menaldo, 2020), among other sentiments.

Yet others see “canceling” as a realization of democratic values: People using their freedoms to withdraw support from those who have expressed objectionable ideas (e.g., Freedman, 2019). Democratic values may be universally approved in the abstract, but prejudice is an important factor in *when* individuals deploy democratic values to defend (or censure) those expressing prejudice (White & Crandall, 2017).

Social Values

Psychological theories of values explain how people go from abstract ideas to concrete representations of values. Values are abstract ideals or goals, varying in importance and transcending situations, that act as guiding principles for an individual or group (Maio, 2010; Maio et al., 2006; Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012). These values can be seen as existing in a social system, given their normativity and widespread endorsement (Rohan, 2000). Democracy, and the values therein, is one such social system (e.g., freedom of speech, right to a fair trial). Competing values are often balanced against each other in a democracy (e.g., majority rule, protection of minority viewpoints), and to achieve equality, one must

sometimes trade off liberty to achieve it. A member of a democratic society must then decide *when* to apply the abstract value to a specific situation.

The specific abstract concept of self-direction, which includes personal freedom and independence (Maio, 2010; Schwartz, 2012), is the relevant *abstract* value, as democracy in the United States presumes and prioritizes the autonomy and rights of the individual (Dahl, 1989). Both conservative and liberal modern political ideologies in the United States share this focus on the individual (Kerlinger, 1984).

The abstract, normative nature of values affords them the ability to be used as rhetorical justifications for prejudice (Kristiansen & Zanna, 1994). The mental representations model shows how it is in the process where a specific abstract value is either applied or not applied to a specific scenario. Maio (2010) notes that “the abstract nature of values makes them malleable in their application” (p. 25). Prejudice operates in this malleability, and this process is described in the long history of research into political tolerance.

Political Tolerance

Political tolerance is the extension of civil liberties to those one dislikes or disagrees with (Marcus et al., 1995). The American public supports democratic values in the abstract, but less so when applied to specific situations (Erskine & Siegel, 1975; Lawrence, 1976; Marcus et al., 1995; Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2003; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Stouffer, 1955; Sullivan et al., 1982; Sullivan & Transue, 1999; Zellmann, 1975). Zellman (1975) reported that 89% of a national sample believes in “free speech for all no matter what their views might be,” but only 27% agree to allow a “Communist Party member to make a speech in this city.”

Marcus et al. (1995) asked survey respondents to nominate a strongly disliked group and then asked whether they agree that concrete instantiations of democratic values (e.g., privacy, free speech) apply to this group. Half of the participants were asked to focus on their feelings while answering the dependent variables; the other half were asked to consider their thoughts. Across multiple studies, those that focused on their feelings offered fewer protections of democratic values to the disliked group; focusing on prejudiced feelings derailed applying values. When Marcus et al. had everyone respond to a single target group the researchers nominated, focusing on feeling had little effect for participants who reported little prejudice. But focusing on feeling for those who strongly disliked the group was “the most robust effect” they found (p. 216; also see Nelson et al., 1997; Skitka et al., 2004).

The Current Studies

Freedom of speech is an immediately relevant democratic value used to vicariously justify prejudice (see White & Crandall, 2017). But the JSM suggests justification *content* shouldn’t matter—it is about a *match* between the content and context. We expand from free speech to five other democratic

values: double jeopardy, due process, excessive punishment, reasonable privacy, and freedom of association. We predict that the specific instantiation of a democratic value should correlate with anti-Black prejudice *only* when someone else is expressing anti-Black prejudice (compared to a control condition). We also predict that this relationship will *not* depend on the specific content of the justification being used, since each justification proposed will be interchangeably relevant to the framing of the situation at hand.

Study 1

We present survey takers with vignettes depicting a target who has done some counternormative action: either expressing anti-Black prejudice or some other, comparison action. We also vary these scenarios, such that one of four democratic values are used to situate the action. Participants’ own self-reported prejudice should positively correlate with the relevance of the democratic value to the situation—but only when the target expresses anti-Black prejudice. This should *not* depend on the specific value, since any possibly relevant value can be used as a justification for prejudice. All materials, data, and code to reproduce this study are available at osf.io/5pj6b.

