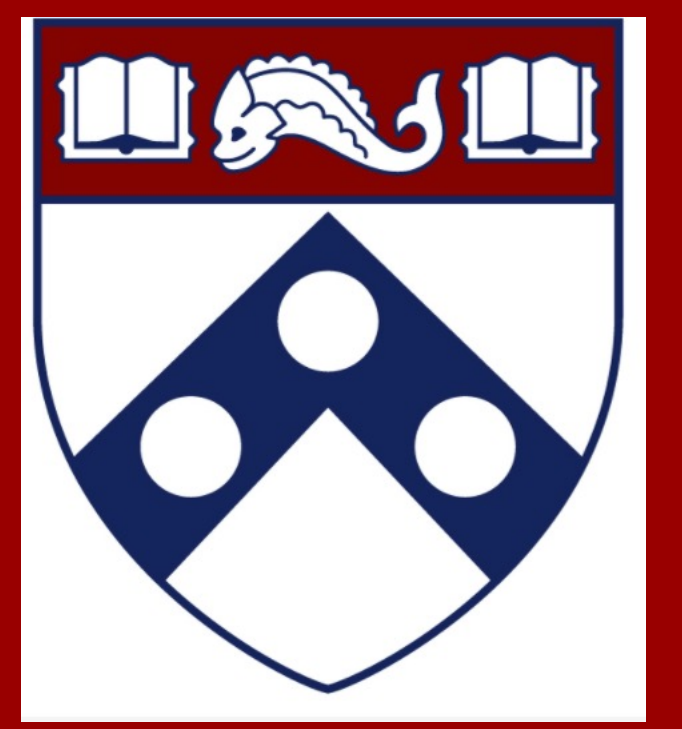# Changing Legislative Racial Landscape in Wisconsin:
Measuring Shifts in Legislative Attention to Race

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Background

Despite the growing activism of racial and ethnic minorities pushing for policy action in different areas, a considerable number of issues are often excluded from the legislative agenda. This is partly due to the overwhelming amount of policy concerns that legislators must address, leading to prioritization of some topics over others. As a result, despite the efforts of constituents, some racial issues may not receive the necessary attention from lawmakers. However, contemporary scholars have not yet explored how legislative attention to race has varied over time. To address this gap, my research utilizes a theory-informed text analysis approach to measure legislative attention to race by examining the frequency and type of racialized words in the text of bills.

