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Racism and the uneven geography of welfare sanctioning in England

Andrew Williams 🄳 | Brian Webb | Richard Gale

School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

Correspondence
Andrew Williams, School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK.
Email: williamsapj@cardiff.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper presents the first spatial analysis of racial disparities in the UK welfare sanction regime. As part of their austerity programme, the UK government tightened the conditionality of welfare programmes and intensified the use of financial penalties against welfare claimants who failed to demonstrate compliance with these conditions. Analysing Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Office for National Statistics between 2012 and 2019 we draw attention to the spatially uneven and highly racialised geography of welfare sanctions in England. Claimants from racially minoritised backgrounds are consistently more likely to be referred for a sanction by Jobcentre caseworkers and receive an adverse decision at the hands of institutional decision-makers. Within this, however, there are important scalar and spatial differences that warrant critical attention. In rural England, the risk of being sanctioned is substantially higher for all groups, but especially for Mixed heritage and Black/Black British claimants who in some areas are over twice as likely to be sanctioned as their White counterparts. Since ethnicity data have not been published for Universal Credit sanction decisions, the presented evidence offers critical insight into the potential persistence of racial injustice in applying welfare sanctions. We identify 'hotspots' of racism in the sanction regime, most of which are in rural areas, before offering three interpretative frameworks through which spatial and racial disparities might be explained. Any suggestion that such disparities simply derive from the behaviour of DWP staff fails to adequately account for deeply entrenched histories of welfare racism, rural racism and the role of welfare sanctioning in dynamics of racial capitalism: that is, disciplining and impoverishing racialised populations in ways that generate conditions for capital accumulation. By contributing new empirical and theoretical insights to the often neglected study of rural austerity and welfare, the paper calls for scholarship to investigate the variegations of welfare, austerity and racial capitalism in diverse rural contexts.

KEYWORDS
austerity, England, racial capitalism, racism, rurality, welfare sanction

1 | INTRODUCTION

Welfare sanctions—penalties applied to people receiving social welfare benefits for not meeting certain stipulated conditions or requirements—have become central to disciplinary approaches to poverty management in North America, Australia and Europe (Schram et al., 2009), and commonly underpin Conditional Cash Transfer programmes in Africa and South America (Cookson, 2018; Reininger et al., 2019; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018). In the UK, conditionality and punishment for 'noncompliance' have been longstanding features of the state welfare apparatus (Garland, 1981). Historical antecedents to the sanction can be found in Elizabethan and Colonial Poor Laws, which enshrined calculations of deservedness and permitted 'vagrants' who refused work to be whipped or branded at the 'house of correction' (Tyler, 2020). In the nineteenth-century workhouse, penalties for inmates refusing to work and obey orders included diet restrictions, and, for more severe or persistent offences, a prison sentence of 'hard labour' (Green, 2006). Notwithstanding these earlier articulations, the 'welfare sanction' itself (previously called disqualification) only became a formal component of the UK's National Insurance system in 1913. Even so, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s, with consecutive neoliberal attacks on welfare and welfare recipients, first by the Conservatives and then in expanded form by New Labour, that the scope, prevalence and severity of sanctioning began to increase (see Webster, 2019 for historical context).

A new, harsher sanction regime introduced in 2012 by the Coalition Government extended the maximum period a person's benefit payment could be reduced or stopped from 26 weeks to 3 years[1] (Webster, 2014a). It also increased the bureaucratic burden on people receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) to provide proof of 'job readiness', with caseworkers issuing sanction referrals for minor 'offences' (e.g., not attending a Jobcentre appointment on time) (Wright et al., 2020). The monthly sanction rate for people in receipt of JSA ranged from 2% to 2.5% between 2000 and 2006, rising to 6% by late 2013 (Watts et al., 2014), resulting in 24% of all JSA claimants between 2010 and 2015 receiving a sanction at some point during their claim (National Audit Office [NAO], 2016). According to Webster (2018a), the sanctions drive in 2010–2016 was 'historically unprecedented in scale' and coincided with the launch of the Work Programme in 2011, which entailed mandatory training sessions, work placements and increased surveillance of case managers.