Method

Respondents were 2020 U.S. general election likely voters, sampled from the YouGov panel to be nationally representative of registered voters. At the end of a larger online survey about contemporary social and political issues, 1,000 respondents participated in the present study. Observations were weighted according to gender, age, race, education, region, and past presidential vote based on registered voters in the November 2016 Current Population Survey, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Any respondent indicating “no opinion” on any of the prejudice items (described below; $n = 69$) were removed from all analyses.¹ Weights were recentered after dropping these cases. A final sample of 931 observations were used in analyses. Standard errors were calculated using a sandwich-type estimator, as ordinary procedures not designed for survey weights might inflate type I error (Lumley, 2010, 2020; Lumley & Scott, 2017). Model comparisons were tested using a Rao–Scott likelihood ratio test (Lumley & Scott, 2014).

Justification. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four justification conditions, each corresponding to a different democratic value: double jeopardy, due process, excessive punishment, or reasonable privacy. Each condition first described a situation where some controversial action was done. Respondents were then told about two opposing views on the situation: While some people think the value should apply to the situation, others do not. Reasons were given for each of these stances and the order of the reasons was randomized. The design is summarized in Table 1. To illustrate, the “double jeopardy” situation read:

Table 1. Summary of Experimental Design (Study 1).

Democratic Value	Anti-Black Behavior	Other Behavior	N
Double jeopardy Due process	Tell negative jokes about Black people at work	Skip out on work early and get drunk at a nearby bar	233
	Black Lives Matter should be considered a hate group	Police departments in American cities should be considered a hate group	225
Excessive punishment	Language critical of Black people, making jokes about Black people	Language critical of White people, making jokes about White people	237
Reasonable privacy	Participates in “alt-right” culture . . . a movement considered racist against groups like Black people and immigrants	Participates in “furry” culture . . . considered strange, with adults dressing in animal costumes taking on furry-themed persona	236

Colin has worked at the same company for decades. Years ago, while he was a mid-level employee, he would sometimes [tell negative jokes about Black people at work/skip out on work early and get drunk at a nearby bar]. He got in trouble for this: The company docked his pay for a pay period, and he had to attend unpaid [sensitivity training classes/substance abuse classes]. He stayed at this company, though, and is now on the executive team. Recently, someone found old records showing that this earlier incident happened. Many employees at the company were angry with Colin, and they demanded he be fired. After enough outcry, the company finally relented. They let Colin go, saying that—even though he had already been punished—this incident has hindered his abilities to be an effective manager.

This story touches on a principle called “double jeopardy.” It means that someone cannot be charged and punished for the same crime twice. Some feel like this idea should only apply to criminal trials, while others think the spirit of the principle should extend to punishments in the workplace and at schools.

Target group. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: a *Black* or *other* group condition. For each justification condition, the Black condition included prejudice against Black people being expressed. The other group conditions varied in controversial actions across the justification condition: Instead of expressing anti-Black prejudice, someone skipped out on work early to get drunk (double jeopardy), expressed prejudice toward police (due process), expressed prejudice against White people (excessive punishment), or outed someone for participating in an embarrassing online subculture (privacy).

Relevance. Respondents were asked: “How relevant do you think the idea of [democratic value] is to this situation? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means it is *not relevant at all* and 100 means it is *very relevant*.”

Prejudice. We measured anti-Black prejudice at the end of the survey by asking respondents to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the following statements on a Likert-type scale: “White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin” (Neville et al., 2000), “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African Americans to work their way out of the

Table 2. Analysis of Variance Table for the Saturated Model Using Rao–Scott Likelihood Ratio Test (Study 1).

Term	2logLR	df	ddf	p
Target Group	3.64	1	929	.059
Prejudice	5.78	1	929	.019
Justification	18.16	3	927	.001
Target Group × Prejudice	10.08	1	924	.002
Target Group × Justification	1.96	3	922	.574
Prejudice × Justification	3.63	3	922	.299
Target Group × Prejudice × Justification	2.41	3	915	.485

lower class,” and “Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors” (Sears & Henry, 2003). Possible answers ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* on a 5-point scale, with a sixth option reading, “no opinion.” Respondents indicating no opinion on any of the three items were dropped from all analyses. Responses to the third item were reverse-scored, then all three items were averaged together to create an indicator of anti-Black prejudice ($\alpha = .88$), where higher scores indicate more prejudice.

