

Public opinion of new justices affects views on entire Supreme Court

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A new study finds that the extent to which U.S. adults support newly appointed justices to the Supreme Court strongly influences the extent to which they support the high court as an institution.

"Prior to this study, nobody had really investigated the extent to which the way people view the [high court](#) is influenced by the way they feel

about new justices," says Elizabeth Lane, co-author of the study and an assistant professor of political science at North Carolina State University. "That's what we wanted to explore with this work. And given the current focus on how the public views the Supreme Court, it seems especially timely."

For the [study](#), published in *Political Behavior*, researchers conducted an in-depth survey of 1,223 Black and white U.S. adults.

Study participants were asked a series of demographic questions, including race, age, income and political affiliation. Participants were then asked to review the demographic background of four fictional Supreme Court nominees, including the nominee's race, religion, ideology and the political party of the nominating president.

Participants were then asked to answer questions about whether they would support the nominee; whether they thought the nominee would be impartial; and how qualified they thought the nominee was for the Supreme Court.

Study participants were also asked questions about how they would view the Supreme Court if the nominee were confirmed; the extent to which the nominee's confirmation would affect their view of the court "as a legal institution"; and whether they thought the Supreme Court would be more likely to "make decisions that I agree with."

"One big takeaway is that supporting a nominee because of shared [racial identity](#) is one of the dominant predictors of support for the court in the context of nominations," Lane says. "Black respondents view Black nominees more favorably, and as a result, view the court more favorably should that nominee be confirmed. This effect is particularly strong for Black Democrats."

"The Supreme Court doesn't garner much attention unless it is issuing big opinions or a vacancy on the court needs to be filled," Lane says.

"And [public opinion](#) is important to the court, because it relies on [public support](#) to put pressure on the president and Congress to take action that reflects the will of the court.

"This study sheds light on one of the factors that influences public opinion of the court, and which nobody had demonstrated before. One of the key findings is that providing representation for Black Americans—who have historically been marginalized—really benefits the institution, without meaningfully decreasing support among white respondents."

More information: Miles T. Armaly et al, The Influence of Descriptive Representation on Support for Judicial Nominees and the US Supreme Court, *Political Behavior* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s11109-024-09966-2](#)

Provided by North Carolina State University

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