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Challenging the stubborn core of opposition to equality: Racial contact and policy attitudes

Abstract

A Random Digit Dialing survey (n=794) examined the interracial contact experiences and racial attitudes of white South Africans. The survey measured racial attitudes not only in terms of individuals' prejudice, but also in terms of their perceptions of group threat, perceived injustice, and support for various government policies designed to rectify the legacy of apartheid. The results indicated that the frequency and quality of interracial contact predicted whites' support for both race compensatory and race preferential policies of redress, and these effects were partly mediated by perceived threat, sense of fairness, and racial prejudice. The research points to a potential rapprochement between the social psychological theories of intergroup contact and group positioning theories derived from the work of Blumer. It also highlights the value of adopting a more expansive and politically nuanced conception of the 'consequences' of contact and desegregation.

Keywords: prejudice, contact hypothesis, policy attitudes, South Africa

Challenging the stubborn core of opposition to equality: Racial contact and policy attitudes

On the face of it, white racial attitudes have undergone an encouraging transformation over the past 50 years. Research using standard measures of stereotyping, social distance and emotional tolerance has evidenced a steady decrease in whites' prejudice towards other racial groups, accompanied by an increased acceptance of racial justice as a political ideal (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo & Krysan, 1997; Smith & Dempsey, 1983). Although this trend would seem to warrant optimism, many social psychologists have urged that the evidence should be interpreted cautiously. Some have argued that the demise of so-called 'old-fashioned' racism has been exaggerated by survey research, as its core elements persist and may reappear in situations where the social desirability of appearing 'unprejudiced' is reduced (e.g. Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). Others have pointed to the historical shifting and manifold nature of prejudice, an idea captured by emergent distinctions between old-fashioned and symbolic prejudice (Kinder & Sears, 1981), implicit and explicit prejudice (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), subtle and blatant prejudice (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), and Jim Crow and laissez faire prejudice (Bobo, Kleugel, & Smith, 1997).

The Stubborn Core of Resistance to Racial Transformation? White Resistance to Race-Targeted Policies

The complexity and intransigence of racial prejudice is exemplified by a tradition of research on the so-called 'principle-implementation gap' in racial attitudes, which forms the backdrop to the research reported in this article (see Bobo, 1988; Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Schuman et al., 1997; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo & Kosterman, 1997; Tuch & Hughes, 1996). Research in this tradition has highlighted a contradiction between whites' attitudes towards ideals of racial justice and attitudes towards concrete policies of racial transformation. In general, evaluations of the former are more

positive than evaluations of the latter. Moreover, such research has shown that different types of race-targeted policies attract different levels of opposition amongst whites. In particular, *race compensatory* policies (e.g. scholarships for underrepresented students) typically invoke less political opposition than *race preferential* policies (e.g. racial quotas in schools) (c.f. Tuch and Hughes, 1996).

Consider, as a relevant empirical illustration, Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux's (2007) survey of race attitudes in South Africa. Conducted just over a decade after the abolition of the apartheid system, this survey found that whites' attitudes towards abstract principles of racial justice were overwhelmingly favourable. Indeed, at this idealistic level, race proved to be a poor discriminator of political attitudes, with a tiny percentage of respondents of any race group (5% <) expressing oppositional responses. When asked to express attitudes towards various government interventions designed bring about social change, however, white South Africans tended to be far less supportive than their black compatriots, particularly when policies were targeted at changing *outcomes* as opposed to improving *opportunities*. For example, the majority of whites rejected policies of affirmative action and land redistribution as a means of addressing economic disadvantage, while a sizeable minority rejected proposals to use racial quotas to address educational segregation. In addition, whereas the overall principle-implementation gap was negligible for black South Africans (6%), for white South Africans it was substantially higher (27%). In short, echoing a pattern documented widely in the United States, this survey confirmed that whites "...increasingly reject racial injustice in principle but are reluctant to accept the measures necessary to eliminate injustice" (Pettigrew, 1979, p.119)

Explanations of this 'principle-implementation gap' in race attitudes have focused, *inter alia*, on the role of self-interest, stratification beliefs, realistic conflict, political conservatism, and prejudice. Rather than theoretical consensus, the field has generated sharp, and often politically charged, disagreements. Thus, as Tuch and Hughes (1996, p.724) note somewhat euphemistically, "...what

accounts for this gap, and what the gap reveals about whites' racial thinking, continues to be hotly debated in the race attitudes literature". What is not in dispute, however, is the fact that white policy attitudes have proved to be enormously resilient to change and thus constitute a 'stubborn core' of social psychological resistance to the practice of racial justice.

Reducing White Resistance to Implementation of Race-Targeted Policies: The Potential Role of Racial Contact

In this paper, we evaluate a potential social psychological intervention for altering white policy attitudes, namely the promotion of positive interracial contact. The so-called 'contact hypothesis' holds that positive interaction between members of different groups tends to improve intergroup relations (Allport, 1954), an idea that has generated a long history of research in social psychology. Although acknowledging its potential benefits, early reviews of the contact literature highlighted the context specific effects of contact, the practical obstacles to creating the conditions for positive contact, and the apparent failure of interpersonal attitude changes to generalise to intergroup attitudes (e.g., Amir, 1969; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Stephan, 1987). In recent years, however, the literature has taken a decidedly optimistic turn, epitomised by Pettigrew and Tropp's landmark review. Based on a comprehensive meta-analysis of the contact literature, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) have concluded that: (1) contact improves prejudice in the overwhelming majority of cases; (2) its effects often generalise beyond the immediate contexts of interaction to shape the wider patterning of intergroup attitudes; (3) such effects are facilitated by, but not necessarily contingent upon, situational factors such as equality of status between participants; and (4) they hold not only for ethnic and racial prejudices, but also for other forms of prejudice (e.g. homophobia, ageism and xenophobia). Although conceding that the positive effects of contact are weaker for minority than for majority status groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005a)

and that contact effects are stronger on affective dimensions than on other dimensions of prejudice (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005b), these authors present a robust case for its general efficacy as a means of transforming intergroup prejudice in divided societies.

Perhaps because contact researchers have usually defined prejudice in terms of individuals' affective responses towards, or stereotypes about, others, few studies have investigated systematically its effects on we have called the 'stubborn core' of white resistance to race-targeted policies. Nor, as we elaborate below, have researchers explored the relationship between interracial contact and different types of policy attitudes, an issue that is potentially important given evidence that whites are generally more supportive of race compensatory policies than they are of race preferential policies. By implication, the social and psychological processes that may underlie the relationship between contact and policy support (or lack of support) have been also theoretically under-specified. In order to address these gaps in the literature, we draw on the broader literature on race policy attitudes, which clarifies some of the processes by which contact predicts support (or lack of support) for race-targeted policies.