Results

We first fit a full model regressing value relevance on the three-way interaction between target group, justification, and self-reported prejudice, as well as all lower order effects.² The likelihood ratio test for the hypothesized two-way interaction between target group and prejudice was significant ($2\log LR = 10.08, p = .002$). The relationship between value relevance and prejudice depended on the target group condition. However, the omnibus test for the three-way interaction was not significant, $p = .485$, suggesting that this interaction between target group and prejudice does *not* depend on which democratic value is measured (Table 2).

Nonetheless, Figure 1 displays the data for all four democratic values (keeping in mind that the proper statistical hypothesis test does *not* do this disaggregation). The tests of simple slopes are in Table 3. We see the general hypothesized pattern of results across democratic values: Only when the infraction in the story was based on anti-Black prejudice was the relevance of each value positively correlated with

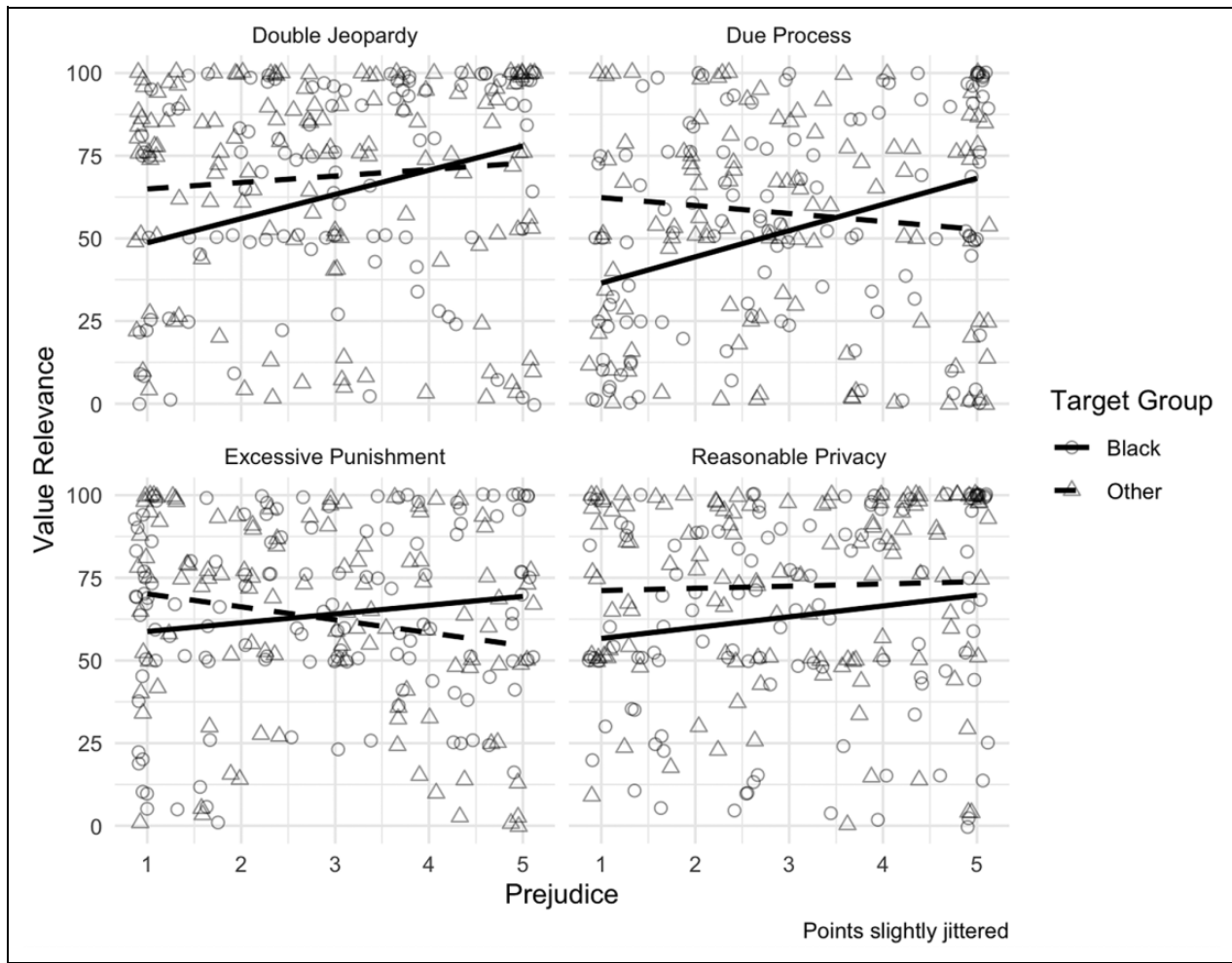


Figure 1. Value relevance regressed on prejudice, by justification and target group (Study 1).

Table 3. Simple Slopes Between Prejudice and Value Relevance, by Justification and Target Group (Study 1).

Justification	Target Group	Prejudice <i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Double Jeopardy	Black	7.32	3.26	2.25	.025
	Other	1.95	2.39	0.81	.416
Due process	Black	7.92	2.30	3.45	.001
	Other	-2.40	3.27	-0.73	.463
Excessive punishment	Black	2.65	1.87	1.42	.156
	Other	-3.91	2.58	-1.52	.129
