

# School Choice Is Not Enough: The Impact of Critical Social Justice Ideology in American Education

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## Executive Summary

Results of a representative survey of more than 1,500 Americans aged 18 to 20 suggest that Critical Race Theory (CRT) and radical gender ideology, together known as Critical Social Justice (CSJ), is widespread in American schools. Ninety-three percent of American 18- to 20-year-olds said that they had heard about at least one of eight CSJ concepts from a teacher or other adult at school, including “white privilege,” “systemic racism,” “patriarchy,” or the idea that gender is a choice unrelated to biological sex. Additionally, 90% of respondents had heard about at least one CRT concept and 74% about at least one radical gender concept.

*CSJ appears to have a significant impact in shifting children to the political left.*

In partisan terms, those exposed to no CSJ concepts break 27% to 20% for the Republican Party, while those who have been taught the maximum of eight CSJ concepts lean a whopping 53% to 7% toward the Democratic Party. In strongly Republican counties, young people taught no CSJ concepts lean Republican 38% to 20%, whereas in the same counties, those taught the maximum number of CSJ concepts lean Democratic by a stunning 46% to 14%. Parents also have less influence on their children than one might think. For instance, young people with

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a Republican mother who are taught no CSJ lean 61% Republican to 14% Democratic, while individuals with a Republican mother who are taught a high number of CSJ concepts in school are more balanced, at 25% Republican and 30% Democratic.

*CSJ is not being taught as one theory among others but rather, in 7 out of 10 cases, as “truth.”*

These concepts are introduced as the only respectable approach to race, gender, and sexuality in American society. This has significant consequences for the policy preferences of young people (and, thus, for future policy). For instance, support for preferential hiring and promotion of black people increases from 17% among those exposed to no CRT in school to 44% among those exposed to the maximum of five CRT concepts. Those taught that the black-white pay gap is due mainly to discrimination were 14 points more likely to agree with this than those who were not taught this idea.

Compared to those not taught a specific idea, those taught these concepts are 15 points more likely to agree that “being white is one of the most important sources of privilege in America,” 23 points more likely to agree that “white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people,” and 29 points more likely to agree that “America is built on stolen land.”

*CSJ increases fear among students.*

Thirty-eight percent of those who were not taught CSJ reported that they were afraid of being punished, shamed, or expelled for voicing opinions on controversial subjects, rising to between 62% and 68% among those taught at least two CSJ concepts. Among Republican young people, fear levels jump from 31% to 74% after exposure to CSJ. As a likely consequence of this fear, those exposed to CRT become less willing to criticize a black schoolmate, preventing black pupils from hearing useful feedback from classmates. Recalled discomfort with criticizing a black schoolmate at school rose from 32% of those not exposed to CRT to 50% among young people who were taught at least some CRT in school. By this measure, CRT instruction appears to have a harmful effect on young people and damages the very people it purports to help.

*CSJ is taught in all types of school.*

The survey found 73% of parochial schoolers, 82% of non-religious private schoolers, and 83% of homeschoolers report being taught at least one CSJ term. Public schools do teach more radical gender theory, with 56% of those who attended one being taught at least one radical gender concept. This figure is somewhat lower among non-religious private schoolers, parochial students, and homeschooled children, but gender theory is present in all forms of school.

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Therefore, school choice may allow a small number of highly informed and committed parents to insulate their children from CSJ, but it will make little difference to the level of indoctrination in the American school-age population.

#### Report Recommendations

In addition to recommending that lawmakers and parents redirect their political energy and capital from focusing on school choice alone, this report suggests:

- State governments must seek to intervene in the public-school curriculum, such as banning the teaching of CRT and radical gender theory as truth, clamping down on political indoctrination, and requiring teaching materials to be made available upon request. This means issuing finer-grained policy guidance that defines which concepts (such as systemic racism) are political, and which are held in consensus.

- State governments should seek to introduce more content on the excesses of left-wing utopianism and non-European civilizations in history. This can better contextualize American history, helping students better comprehend that America’s sins are less exceptional than its achievements.
- Students also need to be taught about the law and the Constitution, especially the First Amendment, which has been shown to improve the understanding of the importance of free speech and due process.
- Lawmakers and school administrators must ensure that there are clear routes for parents to report breaches of political impartiality, and that those breaches are addressed.
- Teacher training and school inspection should uphold a norm of political impartiality and be audited to ensure that is taking place.

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## Introduction

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and radical gender ideology are endemic in American schools, with 93% of American pupils reporting that they have been taught and/or have heard from an adult at school one or more Critical Social Justice (CSJ) concepts, including “white privilege,” “systemic racism,” or the idea that gender is a choice unrelated to biological sex. These are some of the findings of a new representative Deltapoll survey of 1,505 young people aged 18 to 20 who recently exited high school.<sup>1</sup>

CSJ is not being taught as one theory among others, but, in most cases, as the only respectable approach to race, gender, and sexuality in American society. CSJ instruction is not just window-dressing. As we will show, it is associated with a substantial leftward shift in the attitudes and policy preferences of pupils exposed to these ideas. The more intensively pupils have been exposed to CSJ, the more they lean left on identity politics and the more white students feel guilty about their ostensible racial privilege.

This is a disaster for those who endorse classical liberal ideals such as color-blindness, equal treatment, the scientific method of discovery, and free speech. These results represent a major defeat for those who believe it is important to cultivate pride in American achievements and attachment to American national identity. Beyond this, we find that exposure to CSJ is correlated with greater fear of being expelled from school and reluctance to criticize a black classmate. Taken together, these results indicate that CSJ creates a climate of uneasy race relations, less constructive feedback to black pupils from peers, and more negative feelings among white students about their heritage.

### A Word about Terminology

This report focuses on the teaching of Critical Race Theory and radical gender theory in American classrooms. Taken together, those concepts comprise radical cultural left ideologies known as Critical Social Justice (CSJ).<sup>2</sup> CSJ represents an offshoot of the left’s post-1960s intellectual shift from economics and class to culture and identity groups. This has given rise to a cultural socialism focused on race, sexual minorities, and gender. Its core features include:

- A focus on extreme expressions (e.g., “cancel culture” reactions to supposed microaggressions) of the moral foundations of care or harm, and equality;<sup>3</sup>

- A socialist concentration on inequality, hierarchy, and power;
- The primacy of race, gender, and sexual inequalities over material or psychological forms of inequality;
- A focus on unmeasurable and unfalsifiable “structures” of oppression that purportedly advantage whites, males, or heterosexuals, and disadvantage racial minorities, women, and sexual minorities;
- Inequalities of outcome—such as race or gender gaps—used as evidence for both causes (“structural racism”) and effects (“racial disparity”), resulting in circular logic;
- A keen interest on language and narratives as forces that sustain invisible hierarchies of power and self-esteem;
- The belief that existing “structures” are a continuation of previous “structures” that were in place during periods of blatant racism, like Jim Crow laws in the South (again, there are no measures of these structures independent of outcome disparities);
- The view that traditional historical narratives or classical liberal principles produce emotional harm or even trauma for minorities;
- The rejection of the scientific method, measurement, and falsifiability in favor of “lived experience” and standpoint epistemology;
- The belief that identities such as gender or race are socially constructed rather than biologically determined, and that constructions such as binary genders embody power and domination.

In this study, we draw a distinction between “high” CSJ theory, such as the scholarly work of Derrick Bell or Kimberlé Crenshaw, and applied CSJ, embodied in terms such as “white privilege,” “systemic racism,” or the belief that gender is a choice not constrained by biology. Though these are not formally listed as tenets of CSJ, versions of these terms are fully consonant with high academic CSJ theory. The fact that they are applied in bite-size expressions of CSJ does not, in our view, make them any less integral to CSJ.

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## Critical Race Theory and Gender Theory as Political Issues

Where did CSJ come from, and when did it arrive? Content analyses of millions of academic abstracts show a substantial increase in focus on “racism” and “sexism” in scholarly work since the 1970s; “diversity,” “social justice,” and “equity” since the 1990s; and “white privilege” since the 2000s.<sup>4</sup> In the mid–2010s, big data analyses comparing academic and media content show that the media caught up with academia in the frequency with which it used these terms. Critical race and gender ideas had spread from campus to a newly politicized media and, later, corporations.<sup>5</sup> CSJ-inspired diversity training and radical K–12 classroom instruction were two major manifestations of this new development.

In 2020, Christopher F. Rufo began to expose some of the more egregious examples of CRT, such as Seattle Public Schools telling teachers that the education system is guilty of “spirit murder” against black children and that white teachers must “bankrupt (their) privilege in acknowledgment

of (their) thieved inheritance.” In another case, a Cupertino, California, elementary school forced third graders to deconstruct their racial and sexual identities and rank themselves according to their “power and privilege.”<sup>6</sup>

After Rufo appeared on Fox News calling for President Donald Trump to put a stop to CRT in the federal government, the administration duly proceeded to ban it in federal agencies. Though later repealed by President Joe Biden, the issue had gained public attention. By mid-2021, surveys showed that cancel culture, wokeness, and political correctness were an above-average issue for Republican voters, with a third selecting it as one of their top three issues from a list of 10. Even among independents, these were mid-ranking concerns.<sup>7</sup>

In November 2021, Virginia gubernatorial candidate Glenn Youngkin defeated Democratic opponent Terry McAuliffe in a state that Biden won in 2020 by more than 10 points. Youngkin’s attacks on CRT, and on his opponent’s remarks that teachers and not parents should decide what is in the curriculum, helped swing the election in Youngkin’s favor.<sup>8</sup> In the midst of these campaigns, progressives insisted that CRT was not being taught in schools. “We don’t get it. . . . It’s not even happening in our classes,” declared a Phoenix English teacher.<sup>9</sup> Teachers’ unions and associations steadfastly maintain that the entire anti-CRT narrative is merely a right-wing ploy, with conservative activists cherry-picking a few high-profile anecdotes to draw misleading generalizations about schools.

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## CRT Concepts vs. Factual Knowledge

Denials that CRT is being taught in school are often accompanied by charges that anti-CRT activists merely oppose the teaching of uncomfortable historical facts. While we will dispute this accusation, we recognize that disagreement over both what qualifies as “historical fact,” and how such facts are framed or contextualized, is likely a major source of political polarization on this topic. As such, it is important to briefly clarify our objections to teaching CRT-related concepts and narratives as factual knowledge.

First, it is one thing to teach about historical events and practices, and quite another to teach that they are the primary if not the sole causes of group outcome disparities today. For example, no reasonable person could deny that slavery and *de jure* racial segregation are part of America’s history, and most, including the authors of this report, would agree that such history should be regarded and taught as fact in America’s K–12 schools.

On the other hand, the idea that blacks, whites, and other racial/ethnic groups would have the same or similar socioeconomic outcomes today if not for that history is a highly contestable and not readily falsifiable claim that has no business being taught as settled fact. As has been noted elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> outcome disparities of varying size between ancestral groups are the norm, not the exception—even among U.S.-born whites of differing European ancestry. And many of these disparities have persisted through time despite having no obvious connection to social oppression. While many academic researchers nonetheless view group disparities as reflections of past and/or present social oppression, others have complicated or impugned such causal narratives.

For instance, economic historian Gregory Clark compellingly advances and cross-nationally tests a theoretical model in which group differences in social status emerge and temporally persist (or converge) as a function of groups’ differential selection, endogamy, and assortative mating patterns (through which “underlying social competence” is transmitted from one

generation to the next).<sup>11</sup> Other work calls into question the independent effects of wealth on intergenerational outcomes,<sup>12</sup> and still others question the long-term socioeconomic effects of slavery on the descendants of slaves.<sup>13</sup>

The goal here is not to score points in this complicated causal-historical debate but rather to underscore that there's still very much a debate to be had. Regardless of the narrative one finds most convincing, to teach students that group disparities are mainly or entirely the result of social oppression and bias—and thus that “white” people (an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse and rather incoherently constructed census category) are privileged beneficiaries thereof—is not the same as teaching heliocentrism, natural selection, and a billions-of-years-old earth, that is, scientific concepts whose underlying body of evidence is so dispositive that no reasonable person could deny them. Nor is questioning this causal narrative akin to “flat eartherism.” Schools and teachers that promote it as such are no longer engaged in the teaching of historical facts but rather in political indoctrination.

In other cases, though, the issue is less the teaching of contested causal narratives as historical facts than the selective or decontextualized teaching of historical facts. In our increasingly interconnected and globalizing world, it is vital that students are equipped with a broad rather than provincial appreciation of human history. On this count, to teach (for instance) that the U.S. was built on “stolen land” while eliding the fact that territorial conquest and expansion has been the norm across human history—including among the native Americans whose land was “stolen”—or to teach about the practice of slavery in the U.S. without placing it in historical perspective—such as by mentioning the even larger and more enduring Arab slave trade—is to equip students with a reading of human history that is narrowly centered on evil white men. Students should be taught human history and the human experience in its entirety—not tendentiously selected segments thereof. And apart perhaps from time constraints, we struggle to think of wholly apolitical reasons for doing otherwise.

Finally, in still other cases, the issue pertains to the uncritical teaching of academic concepts. An example of this is teaching students that white people harbor harmful unconscious or implicit racial biases against black people while neglecting to note that both the meaning and the instruments used to measure implicit bias are scientifically controversial<sup>14</sup> and disputed. Teachers that engage in this practice not only misrepresent and distort the scientific record but also risk cultivating inaccurate beliefs about the prevalence of racial bias in social interactions and in society at large.

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## Yes, CSJ Is Really Being Taught in Schools

Of course, if CSJ-related ideas are *not*, in fact, being widely promoted or taught as “truth” in America’s K–12 schools, then the foregoing discussion is moot. We must thus consider whether the kinds of stories that Rufo cites are exceptions, or whether they speak to a broader pedagogical phenomenon.

One direct means of getting at this question is to survey nationally representative samples of K–12 public school teachers. Unfortunately, the recruitment of such samples is very expensive, if only because schoolteachers constitute a minuscule fraction of the wider U.S. population. Surveys of educational organizations or teachers’ unions are less than ideal substitutes, as they rely on non-random volunteer samples and are thus likely to exhibit strong selection bias.

Given the above limitations, and because most parents don't have time to observe what is being taught in their children's schools and often lack access to lesson content, we opted to collect a random sample of observations from those with recent direct recent experience in American classrooms: former pupils. Since surveys are generally restricted to adults, and we are interested in whether exposure to CSJ is rising with each new graduate cohort, this means sampling 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds.

### **The Survey**

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This report is based on a sample of 1,505 18- to 20-year-old Americans (approximately 500 individuals of each age) surveyed by the established polling firm Deltapoll between August 18 and August 23, 2022.<sup>15</sup> This means 18-year-olds will have freshly graduated and 19- and 20-year-olds will be in higher education or the workforce (half of the sample are at university or community college). While previous surveys of CSJ have focused on the beliefs of adults (including those who are parents of schoolchildren), we have no proper measure of how widespread the teaching of applied CSJ concepts is in American schools. Our method seeks to interview a random sample of those who have recently graduated from school and can recollect their recent school experiences in order to estimate the extent to which CSJ has become part of American education.

### **Prevalence of CSJ**

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To estimate the prevalence of student exposure to CSJ ideas, we began by asking respondents the following:

“Thinking about the school you attended, were you ever taught any of the following concepts in class or did you hear them from adults in the school you attended?”