What is the nature of the relationship between interracial contact and white policy attitudes?

In more concrete terms, the first goal of our research was to explore three alternative hypotheses regarding the relationship between interracial contact and white policy attitudes.

The first hypothesis is that contact has little or no impact on policy attitudes, an idea proposed by Jackman and Crane (1986) in a seminal critique of the contact hypothesis. In their analysis of national survey data collected in the United States, these researchers reported that physical proximity to, and contact with, black people had an uneven relationship with different forms of white racial prejudice. Contact was a good predictor of whites' emotional acceptance of black people, but a poorer predictor of their support for race-targeted interventions in the domains of housing, schooling and employment.

Discussing this pattern of results, Jackman and Crane criticised the model of prejudice that informs contact research, which conceives prejudice primarily as an expression of ignorance and ‘parochial negativism’ rather than as a rationalization of collective political interests. As such, it may obscure the fact that ‘liking’ members of other racial groups need not translate into concrete support for the implementation of racial equality in a structural sense. Periodically, other commentators have raised analogous concerns about the model of social change that underpins the contact hypothesis (e.g. Connolly, 2000; Reicher, 1986, 2007; Wright & Lubensky, 2008), including members of our own research group (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005), and there is a lingering scepticism about the capacity of contact to alter white attitudes towards matters of ‘core redistributive’ justice (Jackman, 1994).

Based on Jackman and Crane’s research, one might conclude that contact has a negligible impact on policy attitudes. In our view, however, this conclusion is premature. Jackman and Crane’s (1986) study was published over 20 years ago, based on data collected in late 1970s, and, as far as we know, their findings have not been systematically replicated. Moreover, although race policy attitudes have seldom featured as a coherent focus of research on the contact hypothesis, there is some evidence to suggest that contact may increase the degree to which historically advantaged groups are willing to accept interventions designed to promote social justice in a more general sense (e.g. Brigham, 1993; Lopez, 2004; Surace & Seeman, 1967). Of most direct relevance to this article, Dixon et al. (2007) found that contact was negatively associated with whites’ opposition to policies such as educational desegregation and affirmative action in post-apartheid South Africa, albeit its effects were relatively small in magnitude and statistically significant for some policies but not others. A second hypothesis about the contact-policy attitude relationship, then, is that contact has a generalised positive association with support for race-targeted policies, analogous to its association with other forms of racial prejudice.

A third hypothesis represents a kind of ‘intermediate’ position. It suggests that contact may have a positive relationship with policy support, but that the strength of this relationship is contingent upon the nature of the policies being evaluated. Specifically, we might predict that the positive association between contact and policy support is stronger for *race-compensatory* than for *race preferential* targets (Tuch & Hughes, 1996). As such, contact can often yield positive intergroup outcomes, yet not be sufficiently powerful to produce such positive effects when concern for the outgroup conflicts with a direct threat to material advantages of the ingroup. In so far as race-preferential policies do not merely increase blacks’ opportunities to compete with whites for resources and opportunities, but also entail a direct reallocation of such resources and opportunities, one might expect them to be a focus of resistance to social change. Thus, one might expect that the beneficial impact of contact on policy attitudes would be weaker or even non-existent when the policies being evaluated are framed as ‘race preferential’ as opposed to ‘race compensatory’.

Why is contact associated with policy attitudes?

The second aim of our research is to clarify some of the social psychological processes that may explain the relationship between interracial contact and whites’ attitudes towards race-targeted policies. In order to do so, we used the work of American sociologist Herbert Blumer as a theoretical touchstone, drawing particularly on his seminal writings on racial prejudice (e.g. Blumer, 1958). Blumer famously rallied against a conception of prejudice focused exclusively on the individual’s feelings towards others -- on antipathies and aversions that arise, for example, out of a personal trajectory of socialization experiences. To the contrary, he argued that prejudice is also defined by members’ evolving sense of their own group’s positioning vis à vis other groups within a racial order. This sense of positioning is oriented not only to the existing economic and political status hierarchy (*what is*), but also to the

perceived system of entitlements that underpins this hierarchy (*what ought to be*; see also Kluegel & Smith, 1986). According to Blumer, it is precisely when members of historically advantaged groups perceive such entitlements as threatened by the actual or imagined actions of a racial minority that members manifest ‘prejudice’ towards that minority.

Blumer’s re-conceptualization of prejudice as ‘sense of group positioning’ has proved useful in sociological research on white policy attitudes, which has demonstrated, for example, that: (a) perceived group threat is a powerful predictor of racial attitudes in general and of policy attitudes in particular (e.g. Bobo, 1988; McClaren, 2005); (b) demographic and economic conditions that intensify members’ sense of racial competition also tend to intensify their resistance to practical interventions designed to promote racial equality (e.g. Bobo, 1983; Quillan, 2005; Smith, 1981); and (c) the degree of prejudice directed towards minorities varies according to the extent to which they are constructed as threatening the ‘rightful prerogatives’ of the ingroup (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). In our view, his framework may also elucidate the mechanisms through which contact with members of historically disadvantaged groups may shape the attitudes of members of historically advantaged groups towards the implementation of racial equality. Although Blumer did not to our knowledge directly discuss the role of contact as a mechanism for changing political attitudes, we believe his work flags two potential mediators of the relationship between contact and whites’ policy attitudes, namely perceptions of intergroup threat and perceptions of intergroup injustice. The present research was thus designed to test a model that predicted that contact shapes whites’ policy attitudes indirectly via its relationship with these intervening variables. It also tested the potential mediating role of racial prejudice, as this variable features prominently in the literature both on intergroup contact and on white policy attitudes (see Krysan, 2000; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Threat. As indicated above, group threat is now established as a robust and consistent predictor of racial policy attitudes in sociological work (see Bobo, 1988, 1999), a theme that is echoed within some recent social psychological literature (c.f. Renfro, Duran, Stephan & Clason, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Interestingly, threat has also featured as a central variable in some recent research on the contact hypothesis (e.g. McClaren, 2005; Tausch et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2006). In a suggestive study conducted in Northern Ireland, for example, Tausch et al. (2007) found that the effects of contact on sectarian attitudes of Catholics and Protestants were partly mediated by its impact on members' sense of threats to the ingroup. Building on such work, we predicted that whites' tendency to construe their relationship with blacks in terms of a competitive struggle for material advantage might mediate the relationship between contact and support for race-targeted policies.

