

# Prejudice: Causes, Effects, and Remedies

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## Keywords

prejudice, exclusionary attitudes, discrimination, intergroup relations, political psychology, political behavior.

## Abstract

Prejudice—a negative disposition toward outgroups rooted in faulty generalizations—has attracted attention from political scientists across all subfields. I review existing theory and evidence on the causes, effects, and remedies of prejudice in politics. Four core insights emerge: First, research on the causes of prejudice emphasizes structural factors as core determinants, underscoring why prejudice is a stable disposition which is hard to reduce. Second, empirical evidence on the political effects of prejudice remains limited and faces serious identification challenges. Third, although an emerging literature examines institutional remedies to prejudice, most studies focus on light-touch or grassroots interventions that are at odds with the literature’s understanding of prejudice as a stable disposition shaped by structural factors. Finally, RCTs that encourage engagement with prejudice-reduction interventions rarely contend with broader forms of social and political selection outside experimental contexts, dynamics that are substantively important and crucial for scaling such interventions. I conclude by highlighting underexplored questions that can guide future research.

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**Prejudice:** A negative disposition toward outgroups, rooted in faulty generalizations and expressed through cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Prejudice is a pervasive feature of politics in many countries worldwide. Existing research suggests that prejudice explains a broad range of political outcomes, including immigration attitudes (Newman and Malhotra 2019), presidential vote choice (Piston 2010), welfare policy preferences (Gilens 1995), economic discrimination (Peyton and Huber 2021), and support for political violence (Armaly and Enders 2024). Given the adverse social and political consequences of prejudice, political scientists have long studied its causes and effects, and a growing literature considers whether it may be reduced (Paluck et al. 2020).

Complementing recent reviews that focus on prejudice reduction (Paluck and Green 2009, Hultman and Mousa 2025, Paluck et al. 2020), often emphasizing the crucial methodological shortcomings of specific approaches (Green and Seher 2003, Paluck et al. 2019, 2020, Lowe 2025), this review takes a broader perspective, considering theory and evidence on the causes, effects, and remedies of prejudice in politics. This approach is warranted for three reasons. First, understanding the causes of prejudice can inform research on remedies by clarifying its underlying nature and directing scholars toward solutions that address root causes. Second, considering the effects of prejudice can clarify its political centrality and the societal costs and benefits of reducing it. Finally, focusing on *prejudice in politics* treats prejudice as a disposition constituted by, and consequential for, institutions, elites, and political dynamics, complementing cognitive perspectives that view prejudice as a generalized human tendency largely abstracted from political context (Weiss 2025). Given the scope of this review, I report core themes in the literature, rather than an exhaustive account of the published record. However, by taking a bird’s-eye view, and situating the study of prejudice reduction within the broader literature on the causes and effects of prejudice, I seek to underscore gaps and tensions in the literature that motivate avenues for new research.

## 2. CONCEPTUALIZING PREJUDICE

Throughout this review, I adopt a broad definition of prejudice as any negative cognitive, affective, or behavioral disposition toward an outgroup that is rooted in, or motivated by, inaccurate generalizations. Thus, two conditions must hold for a belief, attitude, or behavior to be classified as prejudicial. First, it must carry negative valence toward either an individual outgroup, or the outgroup as a whole. Second, it must be motivated, at least in part, by a generalization that does not apply to all members of the group.

Prejudice, as conceptualized above, is related to but conceptually and empirically distinct from other dispositions extensively examined in the literature. It differs from racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996), which bundles together several dispositions: ideological beliefs about minorities (e.g., ‘*if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites*’) and preferences over group-targeted policies (e.g., ‘*blacks have gotten less than they deserve*’) (Carmines et al. 2011). The contextual specificity of these measures, together with their conflation of general outgroup evaluations with ideological beliefs and policy preferences (Peyton and Huber 2021), makes them less compelling for studying intergroup animus comparatively.

Prejudice is also related to but conceptually distinct from discrimination. Scholars of discrimination often distinguish between taste-based discrimination and statistical discrimination. Taste-based discrimination refers to behavior motivated by a distaste toward an outgroup, whereas statistical discrimination refers to behavior motivated by a belief about the distribution of traits among members of different groups (Arrow 1998). Under the def-

inition guiding this review, taste-based discrimination can be thought of as a behavioral tendency caused by prejudice. Statistical discrimination, by contrast, may be unrelated to prejudice when the beliefs motivating it are accurate, but may constitute a form of prejudice when those beliefs reflect faulty generalizations (Bohren et al. 2023). In line with this understanding, some of the studies reviewed below employ behavioral games to measure discrimination as a consequence of prejudice (Enos and Gidron 2018, Peyton and Huber 2021), whereas others employ similar games to measure the behavioral manifestation of prejudice (Scacco and Warren 2018, Lowe 2021).

