Race and Systemic Crises in International Politics:
An Agenda for Pluralistic Scholarship

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Abstract

In recent years, scholars of global politics have shown that issues of race and white supremacy lie at the center of international history, the birth of the field of International Relations, and contemporary theory. In this article, I argue that race plays an equally central role in the 21st century's current and future crises: the set of systemic risks that includes intensifying climate change, deepening inequality, the endemic instabilities of capitalism, and migration. To make this argument, I describe the contours of the current crisis and show how racism amplifies its effects. In short, capitalism's winners and losers and the effects of climate change fall along racial lines, which amplifies both direct and indirect racial discrimination against non-white migrants and states in the Global South. These interdependent crises will shape the next fifty years of international politics and will likely perpetuate the vicious cycle of global racial inequality. Accordingly, this article presents a research agenda for all IR scholars to explore the empirical implications of race in the international system, integrate marginalized perspectives on global politics from the past and present into their scholarship, and address the most pressing political issues of the 21st century.

1 Introduction

What role do racism and white supremacy play in contemporary international politics and how will they affect global relations over the next fifty years? In the last decade, International Relations (IR) scholars have revitalized the study of race and racism in international politics.[1] This study dates back to the late 19th century when white Anglo-European scholars developed IR as the science of administrating the world's inferior races and W.E.B. Du Bois and other members of the Howard School contributed their own novel analyses of the hierarchical international system.[2] However, issues of race were marginalized after World War II despite the persistence of racial inequality in international politics. As such, race's importance to IR scholarship receded from view until the 1990s, and it only re-emerged with postcolonial scholars' critiques of the field's imperial foundations.[3] Recent scholarship has seized on both disciplinary and international history to show that white supremacy drove the emergence of the race-hierarchical sovereign state-system,[4] birthed the field of International Relations,[5] and structures contemporary theory.[6]

The expanding engagement with race and racism has taken three ideal-typical forms. First, a large body of literature on race and IR focuses either on the field's racist history or the role that white supremacy played in previous eras of international politics.[7] This scholarship unpacks how the study of race and contributions from Black scholars were purged from the field following the Second

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1. Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, *Race and Racism in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2015).

2. Errol A. Henderson, "The Revolution will not be Theorised: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's Challenge to White Supremacist IR Theory," *Millennium—Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017): 492–510; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

3. Roxanne Lynn Doty, "The Bounds of 'Race' in International Relations," *Millennium—Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1993): 443–461; Siba N. Grovogui, "Come to Africa: a Hermeneutics of Race in International Theory," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26, no. 4 (2001): 425–448.

4. Alexander D. Barder, "Scientific Racism, Race War and the Global Racial Imaginary," *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2019): 207–223.

5. Vineet Thakur, Alexander E. Davis, and Peter Vale, "Imperial Mission,'Scientific' Method: An Alternative Account of the Origins of IR," *Millennium* 46, no. 1 (2017): 3–23.

6. Meera Sabaratnam, "Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts," *Millennium* 49, no. 1 (2020): 3–31.

7. Lucian M. Ashworth, "Warriors, Pacifists and Empires: Race and Racism in International Thought Before 1914," *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (January 2022): 281–301; Richard W Maass, *The Picky Eagle: How Democracy and Xenophobia Limited U.S. Territorial Expansion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Thakur, Davis, and Vale, "Imperial Mission,'Scientific' Method: An Alternative Account of the Origins of IR."

World War, as well as the interdependence between white supremacy and great power politics. Second, many of the debates, symposiums, and general interest surrounding race and IR have resembled internal debates within critical and post-structural circles. For example, Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit's recent contention that securitization theory suffers from racism and methodological whiteness generated intense scholarly discussion and consternation among critical security studies scholars.[8] These debates pervade the study of race and IR: Ten out of fifteen articles in the recent special issue on race in *Security Dialogue* consider how racism and Western-centrism affect security studies and the prospects for creating an anti-racist discipline. Finally, and related, the empirical work on race in IR is largely mid-range and it focuses on specific instances of racial inequality in the contemporary era, such as racism in public attitudes about foreign aid, neocolonial military relations, and raced markets.[9] These studies sharply point out the persistence of racism and racial bias in modern-day international politics.

This work has served International Relations well for several reasons. First, it has reinvigorated the study of the field's history. These insights push IR scholars away from the conventional Aberystwyth, Great Power, and Thucydides-centered origin stories, and they have reoriented their attention toward how race and white supremacy created the modern discipline. This reorientation even permeates the mainstream IR academy,[10] and it has led to further studies of race in IR that emphasize the continuities across time of these forms of inequality and oppression. Second, it has opened space for scholars to study aspects of international politics that go beyond the field's conventional objects of inquiry: war, trade, diplomacy, etc. Indeed, IR scholarship has emerged on wide-ranging topics

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8. Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, "Is Securitization Theory Racist? Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiblack Thought in the Copenhagen School," *Security Dialogue* 51, no. 1 (2020): 3–22; Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, "Racism and Responsibility—The Critical Limits of Deepfake Methodology in Security Studies: A Reply to Howell and Richter-Montpetit," *Security Dialogue* 51, no. 4 (2020): 386–394.

9. Andy Baker, "Race, Paternalism, and Foreign Aid: Evidence from U.S. Public Opinion," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 93–109; Seungsook Moon, "Race, Transnational Militarism, and Neocoloniality: The Politics of the THAAD Deployment in South Korea," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 6 (2021): 512–528; Lisa Tilley and Robbie Shilliam, "Raced Markets: An Introduction," *New Political Economy* 23, no. 5 (2018): 534–543.

10. Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, and David A. Lake, "Race in International Relations: Beyond the "Norm Against Noticing"," *Annual Review of Political Science* 25 (2022): 175–196; Phillip Y. Lipscy and Jiajia Zhou, "Institutional Racism in International Relations," *Available at SSRN 4202426*, 2022, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4202426.

including international migration,[11] the treatment of Roma in Europe,[12] and the effect of racialized representations in film.[13] Finally, it has led IR scholars to reflect on their positionality in their research and teaching practices, as well as on whether their perspectives and methods perpetuate Western-centrism.[14] This reflection will only increase awareness of the roles that race and white supremacy play in shaping not only the field of IR, but also how it is taught to undergraduates, graduate students, and the public at-large.

However, race and racism not only played an important historical role in international politics and in the creation of International Relations, but they also lie at the center of the 21st century's most pressing global challenges. As a result, the scholarship on race and IR must combine insights from existing approaches to empirically study the larger, structural features of the international system that will allow these crises to fester. These challenges include the set of systemic risks that includes the worsening climate crisis, rising economic inequality, and political violence. These risks are *inter-dependent* and they have historical antecedents, which means that they cannot be studied in isolation. For instance, an analysis of the racial inequalities created by the climate crisis requires an understanding of the contemporary construction of race in the international system, the historical legacies of Anglo-European imperialism, and the state of modern capitalism.

Moreover, each of these risks not only involves entrenched systemic racism and white supremacy but also involves all three IR levels-of-analysis. For example, global capitalism's winners and losers fall along racial and class lines; however, the recent rise of right-wing populism shows how class-based inequality exacerbates racial resentment because politicians are incentivized to draw on this resentment for political gain. One cannot appreciate the role that global inequality plays without interrogating state- and individual-level factors. Doing so requires integrating the insights from existing inter-field debates, historical approaches, and empirical studies into larger empirical accounts

11. Andrew S. Rosenberg, *Undesirable Immigrants: Why Racism Persists in International Migration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

12. Zoltán Búzás, *Evading International Norms: Race and Rights in the Shadow of Legality* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

13. Samar Al-Bulushi, "Race, Space, and 'Terror': Notes from East Africa," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 1_suppl (2021): 115–123.

