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Political scientist Christopher Parker named a Carnegie Fellow

As the demographic landscape of the United States shifts towards a majority-minority population in the coming decades, understanding the intersection of race and political polarization becomes increasingly urgent. While much of the existing literature emphasizes the partisan divide, it often overlooks how these dynamics specifically impact communities of color.

Christopher Sebastian Parker, a UC Santa Barbara political science professor, seeks to fill this significant gap. Now, he has been awarded a 2025 Carnegie Fellowship from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to continue his research into how polarization affects communities of color. Parker is among 26 distinguished recipients chosen from over 300 nominees for this honor, which includes a stipend of up to $200,000 to support his research.

“This project is not just an academic endeavor; it is a vital exploration of how racial dynamics shape our political reality,” Parker said. “As our society grapples with increasing polarization, understanding the responses of communities of color is essential for fostering a more inclusive and democratic future.”

With the support of the Carnegie Fellowship, Parker’s research promises to contribute significantly to the dialogue on political polarization and its impact on diverse communities, ultimately seeking pathways toward greater societal cohesion.

Established in 2015, the Andrew Carnegie Fellows Program aims to foster high-caliber research in the humanities and social sciences. This year, the program has focused on tackling the issue of political polarization in the US, encouraging scholars to explore its roots and devise strategies for the future.

In his work, Parker aims to investigate how polarization, particularly through the lens of racial threat, influences the political attitudes and behaviors of communities of color. He posits that while these communities may benefit from the inclusive identity associated with the Democratic Party, they also endure significant hostility from the opposing political faction. Parker's research will explore several critical questions: How does perceived racial threat affect the engagement of communities of color in the political process? Does it strengthen their attachment to American democracy, or does it push them toward alternative political models that promise greater inclusivity? Parker seeks to understand how these dynamics may shape the political landscape and attitudes within these communities.

Utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, Parker plans to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how polarization impacts political support among communities of color. His approach will include open-ended survey questions to gather nuanced insights into respondents' motivations and experiences, alongside a two-wave panel design to assess the enduring effects of polarization beyond the electoral cycle.

Parker's previous work laid the groundwork for this study, particularly his research on the Tea Party, which explored how perceptions of racial threat could mobilize Republican voters. By extending this framework, he aims to provide a deeper understanding of how communities of color respond to polarization and the implications for American democracy.

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