



Diversity, equity, and inclusion regression: Perceptions of organizations that fail to persevere in their stated commitments[☆]

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ABSTRACT

U.S. organizations have increasingly abandoned their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The present research examines whether assessments of an organization's motivation to be non-prejudiced and anticipated identity safety at an organization are impacted by the organization's perseverance in their DEI commitment. Across four experiments with Black Americans ($N = 1375$), organizations that had diversity statements two years ago and have either removed or diluted this statement in the present were perceived as less genuinely committed to be non-prejudiced, less tenacious in their DEI commitments, and signaled less anticipated belonging for Black Americans compared to an organization that has persisted in its commitment. These effects emerged even when anti-DEI state legislation (Study 2) and norms of DEI regression across organizations (Study 3) were made salient. These findings demonstrate that perseverance of organizational identity safety cues is critical in shaping attributions of motivations and identity safety.

Organizations often make public and private commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). For example, organizational diversity statements are public-facing statements made by organizations indicating their commitment to DEI. Such statements can have a positive impact on marginalized group members anticipated belonging and treatment at an organization (see Kruk & Matsick, 2021). Other efforts may be more internal facing, including affinity groups for marginalized employees or environmental cues, such as posters and murals indicating support for DEI. Collectively, diversity statements, posters, or other signals of DEI commitments are considered identity safety cues, as they signal that the organization endorses egalitarian ideologies, and thus marginalized group members can expect to feel included, with reduced fear of discrimination, in these environments (e.g., Chaney et al., 2016; Cipollina & Sanchez, 2022; Derricks et al., 2023; Kirby, Barreto, et al., 2024; Wilton et al., 2015).

While identity safety cues, such as organizational diversity statements, seemingly became the norm at U.S. organizations (> 87% had a public facing diversity statement; Jones & Donnelley, 2017), the U.S. has entered a “DEI regression” (circa 2025), with organizations increasingly abandoning DEI initiatives and a January 2025 executive order seeking to ban DEI efforts at the federal level. That is, norms of organization diversity commitments have weakened across the 2020's

(Associated Press, 2025). The present research examined how Black Americans perceive the perseverance, compared to the removal or dilution, of an organization's DEI commitment, with implications for their felt identity safety. In particular, we attend to perceptions of an organization's motivation to be non-prejudiced (e.g., Chaney et al., 2015; Derricks et al., 2023; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025; Thai & Nylund, 2024), specifically if organizations were perceived to be less genuinely motivated (less internally and/or more externally motivated) to be non-prejudiced in the past if the organization has now removed or diluted their commitment to DEI, and more genuinely motivated in the present day if they have persevered in their DEI commitment.

1. Perceived motivations of identity safety cues

At the individual level, people may perceive a person's egalitarian behavior to be driven by internal (personal values) or external (norm adherence, performance) motivations (e.g., Benbow et al., 2024; LaCasse et al., 2015; Major et al., 2013, 2016; Mendes & Koslov, 2013; Moser et al., 2025), with greater internal motivations and/or fewer external motivations being considered as more “genuine” (e.g., Burns & Granz, 2023; Chu & Ashburn-Nardo, 2022; Thai & Nylund, 2024). The same is true for organization perceptions; organizational commitments

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to DEI can be perceived as differentially motivated by internal or external reasons (e.g., Chaney et al., *in press*; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025; Pham & Chaney, 2026; Ponce de Leon et al., 2024; Ragland & Sommers, 2024; Wilton et al., 2020). Indeed, recent research has tied frameworks of perceived motivations to assessments of allyship and identity safety cues (Chaney et al., 2015; Moser & Wiley, 2025; Pietri et al., 2024). For example, demonstrated commitment across behaviors and stated values (e.g., employing people of color and stating a commitment, Bachrach et al., 2022; Kroeper et al., 2022; Ragland & Sommers, 2024; Wilton et al., 2020), and years of stated commitment (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024) can lead to perceptions that an organization is more genuine in its commitment to being egalitarian. In turn, perceptions of more genuine commitments are associated with more positive outcomes for members of marginalized groups, including anticipated belonging at, and greater interest in, the organization (e.g., Derricks et al., 2023; Ponce de Leon et al., 2024; Thai & Nylund, 2024).

Notably, consistency of behavior was identified in early social psychological research as indicative of greater perceived internal motivations and less external motivations for that behavior (Kelley, 1967, 1973). That is, if a person or organization engages in a behavior across time, lay perceivers are likely to view the behavior as more internally, and less externally motivated. Indeed, consistency has been theorized to shape attributions of interpersonal allyship (Moser & Wiley, 2025) and organizational DEI efforts (e.g., Chaney et al., 2015). Empirical research supports such theories; organizations that had DEI statements for longer periods of time (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024) and maintain those statements year-round rather than just during particular months (e.g., Pride month; White & Carter, 2026) are perceived as more genuinely motivated. Yet, examinations of the length (i.e., past years) of an organization's stated commitment to DEI (e.g., Ponce de Leon et al., 2024), or the timing of an organization's statement during a period of expected egalitarian statements (e.g., White & Carter, 2026), were primarily during times of assumed benefits to such commitments, which may prompt discounting, or the attribution to external motivations due to recognition of the benefits of such behaviors (Kelley, 1973; Moser & Wiley, 2025). Research has not yet examined how an organization's continued commitment to DEI in the face of external obstacles and increasing anti-DEI norms impacts perceptions of the organization's motivations in the past and present.

Another component of consistency is if an organization maintains or walks back its stated commitment to DEI. We consider this maintenance of a DEI commitment to be *perseverance*. Perseverance captures the current socio-political climate of declining norms in organizational commitments to DEI and potential downshifts in perceived benefits (and increases in costs) for organizations that maintain a DEI commitment. That is, perseverance in a stated commitment to DEI may be viewed as particularly genuine when doing so is no longer the norm and may be costly. Indeed, the augmentation principle argues that costly behaviors are often attributed to internal motivations (Kelley, 1973; Moser & Wiley, 2025).

Of relevance, organizations with diversity statements were perceived as less genuinely motivated in their commitment to DEI when it was made salient that organizational diversity statements were the (descriptive) norm (Chaney et al., *in press*), suggesting that organizational behavior in line with norms is perceived as *less* genuine. Similarly, a cisgender-heterosexual person who shares their pronouns when doing so is the context norm is evaluated as less genuine in their allyship compared to when pronoun sharing is not the context norm (Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). Thus, an organization that perseveres in their stated DEI commitment despite norms *against* such commitments is likely to be perceived as more genuinely motivated than an organization that abandons their commitment.

Critically, we consider perceptions of genuine motivations to mean greater internal motives *and/or* lower external motives. That is, while truly genuine motives may be considered high internal and low external motivations (and non-genuine motives may be considered high external

and low internal motivations), most organizations are likely not perceived as having such singular motives. Indeed, past research finds that perceived internal and external motivations are not always negatively correlated but rather independently influenced (e.g., varied information sources independently influence perceived internal and external motives, and perceived motives are often not significantly, or only weakly correlated; Chaney et al., *in press*; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). Lay perceivers largely recognize the complexity of motivations and attribute motivations for others' DEI efforts to both internal and external motivations. Moreover, perceived internal and external motives both independently contribute to perceptions of allyship (e.g., Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025) and are at times informed by different levels of identity-relevant information (e.g., aggregate attitudes of a broader context versus local-level adoption of identity safety cues; Pereira-Jorge & Chaney, 2026). Thus, assessments of perceived motives are incomplete if not attending to both of these facets. Here, we use "perceptions of genuine motives" to broadly mean greater internal and less external motivations but also aim to offer specificity in perceptions of these independent motives.

2. Diversity dilution

Rather than remove (fail to persevere) a stated DEI commitment, organizations may adjust the language of their stated commitment. That is, organizations may attempt to define diversity differently rather than remove a stated commitment entirely. How organizations define diversity can vary dramatically from the operationalization in social psychological research (e.g., Howard et al., 2022; Kirby, Russell Pascual, & Hildebrand, 2025). Organizations may define diversity broadly as individual differences, such as personality and cognitive styles and/or as demographic diversity, referencing federally protected social categories from discrimination (i.e., Howard et al., 2022; Kirby, Russell Pascual, & Hildebrand, 2025). In 2020, the majority of the top 250 Fortune organizations' webpages had broad definitions of diversity that referenced non-demographic traits or characteristics of people (Kirby, Russell Pascual, & Hildebrand, 2025). This is not unique to organizational sectors, as only 19% of higher education institutions in 2009 explicitly referenced diversity with racial and ethnic identity in their diversity statements (Wilson et al., 2012). Diversity commitments that include these non-marginalized identities are considered diluted diversity commitments (Kirby, Russell Pascual, & Hildebrand, 2025).