Perceived injustice. Correspondingly, we predicted that whites' perceptions of entitlement might mediate the relationship between contact and policy attitudes. According to work in the Blumerian tradition, whites' opposition to social change is fundamentally grounded in their sense that it violates their 'rightful' prerogatives and deprives them of 'legitimate' privileges in comparison to the black outgroup. Thus, attempts to implement race-targeted policies are resisted because they are construed as unjust. Contact, however, tends to encourage members of historically advantaged groups to reappraise the norms of the ingroup, including received assumptions about entitlement, as part of a broader 'deprovincialization' of their view of the social world (Pettigrew, 1998). Similarly, by encouraging ingroup members to learn about the situation of others, contact may lead such group members to modify their views on who deserves what (with associated shifts in their willingness to accept interventions designed to create equality). In short, the relationship between contact and policy attitudes may be mediated by perceptions of (in)justice.

Prejudice. Last, we explored the possibility that prejudice reduction mediates the relationship between contact and policy attitudes. This possibility is supported by the extensive sociological literature on predictors of policy attitudes, which has identified prejudice as an important predictor of whites' support for race-targeted interventions (e.g. see Krysan, 2000 for a review). To cite a relevant illustration: Durrheim's (2003) survey indicated that 'old fashioned' racism – defined in terms of respondents' willingness to endorse crude racial stereotypes of black people – was a strong predictor of white attitudes towards race-targeted reforms in post-apartheid South Africa. In so far as positive contact has consistently been found to decrease this kind of prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), we predicted that it might also indirectly decrease whites' tendency to oppose the implementation of racial equality.

Research Context: Contact and White Attitudes towards Restitution in Post-Apartheid South Africa

We examine these issues in the context of whites' contact experiences and policy attitudes in post-apartheid South Africa. Most research on both the contact hypothesis and on attitudes towards race-targeted policies has been conducted in the United States. South African society, where the present research was conducted, provides a relevant, timely and distinctive context of comparison. Similar to the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, South Africa has recently undergone a dramatic social and political transformation. In a relatively brief period of time, the civil rights of black citizens have been radically extended under a new constitution, the country's first democratic government has come to power, and the long era of state-enforced segregation has ended. During the same period, the ANC government has implemented several initiatives designed to redress the injustices of the past, including quota systems in education and sport, affirmative action in the workplace, economic incentives for black businesses, and a rolling program of land restitution. The nature of everyday relations between groups

has also been radically altered by the fall of apartheid, with some desegregation occurring, for instance, in institutions of education, leisure and employment. The opportunity for interaction across racial lines, of course, continues to be limited by practices of informal segregation that operate both a macro-spatial level (Christopher, 2005) and at more intimate scales (Dixon, Tredoux & Clack, 2005). Nevertheless, processes of desegregation in institutions of education and employment have reduced many of the barriers to association implemented during the era of apartheid.

Research conducted in the post-apartheid era suggests that these new forms of racial contact are changing racial attitudes for the better, encouraging reconciliation between historically divided communities. During the apartheid era, contact research yielded mixed findings and, given the states' systematic enforcement of racial segregation and inequality, often involved anomalous situations and provided limited support for the contact hypothesis (c.f. Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008). To be sure, some positive findings emerged. In the only example of (quasi)experimental work on contact conducted in South Africa, for example, Luiz and Krige (1981) found that contact improved white school girls' attitudes towards 'coloured' school girls, an effect that persisted at a one year follow up (Luiz & Krige, 1985). Other studies conducted around the same period, however, suggested that contact either had limited impact on racial attitudes or was positively correlated with prejudice (e.g. Mynardht (1982) in Mynhardt and du Toit, 1991). Research conducted in the post-apartheid era is still relatively scant, but has tended to paint a somewhat more optimistic picture. Examples include Gibson's (2004) national survey, which found that contact had a strong positive relationship with attitudes towards racial reconciliation, and Holtman, Louw, Tredoux and Carney's (2005) study of relations in 18 schools in the Western Cape, which found that contact was negatively associated with prejudice in all sub-groups surveyed (African, Coloured, White English Speaking and White Afrikaans-speaking).

The present study aimed to contribute to this emerging literature on contact and social psychological change in South Africa. It focused on the role of contact in shaping the attitudes of the historically advantaged white group towards policies of transformation in post-apartheid society; thus, it attempted not only to enrich the small South African literature on contact in the ‘new’ South Africa, but also to explore its implications for a form of attitude change that has featured little in the broader tradition of contact research.

The study of such policy attitudes is particularly apposite in societies characterised by a history of inequality. Indeed, the terms ‘historically advantaged’ and ‘historically disadvantaged’ are more apt in the South African context than the usual distinction between ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ groups. Unlike African Americans in the United States, black South Africans represent a sizeable majority of the country’s population (>80%). Moreover, they now predominate in positions of political power in the country and are increasingly leaders in industry and the public sector. At the same time, black South Africans remain underprivileged compared to other ‘race’ groups in the country and continue to suffer most from apartheid’s legacy. White South Africans, on the other hand, form a numeric minority of the country’s population (10%<), yet retain considerable advantages in terms of indicators such as monthly income, access to healthcare, residential wealth and education. Given this continuing pattern of material privilege, it remains imperative to investigate the factors that shape whites’ acceptance of political transformation.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data to be presented in this paper refer to white participants within a larger multiracial sample. The multiracial sample was selected via a countrywide sampling of cellular telephone numbers, which were randomly generated and then screened using an auto-dialler to remove any defunct or non-

existent numbers. The use of mobile phone numbers rather than standard phone numbers was designed to improve sample representativeness. A much higher percentage of South Africans have access to cellular phones than have access to land lines. In 2007, 56% of the adult population (>16 years) either owned or rented a cellular phone, including 52% of the black population and 82% of the white population, with roughly equivalent proportions of males and females (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2007), whereas only 23% of the population rented a landline. The overall participation rate in the survey was high, possibly because the survey was relatively brief and there were no costs financially to the person receiving the call. The cooperation rate for completed interviews was 67.3%. The participants of interest here comprised a probability sample of 794 white adult (>18 years) South Africans.

The study employed a computer-assisted telephone survey protocol, which included measures of interracial contact, group threat, racial prejudice, sense of injustice, and attitudes towards several policies of racial equality. Drawing on a database of cellular phone numbers, a team of four multilingual research assistants interviewed respondents in their preferred language. In an initial phone call, interviewers informed respondents that their phone numbers had been randomly selected and asked if they would be willing to participate anonymously in an interview about 'race and transformation in South Africa'. Respondents who agreed to participate were then called back and interviewed by a research assistant who was proficient in their preferred language. Interviews, which lasted between 15 and 35 minutes, were conducted between March and July 2007 and resulted in an overall sample of some 2484 South Africans. Participants' responses were captured by the interviewer in real time, using bespoke software.

