

Beyond Party and the Pocketbook: Racial Resentment, Hostile Sexism, and Perceptions of Corporate Political Activity

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Abstract

Recent controversies over “woke” businesses have challenged traditional partisan political alignments. Leading to increasing Republican criticism of businesses politically engaged on environment, social, and governance (ESG) issues. This paper explores how the public evaluates business involvement in politics, focusing specifically on whether individuals believe businesses are doing too much (or not enough) to advance environmental, social, and governance goals. We are interested in the role of racial resentment and hostile sexism relative to partisan affiliation, ideology, and pocketbook considerations in driving individual responses to corporate ESG activities, especially when those activities are not explicitly tied to diversity, equity, or inclusion. Does racial resentment, for example, influence attitudes toward increasing wages, improving health care, or reducing poverty? We find that racial resentment and hostile sexism have spillover effects, affecting public support for business involvement in politics across issue areas. Partisan affiliation, political ideology, and personal pocketbook considerations, in contrast, play a more limited role.

Keywords: ESG, Corporate Activism, Business Politics, Public Opinion

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Business has long been involved in the political process, contributing to political candidates, lobbying for favorable policies, and influencing who runs and wins elections.¹ According to Lindblom (1982), business occupies a privileged position in American politics by influencing what ideas make it onto the public agenda. Fearful that businesses could withdraw their investments in local communities, Lindblom argues, elected officials preemptively narrow the range of policy proposals to those acceptable to the business community. Influencing politics “quietly” through traditional venues and focusing on economic activity (e.g., economic regulation and taxes), business interests and Republican politics have mostly aligned (Culpepper 2010, 2021). The Democratic Party was, at least historically, the party of labor; Republicans were the party of business.

This traditional cleavage began to break down long before businesses went “woke.” Reagan Democrats, a key to the Republican governing coalition in 1980, were defined as socially conservative union members who felt the Democratic Party had moved too far to the left (Abramson and Rhode 1983). As Ronald Reagan famously quipped, “I didn’t leave the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party left me.”² As head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, California Representative Tony Coelho aggressively targeted corporate campaign contributions in the mid-1980s by reminding businesses that Democrats still controlled the House of Representatives (Gaddie 1996; Goidel, Gross and Shields 1999). And, in what was seen as a betrayal of his labor union base, President Bill Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Baer 2000).

Within this context, the growth of “woke capitalism” or “stakeholder capitalism” may reflect a broader partisan realignment. The Democratic Party increasingly appeals to college-educated and economically affluent progressives while the Republican Party increasingly aligns with socially conservative, white working-class voters (Zingher 2022;

¹Bonica (2016); Kalla and Broockman (2014); Canes-Wrone and Gibson (2019); Katz (2015); Quinn and Shapiro (1991)

²<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/26/how-the-right-gets-reagan-wrong-215306/>

Hersh and Shah 2023; Goidel, MQ Moreira and Armstrong 2024). Demographic change also plays a role. As the Baby Boom generation phases into retirement, Millennials and Gen Z make up a larger share of the workforce, consumer markets, and the electorate (Twenge 2023). As voters, consumers, and employees, these younger generations pressure corporations to play a more visible role in public life and actively engage in partisan consumerism (Panagopoulos et al. 2020; Baker and Zuech 2021; Jin et al. 2023a). As a result, corporate CEOs increasingly make public statements supportive of a broad array of progressive social causes, including support for voting rights, DEI employment initiatives, and environmental sustainability. These efforts parallel lobbying efforts and, arguably, signal political capacity and virtue helpful to their political pursuits (Liu, Wei and Zhang 2023).

Not surprisingly, this progressive wave of corporate political activity has not gone unnoticed or unchallenged (Ulver and Laurell 2020). ESG initiatives increasingly face criticism from Republican politicians, conservative activists, and shareholders.³ As of September 2023, for example, 20 U.S. states had rules limiting “considerations of, and/or the weight given to, ESG-related factors in investment decisions and/or discourage such investments.”⁴ Echoing these concerns, Florida Governor and Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis wrote in “The Courage to be Free” that “Both the legislative and executive branches should use their respective authorities to defend individuals against large corporations that are wielding what is effectively public power.”⁵

If such statements fit well within contemporary populist politics, they also reflect a change from the Republican Party’s long-term alliance with corporate political interests. As Hersh and Shah (2023) observe, this shift is well-recognized by corporate stakeholders and business leaders. The public, Hersh and Shah observe, is less likely to recognize this shift. Even when they do, they often become more negative toward corporate political

³<https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2023/06/01/anti-esg-shareholder-proposals-in-2023/>

⁴<https://www.morganlewis.com/pubs/2023/07/esg-investing-regulations-across-the-50-states>

⁵<https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/28/ron-desantis-calls-for-crippling-the-esg-movement-in-new-book.html>

activity rather than more supportive of the issue at stake (Marsh and Peterson Forthcoming).