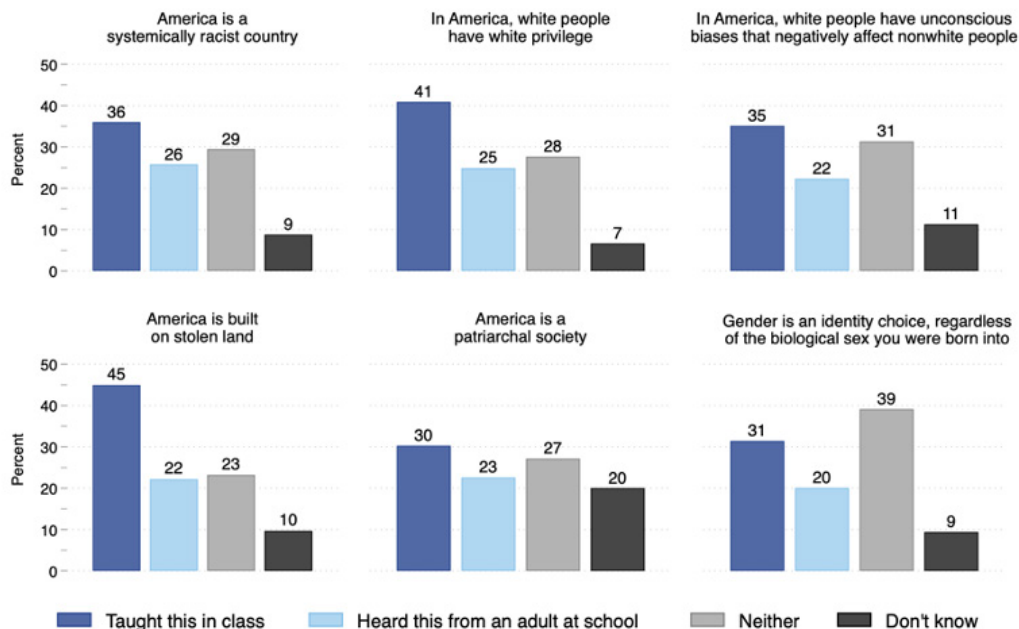
Respondents were asked whether they had been taught these concepts, heard them from an adult at school, had not heard them, or didn't know. Note that “don't know” answers could mean that the concepts weren't mentioned, or that the student could not recall if they were. Individuals could tick more than one box, mentioning that they had both been taught and heard about a concept, for instance.

Combining results for those that were taught or heard about a given concept produces the results in **Figure 1**. For CRT-related concepts, 62% reported either being taught in class or hearing from an adult in school that “America is a systemically racist country”; 69% that “white people have white privilege”; 57% that “white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people”; and 67% that “America is built on stolen land.”

The share exposed to gender-related concepts is slightly lower, but still a majority. Fifty-three percent reported they were either taught in class or heard from an adult at school that “America is a patriarchal society,” and 51% reported hearing that “gender is an identity choice” regardless of biological sex. Removing “don't know” responses, which arguably understate the extent of CSJ, adds several percentage points to these figures. For instance, net of “don't know” responses, 66% of respondents were taught or heard about the U.S. as a patriarchy and 57% about gender as a choice regardless of sex.

Figure 1

## Exposure to CSJ Concepts in High School



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note. Data are weighted. N=1,505 respondents recruited via Deltapoll between August 18 and 23, 2022. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Question wording was as follows: "Thinking about the school you attended, were you ever taught any of the following concepts in class or did you hear them from adults in the school you attended?"

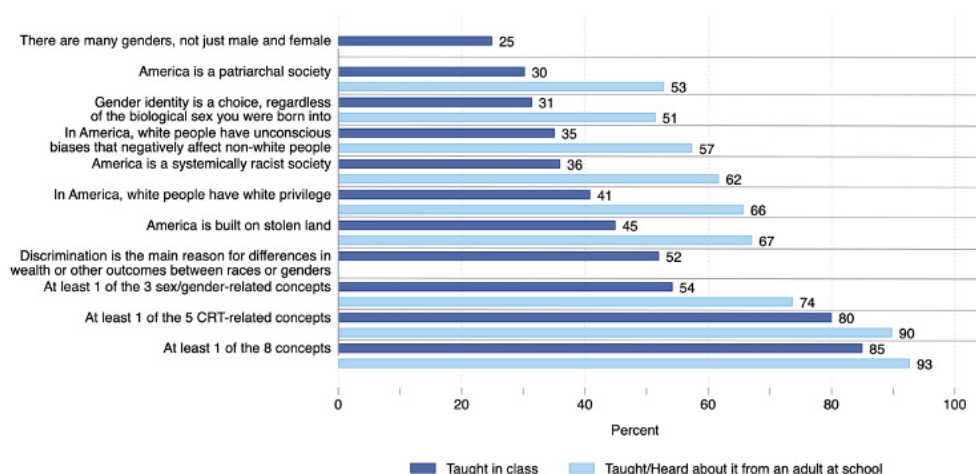
In addition to the six questions in Figure 1, these young people were also asked the following: "During your time in high school, college, or other educational settings, were you ever taught that discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth or other outcomes between races or genders (Yes/No/DK)" and "When it comes to gender, which one of the following comes closest to what you were taught by your teachers?" Response categories included: "There are many genders, not just male and female"; "There are two genders, just male and female"; "There are more than just male and female genders, but not many more"; "I don't recall being taught anything about gender/Don't know."

Designed to examine whether the effects of high school and university differed, we found modest-to-no differences in the responses of those with no college vs. at least some college education. Including "Don't know" responses, 50% of those in the former vs. 58% in the latter group reported being taught that "discrimination is the main reason" for racial and gender disparities in wealth and other outcomes, and 25% vs. 26%, respectively, reported being taught that "there are many genders." While the first of these differences reaches statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ), it is practically small in size. These items are thus treated as analogous to the previous six in tapping exposure levels to CSJ concepts in school. **Figure 2** summarizes results for all eight items.



Figure 2

## Share of Students Taught or Exposed to CSJ Concepts in School



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. N=1,505 respondents recruited via Deltapoll between August 18 and 23, 2022. Bars represent the share of respondents who reported being taught in class each of the listed concepts. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. “Neither/No” and “Don’t know” responses are included in the analysis but not shown. A “Heard about it” response category did not feature in two of the items (“There are many genders...” and “Discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth...”).

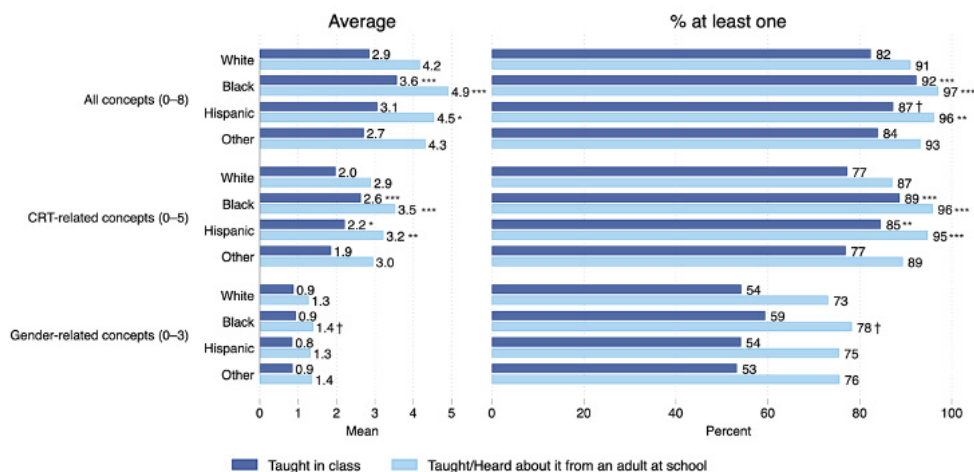
## Which Students Are Most Exposed?

Exposure to CSJ concepts tends to vary by race/ethnicity, though such differences are almost entirely driven by exposure to CRT and are largely absent across the radical gender concepts. **Figure 3** graphs the mean level of exposure to all eight concepts—the five CRT-related concepts, and the three gender-related concepts—by racial/ethnic group.

On average, black respondents reported being taught or hearing about 4.9 of the 8 CSJ concepts (described as “all concepts” in the figure) and 3.5 of the 5 CRT-related concepts, as compared to averages of 4.2 and 2.9, respectively, for whites, and averages of 4.5 and 3.2, respectively, for Hispanic respondents. Thus black, and to a lesser extent Hispanic, respondents have been taught more CRT than whites. Differences between the average exposure of black and white respondents ( $p < 0.001$ ) and Hispanic and white respondents ( $p=0.005$ ) to the five CRT-related items are both statistically significant and are approximately 0.39 and 0.20 of a standard deviation in magnitude, respectively. Differences between white and “other” respondents, though, are indistinguishable from zero, as are all group differences in exposure to the three gender-related concepts.

Figure 3

## Average Levels and Rates of CSJ Exposure by Respondent Race/Ethnicity



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. N=1,460, including 528 white, 385 black, 291 Hispanic, and 256 “other” respondents. “Other” respondents include East Asian (71), South Asian (36), Arab/Middle Eastern (27), Native American or Alaskan Native (33), and respondents who selected “other.” Respondents (45) who refused or neglected to specify a racial/ethnic category (including “other”) are excluded from the analysis.

“All concepts” refers to a summary index that adds the total number of concepts (out of eight) that respondents reported being taught in class or taught in class and/or heard about from an adult at school. “CRT-related concepts” refers to a summary index consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following five concepts: 1. “America is a systemically racist society”; 2. “In America, white people have white privilege”; 3. “In America, white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people”; 4. “America is built on stolen land”; 5. “Discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth or other outcomes between races or genders.” “Gender-related concepts” refers to a summary index consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following three concepts: 1. “America is a patriarchal society”; 2. “The gender we identify with is more socially given than determined by our biology”; 3. “There are many genders, not just male and female.” Percentage estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. White respondents are the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

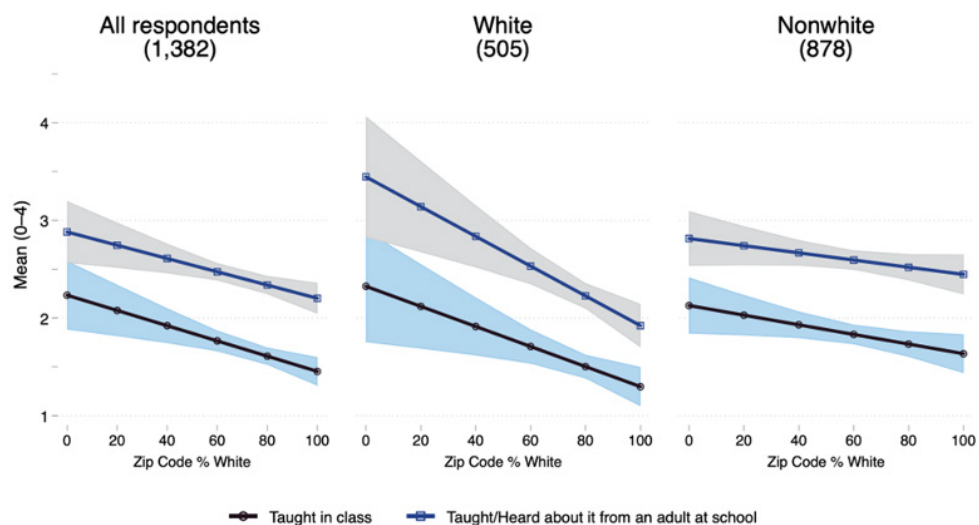
†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Why black and Hispanic respondents report greater CRT-related exposure than white respondents appears to be at least partly due to less CRT being introduced in schools in whiter areas. Specifically, and except for the “stolen land” item,<sup>16</sup> the higher the white share of the population in respondents’ zip codes,<sup>17</sup> the lower the chance of CRT content in school. To illustrate this, the left panel of **Figure 4** regresses additive indexes comprised of four CRT-related “taught” and “taught/heard about” items (omitting the “stolen land” question) onto white zip code population share along with controls for race/ethnicity, census division, zip code rural share, and median zip-code household income. Holding all other variables constant, each percentage point increase in zip code white population share results in statistically significant 0.005 and 0.007-unit decreases on the four-item “taught” and “taught/heard about” indexes, respectively (p<.001 in both cases). In more substantive terms, moving from zip codes in which whites comprise 20% of the population to zip codes in which they comprise 80% of the total results

in a 0.32-unit decrease in the number of concepts respondents report being taught in class (1.93 to 1.61) and a 0.41-unit decrease in the number taught and/or heard about from an adult at school (2.74 to 2.33).

Figure 4

### Effects of Zip Code “Whiteness” on CRT-Related School Exposure, by Respondents’ Race



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Grey and light-blue shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals. Outcome variables are summary indexes consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following four CRT-related concepts: 1. “America is a systemically racist society”; 2. “In America, white people have white privilege”; 3. “In America, white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people”; 4. “Discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth or other outcomes between races or genders.”

All estimates are adjusted for county rural population share, median zip code household income, and census division. Estimates for “all respondents” additionally adjust for respondent race/ethnicity. Estimates for “white” and “nonwhite” respondents are derived from models that interact white/nonwhite backgrounds with a zip code’s white population share while holding all other control variables constant.

Respondents (123) with missing data on relevant variables are excluded from the analysis.

The results further indicate that these relationships tend to be stronger—though not always significantly so<sup>18</sup>—among white than nonwhite respondents. More precisely, each percentage point increase in the share of a zip code’s “whiteness” significantly predicts a unit decrease of 0.010 and 0.015, respectively, on the four-item “taught” and “taught/heard about” indexes for white respondents. This is compared to a weaker unit decrease of 0.005 and 0.004 for nonwhite<sup>19</sup> respondents.

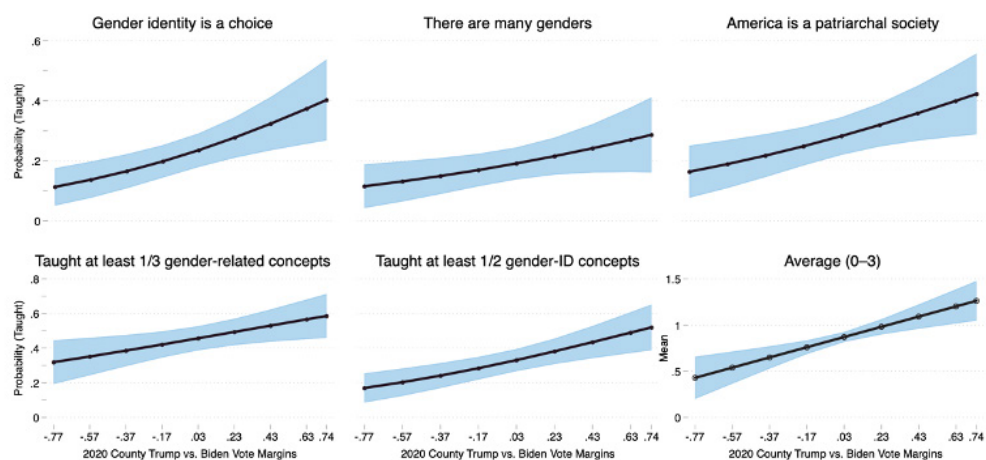
While we can only speculate about why students in more-white zip codes are less exposed to these concepts, we can say there is no evidence that the foregoing pattern is a function of local partisanship, which we measured as the difference between the share of a county that voted for Biden vs. Trump in the 2020 presidential election. Indeed, adjusting for local partisanship has

only a modest moderating effect on the above estimates.<sup>20</sup> Net of zip code racial composition and the other control variables, being in either a heavily Democratic or Republican county does not meaningfully affect the volume of reported CRT-related exposure.<sup>21</sup> Of course, given the substantial overlap between partisanship and whiteness, this is not surprising.<sup>22</sup>

What local partisanship does meaningfully affect—and what local racial composition does *not*<sup>23</sup>—is classroom exposure to the radical gender-related concepts. **Figure 5** shows that, net of race/ethnicity, local racial composition, and other geographic/contextual control variables, shifting from a county that favored Trump over Biden by 77 points (scale minimum) to one that favored Biden over Trump by 74 points (scale maximum) predicts a 35-point increase (17% to 52%,  $p=0.001$ ) in the probability of being taught that “gender is an identity choice” regardless of biological sex and/or that “there are many other genders”; a 26-point increase (16% to 42%,  $p=0.011$ ) in the probability of being taught that “America is a patriarchal society”; and a 27-point increase (32% to 59%,  $p=0.023$ ) in the probability of being taught at least one of the foregoing concepts.

Figure 5

### Effects of Local Partisanship on Critical Gender-Related Exposure



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted.  $N=1,382$  across all models. Respondents (123) with missing data on relevant variables are excluded from the analysis. Light-blue shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals. Except for those in the bottom-right panel (Average 0–3), all estimates are derived from logistic regression models, and all lines represent the predicted probability of the listed outcome while zip code white population share, respondent race/ethnicity, county rural population share, median zip code household income, and census division are held to their median/modal values. Estimates in the bottom-right panel are derived from linear regression models. The line in this panel represents the average total number of the three gender-related concepts that respondents reported being taught in class.