Reasonable privacy	Black	3.27	1.89	1.74	.083
	Other	0.67	2.28	0.29	.770

Table 4. Coefficients for the Final Model (Study 1).

Term	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	48.6	4.62	10.5	<.001
Target group—other	21.9	5.93	3.70	<.001
Prejudice	5.13	1.20	4.28	<.001
Justification—due process	-11.2	3.66	-3.07	.002
Justification—excessive punishment	-2.66	3.36	-0.79	.428
Justification—reasonable privacy	1.60	3.23	0.50	.621
Target Group × Prejudice	-5.78	1.82	-3.18	.002

respondents’ own anti-Black prejudice. For example, the “due process” scenario shows that prejudice predicts value relevance in the *anti-Black* condition ($p = .001$) but not in the *other* condition ($p = .463$).

We then compared this saturated model (i.e., with the three-way interaction and all lower order interactions and main effects) with a simpler one. This more parsimonious model regressed relevance on target group, justification, self-reported prejudice, and the two-way interaction between

target group and self-reported prejudice. This less complex model did *not* perform significantly worse than the saturated model, $2\log LR = 10.39, p = .319$, so we focus on interpreting this simpler model. The coefficients for this final model are found in Table 4. Reference categories for the target group and justification variables were Black and double jeopardy, respectively.

The interaction between prejudice and target group was significant, $b = -5.78, SE = 1.82, t(924) = -3.18, p = .002$. The simple slopes are plotted in Figure 2 and listed in Table 5. Because the two-way interaction was not qualified by justification condition,