A second related, but contradictory, criticism is that woke businesses are deploying a cynical “bait and switch” strategy, publicly advancing progressive social causes to detract attention from increasing corporate profits and shareholder value while depressing wages and reducing benefits.⁶ Seen in this light, corporate social justice becomes a tool for limiting more fundamental challenges that might undermine corporate political power. In his book, *Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America’s Social Justice Scam*, Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, for example, observed “Wokenomics is a powerful weapon for CEOs, which they can readily deploy as a smoke screen to distract from greed, fraud, and malfeasance.”

If companies are symbolically signaling support for environmental goals or racial and gender equity, does this provide political cover for low wages, strong earnings, and creating shareholder value? This brings us to the current analysis’s central question: Does the public distinguish between business involvement in politics across issue areas? Or do the same factors (e.g., partisan affiliation, ideology, and racial resentment) that drive opposition to DEI initiatives also drive opposition to “bread and butter” issues like increased wages and improved health care? Sumner (2022) observes that support for corporate political activity depends on the issue at stake, as well as individual ideological, partisan, and issue-based preferences.

Public Opposition to ESG

An emerging literature finds that CEOs often take public stances on hot-button issues to appease their corporation’s stakeholders, and these appeasement strategies can pay off reputationally and financially (Larcker et al. 2018). For example, CEO activism makes

⁶<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/28/opinion/corporate-america-activism.html>.

young consumers more trusting of the CEO's corporation (Jin et al. 2022) and more likely to become or remain a loyal customer of the corporation (Jin et al. 2023b). Yet, taking these public stances can alienate a subset of stakeholders that hold the minority opinion (Bedendo and Siming 2021; Brown, Manegold and Marquardt 2020), especially when public stances are taken on more contentious social issues (Larcker et al. 2018). So, why do CEOs take public stances on issues when their public stances could—if miscalculated—hurt the bottom line?

Opposition to corporate political activity is nuanced. Hersh (2023) finds that opposition is conditional on individual partisanship and the issue at hand. For example, Democrats want businesses to use their resources to influence policy on climate change or income inequality, but not taxes. Meanwhile, Republicans are generally opposed to corporate political activity. Business leaders perceive that businesses—including their own—have shifted leftward in response to pressure from their stakeholders (Hersh and Shah 2023). This shift, however, appears to have happened within the last few years. Cohen et al. (2019) find, looking at political donations from 2000 to 2017, that CEOs were much more likely to give to Republican candidates than Democratic candidates. While we are interested in examining how the public views corporate political activity, most existing research looks at how employees and consumers respond to corporate political activity.

As previously mentioned, corporate political activity can both attract and repel stakeholders (Jin et al. 2023b, 2022; Bedendo and Siming 2021; Brown, Manegold and Marquardt 2020). Employees that feel more politically aligned with their employers are more satisfied with their jobs (Zacher and Rudolph 2023; Williamson and Perumal 2021). Politically unaligned employees are likelier to be dissatisfied, and, thus, more likely to resign (Bermiss and McDonald 2018). This is especially true of conservative employees working for more liberal firms. Among consumers, alienation is perhaps best captured by the act of boycotting. Boycotting involves withholding support and expressing disapproval to-

wards companies that hold opposing political positions—motivated by a desire to punish such companies (Copeland 2014). On the other hand, “buycotting” involves actively endorsing and supporting companies that align with one’s political beliefs. It is motivated by a desire to reward such companies (Copeland 2014). Boycotting and buycotting fall under the broader umbrella of consumer behavior known as political consumerism.

While previous literature investigates CEO political activism and its effects on consumers (Panagopoulos et al. 2020; Hydock, Paharia and Weber 2019; Endres and Panagopoulos 2017), it does not explore the individual-level determinants of opposition to political activism. Our research seeks to fill this gap.

Expectations

Theoretically, we offer four rationales for why individuals might oppose corporate political activity. First, individual responses to corporate political activity might be ideological, meaning that it would be in their belief that corporations should stick to core business activity and stay out of politics. Macey (2022) argues that the growth in ESG activity, and demands that corporations become more politically involved, reflects government dysfunction and failure, and a “libertarian turn” in American politics. Corporate political activity, he further contends, is unlikely to be successful in addressing larger systemic issues, such as climate change or racial discrimination.

The political leanings of stakeholders, particularly investors, play a pivotal role in shaping corporate political activity (Wright 2023). Specifically, investors’ political affiliations guide their investment choices, with a preference among Democrats to support firms that exhibit a liberal political stance (Enete and Sturr 2023). Because stakeholders and CEOs themselves are, for the most part, socially liberal, corporate political activity reflects their beliefs (Wright 2023). Therefore, in addition to an ideological commitment to the idea that corporations should stick to core business activity, conservatives likely

disagree with the content of corporate political activity.

H1: *Opposition to corporate political activity should reflect political ideology. Conservatives should consistently oppose corporate political activity regardless of issue focus.*

Second, individuals might respond to corporate activity as partisans, supporting activity that benefits their side and opposing activity that works against their party's goals. Republican Leader Mitch McConnell well articulated this view, arguing that corporations should stay out of politics, except when donating to Republican candidates and causes.⁷ His view is consistent with the research on employee satisfaction and employee-employer political alignment (Zacher and Rudolph 2023; Williamson and Perumal 2021). If partisanship is driving opposition, we should see partisan affiliation play a larger role on issues that create a partisan advantage (voting rights and fair elections) and on issues that have been highly politicized (climate change, gun violence, and racial inequality).