Finally, affective polarization, defined as partisans' disdain for supporters of opposing parties, represents a specific form of prejudice, directed towards partisan outgroups. It is often measured as the gap between positive evaluations of one's own party supporters and negative evaluations of opposing party supporters (Iyengar et al. 2019), and is motivated, at least in part, by one's misperception and generalization regarding political opponents (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). Thus, affective polarization fits squarely within the definition of prejudice, and findings on the causes, effects, and remedies of prejudice are often informative for understanding affective polarization.<sup>1</sup> A key difference, however, is that in contrast to the literature on prejudice, which often focuses on ascriptive identity groups (e.g., ethnic minorities), affective polarization centers on partisan identity which is developed (rather than inherited), and more susceptible to change. Thus, even though the above definition of prejudice encompasses affective polarization, and acknowledging that the division in the literature between both constructs is somewhat artificial, I focus my review on prejudice towards descent-based social groups.

## 2.1. Measuring Prejudice

The commonly accepted and broad definition of prejudice has motivated scholars to study this phenomenon across diverse target groups and geographical contexts. A challenge, however, is that many studies employ contextually-suitable measures of prejudice that vary across contexts, making it difficult to compare estimates across studies. In an increasingly comparative field, scholars of prejudice must balance the need for contextually suitable measures—often tailored to particular settings but potentially less-transportable to others—with the equally important need for general measures that travel well across contexts but may fail to capture nuance in the local nature of prejudice. Overlap in measures of prejudice across studies, however, is a necessary condition for knowledge accumulation.

Thus, scholars should attempt to design their studies in a way that combines both general and contextually-specific measures of prejudice. Such attempts would benefit from more systematic methodological evaluations validating general measures of prejudice across contexts, and establishing the efficacy of novel and unobtrusive ways to measure prejudice behaviorally. Complementing creative measurement strategies in the field (Siegel and Badaan 2020, Mousa 2020), the rise of LLMs that can be applied to systematically analyze text, speech, videos, and administrative records holds special promise for measuring prejudice at scale for both descriptive and causal studies.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, scholars highlight the role of segregation and homogeneous political networks in influencing both prejudice (Kasara 2013) and affective polarization (Smiley and Kaiser 2026). Similarly, like prejudice (Gilens 1995), affective polarization shapes policy preferences (Druckman et al. 2021). Finally, similar remedies (e.g., intergroup contact (Mousa 2020, Levendusky and Stecula 2021)) have been developed to reduce both prejudice and affective polarization.

### 3. CAUSES OF PREJUDICE

Existing theories suggest that the causes of prejudice range from micro-level factors such as perceptions and personality traits, to broader societal dynamics of segregation and political competition. Theories of prejudice often complement one another, and while some political psychologists have focused on personality traits as root causes of prejudice (McFarland 2010), the broader political science literature attributes the emergence of prejudice to five key causes: social context, individual worldviews, political competition, violent conflict, and historical legacies.

#### 3.1. Social Context

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**Social Context:** The social environment in which people are embedded, often measured through the demographic composition of administrative units

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Although an extensive literature considers how social context shapes prejudice (for recent reviews, see Weiss (2020), Nathan and Sands (2023)), there exists little consensus on its effects. Some studies find that current (or childhood) exposure to local ethnic or racial diversity reduces prejudice (Kasara 2013, Bursztyn et al. 2024), whereas others find that it increases prejudice (Goldman and Hopkins 2020, Hangartner et al. 2019). A further strand of research points to a more complex relationship, suggesting that the effects of social context depend on personality traits (Velez and Lavine 2017), socioeconomic conditions (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000), outgroup size and distance (Enos 2017), and the broader composition and distribution of groups in society (Fouka and Tabellini 2022).

Three explanations may account for these divergent findings on social context. First, one's social context may trigger a range of mechanisms (e.g., positive or negative intergroup contact, cross-group political competition, or economic cooperation), that could in theory shape prejudice in diverging ways (Nathan and Sands 2023). By virtue of their level of analysis (Eric Oliver and Wong 2003), or temporal breadth (Goldman and Hopkins 2020), different studies may be well suited to capture different mechanisms, ultimately yielding mixed results. Second, diverging findings may be a matter of external validity, wherein social context has diverging effects for different social cleavages, or in diverse political contexts. Finally, mixed evidence may reflect challenges to causal identification. Various factors, including social and political preferences, likely confound the relationship between social context and prejudice. Although some studies address these concerns through observational or experimental designs, many do not, making it difficult to assess whether estimated effects are over- or understated. More careful theorizing and measurement that directly target the mechanisms underlying the effects of social context across different cases (e.g., Enos (2017)) could help resolve these challenges.

#### 3.2. Individual Worldviews

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**Social Norms:** Shared beliefs over what constitutes suitable behavior in a given social context

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Another prominent explanation for intergroup prejudice centers on individuals' worldviews, and specifically their values, beliefs, and perceptions of norms. Focusing on majority group members' beliefs about minorities, a prominent line of work argues that prejudice is driven by (often inaccurate) perceptions that minority groups hold attributes or practices that conflict with dominant social norms (Bracic 2020, Choi et al. 2022). Consistent with this argument, Choi et al. (2019, 2021) implemented a large-scale field experiment in Germany showing how immigrant confederates who comply with civic norms or signal alignment with prevailing cultural practices experience less discrimination from native bystanders than otherwise similar non-compliant immigrants.