Diluted diversity definitions appear to be an attempt to include socially dominant groups. Yet, organizational diversity definitions impact marginalized individuals' intentions to engage with that organization. LGBTQ+ people indicated they were less likely to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity at an organization with a diluted diversity statement, relative to demographic diversity statement, indicating a lack of anticipated authenticity (Kirby, Barreto, et al., 2024). Similarly, Black Americans reported less organizational interest in organizations with diluted, relative to demographic diversity statements (Kirby, Russell Pascual, & Hildebrand, 2025). Indeed, organizational identity practices that are not explicitly tailored to one's most salient marginalized identity elicit lower expectations of equitable treatment among employees of all backgrounds (i.e., procedural fairness) and lower organization identity-safety attitudes (i.e., attraction, interest, and trust, Johnson & Pietri, 2025). In the present research, we consider diluting a diversity statement that previously included marginalized, protected social classes, as another form of failed perseverance.

3. Current research

Integrating research on organizational identity safety cues and perceived motivations (e.g., Chaney et al., *in press*; Moser & Wiley, 2025; Ponce de Leon et al., 2024), we report four experimental studies examining Black Americans' perceptions of organizations that had diversity statements two years ago, and have since persisted in their

diversity statement, diluted their statement, or completely removed their statement. Across studies, we consider perceived motivations for the organization's commitment to DEI two years ago and in the present day, as well as present day anticipated belonging at the organization and perceived DEI tenacity of the organization. We include DEI tenacity as an indicator that the organization is not only internally motivated, but also engaging adamantly in their DEI commitments. Further, we examine if perceptions of the organization are impacted when it is indicated that removal of DEI commitments is the norm, presented as a behavior occurring concurrently with a proposed state policy against DEI commitments (Study 2) or a mere trend across organizations (Study 3).

For all data and materials, see https://osf.io/gu8p5/?view_only=9a8055faf10548398a27fd0c6ac9ba32. Studies 1b and 2 were preregistered. Across all studies, all measures, manipulations, and data/participant exclusions are reported in the manuscript or its Supplementary Material. Several additional measures can be found in the Supplement for all studies. All studies utilized Prolific for participant recruitment. To ensure participants were human, we utilized the captcha feature in Qualtrics, examined geo-locations and survey completion times, and included open-ended questions at survey end.

4. Study 1a

Study 1a was an initial examination of Black American's perceptions of an organization that persisted, removed, or diluted their diversity statement over a two-year period. We hypothesized that Black Americans would perceive an organization that persisted (i.e., retained a diversity statement) as generally more genuinely motivated both in the past and present, report greater DEI tenacity, and greater anticipated belonging compared to an organization that either diluted or removed its diversity statement. Notably, we did not make specific hypotheses regarding shifts in both or either perceived internal and external motivations in the past or present given past research finding some inconsistency in when perceived internal and external motives shift (Chaney et al., in press; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). Said differently, we anticipated a wholistic perception of greater genuine motives (greater internal and/or less external motivation) for an organization that persisted relative to a dilution or removal organization. We further hypothesized Black Americans would not differentiate in their perceptions between organizations that diluted or removed. As the first examination of this research question, this study was not pre-registered.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

An a priori power analysis for a 3-cell, between-subjects ANOVAs indicated a desired sample size of 246 for a medium-large effect ($f = 0.20$) with 80% power. We recruited 341 Black American participants from Prolific in case of exclusions. Ultimately, 43 were removed from the analytic sample for not identifying as Black ($n = 4$), failing multiple instructional attention check items ($n = 34$), or not starting the survey after indicating consent ($n = 5$), leaving an analytic sample of 298 participants. A sensitivity power analysis indicated the sample could detect a small-medium effect ($f = 0.18$) for a 3-cell, between-subjects ANOVA with 80% power. See Table 1 for demographics. Data was collected in March 2025.

4.1.2. Procedure

After providing consent, all participants saw a webpage for an organization, "EON Investments." Participants were informed that this was a snapshot of what the organization's website looked like "two years ago" (i.e., 2023). The website included generic information about the organization, including a section titled "Our Staff." For all participants, this included a diversity statement that said: "EON Investments is an exceptional blend of diverse ethnic, cultural, and other backgrounds, ...

Table 1
Demographic summary.

Demographic information	Study 1a	Study 1b	Study 2	Study 3
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender				
Women (cisgender and transgender)	181 (60.7%)	105 (47.9%)	218 (52.4%)	227 (61.8%)
Men (cisgender and transgender)	114 (38.3%)	114 (52.1%)	193 (46.4%)	163 (36.4%)
Non-binary	1 (0.3%)	–	2 (0.5%)	4 (0.9%)
Transgender identifying	17 (5.6%)	11 (2.7%)	42 (10.1%)	13 (2.9%)
Gender non-conforming	1 (0.3%)	–	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.4%)
Self-identified	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.2%)	5 (1.2%)	2 (0.4%)
Race/ethnicity				
Black or African American	297 (99.7%)	217 (99.1%)	416 (100%)	442 (98.67%)
Biracial/Multiracial/More than one race/ethnicity (including Black racial identity)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.9%)	–	6 (1.34%)
Participants' age (in years)	Study 1a <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) 40.44 (12.54)	Study 1b <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) 37.86 (13.00)	Study 2 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) 32.55 (11.20)	Study 3 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) 42.00 (13.29)
Political Orientation (1, Strongly liberal- 7, Strongly conservative)	3.71 (1.82)	4.03 (1.98)	3.91 (2.09)	4.71 (1.73)
Socio-Economic Status (1, Poor or just barely making it- 5, Wealthy)	2.63 (0.76)	2.81 (0.78)	2.98 (0.69)	2.54 (0.83)

We define diversity broadly, appreciating diversity on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, disability status, sexual orientations, among others." The selection of two years ago (i.e., 2023) was selected simply as a recent time when there were not immense increases or discussions about DEI at organizations (i.e., not 2020), but also a time when DEI efforts were not being actively targeted by the federal government (i.e., not 2025- current).

Next, all participants immediately saw a snapshot of EON Investments' website from the "present day" (i.e., 2025). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three organizational conditions: Persist, Dilution, Removal. In the *Persist* organization, the website was identical to what participants saw on the website two years ago. In the *Dilution* organization, the "Our Staff" section now read, "EON Investments is an exceptional blend of diverse talents and problem solvers... We define diversity broadly, appreciating diversity of thought, style, technical capabilities, personality, working styles, and expertise, among others" (adapted from Kirby, Barreto, et al., 2024). In the *Removal* organization, all mentions of diversity were now absent, instead there was general language about "our employees are an integral part of who we are as a company and how we see our future."

After, all participants completed manipulation check questions, including the name of the company and a multiple-choice item asking, "What changes, if any, did the website have," with options including "no changes" and "changes in the 'Our Staff' section." Participants who did not correctly respond to this item (*Persist*: $n = 35$, *Dilution*: $n = 45$, *Removal*: $n = 37$) were presented with the two website snapshots again, and all correctly completed the manipulation check the second time. Full manipulation materials appear in the Supplement.

Next, all participants were again shown the website snapshot from two years ago and completed measures of perceived internal and external motivations to be non-prejudiced regarding the organization. Participants then saw the present-day website snapshot and completed the same measure. Participants then completed measures assessing perceptions of the organization's tenacity in their DEI commitment, anticipated procedural fairness for Black employees, and expectations of discrimination that Black employees face at the organization before

providing demographics and being debriefed.¹

4.1.3. Measures

4.1.3.1. Perceived organizational motivations. We assessed perceived motives twice, presenting the same items each time (adapted from Chaney et al., in press; Major et al., 2013). Participants were first presented with the organization's diversity statement at Time 1 (i.e., two years ago), and asked to indicate how likely it was that the organization was motivated to display a diversity statement for the following reasons (e.g., "Two years ago, how likely is it that EON investments..." on a scale from 1(*Very unlikely*) – 7(*Very likely*). Five items assessed the extent to which the organization was perceived as motivated from organizational values to be egalitarian, representing perceived internal motives to display the diversity statement (e.g., "Believed it was important to their company's concept to be non-prejudiced"). Five items assessed the extent to which the organization was perceived as externally motivated to display the diversity statement to comply with external sources of pressure or influence, such as avoiding negative reactions or complying with social norms (e.g., "Felt pressure by their consumers to be inclusive"). Reliability was high for both internal ($\alpha = 0.85$) and external motives ($\alpha = 0.83$) at Time 1.

Time 2 motives repeated the same items from Time 1, now presented with the "present-day" statement. Participants were asked, "Here is the company website from TODAY. Now, how likely is it that EON Investments..." before reporting on perceived internal and external motivation items. Reliability was high for internal ($\alpha = 0.92$) and external motives ($\alpha = 0.84$) at Time 2.

4.1.3.2. DEI tenacity. Five items assessed the organization's perceived unwavering dedication and commitment to DEI ($\alpha = 0.85$). Items were rated on a 1(*Strongly disagree*) – 7(*Strongly agree*) Likert scale; a sample item includes, "I believe that this company would continue to support diversity, equity, and inclusion if it faced obstacles" (adapted from Thai & Nyland, 2024).

4.1.3.3. Anticipated belonging. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with eight statements ($\alpha = 0.95$) indicating anticipated belonging at the organization (Derricks et al., 2023) on a 1(*Strongly disagree*) – 7(*Strongly agree*) Likert scale. Sample items include "At EON Investments, I would feel respected," and "I would belong at EON Investments."