H2: *Opposition to corporate political activity should reflect partisanship with the strongest effects on the most politicized issues.*

Third, individuals might respond reflexively to “woke” corporate political activity (Wetts and Willer N.d.), largely lumping corporate political activity together, and opposing ESG because it advances a progressive social agenda. As a result, opposition to corporate political activity would better reflect racial resentment and hostile sexism than partisan affiliation or ideology (Gubitza and Avant 2020).

H3: *Opposition to “woke” corporate political activity should reflect racial resentment and hostile sexism.*

Fourth, and finally, we are interested in the importance of social and political variables relative to pocketbook economic considerations. One might argue, for example, that opposition to climate change or DEI initiatives might be rooted in economic vulnerability

⁷<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/mcconnell-warns-corporate-america-stay-out-politics-says-donations-are-n1263173>

(Melcher 2023; Benegal and Scruggs 2016), but that this economic vulnerability should not extend to economic issues. This leads to our fourth hypothesis:

H4: *Pocketbook financial considerations should affect support for corporate political activity on “bread and butter” issues, like raising wages and providing affordable health care.*

Data

To test these hypotheses, we use survey data from a module in the 2022 Cooperative Election Study (CES) fielded in the months leading up to the midterm elections. The module contains 1,000 respondents and, using sampling matching and weights provided by the CES, approximates a nationally representative sample. As dependent variables, we use a set of items designed to gauge whether respondents think businesses are doing too much, not enough, or about the right amount across a set of issues, ranging from addressing climate change to reducing racial and sex-based discrimination to increasing wages and reducing poverty. We model support for business involvement in politics as a function of partisanship, ideology, racial resentment, and hostile sexism, as well as a set of pocketbook considerations.

Business Involvement in Politics

There is no shortage of evidence that corporate ESG activities have increased over time, including ESG-related investments, references in quarterly statements, or annual earnings calls.⁸ ESG scores, metrics designed to capture corporate ESG efforts, are increasingly used as tools to guide investment decisions and in the academic literature to gauge the effectiveness of ESG investment strategies (Clément, Robinot and Trespeuch 2023; Drempeic, Klein and Zwergel 2020). ESG, however, encompasses a wide range of activities,

⁸Reports indicated, for example, that executives increasingly talk about ESG activities in their earnings reports. <https://www.cbinsights.com/research/ai-esg-scores-sustainability-brands-investors/>

ranging from DEI initiatives to combat race and gender discrimination, efforts to address climate change and increase sustainability, and corporate statements supporting voting rights. Our interest in the current paper builds off the diversity in activities encompassed under the ESG label. Does public support vary across issue areas? Or do individuals think of the various initiatives as a cluster of “woke” business activities? Within this context, it is worth noting that the expansion of corporate political activity into areas not explicitly tied to economic activity itself reflects dysfunctional government and, arguably, a “libertarian turn in the history of American politics” (Macey 2022).

We measure opposition to corporate ESG activities by asking survey respondents: “On each of these following issues, would you say American corporations (a) are not doing enough; (b) are doing about the right amount; or (c) are doing too much?”

- “Protecting Voting rights”
- “Addressing Climate Change”
- “Reducing Gender and Racial Inequalities”
- “Assuring Free and Fair Elections”
- “Providing Access to Affordable Health Care”
- “Addressing Gun-Related Violence”
- “Increasing Worker Wages”
- “Reducing Poverty”

Respondents answered the prompt on an 11-point scale where zero indicates that the respondent believes American corporations are not doing enough, five indicates that the respondent thinks American corporations are doing about the right amount, and 10 indicates that the respondent thinks American corporations are doing too much.

In Figure 1, we present the medians and interquartile ranges for each of these items. Across issue areas, there is more support for corporate political activity than opposition. On none of the items considered is the median response greater than 5, indicating