Using the language tool capable of quantifying the magnitude and frequency of racialized words in bill texts, developed by my mentor Amber Mackey. With this tool, my project aims to investigate how legislative attention to racial issues has evolved over time.
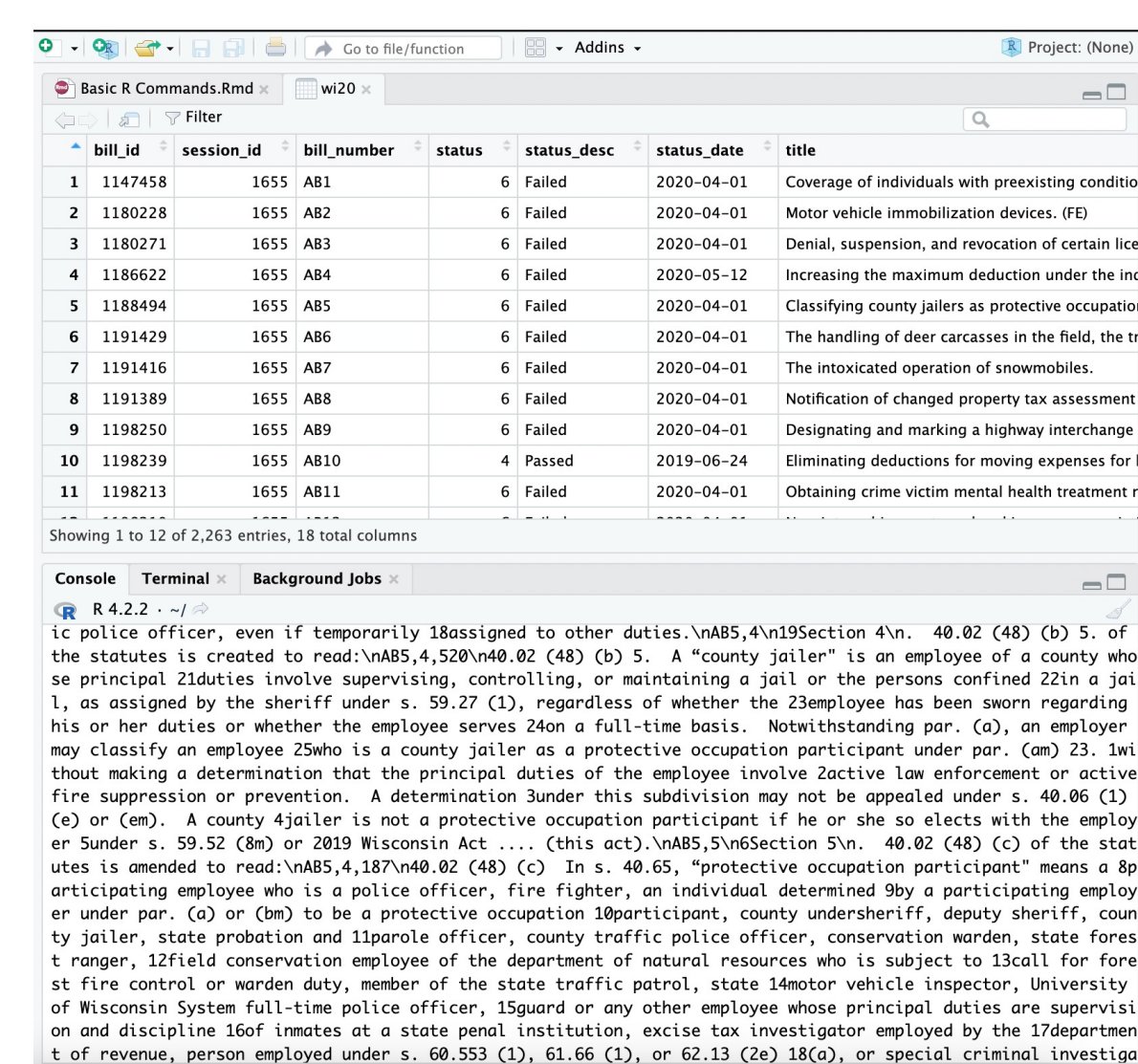
Research Questions

How has legislative attention to racial issues changed over time?

Was there an increase, decrease, or no change in the racialized language used in the state legislature of Wisconsin between 2010-2020?