4.2. Results

A 3(Organization)x2(Time) mixed ANOVA was conducted for perceived internal and external motives. One-way ANOVAs (Organization: Persist, Dilute, Remove) and Tukey's post-hoc tests were conducted for other primary outcomes.

4.2.1. Perceived internal motives

A 3 × 2 ANOVA revealed significant main effects of Organization, $F(2,295) = 10.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.067$, and Time, $F(1,295) = 36.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.111$. These effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $F(2,295) = 17.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.107$. See Fig. 1.

Examining simple effects by Organization revealed a significant effect of Time in the Removal, $F(1,295) = 59.90, p < .001, d = 0.90$, and the Dilution organizations, $F(1,295) = 13.95, p < .001, d = 0.43$, but not the Persist organization, $F(1,295) = 0.63, p = .427, d = 0.09$ (Present: M

$= 5.30, SE = 0.15$; Two years ago: $M = 5.18, SE = 0.13$). Participants in the Removal ($M = 3.95, SE = 0.15$) and Dilution ($M = 4.42, SE = 0.15$) organizations perceived the organization as significantly less internally motivated to be non-prejudiced in the present day than two years ago (Removal: $M = 5.08, SE = 0.12$; Dilution: $M = 4.99, SE = 0.13$).

Examining simple effects instead by Time revealed a significant effect of Organization in the present day, $F(2,295) = 20.95, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.124$, but not two years ago, $F(2,295) = 0.62, p = .538, \eta_p^2 = 0.004$. All organizations were perceived as having moderately high internal motivations to be non-prejudiced two years ago. In the present day, the Persist organization was perceived as more internally motivated than both the Removal, $p < .001, d = 0.94, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.94, 1.77]$, and Dilution organizations, $p < .001, d = 0.63, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.46, 1.30]$. The Dilution organization was also rated as greater in internal motives than the Removal organization, $p = .025, d = 0.29, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.06, 0.89]$.

4.2.2. Perceived external motives

A 3 × 2 ANOVA revealed no main effect of Organization, $F(2,295) = 0.19, p = .831, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$, a significant main effect of Time, $F(1,295) = 34.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.104$, and a significant interaction, $F(2,295) = 10.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.065$. See Fig. 1. Examining simple effects by Organization revealed significant effects of Time in the Removal, $F(1,295) = 40.58, p < .001, d = 0.74$, and the Dilution organizations, $F(1,295) = 16.05, p < .001, d = 0.47$, but not the Persist organization, $F(1,295) = 0.01, p = .928, d = 0.00$ (Present: $M = 4.47, SE = 0.15$; Two years ago: $M = 4.46, SE = 0.14$). Participants in the Removal ($M = 5.06, SE = 0.13$) and Dilution ($M = 4.87, SE = 0.13$) organizations perceived the organization as significantly more externally motivated to be non-prejudiced two years ago than in the present day (Removal: $M = 4.07, SE = 0.15$; Dilution: $M = 4.22, SE = 0.15$).

Examining simple effects instead by Time revealed a significant effect of Organization two years ago, $F(2,295) = 5.28, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = 0.035$, but not in the present day, $F(2,295) = 1.84, p = .160, \eta_p^2 = 0.012$. Participants perceived that two years ago, the Persist organization had significantly lower external motivations than both the Dilution, $p = .033, d = 0.31, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.03, 0.78]$ and the Removal organizations, $p = .002, d = 0.45, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.23, 0.97]$. No significant difference emerged between the Dilution and Removal organization, $p = .303, d = 0.15, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.18, 0.56]$. Yet, despite now having varied statements in the present day, all organizations were rated as having moderate external motivations to be non-prejudiced.

4.2.3. DEI tenacity

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(2,295) = 17.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.106$. Participants perceived the Persist organization ($M = 4.58, SE = 0.12$) as having significantly greater DEI tenacity than the Dilution ($M = 3.79, SE = 0.16$), $p < .001, d = 0.57, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.32, 1.26]$, and the Removal organizations ($M = 3.43, SE = 0.14$), $p < .001, d = 0.87, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.68, 1.61]$. There was no significant difference between the Dilution and Removal organizations, $p = .167, d = 0.24, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.11, 0.82]$. See Fig. 2.

4.2.4. Anticipated belonging

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(2,295) = 15.23, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.094$. Post-hoc tests revealed that participants anticipated significant greater belonging in the Persist organization ($M = 5.09, SE = 0.12$) than the Dilution ($M = 4.40, SE = 0.14$), $p = .002, d = 0.53, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.31, 1.09]$, and the Removal organization ($M = 4.03, SE = 0.15$), $p < .001, d = 0.69, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [0.68, 1.45]$. There was no significant difference between the Dilution and Removal organizations, $p = .141, d = 0.24, 95\% CI_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.75, 0.01]$.

¹ Additional measures of organizational attraction, anticipated manager allyship, company trust, and perceived authentic motives were completed and are reported in the Supplement. Across these outcomes, people viewed the Persist organization more favorably than the Dilution and Removal organizations.

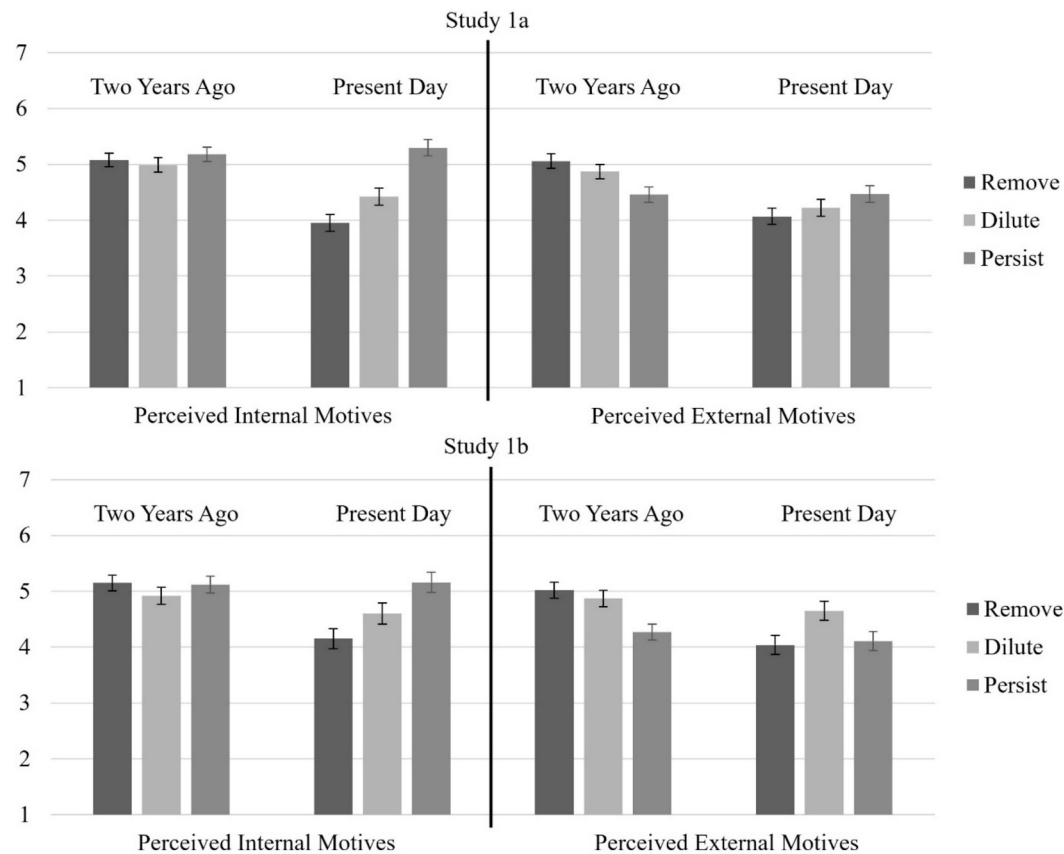


Fig. 1. Perceived motives by time and organization, Studies 1a and 1b. Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

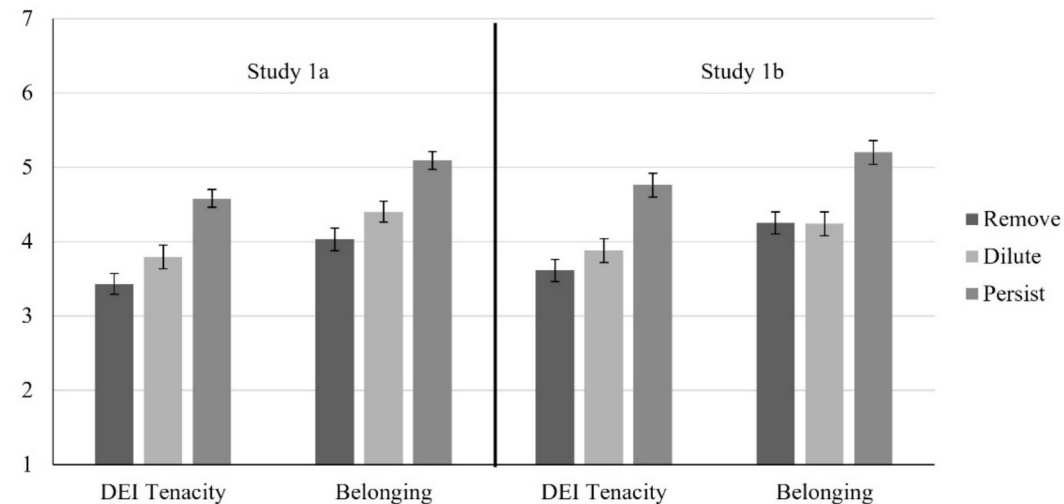


Fig. 2. Perceived DEI tenacity and anticipated belonging by organization, Study 1a and 1b. Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