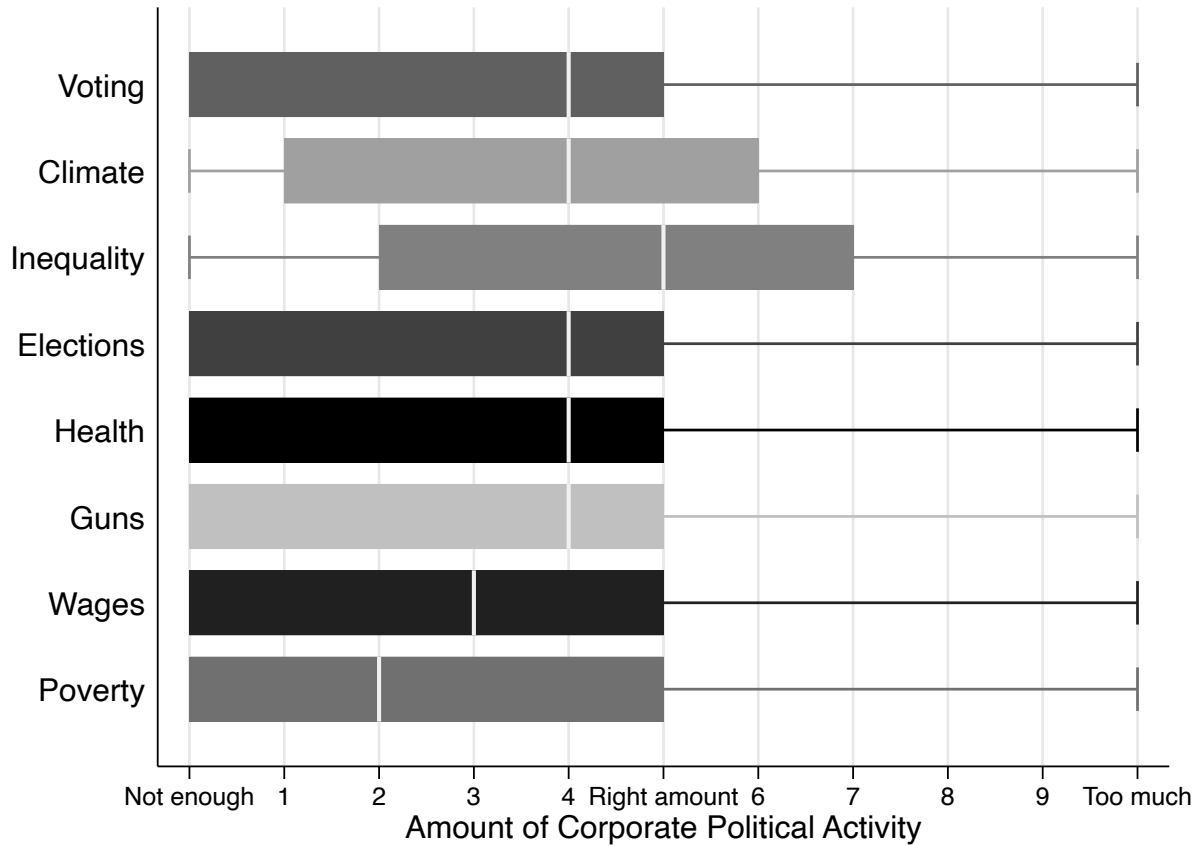


Figure 1: Distribution of Opposition to Corporate Political Activity by Issue Area

that respondents thought businesses were doing too much. Second, we do see variation across issue areas. For example, we find greater opposition to corporate political activity aimed at reducing racial and gender-based inequalities than reducing poverty or increasing wages.

We model opposition to corporate political activity as a function of a set of social/political variables (partisan identification, ideology, racial resentment, and hostile sexism) as well as a set of pocketbook considerations (college education, income, union memberships, working in a blue-collar job, unemployment, and stock ownership). We

are especially interested in the relative importance of social variables and pocketbook considerations on financial issues (increasing wages, improving health benefits, and reducing poverty) but also on issues not specifically tied to race or gender.

Social Variables

Our models include four social variables: partisan identification, ideology, racial resentment, and hostile sexism. Partisan identification is measured using a standard seven-point scale ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican ($M=3.88$; $SE=.09$). Political ideology is measured on a five-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative ($M=3.39$; $SD=.07$). Racial resentment and hostile sexism are indices composed of multiple questions/prompts.

The CES Common Content includes prompts from the well-established racial resentment and hostile sexism batteries.⁹ Our measure of racial resentment is an additive index of the following four items:

- “Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.”
- “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.” (Reverse Coded)
- “White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.” (Reverse Coded)
- “Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.”

Racial resentment ranges from one to five ($M=2.71$; $SE=1.24$; $\alpha=0.89$). We measure hostile sexism as an average of the following two items ($M=2.67$; $SD=0.05$; $\alpha=0.76$):

- “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.”

⁹DeSante and Smith (2020); Glick and Fiske (1996); Kinder and Sanders (1996)

- “Women are too easily offended.”

Hostile sexism also ranges from one to five. The average respondent falls between a two and three on racial resentment and hostile sexism, meaning they are between neither agreeing nor disagreeing and somewhat disagreeing with the prompts.

Pocketbook Variables

Our selection of pocketbook variables is designed to capture an individual’s working-class status. Previous research has grappled with how best to measure working-class status. Our approach is to include a range of indicators.¹⁰ Specifically, we include:

- **w/o College** - individuals without a college education (36.7 percent).
- **Low Income** - households earning 40,000 or less per year (27.9 percent).
- **Union Household** - households where at least one household member is/was in a union (29.9 percent).
- **Blue Collar** - whether a respondent reported working in the following industries: agriculture, mining, utilities, construction, or manufacturing (11.9 percent).
- **Out of Work** - respondents who reported that they were laid off, unemployed, retired, disabled, homemaker, or student (51.6 percent).
- **Doesn’t Own Stock** - coded 1 if the respondents report not owning stock, 0 otherwise (55.7 percent).