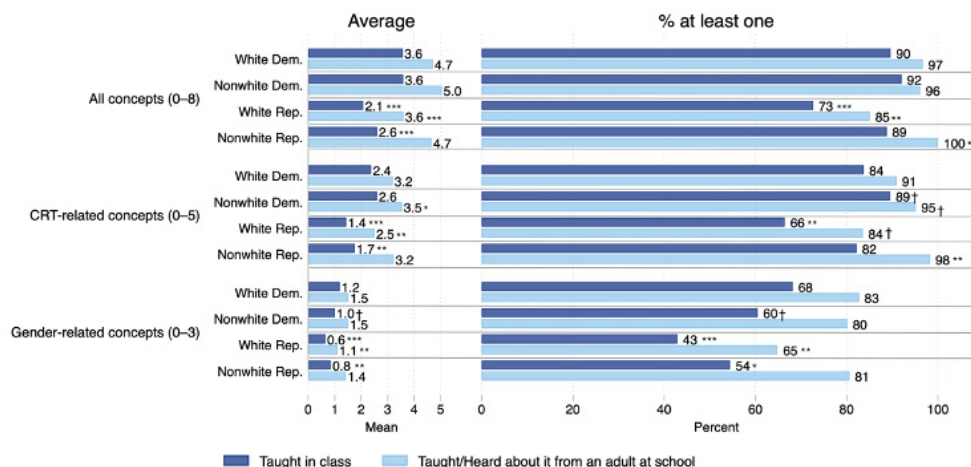
In sum, whereas CRT-related exposure decreases (at least for white respondents) as a function of local “whiteness” irrespective of local partisanship, exposure to the radical gender concepts increases as a function of local “blueness” (i.e., the Democratic lean of the county) irrespective of local whiteness. Nonetheless, it’s notable that nearly one-in-three respondents in even the reddest of counties are expected to report being taught at least one-in-three radical gender concepts. Together with the weak relationship between CRT-exposure and local partisanship, this suggests that even schools in majority-Republican counties are far from immune to the propagation of left-wing racial and gender ideology.

But given that reported exposure to the CRT-related and radical gender concepts is still significantly greater in less white and/or “bluer” residential areas, it follows that self-identified Democratic respondents will report more exposure, on average, than their Republican counterparts. Our data confirm this. As shown in **Figure 6**, both white and nonwhite Democrats report higher levels of exposure, on average, across the board than their nonwhite counterparts, though these differences tend to be somewhat larger among whites<sup>24</sup> and in the “taught” rather than the “taught/heard about” indexes.

On average, and of the eight concepts listed, white Democrats report being taught (mean=3.56) nearly 1.5 more concepts and being taught and/or hearing about 1.1 more concepts (mean=4.70) than white Republicans (mean taught=2.08; mean taught/heard about=3.60), while nonwhite Democrats report being taught (mean=3.59) one more concept and being taught and/or hearing about 0.39 more concepts (mean=5.04) than nonwhite Republicans (mean taught=2.59; mean taught/heard about=4.65). Though the control variables in our dataset do account for some of these differences, sizable portions of them persist. Why this is the case is unclear, though we later consider the possibility that exposure—and/or the broader school environment it captures—causally influences partisanship.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 6

**Average Levels and Rates of CSJ Exposure by Respondent Party Self-Identification**



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. N=743, including 172 white Democrats, 339 nonwhite Democrats, 120 white Republicans, and 112 nonwhite Republicans. Respondents (762) who identified as a non-leaning “Independent” or “don’t know” their party affiliation and/or who refused or neglected to specify a racial/ethnic background (including “other”) are excluded from the analysis.

“All concepts” refers to a summary index that adds the total number of concepts (out of eight) that respondents reported being taught in class or taught in class and/or heard about from an adult at school. “CRT-related concepts” refers to a summary index consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following five concepts: 1. “America is a systemically racist society”; 2. “In America, white people have white privilege”; 3. “In America, white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people”; 4. “America is built on stolen land”; 5. “Discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth or other outcomes between races or genders.” “Gender-related concepts” refers to a summary index consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following three concepts: 1. “America is a patriarchal society”; 2. “The gender we identify with is more socially given than determined by our biology”; 3. “There are many genders, not just male and female.” Percentage estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. White Democrats are the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

All told, though Democrats report significantly higher levels of exposure, Republicans are highly exposed as well. Consider that even 73% of white Republicans still report being taught one of the eight concepts, including 66% who report being taught one of the five CRT-related concepts and 43% who report being taught one of the three gender concepts. Thus, Republicans are still receiving a “healthy” dose of exposure in their schools, even while Democrats are receiving the largest dose of all. This is not just an issue for blue counties or pupils.

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## Is CSJ Being Taught as One Perspective, or as Truth?

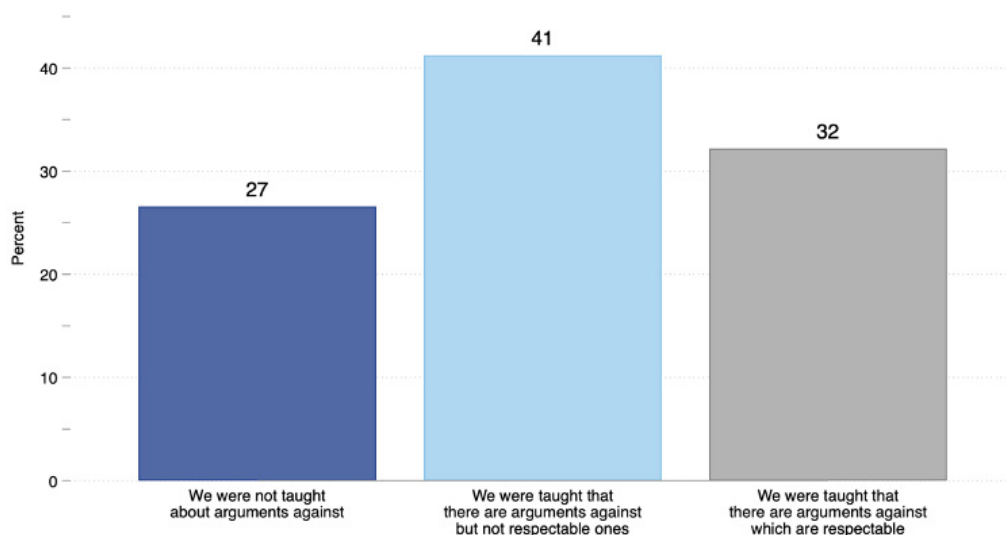
It is one thing to introduce students to a range of perspectives on race, gender, and sexuality. This means setting out CSJ as one set of theories alongside classical liberal counterarguments. Therefore, our next task is to assess the extent to which schools approach CSJ critically or are propagating it as the only way to approach the world. After asking about whether our young respondents had been taught six of the above CSJ terms in high school, we asked, “When you were taught these concepts, what were you taught about arguments against these concepts? If this happened more than once, please think about the most recent time.” Response categories included 1. “We were not taught about arguments against”; 2. “We were taught that there are arguments against, but not respectable ones”; 3. “We were taught that there are respectable arguments which are respectable”; 4. “Don’t know.”

Net of those who didn’t know, the balance of answers in **Figure 7** shows that just a third—32%—were taught that there are respectable counterarguments to CSJ concepts. In other words, nearly 7 in 10 students are being implicitly or explicitly given the impression that CSJ concepts are the only “correct” and respectful approaches to the phenomena they discuss. This would seem to violate basic principles of Socratic dialogue, constructing an argument, and hypothesis testing, and it is not how students should be taught critical thinking.

Importantly, the degree to which CSJ concepts were taught as truth or as one perspective in a debate does not meaningfully vary by race, political orientation, or high school type. Whites (26.5%) and nonwhites (28.7%), Democrats (26.4%) and Republicans (28.2%), liberals (25.8%) and conservatives (27.9%), and public (27.7%) and private/parochial school (25.3%) respondents were similarly likely to report being told about respectable counterarguments. Thus, there is no evidence that this response reflects respondents’ political biases. Instead, the data suggest that majorities in all groups have been given the impression that the concepts they are being taught are beyond reproach.

Figure 7

## Classroom Exposure to CSJ Concept-Opposing Arguments



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. N=1,003. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Sample is limited to respondents who reported being taught at least one of six CRT-related and gender-related concepts. Respondents who gave a “Don’t know” response (N=166) are excluded. Question wording reads as follows: “When you were taught these concepts, what were you taught about arguments against these concepts? If this happened more than once, please think about the most recent time.”

This “indoctrination” interpretation is further supported by evidence that students taught more CSJ concepts are more likely to have been taught these as facts rather than as arguments in a debate. As shown in **Figure 8**, 28% of respondents who said they were taught only one of six<sup>26</sup> CSJ concepts (who serve as this model’s reference group) also reported being taught that there are no respectable counterarguments. This rate climbs to 33% among those who reported being taught two concepts, to 36% for respondents taught three concepts, and to 40% and 48% for those who reported being taught four or five concepts, respectively. Thus, while it is hardly a linear relationship, the greater number of CSJ concepts a respondent reported being taught, the greater the likelihood that they were not taught competing perspectives or were told that opposing arguments that exist are not “respectable.” And these effects are robust to a large battery of control variables,<sup>27</sup> including race and political orientation.

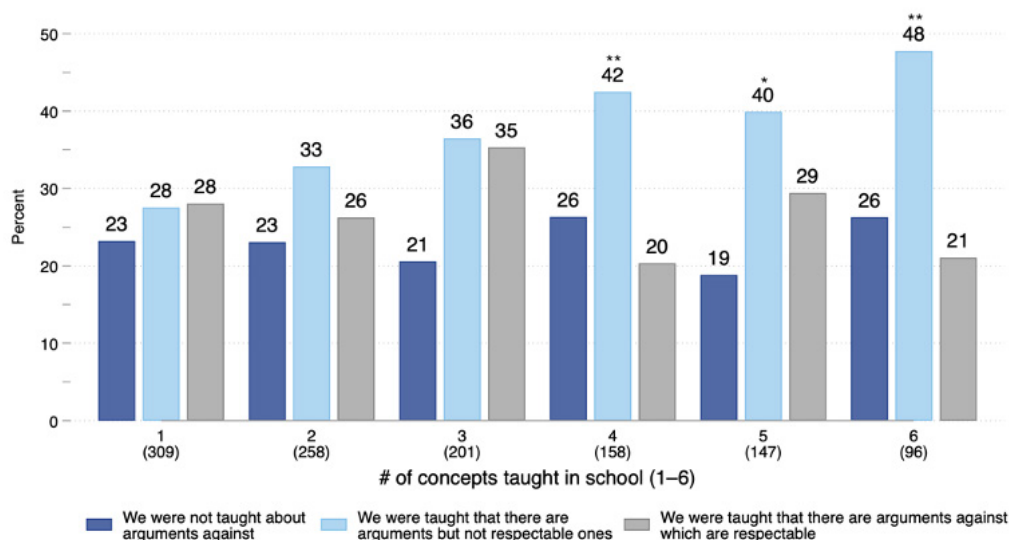
Should CSJ be banned, or should it be taught with equal time allotted to arguments for and against? It is difficult to know whether competing arguments will be given a fair hearing. Our data show, for instance, that students who said that they were taught respectable counterarguments were no less likely to endorse CSJ ideas than students who were taught CSJ as truth. Whether this is because counterarguments were not presented as convincingly or extensively as those in favor of CSJ, or whether CSJ instruction resonated better with the students, is impossible to ascertain. We will discuss more policy recommendations later in this report, but at this point, the takeaway for those skeptical of CSJ is that more attention must be paid to providing teachers with high-quality materials on the counterarguments and ensuring this is conveyed in class, or,



failing this, that CSJ teaching be halted altogether. Another option may be to have committed external providers offer competing viewpoints on contentious issues, or in debate format, so that each side is presented with equivalent motivation.

Figure 8

### Classroom Exposure to Arguments Opposing CSJ, by Number of CSJ Concepts Taught



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes in parentheses. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Sample is limited to respondents who reported being taught at least one of six CRT-related and gender-related concepts. “Don’t know” responses are included in the model to boost statistical power but are not shown. Question wording for the outcome variables reads as follows: “When you were taught these concepts, what were you taught about arguments against these concepts? If this happened more than once, please think about the most recent time.” Respondents who indicating being taught only one of the six concepts are the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

## Impact of CSJ Instruction on Policy Attitudes

The prevalence of students’ classroom exposure to left-wing ideological concepts raises the question of its attitudinal impact. Specifically, are students who report receiving such instruction more “woke” than those who do not? Given the many other sources of attitudinal influence that any effect of exposure must compete with, there is ample reason to doubt this. At the same time, our respondents are in a phase of life in which, by some accounts, social and political attitudes are maximally malleable and have yet to fully crystalize.<sup>28</sup>

The potential for exposure to these concepts to shape related attitudes is not at all implausible. In fact, in a dissertation chapter,<sup>29</sup> one of us (Goldberg) found that having white respondents read a short “racially woke” op-ed article led to significant 8- to 12-point increases in support (mostly via increases in collective shame and guilt) for race-based affirmative action, government assistance, and reparations to African Americans. If attitudinal shifts of this magnitude can be produced over a span of just minutes, what might be the effects of more protracted exposure?

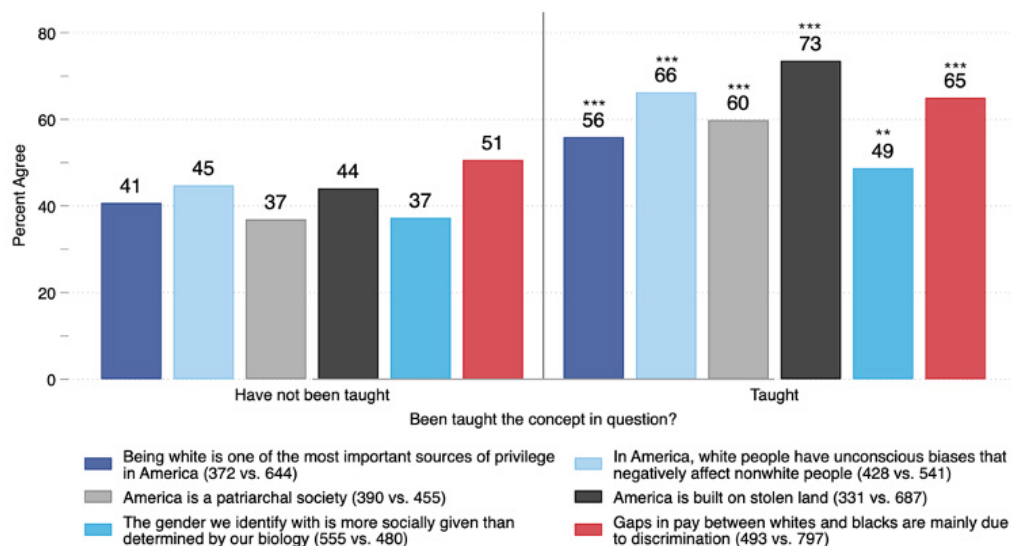
Educators who incorporate such concepts into their instruction clearly expect, or at least hope, that doing so makes a difference in the minds of students. The notion that concepts like “white privilege” and “systemic racism” are solely taught for knowledge’s sake strains credulity—especially when such instruction most often entails the omission or delegitimization of competing arguments. No, the hope is that students—especially white students—will come to see white people as ultimately responsible for the creation and persistence of racial inequality, and that this realization will ultimately inspire support for the current race-conscious, “equity-oriented” policies and the even-more-radical policies of tomorrow.

Perhaps this hope is ill-founded, but our data indicate otherwise. As an initial test, we examined whether those who report being taught a given concept are more likely to endorse it. **Figure 9** shows that, compared to those who said they were not taught the concept in question, those who indicated they were taught it were 14 points more likely to agree that the black-white pay gap is due mainly to discrimination, 15 points more likely to agree that “being white is one of the most important sources of privilege in America,” 23 points more likely to agree that “white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people,” and 29 points more likely to agree that “America is built on stolen land.”

These results also hold for gender-related concepts. Among those who were taught that gender is a choice, 49% agree “the gender we identify with is more socially given than determined by our biology,” compared to 37% agreeing among those who were not taught this idea in school. Those taught about gender as an identity are also more likely to view it as detached from biological sex. These differences—virtually all statistically significant at the 99.9% level—persist after controlling for a range of other variables pertaining to alternative explanations, including race, political orientation, county rurality, county partisanship, county racial liberalism, and county school segregation.