The sample for the present study comprised 413 men (52%) and 381 women (48%), which slightly over-represented men relative to the national average (49.8%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 86

years, with a mean age of 41 years ($SD = 14.3$), and the sample contained a mix of English (43%) and Afrikaans (57%) home language speakers that approximated the national proportion. Respondents were drawn from nine provinces in South Africa, but the sample was dominated by respondents living in the most populous regions of Gauteng (42%), the Western Cape (21%) and KwaZulu-Natal (11%). Almost two-thirds of the sample reported a gross monthly income that fell in the upper two earning categories used in the survey, namely R10 000 - 20 000 (36%) per month and >R20 000 (28%) per month (at the time of writing R7.5 \approx \$1). The vast majority had matriculated from high school (86%) and most had some form of post-tertiary qualification such as a degree or diploma (56%).

Survey Measures

The survey instrument was constructed initially in English and then translated into other commonly spoken languages in South Africa, including Afrikaans. Each translation was completed independently by two bilingual mother-tongue speakers of the language, who then met to resolve any discrepancies.

Interracial contact. Six items measured the frequency and quality of interracial contact on five point scales, with higher scores indicating more and better quality interaction. The first two items measured how much interracial contact respondents experienced in their everyday lives as acquaintances and as friends.¹ The other four items measured respondents' perceptions of the degree to which their everyday contact with the other race group was friendly, cooperative, close, and equal in status (c.f. Islam & Hewstone, 1993). Both quantitative and qualitative contact measures had good internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = .68$ and $.67$ respectively); nonetheless, it should be noted that these estimates of internal consistency are based on two and four items respectively, and doubling the number of items would, by the Spearman-Brown prophecy, increase the coefficients above $.8$ in each case. Preliminary analyses revealed that the two contact measures were only moderately correlated, $r = .32$, $p < .01$.

Group threat. Threat was measured using items employed by Bobo and colleagues to assess perceptions of material threat (see Bobo, 1999), augmented by items measuring perceptions of symbolic threat (see Stephan et al., 2002). The six material threat items measured perceived competition between race groups in the domains of housing, jobs, education, economical welfare, and legal and political power (e.g. ‘More jobs for black people mean fewer jobs for members of other groups’). The five symbolic threat items measured perceived threats to cultural values (e.g. ‘The traditions and values that are important to white people are under threat because of the influence of black people’s values’). Three of these items were adapted from Stephan et al. (2002), and two were written to reflect domains of potential symbolic threat specific to the South African context. Principal component analysis showed that all items loaded on a single dominant factor ($\alpha = .79$); thus, a single group threat score was computed by averaging scores across all 11 items. Item responses ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of threat.

Prejudice. The prejudice measure consisted of five items, which measured racial attitudes on a 10 point scale ranging from low (1) to high (10) levels of prejudice. The items consisted of a series of semantic differential scales, i.e., Negative-Positive, Cold-Warm, Hostile-Friendly, Suspicious-Trusting, and Disrespectful-Respectful. Internal consistency for this measure was high (Cronbach $\alpha = .90$).

Perceived injustice. Perceived injustice was assessed using a single item concerning perceptions of socioeconomic inequity. Respondents were first asked to rate the social and economic life circumstances of whites on a Cantrill ladder (steps from 0 to 10). They were then asked where whites should be placed on the ladder if they were to have their “fair and rightful share of wealth in the country.” Perceived ingroup injustice was calculated by subtracting the present status from the justly entitled status for the white group, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived injustice.

Policy attitudes. Lastly, 11 items measured attitudes towards race compensatory and race preferential policies in the realms of education, land and housing, business and employment and culture and arts. These items were largely based on those used by Dixon et al. (2007). They were designed to assess evaluations of ongoing government initiatives to promote equality in South Africa. The six race compensatory items ($\alpha = .76$) measured attitudes to policies that redress racial inequality in ways that do not directly disadvantage whites (e.g. helping black farmers acquire bank loans to buy land). The five race preferential items ($\alpha = .78$) measured attitudes to policies that confer competitive advantage to blacks, whilst directly undermining white privilege (e.g. land appropriation). For both types of policy attitudes, higher scores denoted higher levels of policy opposition.

More specifically, attitudes towards the following policies were assessed. In the sphere of education, respondents evaluated government funding of education programs in black areas (race compensatory policy), scholarships for black students who do well in school (race compensatory policy), and use of racial quotas in schools and universities (race preferential policy). In the sphere of land and housing, respondents evaluated the provision of loans to black farmers (race compensatory policy), the creation of laws to stop farmers evicting farm labourers (race compensatory policy), and the appropriation of white-owned land for the resettlement of black communities (race preferential policy). In the sphere of business and employment, respondents evaluated the use of race-targeted skills training (race compensatory policy), preferential tax breaks and economic incentives for black businesses (race preferential policy), and affirmative action (race preferential policy). Last, in the sphere of culture and arts, respondents evaluated government initiatives to support emerging black artists and performers (race compensatory policy) and the provision of more radio and TV time to programmes broadcast in black languages (race preferential policy).

Results

Policy Attitudes

Figure 1 illustrates mean levels of opposition towards a variety of race-targeted policies, with associated 95% confidence intervals. It shows that there is considerable attitudinal variability across individual policies and across policy type. For example, strongest levels of opposition are displayed towards affirmative action, black economic empowerment and land appropriation. Lowest levels of opposition are displayed towards government investment in black schools and job training to promote equal employment opportunities for black workers. When averaged across categories, as expected, race compensatory policies ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .76$) attract significantly less opposition than race preferential policies ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .86$), representing a robust, statistically significant effect, $t(747) = 37.98$, $p < 0.0001$, $d = 1.38$). Internal reliability coefficients computed for the scales implicit in this averaging were acceptably high ($\alpha = 0.76$ for compensatory policies, and $\alpha = .78$ for preferential policies, respectively).

-- Place Figure 1 here --

Relationships between Contact and Policy Attitudes

The correlations between scores on the contact scales and the policy attitude measures were all significant, and they supported the hypothesis that contact predicts lowered opposition to race-targeted initiatives. Greater contact quality corresponded with less opposition to both race compensatory and race preferential policies, $r = -.49$ and $-.34$, respectively, $p < .001$. Similarly, greater contact quantity was associated with less opposition to both race compensatory policies, $r = -.10$, $p < .01$, and race preferential policies, $r = -.14$, $p < .01$.² It is clear from these patterns of correlations that contact quality is generally a stronger predictor of both types of policies. We also find that the inverse correlation between contact

quality and opposition to compensatory policies is significantly stronger than that between contact quantity and opposition to preferential policies ($t = 4.79$, $df = 746$, $p < .001$).