Some of these indicators are more interrelated than others. For example, **w/o College** is correlated with **Low Income** at $\rho = 0.28$, **Out of Work** at $\rho = 0.20$, and **Doesn’t Own Stock** at $\rho = 0.34$.

¹⁰Francia and Bigelow (2010); Bartels et al. (2006); Zingher (2020)

Results

Before presenting the results of our regression models, we consider whether opposition to corporate political activity across issues areas reflects a single underlying latent construct or multiple constructs. In Figure 1 (above), we displayed median opposition to corporate political activity across issue areas. Based on the medians, it appears that survey respondents were able to distinguish across issue areas. However, the individual items are also highly correlated—correlations range from 0.40 to 0.74—and Cronbach’s Alpha for an eight-item index is 0.90.

To further investigate this question, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (with orthogonal rotation). The findings are presented in Table 1. What emerges is a three-factor solution reflecting the items gauging social issues (inequality, climate, and gun violence), economic issues (wages, health care, and poverty), and governance issues (voting rights, free and fair elections). Rather than reflecting a single underlying construct

Table 1: Factor Analysis of Support for Corporate Political Activity

	Social	Economic	Governance
Voting	.3299	.2552	.6512
Climate	.7164	.3576	.1908
Inequality	.7166	.2777	.2693
Elections	.2216	.3795	.6591
Health	.4024	.5858	.2896
Gun Violence	.6429	.3642	.2918
Wages	.3608	.7072	.2458
Poverty	.3259	.6967	.3421

(reactions to business involvement in politics), it appears that individuals are responding as well to the focus of the activity.

Factor analysis can give some insight into the underlying dimensions capturing opposition to corporate political activity, but it leaves open the question of how individuals

evaluate these activities. Are individuals largely responding to these items as partisans? Or do economic considerations play a role? To answer this question we regressed opposition to corporate political activity across issue areas on our competing sets of social and pocketbook economic factors. We estimate nine linear regression models with each item as an outcome, as well as an index of all eight items. The results are presented visually as coefficient plots in Figure 2, with the full results presented in Table A1 of the Appendix.

What is most striking about the results is the relative importance of racial resentment and hostile sexism across all eight issue areas (supporting **Hypothesis 3**). The smallest effect of racial resentment suggests that a one-unit increase in racial resentment is associated with a 0.63 point increase on the 11-point poverty scale (24 percent of a standard deviation). The largest suggests a one-unit increase in racial resentment is associated with a 1.17 point increase on the 11-point inequality scale (36 percent of a standard deviation). Racial resentment and hostile sexism are important even in those areas where they have little explicit connection (wages, health care, and poverty) to race or gender. Individuals, it would appear, reflexively respond to cues about business involvement in politics as part of a larger progressive social agenda.

Unlike racial resentment and hostile sexism, partisan identification varies in importance across issues. With controls of racial resentment and hostile sexism, it is not a significant predictor of opposition to corporate political activity in support of voting rights or assuring free and fair elections. Notably, if individuals were calculating support or opposition to corporate political activity based on partisan advantage, these are the issues where we should have seen strong effects. Nor is partisan identification a significant predictor of opposition to the “bread and butter” issues - raising wages, providing access to health care, or reducing poverty. In support of **Hypothesis 1**, partisan identification primarily plays a leading role on the most visible and polarizing issues - addressing climate change, reducing race and gender inequalities, and reducing gun violence - where party cues are most readily available.