14. Olivia U. Rutazibwa, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Coloniality, Capitalism and Race/ism As Far As the Eye Can See," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 48, no. 2 (2020): 221–241.

of race's central role in contemporary systemic challenges.

Below, I propose a research agenda for theorizing and studying global politics that centers race, white supremacy, and these ongoing systemic challenges. This agenda combines an empirical focus on all three IR levels-of-analysis, a theoretical focus on global white supremacy, and a methodological focus on pluralism. To make this call, I center the ongoing climate crisis as the linchpin of our contemporary predicament. This agenda moves beyond merely "adding race and stirring" to existing debates. Traditional topics like political violence continue to hold relevance under this agenda. However, now the importance of race to the unfolding of international political events becomes paramount.

In proposing this agenda, I do not mean to disparage the extant work on race in IR, nor do I suggest that scholars focused on unmasking the racialized forms of power in the discipline ought to change course. Rather, my purpose is to bring together existing approaches to the study of race in IR in a way that integrates international political realities: 1) race lies at the center of the contemporary international system, yet it remains severely under-addressed by the disciplinary mainstream; and 2) the 21st century has presented, and will continue to present, different political realities than the 20th. The fact that race plays such an important role in these modern challenges provides an opportunity to present an agenda for empirically studying international politics that also brings race to the center of the discipline.

This article is structured as follows. First, I describe the unique challenges of 21st century international politics, particularly its set of interdependent crises, and argue that race and racism lie at their center. Second, I review the recent scholarship on race in international politics, and I elaborate on its limitations for the purposes of studying contemporary international crises. Third, I present a research agenda for studying 21st century international politics that combines the strengths of existing approaches to race in IR. The final section concludes.

2   21st Century International Politics: An era of crisis

The field of International Relations has long centered on helping states and policymakers avoid putative crises. During the early 20th century, scholars feared catastrophic wars between both "dark" and

"fair" races and the great powers.[15] While the early discipline's overt racism and concerns with racial administration dissipated after 1945, the mainstream field largely studied the behavior of sovereign, formally equal states in the anarchic international system to interrogate the origins and consequences of destabilizing great power wars. Indeed, most mainstream IR scholarship from the 1950s through the 2000s focused on the causes and consequences of war and the role of institutions in mitigating conflict, reducing transaction costs, and facilitating cooperation. This lineage has generated rich insights ranging from the effect of polarity on balancing strategies to the importance of side-payments for generating cooperation.

While great power politics certainly remains a decisive influence over international order—as the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine makes clear—the intensification of the climate emergency, the 2008 Great Recession, and the COVID-19 global pandemic reveal that contemporary international politics no longer is limited to the narrow issues of conflict and cooperation under anarchy. Both mainstream and critical scholars have responded to these critical changes during the 21st century conjuncture. Mainstream scholars of IPE and environmental politics have engaged with contemporary crises for some time, particularly through their study of the 2008 financial crisis and intergovernmental cooperation to fight climate change, but little of this work is published in top political science journals.[16]

Critical scholars have also engaged with cognate fields to analyze these new developments. In many circumstances, this engagement bridges traditional IR topics like security with the contemporary period. For instance, Sachil Flores Singh draws on David Lyon and Harold Wolpe to analyze how credit legislation, policy, and scoring reproduce Apartheid-era social categories and reproduces non-white populations as "risks."[17] Others have used similar strategies to engage with the international political implications of the 2008 financial crisis for the intersection of global finance and security.[18]

But the 21st century has brought changes to international politics that transcend mere one-off

15. E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1939); Charles Henry Pearson, *National life and character: A forecast* (London: Macmillan, 1913).

16. Phillip Y. Lipscy, "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis," *International Organization* 74, no. S1 (2020): E99–E100.

17. Sachil Flores Singh, "Social Sorting as 'Social Transformation': Credit Scoring and the Reproduction of Populations as Risks in South Africa," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 4 (2015): 365–383.

18. Paul Langley, "Toxic Assets, Turbulence and Biopolitical Security: Governing the crisis of Global Financial Circulation," *Security Dialogue* 44, no. 2 (2013): 111–126.

global political events. Scholars and other analysts beyond the field of IR discuss our present circum-stances as a unique period of *crisis*.[19] But what is a crisis? As Alexander Barder notes, the word "crisis" comes from Greek and it "means a moment of…a forced 'choice' at a crucial moment when the po-litical order was placed in question."[20] These moments require such a choice because they contain threat, urgency, and uncertainty, the combination of which generate existential threats.[21] Existential threats from overlapping crises are different than the other threats IR scholars examine because they destabilize the conditions under which states, leaders, and publics make supposedly rational deci-sions. As a result, crises require a reappraisal of how scholars study or understand that order because they challenge previous models. While crises can occur within any order, *global* crises concern the functioning of the international order.

The international system has faced destabilizing challenges in the past, such as global total war, but none have replicated the extensive list of dire, long-term systemic risks that currently plague the planet. These risks go beyond the threat of global war and include "climate heating, biodiversity loss, pandemics, widening economic inequalities, financial system instability, ideological extremism, pernicious social impacts of digitization, cyber attacks, mounting social and political unrest, large-scale forced migrations, and an escalating danger of nuclear war."[22] While the world has faced sub-sets of these risks throughout history, they now seem to occur with more frequency, severity, and more often simultaneously, which makes the state of global politics significantly more precarious than it was even two decades ago. This precariousness requires scholars to examine international politics differently. If contemporary political conditions no longer resemble those under which the field emerged, then the discipline must respond.

The 21st century is not the first time in recent history that scholars have opined on the causes and effects of international crisis. Historical sociologists examined the 1970s as a period of crises due to the eroding of post-war American capitalism after the fall of Bretton woods and decaying American

19. Lipscy, "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis."

20. Alexander D. Barder, "Neo-Materialist Ecologies and Global Systemic Crises," *Globalizations* 13, no. 4 (2016): 398.

21. Lipscy, "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis," E100.

22. Thomas Homer-Dixon et al., "A Call for an International Research Program on the Risk of a Global Polycrisis," *Available at SSRN 4058592*, 2021, 3, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4058592.

power after the Vietnam War.[23] These analyses show that global politics and economics intersect to create the conditions necessary to throw the international system into periods of instability. And the resolution of that crisis often involves a new conjuncture that has disastrous consequences for domestic working classes and the global South.

But what is different about the 21st century? International systemic crisis cannot be sufficient to generate necessary change in how IR scholars analyze the world because scholarship does not always change in response to those crisis. While this account ignores the racist foundations of IR, the crisis of 1914–1918 certainly created the impetus for scholars to think differently about world politics, and this change manifested in work by scholars like E.H. Carr and G. Lowes Dickinson.[24] Yet, contemporary mainstream IR and the conventional debates that continue to define undergraduate and graduate education came to maturity during the postwar crisis. The neorealist-neoliberal debate merely formalized approaches to international politics that had proliferated for decades. Given this variance in response, there must be something unique about our present period to create the impetus for change.