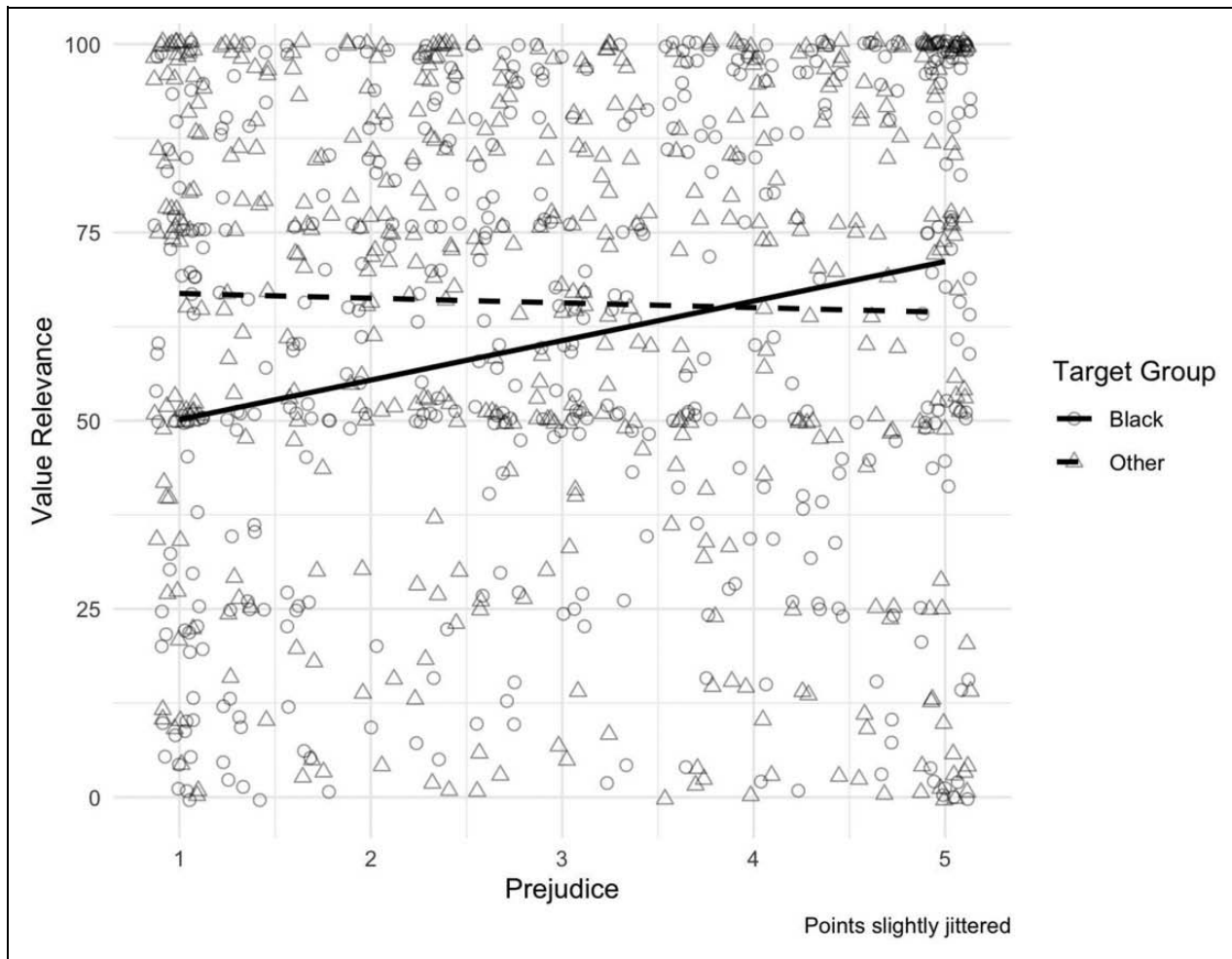


Figure 2. Value relevance regressed on prejudice, by target group (Study 1).

Table 5. Simple Slopes in the Final Model Between Prejudice and Value Relevance, by Target Group (Study 1).

Target Group	Prejudice <i>b</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Black	5.13	1.20	4.28	<.001
Other	-0.65	1.36	-0.48	.631

the simpler analysis tells a straightforward story. Prejudice played a key role when anti-Black actions faced punishment—but played no role in perceiving the applicability of democratic protections when the actions were *unrelated* to anti-Black prejudice. Respondents are not completely principled when claiming democratic values are at stake, and they instead rely on their relevant attitudes.

Discussion

Democratic values can be used to vicariously justify prejudice. Anti-Black prejudice positively predicted the relevance of a democratic value to a specific situation—but only when the value served as a defense for anti-Black sentiment. This

relationship was not present for control actions unrelated to prejudice. And this relationship did not depend on the content of the justification: All democratic values can be seen as more or less interchangeable, so long as they are appropriately framed for the situation. In this way, no specific democratic value is “special,” and each functions as the JSM predicts.

Study 2

We conceptually replicate and extend our findings from Study 1, using a fifth democratic value as the potential justification (freedom of association). Crucially, we also manipulate *whose* democratic rights might be relevant: Is it the person who expresses the prejudice or the group who severs ties with this individual afterward? When asking how relevant the value is for the person expressing prejudice, respondents’ anti-Black prejudice should *positively* predict the relevance of the value when someone expresses prejudice—but no relationship in a control scenario. However, when asking whether the value is relevant for the group that punished the individual, prejudice should *negatively* predict the relevance of the value when the individual expresses prejudice (but again not in the control).