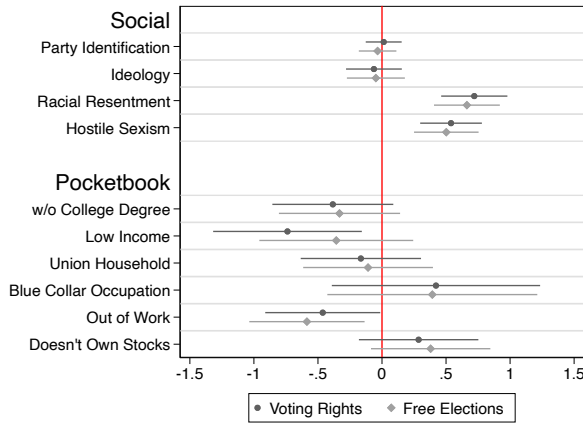


Figure 2a: ESG Issues – Elections

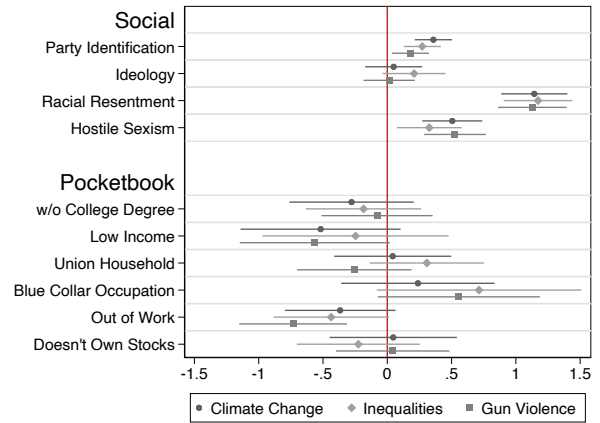


Figure 2b: ESG Issues – Cultural

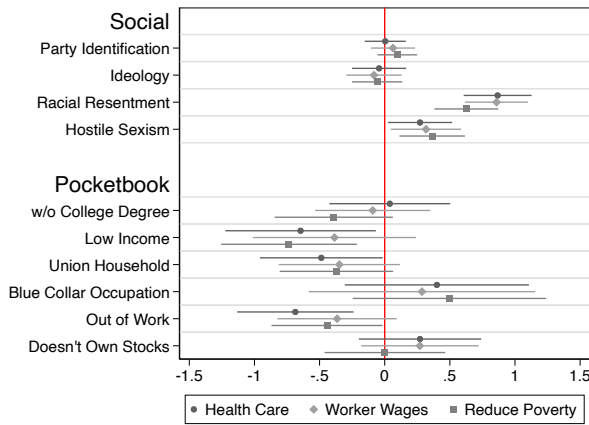


Figure 2c: ESG Issues – Economic

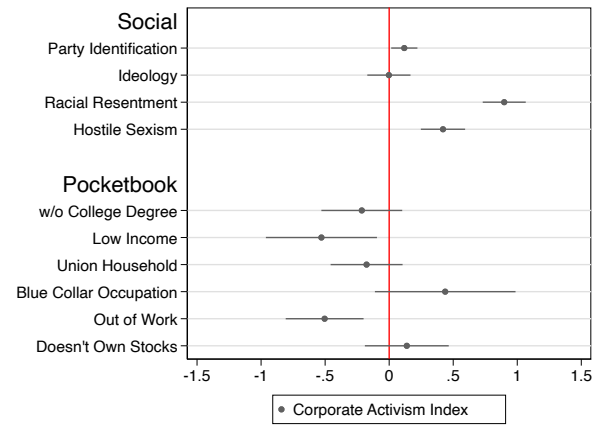


Figure 2d: ESG Issues - Index

Notes. All eight of the individual ESG Issues, as well as the index are continuous variables ranging from 0 = not enough to 11 = too much. The coefficients plotted here are from linear regression models. The models include survey weights provided by CES. The coefficients are bracketed by 95 percent confidence intervals.

Overall, we find no support for **Hypothesis 2**. With controls for racial resentment, hostile sexism, and partisan identification, ideology is not a significant predictor of opposition to corporate political activity in any of the nine models. Thus, we find little evidence that opposition to corporate political activity is ideological, reflecting a principled belief that businesses should stick to their core business.

Finally, some of the pocketbook economic considerations do play a consistent role in predicting opposition to corporate political activity—lending mixed support to **Hypothesis 4**. Individuals who are out of work (retired, unemployed, and students) consistently

support corporate political activity to address a range of issues. It is not entirely clear that this is economic self-interest at work, however, as the effect of being out of work is only marginally significant as a predictor of support for increasing wages but is a significant predictor for addressing climate change, protecting voting rights, and assuring free and fair elections. Having said that, the most consistent effects of pocketbook considerations on support for corporate political activity are for providing access to affordable health care. Lower-income, union households, and out-of-work respondents all favor corporate activity aimed at providing access to affordable health care.

Discussion

Our eight measures of opposition to corporate political activity reveal whether respondents think American corporations are “doing enough” or “doing too much,” as well as the motivations for these perceptions. But, the responses don’t inform us if “doing too much” means the corporate activity is too liberal or too conservative. We assume, given the current rhetoric regarding business in politics, that prompts referencing corporate activity on “addressing climate change” cue respondents to think of “woke” ESG goals and activities. However, it is possible that more liberal respondents perceive businesses as taking action consistently to the right of their preferences.

To explore these nuances, we fielded a small (five question) supplementary survey as part of the Verasight Interdisciplinary Omnibus Survey. We ask respondents specifically about businesses 1) advocating for progressive causes, and 2) stepping in on economic, social, or cultural issues when the federal government fails. The exact question wording follows:

1. “American businesses should spend more time making money and less time advocating for progressive social causes.”
2. “If the federal government fails to address an economic, social, or cultural issue,

then it is big business’s responsibility to address the problem.”

Responses range from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree (M=2.68 and 2.92; SE=1.28 and 2.92 respectively). We quasi-replicate our previous set of analyses on these two dependent variables—we are limited in the number and scope of independent variables. We include two social and two pocketbook variables in our ordered logistic regression models: party identification, racial resentment, w/o college degree, and low income.¹¹