What are the implications of such a change (increase, decrease, or no change) on the state of Wisconsin?
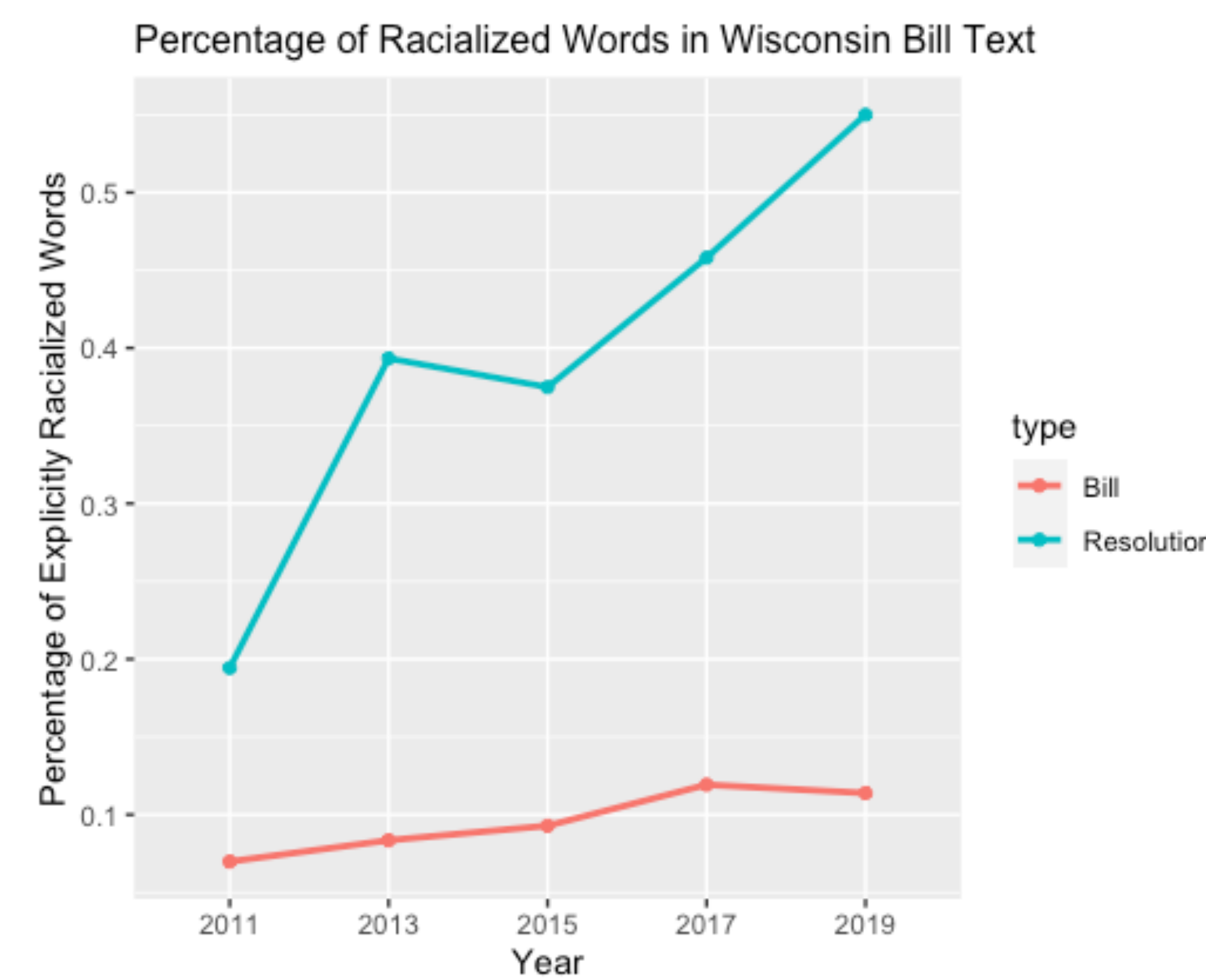
Project Scope