We provide a detailed preregistration at osf.io/whzae; all materials, data, and code to reproduce this study are available at osf.io/5pj6b.

Method

Respondents were 1,036 self-identified registered voters in the United States, participating at the end of a larger survey on social and political issues. Respondents were sampled from the YouGov panel to be nationally representative of registered voters. Sampling, weighting, exclusions, and significance tests were all carried out as in Study 1. A final sample of 994 responses were used for all analyses, after excluding those indicating “no opinion” on any of the prejudice items ($n = 42$).

Offense. Participants read a vignette about Robert, who was kicked out of his neighborhood golf club. They were randomly assigned to read one of the two reasons: In the *prejudiced* condition, other members noticed him “telling insensitive jokes about Black Lives Matter protests.” In the *control* condition, they noticed him “wearing clothes that are too casual for the dress code.”

Target. Then, respondents were randomly assigned to consider the “freedom of association” of either the man who was removed from the club (individual) or the other members of the club (group). In the *individual* target condition, freedom of association was said to mean that “people have a right to decide which groups they want to join or leave.” In the *group* target condition: “groups have a right to decide the criteria that allow people to join or be removed from their group.”

Relevance. We measured relevance by asking individuals either: “How relevant do you think Robert’s right to freedom of association is to this situation?” (individual) or “How relevant do you think the golf club members’ right to freedom of association is to this situation?” (group). We again asked participants to indicate “on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means it is *not relevant at all* and 100 means it is *very relevant*.”

Prejudice. The same three measures and scoring methods were used as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .90$).

Results

We regressed relevance on the three-way interaction between offense, target, and prejudice, as well as all two-way interactions and main effects. The likelihood ratio for the hypothesized three-way interaction was significant, $2\log LR = 68.63$, $p < .001$ (Table 6). We then probed this interaction by examining the simple slope for relevance regressed on prejudice in each of the four experimental cells (Table 7).

First, consider when the member was kicked out for telling racist jokes. Prejudice positively predicted the relevance of the *individual’s* (i.e., the person saying the jokes) right to freedom of association. But prejudice negatively predicted the relevance

Table 6. Analysis of Variance Table for the Saturated Model Using Rao–Scott Likelihood Ratio Test (Study 2).

Term	2logLR	df	ddf	p
Prejudice relevance	9.81	1	992	.002
Target	18.63	1	992	<.001
Prejudice	5.01	1	992	.026
Offense × Target	0.29	1	989	.585
Offense × Prejudice	2.79	1	989	.098
Target × Prejudice	23.24	1	989	<.001
Offense × Target × Prejudice	68.63	1	986	<.001

Table 7. Simple Slopes in the Final Model Between Prejudice and Value Relevance, by Target Group (Study 2).

Offense	Target	Prejudice <i>b</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Prejudiced	Group	−10.03	1.70	−5.90	<.001
Control	Group	−0.82	1.43	−0.57	.567
Prejudiced	Individual	11.02	1.45	7.60	<.001
Control	Individual	−5.14	1.53	−3.36	.001

of the *group’s* (i.e., the neighborhood golf club) rights in this situation. When prejudice was relevant to the situation (i.e., telling racist jokes), prejudice was a significant predictor.

Second, consider when the member was kicked out for violating the dress code. Prejudice was not significantly related to the relevance of the *group’s* rights. By contrast, we found a negative relationship between prejudice and the relevance of the *individual’s* right to freedom of association when the individual was kicked out of the group over not adhering to the dress code (Figure 3). We did not a priori predict this relationship, but it does not harm our theoretical conclusions, so we do not discuss it further.

Examining the predicted values for those scoring at the maximum in anti-Black prejudice (17% of the sample) illustrates these findings well. These individuals scored 75 of 100 in value relevance when considering an individual who expressed prejudice—but only 36 of 100 when that individual violated the dress code. Conversely, they scored 54 of 100 when considering the golf club’s rights to kick out an individual for a dress code violation, while this was 42 of 100 when the individual made racist remarks. To these highly prejudiced respondents, violations of the golf club’s dress code implicated the value of free association more than making racist remarks.