5. Study 1b

Study 1b replicated the experimental paradigm from Study 1a, again investigating Black Americans. Study 1b design and hypotheses were

pre-registered (https://osf.io/ws7m9/?view_only=4acd35b28dcb4079b28042a0c8ae228f).² Note, this study also pre-registered and collected a sample of White cisgender-heterosexual men as a high-status group comparison. While these analyses, mirroring the pre-registration,

² The use of mixed ANOVAs to analyze perceived motives is a deviation from pre-registered analyses.

are reported in their entirety in the Supplement, we opted to only include results in the manuscript for Black Americans as they were ultimately the focus.³ Our hypotheses for Black Americans mirrored Study 1a. Note, the pre-registration also included two other primary variables (expected levels of anti-Black and anti-White discrimination at the organization). These are now reported in the Supplement as they were highly skewed.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants

As the study was pre-registered to compare White and Black perceivers, an a priori power analysis was conducted for 2×3 between-subjects ANOVAs and revealed a desired sample size of 390 for small-medium effect ($f = 0.20$) with 80% power. We recruited 502 U.S. participants from Prolific in case of exclusions, which exceeded the pre-registered amount of 450 for recruitment. Ultimately, 54 participants were removed from the analytic sample for not reporting their racial identity, gender identity, transgender status, or sexual orientation, which was relevant for our desired samples of White cisgender-heterosexual men and Black people, leaving an analytic sample of 448 participants. Of the excluded 54, 46 also failed two or more instructional attention check items.

From the retained 448 participants, 219 identified as Black Americans and are included in the below reported analyses. A sensitivity power analysis indicated this sample was sufficient to, with 80% power, capture a medium effect ($d = 0.42$) for a 3-cell between-subjects ANOVA and a small effect size ($d = 0.21$) for a mixed 2×3 ANOVA. Data was collected in March 2025.

5.1.2. Procedures

Procedures were identical to Study 1a. After viewing condition materials, all participants completed manipulation check questions. Participants who did not correctly respond to this item (Persist: $n = 57$, Dilution: $n = 69$, Removal: $n = 47$) were presented with the two website snapshots again, and all correctly completed the manipulation check the second time. Study 1a measures of perceived Time 1 ($\alpha = 0.85$) and Time 2 ($\alpha = 0.94$) internal motives, Time 1 ($\alpha = 0.81$) and Time 2 ($\alpha = 0.88$) external motives, DEI tenacity ($\alpha = 0.84$), and anticipated belonging ($\alpha = 0.94$) were included. Secondary measures of interest are reported in the Supplement.⁴

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Perceived internal motives

A $2(\text{Time}) \times 3(\text{Organization})$ mixed ANOVA revealed significant main effects of Organization, $F(2,216) = 3.25$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.029$, and Time, $F(1,216) = 19.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.084$, and a significant interaction, $F(2,216) = 10.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.089$.

Examining simple effects by Organization revealed a significant effect of Time for the Removal organization, $F(1,216) = 38.60$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.85$, but not the Dilution, $F(1,216) = 3.52$, $p = .062$, $d = 0.26$ (Present: $M = 4.60$, $SE = 0.19$; Two years ago: $M = 4.92$, $SE = 0.15$), or Persist organizations, $F(1,216) = 0.62$, $p = .432$, $d = 0.06$ (Present: $M = 5.16$, $SE = 0.18$; Two years ago: $M = 5.12$, $SE = 0.15$). Participants perceived the Removal organization as significantly less internally

motivated to be non-prejudiced in the present day ($M = 4.04$, $SE = 0.17$) than two years ago ($M = 5.02$, $SE = 0.14$). See Fig. 1.

Examining simple effects instead by Time revealed a significant effect of Organization in the present day, $F(2,216) = 19.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.067$, but not two years ago, $F(2,216) = 0.75$, $p = .473$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.007$. In the present day, the Persist organization was perceived as more internally motivated than both the Removal, $p < .001$, $d = 0.38$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.50, 1.52], and the Dilution organization, $p = .034$, $d = 0.66$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.04, 1.09]. The Removal and Dilution organizations did not significantly differ, $p = .089$, $d = 0.27$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.96, 0.07].

5.2.2. Perceived external motives

A $2(\text{Time}) \times 3(\text{Organization})$ mixed ANOVA revealed significant main effects of Organization, $F(2,216) = 5.13$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.045$, and Time, $F(1,216) = 17.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.075$, and a significant interaction, $F(2,216) = 6.04$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.053$.

Examining simple effects by Organization revealed a significant effect of time in the Removal organization, $F(1,216) = 28.65$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$, but not the Dilution, $F(1,216) = 1.26$, $p = .263$, $d = 0.16$ (Present: $M = 4.65$, $SE = 0.17$, Two years ago: $M = 4.87$, $SE = 0.15$), or Persist organizations, $F(1,216) = 0.79$, $p = .376$, $d = 0.13$ (Present: $M = 4.11$, $SE = 0.17$; Two years ago: $M = 4.27$, $SE = 0.14$). Participants perceived the Removal organization as significantly more externally motivated two years ago ($M = 5.02$, $SE = 0.14$) than in the present ($M = 4.04$, $SE = 0.17$).

Examining simple effects instead by Time revealed a significant effect of Organization two years ago, $F(2,216) = 7.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.068$, and in the present day, $F(2,216) = 3.78$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.034$. Two years ago, participants perceived the Persist organization as having significantly lower external motivations than both the Dilution, $p = .004$, $d = 0.48$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.19, 0.98], and the Removal organizations, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$, [0.36, 1.14]. Perceptions of the Dilution and Removal organization two years ago did not significantly differ, $p = .434$, $d = 0.13$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.24, 0.55]. In present day, participants perceived the Persist organization as having significantly lower external motivations than the Dilution organization, $p = .027$, $d = 0.39$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.06, 1.02], but not the Removal organization, $p = .774$, $d = 0.05$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.53, 0.40]. Participants also perceived the Dilution organization as having significantly greater external motives than the Removal organization in the present day, $p = .004$, $d = 0.41$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.14, 1.08].

5.2.3. DEI tenacity

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(2,216) = 15.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.123$. Participants perceived the Persist organization as having significantly greater DEI tenacity ($M = 4.76$, $SE = 0.16$) than the Dilution ($M = 3.88$, $SE = 0.16$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.71$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.35, 1.41], and the Removal organization ($M = 3.61$, $SE = 0.15$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.87$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.64, 1.67]. There was no significant difference between the Dilution and Removal organizations, $p = .432$, $d = 0.19$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.80, 0.25]. See Fig. 1.

5.2.4. Anticipated belonging

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(2,216) = 12.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.100$. Participants anticipated significantly greater belonging in the Persist organization ($M = 5.20$, $SE = 0.16$) compared to the Dilution ($M = 4.24$, $SE = 0.16$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.75$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.42, 1.49], and the Removal organizations ($M = 4.25$, $SE = 0.15$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.74$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.43, 1.47]. The Dilution and Removal organizations did not significantly differ, $p = .999$, $d = 0.01$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.52, 0.54].

5.3. Study 1a and 1b discussion

Studies 1a and 1b largely replicated each other. Organizations that diluted or removed their diversity statements two years later were

³ Results for White cisgender heterosexual men largely mirrored Black participants, though Black Americans generally had more positive evaluations of organizations that persisted. See Supplement for all results.

⁴ In addition to the Supplemental measures from Study 1a, Study 1b also measured anticipated organizational financial gain, anticipated customer service use, perceived norm compliance motives, and anticipated organization DEI norms. As in Study 1a, across measures, people generally viewed the Persist organization more favorably than the Dilution and Removal organizations.

evaluated as having fewer internal motives and greater external motives than when they previously had a diversity statement. Organizations that persevered with their diversity statements were perceived as more internally motivated in the present day, and less externally motivated in the past, than the organizations that removed or diluted their statements. Further, in line with hypotheses, organizations who diluted or removed their diversity statements elicited similar (low) expectations of anticipated belonging at the organization and DEI tenacity. Meaning, abstracting diversity to the level of the “individual,” rather than protected social groups, was akin in its impact on Black Americans as removing a diversity statement entirely. Study 1a-1b findings further reveal the nuanced ways in which attributions of internal *and* external motives are shaped; Removal or dilution of a diversity statement generally shaped perceptions of internal motives in the present (but not the past) and perceptions of external motives in the past (but not the present) relative to perseverance.

Finally, in Studies 1a-1b, Black Americans evaluated an organization that removed a DEI statement as less externally motivated to be non-prejudiced in the present than in the past, which may appear counter to our hypotheses. However, we note that these findings may simply indicate that people do not perceive the organization as motivated to be non-prejudiced in the present, and thus assessing external motives is counter intuitive. Further, the organization that removed its DEI statement was rated as lower in DEI tenacity and anticipated belonging, supporting our general hypothesis that removing a DEI statement is associated with perceptions of a less genuine commitment.