Dissect all bills produced in a Wisconsin's state legislature between the years 2010 and 2020 using the racialized hierarchy tool in R studio.
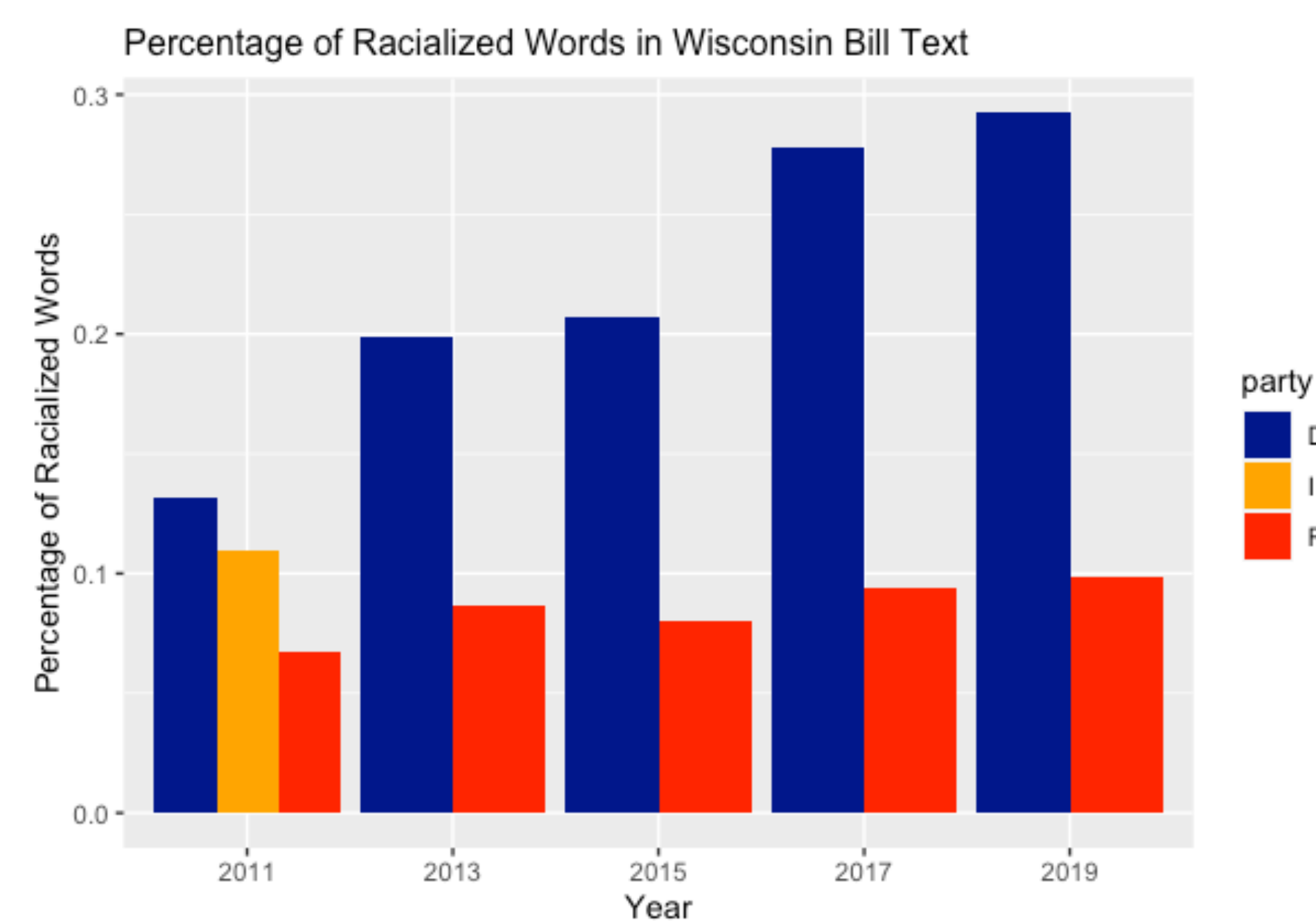

Findings

Wisconsin is showing an increase in racialized words overtime in resolutions (more symbolic), whereas bills (more substantive) are only showing a slight increase over time.

Percentage of Racialized Words in Wisconsin Bill Text

Data shows Democrats are continuously increasing in their usage of racialized language while Republicans usage of racialized language is stagnant.