In contrast to theories of norm adherence, which emphasize majority group members' beliefs about minorities, theories of collective victimhood explain prejudice as a product of intragroup cultural narratives. Collective victimhood is often understood as a social group's shared understanding of past or present victimization (Antoniou et al. 2020), and existing research suggests that non-inclusive forms of collective victimhood, which emphasize the group-specific rather than universal implications of suffering, can increase prejudice by heightening perceptions of threat, reinforcing group boundaries, fostering parochialism, and encouraging zero-sum competition with outgroups over victimhood status (Shelef and vanderWilden 2025). Consistent with this view, a meta-analysis of (mostly) correlational studies and light-touch survey experiments finds that non-inclusive (inclusive) victimhood narratives increase (reduce) outgroup hostility (Kljačić et al. 2024). However, recent work leveraging both the timing of survey interviews around Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day and a panel survey experiment priming collective victimhood reports null effects (Shelef and vanderWilden 2025). One interpretation of these mixed findings is that collective victimhood shapes prejudice primarily through long-term socialization processes, while short-term increases in the salience of victimhood have limited impact. Yet, studies directly identifying the effects of socialization over the life course are rare, albeit crucial for establishing the role of collective victimhood (and other cultural narratives) on prejudice.

Extending these perspectives, and explicitly focusing on minority groups, recent work emphasizes the role of status and belonging in shaping intergroup prejudice. Specifically, Pérez et al. (2023) develop a theory of national identification to explain prejudice *between* minority groups. Through a series of studies, they show how stronger US nationalism is associated with greater anti-Black attitudes among Latinos, and how experimentally inducing perceptions of declining American status increases such prejudice. The authors interpret these findings as evidence that minority group members adopt exclusionary attitudes to differentiate themselves and gain access to higher-status social categories.

### 3.3. Political Competition

Diverging from the explanations above that focus on inter- and intragroup processes that generate prejudice, other research considers elites' top-down influence on intergroup relations. Theories of ethnic politics suggest that political elites often mobilize intergroup divisions to secure their electoral advantage (Glaeser 2005, Posner 2005). In line with this insight, the empirical literature has focused on two interrelated ways in which electoral politics influences prejudice: electoral competition and politicians' cues and behaviors.

Acknowledging the polarizing nature of elections during which intergroup relations are often framed in terms of "Us" vs. "Them" (Bassan-Nygate and Weiss 2020), some studies leverage the (often random) assignment of respondents to survey-interview dates to demonstrate how election salience—measured as temporal proximity to election day—increases perceived ethnic discrimination, status anxieties, and outgroup mistrust (Gadjanova 2022), but not religious intolerance (Nellis 2023). Interestingly, studies that focus on representation in *aftermath* of elections mostly point in a different direction (though see Zonszein and Grossman (2025)), suggesting that minority representation— theorized to provide information about outgroups and shape perceptions of norms—can reduce prejudice and discriminatory intentions (Hajnal 2001, Chauchard 2014).

Extending studies on political representation, and further emphasizing the conditional impact of electoral politics on prejudice, additional research focuses on elite political behav-

ior. Some studies, focused on Donald Trump’s exclusionary rhetoric, demonstrate politicians’ capability to fuel prejudice (Schaffner 2020, Newman et al. 2021). In contrast, other work, focused specifically on partisan animus, suggests that elite political cooperation can ameliorate cross-group tensions (Bassan-Nygate and Weiss 2022, Wagner and Praprotnik 2024, Weiss et al. Forthcoming). Taken together, these findings emphasize that electoral politics can profoundly influence intergroup relations. Notably, this influence appears to be complex and conditional, requiring new theoretical frameworks that could systematically clarify how different elements of electoral politics affect prejudice.

### 3.4. Violent Conflict

Moving beyond ordinary political competition, another line of research emphasizes how violent conflict, often thought of as a consequence of intergroup tensions, can itself fuel prejudice. Episodes of conflict heighten threat perceptions, harden group boundaries, and in doing so, are theorized to motivate prejudice (Beber et al. 2014). For example, in pre-separation Sudan, survey evidence suggests that exposure to Southerners’ riots increased exclusionary attitudes among Northerners (Beber et al. 2014). In Israel, a small panel survey of elementary and middle-school students suggests that stereotypes of various Arab outgroups sharply increased in the aftermath of two concentrated terror attacks (Bar-Tal and Labin 2001). Finally, more recent evidence from Syrian refugees suggests that exposure to violence among Sunni respondents is associated with more negative emotional reactions towards Shiites (Hall and Kahn 2020).

Complementing these studies that directly measure the association between violence exposure and prejudicial attitudes using surveys, other work leverages administrative records linked with data on terrorism fatalities to document how local exposure to violence increases ingroup bias in various contexts including judicial decision making (Shayo and Zussman 2011) and market transactions (Zussman 2016). These results emphasize how violence can spur a self-enforcing cycle of intergroup hostility and discrimination, contributing to the stability and durability of prejudice in conflict-ridden societies.