Relationships between Contact, Group Threat, Prejudice, Perceived Injustice, and Policy Attitudes

Table 1 presents the inter-correlations of contact (quantity and quality) and policy attitudes (preferential and compensatory) with the three potential mediator variables we flagged in the introduction as potentially predictive (threat, prejudice, perceived injustice). All of the relationships are significant at the $p < .001$ level, with the exception of the relationship between perceived injustice and contact quantity, $r = -.01$. In addition, with a few exceptions (e.g. the correlations between contact quantity and the two policy variables), the relationships are moderately large (e.g. the correlations between perceived threat and the policy variables are larger than .36 in both instances). Table 1 also makes it clear that there is a fair amount of inter-correlation between the predictor variables, and supports the importance of the mediator analyses we proposed earlier.

Mediators of the Relationship between Contact and Policy Opposition

As we argued previously, group threat, prejudice, and perceived injustice are likely to mediate the relationship between contact and opposition to compensatory and preferential policies. That is, contact is likely to have indirect effects through each of these variables. It was not immediately clear to us whether this mediation would be complete, or whether contact would have both direct and indirect effects on opposition to transformative policies.

To prepare for mediation analysis, we conducted preliminary regression analyses, separately for preferential and compensatory policies. The point of these analyses was to ascertain whether we needed to include both contact variables in the mediation analysis, or whether one would suffice. We therefore

entered contact quality and quantity in a single model, and retained one or both for the mediation analysis, depending on tests of the partial coefficients. In the case of opposition to compensatory policies, contact quality was retained as a significant, and contact quantity was rejected (for contact quantity $b = .01, t = .22, p > .83$, and for contact quality $b = -.57, t = -14.27, p < .001$). In the case of opposition to preferential policies, contact quality was again retained at step 1, and contact quantity rejected (for contact quantity $b = .002, t = -.05, p > .9$, and for contact quality $b = -.46, t = -9.48, p < .001$).

For the mediation analysis, we opted for a method recently described by Preacher & Hayes (2008) for examining the effects of multiple mediators simultaneously. We treated group threat, prejudice, and perceived injustice as the mediators of the relation between contact quality and opposition to policies, and ran separate multiple mediation analyses for opposition to compensatory policies and opposition to preferential policies, respectively. Graphical depictions of this multiple mediation analysis are shown as Figures 2 and 3.

-- Place Figures 2 & 3 here --

Figure 2 shows that the relationship between quality of contact and opposition to compensatory policies is partially mediated by group threat, and perceived injustice, but not by prejudice. The indirect effect of quality of contact through each of the mediators was tested with the bootstrap analysis recommended by Preacher & Hayes (2008), using their software script, and statistically significant results were found for the threat and injustice mediators (95% coefficient CIs of $[-.1, -.04]$ and $[-.06, -.02]$, respectively), but not for prejudice (95% coefficient CI $[-.05, .02]$). The total effect of quality of contact on opposition to compensatory policies is $-.56 (t = -14.75, p < .001)$, and the direct effect, after mediation was taken into account, is $-.44$ as shown in the diagram ($t = -10.15, p < .001$).

Figure 3 shows that the relationship between quality of contact and opposition to preferential policies is mediated by group threat, perceived injustice, and prejudice. The indirect effect of quality of contact through each of the mediators was tested with the bootstrap analysis recommended by Preacher & Hayes (2008), using their software script, and statistically significant results were found for each of threat, prejudice and injustice (95% coefficient CIs of [-.16, -.06], [-.13, -.03], and [-.07, -.02] respectively). The total effect of quality of contact on opposition to preferential policies of redress was -.46 ($t = -9.96$, $p < .001$), and the direct effect, after mediation was taken into account, is -.24 as shown in the diagram ($t = -4.47$, $p < .001$).

Figures 2 and 3 show that quality of intergroup contact is significantly related to opposition to both compensatory and preferential policies, in its own right, and through mediating relationships with perceived group threat, prejudice, and perceived injustice towards one's own group. An important question that is not addressed in this analysis is the extent to which these relations may be dependent on other factors, such as the education or socio-economic status of respondents. In South Africa, demographic factors of this kind are likely to map onto patterns of interracial contact, and the apparent effects of contact may be due to class differences, in particular. In order to check on this issue, we reran the multiple mediation analyses after controlling for differences in education and income across respondents. In the case of opposition to compensatory policies, the pattern of results was virtually unaffected, the only difference being a marginal increase in the amount of variance resolved by the multiple mediation analysis ($R^2 = 0.33$ vs $R^2 = 0.29$). In the case of opposition to preferential policies, the pattern of results was unaffected, and there was no meaningful difference in the amount of variance resolved by the multiple mediation analysis ($R^2 = 0.24$ vs $R^2 = 0.23$).

It should be noted that mediation and regression models suppose directionality of relationships, and it is well known that such assumptions may be mistaken, or problematic. In the present case, we

have assumed that threat, prejudice and perceived injustice mediate the impact of contact quality on opposition to policies of redress. A plausible alternative model might posit the reverse causal path; that is, that threat, prejudice and perceived injustice mediate the impact of race policy attitudes on contact quality. We thus ran separate multiple mediation analyses for each of the policy attitude variables, treating contact quality as the outcome, policy attitudes as the predictor, and group threat, prejudice, and perceived injustice as the mediators.

In the case of preferential policy attitudes, the model postulating multiple mediation was statistically significant, and had a similar R^2 value to that found when the outcome and predictor were in the opposite direction ($F = 65.28$, $df = 4$, 731 , $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$). However, the direct effect of perceived injustice was not significant ($b = -.01$, $t = -1.289$, $p > .19$) after partialling out the effect of opposition to preferential policies. Also, the direct effect of opposition to preferential policies on contact quality was smaller than that in the case of the reversed model (i.e. the direct effect of contact quality on opposition to preferential policies – $b = -.13$ as opposed to $b = -.24$), although it is not clear whether this difference in magnitude is statistically significant (the 95% confidence intervals overlap - $[-.18, -.07]$ vs $[-.33, -.14]$). Further, the total effect of opposition to preferential policies on contact quality (i.e. totalling direct and indirect, or mediated effects) was estimated at $-.26$, whereas the total effect for our original model (effect of contact quality on opposition to compensatory policies) was estimated at $-.46$. 95% confidence intervals for these effect estimates do not overlap $[-.31, -.21]$ vs $[-.55, -.37]$), thereby suggesting that contact quality has a greater total effect on opposition to preferential policies than when the model is reversed.