The present period is distinct because it is marked by several overlapping global crises that have the potential to cause irreversible and catastrophic consequences. These crises include various interdependent systemic risks including climate change, inequality, political violence, and the endemic instabilities of neoliberal capitalism. These risks are simultaneous, they affect each other, and their causes and consequences occur throughout the world. To be sure, the 1970s involved the interdependent crises of postwar capitalist accumulation and American hegemony, but their scale was neither global nor their effects catastrophic. Mainstream IR theory continued to coalesce around the "neo-neo" debate because the crisis of the 1970s did not challenge the supposed fundamentals of the international system: conflict, competition, and cooperation under anarchy. The challenge to U.S. hegemony and the instability following the fall of Bretton Woods fit naturally within existing mainstream theories,[25] as did the emergence of complex interdependence and the rise of IPE, both of which

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23. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (Verso, 1994).
24. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*; G. Lowes Dickson, *The European Anarchy* (London: Routledge, 1916).
25. E.g., Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

adapted extant approaches to current events. So, the field proceeded through the 1980s engaging in the neo-neo debate, developing IPE, and critiquing this mainstream. One may argue that this state of affairs was unproductive, depending on which side they fall of this divide. Regardless, the crisis of the 1970s lacked something to make most IR scholars re-evaluate their object of study. The current crisis is different because international political concerns go beyond traditional great power politics.

Of course, traditional topics, such as political violence, remain important concerns. But the governing dynamics of violence now look different than they did during the halcyon days of postwar great power politics. For example, analyses of the causes of violence now include climate change-related catalysts. Several mechanisms link climate change to political violence, but most empirical work investigates the causes of climate-related natural disasters.[26] For one, climate shocks produce crop failure or other other food price increases that catalyze migration both within or between states.[27] This migration causes conflict when hosts fear competition from migrants over scarce resources, when hosts perceive migrants as security threats, when pre-migration tensions exist between hosts and migrants, and when migration alters the balance of power between groups.[28] The expected worsening of the climate crisis will only exacerbate these effects.

While climate change requires several contextual factors to escalate in full-blown conflict, those factors relate to the other aspects of the contemporary crisis. For example, states with high levels of poverty and income inequality and that have populations with a strong reliance on resource extraction are most at risk for climate shocks to produce the dire economic conditions necessary for violence to occur.[29] Studies following the 2008 global financial crisis highlight persistent income inequality within both global North and South states, and world-systems analyses continue to demonstrate that many countries in the global South remain structurally trapped as sources of primary resources for the global economy. As a result, the systemic risks that link climate change, drought,

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26. Ole Magnus Theisen, "Climate Change and Violence: Insights from Political Science," *Current Climate Change Reports* 3 (2017): 210–221.

27. Hanne Seter, "Connecting Climate Variability and Conflict: Implications for Empirical Testing," *Political Geography* 53 (2016): 1–9.

28. Rafael Reuveny, "Climate Change-Induced Migration and Violent Conflict," *Political Geography* 26, no. 6 (2007): 656–673.

29. Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, "Environment, Scarcity, and Violence" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

food scarcity, and violence interact with other systemic risks, such as those that connect financialization, income inequality, and precarity under modern neoliberalism, to accentuate negative outcomes in the international system. The negative outcomes, such as the increased likelihood of civil conflict diffusing across borders to create regional conflict, can then feed back to worsen the underlying food crisis.

This example evinces how modern crises emerge because global systems are integrated and interact with increased frequency. As a result, a shock to one system, like the Russian invasion of Ukraine, might stress another system to the point of failure. Cascading failures across multiple systems will affect the entire world. Historian Adam Tooze has popularized the term "polycrisis" to describe this conjuncture. While first developed by Edgar Morin,[30] Jean-Claude Juncker used the term to describe the confluence of the Brexit, refugee, Eurozone, and climate crises.[31] Tooze seized on Juncker's usage to describe how overlapping emergencies during 2020–2022 become more dangerous than the sum of their parts.[32] This exercise and the scale of Tooze's public profile has highlighted how the interaction between political economy, security, climate, and pandemic risks simultaneously amplify the risk of nuclear war, Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, climate crisis, hunger crisis, stagflation risk, and the rise of right-wing extremism. The concept is analytically useful because it highlights "the causal interaction of crises across global systems,"[33] as well as the uniqueness of our collective circumstances. However, critics argue that the term is a vacuous distraction, or it merely describes an obvious state-of-affairs.[34] I do not wade into these debates, but this discourse shows that the contours of a research agenda on the global polycrisis are not obvious. How should scholars study the "causal entanglement of crisis in multiple global systems?"[35]

In the next section, I argue that racial inequality and prejudice play an important role in these

30. Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern, "Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium," (Cresskill, NJ), 1999,
31. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_16_2293
32. https://adamtooze.com/2022/06/24/chartbook-130-defining-polycrisis-from-crisis-pictures-to-the-crisis-matrix/
33. Michael Lawrence, Scott Janzwood, and Thomas Homer-Dixon, "What is a global polycrisis? And how is it different from a systemic risk?," 2022, 3, https://cascadeinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/What-is-a-global-polycrisis-v2.pdf.
34. https://www.vox.com/23572710/polycrisis-davos-history-climate-russia-ukraine-inflation
35. Lawrence, Janzwood, and Homer-Dixon, "What is a global polycrisis? And how is it different from a systemic risk?," 9.

crises to motivate a research agenda for studying them.

3   The Role of Race in Contemporary Crises

The previous discussion describes the uniqueness of 21st century challenges to and of the international system. This set of interdependent systemic risks involves the worsening climate crisis, inequality, political violence, financial system destabilization, mass migration, among others. This situation is dire because these systemic risks are happening simultaneously and on a global scale. Despite bringing the acuity of our present circumstances into sharp relief, existing approaches to the study of contemporary crises ignore the role that race and racism play in holding it all together. Integrating race into the study of global crisis will provide a foundation for analyzing 21st century international politics. Indeed, race structures the most pressing contemporary challenges, and its persistent role in these systemic crises make the present challenges more intractable. As a case in point, I will focus on four implications of the present systemic crisis—1) inequality under global neoliberal capitalism; 2) climate change; 3) migration; and 4) political violence—and show how race intervenes in the interconnections among them.

But first, what is "race?" How does it operate as an analytic category? And what does it mean in the context of these international challenges? Races are not natural kinds; they are ideas that stipulate that one can separate humankind into groups on the basis of shared physical attributes, cultural practices, or descent. Europeans began using the term during the 16th century to justify their own superiority, as well as practices of slavery, expropriation, and imperialism. The "scientific" racism of the 19th and 20th centuries used techniques from the social and natural sciences to further ensconce supposedly inherent racial differences in collective ideologies and perpetuate white supremacy both between and within states. Although such explicit racism lost its social desirability in the years following the Second World War and decolonization, racial inequality persists in the modern day through "color-blind" practices and institutions. For example, notions of "developed" versus "undeveloped" states have replaced the 19th and 20th century standard of civilization to justify intervention from the Anglo-European core into the non-White Global South. Critical race theorists show how this

transition allows racism to hide in plain sight,[36] and global white supremacy persists through institutional practices, colonial legacies, and public attitudes that further perpetuate these inequalities. As a result, "race" operates through the mutual constitution of the structural inequalities and individual attitudes that arise from the social construction of white supremacy.