### 3.5. Historical Legacies

Finally, in contrast to accounts that emphasize how personal experiences shape prejudice, research on the historical persistence of culture and institutions suggests that animosity toward outgroups may have deeper roots. Examining these roots introduces numerous challenges of measurement and identification (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022). Nevertheless, existing studies suggest that in the US South, the emergence of Jim Crow institutions and cultural practices of Black subjugation in the aftermath of chattel slavery explains contemporary levels of prejudice (Acharya et al. 2018).

Other work, invoking historical legacies in experimental contexts, reports reductions (modest increases) in antisemitism among Spanish citizens with low (high) levels of national identification in response to survey-based primes providing information about the fifteenth-century expulsion of Jews from Spain (Balcells et al. 2026). Complementing these insights, studies focusing on adjacent outcomes such as mistrust and violence (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011, Voigtländer and Voth 2012) underscore how group divisions more broadly may be socially constructed over generations, a factor that may explain the stability of prejudice as well as its cultural and political significance.

### 3.6. General Insights

The central insight emerging from the studies above is that while prejudice is often measured at the individual-level, it is a product of powerful societal processes. Prejudice is shaped by our social environment, and is often informed by cultural practices, perceptions of prevailing norms, institutions, and salient conflictual events. For that reason, it is an especially stable disposition (Weiss 2026).

That said, debates over the central causes of prejudice are far from settled, and several substantive matters call for further attention. First, the relative importance of the causes above is rarely addressed in empirical studies or theoretical syntheses, possibly due to highly heterogeneous research designs that inhibit knowledge accumulation. Second, with respect to social context, further theory and evidence should clarify the extent to which diversity has universal or contextually conditional effects on prejudice. Third, although various frameworks explain the relationship between worldviews and prejudice, empirical studies that credibly identify the long-run effects of socialization into different cultural practices and values are much needed. Fourth, while a range of studies employing credible designs suggest that political competition is profoundly consequential for intergroup relations in diverging ways, scholars would benefit from theoretical frameworks that systematically clarify how different elements of electoral politics and different structures of political competition may improve or impair intergroup relations. Finally, descriptive work that traces the evolution of prejudice and historical legacies—explaining why animosity toward some target groups loses salience over the long run while prejudice toward others remains sticky across space and time—would be highly informative for contextualizing and directing future empirical studies of prejudice.

## 4. EFFECTS OF PREJUDICE

Scholars have devoted considerable attention to prejudice, due to its expected influence on many domains of social life. Political scientists commonly examine three outcomes linked to prejudice: political behavior, intergroup discrimination, and violent conflict.

### 4.1. Political Behaviors

Prejudice has been shown to influence a range of policy preferences. For example, Whites' dispositions towards Black Americans have been associated with support for welfare policy and the death penalty (Gilens 1995, Soss et al. 2003), and prejudice towards Latinos has been shown to motivate immigration preferences (Newman and Malhotra 2019). Moreover, in the realm of foreign policy, an experiment conducted across thirteen European countries finds higher opposition to foreign interventions aimed at supporting Muslim (rather than non-Muslim) minorities in China, with these effects increasing in respondents' levels of anti-Muslim prejudice (Findor et al. 2025).

Alongside influencing policy preferences, research shows that prejudice informs vote choice. For example, studies from the US document a negative relationship between racial prejudice and vote intention for Barack Obama (Piston 2010). Other work finds that support for Donald Trump is associated with prejudice toward, and dehumanization of, Black Americans (Jardina and Piston 2022). Similarly, cross-national surveys suggest that prejudice toward the LGBTQ community is associated with lower support for LGBTQ candidates (Magni and Reynolds 2021). This evidence suggests that while minority candidates often

incur an electoral penalty among prejudiced voters, majority candidates can, under certain conditions, translate intergroup prejudice into an electoral advantage.

## 4.2. Discrimination

Discrimination is yet another outcome theorized to result from prejudice. Scholars have increasingly turned to audit experiments to recover patterns of discrimination in naturalistic settings (Broockman 2013). Such endeavors are descriptively informative, and often involve supplementary analyses to establish that discrimination is indeed motivated by prejudice (see for example Druckman and Shafranek’s 2020 discussion of racial threat). However, audit studies rarely elicit individuals’ underlying prejudicial beliefs and preferences, making it hard to determine their relationship with discrimination.

Addressing this limitation, a related line of research combines surveys with experimental games to measure the behavioral consequences of prejudice. In the Israeli context, survey measures eliciting preferences for social distance towards Palestinian Citizens of Israel, have been shown to strongly correlate with non-cooperative behaviors in public goods games (Enos and Gidron 2018). In the US context, explicit prejudice towards Black Americans, but not racial resentment, has been shown to influence discriminatory behaviors in ultimatum games (Peyton and Huber 2021).