In the case of compensatory policy attitudes, the model postulating multiple mediation was statistically significant, and had a similar R^2 value to that found when the outcome and predictor were in the opposite direction ($F = 92.64$, $df = 4$, 735 , $p < .001$, $R^2 = .33$). However, the direct effect of perceived

injustice was again not significant ($b = -.004$, $t = -.34$, $p > .7$) after partialling out the effect of opposition to compensatory policies. Also, the direct effect of opposition to compensatory policies on contact quality was again smaller than that in the case of the reversed model (i.e. the direct effect of contact quality on opposition to compensatory policies – $b = -.29$ as opposed to $b = -.44$), and since the 95% confidence intervals around these coefficients do not overlap, it is reasonable to conclude that the difference is statistically significant ($[-.35, -.24]$ vs $[-.52, -.36]$). Further, the total effect of opposition to compensatory policies on contact quality (i.e. totalling direct and indirect, or mediated effects) was estimated at $-.41$, whereas the total effect for our original model (effect of contact quality on opposition to compensatory policies) was estimated at $-.56$. 95% confidence intervals for these effect estimates do not overlap ($[-.46, -.35]$ vs $[-.64, -.49]$), suggesting that contact quality has a greater total effect on opposition to compensatory policies, than when the model is reversed.

Overall, the test of the alternate model shows that perceived threat and prejudice could act as mediators of a relationship between opposition to policy attitudes (IV) and contact quality (DV). What is clear from our analysis, however, is that perceived injustice does not act as a mediator for this model in the case of either type of policy attitude we studied. It is also clear that the direct and total effects of opposition to policy attitudes on contact quality are lower in magnitude than the other way round. We do not dismiss the alternate model, but consider instead that what might be demonstrated by this analysis is the bi-directionality of the contact-policy attitude relationship. Thus, as demonstrated by longitudinal contact research (e.g., Binder et al., 2009; Eller & Abrams, 2004; Levin et al., 2003), both causal paths are in operation, but they may not always be equal in magnitude.

Discussion

The transition from apartheid to post-apartheid society is at an early stage in South Africa and the legacy of racial inequality persists. Yet profound societal changes have already occurred. In many

areas of economic and social life, the system of segregation that characterized the apartheid era is in retreat, and the ANC government has implemented many policies to combat inequalities of wealth and opportunity. The present research explored the role of interracial contact in shaping whites' attitudes towards this process of political transformation.

The effects of contact on standard indices of prejudice have, of course, already been widely demonstrated by other research (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, 2003). Increasingly, such research has also supported the idea that contact can have beneficial impacts on related measures such as trust, forgiveness, willingness to 'mix' with others, and support for reconciliation (e.g. Gibson, 2004; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger & Niens, 2006; Hewstone et al., 2005). Some commentators, however, have questioned the efficacy of contact in altering attitudes towards concrete interventions designed to undo racial inequality; after all, "... when efforts to reduce prejudice focus exclusively on getting dominant group members to think nicer thoughts and feel positive emotions about the disadvantaged group, they may not necessarily increase support for broader structural and institutional changes" (Wright & Lubensky, 2008, p.18). The work of Jackman and Crane (1986) in particular has helped to establish a healthy scepticism about the value of contact (and similar psychological interventions) in transforming the political attitudes that constitute what we have called the 'stubborn core' of white conservatism. However, little empirical attention has been paid to the relationship between contact and policy orientations in the decades since the publication of their seminal survey.

At the outset of the present research, it seemed plausible to us that contact might exercise a moderately beneficial but uneven impact on white policy attitudes. Notably, we expected that interracial contact might decrease whites' opposition to race compensatory policies, but have little impact on their attitudes towards race preferential policies. The latter, after all, constitute more immediate, explicit and

substantial challenges to the *positional order* of race (Blumer, 1958) and thus are more directly implicated in the conservation of inequality between racial groups (c.f. Jackman, 1994). That is to say, they implement political change in ways that impinge more directly on the historical advantages of the dominant group, create a greater sense of competitive threat and injustice, and thus provoke stronger, and arguably less tractable, levels of opposition (c.f. Tuch & Hughes, 1996).

As it turned out, our results have pointed to an optimistic extension of the contact hypothesis. Although we found that whites' opposition to race preferential policies in the 'new' South Africa (e.g. affirmative action) was indeed stronger than their opposition to race compensatory policies (e.g. job skills programmes), we also found that interracial contact was negatively related to *both* types of policy attitudes. In other words, the more contact whites have with black people, and the better the quality of such contact, the less likely they are to resist interventions such as affirmative action, educational quotas, and the creation of new laws to protect black farm labourers.

Two points of qualification complicate this simple claim. First, the quality of the contact involved is clearly more crucial than its quantity in determining policy attitudes. Indeed, it is striking that contact quality – defined in terms of its approximation to some of Allport's (1954) optimal conditions – was not only negatively related to both of the policy attitude measures employed in our survey, but also the magnitude of such relationships was considerably stronger than those associated with contact quantity. Second, although significant relationships emerged for both types of policies, the effects of contact on the *race compensatory* policies tended to be somewhat stronger than its effects on *race preferential* policies. In other words, our results suggest that whites' attitudes towards interventions that directly challenge ingroup privilege may be somewhat less susceptible to contact effects than interventions that merely enhance blacks' opportunities to 'get ahead'.

What kinds of social psychological processes help to explain the association between interracial contact and whites' evaluations of race-targeted interventions? The design of our research allows us to offer some preliminary reflections on this question. In the case of preferential policies, the contact-policy attitude relationship seems to be partially mediated by whites' emotional attitudes towards blacks, a pattern that ties together research on the role of contact in prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) with research suggesting that prejudice drives whites' resistance to the concrete implementation of racial equality (c.f. Krysan, 2000)³. In the case of both preferential and compensatory policy attitudes, perceived group threat and perceived sense of injustice also seem to partially mediate the relationship between contact and resistance to race-targeted policies. That is to say, our results suggest that contact reduces whites' policy opposition by decreasing their perceptions of being locked into a competitive interracial struggle over resources in the new South Africa in which the socioeconomic situation of their racial group is seen as unfair.