To begin, the ordering principle of the world's economic system has become the most stable and enduring feature of international politics. In the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union and the birth of state capitalism in China, nearly every country in the world is embedded in the globalized, neoliberal order. No plausible alternative to capitalism exists,[37] and the particularities of the modern capitalist order structure the relations between global crisis and global conflict and generate inequalities.[38] The rise of right-wing populism in many countries reveals the uneven distribution of winners and losers under capitalism that falls along racial lines. On the one hand, racial inequality has increased, particularly following the 2008 global financial crisis, with non-whites losing a greater percentage of their wealth than white households, which has led to increased racial wealth and income disparities.[39] On the other hand, the effects of modern neoliberal capitalism have increased the precarity of working class whites in the Global North. These effects have bolstered racial resentment and white supremacy, as working class whites respond to their own increased precarity by blaming non-whites, often at the behest of entrepreneurial politicians looking to bolster their own electoral ambitions.[40] The recent rise in anti-Asian racism in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and US-China foreign relations epitomizes this connection,[41] and this process shows how white supremacy is linked to both popular

36. Étienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 2014).

37. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

38. Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Aida A. Hozić, "Follow the Bodies: Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis and Feminist IPE," *International Relations* 35, no. 1 (2021): 173–177.

39. Signe-Mary McKernan et al., "Disparities in Wealth Accumulation and Loss from the Great Recession and Beyond," *American Economic Review* 104, no. 5 (2014): 240–244.

40. Marc Edelman, "Hollowed out Heartland, USA: How Capital Sacrificed Communities and Paved the Way for Authoritarian Populism," *Journal of Rural Studies* 82 (2021): 505–517.

41. Daegyeong Kim, "Anti-Asian Racism and the Racial Politics of US-China Great Power Rivalry" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2022).

sovereignty and the exploitative logics of capitalism.[42]

This analysis connecting the system-level dominance of neoliberal capitalism and domestic racial resentment relies on the theory of *racial capitalism*.[43] Although it is theoretically varied,[44] racial capitalism describes how racism exploits black people and foments the white supremacist hostility of working class whites that bolsters the capitalists' ability to exploit everyone. It is a global process that has implications within all societies and links domestic and international politics. As such, racial capitalism explains one way that racial prejudice persists in ostensibly color-blind societies, and it reveals how the real effects of capitalism on the entire working class exacerbate racism. And it shows one way that domestic politics intervenes in international crises because incentives within democracies encourage politicians to tap into real concerns to instrumentally use racial resentment to win elections. As a result, the simultaneous spread of (liberal and illiberal) democracy and neoliberal capitalism will amplify racial resentment. This relationship between leaders and citizens in democracies pervades throughout the Anglo-European world and complicates states' abilities to combat structural crises. More specifically, this insight shows that the symbiosis between international and domestic politics creates a base of racial resentment that both maintains racial inequality and prevents international cooperation, both of which promote the Global North/South divide and create negative externalities in the South.

These domestic knock-on effects have important consequences in an age of climate crisis. Climate-related shocks like drought and extreme weather events will have global effects, but these effects will disproportionately disadvantage the non-white Global South.[45] As a result, the majority of climate-related migration flows will be non-white. Under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism and simmering racial resentment, it is unlikely that governments of the Global North—despite their material capabilities—will have the political will to assist climate migrants from the Global South. In this way,

42. Inés Valdez, *Democracy and Empire: Labor, Nature, and the Reproduction of Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

43. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

44. Julian Go, "Three Tensions in the Theory of Racial Capitalism," *Sociological Theory* 39, no. 1 (2021): 39–40.

45. Kimberley Thomas et al., "Explaining Differential Vulnerability to Climate Change: A Social Science Review," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 10, no. 2 (2019): 1–18.

the worsening climate crisis interacts with the crises of deepening inequality and racial resentment under capitalism to make a "climate fortress" Global North increasingly likely. When climate migrants are locked out of the Global North, the further effects of large migrant flows get pushed onto countries within the Global South. Large migration flows have led to increased tensions between migrants and hosts due to perceived competition over scarce resources in many country contexts. These tensions often turn violent, and this violence has the potential to become more widespread and more intense as the scale of the climate crisis forces more people from more groups to move.

Increases in violence in the Global South will not only lead to death, destruction, and dislocation within local communities, but also they will further amplify racist perceptions within the Global North. Anglo-European states continue to use "objective" standards to restrict non-white migration, but these standards ignore the fact that Anglo-European imperialism and exploitation created these "objectively undesirable" migrants.[46] Colonial uprisings led Global North states to perceive the South as inherently violent, which continues to provide justification to treat non-white migrants with extra scrutiny. Therefore, an increase in violence due to climate migration will further perpetuate these justifications and make it less likely that Northern states will assist non-white migrants from the South, especially since climate change will affect the citizens of the former as well.

In this way, the ongoing, overlapping crises of international politics—inequality, financial instability, climate change, and ideological extremism—reinforce each other, and unpacking them requires one to integrate all three IR levels of analysis. These structural crises affect and are affected by domestic politics. Doing so involves understanding the role of racism and racial inequality at each level too. The failure of international cooperation on climate change may resemble a collective action problem, but color-blind racism and structural racial inequality create the conditions that make this collective action problem intractable. In other words, one cannot apply existing IR approaches to collective action problems or cooperation under anarchy to understand the true failures of climate cooperation. States certainly have the incentive to shirk their responsibilities to combat emissions, but the link between global capitalism and racism within states creates overlapping domestic and

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46. Rosenberg, *Undesirable Immigrants: Why Racism Persists in International Migration.*

international conditions that create incentives both for leaders to stir up climate change denialism and oppose national emissions standards and for citizens to deny both climate action and aid for climate migrants from the Global South.[47] While critical and mainstream IR scholars have addressed individual components of the climate crisis,[48] none have considered its totality.

This discussion provides an illustrative case in point, but it is not exhaustive. The scope and scale of the international politics of the 21st century far exceed the bounds of this article. The purpose of this discussion is to illustrate how race and racism intervene in the contemporary, interdependent crisis and exceed the bounds of typical IR approaches. In the next section, I describe existing approaches to race in IR, and I argue that none in isolation are equipped to analyze the structural crises of modern international politics.

4 Race and Racism in IR: Existing approaches

International Relations continues to reckon with both its white supremacist past and its persistent ignorance of race. Recent IR scholarship further unmasks this reality and offers incisive critiques of the discipline and the type of knowledge it prioritizes. This move has produced three scholarly camps. The first camp exposes the incontrovertible history of the discipline. While conventional histories point to Thucydides as IR's founding text and to the creation of the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth as its inception,[49] critical histories show that IR began as a science of imperial administration. Early meetings of the American Historical Association and the American Economic Association—the two associations to which IR scholars belonged at the turn of the 20th century—considered how the management of "lower" races compromises imperial ambitions.[50] This scholarship was based on commonly held ideas of "scientific" racism, which warranted both global white supremacy and Anglo-European imperial projects. This history contradicts the scholarly pre-

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47. See, e.g., Andreas Malm, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism* (London: Verso Press, 2021).

48. Carl Death, "Climate Fiction, Climate Theory: Decolonising Imaginations of Global Futures," *Millennium* 50, no. 2 (2022): 430–455; Alexander Thompson, "Rational Design in Motion: Uncertainty and Flexibility in the Global Climate Regime," *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 2 (2010): 269–296.

49. Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

50. Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*, 41–45.

sumption that IR is a "color-blind" discipline that has proliferated since 1945.