Figure 9

### Students Who Agree with CSJ Concepts, by Whether the Concept Was Taught or Not Taught in School



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Bars represent the share of respondents who gave an “Agree” response to the statements shown in the legend. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Sample sizes for the “Have not been taught” and “Taught” groups are shown in parentheses. Respondents who gave either a “Heard it about from an adult at school” or “Don’t know” response are excluded from the analyses. The “Have not been taught” group serves as the reference category for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

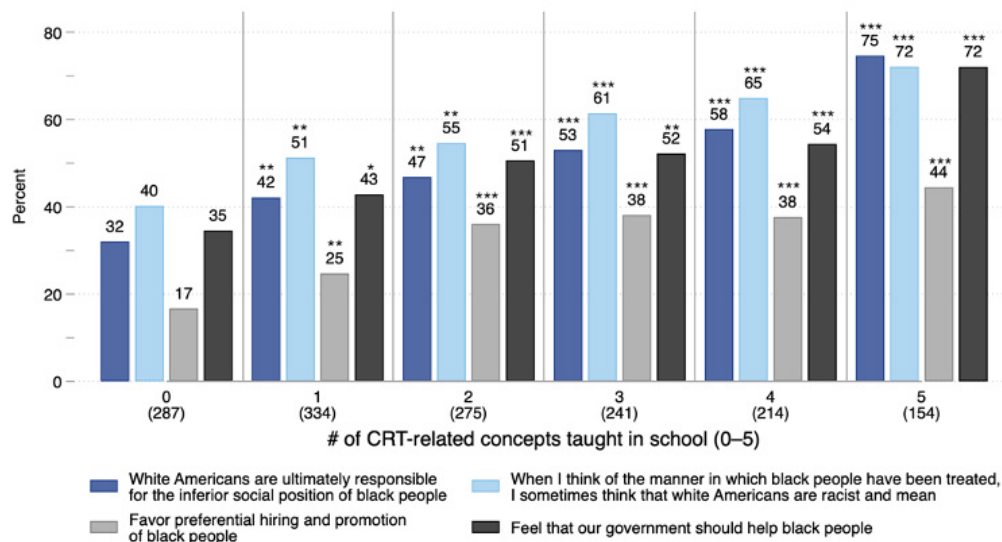
If the effects of such instruction were entirely limited to the above, its proponents are likely to be disappointed. For what good is increasing agreement with CRT-related concepts if that agreement doesn’t translate to increased support for “anti-racist” policies? However, because such policies discriminate on the basis of race and can be regarded as unfair, increasing support for them—particularly among whites—may not be so easy. To this end, it’s important that instruction increases the justifying belief that white people are to blame for (and thus are responsible for rectifying) black disadvantage. Our next analysis thus examines whether the volume of CRT-related classroom exposure—which we operationalized as the total number of CRT-related concepts respondents reported being taught in school, from one to five—affects attitudes toward whites and pro-black policies like affirmative action and race-based government assistance.

First, we consider whether exposure to a larger share of the five concepts increases agreement with the four attitudes and policy outcomes listed in the legend of **Figure 10**. Across all four outcomes (two race policies, two white-responsibility statements), we observe significantly lower levels of attitudinal agreement and support among those who didn’t recall being taught any of the five CRT-related concepts (the “no exposure” group), and the highest levels of agreement and support among those who report being taught all five concepts. Notice that these increases jump between those who were taught nothing and those taught at least one CRT concept. There is another step-change between those exposed to four concepts and those exposed to five. This may be an indication that students who received the maximum exposure score could have been given a much higher concentration of CRT in their schooling than students who just heard four.

Adjusting for alternative explanations using demographic, social, and area control variables has only a minimal moderating effect on the substantial statistically significant difference in attitudes between those taught no CRT concepts and those taught all five.<sup>30</sup> On whites being responsible for the social position of black people, the gap is 43 points between no exposure and maximum exposure; for whites generally considered “racist and mean,” the gap is 32 points; for preferential hiring and promotion of African Americans, 27 points; and for government helping black people, the gap is 37 points. These are nearly all significant at the 99.9% level and show that teaching CRT to children has a massive effect on young people’s policy attitudes. Interestingly, these results are similar for white and nonwhite respondents, though not always of the same magnitude.<sup>31</sup> Thus, regardless of respondents’ racial/ethnic backgrounds, greater CRT-related classroom exposure increases that belief that white people are to blame for the relative deprivation of African Americans.

Figure 10

### Racial Attitudes and Policy Preferences, by CRT-Related Classroom Exposure



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are shown in parentheses. Bars represent the share of respondents across each exposure category that provided an “Agree” response to the statements shown in the legend. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. The five CRT-related concepts encompass the following: 1. “America is a systemically racist society”; 2. “In America, white people have white privilege”; 3. “In America, white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people”; 4. “America is built on stolen land”; 5. “Discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth or other outcomes between races or genders.” Respondents who reported being taught none of the five CRT-related concepts serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance. Excluding “don’t know” responses lowers the power of teaching the concepts but does not alter the substantive pattern observed.

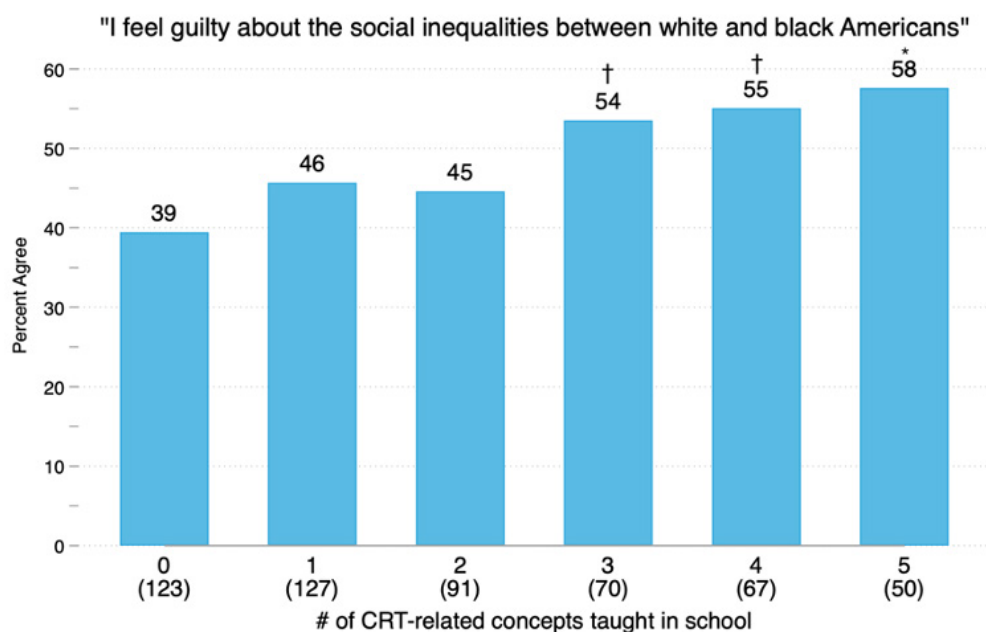
†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Those who oppose CRT are concerned that it targets and has a negative psychological effect on one particular racial group (whites), which might constitute a violation of civil rights laws on the basis of race. Our results support this contention (**Figure 11**). We find that white respondents with higher CRT-related exposure feel more guilty about their race, experiencing negative sentiment toward their own group. Whereas 39% of whites who did not report any CRT-related

classroom exposure indicated feeling “guilty about the social inequalities between white and black Americans,” this share rises to 45% among whites who reported being taught one or two CRT-related concepts, and to between 54% and 58% among whites who reported being taught three or more concepts. Here, we should also note that levels of agreement with this statement are considerably and significantly higher among white liberals (65%) than white conservatives (29%), which accords with the findings of past research.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 11

### White Guilt as a Function of CRT-Related Classroom Exposure



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample is limited to non-Hispanic white respondents. Sample sizes are shown in parentheses. Bars represent the share of respondents across each exposure category that provided an “Agree” response to the statements shown in the legend. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Respondents who reported being taught none of the five CRT-related concepts offered in this question serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

While we can’t conclude that exposure *causes* attitude change using cross-sectional data— those with progressive attitudes could have had parents more likely to select schools where CRT is taught (or to recall being exposed to it)— what we can say is that these relationships are robust to a number of alternative explanatory factors<sup>33</sup> that our dataset allows us to control for.

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## How CSJ Instruction Affects Political Beliefs and Partisanship

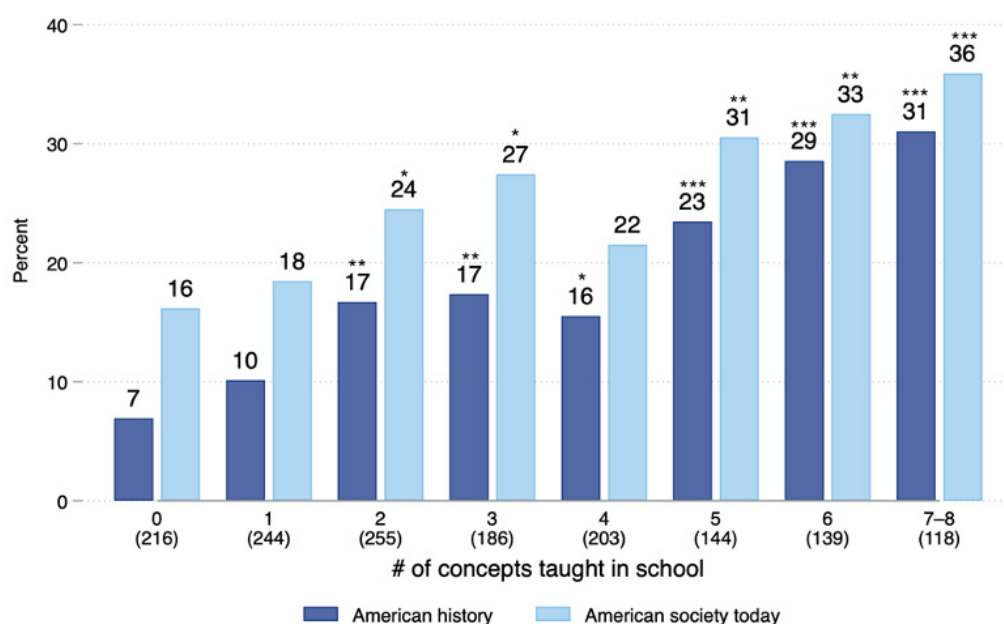
Earlier, we showed that self-identified Democrats (and liberals) reported significantly higher levels of CSJ exposure than Republicans—differences that are not entirely explained by the control variables in our dataset. One of the possible explanations we proposed for these differences is that Democrats/liberals are more likely to recall ideologically congruent information than their Republican/conservative counterparts. However, given the relationships we document between exposure and the endorsement of radical gender and racial attitudes, another possibility is that such exposure causally influences political self-identification. More specifically, it is possible that those exposed to more CSJ in class attend schools where there is more intense left-wing bias among teachers and in messaging around pedagogy, assemblies, activities, flags, celebrations, and on school noticeboards—the cumulative effects of which could shape pupils’ political identities.

Toward examining the plausibility of this causal account, we begin by assessing the extent to which CSJ instruction is connected to a broader ideological orientation in schools—are those who report being taught more CRT also taught to view national politics from a leftist perspective? One way to assess this is to discover how students are being taught about American history and society. We thus asked respondents whether they were taught to have more pride or shame about the American past and present, were taught a neutral picture, or didn’t know. We find that students who reported higher levels of exposure to CSJ were significantly more likely to say they had been taught a shameful picture of the country (**Figure 12**). For example, of those students who reported being taught either nearly all<sup>34</sup> (seven of eight) or all eight of the CSJ concepts also indicated they were taught more shame than pride about the country’s history and America today, 31% and 36%, respectively. This compares to 7% and 16%, respectively, among those who were not exposed to any CSJ in school.

This again suggests considerable variation in the ideological atmosphere among schools, even as there was little substantial difference in the balance of pride and shame taught in school between Democratic and Republican-leaning counties.

Figure 12

### Percent Reporting Being Taught “More Shame Than Pride” About America’s Past and Present



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighed. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Question prompts read as follows: “Which one of the following best characterizes what you were taught in high school, college, or other education settings about American history/American society today?” Response options are “More pride than shame about America’s history (society today),” “An even mix of pride and shame about America’s history (society today),” “More shame than pride in America’s history (society today),” “No pride or shame,” and “Don’t know.” Bars represent the percent of respondents that gave “More shame than pride” responses. Other responses are not shown. Respondents who reported being taught none of the eight CSJ concepts serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

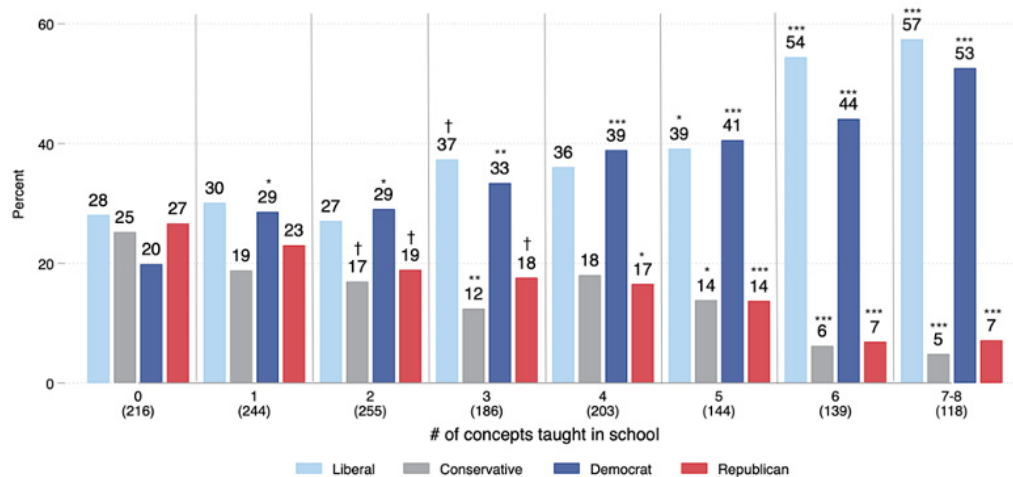
†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

What is the effect of CSJ-rich environments on pupils’ politics? We know, for example, that young people began to favor the Democrats in the early 2000s, breaking 34 points for Obama in 2008, 18 points for Clinton in 2016, but back to 34 points for Biden in 2020.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the university freshman class (driven by female freshmen) has trended liberal since the early 2000s.<sup>36</sup> As we suggested earlier, might the school system be playing a part in this trend?

**Figure 13** shows that individuals exposed to six or more CSJ concepts in school break 54% to 57% liberal (based on the number of concepts) to 5% to 6% conservative, whereas those exposed to no CSJ are much more evenly balanced, at 28% liberal to 25% conservative. In partisan terms, those exposed to no CSJ concepts break 20% Democratic and 27% Republican, while those who have been taught six to eight CSJ concepts break 44% to 53% Democratic (based on the number of concepts) and 7% Republican.

Figure 13

## Political Identification, by Exposure to CSJ Concepts in School



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Bars represent the percent of respondents identifying as liberal, conservative, Democrat, and Republican. Respondents who identified as “moderate” and/or “Independent” or who “don’t know” their party affiliation or ideological placement are included in the data but are not shown. Respondents who reported being taught none of the eight CSJ concepts serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

† $p < 0.1$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

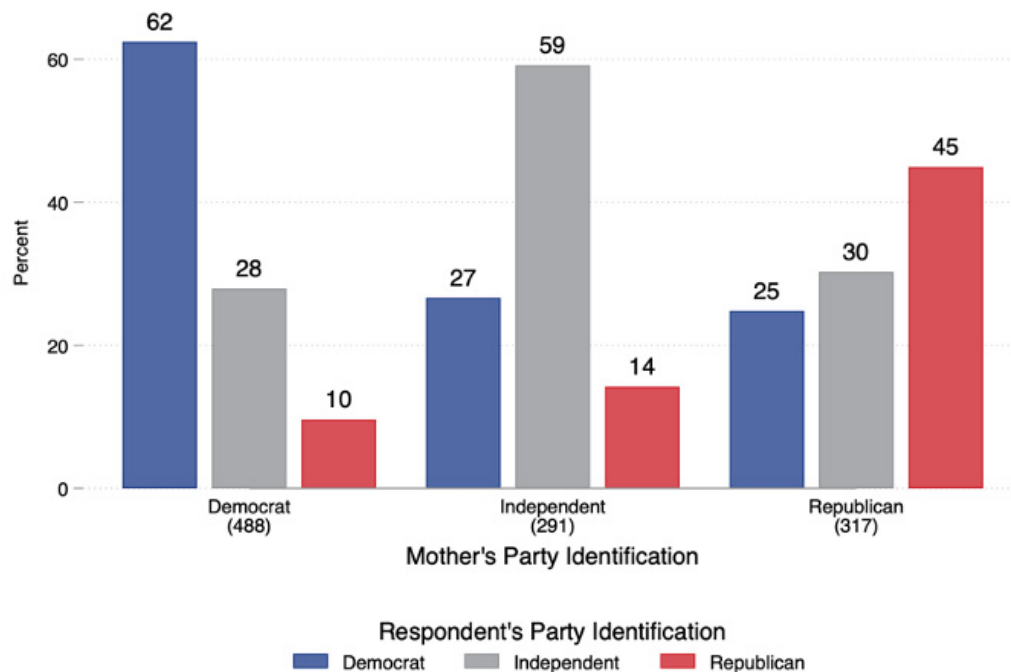
It could be argued, of course, that conservative students are placed in more conservative schools because their parents are conservative or that they live in more conservative communities. For several reasons, we think this is an unlikely explanation.