6. Study 2

Study 2 sought to examine if perceptions of organizational perseverance was impacted by if the organization was responding to (or ignoring) broader societal norms; here, we considered if salience of a state law suggesting DEI efforts are not permitted would buffer against the detrimental effects of an organization failing to persevere. Specifically, past research has suggested that organizations who engaged in normative diversity signaling (i.e., having a diversity statement when doing so was the norm across organizations) were perceived as more externally motivated in their DEI commitments compared to organizations whose DEI commitments were present in the absence of a norm (Chaney et al., *in press*). That is, norms across organizations represent an external driver for DEI commitments that lay people recognize and include in their attribution processes (Moser & Wiley, 2025).

In the present study we sought to examine if lay perceivers similarly recognize legislation against DEI commitments as an external pressure *against* DEI and include this information in their attribution processes for organizations who counter (or comply) with this external driver to remove DEI commitments. We contend that organizations that persevere in their DEI commitments, countering broader societal pressures (here, legislation against DEI commitments that may be considered akin to an injunctive norm), would be perceived as more internally and less externally motivated than an organization that perseveres in their commitment when no such challenges to DEI commitments are present, and in turn evaluate the organization more favorably. In contrast, we expected that perceivers would continue to negatively evaluate organizations (i.e., not tenacious, greater external and/or fewer internal motives) that removed or diluted their commitments to DEI over time, but that these evaluations would be *less negative* overall if failed perseverance was due to compliance with legislation compared to when not driven by legislative compliance. In the present study we considered legislation against DEI commitments to be indicative of a broader anti-DEI norm, and thus perseverance would indicate counter-normative behavior while removing or diluting a commitment would indicate normative behavior. Study 2 was pre-registered: https://osf.io/akwz7/overview?view_only=5b4252a6121e444b86d5524ea4130c5b.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants

An a priori power analysis for a 2×3 between-subjects ANOVA revealed a desired sample size of 394 to detect a medium effect ($d = 0.36$) with 90% power. We recruited 450 Black participants from Prolific in exchange for compensation in June 2025. However, 24 were excluded for failing multiple attention checks and 10 for not identifying as Black during the survey, resulting in an analytic sample of 416 Black participants. See Table 1 for demographics. A sensitivity power analysis indicated this sample was sufficient to, with 80% power, capture a small effect ($d = 0.22$) for a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ mixed ANOVA and a small-medium effect for a 2×3 between-subjects ANOVA ($d = 0.30$).

6.1.2. Procedure

Study 2 mirrored Study 1 except that in between participants viewing the organization's webpage from two years ago and the present day, participants saw information about the unnamed U.S. state the organization operated in. Across conditions, this included generic information such as how many other large investment organizations were operating in the state and changes in the state population in the last two years. Only in the DEI Legislation condition, the materials also indicated: “The state recently proposed a law saying, “in the state of [redacted], so called diversity, equity, and inclusion policies are considered discriminatory and thus unlawful.” Critically, we opted to use language about a proposed, rather than enacted, state law so that the Persist organization was not presented as actively violating a state law. The remainder of the survey and measures were the same as Study 1 and all scales indicated adequate reliability (T1 internal motives, $\alpha = 0.82$; T1 external motives, $\alpha = 0.85$; T2 internal motives, $\alpha = 0.90$; T2 external motives, $\alpha = 0.85$; DEI tenacity, $\alpha = 0.82$, anticipated belonging, $\alpha = 0.89$).⁵

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Perceived internal motivations

The 2(Time) $\times$ 2(State Context) $\times$ 3(Organization) mixed ANOVA for perceived internal motives revealed significant main effects of Time, $F(1,410) = 26.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.062$, and Organization, $F(2,410) = 9.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.046$, and no effect of State Context, $F(1,410) = 0.51$, $p = .475$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.010$. The Organization $\times$ State Context interaction was not significant, $F(2,410) = 0.98$, $p = .376$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.005$, nor was the Time $\times$ State Context interaction, $F(1,410) = 2.23$, $p = .136$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.005$. The Time $\times$ Organization condition was significant, $F(2,410) = 15.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.069$. The three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,410) = 1.14$, $p = .321$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.006$.

We first probed the significant Time $\times$ Organization interaction by Organization. The Removal organization was rated as having greater internal motivations two years ago ($M = 5.33$, $SE = 0.09$) than in the present ($M = 4.46$, $SE = 0.11$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.64, 1.10]. There were no simple effects of Time for the Dilution (Two years ago: $M = 5.23$, $SE = 0.09$; Present: $M = 5.06$, $SE = 0.11$), $p = .144$, $d = 0.13$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [−0.06, 0.40], or Persist organizations (Two years ago: $M = 5.40$, $SE = 0.09$; Present: $M = 5.39$, $SE = 0.11$), $p = .933$, $d = 0.01$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [−0.22, 0.24].

Probing the interaction instead by Time revealed no simple effect of Organization two years ago, $F(2,410) = 0.98$, $p = .375$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.005$, but a

⁵ Additional Study 2 measures mirrored Study 1b. Again, participants generally rated the Persist organization more favorably than the Dilution and Removal organizations. Significant main effects of State Context emerged for organizational trust, norm compliance motives, and anticipated service use, such that participants reported greater organizational trust, greater norm compliance motives, but less service use in the control state context compared to the Anti-DEI state context. No significant interactions emerged.

significant simple effect in the present, $F(2,410) = 18.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.085$. In the present, the Persist organization was perceived as having greater internal motivations than the Dilution, $p = .029, d = 0.21, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.04, 0.63]$, and Removal organizations, $p < .001, d = 0.76, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.63, 1.23]$. The Removal organization was perceived as having fewer internal motivations than the Dilution organization, $p < .001, d = 0.45, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.30, 0.90]$. See Fig. 3.

6.2.2. Perceived external motivations

The 2(Time) x 2(State Context) x 3(Organization) mixed ANOVA for perceived external motives revealed significant main effects of Time, $F(1,410) = 13.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.032$, and Organization, $F(2,410) = 4.72, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = 0.023$, but no effect of State Context, $F(1,410) = 1.04, p = .308, \eta_p^2 = 0.003$. The Organization x State Context interaction was not significant, $F(2,410) = 0.21, p = .813, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$, nor was the Time x State Context interaction, $F(1,410) = 0.65, p = .422, \eta_p^2 = 0.002$. The Time x Organization condition was significant, $F(2,410) = 17.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.077$. The three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,410) = 0.18, p = .835, \eta_p^2 = 0.008$.

We first probed the significant Time x Organization interaction by Organization. The Removal organization was rated as having greater external motivations two years ago ($M = 4.93, SE = 0.10$) than in the present ($M = 4.17, SE = 0.11$), $p < .001, d = 0.60, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.55, 0.99]$. There were no simple effects of Time for the Dilution (Two years ago: $M = 4.75, SE = 0.10$; Present: $M = 4.82, SE = 0.10$), $p = .517, d = 0.06, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.29, 0.15]$, or Persist organizations (Two years ago: $M = 4.41, SE = 0.10$; Present: $M = 4.40, SE = 0.11$), $p = .917, d = 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.20, 0.23]$.

Probing the interaction instead by Time revealed significant simple effects of Organization two years ago, $F(2,410) = 6.87, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.032$, and in the present, $F(2,410) = 9.36, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.044$. Two years ago, the Persist organization was perceived as having significantly fewer external motivations than both the Removal, $p < .001, d = 0.43, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.24, 0.80]$ and Dilution organizations, $p = .017, d = 0.30, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.06, 0.62]$. The Dilution and Removal organization did not significantly differ, $p = .205, d = 0.16, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.46, 0.10]$. In the present, the Persist organization was perceived as having significantly fewer external motivations than the Dilution, $p = .006, d = 0.33, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.12, 0.72]$, but not the Removal organization, $p = .124, d = 0.17, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.54, 0.07]$. The Removal organization was perceived as having significantly fewer external motivations than the Dilution organization, $p < .001, d = 0.50, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.35, 0.96]$.

6.2.3. DEI tenacity

The ANOVA revealed significant main effects of Organization, $F(2,410) = 24.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.106$, and State Context, $F(1,410) = 5.16, p = .024, \eta_p^2 = 0.012$, and no significant interaction, $F(2,410) = 0.91, p = .402, \eta_p^2 = 0.004$. Organizations were rated as more tenacious in their DEI commitments in the control context ($M = 4.40, SE = 0.09$) than the anti-DEI context ($M = 4.13, SE = 0.09$). Additionally, the Persist organization ($M = 4.85, SE = 0.10$) was perceived as more tenacious than the Dilution ($M = 4.06, SE = 0.10$), $p < .001, d = 0.66, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.45, 1.14]$, and the Removal organizations ($M = 3.88, SE = 0.11$), $p < .001, d = 0.82, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.65, 1.34]$. Perceptions of the Removal and Dilution organizations did not significantly differ, $p = .354, d = 0.16, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.14, 0.55]$.