Audit studies and research employing survey-data linked to behavioral games, complement one another. The former allow researchers to document discrimination in consequential decision making, while the latter demonstrate the relationship between prejudice and discrimination in controlled environments. Notably, both approaches employ randomization as a measurement tool, but neither leverages randomization to causally identify the effects of prejudice. Thus the nature and magnitude of the effects of prejudice on discriminatory behavior remains somewhat unclear.

## 4.3. Political Violence

Though intergroup animosity is often viewed as central to dynamics of political violence, and though Green and Seher (2003) have emphasized the value of empirically examining the role of prejudice in violent conflict more than two decades ago, evidence on the relationship between prejudice and political violence remains limited. Research from Bosnia argues that civil war violence is influenced by intergroup prejudice, but relies on residential patterns rather than direct measures of animosity to support this claim (Weidmann 2011). Turning to more direct evidence, in the U.S., measures of racial resentment have been shown to correlate with general support for political violence (Armaly and Enders 2024), and meta-analyses recover a positive association between respondents’ self-reported dehumanization and aggression (Cheng et al. 2025).

These studies suggest that prejudice may very well play a meaningful role in motivating violent conflict. However, measurement and identification challenges endemic to survey explorations of political violence (see Westwood et al. (2022)), as well as the minimal breadth of evidence emphasize the need for more theory and evidence in this space.

## 4.4. General Insights

Various theoretical frameworks suggest that prejudice is politically consequential. However, empirical evidence on its effects faces two central limitations. First, most studies

do not employ research designs that allow for credible causal identification under well-defined assumptions. Instead, the literature relies heavily on correlational analyses—often implicitly invoking selection-on-observables assumptions—while giving limited attention to the endogenous social and political processes that may confound the relationship between prejudice and downstream political outcomes.

Compounding these identification challenges is a second, equally important, measurement concern. Most studies examining the political consequences of prejudice rely on surveys to measure both prejudice and its political consequences. Measures of political outcomes, rely almost exclusively on self-reports, raising questions about the true relationship between prejudice and consequential political behavior. These limitations underscore the inherent challenges of studying the effects of prejudice and highlight the need for creative research that moves beyond correlational evidence on self-reported behavior, to provide more direct and credible estimates of the political consequences of prejudice.

## 5. REMEDIES FOR PREJUDICE

The most vibrant area of research on prejudice in recent years focuses on remedies. Reviewing the empirical literature, scholars have distinguished between light-touch and more intensive approaches for prejudice reduction (Paluck et al. 2020). Complementing this important distinction, and following Ditlemann et al. (2017), I classify remedies based on their level of intervention, distinguishing between micro-, meso-, and macro-level approaches.

### 5.1. Micro-Level Approaches

Often drawing on theories in social psychology, micro-level remedies attempt to reduce prejudice by targeting individuals' beliefs, cognition, and emotions. Following Broockman and Kalla's (2016) groundbreaking field experiment on reducing Transphobia in the US, perspective taking, broadly defined as an exercise encouraging ingroups to imagine an experience from their outgroup's point of view, is one of the most well-studied remedies in the political science literature. Existing research demonstrates that survey based perspective taking prompts can increase short-term pro-refugee behavior, without shifting broader prejudicial attitudes (Adida et al. 2018). Other work from Hungary demonstrates how a game that encourages taking the perspective of Roma minorities durably reduced prejudice up to one-month post-treatment (Simonovits et al. 2018), whereas a meta-analysis of three survey experiments in Colombia shows how immigrant narratives and perspectives can increase natives' inclusionary attitudes (Bandiera et al. 2026).

Considering the scope of perspective taking effects, and in line with an understanding that prejudice is motivated at least in part by inaccurate generalizations, Adida et al. (2025) cross-randomize perspective taking with information interventions in three survey experiments. They find that perspective taking prompts increase warmth and support for pro-refugee policies, but do not impact factual knowledge on refugees, whereas factual information increases knowledge without consistently shaping other outcomes. This complex pattern of results raises interesting questions about the construct being shifted in prejudice-reduction interventions: do common interventions alter deep-seated attitudes rooted in strongly held beliefs, or do they merely reduce the expression or salience of those attitudes without influencing underlying convictions? Answering this question introduces various measurement challenges, but could theoretically inform our expectations regarding

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#### Perspective Taking:

A psychological process in which ingroups imagine an experience from their outgroup's point of view

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the durability of “light touch” interventions.

Moving beyond individual-level effects, and in line with Ditzmann et al. (2017) who propose that interventions may encourage peer-to-peer influence, Larson and Lewis (2025) employ a field experiment in Uganda to consider the role of social networks in diffusing the effects of perspective taking interventions. In within-subject pre-post analyses, they find that exposure to a perspective taking task improved attitudes towards refugees, and that the evolution of attitudes over time is conditioned by (endogenous) peer attitudes. Finally, in a broader effort to synthesize theoretical insights from the literature and evaluate their implications in naturalistic settings, Kalla and Broockman (2023) distinguish multiple forms of perspective taking, and employ field and survey experiments, to demonstrate the relative effectiveness of perspective getting as an approach to reducing exclusionary attitudes.