First, the political affiliation of a young person’s mother<sup>37</sup> is the most important predictor of their partisanship. As shown in **Figure 14**, respondents who said their mother is a Democrat leaned 62% to 10% Democrat to Republican. By contrast, those with a Republican mother backed the Republicans over the Democrats, but at a lower rate (45% to 25%).



Figure 14

### Respondent Party Identification by Mother's Party Identification



Source: Deltapoll survey

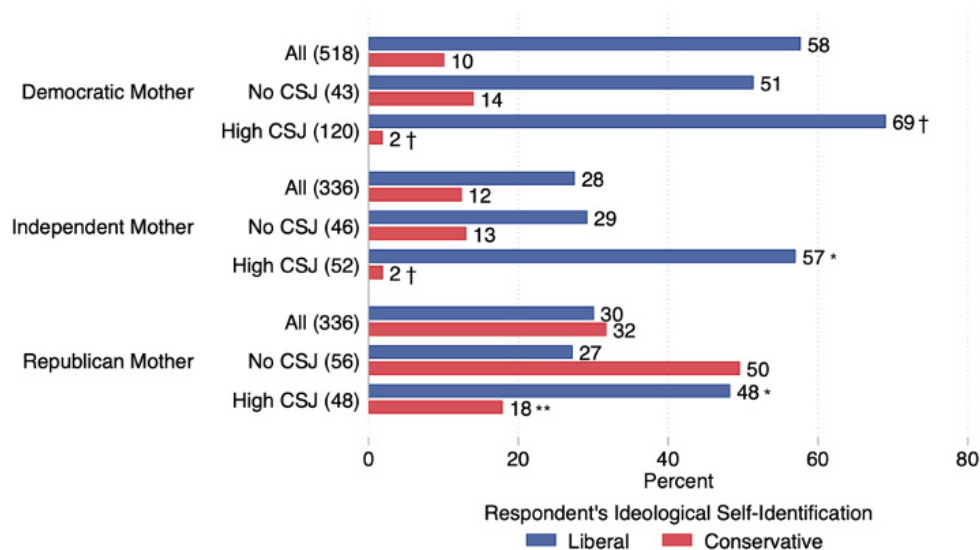
Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Bars represent the percent of respondents who identify as Democrat, Independent, and Republican by the reported party identifications of respondents' mothers. Respondents (409) who "don't know" their party identification and/or that of their mothers are excluded from the analysis.

The first point to note is that Democratic parents are better able to pass their political affiliation on to their children than Republicans. Why might this be? One reason could be that schools tend to reinforce the political leanings of the parents and to socialize children in a leftward direction.

The results illustrated in **Figure 15** indicate that CSJ exposure, arguably a proxy for ideological influence, has a major impact on the politics of students. For instance, young people whose mother is a Democrat break 58% Democratic and 10% Republican (Figure 14). Those with a Democratic mother who were taught no CSJ lean 51% to 14% liberal over conservative, and those with a Democratic mother who were taught six or more CSJ concepts ("High CSJ") lean 69% to 2% liberal over conservative. This 18-point, CSJ-linked leftward shift of young people with Democratic mothers at the minimum and maximum of CSJ exposure rises to a 28-point ( $p=0.011$ ), CSJ-based leftward shift among those with independent mothers (from 29% to 13% to 57% to 2%) and a 21-point ( $p=0.037$ ), CSJ-associated change among those with a Republican mother (from 27% to 50% to 48% to 18%).

Figure 15

### Respondent Ideological Identification, by CSJ Exposure and Mother's Party Identification



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Bars represent the percent of respondents identifying as liberal and conservative by their mothers' party identification and CSJ exposure. Respondents who identified as "moderate" or who "don't know" their ideological placement are included in the data but are not shown. "No CSJ" refers to respondents who reported being taught none of the eight CSJ concepts. "High CSJ" refers to respondents who reported being taught six or more CSJ concepts. "All" refers to estimates for a given mother-party subsample irrespective of CSJ exposure. "No CSJ" respondents serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

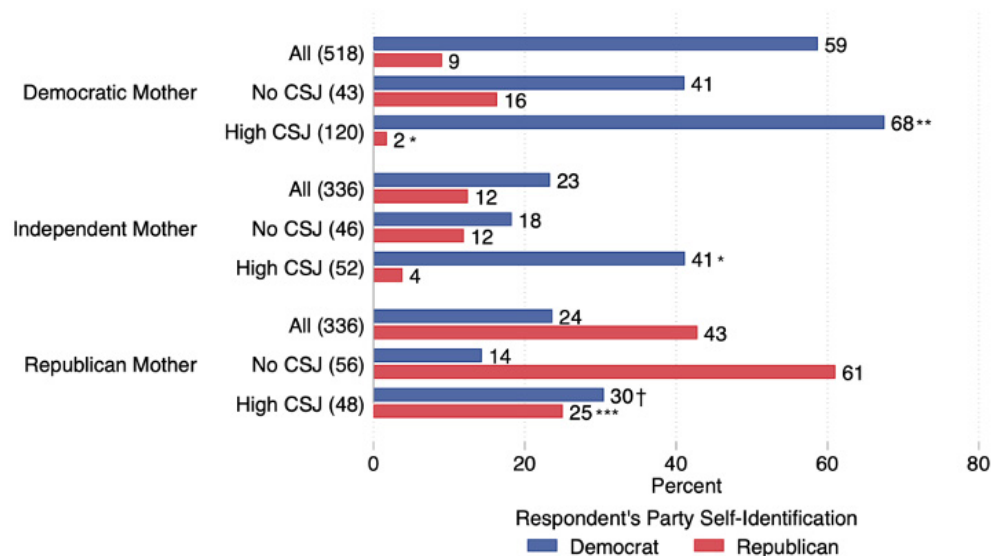
†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Running the analysis with youth partisanship instead of youth ideology (**Figure 16**) shows that a young person with a Republican mother who is taught no CSJ leans 61% Republican to 14% Democratic, while individuals with a Republican mother who get taught a high dose of CSJ in school are more balanced, at 25% Republican and 30% Democratic. For youth with an independent mother, the balance shifts from 12% Republican and 18% Democratic affiliation among young people taught no CSJ to 41% Democratic and 4% Republican among those taught six to eight CSJ concepts.

While small sample size on subgroups means there is some noise in the figures, the general picture is clear: CSJ and school ideology appear to be having a major impact in converting young people to left-wing beliefs and Democratic partisanship. Moreover, the biggest effect of education in predicting a shift in political beliefs is occurring among young people from a Republican or independent family background.

Figure 16

### Respondent Party Identification, by CSJ Exposure and Mother's Party Identification



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Bars represent the percent of respondents identifying as Democrat and Republican by their mothers' party identification and CSJ exposure. Respondents who identified as "Independent" or who "don't know" their party affiliation are included in the data but are not shown. "No CSJ" refers to respondents who reported being taught none of the eight CSJ concepts. "High CSJ" refers to respondents who reported being taught six or more CSJ concepts. "All" refers to estimates for a given mother-party subsample irrespective of CSJ exposure. "No CSJ" respondents serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

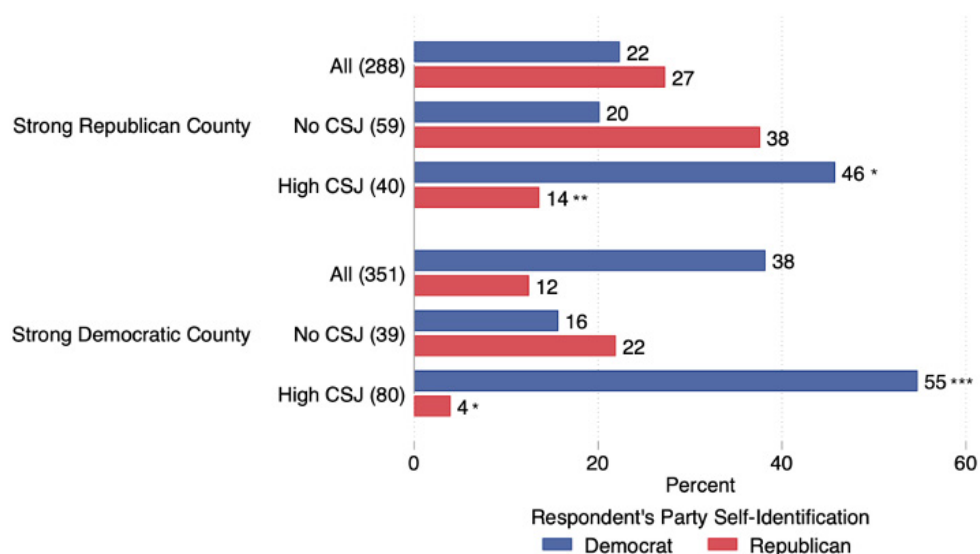
†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

The same influences can be seen when examining youth partisanship in relation to the political leaning of their county. **Figure 17** compares the political affiliation of young people in the most Republican fifth of counties (16% to 73% Republican margin) and most Democratic fifth (a 29% to 77% Democratic margin). Including respondents who "don't know" their party affiliation, in strong Republican counties, young people lean Republican, but only by a 27% to 22% margin over the Democrats. In strong Democratic counties, young people back the Democrats by a much healthier 38% to 12% ratio over the Republicans.

The impact of CSJ instruction, a proxy for the ideological atmosphere at schools, is similarly profound. In strong Republican counties, youth Republican affiliation drops 24 points between those who have not been taught CSJ in school (38% of whom identify as Republican) and those where students were taught six or more CSJ concepts (among whom just 14% are Republican). For youth in strongly Democratic counties, we see a similar-sized effect, with those who have not been taught CSJ in school actually leaning Republican by a 22% to 16% margin,<sup>38</sup> while youth who were taught six or more CSJ concepts lean 55% Democratic to just 4% Republican. Thus, there is a powerful incentive for Republican congressmen to seek to implement political impartiality, including CSJ bans, in schools and for Democratic congressmen to maximize the amount of CSJ and political activism taught in schools.

Figure 17

## Respondent Party Identification, by CSJ Exposure and County Partisanship



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note. Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Bars represent the percent of respondents identifying as Democrat and Republican by CSJ exposure and in strong Republican vs. strong Democratic counties. Respondents who identified as Independent or who “don’t know” their party affiliation are included in the data but are not shown. “No CSJ” refers to respondents who reported being taught none of the eight CSJ concepts. “High CSJ” refers to respondents who reported being taught six or more CSJ concepts. “Strong Republican County” refers to counties whose 2020 Trump vs. Biden vote margins rank at or below the 20th percentile on the pro-Trump side of the vote margins distribution. “Strong Democratic County” refers to counties whose 2020 Biden vs. Trump vote margins rank at or above the 80th percentile on the pro-Biden side of the vote margins distribution. “All” refers to estimates for a given county-party subsample irrespective of CSJ exposure. “No CSJ” respondents serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Even when we include a “kitchen sink” of control variables—including, but not limited to, partisanship of a student’s mother and father (both assessed on a 5-point scale from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican), the partisan lean in their county, and zip-code correlates of partisanship (% white, % rural)—high exposure to CSJ has a powerful effect,<sup>39</sup> at the 99% level of statistical significance or better, on their ideology and partisanship.

Given the pattern of CSJ exposure being correlated with more liberal and Democratic sympathies, it is little wonder that many Democratic respondents support public schools teaching these morally and empirically contentious ideas. In a separate study, Democratic voters back the teaching of CRT by a 39% to 9% margin, while Republican voters oppose it 68% to 10%. And 95% of Republican voters opposed the teaching of social and political activism, while 55% of Democratic voters endorsed it.<sup>40</sup> Given the apparent power of schools (regardless of the type of schooling) to shape young people’s partisanship and ideology, the battle to shape school curriculum content must be considered a top priority for both parties in the years ahead.

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## The Impact of Private and Religious Schools and Homeschooling

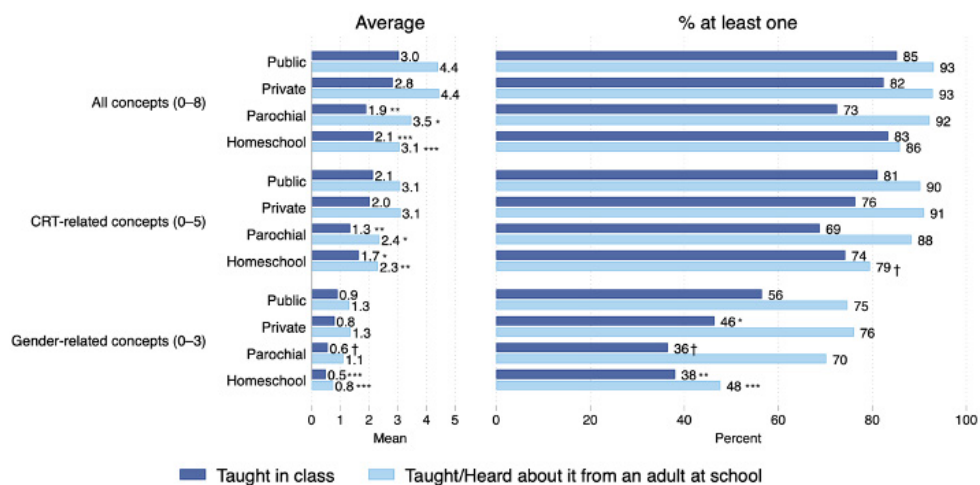
Curriculum content in public schools is one policy arena of contention, but “exit” rather than “voice” is arguably the preferred option in conservative policy circles.<sup>41</sup> That is, many conservatives seek to reduce the impact of the public school system by emphasizing school choice, private schools, and homeschooling. But this strategy hinges on whether school type matters. If CSJ is being taught in private, religious, and charter schools, then expanding them will have little impact on the indoctrination of pupils. If CSJ can be acquired from social media, entertainment, and peers, then homeschooling will not prevent young people from acquiring these ideas.

As shown in **Figure 18**, levels of reported exposure to CSJ are generally very similar for those who attended public and non-religious private high schools (n=181). On the other hand, homeschoolers (n=59) and those who attended parochial schools (n=29) tend to report significantly lower levels of exposure than public schoolers, differences that (depending on the concept category and index) range from 0.3 to 0.6 of a standard deviation in magnitude. Taken together, these data suggest that homeschooling or sending one’s kids to a religious (vs. a non-religious) private school can help to limit the *volume* of their exposure to CSJ. However, no non-public forms of schooling preclude exposure to CSJ altogether.

Indeed, 73% of parochial schoolers, 82% of non-religious private schoolers, and 83% of homeschoolers reported being taught at least one CSJ term,<sup>42</sup> all of which are statistically indistinguishable from rates among public schoolers (85%). But while not varying meaningfully overall, rates of being taught at least one of the gender-related concepts are, in fact, significantly lower among non-public schoolers. Whereas 56% of public schoolers reported being taught at least one of these concepts, this figure falls to 46% among non-religious private schoolers (p=0.022), 36% of parochial schoolers (p=0.055), and 38% of homeschoolers (p=0.008).