At the same time, Black scholars both independently theorized international politics and critiqued the white supremacist focus of the incipient field. These Howard school thinkers dissented against both the racially segregated field of IR and the imperial structure of the international system.[51] Members of the Howard school included Alain Locke, Merze Tate, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Ralph Bunche, and these dissident scholars made independent theoretical contributions to IR theory that contribute to our understandings of the relationship between nationalism and imperialism, and the relationship between race and democracy.[52] Robert Vitalis' work shone a new light on the Howard school, and recent work at the intersection of political theory and IR has engaged with this scholarship. However, the fact that this scholarship needed "excavating" in the first place reveals how the Anglo-European IR academy marginalized the study of race and ignored the work of non-white scholars.

Those in the second camp critique the *contemporary* discipline for its "norm against noticing" race and argue that scholars' theoretical and epistemological commitments perpetuate white supremacy.[53] These contemporary critiques build on engagement with IR's racist and imperial history to unpack the ongoing theoretical significance of Eurocentrism and white supremacy. This approach implies that failing to properly account for this history reproduces the same racist conventional wisdom and creates scholarly limitations among both scholars and laypersons.[54]

These sharp engagements flourish within critical circles too. For instance, scholars argue that Foucauldian approaches to security studies "exemplif[y] 'methodological whiteness'" because they perpetuate Foucault's undertheorization of race.[55] Methodological whiteness furthers "racialised metahistorical narratives and myths about the exceptional, vanguardist, and progressive character of the

51. Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*, 79–82.

52. Henderson, "The Revolution will not be Theorised: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's Challenge to White Supremacist IR Theory."

53. E.g., Randolph B. Persaud and R.B.J. Walker, "Apertura: Race in International Relations," *Alternatives* 26, no. 4 (2001): 373–376; Howell and Richter-Montpetit, "Is Securitization Theory Racist? Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiblack Thought in the Copenhagen School"; Robert Vitalis, "The Graceful and Generous Liberal Gesture: Making Racism Invisible in American International Relations," *Millennium—Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 331–356.

54. Sabaratnam, "Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts."

55. Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, "Racism in Foucauldian Security Studies: Biopolitics, Liberal War, and the Whitewashing of Colonial and Racial Violence," *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 1 (2019): 3.

'West,'"[56] which biases IR toward Eurocentric historical accounts and theories. Others even question whether it is even possible or advisable for the field to provide anti-racist perspectives or to "decolonize" the university.[57] These perspectives critique all aspects of the discipline for their insufficient attention to issues of race, as well as the oft-unintentional ways that mainstream, critical, and postmodern approaches to IR fall short.

The third camp empirically uncovers instances of racism and racial inequality in the contemporary international system. This work has generated insights into raced markets,[58] questions of race and human rights,[59] racialized identities in international politics,[60] European policing of the recent migrant "crisis,"[61] among other phenomena. These studies, while relatively rare compared to the other two varieties, are essential for revealing the persistence of racial inequality in the contemporary, ostensibly "color-blind" international system. Without them, the study of race and IR will remain a marginalized area of study because a paucity of contemporary applications permits detractors to question its current relevance.

All in all, the recent turn to study race and IR has pushed the field forward. Its historical emphasis It demonstrates how racial inequality and oppression are continuous across space and time, despite the putative "color blindness" of contemporary international politics. It has also led to the creation of journal special issues, speaker series, funding initiatives, and conference panels aimed at exposing IR scholarship's silence on issues of race, the championing of diversity in the academy, and the awareness of how existing scholarly and teaching practices reinforce white supremacy. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that a greater proportion of IR scholars now focus on issues of race than at any point in the discipline's postwar history.

However, recent waves of engagement neglect the study of the 21st century's systemic challenges

56. Sabaratnam, "Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts," 28.

57. David Chandler and Farai Chipato, "A Call for Abolition: The Disavowal and Displacement of Race in Critical Security Studies," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 1_suppl (November 2021): 60–68.

58. Tilley and Shilliam, "Raced Markets: An Introduction."

59. Búzás, *Evading International Norms: Race and Rights in the Shadow of Legality*.

60. Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

61. Ida Danewid, "Policing the (Migrant) Crisis: Stuart Hall and the Defence of Whiteness," *Security Dialogue*, 2021, 1–17.

for several reasons. First, the most prominent studies of race in IR focus on legacies of racism in both disciplinary and international history. Disciplinary historians have made important contributions to opening up the field to think about race and racism as questions of IR proper, but scholars must use these insights to understand empirical manifestations of racism in the contemporary world. Second, the necessity of exposing the contemporary importance of race has led internal critiques of the discipline to proliferate within the critical and post-structural circles. These internal debates certainly have an important role but they quickly generate more heat than light when they dominate discussions of race in IR. Such "bacchanals"[62] often take place between white scholars from the Global North, and they reflect the social incentives that Stephane Baele and Gregorio Bettiza identify among the field's other numerous "turns."[63] Finally, existing empirical work on race in IR is largely mid-range, and it is disconnected from accounts of the larger social forces at play in the 21st century.

In the next section, I build on this final point to argue that the rapid shifts in international politics during the 21st century provide the ideal opportunity for IR scholars to integrate the empirical study of race into their scholarship. The 21st century's present and future structural crises, such as the climate crisis, *require* the study of race to fully understand their intractability. But this study of race necessitates scholars to go beyond extant approaches to fully grasp the structure of contemporary international politics. Doing so will involve integrating insights from existing approaches and connecting the historical antecedents of present challenges with contemporary causes at the individual, state, and international system levels-of-analysis. To do so, I present an agenda for IR scholars to engage with international politics under these conditions.

5 An Agenda for Studying Race and International Crises

The previous sections describe the distinctiveness of contemporary international politics and highlight how race and racism lie at the center of the 21st century's challenges. This story is complex

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62. Navnita Chadha Behera, Kristina Hinds, and Arlene B. Tickner, "Making Amends: Towards an Antiracist Critical Security Studies and International Relations," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 1_suppl (November 2021): 9.

63. Stephane J. Baele and Gregorio Bettiza, "'Turning' Everywhere in IR: On the Sociological Underpinnings of the Field's Proliferating Turns," *International Theory*, 2020, 1–27.

because racism is both a cause and consequence of these political events. It also raises several thorny puzzles. For instance, global racial inequalities continue to affect billions of lives in the Global South. Legacies of Anglo-European imperialism and neo-colonialism caused these inequalities, and they reinforce racist perceptions of the Global South, promote a "fortress Global North," and prevent the cooperation and solidarity necessary to solve crises like climate change. On the one hand, breaking this cycle of underdevelopment and exploitation seems to be one possible path forward. On the other hand, conventional development strategies rely on a neoliberal capitalist logic that will only exacerbate the crisis. So, the challenges of contemporary international politics are doubly complex: they are multi-faceted and present no easy solutions.

How should IR scholars respond? While existing approaches to race in IR focus on historical, disciplinary, or localized applications, extant work on the international politics of crisis eschew discussions of race all together. I provide recommendations for empirical, theoretical, and methodological agenda to help scholars work through the puzzle of contemporary international politics. The importance of race and racial inequality to really existing international politics lies at the center of this agenda. Then, I elaborate on three advantages and three challenges to the approach. Recall that the task at hand is to adapt the field of IR to study the most important aspects of modern international politics. As such, this section puts forth recommendations that may seem controversial to some and impractical to others. For example, postcolonial scholars of race and IR and quantitative IPE scholars may appear to have little in common, but I assert that the scope of the climate crisis provides the impetus for scholars from different "cultures" to collaborate to uncover the nature of the challenge.