A related line of research, considers whether priming similarities between majority and minority group members can reduce prejudice. One common approach uses surveys to prime natives’ family histories of immigration or oppression, as a way to boost empathy, and in turn reduce prejudice towards refugees and immigrants. However, the evidence on the effectiveness of this approach is mixed.

Survey experiments from the US—a context where immigration histories are relevant to many families—suggest that primes of immigration history are effective across the board (Williamson et al. 2021). In contrast, evidence from Greece and Germany suggests that such primes are effective only among respondents with family histories of forced displacement (Dinas et al. 2021), whereas a survey experiment priming a “never again” narrative of Holocaust commemoration is only effective among respondents whose families *did not* survive the Holocaust (Wayne and Zhukov 2022). Finally, more recent work employing five experiments across Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece, suggests that priming family histories of displacement does not improve attitudes or behaviors towards refugees at all, and if anything, may result in a small backlash effect (Sambanis et al. 2023).

Taken together, evidence on the effectiveness of micro-level approaches suggests that targeting individuals’ beliefs, cognition, and emotions can, under certain conditions, reduce prejudice. Notably, most of this evidence stems from highly controlled survey experiments in which treatments are relatively stylized, outcomes are measured immediately post-treatment, and compliance is either forced or monetarily incentivized. Many studies employing such designs emphasize the potential scalability of micro-level remedies. However, with the exception of work on door-to-door canvassing (Broockman and Kalla 2016, Kalla and Broockman 2020, 2023), empathy based education (Alan et al. 2021, Weiss et al. 2023), and social media exposure (Weiss et al. 2026), few studies examine how micro-level interventions can be implemented outside survey environments and at scale, or how individuals—particularly those with exclusionary attitudes—can be incentivized to empathize with outgroups. As I elaborate below, addressing these questions is critical for establishing the applied implications of research on micro-level remedies.

## 5.2. Meso-Level Approaches

Meso-level approaches seek to reduce prejudice by influencing people’s social environment. Intergroup contact is, by far, the most common meso-level approach for prejudice reduction. Rooted in frameworks of social context, and understanding prejudice as a consequence of limited familiarity with outgroups, scholars have implemented creative field experiments in Nigeria (Scacco and Warren 2018), Iraq (Mousa 2020), Afghanistan (Zhou and Lyall 2020),

India (Lowe 2021), and Israel (Asimovic et al. 2024), bringing members of different groups together, and examining the attitudinal and behavioral effects of intergroup interactions. Most studies of prolonged intergroup contact focus on in-person interactions, mostly unfolding in vocational training programs or cultural and sporting activities (e.g., (Scacco and Warren 2018, Mousa 2020)). However, other work focuses on online-mediated exchanges in contexts where face-to-face interaction may be threatening and costly (Majumdar 2026).

Initial meta-analyses including both correlational and experimental studies point to the promising potential of contact in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Yet, recent reviews of experimental work offer a more skeptical view: meta-analytic estimates are positive but small, and decreasing in sample size and adherence to pre-registration plans (Paluck et al. 2019, 2020, Lowe 2025). An emerging consensus from these studies is that while positive contact—in various forms that do or do not align with Allport’s (1954) original scope conditions—may reduce prejudice, its effects are modest and do not always generalize from the target of interaction to the outgroup as a whole (Lowe 2025).

Complementing studies of intergroup contact, another line of research considers how the media shapes prejudice. In a pathbreaking field experiment in Rwanda, Paluck (2009) shows that a radio soap opera on intergroup reconciliation reduced prejudicial behaviors and increased perceptions of inclusive social norms, while having little effect on individuals’ underlying beliefs. Further emphasizing the media’s capacity to reduce prejudice, multiple studies show that mass exposure to celebrated immigrants can improve sentiments and behaviors toward minorities (Alrababah et al. 2019, Unan 2025). However, as Kalla and Brookman (2022) show, not all forms of media exposure effectively reduce prejudice: brief TV-based issue ads focused on Immigration and LGBTQ rights have no detectable impact on prejudicial attitudes or related policy preferences. One reason for these diverging results may be that longer, socially embedded forms of exposure (unlike brief, one-off ads), are better able to shape shared narratives, norms, and culture, that in turn impact prejudice.

Finally, a related path to reducing prejudice focuses on enforcing social norms. Across domains, changing perceptions of social norms is theorized to reduce negative public behaviors, even in the absence of private belief change (Tankard and Paluck 2016). In line with this insight, experiments on Twitter suggest that by reacting to hate-speech and alerting users to inclusive social norms, influential social referents can reduce hate speech online (Siegel and Badaan 2020). In contrast to the remedies reviewed above, which seek to persuade individuals about the qualities of outgroups, social norm interventions target perceptions of social expectations. As such, they depend on the presence of inclusionary norms—which are often absent in deeply divided societies—and they may shift public behavior without transforming private beliefs.