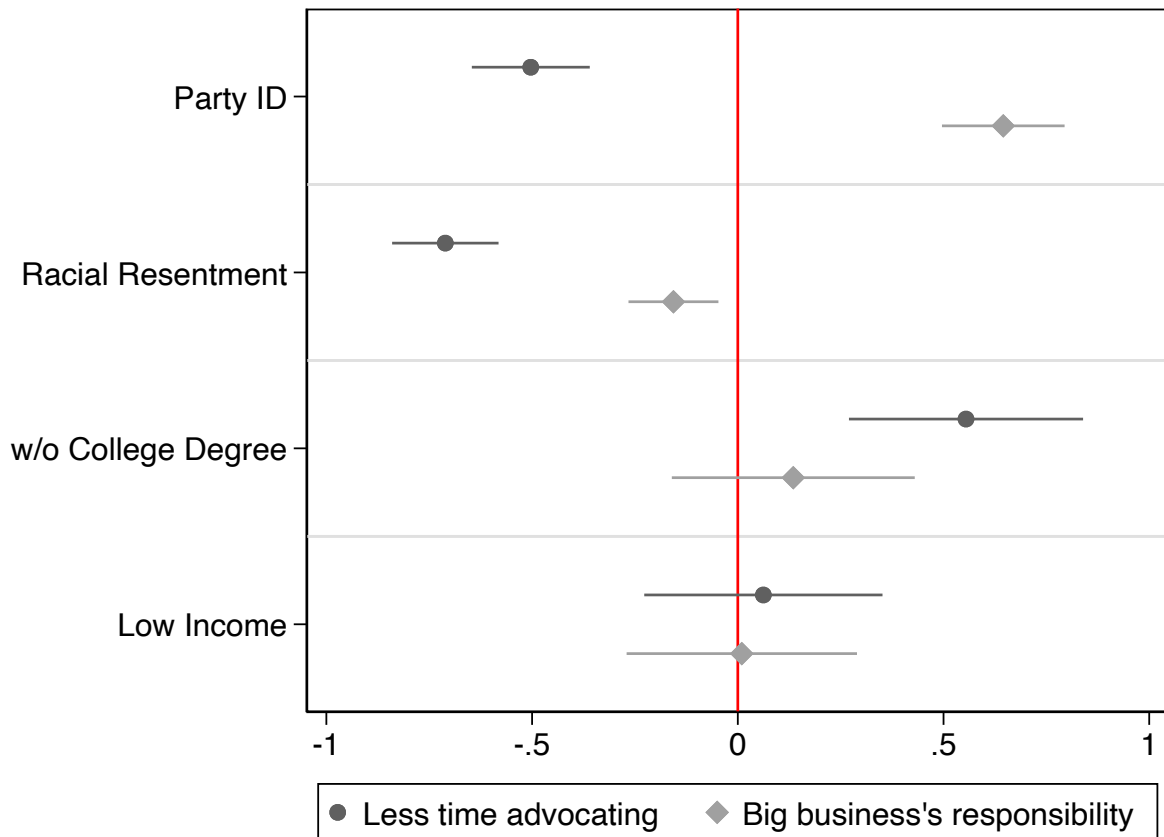


Figure 3: The relationship between racial resentment and corporate political activity

Notes. **Less time advocating** and **Big business’s responsibility** are ordinal variables ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The coefficients plotted here are from ordered logistic regression models. The models include survey weights provided by CES. The coefficients are bracketed by 95 percent confidence intervals.

The results from these additional analyses are presented in Figure 3 and Table A2 of the Appendix. Our analyses provide further evidence that racially resentful Americans

¹¹Party identification is a three-point scale, racial resentment

are opposed to corporate political activity at its current levels, but not opposed to the general idea of business involvement in politics. For example, a one-unit increase in racial resentment makes a respondent approximately 13.7 percent more likely ($p=0.00$) to agree that corporations “should spend more time making money and less time advocating for progressive social causes,” and approximately 3.4 percent more likely ($p=0.01$) to agree that big business should step up “if the federal government fails to address an economic, social, or cultural issue.” How can racially resentful respondents both want businesses to “shut up and dribble” and to step in when the government fails? We suspect that abstract support for business involvement in politics does not translate into specific support for business involvement in social, economic, or governance issues.

Contrary to racial resentment, the effect of partisan identification is consistent in nature. Republicans are significantly more likely to agree that business should spend less time advocating for progressive causes, and less likely to agree that big business should step in when the government fails. Republicans are anti-big business involvement in politics across both issues.

Conclusion

One of the more important changes in contemporary politics has been a shift in the alignment of corporate political interests and the Republican Party. This shift was preceded by changes to the Democratic Party, moving it from a working-class party to a party dominated by college-educated elites, and to the Republican Party, as it increasingly hewed toward right-wing populism and away from corporate political elites (Goidel, MQ Moreira and Armstrong 2024; Zingher 2022; Hersh 2023). As these shifts were unraveling, American national government grew increasingly dysfunctional (Mann and Ornstein 2016; Goidel 2013). As a result, the pressures increased for corporate America to play a role in addressing political issues ranging from the existential threat of climate change to the

persistent problems of race and gender-based discrimination.

In this paper, we explored how individuals respond to corporate political activity across a range of environmental, social, and governance issues. The findings are as striking as they are clear. Individual opposition to corporate political activity is rooted most consistently and powerfully in racial resentment and hostile sexism. Even in issue areas such as increasing wages, providing affordable health care, and reducing poverty, racial resentment and hostile sexism drive opposition to corporate political activity. Our interpretation is that the effects of racial resentment and hostile sexism spill over into these related issue areas because they are seen as part of a larger “woke” progressive social agenda.