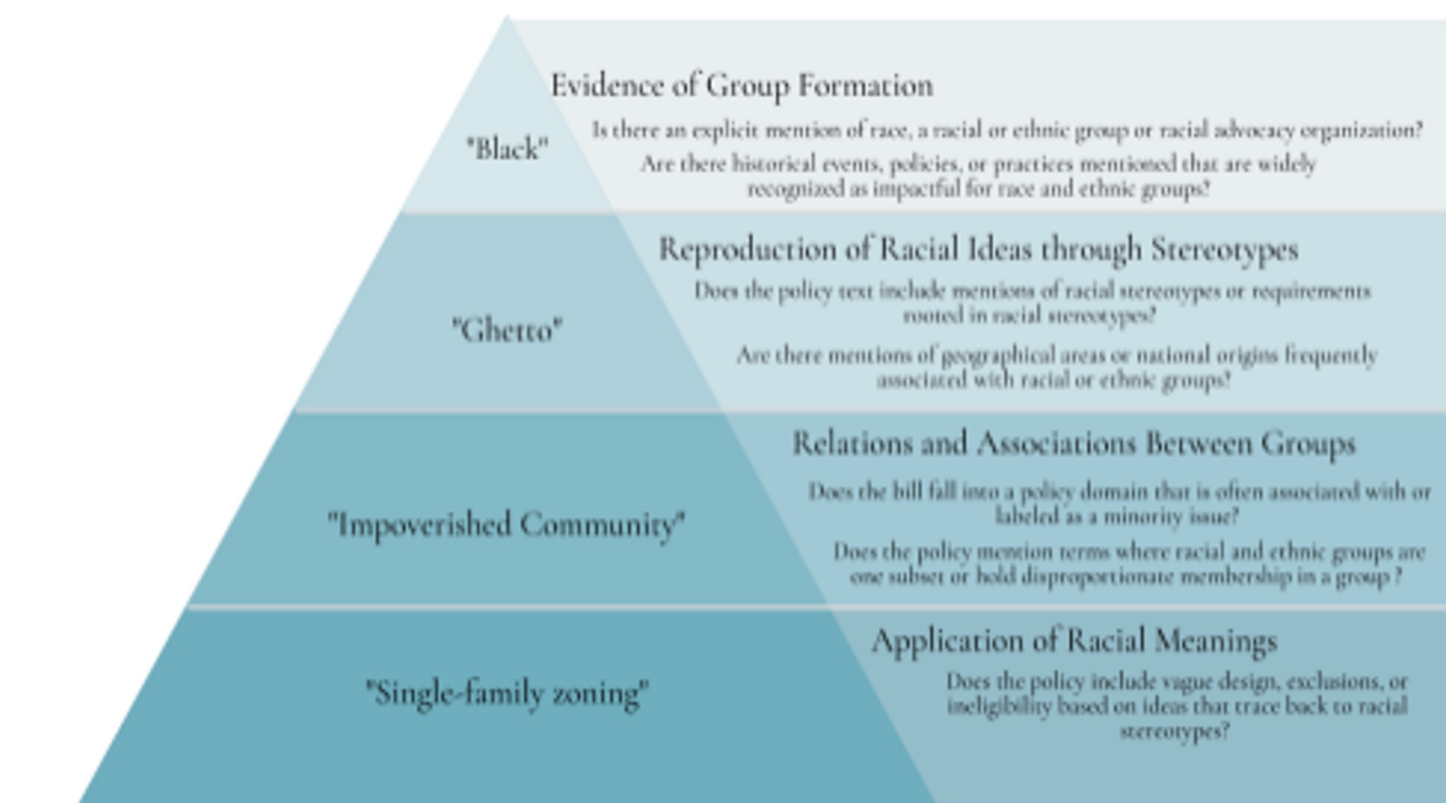Percentage of Racialized Words in Wisconsin Bill Text

Implication of Findings

The fact that bills, only show a slight increase in the use of racialized language yet there is a major increase of racialized language in resolutions could suggest that:

1. There is still a disconnect between the language used in political discourse.
2. There is a disconnect in the actual implementation of substantive policies (bills) that are giving attention to race and the potential need for this attention (seen in the resolution).

Methods

The investigation was conducted using text analysis to identify racialized language in Wisconsin state laws and bills. Using R, the amount of racialized language in these bills was analyzed. The racialized language hierarchy tool will be able to identify terms and words that currently have a racialized meaning both implicitly and explicitly.

Mackey, Amber. (2022) *"Racialized Language Hierarchy: A Tool for Measuring Attention to Race in Policy Text."*

Policy Recommendations

1. More focus on substantive policies: While symbolic gestures are important, policymakers must also focus on implementing substantive policies that reflect the same increase of racialized language as the resolutions and take the racial implication of all bills into account.

1. Foster collaboration and consensus-building: The findings suggest that there may be a widening partisan divide on issues related to these findings. Policymakers should make a concerted effort to foster collaboration and build consensus across party lines to address issues in the state related to findings.

While these recommendations are valid for the findings, it can be questioned whether these recommendations are viable for Wisconsin because of the demographics of the state.

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