Meso-level remedies are compelling because they directly address some of the central social antecedents of prejudice, including social context, norms, and culture. However, our understanding of such remedies is far from complete. For example, recent research suggests that distinct types of contact can have diverging effects (Chakraborty et al. 2024, Majumdar 2026, Lowe 2021, Weiss 2026), but our empirical understanding of which forms of intergroup interaction do or do not reduce prejudice—and why—remains limited. Moreover, like in the case of micro-level remedies, it is unclear how individuals may be incentivized to select out of segregated spaces, consume reconciliatory media, or advocate for inclusive social norms. As I further elaborate below, empirically investigating these selection processes is an important complement to recent empirical developments.

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**Institutions:** A system of rules, beliefs, and norms that manifests in organizations and shapes citizens' expectations and behaviors at scale

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### 5.3. Macro-Level Approaches

Finally, macro-level remedies focus on institutional or structural dynamics that can improve intergroup relations. These approaches are especially compelling for two reasons. First, institutions—broadly defined as a system of rules, beliefs, and norms that manifests in organizations—are potentially impactful, as they have the capacity to shape citizens' social expectations and incentives. Second, in contrast to micro- and meso-level approaches, the broad reach of institutions, and their centrality to citizens' daily lives, can facilitate scalable dynamics of prejudice reduction (Weiss 2026).

Various studies consider how education—specifically curricula changes and school programs—may reduce prejudice. For example, an RCT in Turkish schools shows how a curriculum designed to equip students with empathy and perspective-taking skills reduced school-violence and social exclusion of refugees, and increased pro-sociality and the formation of cross-group ties (Alan et al. 2021). Similarly, two RCTs from Israel demonstrate how a monthlong diversity education program that facilitated constructive classroom discussions on intergroup relations reduced prejudice and motivated pro-diversity behavior up to thirteen weeks post-treatment (Weiss et al. 2023). Further echoing the promise of educational institutions, Ghosh et al. (2026) demonstrate how inter-ethnic youth camps in West Bengal—which engage children in rituals, sports, and civics training—facilitated intergroup friendships up to a year post-treatment.<sup>2</sup>

As the findings above emphasize, education is an especially powerful force in reducing prejudice, for two reasons. First, schools have prolonged access to students, who are embedded in structured environments through which information, values, and norms can be transmitted top-down. As a result, targeting students, capturing their attention, and facilitating meaningful persuasion may be more feasible within school settings than later in one's life course. Second, students' attitudes are often especially malleable, and the values and preferences they adopt throughout their educational career may endure in the long-run. Accordingly, the returns to early intervention in school settings may be especially high.

Complementing studies on education, another line of research examines how diversity within state institutions shapes intergroup relations. Research on diversifying armies suggests that military service can increase exposure to outgroups, which in turn may reduce prejudice. Empirical evidence supporting this claim comes from studies in the United States (Green and Hyman-Metzger 2025), Burundi (Samii 2013), and Norway (Finseraas and Kotsadam 2017). These findings echo the foundational theoretical insights of Allport (1954) and are substantively related to experimental studies of intergroup contact. However, they differ in an important respect: the cross-group interactions they analyze are generated by broad, top-down institutional reforms and national policies, rather than by targeted, grassroots interventions.

Further emphasizing the promise of institutionally induced cross-group interactions to reduce prejudice, Mo and Conn (2018) examine how teachers' service in disadvantaged communities shapes their intergroup attitudes. Comparing Teach for America admits, with their peers who were narrowly rejected from the program, they show that serving as a teacher in a disadvantaged community reduces class- and race-based prejudice, and increases recognition of systemic injustice. Complementing these findings, other work suggests that the effects

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<sup>2</sup>By randomizing components of the camp, the authors demonstrate that different elements of education programs can have positive (or negative) effects among different groups, emphasizing the importance of optimizing curricula in ways that maximize cross-group tolerance.

of diversity within institutions may extend beyond their rank and file, shaping patterns of prejudice among the broader public. Indeed, research in the context of service provision shows how inclusionary institutions can facilitate meaningful interactions between service providers and citizens (Weiss 2021), or convey novel information about minorities' contributions to society, ultimately leading to broad patterns of prejudice reduction (Weiss 2026). Diversity in the rank and file of public institutions is especially promising for prejudice reduction, as it provides minority service providers with opportunities to leverage their skills and organizational status to contribute to the common good, and in doing so, counteract prevailing stereotypes relating to threat and resentment.

#### 5.4. General Insights

Political scientists' consensus that institutions meaningfully shape society, and recent calls to move away from nudges towards remedies that focus on "structural features of the environment like institutional rules..." (Paluck et al. 2020, p. 550), underscore the merits of macro-level remedies. Much attention has been allotted to micro- and meso-level approaches in recent years in part due to their research design tractability. However, institutions' capacity to facilitate positive dynamics at scale, among broad populations, often in a recurring and prolonged fashion, should encourage more research on macro-level approaches for prejudice reduction.