6.2.4. Anticipated belonging

The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(2,410) = 15.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.071$, no effect of State Context, $F(1,410) = 2.08, p = .150, \eta_p^2 = 0.005$, and no significant interaction, $F(2,410) = 1.45, p = .236, \eta_p^2 = 0.007$. Participants indicated moderate anticipated belonging across state contexts (Control: $M = 5.00, SE = 0.08$; Anti-DEI: $M = 4.84, SE = 0.08$). As in Studies 1a-1b, Black participants anticipated greater belonging in the Persist organization ($M =$

$5.35, SE = 0.09$) compared to the Dilution ($M = 4.78, SE = 0.09$), $p < .001, d = 0.54, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.25, 0.87]$, and Removal organizations ($M = 4.65, SE = 0.10$), $p < .001, d = 0.68, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [0.41, 1.03]$. Perceptions of the Removal and Dilution organizations did not significantly differ, $p = .447, d = 0.13, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{meandiff}} [-0.15, 0.47]$.

6.3. Discussion

Study 2 largely replicated Study 1. Black participants anticipated greater belonging at organizations that persisted, perceived a persisting organization as more committed to DEI, and perceived greater internal motivations for their present-day (but not past) DEI commitment compared to organizations who failed to persist (diluted or removed). Persist organizations were also perceived as having fewer external motivations in the past compared to both organizations that later failed to persevere, and fewer present-day external motivations compared to the Dilution organization. These effects remained true even if the organization removed or diluted its DEI statement seemingly in response to proposed state legislation. State context only significantly impacted perceived DEI tenacity, such that all organizations were viewed as more tenacious in the control state context compared to the anti-DEI context. Finally, we note that as in Study 1, participants again rated the organization that removed a DEI statement as having greater external motivations in the past than the present. However, this organization was rated as significantly lower in DEI tenacity and anticipated belonging, supporting our belief that participants may simply be indicating lower external motivations in the present due to a perceived *lack* of motivation to be non-prejudiced. We return to this point in the general discussion.

Notably, it is possible that participants were already aware of broad anti-DEI efforts in the United States, and thus our attempted manipulation did not significantly shape perceptions of the organization. Yet, we argue that perceptions of organizational DEI commitments that fail to persist over time are perceived as less genuine *regardless* of external forces. Nevertheless, both of these explanations ultimately suggest that failed perseverance contributes to attributions of greater external motivations in the past (and lower internal motivations in the present) that are associated with Black Americans' perceptions of an organization. Yet, as we did not include manipulation checks on perceived norms, we encourage future research that directly assesses awareness of current societal trends. We aimed to correct this in Study 3.

7. Study 3

We again sought to examine if recognition of a DEI regression norm across organizations would buffer against the negative perceptions of organizations that fail to persevere in their DEI commitments. In Study 3, we more clearly manipulated norms by indicating that the norm across organizations was to continue displaying values publicly on their websites, that the norm across organizations was to no longer display values publicly on their websites, or by providing information about norms across organizations without reference to time. Study 3 thus sought to clearly manipulate descriptive norms of DEI commitment stability or regression.

We again hypothesized that an organization that persisted in its DEI commitment would be perceived as more internally and/or externally motivated, as having greater DEI tenacity, and facilitating greater anticipated belonging for Black Americans compared to an organization that removed its diversity statement. Despite Study 2 findings, we again hypothesized that perceivers would continue to negatively evaluate organizations that removed their commitments to DEI over time, but that these evaluations would be *less negative* overall if failed perseverance was in-step with norms across other organizations to regress compared to when a stable norm or no norm information was presented. Notably, we did not include the dilution condition as it did not significantly vary from the removal condition in previous studies and to preserve statistical power. Study 3 was not pre-registered.

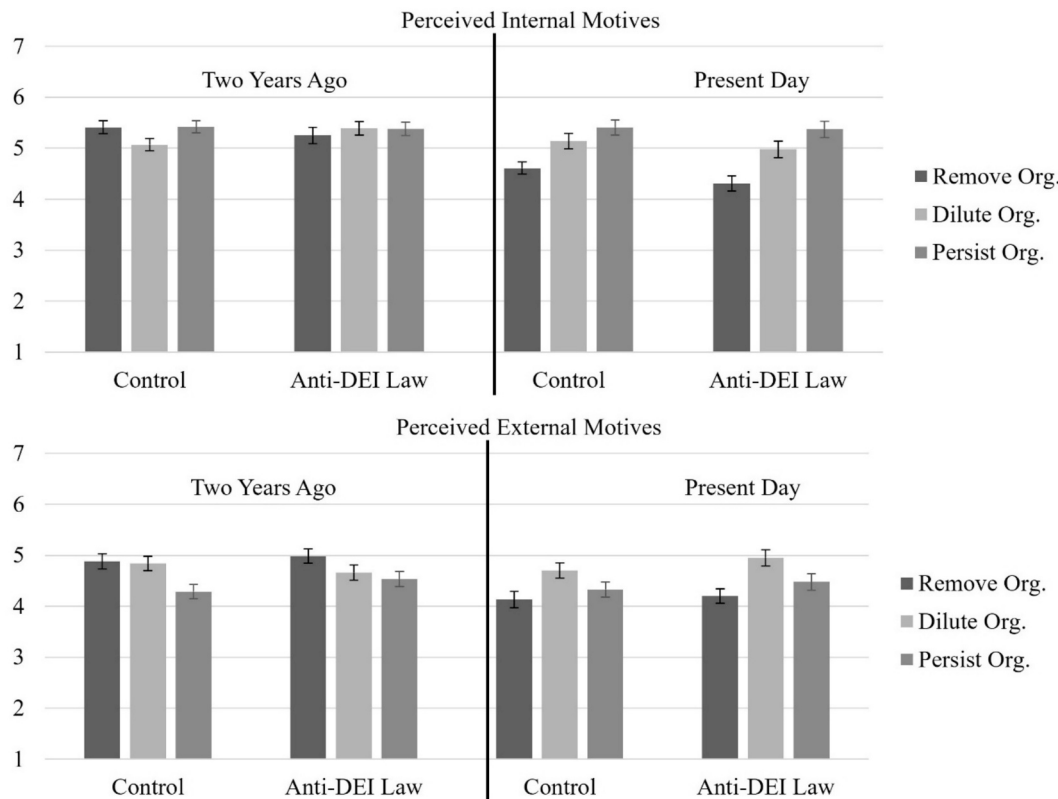


Fig. 3. Study 2 perceived internal and external motivation by condition and time. Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

7.1. Method

7.1.1. Participants

An a priori power analysis for a 3×2 between-subjects ANOVA revealed a desired sample size of 432 to detect a small effect ($d = 0.30$) with 80% power. In all, 452 Black U.S. participants were recruited from Prolific in October 2025. An analytic sample of 448 was retained (one excluded for not identifying as Black in the survey and three for failing multiple attention checks). See Table 1 for demographics. A sensitivity power analysis indicated this sample was sufficient for a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ mixed ANOVA, with 80% power, to detect a small effect ($d = 0.17$) and for a 2×3 between-subjects ANOVA to detect a small-medium effect ($d = 0.29$).⁶

7.1.2. Procedure

Study 3 mirrored Study 1 with the following exceptions. First, after providing consent participants were informed they would read a news article and answer questions. Participants were randomly assigned to read either a control, stable norm, or regression norm article about how organizations use websites to shape their brand image. In all articles, participants read that in 2023, “87% of organizations publicly stated a commitment to diversity and inclusion on their website...50% of companies include information about efforts to combat climate change, and 49% include information about the company’s charitable donations.” In the *Control* condition article, no information on new trends was presented. In the *Stable Norm* condition article, participants also read that in July 2025 no significant changes were found, such that organization websites publicly stated values largely mirrored 2023. In the *Regression Norm* article, participants instead read that in July 2025, “only 50% publicly stated a commitment to diversity and inclusion, but that there

was no significant change in the percentage of companies that stated values about climate change or charitable donations (articles adapted from Chaney et al., in press; presented in full in Supplement).

After reading the articles, participants completed questions about the content of the articles before advancing, including ensuring a correct response to the “main findings of the reported study” assessed on a multiple-choice question. In the *Control Norm* condition, the response options were Organizations’ websites... either “display information about their values” (correct response) or “do not display information about their values.” In the *Stable Norm* and *Regression Norm* conditions, the response options were: “continue to display information about their values” (*Stable Norm* correct response), “are less likely to display information about their values today than two years ago” (*Regression Norm* correct response), or “rarely include information about their values.” Participants who responded incorrectly (*Control*: $n = 15$, *Stable*: $n = 23$, *Regress*: $n = 26$) reviewed the article again and all participants correctly completed this manipulation check on the second attempt.⁷

The remaining procedures were identical to Study 1; participants reviewed an organization’s website in the past and present, and completed measures of perceived motives, DEI tenacity, and anticipated belonging (T1 internal motives, $\alpha = 0.85$, T2 internal motives, $\alpha = 0.95$; T1 external motives, $\alpha = 0.87$; T2 external motives, $\alpha = 0.89$; DEI tenacity, $\alpha = 0.89$; anticipated belonging, $\alpha = 0.94$).⁸

⁷ Slightly higher error rates in the *Stable* and *Regression Norm* condition may reflect that three response options were provided in these conditions compared to two in the *Control* condition.