Figure 18

## Average Levels and Rates of CSJ Exposure, by Type of High School



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. N=1,505, including 1,236 public schoolers, 181 private schoolers, 29 parochial schoolers, and 59 homeschoolers. “All concepts” refers to a summary index that adds the total number of concepts (out of eight) that respondents reported being taught in class or taught in class and/or heard about from an adult at school. “CRT-related concepts” refers to a summary index consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following five concepts: 1. “America is a systemically racist society”; 2. “In America, white people have white privilege”; 3. “In America, white people have unconscious biases that negatively affect nonwhite people; 4. “America is built on stolen land”; 5. “Discrimination is the main reason for differences in wealth or other outcomes between races or genders.” “Gender-related concepts” refers to a summary index consisting of “taught” and “taught and/or heard about” responses to the following three concepts: 1. “America is a patriarchal society”; 2. “The gender we identify with is more socially given than determined by our biology”; 3. “There are many genders, not just male and female.” Percentage estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Public schoolers are the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

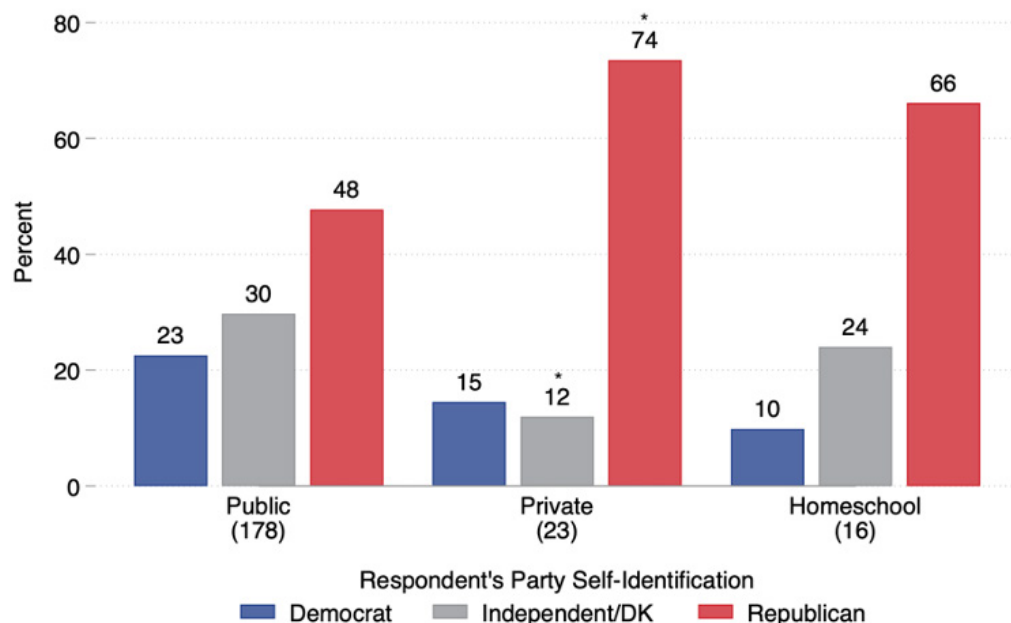
In sum, conservatives can find some solace in the fact that religious schooling and homeschooling appear to expose students to lower levels of CSJ. At the same time, the vast majority of those that do not attend public school attend non-religious private schools, which our data suggest do not offer much “protection.” Moreover, there’s no form of schooling in which large majorities have no classroom exposure to CSJ. Even among young people with two Republican parents, 64% of those attending private school (n=23) and 71% who were homeschooled (n=16) report being taught at least one CSJ concept. Only if we limit the sample (n=20) to youth whose parents are both strong Republicans (point 5 on 1-to-5 partisanship scale) does the share (45%) who were never taught a single CSJ concept at parochial, private, or homeschool roughly match the share that were taught at least one (54%). *There is thus no strong evidence that politically engaged parents from conservative backgrounds who are actively involved in their children’s education can entirely prevent their children from being taught CSJ.*

But while parents’ partisanship and school type are rather limited in their ability to shield children from CSJ, our data suggest that they do have some appreciable influence on the latter’s political leanings. **Figure 19**, for instance, shows that children whose parents are both

Republican are more likely to pass on their partisanship if they send their children to private schools (74% of youth with two Republican parents who attended private school are Republican) or homeschool them (66%) rather than send them to public school (48%). Though the sample contains just 23 young people who went to private school with two Republican parents and 16 such people who were homeschooled, the results suggest that private or homeschooling lead to a greater transmission of political beliefs. When we include the entire sample and control for a “kitchen sink” of background and contextual variables—including race/ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, age, parents’ partisanship, and area/geographic factors—private schooling predicts a statistically significant 10-point increase (21% to 31%;  $p=0.030$ ) in the chance a young person will be Republican.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 19

### Party Identification Among Respondents with Two Republican Parents, by High School Type



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Bars represent the percent of public, private, and homeschoolers with two Republican parents who identify as Democrat, Independent (or who “don’t know” their party affiliation), and Republican. Public school respondents serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

† $p < 0.1$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Our best estimate, therefore, is that private and homeschooling has a small effect on children’s partisanship and ideology. These forms of education are correlated with children being somewhat more Republican and conservative, regardless of whether their parents are Republicans or not, but the differences are not dramatic.

### Comparing with Another Data Set

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Because our samples of parochial and homeschool students are tiny, it's important to briefly compare our estimates of political identity outcomes with those from a larger dataset. To this end, we use the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) 2022 student survey of some 45,000 American undergraduates, largely from R1 research institutions, which educate 15% to 20% of U.S. college students.<sup>44</sup>

The data are very consistent with respect to partisanship and ideology. In both datasets, young people who went to private school (24% in FIRE, 26% in Deltapoll) are more Republican than those who attended public school (21% in FIRE, 20% in Deltapoll), with those who were homeschooled most likely to be Republican (34% in FIRE, 37% in Deltapoll). The “very liberal” share is similar in public (20% in FIRE, 21% in Deltapoll) and private schools (18% in FIRE, 25% in Deltapoll), but much lower among those who were homeschooled (9% in FIRE, 11% in Deltapoll).

While school type has some effect, this pales in significance, as noted earlier, compared to curriculum content. Only if conservatives are sure that a private or parochial school or homeschool curriculum is free of CSJ will they be able to curb its effects for their students. If many teachers support CSJ, curriculum content is difficult and time-consuming to access, and if parents choose schools based on academic performance metrics or the social status of peers rather than ideology, school choice will have little effect on political indoctrination.

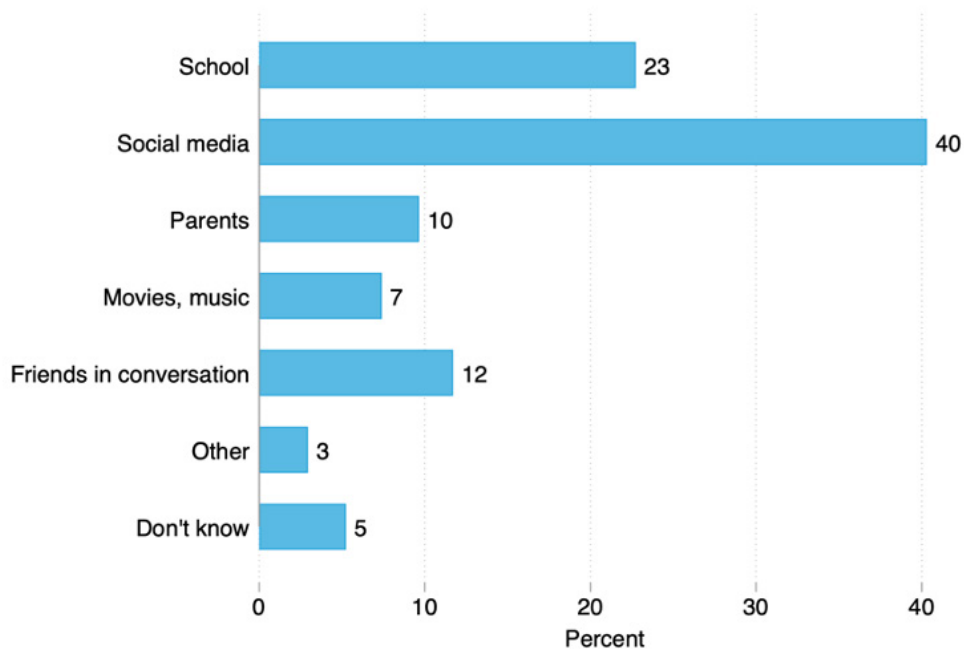
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## The Role of Social Media and Peers

A further complication concerns the many sources of socialization beyond the schoolhouse doors. For nearly a quarter of respondents, exposure to CSJ originates in the classroom. When asked where they first encountered the CSJ concepts they were asked about, “school” (23%) was second only to social media (40%); “friends in conversation” (12%) came in at a more distant third (**Figure 20**). Thus, a significant number of students encounter CSJ for the first time in class. However, those who first heard about CSJ at school are not statistically more likely to support these concepts than those who first heard about it elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> This shouldn't be taken to mean that school doesn't matter. To the contrary, the degree of classroom exposure to CSJ is significantly associated with approval of CSJ ideas when controlling for the source of first contact with CSJ. Whether by introducing or reinforcing ideas acquired online, school is an important influence.



Figure 20

**Source of First Exposure to CSJ Concepts**

Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. N=1,474. Bars represent the share of respondents who reported first hearing about the concepts from each listed source. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole number. Question wording reads as follows: "Where did you first hear about these concepts? Choose the most frequent source if you heard of some of the concepts from differences sources." Question was asked in relation to the six CSJ concepts shown in Figure 1. Respondents (31) who indicated that they had "never heard of" the concepts they were asked about are excluded from the analysis.

## Resist Indoctrination by Reforming Schools, Not Merely by More School Choice

What our analysis of school type and social media shows is that alternative schooling is a good option for politically literate and motivated parents seeking to insulate children from CSJ. However, unless homeschooling is accompanied by limits to young people's screen time and peers, they are likely to encounter CSJ in some form. For conservative parents, the quietist option of withdrawal is unlikely to achieve full protection from CSJ unless segregation is pushed to near-Amish levels. This points to the need for a more activist and reformist orientation toward the existing public system for those who wish to pursue cultural and political change.

Moreover, even if motivated parents do manage to insulate their children from these influences, school choice is unlikely to move the dial for American children as a whole. Most parents lack the wherewithal or motivation to make informed decisions even if there is sufficient school variety in their area. In addition, given the volume of students educated in the public system, the more politically impactful strategy—for Republicans or Democrats—is to focus on shaping teaching in public schools. All told, school choice is not likely to be an effective strategy for those seeking to change youth socialization in the aggregate unless this is combined with strong ideological school branding, mass school acquisition by committed parents' groups, and public information campaigns that create a separate school system akin to Catholic or Jewish religious schools. This seems a more distant prospect than reforming the existing system.

If political capital is scarce, it should be expended on reforming the public school system in states where a particular party has the advantage. In red states, this means Republican energy should go to school reform more than school choice. There is no “exit” shortcut. Instead, “voice” to reform public schools is the best option. On the other hand, in blue states, Republicans would be better served focusing on school choice or homeschooling. Democrats supportive of CSJ, meanwhile, should opt for the reverse approach, favoring “exit” in red states if they cannot protect the curriculum and using their political “voice” to boost the CSJ curriculum in blue states.

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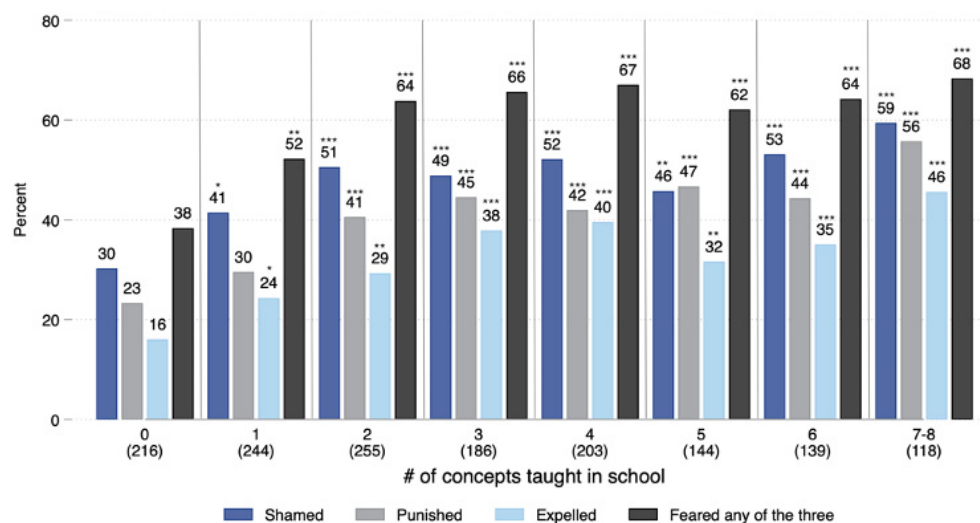
## CSJ's Impact on Students' Educational Experience

Diversity training has been shown to produce either no effect, or actions motivated by unpleasant feelings from employees who take it. In a previous Manhattan Institute report, one of us found that adults who attended diversity training (half of which featured CSJ concepts) were significantly more worried about losing their jobs or reputations for speech, and, consequently, self-censored more than people who did not take diversity training.<sup>46</sup> The same results hold for children exposed to CSJ in class.

To assess people's fear of being expelled or punished for speech when they were at school, we asked, “Thinking generally about your time in high school, college, or other educational settings, were you ever fearful of being [1-shamed, 2-punished, 3-expelled] from school for voicing your opinions on controversial subjects?” Response categories were “yes,” “no,” or “don't know.” Those who reported being taught one or more CSJ concepts were significantly more likely to report being fearful of being shamed, punished, or expelled than those who were not exposed to CSJ (**Figure 21**). Overall, 38% of those who were not taught CSJ reported fear on at least one of the three punishment dimensions, increasing to 63% among those taught at least one CSJ concept. Fear of at least one punishment significantly increases, by 12 points ( $p=0.015$ ), as the number of reported concepts increases from one to two but remains relatively stable (in the 62% to 68% range) thereafter.<sup>47</sup> Appendix D.2.1 further reveals that fears of informal and formal sanctions are virtually the same across racial/ethnic groups and are not limited to white respondents.

Figure 21

## Fear of Informal and Formal Sanctions, by CSJ Exposure



Source: Deltapoll survey

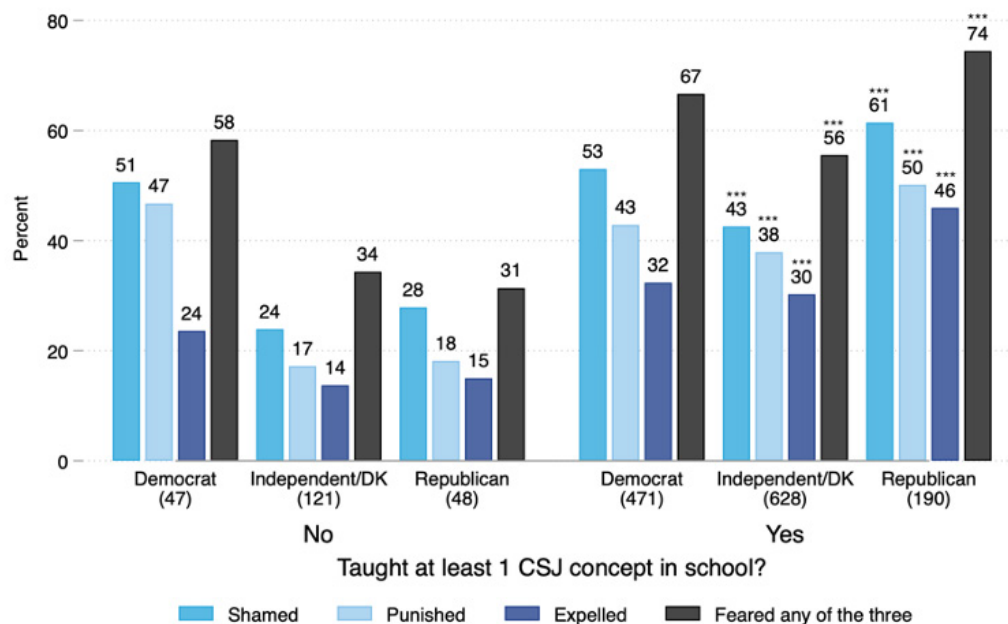
Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Question prompts read as follows: “Thinking generally about your time in high school, college, or other educational settings, were you ever fearful of being [shamed/punished/expelled] from school for voicing your opinions on controversial subjects?” Response options are “Yes, I was fearful of this”; “No, I was not fearful of this”; and “Don’t know.” Bars represent the percent of respondents who gave a “Yes, I was fearful” response to each of or at least one of the three punishment types. “No CSJ” respondents serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

More important than racial differences are the effects on right-leaning young people of being taught CSJ, with the fear levels of young Republicans affected more than those of independents. Young Democrats were affected least. **Figure 22** shows that just 31% of young Republicans who were not exposed to CSJ said they worried about any of the three forms of punishment for voicing their opinions on controversial subjects. This jumps to 74% for Republican-identifying young people who were exposed to CSJ, including 61% who feared shaming, 50% worried about punishment, and 46% concerned about being expelled. This 43-point shift, from 31% to 74%, compares to a statistically insignificant 9-point ( $p=0.306$ ) increase for Democrats (from 58% to 67%) and a significant 22-point rise ( $p < 0.001$ ) among independents (from 34% to 56%). While CSJ heightens fear across the board, this disproportionately affects Republican pupils. A similar-sized pattern holds for conservative young people in relation to liberal youth.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 22

### Fear of Informal and Formal Sanctions, by Party Identification and CSJ Exposure



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Question prompts read as follows: “Thinking generally about your time in high school, college, or other educational settings, were you ever fearful of being [shamed/punished/expelled] from school for voicing your opinions on controversial subjects?” Response options are “Yes, I was fearful of this”; “No, I was not fearful of this”; and “Don’t know.” Bars represent the percent of “No CSJ” vs. “Some CSJ” (i.e., those who reported being taught at least one CSJ concept) respondents who gave a “Yes, I was fearful” response to each of or at least one of the three punishment types. “No CSJ” respondents serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

The teaching of CSJ is associated with elevated fear among pupils of voicing their beliefs on controversial subjects. This is especially the case for those with right-of-center political views or Republican partisan affiliation. But does this affect the way students behave toward each other? Might it discourage debate and the exchange of ideas between students, particularly across racial lines? Given that peer feedback is known to be an effective mode of improving student outcomes,<sup>49</sup> any process that hampers the ability of students to give each other constructive criticism risks impairing this mode of learning and limiting the potential of students to learn from mistakes.