This agenda is not novel in its ambition; Phillip Lipscy has recently proposed a general agenda to study the politics of international crisis.[64] His proposal critiques extant approaches to international political economy (IPE), which resemble mid-range theories, for ignoring crises and focusing on routine relationships, such as trade. He suggests that scholars ought to combine international security's emphasis on critical events with the strengths of IPE to better understand the politics of crisis. His proposal obviates some of the concerns with mid-range theorizing, and he discusses how crisis such

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64. Lipscy, "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis."

as COVID-19 have the potential to affect the global order.[65] To do so, he describes the characteristics of crisis at the systemic, state, and individual levels-of-analysis and lists a variety of important avenues for future research. My approach below finds common cause with his explication of the politics of crisis, as well as its vital prescriptions for engaging with policy. But it extends it by focusing on the overlapping nature of simultaneous crises, methodological pluralism, and white supremacy.

5.1 Empirical Agenda: A return to the three levels-of-analysis

Contemporary international challenges are complex because they involve racialized dynamics among actors at the individual, state, and international system levels. Accordingly, the next 50 years of IR scholarship must empirically engage with each level-of-analysis and their interactions because limiting oneself to a single level risks limiting the potential analysis. IR scholars have long wrestled with the multiple "levels" of international politics,[66] and debates have raged over whether the system, state, or individual level should be hegemonic in grand IR theories. I do not take a strong position on which level is paramount or their ontological status. Rather than engage in such debates, this empirical agenda merely pushes scholars to fully engage with all three levels-of-analysis when studying contemporary crisis in the international system.

If crises emerge from all three levels, then scholars should examine their causes and consequences at each. This suggestion builds on the call to more fully integrate hierarchy into the study of race and IR,[67] as well as the mainstream perception that scholars should embrace mid-range over grand theorizing.[68] Most IR scholars engage in mid-range theorizing, and they typically use limited empirical tests—either case studies or quantitative analysis—to substantiate their theories. The purpose of such an approach is for scholars to carefully unpack the mechanisms that generate their phenomena of interest. But conventional mid-range approaches are limited to one level-of-analysis, which leaves one blind to how dynamics at other levels affect the phenomenon of interest.

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65. Lipscy, "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis," E116.

66. J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics* 14, no. 1 (1961): 77–92; Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

67. Freeman, Kim, and Lake, "Race in International Relations: Beyond the "Norm Against Noticing"."

68. David A. Lake, "Theory is Dead, Long Live Theory: The End of the Great Debates and the Rise of Eclecticism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 567–587.

While scholars should not feel compelled to address all aspects of all dimensions of international politics, attention to all three levels-of-analysis will provide a fuller picture of contemporary issues that will guard against analytical focuses that are too narrow or too broad. Doing so reveals the *structure* of global challenges like climate change. Viewing crises as larger structures of interactions among individuals, states, and the international system allows scholars to integrate mid-range empirical findings into larger conceptual explanations. It also illuminates the paradox of the climate crisis that I discuss above.

For instance, as I note above, the climate crisis is intractable not only because states have difficulty eschewing their own self-interest in cooperation with others, but also because political elites (state-level) have the incentive to mobilize mass climate change denial and racial resentment (individual-level), which further inhibits international cooperation. Climate change denial and associated racial resentment are amplified by the expansion of neoliberal capitalism (system-level), the effects of which exacerbate both within- and between-country racial inequalities, as well as the material effects of climate change in the Global South. However, most approaches that investigate the potential effects of climate change focus on how climate-related natural disasters affect the likelihood of violence within a country or region. Ignoring the interaction between the individual, state, and system levels-of-analysis risks leading the analyst to propose counter-productive policy solutions. For example, Wario Adano *et al.* discuss how various institutional arrangements can prevent violent conflict over natural resources, but they neglect how some ingenious social and economic institutions can reproduce the precarity of non-white states.[69] At the same time, analyses that ignore the importance of direct climate effects risk reifying the importance of structural factors, at the expense of the climate emergency's real, violent effects.[70]

How should scholars implement this comprehensive approach? Ida Danewid's exploration of the European migrant crisis offers a roadmap.[71] Danewid uses the moral panic over the alleged migrant

69. Wario R. Adano et al., "Climate Change, Violent Conflict and Local Institutions in Kenya's Drylands," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1 (2012): 65–80.

70. Aidan O'Sullivan, Jessica Omukuti, and Stacia S. Ryder, "Global Surpluses of Extraction and Slow Climate Violence: A Sociological Framework," *Sociological Inquiry*, 2022, E.g.,

71. Danewid, "Policing the (Migrant) Crisis: Stuart Hall and the Defence of Whiteness."

sexual assaults on New Year's Eve in Cologne to illustrate how coercive migration policy-making is rooted in a larger historical narrative centered around the ebbs and flows of the neoliberal economic order. This work is an ideal model for integrating mid-range empirical findings into structural discussions of international politics. And it could be extended to probe how intertwined global capitalism and individual racial prejudices impact broader European cooperation over refugee policies amidst the looming climate crisis.

Several other promising areas of research could follow a similar approach. Scholars could integrate other mid-range findings into broader treatments of international crises, such as those that consider racial biases in foreign policy-making, public opinion narratives of undeserving migrants, how economic inequality emboldens the radical right, and racialized perceptions of threat.[72] Integrating empirical insights from these specific studies into a wider framework can enrich our understanding of global challenges.

5.2   Theoretical Agenda: A focus on global white supremacy

The second component of this agenda is theoretical. Currently, theories of race—internationally and otherwise—and theories of international politics are largely disconnected, but since race, racism, and racial inequality allow these crises to fester, scholars must theorize how these two features fit together. A focus on the global system of white supremacy provides a path forward. This focus goes beyond exploring the relationship between domestic racism and foreign policy; it shows how international and domestic racial hierarchies are mutually constitutive and compound contemporary international crisis.

Errol Henderson's work inspires this call for a theoretical focus on white supremacy.[73] White supremacy describes social systems in which white people are superior to other racial groups in ma-

72. Baker, "Race, Paternalism, and Foreign Aid: Evidence from U.S. Public Opinion"; Kyung Joon Han, "Income Inequality and Voting for Radical Right-Wing Parties," *Electoral Studies* 42 (2016): 54–64; Enze Han and Daniel Marwecki, "Racialized International Order? Traces of "Yellow Peril" Trope in Germany's Public Discourse toward China," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2020, 1–19; Mara Ostfeld, "The Backyard Politics of Attitudes toward Immigration," *Political Psychology* 38, no. 1 (2017): 21–37.

73. Errol A. Henderson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2013): 71–92; Robbie Shilliam, "Race and Racism in International Relations: Retrieving a Scholarly Inheritance," *International Politics Reviews* 8, no. 2 (2020): 185.

terial and ideological terms. White supremacist social systems are hierarchical, which allows this concept to accord with extant work on hierarchy in IR. The extant IR approach to hierarchy shows that states are "organized into vertical relations of super- and subordination" rather than sovereign equals.[74] Race is a hierarchical concept, which allows it to fit in naturally with an approach to international relations that prioritizes such unequal relations. Existing work on race in IR already shows that racial hierarchy persists in the ostensibly color-blind international legal apparatus and that race and racism affect foreign policy considerations through, for example, leading states to perceive other states as threats.[75] In this account, race presents itself as yet another dimension of inequality within the international system. This work shows the symbioses among racial hierarchy, international law, and foreign policy to note how race affects far-reaching aspects of IR from status of force agreements to economic policy.