⁸ Supplemental measures for Study 3 mirror Study 2’s Supplemental measures. Across measures, organizational perceptions were more favorable in the *Persist* condition compared to the *Remove* condition. No effects of Norm Condition emerged, nor did any interactions.

⁶ Due to an error, this study was not pre-registered.

7.2. Results

7.2.1. Perceived internal motivations

A 2(Time) x 2(Organization) x 3(Norm) mixed ANOVA was conducted. There were significant main effects of Time, $F(1,442) = 109.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.199$, and Organization, $F(1,442) = 111.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.202$, but not Norm, $F(2,442) = 2.62$, $p = .074$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$. The Time x Organization, $F(1,442) = 174.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.283$, and Time x Norm interactions were significant, $F(2,442) = 4.13$, $p = .017$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.018$, but not the Organization x Norm interaction, $F(2,442) = 0.94$, $p = .392$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.004$. Finally, these were qualified by a significant three-way interaction, $F(2,442) = 3.15$, $p = .044$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.014$. See Fig. 4.

We probed the significant three-way interaction. The effect of Norm condition was not significant for the Persist organization two years ago, $F(2,442) = 1.39$, $p = .250$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.006$, or in the present, $F(2,442) = 0.47$, $p = .627$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.002$. Across time, the Persist organization was perceived as having high internal motives. Yet, for the Remove organization, the effect of Norm condition was significant both when evaluating motives two years ago, $F(2,442) = 4.23$, $p = .015$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.019$, and in the present, $F(2,442) = 3.55$, $p = .030$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.016$. When evaluating the Remove organization two years ago, participants perceived significantly fewer internal motives in the Stable Norm condition compared to the Control Norm, $p = .013$, $d = 0.39$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.10, 0.86], and the Regression Norm conditions, $p = .015$, $d = 0.33$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.09, 0.81]. There was no significant difference between the Control and Regression Norm conditions, $p = .869$, $d = 0.03$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.36, 0.43]. In evaluating the present-day Remove organization, participants reported significantly fewer internal motives in the Regression Norm condition compared to the Control Norm, $p = .010$, $d = 0.38$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [0.15, 1.10], but not the Stable Norm condition, $p = .065$, $d = 0.24$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.03, 0.85]. There was also no significant difference between the Stable and Control Norm conditions, $p = .365$, $d = 0.13$, 95% CI_{meandiff} [-0.67, 0.25].

7.2.2. Perceived external motivations

A 2(Time) x 2(Organization) x 3(Norm) mixed ANOVA was conducted. There were significant main effects of Time, $F(1,442) = 81.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.155$, and Organization, $F(1,442) = 4.77$, $p = .030$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$, but not Norm, $F(2,442) = 2.51$, $p = .083$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$. The Time x Organization interaction was significant, $F(1,442) = 77.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.149$, but not the Time x Norm, $F(2,442) = 1.91$, $p = .150$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.009$, or the Organization x Norm interactions, $F(2,442) = 1.15$, $p = .318$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.005$. Finally, the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,442) = 2.27$, $p = .104$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.010$. See Fig. 4.

Examining the significant Time x Organization interaction by Organization revealed no simple effect of Time in the Persist organization, $F(1,442) = 0.02$, $p = .888$, $d = 0.02$, but a significant effect in the Remove organization, $F(1,442) = 162.53$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.21$, such that the Remove organization was perceived as having significantly greater external motivations two years ago ($M = 5.14$, $SE = 0.09$) than in the present ($M = 3.78$, $SE = 0.11$). The Persist organization was rated as having moderate external motivations across time (Two years ago, $M = 4.21$, $SE = 0.09$; Present day, $M = 4.19$, $SE = 0.11$). Examining the significant interaction instead by Time revealed significant effects of Organization two years ago, $F(1,442) = 52.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$, and in the present, $F(1,442) = 7.32$, $p = .007$, $d = 0.26$. The Remove organization was perceived as having significantly greater external motivations than the Persist organization in the past. Conversely, the Persist organization was rated as having significantly greater external motivations than the Remove organization in the present.

7.2.3. DEI tenacity

The 2(Organization) x 3(Norm) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(1,442) = 220.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.332$, no main effect of Norm, $F(2,442) = 2.64$, $p = .073$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$, and no significant interaction, $F(2,442) = 2.23$, $p = .109$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.010$. Participants reported significantly greater DEI tenacity in the Persist organization ($M = 4.88$, $SE = 0.09$) than the Remove organization ($M = 3.08$, $SE = 0.09$). DEI

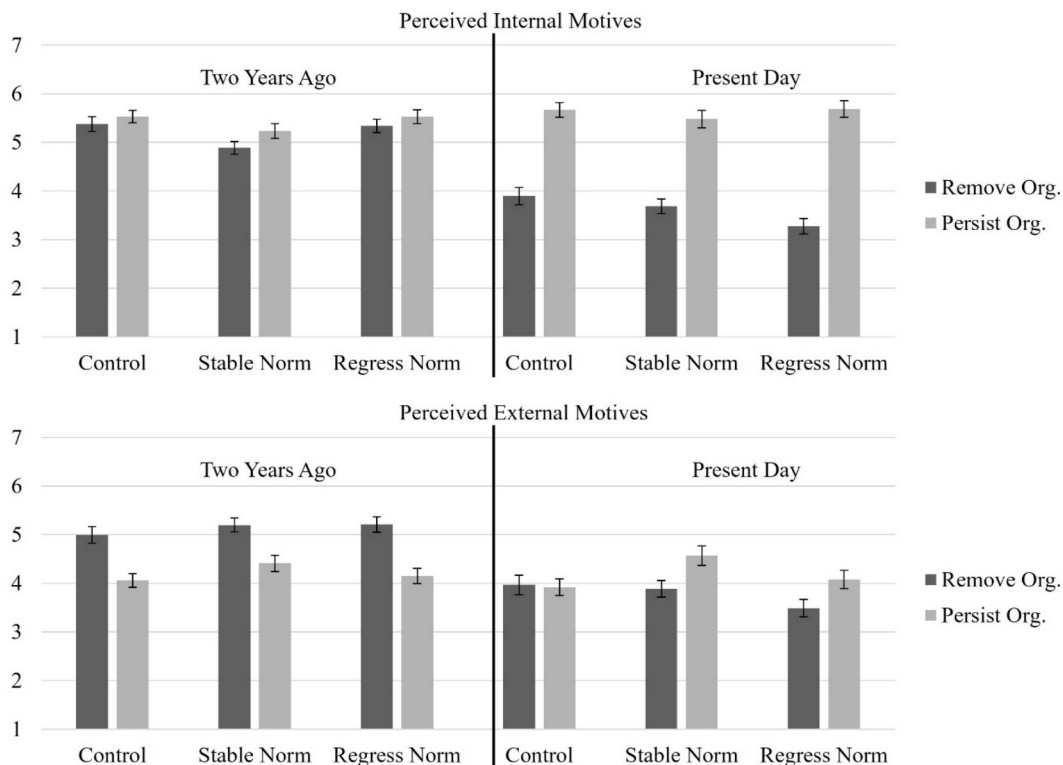


Fig. 4. Study 3 perceived internal and external motives by condition and time. Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

tenacity moderate in the Control ($M = 4.17$, $SE = 0.11$), Stable ($M = 3.84$, $SE = 0.10$), and Regress ($M = 3.92$, $SE = 0.11$) Norm conditions.

7.2.4. Anticipated belonging

The 2(Organization) $\times$ 3(Norm) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Organization, $F(1,442) = 123.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.219$, no main effect of Norm, $F(2,442) = 0.95$, $p = .388$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.004$, and no significant interaction, $F(2,442) = 1.23$, $p = .295$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.006$. Participants reported significantly greater belonging in the Persist organization ($M = 5.13$, $SE = 0.09$) than the Remove organization ($M = 3.80$, $SE = 0.08$). Anticipated belonging was moderate in the Control ($M = 4.57$, $SE = 0.10$), Stable ($M = 4.37$, $SE = 0.10$), and Regress Norm conditions ($M = 4.46$, $SE = 0.10$).

7.3. Discussion

Study 3 largely replicated findings in previous studies; Black participants viewed an organization that persisted in its DEI statement as more internally motivated in the present and less externally motivated in the past, more tenacious in its DEI commitment, and anticipated greater belonging at the organization compared to an organization that removed its DEI statement. Norms across organizations had little effect on the outcomes, in line with Study 2 findings. Here, an effect of norms emerged only in assessing perceived internal motivations, such that an organization that failed to persevere was perceived as less internally motivated in the present if a regression norm was salient compared to when no norm (but not a stable norm) was salient, but more internally motivated in the past when a regression norm (or no norm) was salient compared to when a stable norm was salient. Yet, these effects were small and did not emerge across other outcomes, suggesting that evaluations of organizations that remove their DEI statements were minimally impacted by the explicit manipulation of organizational norms.