Discussion

A democratic value was strategically deployed—or withheld—to justify another’s expressed prejudice. High prejudiced respondents were *more* likely than those low in prejudice to say the prejudiced target’s freedom of association was relevant. And those highly prejudiced were *less* likely than those reporting low prejudice to believe the free association rights of the group who expelled the prejudiced person were relevant. These patterns were not found in a control condition where the

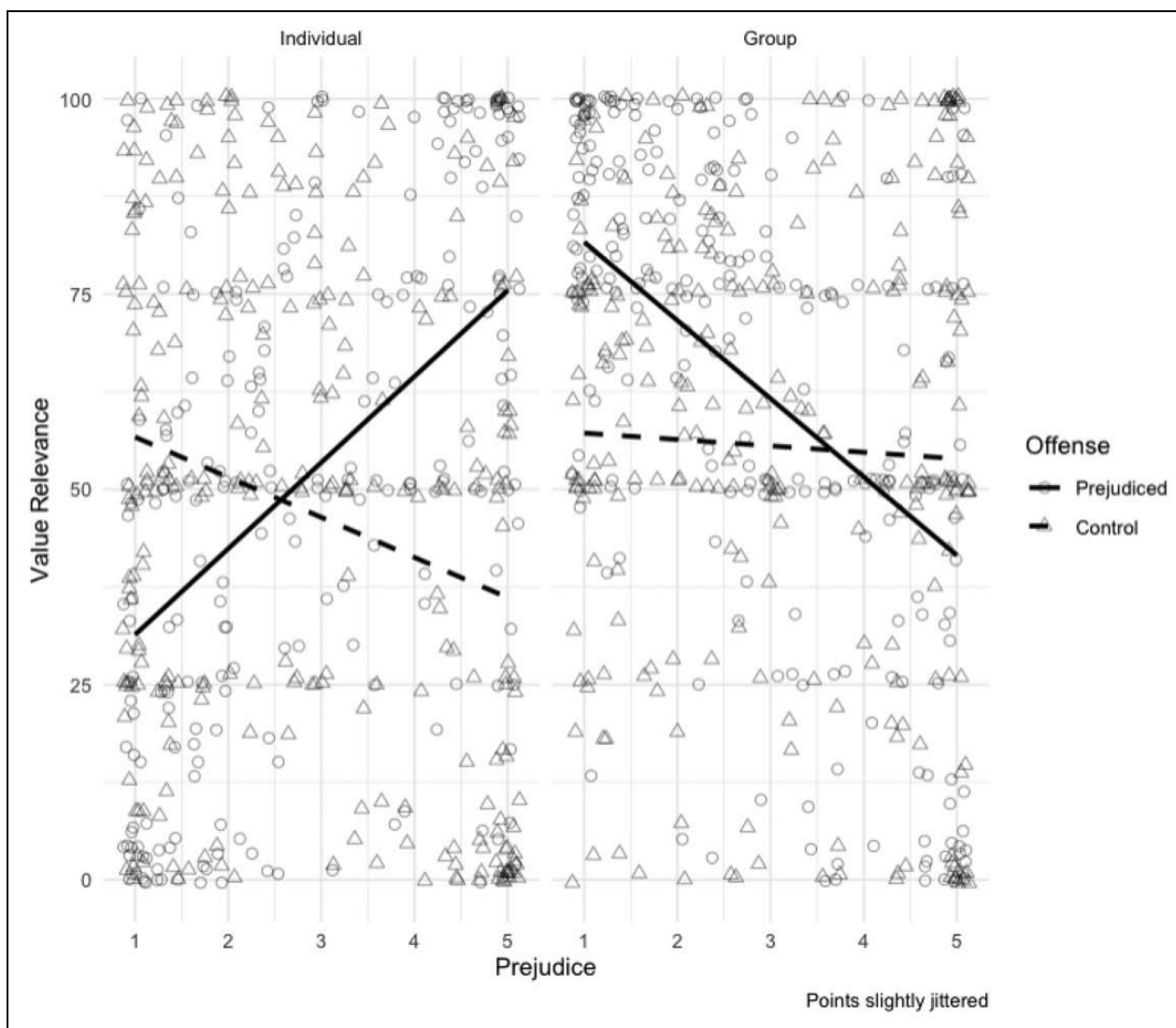


Figure 3. Value relevance regressed on prejudice, by target and offense (Study 2).

offense was dress code violation instead of prejudice. Once again, we find that prejudice only correlates with the application of democratic values in situations where that democratic value can justify the expression of prejudice.