While this work demonstrates the historical antecedents of racial hierarchy and the relations between domestic and international racial politics, there is space to consider the co-constitution of these racial hierarchies and state and individual action. A focus on the constitution of global white supremacy is the key to this approach because it transcends individual prejudices and acts of discrimination; it is a structure of reinforcing institutions and relations. In fact, white supremacy follows the conventional constructivist idea of structuration, in which agents and structures are mutually constitutive.[76] Individuals and states both constitute, and are constituted by, the extant racial hierarchy. This structure—racial inequality between the North and South—constitute the relations between states, as well as the attitudes of people living in those states, and shape behavior. States and individuals reproduce those structures through their actions and beliefs. IR scholars should dissect the nature of this global white supremacy by unpacking how domestic and international racial hierarchies interact. Doing so will lay bare the Gordian Knot of contemporary international politics, that conventional methods of breaking down racial hierarchy will likely exacerbate ongoing and future crises.

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74. Ayşe Zarakol, *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1.

75. Freeman, Kim, and Lake, "Race in International Relations: Beyond the "Norm Against Noticing"," 181–187.

76. Alexander Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1987): 335–370.

Such an agenda raises several outstanding questions about global white supremacy and its relationship with international crises. How does racial hierarchy between and within states mutually constitute state action and individual behavior, beliefs, and attitudes? Has this co-constitution taken different forms since since decolonization and the onset of putative international "color blindness?" How does global white supremacy manifest differently in different country contexts? What are the sources of these differences and have they changed over time? Does this variation affect the global response to different international crises?

These questions concern theorizing the nature of global white supremacy and explicitly connecting theories of race to theories of international politics. These connections necessarily involve an empirical focus on the international system, state, and individual level-of-analysis. They also raise important methodological questions to which I turn in the next aspect of the agenda.

5.3 Methodological Agenda: A synthesis between positivists and post-positivists

The final component of this agenda is methodological. Interdependent crises will likely consume the next fifty years of international politics, and these developments will affect individuals, states, and the entire international system. While some scholars continue to debate the appropriateness of using certain methods to answer certain IR questions,[77] empirically studying the most pressing challenges in contemporary IR is agnostic about method. In fact, doing so likely *depends* on a mixture of qualitative, quantitative, interpretive, ethnographic, and historical methods, among others. As such, this agenda provides the opportunity to bring scholar together who study similar empirical phenomena, even if they do so from different perspectives.

Some my dispute the potential or logical coherence of such a methodological synthesis. Indeed, spirited discussions over method have bled into epistemological in-fighting since the halcyon days of the Third Debate. While participants in this debate have called an implicit truce, with few battles taking place in recent years, the implied incoherence between mainstream and critical remains.

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77. Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, "Critical Methods in International Relations: The Politics of Techniques, Devices and Acts," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 3 (2014): 596–619; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing Is Bad for International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 427–457.

Positivists balk at the scholarship produced by post-positivists and vice versa, and this tension has led to little cross-"cultural" engagement. However, debates over epistemology have little value in international relations. Scholars clearly learn things about international politics: both positivists and post-positivists empirically study their phenomena of interest, they merely use different methods. So what matters is not how or whether we know things, but how to combine research questions with methods to produce relevant insights.

The study of race, racism, and racial inequality in international politics is ideally suited for this synthesis. As I note above, the study of race in IR combines historical, conceptual, theoretical, and empirical analyses. Race is a social construct that has historical antecedents, and different states have different racial ontologies. There are also myriad forms of racism—overt, structural, institutional, symbolic, color-blind, etc.—and racial inequality that exist in international politics and require different approaches to study. While some questions, such as whether exploitative forms of capitalism reinforce contemporary racist perceptions of the Global South, are more suited to historical methods, other tasks, such as demonstrating the economic inequality generated by liberal economic institutions, are more suited to quantitative techniques.

Indeed, the Howard School's body of work reflects this methodological synthesis, as they used a variety of methods to approach the study of race and empire as an empirical science. Du Bois, for example, not only drew on history and social theory to study white supremacy, empire, and injustice,[78] he also pioneered the use of quantitative methods in sociology,[79] which he used to open critical scrutiny to new and existing questions.[80] Such methodological pluralism allowed Du Bois to generate insights for both academic and popular consumption that continue to improve our understanding of racism's many forms.

Studying current and future international crises requires a similar methodological pluralism. For example, understanding the scope of the climate crisis could involve (but is not limited to) coupling a survey of citizens of Global North countries to determine the relationship between racial resent-

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78. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," *The Atlantic Monthly* 115, no. 5 (1915): 707–714.

79. Robert W. Williams, "The Early Social Science of W.E.B. Du Bois," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 3, no. 2 (2006): 366–367.

80. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (New York: Schocken Books, 1899).

ment and attitudes toward climate policy with an ethnographic examination of how genealogies of the "undeserving" poor contribute to these attitudes. The latter's combination of historical and qualitative approaches adds immense explanatory power to the former because one cannot go back in time and collect public opinion data on the questions of interest, nor can one be confident in survey measures of racial resentment due to social desirability bias. As such, this collaboration would use the strengths of qualitative, quantitative, and interpretive methods to bolster our understanding of a key barrier to international cooperation. Further studies could disentangle how the historical evolution of racialized discourses contribute to the structure of contemporary global inequality.

This complementary approach will help illuminate the complex and emergent structure of contemporary crises. While this call for bridge-building may be naive, such methodological pluralism is necessary because no methodological camp is sufficient to unpack every empirical dimension. Moreover, this agenda ensures that all IR scholars will have a space to engage with the most pressing international political problems and interrogate race's role in them.[81]

5.4   Three Advantages

This broad agenda for studying international politics retains many of the strengths of existing approaches: One can use it to analyze great power politics, securitization, and white supremacy with equal effectiveness. Given the recognition of both the uniqueness of contemporary international politics and centrality of race and racism to those crises, this approach's recommendations help scholars unpack the key features of their international political phenomena of interest. There are three additional advantages of adopting these recommendations that will further other goals that IR scholars have discussed.

First, this approach prioritizes empirical pluralism. The former arises out of the explicit recognition that international politics extends far beyond great power politics, security, and political economy. Critical IR scholars have long appreciated this fact, and they have integrated the aesthetics of

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81. There are significant ethical and technical issues associated with the empirical study of race in IR that are beyond the scope of this article. See, Rosenberg (*Undesirable Immigrants: Why Racism Persists in International Migration*, Ch. 4) for more details on this debate.

"everyday" international politics into their research programs.[82] This call to integrate the empirical study of race into an analysis of international crises also serves this purpose. Financial instability, climate change, right-wing populism, and concerns over artificial intelligence all go beyond the traditional concerns of IR scholars. Understanding how these factors create structural risks and crises requires scholars to expand IR's empirical purview, and doing so will accord with existing calls to broaden the field.

Second, this agenda obliges one to engage with both history and historical explanations. Understanding the role of race and racism in perpetuating contemporary international crises requires one to unpack how racial hierarchies emerge and evolve. Such work requires a firm grasp of the history of the phenomena under consideration. To understand the potential effects of the global climate crisis, one could explore the white supremacist foundations of global imperialism that form the bases of racial capitalist accounts of modernity,[83] as well as how these effects on individuals, states, and the international system interact to produce both inaction on climate governance and climate denialism.[84] As such, this agenda finds common cause with historical sociology and IR scholars who encourage the use of a historical approach to theory and empirics.[85]

Finally, this approach to studying international politics furthers the goal of amplifying marginalized voices in the discipline and in the classroom. While Howard School scholars examined the role that race and racism played in international politics and generated their own IR theories during the early 20th century, these voices were expunged from scholarly memory, which illustrates the "norm against noticing" race in IR. The recent IR scholarship on race centers the promotion of non-white scholars from the past and present as a away to acknowledge and push against the hierarchies of knowledge production in IR.[86] Decolonial IR thought's "triple call of de-mythologizing, de-silencing

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82. Michele Acuto, "Everyday International Relations: Garbage, Grand Designs, and Mundane Matters," *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 4 (2014): 345–362.