This latter line of explanation resonates with other recent research on the contact hypothesis, particularly with work suggesting that the effects of contact on outgroup attitudes are sometimes mediated by its impact on constructions of symbolic and material threat (see especially Tausch et al., 2007). It also points to a possible rapprochement between two theoretical approaches to understanding and challenging the problem of racial prejudice that have tended to develop in isolation. The first approach takes its bearings from psychological research in the Allportian tradition, which has defined prejudice in terms of affective reactions towards, and stereotypes about, others (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005b for recent reviews). It has thus measured social psychological change in terms of shifts in extent to which we like one another and/or revise negative beliefs about one another. The second approach takes its bearings on the writings of Herbert Blumer, which has defined prejudice in terms of dominant group members' sense that others threaten their legitimate entitlements and thus

unjustly alter the racial hierarchy (see Bobo, 1999 for a review). It has accordingly defined social change in terms of shifts in this broader sense of ‘racial positioning’. What our research suggests is that interracial contact has the capacity to alter whites’ sense of positional threat and injustice, thereby increasing their willingness to accept the implementation of racial equality at a structural level.

In our view, further exploration of the relationship between contact and these broader constellations of political attitudes is an important topic for future research. It promises to extend the work on the contact hypothesis beyond the confines of the so-called ‘prejudice problematic’ (Reicher, 2007) and toward an analysis of how desegregation reconfigures intergroup perceptions of entitlement, stratification, and racial competition. By the same token, research on this relationship may also enrich work in the Blumerian tradition, showing how concrete shifts in the quality and patterning of everyday encounters between ‘race’ groups may help to reconfigure whites’ personal and collective sense of racial positioning and, perhaps, provide an impetus for socio-political change.

Future research also needs to account for the direct relationship between contact and policy attitudes, which persists even when factoring in the various mediators explored in this study. One possibility, for example, is that contact increases whites’ empathy concerning the material disadvantages suffered by Black South Africans, thereby encouraging them to support race-targeted policies of redress (see Kenworthy et al., 2008). Certainly, recent work suggests that empathy plays an important role in the relationship between contact and prejudice, functioning independently of mediators such as reduced anxiety and threat (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Thus, beyond the mediators examined in the present study, greater research attention should be granted to empathy as a mediator between contact and policy attitudes.

Limitations of the Research

In evaluating the present study, one must bear in mind a number of limitations. First, as is generally true of cross-sectional survey research, we cannot draw strong causal inferences about the nature and direction of relations between our variables. Longitudinal research on contact, for example, gives us reason to suspect that the causal path from interracial contact to race policy attitudes may also work in the opposite direction (see Binder et al., 2009; Levin, van Laar & Sidanius, 2003). Second, we have focused exclusively on how interracial contact shapes whites' policy attitudes in a changing South Africa, thereby leaving unresolved the question how it shapes the policy attitudes of the country's other race groups. This is an important limitation, among other reasons, because the effects of contact on the political orientations of historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups may not be symmetrical (e.g. see Dixon et al., 2007; Wright & Lubensky, 2008). Third, although we have attempted to measure attitudes towards the *implementation* rather than the merely the *principle* of racial equality, our measure of policy attitudes remains a self-report measure, with all of the limitations that this entails. For one thing, one cannot discount the role of social desirability effects, and it is quite possible, for example, that whites' concrete behavioural reactions to race-targeted policies (e.g. voting patterns, employment practices) in everyday settings are less malleable to the effects of interracial contact than is suggested by their responses to our questionnaire.

Finally, the contingencies of the South African situation must be acknowledged, particularly with respect to the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid society and the attendant shift in power relations between groups. Although whites in this country retain considerable advantages in terms of material wealth and command over resources such as education and housing, their monopoly of political power has been significantly eroded in the 'new' South and the kinds of policy interventions studied in our survey are already practical 'realities' to which many whites must accommodate. By implication,

one should be cautious about generalising the results of our research to contexts where relations of inequality remain more stable, where members of advantaged groups are perhaps less resigned to the idea that (some) change must occur, and where, accordingly, the stubborn core of attitudinal resistance to such change may be less tractable. This point should be borne in mind, for example, when comparing the results of our research with those found in Jackman and Crane's (1986) classic survey of the policy attitudes of White Americans in the 1970s.

What the present study does demonstrate, however, is that positive interracial contact is negatively related to whites' self-reported resistance to a variety of race-targeted policies in post-apartheid South Africa. The potential applied significance of these results is worth remembering. In simple terms: the widespread acceptance of both race compensatory and race preferential policies remains vital if the legacy of apartheid era is to be overcome and the abstract ideal of racial equality turned into a concrete reality.

Footnotes

¹ The interested reader should note that these two items have been used as independent predictors of intergroup outcomes in prior contact research (see Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005b for an extended discussion). However, we average the items in the present research to form a reliable scale.

² The interested reader should note that the magnitude of the correlations between contact quantity and the policy domains varied depending on whether respondents reported quantity of contact with acquaintances or with friends. In line with other contact research (see Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005b), correlations with policy attitudes tended to be stronger in the case of contact with outgroup friends (*r*s ranging from $|.07|$ to $|.21|$), as compared to correlations involving outgroup acquaintances (*r*s ranging from $|.01|$ to $|.06|$).

³ This does not mean, of course, that whites who score lower on prejudice scales are *necessarily* more supportive of race-targeted policies. As Jackman (1994) argues, particularly when institutional arrangements encourage paternalistic ideologies of intergroup relations, then inclusive feelings may co-occur with conservative or reactionary policy attitudes.

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Table 1

Correlations between group threat, prejudice, perceived injustice, contact quantity and quality, and policy attitudes

	Intergroup threat	Prejudice	Perceived injustice
Contact quantity	-.19***	-.40***	-.01
Contact quality	-.38***	-.45***	-.20***
Intergroup threat	—	.49***	.31***
Prejudice	.49***	—	.21***
Perceived injustice	.31***	.21***	—
Compensatory policies	.39***	.33***	.28***
Preferential policies	.37***	.32***	.28***