Notably, it is possible that the mere manipulation of an organization removing a DEI statement signaled a norm of regression, especially as all participants had been exposed to a discussion of organizational norms via our manipulation article. This potential cannot be teased apart from the present study, and we encourage future research to examine how organizational norms are inferred from actions of a single company. Further, participants may have already been aware of a norm of regression unfolding in the U.S. While such knowledge may have weakened the stable or control norm manipulations, this likely would have amplified our manipulation of regression.

8. General discussion

Past research has highlighted that people and organizations can (and do) engage in activism and allyship in performative or externally motivated ways, particularly when doing so is advantageous for their reputation or bottom line (e.g., Droogendyk et al., 2016; Gorski & Erakat, 2019; Kutlaca & Radke, 2023; Thai & Nylund, 2024). While engaging in normative DEI efforts can signal that motivations are not merely internally motivated (Chaney et al., in press; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025), the breadth of engagement can still promote identity safety, in part due to the perceptions that many people are *trying* to be non-prejudiced (Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). While the 2020 “racial reckoning” in the U.S. signaled a shift toward normative engagement in DEI efforts, the U.S. has entered a period of DEI regression. The present research thus examined perceptions of organizations who persist, dilute, or remove their commitments over time, especially when norms shift.

Integrating theoretical perspectives on identity safety cues and attributions, the present research aimed to better understand how the larger context (here, behavior across time) impacts assessments of

organizational identity safety cues. Across four samples of Black Americans in 2025, we demonstrate that organizations that persevere in their support for DEI over a two year period are viewed as more genuinely motivated to be non-prejudiced (particularly less externally motivated in the past and more internally motivated in the present), perceived as more tenacious in their DEI commitments, and associated with greater anticipated belonging for Black Americans compared to organizations that remove or dilute their commitment over two years (Studies 1–3). Indeed, organizations that merely diluted their DEI statements were generally evaluated similarly to organizations that completely removed their statements (Studies 1–2). Moreover, these effects were largely stable regardless of if organizations were responding to shifting norms, such as (complying with) anti-DEI state legislation (Study 2) or explicitly stated norms of other organizations (Study 3). Together, these results demonstrate that perseverance shapes perceptions of identity safety cues.

These findings demonstrate the need to expand our understanding of identity safety cues beyond either being present or absent, but to understand the broader context surrounding such cues, including not only norms of their presence (or absence; Chaney et al., in press; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025), but also their perseverance. Previous research on consistency has found that organizations that have DEI statements for longer in their past are evaluated more favorably than those that have added their statements more recently (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024). Other examinations of consistency have considered, for example, an organization that states a commitment to LGBTQ+ people only during Pride month (White & Carter, 2026) or when interpersonal engagement in activism is not consistent (Ciordas et al. in press). Further, consumers state that consistency is important in judging the authenticity of an organization's stated values (Moehl & Friedman, 2022). Yet, these examinations largely highlight instances where organizations or people may believe they have something to gain from their engagement in allyship or identity safety cue enactment (e.g., bottom-line, reputation). Indeed, a belief that a person or organization may benefit from their actions facilitates discounting (Kelley, 1973; Moser & Wiley, 2025). As constructed here, perseverance captures continued identity safety cue enactment *even in the face of potential costs*. Thus, perseverance is in line with the augmentation principle of attribution theories (Kelley, 1973; Moser & Wiley, 2025). While some organizations may abandon DEI efforts to survive a challenging climate or reduce potential backlash, those that persevere may be considered as acknowledging that a commitment to DEI is worth more than such potential costs. Thus, perseverance of identity safety cues is a meaningful and distinct facet of consistency.

From a practical standpoint, the present findings demonstrate that current, persisting diversity statements are particularly powerful identity safety cues given the current climate of DEI regression, in part because they are perceived as more internally motivated in the present. These findings also suggest that perceptions of organizations can update over time, with knowledge of historical behaviors shaping perceptions of their present behavior. For example, knowledge that a retail company such as Target that once celebrated marginalized social groups but then regressed in their efforts during a shifting climate, may shape perceptions of that company if they were to attempt to *again* celebrate marginalized social groups in the future. That is, updating perceptions of an organization's motivations in the past may linger into the future if that organization again changes course. Indeed, organizations that celebrate a past that was exclusionary can signal threat to marginalized groups (Wallace et al., 2024). Moreover, in the present, that organization's decision to regress in their DEI commitments may even make the organization an identity threatening context in the present.

Further, we highlight that perceptions of internal and external motivations to be non-prejudiced are largely impacted independently. For example, in Studies 1a-1b, perseverance (versus removal or dilution) impacted perceptions of internal motivations in the present (but not the past), and generally impacted perceptions of external motivations in the

past (but not the present). As in past research, perceptions of internal and external motives were generally not negatively correlated (Chaney et al., in press; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025), and thus assessing only one or creating an index obfuscates the richness of lay attributions.⁹ Recognizing the unique effects of context on internal and external motives acknowledges the complex processes that are undertaken to determine “genuine” motives. We urge future research that engages with attribution theories to recognize (and capture) these independent perceptions of motives.

Additionally, we note that across studies, organizations were generally perceived to be high in external motivations. This may be specific to organizations (rather than individuals), who, at times, stand to gain both in reputation and financially from DEI efforts; perceivers may assume that in a society driven by capitalism, organizations have external motivations for most behaviors. Nevertheless, organizations with a diversity statement, particularly a statement that persevered, were also perceived as relatively high in internal motivations. Thus, even organizations that may be perceived as having more “genuine” motives were not without external motivations, but rather they also had (greater) internal motivations. Future research is needed to better determine how the unique relationship between perceptions of internal and external motives are discerned, such as if specific identity-relevant cues are more likely to shape attributions of internal (versus external) motives, and how lay perceivers grapple with “genuine” motives for organizations that are ultimately profit-driven.

9. Future directions

This research was conducted in the U.S. in 2025 when daily news revealed that organizations, universities, states, and the federal government were rapidly abandoning their DEI commitments. This environmental context may have amplified the current effects as people were likely aware of this actively unfolding phenomenon and aware that organizations were failing to persevere in their DEI commitments often in advance of any legal or social demands to do so. Yet, we believe that this timing is a strength of this research, rather than a limitation, as it allowed us to capture the in-the-moment reactions and beliefs of Black Americans. Nevertheless, we encourage future research to replicate these experiments in national contexts where DEI regression is not currently the norm. For example, while we found limited evidence that making salient trends across organizations or proposed legalization impacted perceptions of persevering (or regressing) organizations, such effects may emerge amidst a more neutral backdrop.

Notably, we asked participants to assess perceived motives for both two years ago and the present day back-to-back, rather than assessing perceived motives for two years ago and then introducing the present-day website and assessing perceived present-day motives. This could have evoked demand effects. However, this decision was made so that we did not invoke thoughts about perceived motives for the viewing of the present-day website (as participants had not yet completed such measures). Further, we believe that assessments of motives are dynamic and opted to capture how perceptions of an organization's past behaviors can be changed in the present by the current behavior. Choosing to assess perceived motives just in the past would not have allowed us to capture this dynamic updating. This process may mirror how attributions function in-situ, perhaps especially for more novel targets rather than targets frequently engaged with. Nevertheless, we encourage future research to consider alternative approaches that may limit participant demand effects.

This research focused on Black Americans, though we suspect that such effects on perceived motivations would emerge with dominant and other marginalized social groups (see Supplement for Study 1b full

reporting). That is, assessments of motives are likely to depend less on one's identity, and instead on awareness of the various internal and external processes that might motivate someone to enact (or remove) an identity safety cue. For example, the extent that one believes an organization could benefit (financially or reputationally) from having a diversity statement may shape their belief that the organization could even have such an external motivation. We encourage future research to consider how such effects may be differentially impacted by one's identities and beliefs about non-prejudiced motives. Additionally, we assessed perceived motives to be *non*-prejudiced. Yet, motivations to be prejudiced exist (e.g., Forscher et al., 2015). Future research may capture how perceptions of prejudiced motives emerge across organizations that fail to persevere in stated DEI commitments or that actively seek to maintain inequalities via partnering with elected officials harming marginalized communities. Finally, we encourage future research to engage with employees of organizations that have actively persisted, diluted, or removed their DEI efforts as the online, hypothetical nature of the present studies limits out conclusions.

10. Conclusion

Perseverance of organizational identity safety cues is critical in shaping attributions of motivations and identity safety. In four studies, we demonstrate that organizations that persist in their stated commitment to DEI over time are evaluated as more genuinely motivated to be non-prejudiced and facilitate greater identity safety compared to organizations that abandon or dilute their stated commitments to DEI.

Open practices

Data & Materials: https://osf.io/gu8p5/?view_only=9a8055faf10548398a27fd0c6ac9ba32.

Study Preregistrations: https://osf.io/ws7m9/?view_only=4ac35b28dcb4079b28042a0c8ae228f.

https://osf.io/akwz7/overview?view_only=5b4252a6121e444b86d5524ea4130c5b.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Kim E. Chaney: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Resources, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Izilda Pereira-Jorge:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization, Data curation.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2026.104964>.

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⁹ See Supplement for correlations. In Studies 1–2, perceived internal and external motives are not correlated or are positively correlated.

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