In addition, a fundamental, albeit underexplored question, relevant to remedies at all levels of analysis, concerns take-up and incentives. The well-justified emphasis on experimentation to test the effects of remedies has led scholars to focus on contexts where remedies are essentially forced upon subjects as treatments. We know far less about equally important—and often descriptive—questions of selection into treatment (though see Weiss et al. (2026)). For example, what does demand for different interventions look like in divided societies, and is it sensitive to patterns of conflict? Which ingroups are least likely to take their outgroup's perspective, and what does this imply for building broad social cohesion? When and why do societies adopt inclusionary institutions, and what ultimately leads to their demise? Answers to these questions would contextualize our experimental findings and help clarify their broader societal implications.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Progress in knowledge on the causes, effects, and remedies of prejudice over the past decade has been somewhat uneven. Ambitious research on remedies has become increasingly popular, ultimately developing into its own field of 'Prejudice Reduction' (Paluck et al. 2020). Though not without limitation, the success of the prejudice reduction agenda rests on an increasingly common consensus over empirical standards that should be employed to answer a well-defined and concentrated theoretical question (Paluck and Green 2009, Paluck et al. 2019). At the same time, research on the causes of prejudice includes scattered and diverse findings that are hard to synthesize into a unified framework, and the evidentiary base on the effects of prejudice remains lacking. These important areas of research would benefit from the type of critical intervention laid out in Paluck and Green (2009).

Acknowledging the point above, one might ask: what do political scientists know about prejudice? Several answers come to mind. First, we know from a growing set of rigorous studies that reducing prejudice is very hard. Even theoretically motivated, intensive

interventions often yield modest effects at best. This should not dissuade scholars from studying prejudice reduction; rather, it should motivate the testing of underexplored theories in creative and ambitious ways. Second, we know from multiple strands of evidence that prejudice is constructed and shaped by politics. Politics is, of course, an extremely broad term, and there is much to be gained from developing theoretical frameworks that clarify the conditions under which our political system impairs or improves intergroup relations. Finally, we know from numerous studies that prejudice correlates with a wide range of political outcomes. Whether such correlations warrant a causal interpretation is unclear but crucial for understanding the political significance of prejudice.

More generally, this review yields four primary insights and highlights several directions for future research. First, despite being an individual-level psychological disposition, theory and evidence in political science suggest that prejudice is, to a large extent, shaped by structural factors. Such factors, which may at times reinforce one another, help explain why prejudice is considered a durable disposition that is difficult to change.

Second, as noted above, prejudice is widely viewed as a politically consequential disposition. However, existing studies are rarely well-positioned to report credible estimates of its causal effects. Strengthening the evidence base on these effects would be especially valuable, as it would inform debates about the theoretical importance and broader social relevance of prejudice as a political phenomenon.

Third, despite limited evidence on the causal effects of prejudice, a large literature examines interventions designed to reduce it. This work has focused primarily on micro- and meso-level approaches—often framed as scalable—but rarely evaluated outside highly controlled and localized settings. Given political scientists’ emphasis on the structural and political roots of prejudice, and the prevailing consensus regarding the social power of institutions, more attention should be devoted to macro-level remedies, complementing the existing focus on psychological and grassroots interventions.

Finally, empirical studies of remedies primarily focus on estimating their effects, often in experimental settings where compliance is incentivized or forced. With few exceptions, this literature rarely considers individuals’ motivations and incentives to engage in prejudice-reducing experiences. Yet, existing evidence suggests that many individuals—particularly those high in prejudice—may avoid experiences that ultimately improve intergroup relations (Weiss et al. 2026). This highlights an important, albeit underappreciated, point: interventions are most likely to generate broad social change when they are *both* persuasive and capable of overcoming avoidance dynamics.<sup>3</sup> Thus, taking incentives seriously—and attending to the often-overlooked political processes of selection—is crucial for assessing the broader impact of these interventions and for determining whether they produce widespread effects rather than simply preaching to the choir.

## Avenues for Future Research

### 1. Measurement

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<sup>3</sup>Prejudice reduction interventions could also generate broad social change indirectly by encouraging participants to engage in peace promoting behavior (Ditlmann et al. 2017, Asimovic et al. 2024). Assessing the downstream communal influence of such intervention-induced behaviors is yet another promising avenue for research.

- (a) Reassess existing measures of prejudice, develop approaches better suited to comparative research, and promote the use of common outcomes across studies.

## 2. Causes of Prejudice

- (a) Develop theoretical frameworks that clarify the relative importance of different causes, and explain how distinct social, political, and institutional forces generate different forms of prejudice.
- (b) Use harmonized research designs to assess the generalizability of theories and findings, particularly those concerning social context.

## 3. Effects of Prejudice

- (a) Develop theory and employ research designs that enable more credible identification of the effects of prejudice.

## 4. Remedies for Prejudice

- (a) Examine selection into interventions, and use suitable designs to estimate effects among subpopulations with differing demand for prejudice reduction.
- (b) Examine network effects of micro-level interventions using design-based inference.
- (c) Assess how changes in electoral institutions shape prejudice.
- (d) Examine the conditions under which societies adopt institutions with the capacity to improve intergroup relations.

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