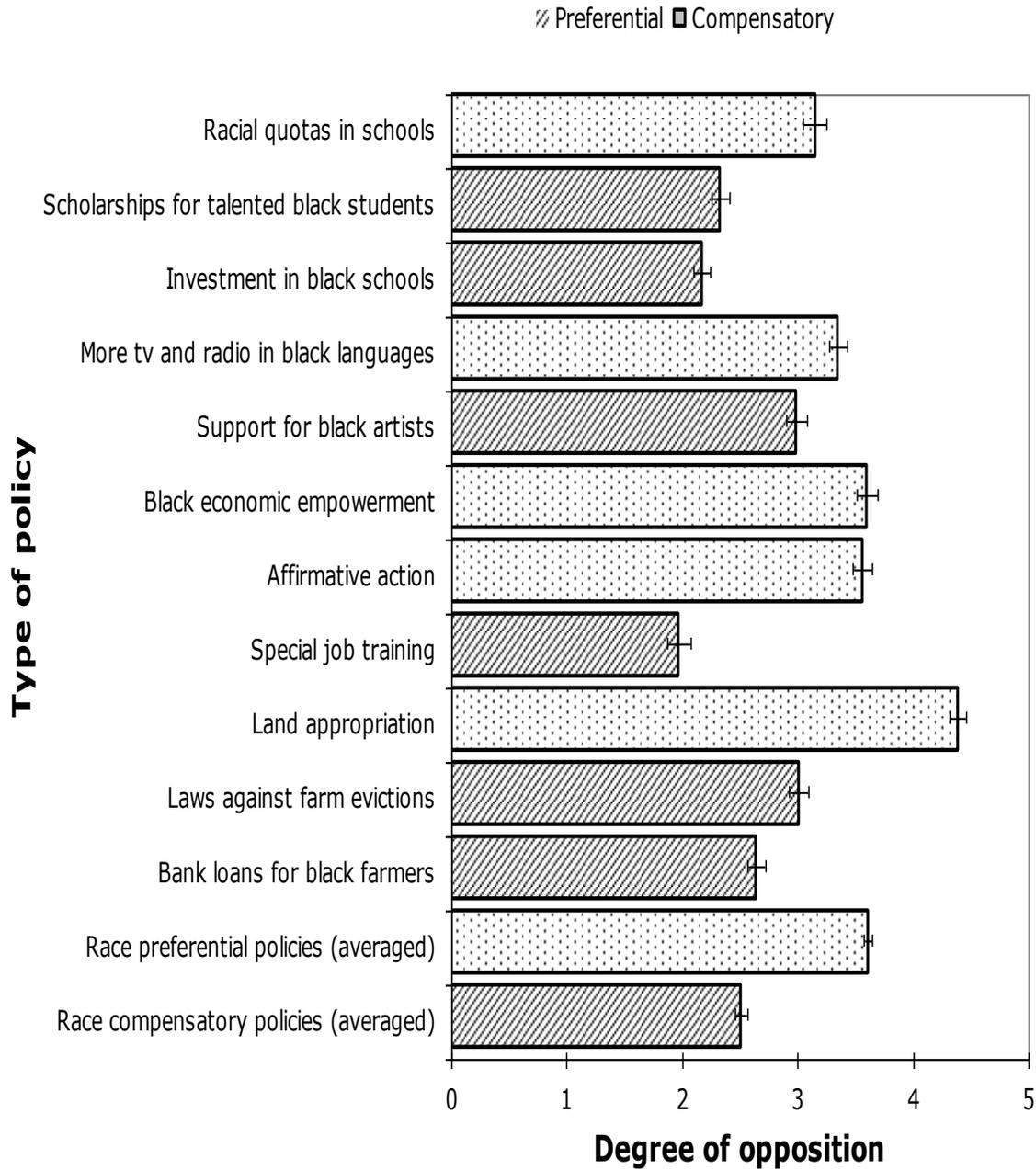
***p<.001

Figure Captions

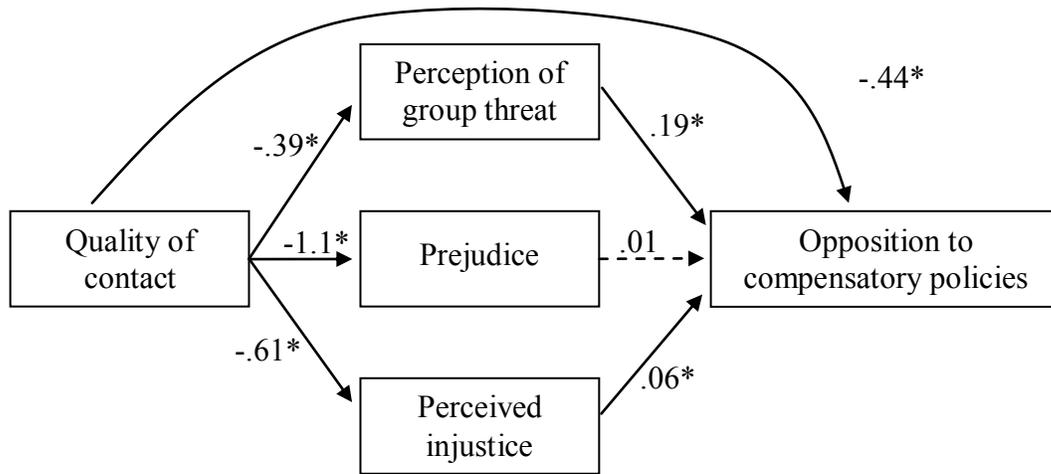
Figure 1. Opposition to preferential and compensatory race policies by white South Africans.

Figure 2. Multiple mediation of the relation between contact quality and opposition to compensatory policies

Figure 3. Multiple mediation of the relation between contact quality and opposition to preferential policies

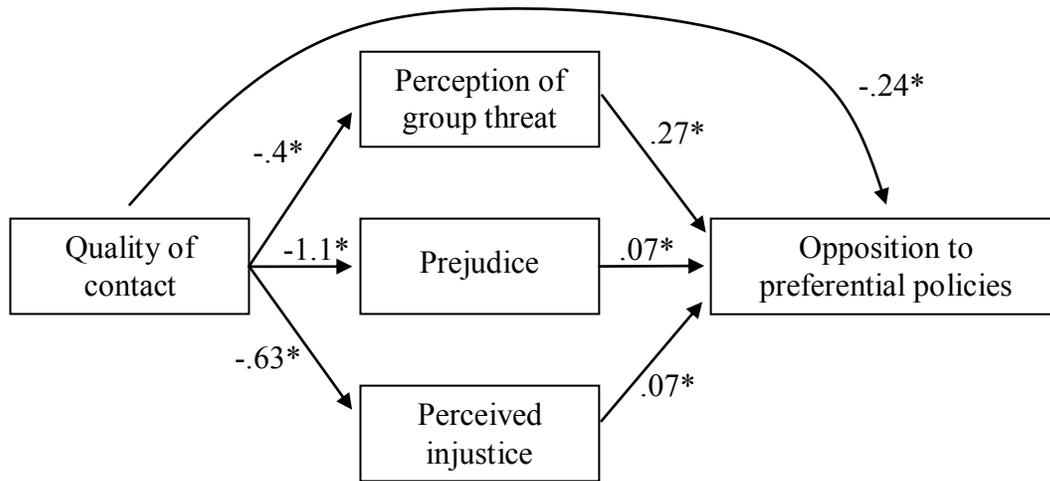


Note: I bars on each column represent 95% confidence interval



$R^2 = .29$; $F = 73.71$, $df = 4, 735$, $p < .001$.

* $p < .001$



$R^2 = .23$; $F = 54.27$, $df = 4, 731$, $p < .001$.

* $p < .001$