83. Michael Warren Murphy and Caitlin Schroering, "Refiguring the Plantationocene: Racial Capitalism, World-Systems Analysis, and Global Socioecological Transformation," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 26, no. 2 (2020): 400–415.

84. Malm, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*.

85. George Lawson, "The Eternal Divide? History and International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 2 (2010): 203–226.

86. Henderson, "The Revolution will not be Theorised: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's Challenge to White Supremacist IR Theory"; Somdeep Sen, "Colouring Critical Security Studies: A View from the Classroom," *Security Dia-*

and anti-colonially de-colonizing our knowledge production or cultivation practices" reflects this aim.[87] Deliberately centering the empirical study of race and racism in international politics will further this agenda beyond the critical and postcolonial areas of the discipline.

Bianca Freeman, D.G. Kim, and David Lake's recent article shows that the disciplinary mainstream will embrace both the study of race and scholarship from non-white scholars.[88] To be sure, much work remains to be done—particularly with respect to scholarship from the Global South[89]—and one should not be too sanguine about IR's future embrace of marginalized voices. But recent efforts show that the most austere institutions at the center of the disciplinary mainstream are willing to make progress in this area. The form of such progress will no doubt push against critiques of the role that positivist epistemologies play in furthering the white supremacy of IR.[90] However, prioritizing the empirical study of race as the centerpiece of an agenda to study the myriad crises in contemporary international politics reflects both a desire to study the world's most pressing challenges and an opportunity to engage with non-white voices from the discipline's past and present.

In addition, solving many of these crises will require cooperative efforts that cross racial lines, given global growth projections that forecast the influence of India, Africa, and southeast Asia. While this analysis emphasizes the role that non-white victimization plays in perpetuating contemporary crises, the scope and nature of these challenges reveals the potential for racial cooperation. Again, one must risk not being too optimistic about these prospects, but the depth of the current crisis and the growing importance of the Global South show that possible solutions must include empowerment. This framework can provide insights into the possible shape of such cooperation by connecting the domestic and international politics.

logue 52, no. 1_suppl (November 2021): 133–141.

87. Olivia Rutazibwa, "From the Everyday to IR: In Defence of the Strategic use of the R-word," *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 2 (2016): 191.

88. Freeman, Kim, and Lake, "Race in International Relations: Beyond the "Norm Against Noticing"."

89. Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: New Agenda for International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 647–659.

90. John M. Hobson, "Unmasking the Racism of Orthodox International Relations/International Political Economy Theory," *Security Dialogue* 53, no. 1 (2022): 3–20.

5.5 Three Challenges

This agenda for studying 21st century international politics also comes with several challenges. First, I provide a scholarly agenda, associated research questions, and examples as a guide. On the one hand, this generality is necessary to provide a foundation for scholars of all approaches to study the role race and racism play in perpetuating overlapping global crises. Dictating strict guidelines or creating a new "school" or "turn" will alienate or marginalize scholars who study IR in different ways. On the other hand, a lack of clearer recommendations—i.e., claims that one should use a particular method in a specific way—makes it more difficult for scholars to implement this agenda. Unfortunately, this trade-off is inherent to scholarly bridge-building. It is difficult to satisfy the large and diverse pool of IR scholars, and providing more specific instructions will reproduce the scholarly Balkanization that this framework means to avoid.

Second, an approach that emphasizes empirical and methodological pluralism risks further fragmenting the field. Recent years have seen scholars reflect on the state of the discipline, and most lamentations claim that IR used to revolve around grand debates that held the field together. Whether one believes that "grand theory" or "isms" are productive ways of organizing the field,[91] IR remains a fragmented discipline, which leads scholars to retrench into their epistemological, theoretical, and methodological communities. IR scholars should aim to expand our understanding of international politics, which motivates this article's agenda. However, its breadth may exacerbate its fragmentation and distinctiveness. While some fragmentation is natural, given the differences in norms across scholarly communities, connecting scholars working to understand contemporary and future challenges to the international system is an important target. Scholarly associations and journals could encourage cross-community dialogue in conferences and special issues to mitigate this problem. But the fragmentation of IR is a condition that exceeds the proposal in this article's scope.

Third, and similarly, IR's distinctiveness as a field has long vexed scholars, with many fearing that its importation of theories and methods from cognate disciplines epitomizes its lack of external in-

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91. David A. Lake, "Why 'Isms' Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects As Impediments To Understanding and Progress," *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2011): 465–480.

fluence. Fears that "the exchange between our discipline and the rest of the social/human sciences is pretty much one-way, and not in our favour" also apply to the challenges facing IR scholars over the next fifty years.[92] Adopting this framework to study contemporary crises requires engaging with scholars in other subfields of political science, social science disciplines, and perhaps the natural sciences, all of which may further perpetuate this problem. Though distinctiveness is a relatively cheap price to pay in exchange for engaging with the world's most pressing problems.

6   Conclusion

International relations no longer resembles the great power politics and imperial administration that motivated the creation of the first department of international politics in 1919. To be sure, conflict continues to exist between states—as the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine makes clear—but these challenges are now joined by a climate crisis, an unstable financial system, persistent inequalities, a lingering global pandemic, democratic backsliding, large-scale migrations, and other destabilizing trends. The goal of this article has been to argue that race and racism play substantial roles in perpetuating these contemporary challenges and that IR scholars should reorient themselves toward studying those roles.

In so doing, I make two suggestions that depend on the premise that these systemic crises will dominate 21st century international politics. First, IR scholars of race should prioritize unmasking race's ongoing centrality to these crises. While disciplinary history, methodological critique, and mid-range empirical studies play an important role in the field and have forced scholars to reckon with IR's role in perpetuating racial hierarchies, contemporary challenges require large-scale empirical attention. The second suggestion amplifies the call for all IR scholars—particularly those in the disciplinary mainstream—to consider the ongoing, central importance of race and racism to IR.

To be sure, some scholars already attend to these issues, but this article sets out an agenda for all IR scholars to both study these empirical realities and the unique challenges of the next half-century.

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92. Chris Brown, "The Poverty of Grand Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (September 2013): 485.

This agenda focuses on empirically unpacking how the individual, state, and system levels-of-analysis exacerbate international crises, theoretically focusing on the nature of global white supremacy, and a true methodological pluralism. These pillars point to ways of integrating the strengths of diverse approaches to the study of international politics that will further existing goals, such as amplifying marginalized voices within the discipline.

The contemporary impetus for disciplinary change is not dissimilar from that which motivated 20th century scholars to create the modern, "race-blind" discipline. And this resemblance should prompt scholars to change their approach to studying international politics in light of the nature of these systemic crises. The difference between the two eras, though, is that IR scholars have diligently engaged with issues of race and racism to expose white supremacy's role in international politics. Accordingly, IR scholars are now in a better position to explicitly analyze how race and racism lie at the center of pressing international challenges. Such intellectual progress will not only create a more inclusive discipline, but it will also ensure that IR continues to engage with the real problems of world politics as the 21st century proceeds.