The effects of partisan identification and political ideology are less consistent and less clear. Party identification matters - independently of racial resentment and hostile sexism - only on the most highly visible and polarized issues (climate change, racial inequality, and gun violence). Ideology does not have an effect independent of these other controls. We should be clear, however, we are not arguing that party and ideology do not matter. They are both important in structuring how individuals think about the world. This includes how individuals evaluate their support for (or opposition to) corporate political activity. But in this case, racial resentment and hostile sexism are more proximate and powerful predictors than partisan affiliation and political ideology. Corporate political activity is seen largely through the lens of race and gender, even those areas not explicitly tied to race or gender. In this respect, corporate efforts to increase wages, provide access to affordable health care, or reduce poverty may suffer from spillover effects from efforts to reduce racial and gender-based inequalities (Tesler 2012, 2015). More generally, corporate political activity may undermine the causes it is intended to support, particularly when those causes are not explicitly tied to race or gender (Marsh and Peterson Forthcoming).

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Appendix A

Supplementary Material

Table A1: Determinants of Satisfaction with Corporate Political Activity on ESG Issues

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	Voting	Elections	Climate	Inequality	Violence	Health	Wages	Poverty	Index
Party ID	0.0133 (0.0715)	-0.0342 (0.0747)	0.359** (0.0740)	0.272** (0.0733)	0.180* (0.0736)	0.00435 (0.0802)	0.0635 (0.0861)	0.0965 (0.0777)	0.118* (0.0521)
Ideology	-0.0630 (0.111)	-0.0478 (0.115)	0.0497 (0.113)	0.209 ⁺ (0.124)	0.0148 (0.102)	-0.0430 (0.106)	-0.0823 (0.108)	-0.0579 (0.0982)	-0.00215 (0.0859)
Racial Resentment	0.720** (0.132)	0.663** (0.131)	1.144** (0.131)	1.172** (0.136)	1.129** (0.136)	0.867** (0.133)	0.859** (0.123)	0.626** (0.125)	0.898** (0.0855)
Hostile Sexism	0.539** (0.123)	0.502** (0.128)	0.506** (0.119)	0.327* (0.129)	0.526** (0.122)	0.271* (0.126)	0.317* (0.137)	0.365** (0.128)	0.420** (0.0880)
w/o College	-0.384 (0.241)	-0.332 (0.241)	-0.278 (0.246)	-0.185 (0.228)	-0.0798 (0.220)	0.0391 (0.236)	-0.0919 (0.225)	-0.391 ⁺ (0.231)	-0.214 (0.161)
Low Income	-0.738* (0.296)	-0.357 (0.306)	-0.518 (0.317)	-0.247 (0.369)	-0.564 ⁺ (0.297)	-0.646* (0.295)	-0.385 (0.319)	-0.735** (0.266)	-0.529* (0.221)
Union Household	-0.165 (0.239)	-0.109 (0.258)	0.0422 (0.232)	0.308 (0.226)	-0.257 (0.227)	-0.486* (0.240)	-0.348 (0.237)	-0.371 ⁺ (0.222)	-0.176 (0.143)
Blue Collar	0.421 (0.414)	0.393 (0.418)	0.239 (0.304)	0.714 ⁺ (0.405)	0.556 ⁺ (0.321)	0.400 (0.360)	0.286 (0.443)	0.497 (0.378)	0.438 (0.280)
Out of Work	-0.462* (0.229)	-0.586* (0.229)	-0.367 ⁺ (0.219)	-0.437 ⁺ (0.228)	-0.733** (0.213)	-0.686** (0.228)	-0.365 (0.233)	-0.443* (0.217)	-0.504** (0.155)
Doesn't Own Stocks	0.286 (0.238)	0.380 (0.237)	0.0465 (0.252)	-0.225 (0.244)	0.0418 (0.225)	0.271 (0.239)	0.270 (0.230)	0.00161 (0.236)	0.138 (0.167)
Constant	0.708* (0.339)	0.978** (0.344)	-1.537** (0.285)	-0.855** (0.276)	-0.996** (0.306)	0.782* (0.334)	0.331 (0.321)	0.540 ⁺ (0.307)	-0.00565 (0.215)
Observations	860	858	862	861	860	862	861	857	864
R ²	0.223	0.172	0.481	0.479	0.422	0.225	0.245	0.234	0.492
Model	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS

Standard errors in parentheses

⁺ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table A2: Perceptions of Business's Role in Politics

	(1)	(2)
	Less Time Advocating	Big Business's Responsibility
Party ID	-0.503** (0.0731)	0.645** (0.0760)
Racial Resentment	-0.711** (0.0660)	-0.156** (0.0558)
w/o College	0.555** (0.145)	0.135 (0.151)
Low Income	0.0622 (0.148)	0.00975 (0.143)
Observations	999	999
Pseudo R^2	0.109	0.030
Model	Ordered logistic	Ordered logistic

Standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01