In this vein, it is noteworthy that our research shows that the teaching of CRT is likely to significantly impair the peer feedback process for black students, limiting potential opportunities for black students’ intellectual growth. For this question, we asked, “How comfortable or uncomfortable would you have been to criticize a white (or black) schoolmate (if none, imagine if there were) during your school years?” Response categories ranged on a five-point scale from “very comfortable” to “very uncomfortable.” For some of the analyses below, this was collapsed to a three-point scale encompassing “comfortable,” “neither,” and “uncomfortable.”

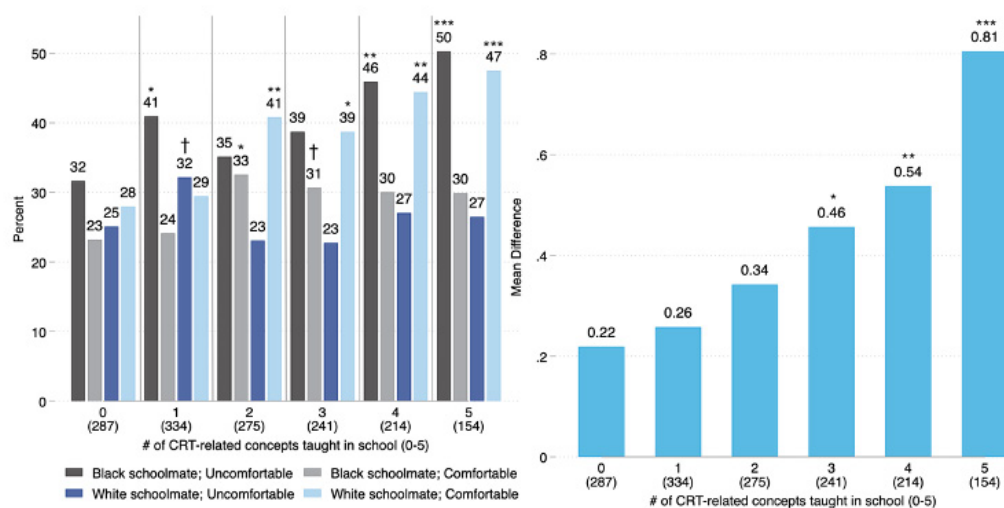
**Figure 23** graphs the results for the sample as a whole. In the left panel, we see that the volume (on a scale from teaching zero to five concepts) of classroom exposure to CRT-related concepts at once increases discomfort toward criticizing a black classmate while increasing comfort toward criticizing a white classmate.

For instance, 32% of respondents who reported being taught none of the five CRT-related concepts in school indicated they would be uncomfortable criticizing a black classmate (23% of them indicated they would be comfortable); yet just 25% of those students taught zero CRT-related concepts said they would be uncomfortable criticizing a white classmate (28% indicated they would be comfortable). By comparison, for respondents who reported being taught four or more CRT-related concepts, 46% to 50% (depending on the number of concepts taught) indicated they were *uncomfortable* criticizing a black classmate, while 44% to 47% indicated they were *comfortable* criticizing a white classmate.

The right panel, which graphs the average white vs. black comfort differences on the original five-point scale, further reveals a “comfort gap” that (non-linearly) grows with each additional concept. Those in the “no exposure” group are just 0.22 units more comfortable toward the prospect of criticizing a white vs. a black classmate, whereas this margin widens to 0.54 to 0.81 units among those that reported being taught four or more concepts. These high vs. no exposure differences remain significant at the 99% level or better when adjusted for a large battery of control variables.<sup>50</sup>

Figure 23

### Comfort with Criticizing a Black vs. White Schoolmate, by CRT-Related Class Exposure



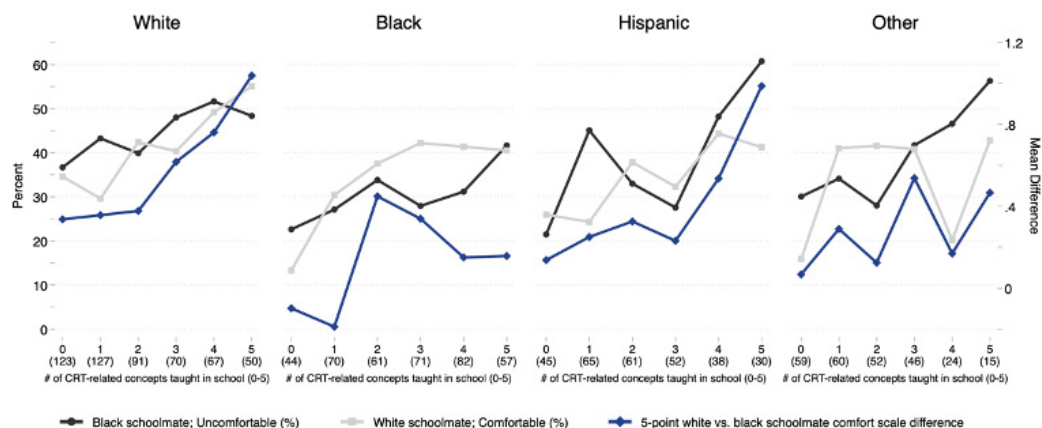
Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. In the left panel, bars represent the percent of respondents who reported that they would have felt comfortable/uncomfortable with the idea of criticizing a black/white schoolmate. These binary responses originate from two five-point scales that range from “Very uncomfortable” (1) to “Very comfortable” (5). In the right panel, bars represent the average difference between respondents’ reported comfort with criticizing a white vs. black schoolmate on the original five-point scale. Positive scores mean that respondents are more comfortable with criticizing a white vs. a black schoolmate. Question prompts for these items read as follows: “How comfortable would you have been to criticize a [black/white] schoolmate (if none, imagine if there were) during your school years?” Respondents who reported being taught none of the five CRT-related concepts serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance. †p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Respondents of different racial/ethnic backgrounds showed substantively similar patterns of results (Figure 24). For instance, among those who reported learning none of the five CRT-related concepts, 37% of white, 23% of black, 21% of Hispanic, and 30% of “other” respondents expressed discomfort at the idea of criticizing a black schoolmate (black line). But for those that reported being taught four or more, these figures jump<sup>51</sup> (depending on the number of concepts taught) to 48% to 52% (white), 31% to 42% (black), 48% to 61% (Hispanic), and 47% to 56% (“other”). As with the sample overall, we also see that CRT-related classroom exposure positively affects comfort toward the prospect of criticizing a white classmate—though this relationship is less clear for “other”<sup>52</sup> respondents. Relative to their “no exposure” counterparts, comfort toward criticizing a white classmate increases<sup>53</sup> by 15 to 20 points for white, 27 to 28 points for black, 15 to 18 points for Hispanic, and 4 to 27 points for “other” respondents who reported being taught four or more concepts.

Figure 24

**Comfort with Criticizing a Black vs. White Schoolmate, by CRT-Related Class Exposure and Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Deltapoll survey

Note: Data are weighted. Sample sizes are in parentheses. Black and light grey lines represent the percent of respondents who reported that they would have felt uncomfortable and comfortable with the idea of criticizing a black and white schoolmate, respectively. These binary responses originate from two five-point scales that range from “Very uncomfortable” (1) to “Very comfortable” (5). Blue lines represent the average difference between respondents’ reported comfort with criticizing a white vs. black schoolmate on the original five-point scale. Positive scores mean that respondents are more comfortable with criticizing a white vs. a black schoolmate. Question prompts for these items read as follows: “How comfortable would you have been to criticize a [black/white] schoolmate (if none, imagine if there were) during your school years?” Respondents who reported being taught none of the five CRT-related concepts serve as the reference group for tests of statistical significance.

†p < 0.1, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

The precise substance of the criticism respondents have in mind in these cases is a matter for further investigation, but these results would suggest that teaching more CRT is likely to benefit white students by introducing a greater willingness among pupils to criticize them while harming black students by withholding the criticism that might further their intellectual development.

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## Policy Recommendations

The most important strategic and policy takeaway for conservatives concerned about CSJ concepts in the classroom is that school choice is an insufficient bulwark against indoctrinating students in left-wing ideology because many students enrolled in alternatives to public high schools are still exposed to and persuaded by these ideas. Several additional high-level policy suggestions follow from the foregoing analysis. These policies should be especially focused on reforming the public education system.

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### Make Schools Free from Bias:

1. Public schools should adopt explicit political impartiality requirements. Something similar exists in U.K. law, preventing the teaching of “partisan political views” and requiring “a balanced presentation of opposing views.”<sup>54</sup> Political impartiality requirements in U.S. public schools should specifically define “critical” approaches to race, gender, and sexuality as political, not as a consensus of moral values.
2. Official school pronouncements, assemblies, and bulletin boards should be held to the impartiality and non-indoctrination standards outlined above.
3. Any discussion of CSJ must be balanced by classical liberal approaches—or not taught at all. Given the predilections of activist teachers who gravitate to teaching in this area, it may be preferable to have outside speakers or groups represent the anti-CSJ position. Several classical liberal organizations have developed useful teaching materials around racism and other identity issues based on a color-blind approach, which should be included in equal proportion, at the very least, to any CSJ materials.
4. Ensure political balance and impartiality in extra-curricular activities, drawing on guidance as to where the line lies between contested and consensus ideas.

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### Audit and Examine:

1. Conduct a rigorous and representative, not qualitative, impact assessment of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) instruction. If measurable positive effects do not outweigh negative effects in statistical analysis of large-scale datasets, DEI instruction should cease until such time as randomized control trials with reformed curricula can be shown to work.
2. Audit teacher-training, clinical psychology training, and other accreditation bodies for political impartiality and non-indoctrination.

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### Establish Education Standards and Curriculum:

1. Establish guidelines as to the age at which CSJ content may be introduced into the classroom, even in the form of contested ideas up for debate.
2. Ensure that impartiality and non-indoctrination are included in ethical obligations taught during teacher training. This should be part of training for teachers and leaders at all levels.
3. Ensure that teaching about American history and society balances the need to acknowledge when the country has failed to live up to its ideals with the need for national pride, which is important for social cohesion.

4. Ensure that teaching of past wrongs (i.e., slavery, fascism, colonialism, conquest, and discrimination) be contextualized by teaching about similar excesses in the non-European past and present, including the excesses of communism and other left-wing movements.
5. Ensure that students are taught about the country's free speech traditions and legal protections for freedom of expression. Research consistently shows that students who are taught about the First Amendment in school are more supportive of freedom of speech.<sup>55</sup> U.K. research likewise shows that university students who read about Britain's tradition of free speech become significantly more tolerant of speech.<sup>56</sup>

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#### **Ensure Transparency and Accountability:**

1. Ensure that parents and teachers who wish to pursue complaints of breaches in impartiality have a clear path to doing so.
  2. States should require public schools to provide curriculum materials on demand, as outlined in the Manhattan Institute's model legislation.<sup>57</sup>
  3. End commercial confidentiality for third-party content contractors. Only contractors who agree beforehand that schools can make their content public, if requested, can be hired.
  4. Schools should consult widely with parents before changing anti-racist or sex-education policies.
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## Conclusion

The findings of this report suggest that the teaching of applied versions of Critical Race Theory and radical gender theory is endemic in American schools. Ninety-three percent of a random sample of 18-to-20-year-old Americans say that they have been taught, or have heard about from an adult at school, one or more Critical Social Justice (CSJ) concepts. In fact, the average respondent reported being taught and/or hearing about more than half of the eight concepts we measured. Even assuming these are overestimates, schools and teachers promoting CSJ narratives can hardly be regarded as rare or isolated occurrences. Rather, it is the experience of a large segment of American high school students, if not the majority.

Given the radical and empirically contested claims contained in these concepts, teaching them requires nuance and the introduction of competing arguments. And yet for the nearly 7 out of 10 respondents who reported being taught at least one of these concepts, these ideas were taught as the only respectable approach to the phenomena they implicate, rather than as theories that are disputed by equally valid alternative views. While we cannot completely rule out selection effects, it appears schools are a powerful force for ideological indoctrination in the United States.

CSJ instruction is not without consequences. It appears to profoundly influence the beliefs and attitudes of young Americans about race and gender. Those who reported being taught CSJ concepts in class were anywhere from 14 to 29 points more likely to endorse them. More alarmingly, for respondents of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, each additional CRT-related concept taught increased the likelihood of blaming white people for racial inequality and endorsing negative generalizations of white people as "racist." Compared to those with no reported exposure, those with maximal levels of classroom CRT exposure were 32 to 33 points more likely to express these attitudes, and they were also 27 to 43 points more likely to endorse racial redistributionist



policies such as affirmative action. Additionally, white respondents who were exposed to all the CRT concepts were nearly 20 points more likely than non-exposed respondents to express feelings of race-based guilt over racial inequality.

While it could be that no single concept, or combination of concepts, are driving these results, we suspect that the volume of reported exposure to them speaks to the broader ideological-political environment at respondents' schools. Consistent with this, those who reported the highest levels of classroom exposure to CSJ were 20 to 24 points more likely than those with no exposure to describe the general tenor of what they were taught about America's past and present as being of "more shame than pride." What is more, we find evidence that suggests this exposure—or the broader educational environment it captures—has consequences for political self-identification. For instance, students taught the maximum number of CSJ ideas were around 25 points more likely to be a Democrat and less likely to be a Republican. And the same holds for identifying as liberal or conservative. Coming from a Republican family or a Republican county is no protection against this: in fact, the correlation between more CSJ instruction and greater liberal/Democratic sympathies is strongest for children from Republican and independent families, or who live in Republican areas.

Our findings further suggest that homeschooling, parochial schooling, or (non-religious) private schooling are only minimally effective in preventing CSJ from being taught. While the first two schooling types may moderate the *volume* of classroom exposure to CSJ, they do not expel it from the classroom altogether. Roughly 7 in 10 young people who experienced these kinds of high schooling reported being taught at least one CSJ concept, and the average was two concepts. Only for those with strong Republican parents do these forms of schooling meaningfully curtail exposure to CSJ. What this suggests, then, is that at the system level, only a small number of parents have the political awareness to be able to limit the impact of progressive ideology in schools and prevent leftward socialization. This may stem from the difficulty of accessing curriculum materials, the time and energy involved, or the fact that parents prioritize cost and conventional learning outcomes. If a sufficient share of teachers or their teaching materials promote CSJ in private or parochial schools, as seems to be the case, then greater school choice will have little impact on indoctrination.

In policy terms, this means that if conservatives invest their hopes in a mass exit from the public school system by advancing school choice and leaving the public school system, this may merely multiply the number of entry points for CSJ rather than reduce the risk that children will be taught it. Given a fixed supply of political capital and resources, a better use of conservative political energy is to focus on regulating or banning the teaching of CSJ in schools and teacher training while pushing for curriculum transparency. Battles over school choice are generally beside the point when it comes to CSJ exposure. Republicans who believe that vouchers will reduce exposure to CSJ are likely to be disappointed. School choice fits with free-market sensibilities but is not the right focus for resisting CRT and radical gender theory in schools.