General Discussion

Democratic values are cherished in a democratic society. They are normative, endorsed widely in the abstract. But values often conflict—such as equality and freedom—in important social issues like racial justice. If trade-offs must be made in when to apply these values, then prejudice should drive when these values are (and are not) applied. These values can justify prejudice by providing a normative, race-neutral shroud to defend the expression of negative racial attitudes. Although social norms in contemporary American society usually *suppress* prejudice, prized democratic values can be mobilized to *justify* the expression of prejudice.

Two nationally representative survey experiments show that prejudice positively predicts the application of democratic values—but only in situations where doing so would vicariously justify another’s expression of prejudice. These patterns are not affected by the content of the value (Study 1); they are relatively interchangeable, so long as they fit the situation. We also find that prejudice negatively predicts the application of an exact same value (freedom of association) in a situation where it would punish (or suppress) prejudice (Study 2).

Crandall and Eshleman (2003) proposed the JSM as a process that happens *within* an individual: One holds a prejudice, normative forces suppress it, so they find a justification that allows them to release the prejudice. The studies discussed here show the process of *vicarious justification*: A person will marshal justifications for someone else’s expressed prejudice as a linear function of their own. White and Crandall (2017, 2021) find the same vicarious justification processes with different justifications. People will find justifications to push back

on the normative processes that suppress prejudices they hold—even when they themselves are not the ones targeted by castigation or cancellation. White and Crandall (2017) find that people vicariously justify due to feeling their expressive autonomy being threatened by suppression. Painting the prejudice as normative obviates the need for justification, eliminating the relationship between prejudice and justification (White & Crandall, 2021).

Lowly Prejudiced Respondents

Social scientists tend to study things we see as problems in society. We use the JSM as a lens for focusing on prejudice. The implicit assumption here (and behind much of the work in stereotyping, prejudice, and intergroup relations) is that understanding when and how people express these negative feelings in pernicious ways is important for promoting a more equal and just society. But readers will note that those low in prejudice are just as unprincipled: They move *away* from saying the value is relevant when it defends prejudice, and they move *toward* saying so when it holds the prejudiced accountable. This replicates several findings (White & Crandall, 2017, 2021) and might also illuminate consequences of prejudice suppression (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Monteith et al., 2016; Pearson et al., 2009; Plant & Devine, 1998). Although it is beyond the scope of the present investigation and the JSM, future research may wish to further explore value application among those low in prejudice.

On Symbolic Racism

Symbolic racism measures have been criticized on the basis of their construct validity (see Tarman & Sears, 2005). Symbolic racism items have been said to merely be capturing components of conservative ideology that are divorced from anti-Black prejudice per se. But we find that symbolic racism correlates with applying democratic values *only* in situations where anti-Black prejudice is expressed. If symbolic racism were capturing ideological and policy preferences relying on conservative principles instead of prejudice, we would not expect to see this pattern of results. Thus, we also believe these data demonstrate the construct validity of such symbolic racism measures, and this paradigm is one that can be used in the future when developing measures of prejudice.

Conclusion

Theories of values conceptualize them as principles that guide behavior (Maio, 2010; Schwartz, 2012). But they can be bent to the will of strongly held attitudes like prejudice. Values are not always guiding principles that transcend situations; they can be normatively loaded rhetorical devices used to contest what is and is not acceptable to express. Although democratic values are held in high regard in the abstract, citizens may accept norm violations when political outcomes suit them (Graham &

Svolik, 2020). We find that individuals strategically apply these values to situations when it justifies shared prejudices.

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Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. For both Studies 1 and 2, we also analyzed those indicating “no opinion” by scoring the three items using an item response theory approach. Results were virtually identical to those presented here. Full details can be found in the Online Supplementary Analyses file.
2. An anonymous reviewer suggested probing the robustness of our conclusions by fitting nonlinear relationships between prejudice and value relevance. We find that nonlinear relationships overfit the model to the data, and the results do not challenge any of our theoretical conclusions. Full details can be found in the Online Supplementary Analyses file.

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