For progressive Democrats who favor these concepts, the long-term strategy should be to encourage CSJ in teachers' colleges and materials while opposing CSJ bans and curriculum transparency wherever possible, while focusing less on whether schooling is provided publicly or privately. Of course, in terms of immediate electoral priorities, the fact that CSJ instruction is unpopular<sup>58</sup> among voters (and teachers' unions oppose school choice) means that parties will have to make calculations that optimize across short- and long-term political horizons. Democrats may not wish to defend CSJ if it costs them elections, and they may wish to oppose school choice if that opposition is what their union constituency prioritizes.

Finally, CSJ has been shown to be associated with a significantly greater fear among students of being shamed, punished, or expelled. Republican-supporting young people taught the maximum amount of CSJ are 43 points more likely to fear punishment, shaming, or expulsion compared to young Republicans who were not taught any.

In addition, CRT instruction is linked, especially among white pupils, to discomfort with the idea of criticizing a black schoolmate. Whites who say they were taught three or more CRT concepts were nearly 13 points more likely to say they would have been uncomfortable criticizing a black schoolmate compared to whites who were taught no CRT. Ironically, the effect of CRT is to discourage criticism that might help to improve the very minority outcomes that CRT claims to care about.

The negative effects of CSJ on the student experience, and on minority outcomes, is something policymakers need to factor into decisions about whether to greenlight instruction in these contentious concepts.

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## About the Authors



**Zach Goldberg** is a Paulson Policy Analyst who recently completed his PhD in political science from Georgia State University. His dissertation focused on the “Great Awakening”—closely examining the role that the media and collective moral emotions played in recent shifts in racial liberalism among white Americans. At MI, his work will touch on a range of different issues, including identity politics, criminal justice, and understanding the sources of American political polarization. Some of Goldberg’s previous writing on identity politics in America can be found at *Tablet* and on his *Substack*.

In the summer of 2020, Goldberg joined MI President Reihan Salam, Columbia University Professor Musa al-Gharbi, and Birkbeck College Professor and MI Adjunct Fellow Eric Kaufmann for a conversation on the “Great Awakening”—the strong leftward shift among white liberals on issues of racial inequality and discrimination, immigration, and diversity that has been taking place since 2014.



**Eric Kaufmann** is an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a professor of politics at Birkbeck College, University of London. Kaufmann’s scholarship focuses on cultural politics, religious and national identity, and demography. He is the author of *Whiteshift* (2018/19), *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth* (2010), *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America* (2004), and *The Orange Order* (2007), among others. He has co-authored reports on academic freedom and the political response to demographic change and edited books on demography and ethnicity. An editor of the journal *Nations & Nationalism*, he has written for the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Foreign Affairs*, *New Statesman*, *National Review*, and *Prospect*. He holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science and lives in London.

### Appendix

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Online appendix available [here](#).

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> For details of the Deltapoll methodology, see appendix A. For topline results, see “Deltapoll Survey Results.”
- <sup>2</sup> Helen Pluckrose and James A. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, N.C.: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020).
- <sup>3</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013).
- <sup>4</sup> David Rozado, “Themes in Academic Literature: Prejudice and Social Justice,” *Academic Questions* 35, no. 2 (2022); Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized*, (London: Profile Books, 2021).
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Christopher F. Rufo is now a senior fellow with the Manhattan Institute. Christopher F. Rufo, “Critical Race Theory in Education,” christopherrufo.com, Apr. 27, 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> Eric Kaufmann, “The Politics of the Culture Wars in Contemporary America,” Manhattan Institute, Jan. 25, 2022.
- <sup>8</sup> Frederick M. Hess, “What Youngkin’s Virginia Win Means for Education,” *Education Next*, Nov. 3, 2021.
- <sup>9</sup> Phil McCausland, “Teaching Critical Race Theory Isn’t Happening in Classrooms, Teachers Say in Survey,” *NBC News*, July 1, 2021.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas Sowell, *Discrimination and Disparities* (New York: Basic Books, 2018); Gregory Clark, *The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015); Zachary Ward, “The Not-So-Hot Melting Pot: The Persistence of Outcomes for Descendants of the Age of Mass Migration,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 12, no. 4 (2020): 73–102; Zach Goldberg, “Exposing the Group Disparities=Discrimination Fallacy,” *Zach’s Newsletter* (blog), May 28, 2021.
- <sup>11</sup> Clark, *The Son Also Rises*.
- <sup>12</sup> Hoyt Bleakley and Joseph Ferrie, “Shocking Behavior: Random Wealth in Antebellum Georgia and Human Capital Across Generations” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 3 (August 2016): 1455–95; Randall K. Q. Akee et al., “Parents’ Incomes and Children’s Outcomes: A Quasi-Experiment Using Transfer Payments from Casino Profits,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 2, no. 1 (January 2010): 86–115; Katrine V. Løken, “Family Income and Children’s Education: Using the Norwegian Oil Boom as a Natural Experiment,” *Labour Economics* 17, no. 1 (January 2010): 118–29; Philipp Ager, Leah Boustan, and Katherine Eriksson, “The Intergenerational Effects of a Large Wealth Shock: White Southerners After the Civil War,” *American Economic Review* 111, no. 11 (November 2021): 3767–94.

- <sup>13</sup> Bruce Sacerdote, “Slavery and the Intergenerational Transmission of Human Capital,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 87, no. 2 (May 2005): 217–34; Cremieux, “Black Economic Progress After Slavery,” *Cremieux Recueil* (blog), Nov. 5, 2022.
- <sup>14</sup> A large repository of articles critical of implicit bias and measures thereof can be found here: Lee Jussim et al., “Articles Critical of the IAT and Implicit Bias,” Open Science Framework.
- <sup>15</sup> See “Deltapoll Survey Results.”
- <sup>16</sup> This is not surprising as differences between black and white respondents in taught/heard about responses are smallest for the “stolen land” concept.
- <sup>17</sup> The average white, black, and Hispanic respondent in our sample resides in zip codes in which whites comprise 79%, 50%, and 62% of the population, respectively.
- <sup>18</sup> The white vs. nonwhite difference in the average effect of zip code whiteness on the four-item “taught” index is not distinguishable from zero ( $p=0.186$ ). The difference in the average effect on the four-item “taught/heard about” index is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level ( $p=0.008$ ), including  $p=0.005$  for the white vs. black difference,  $p=0.007$  for the white vs. Hispanic difference, and  $p=0.055$  for the white vs. “other” difference.
- <sup>19</sup> Individually, the coefficients for black ( $\beta_{\text{taught}}=-0.004$ ,  $p=0.197$ ;  $\beta_{\text{taught/heard}}=-0.002$ ,  $p=0.460$ ), Hispanic ( $\beta_{\text{taught}}=-0.001$ ,  $p=0.785$ ;  $\beta_{\text{taught/heard}}=0.000$ ,  $p=0.986$ ), and “other” respondents ( $\beta_{\text{taught}}=-0.002$ ,  $p=0.560$ ;  $\beta_{\text{taught/heard}}=-0.004$ ,  $p=0.318$ ) are all indistinguishable from zero.
- <sup>20</sup> The effect of zip-code white population share on the “taught” and “taught/heard about” indexes falls by only 0.001 units for both whites (from  $-0.010$  to  $-0.009$  with  $p=0.015$  in the first case, and from  $-0.015$  to  $-0.014$  with  $p=0.001$  in the second) and nonwhites (from  $-0.005$  to  $-0.004$  with  $p=0.111$  in the first case, and from  $-0.004$  to  $-0.003$  with  $p=0.303$  in the second).
- <sup>21</sup> What local partisanship does appear to have an independent effect on is the probability of being taught that “America is a systemically racist country.” Once again, though, these positive effects are larger and reach significance only among whites. Moving from a county that favoured Trump over Biden by 77 points (scale minimum) to one that favoured Biden over Trump by 74 points (scale maximum) results in a 34-point increase in the probability of being taught that “America is a systemically racist country” for whites ( $p=0.010$ ) as compared to a 7.9-point increase for nonwhites ( $p=0.390$ ).
- <sup>22</sup> Unless one adjusts for local racial composition, it will appear that local partisanship and CRT-related exposure are significantly correlated. But this relationship mostly reflects or masks the influence of racial composition. If zip-code racial composition is removed from the model, local partisanship becomes a significant predictor of scores on the four-item “taught” ( $p=0.048$ ) and “taught/heard about” ( $p=0.024$ ) indexes.
- <sup>23</sup> Net of partisanship and other control variables, zip-code white population share does not significantly predict any of the outcomes listed in Figure 5.
- <sup>24</sup> The difference in the size of these gaps is not distinguishable from zero ( $p=0.165$ ). That said, what drives this differential gap size is the fact that white Democrats (mean=1.2 concepts) and Republicans (mean=0.6 concepts) report the highest and lowest levels of classroom exposure to the radical gender concepts, respectively. Thus, whereas partisan gaps on

- the five-item CRT-related “taught” index are very similar for whites (0.94 concepts) and nonwhites (0.84 concepts), partisan gaps on the gender-related “taught” index are larger among whites (0.54 concepts) than nonwhites (0.15 concepts).
- <sup>25</sup> Three other possibilities come to mind. First, it’s possible that Democrats are more likely to attend to and recollect ideologically consistent information. Second, it’s possible that recall is affected by one’s partisan and/or ideological commitments such that Democrats are more likely to “remember” being taught such concepts regardless of whether they were. Third, Democrats might be selecting into courses or speakers where CSJ is discussed.
- <sup>26</sup> To clarify any potential confusion, these “opposing argument” items were asked of those who reported being taught in a high school class at least one of six concepts shown in Figure 1. They thus preceded the two questions that ask whether, “in high school, college, or other educational settings,” a respondent was ever taught that “discrimination is the main reason” for group differences and that “there are many genders.” “Yes” responses to these items were thus not included in the current index.
- <sup>27</sup> Readers interested in seeing the adjusted results can refer to appendix C.1.
- <sup>28</sup> See, e.g., David O. Sears and Christia Brown, “Childhood and Adult Political Development,” in *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, eds. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, Jack S. Levy (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- <sup>29</sup> Interested readers can refer to chapter 7 of report co-author’s dissertation: Zachary Goldberg, “Explaining Shifts in White Racial Liberalism: The Role of Collective Moral Emotions and Media Effects,” PhD diss., Georgia State University, May 2, 2022.
- <sup>30</sup> For these adjusted results, see appendix C.
- <sup>31</sup> Specifically, the percentage-point differentials between those in the zero and “maximal exposure” categories are 38 for whites (72% vs. 34%) and 46 points for nonwhites (78% vs. 32%) for “white Americans are ultimately responsible;” 23 for whites (65% vs. 42%) and 41 for nonwhites (80% vs. 39%) for “white Americans are racist and mean;” 23 for whites (41% vs. 18%) and 33 for nonwhites (49% vs. 16%) for “favor preferential hiring and promotion;” and 34 for whites (72% vs. 38%) and 39 for nonwhites (73% vs. 34%) for “government should help black people.” However, none of the between-group differences in the size of these gaps approach significance at the 95% threshold.
- <sup>32</sup> Similar findings are reported in in section 6.4.6 of Goldberg, “Explaining Shifts in White Racial Liberalism.”
- <sup>33</sup> These include respondent sex, race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, household income, party-ID, ideological self-identification, type of high school, census division, parents’ party self-ID, parents’ educational attainment, social media frequency, rural share of respondents’ counties, racial school segregation in respondents’ counties, county partisanship, county racial liberalism (i.e., reverse-coded “racial resentment”), zip-code white population share, and zip-code median household income.
- <sup>34</sup> Just 36 respondents reported being taught all eight CSJ concepts. To improve the reliability of estimates at the highest exposure levels, we combine these respondents with those who reported being taught seven of the eight CSJ concepts.

- <sup>35</sup> Alec Tyson and Shiva Maniam, “Behind Trump’s Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education,” Pew Research Center, Nov. 9, 2016; “National Exit Polls: How Different Groups Voted,” *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 2020.
- <sup>36</sup> Kevin Eagan et al., “The American Freshmen: National Norms, Fall 2016,” Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 2017.
- <sup>37</sup> Respondents’ reported party identification correlates (Spearman Rho) at 0.44 with their mothers’ and 0.38 with their fathers’ reported party identification. In a regression model that adjusts for sex, age, census division, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity, the average effect of a unit increase (i.e., moving up a category in the Republican direction) in mothers’ party identification ( $\beta=0.339$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) on respondents’ party identification are a little less than twice the size of those of a unit increase in fathers’ party identification ( $\beta=0.183$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- <sup>38</sup> If this surprises the reader, he/she should keep in mind that there are only 39 respondents in this No-CSJ/Strong-Dem-County group, so estimates are noisy.
- <sup>39</sup> Charts of the results from these “kitchen sink” models are shown in appendix C.
- <sup>40</sup> Parents Defending Education, “POLL: Americans Overwhelmingly Reject ‘Woke’ Race and Gender Policies in K–12 Education,” press release, [defendinged.org](http://defendinged.org), May 10, 2021.
- <sup>41</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Response to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- <sup>42</sup> If we exclude the two items that were asked in relation to “any educational setting” (including college), the results are 77% for public schoolers, 70% for parochial schoolers, 71% for private schoolers, and 77% for homeschoolers. However, we should note that the results including these two items do not differ between those with no and at least some college education.
- <sup>43</sup> In this “kitchen sink” model, homeschooling is associated with a statistically insignificant 6-point ( $p=0.426$ ) increase in the probability of identifying as Republican.
- <sup>44</sup> FIRE survey data were sent privately to report author Eric Kaufmann.
- <sup>45</sup> In no case did we observe a statistically significant difference in conceptual endorsement between those who reported first hearing a given concept in school and those who reported first hearing it elsewhere. If anything, levels of endorsement were slightly (but not significantly) higher among the latter, though such small differences are entirely a function of liberal respondents (20%) being somewhat less likely than conservatives (28%) to report first encountering concepts in school.
- <sup>46</sup> Kaufmann, “The Politics of the Culture Wars in Contemporary America,” 5.
- <sup>47</sup> As shown in appendix C.6, these differences between respondents who reported being taught no CSJ concepts and those who reported being taught at least some remain statistically significant (generally at the 99.9% level), net of the controls in our dataset.
- <sup>48</sup> Differences among ideological groups mirror those observed among partisan groups. Readers interested in these results can refer to appendix C.6.

- <sup>49</sup> Lan Li, Xiongyi Liu, Allen L. Steckelberg, “Assessor or Assessee: How Student Learning Improves by Giving and Receiving Peer Feedback,” *British Journal of Educational Technology* 41, no. 3 (May 2010): 525–36.
- <sup>50</sup> Estimates from these “kitchen sink” models are shown in appendix C.7.
- <sup>51</sup> In the baseline models, these average increases are statistically significant for white ( $p=0.039$ ), Hispanic ( $p < 0.001$ ), and “other” respondents ( $p=0.041$ ) but fall short of 95% significance for black respondents ( $p=0.070$ ). In the adjusted models, they remain significant for white ( $p=0.040$ ) and Hispanic respondents ( $p < 0.001$ ) but are no longer significant for “other” respondents ( $p=0.249$ ).
- <sup>52</sup> For “other” respondents, the rate of “comfort” responses inexplicably plummets among those taught four concepts. However, as there are only 24 “other” respondents in this exposure category, the reliability of this estimate is questionable.
- <sup>53</sup> In the baseline models, these average increases are statistically significant for white ( $p=0.005$ ), black ( $p=0.005$ ), and “other” respondents ( $p=0.021$ ) but fall short of 95% significance for Hispanic respondents ( $p=0.057$ ). In the adjusted models, these increases remain significant for white ( $p=0.004$ ) and black ( $p=0.005$ ) respondents but are no longer significant for “other” respondents ( $p=0.175$ ).
- <sup>54</sup> See [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk), Education Act 1996, sections 406 and 407.
- <sup>55</sup> Knight Foundation, “Future of the First Amendment 2022: High Schooler Views on Speech over Time,” Knight Free Expression Research Series Report, May 24, 2022.
- <sup>56</sup> Thomas Simpson and Eric Kaufmann, “Academic Freedom in the UK,” Policy Exchange, Nov. 11, 2019.
- <sup>57</sup> Christopher F. Rufo, James R. Copland, John Ketcham, “A Model for Transparency in School Training and Curriculum,” Manhattan Institute, Dec. 1, 2021.
- <sup>58</sup> Kaufmann, “The Politics of the Culture Wars in Contemporary America,” 48.