The UK welfare sanction regime has been subject to substantial critique due to its role in producing destitution (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018) and undermining basic human rights (Adler, 2018) by increasing rates of food bank use (Loopstra et al., 2015), indebtedness (Dagdeviren et al., 2020), 'survival sex' (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2019), 'survival crime' (Welfare Conditionality Project, 2018), anxiety and depression (Williams, 1944, 2021) and suicide (Mills, 2018). Sanctions have disproportionately impacted single homeless people (Reeve, 2017), ethnic minorities (de Vries et al., 2017), migrants (Dwyer et al., 2019), lone parents and disabled people (Reeves & Loopstra, 2017). Meanwhile, the perpetual threat of a sanction represents a deterrent to new benefit claimants (Tyler, 2020) and disciplines existing claimants through fear (Wright et al., 2020) and digital surveillance via the Claimant Commitment and the 'Universal Jobmatch panopticon' (Fletcher & Wright, 2018, p. 323). Despite the increasingly punitive configuration of the benefits system, sanctioning has proved largely ineffective in enabling people to enter and sustain paid work that lifts them out of poverty (Dwyer, 2018; NAO, 2016; Taulbut et al., 2018)—a process, Grover (2019) argues, that constitutes a 'violent proletarianisation', a form of structural violence exercised by the capitalist state to force people into low paid, chronically insecure forms of wage-labour for the enrichment of the capitalist class.

In academic and popular accounts, such as Ken Loach's 2016 film *I, Daniel Blake*, the sanction regime is depicted as an arbitrary and impersonal bureaucratic mechanism whose claim to 'impartiality' is based on strict process and physical and moral distance. Whether a sanction is applicable is the sole responsibility of a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 'decision-maker' who should 'consider the facts and evidence and all the individual circumstances of the case to make an impartial, independent and reasoned decision' (DWP, 2013, n.p). The separation of the decision-maker and the subject of their decision-making supposedly allows routinised, mechanical and non-emotional encounters whereby responsibility is dispersed (Bauman, 1989; Lens, 2008). But, following Lipsky (1980), the discretion of street-level bureaucrats underlines the impossibility of 'blind justice' (Rawls, 1971), which leads to questions as to the localised geographies of welfare (Edmiston et al., 2022) and the ways welfare encounters are negotiated, deliberated, improvised and experienced (May et al., 2019).

Institutional racism has long characterised the discretionary judgement of sanctions and welfare-to-work programmes in North America (Harvey & Pickering, 2010; Schram et al., 2009; Soss et al., 2011) and Europe (Pedersen et al., 2018). Monnat (2008), for example, notes how in the USA Black women in general, but especially those who match ideological constructions of irresponsibility and un/deservingness, have greater odds of being sanctioned. In the UK, Webster's longstanding work on sanctions has been instructive. Analysis of ethnic differentials in sanction rates for those in receipt of JSA and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) from 2005 to 2018 shows that people of mixed ethnicity and Black/

Black British heritage are consistently the most likely to be sanctioned (Webster, 2018b). Similarly, de Vries et al. (2017) indicate younger JSA claimants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are referred for a sanction more often, and for more severe sanctions, than their White counterparts. In October 2013, the most intense period of welfare sanctioning, just over 25% of Black/Black British men aged 18–24 in receipt of JSA were referred for a sanction compared with 20% of White claimants of a similar age and gender. Women of the same age and ethnic group faced a referral rate of 18% compared with 15% of White claimants (see de Vries et al., 2017, pp. 17–18).

Emerging evidence has exposed the pressure on Jobcentre Plus (JCP) workers and decision-makers to meet performance targets[2] related to 'off benefit flows' whereby success is categorised as claimants ending their benefit claim irrespective of whether they have entered employment (Redman & Fletcher, 2021). Despite such targets being met with uneven implementation and even resistance on the ground (Flint, 2019; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2014), Redman and Fletcher's interviews with former JCP workers demonstrate clear evidence of localised sanction regimes with weekly managerial targets and strategies of stigmatisation, quantification, competition and absolving workers of moral responsibility. Research has revealed significant local and regional variation in referral and sanction rates between Jobcentres (NAO, 2016; Webster, 2014b); local authorities (LAs) (Loopstra et al., 2015); and rural/urban areas (May et al., 2020), with claimants generally being 'treated more harshly in areas of high unemployment either by being required to attend more interviews or by being more readily sanctioned for non-attendance or unpunctuality' (Webster, 2014b, p. 5).

Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions that examine racial disparities in welfare sanctioning at a UK level (excluding Northern Ireland) (de Vries et al., 2017; Webster, 2018b), or for specific social groups—for example, Roma migrants (Dinu & Scullion, 2019) or homeless Polish migrants (Serpa, 2019)—research on welfare conditionality in the UK has largely overlooked 'race' and ethnicity and there is a notable absence of research that examines the racialised geography of welfare sanctions. Contemporary racial injustice in the UK sanction regime remains effectively concealed because, unlike data for JSA sanction decisions, ethnicity data are not available for Universal Credit sanction decisions because the DWP does not publish data on 'non-mandatory self-declared diversity fields' until the completion rate is 70% or above (DWP, 2022). Until then, analysis of JSA sanction data provides a necessary proxy to assess the prevalence of ongoing racial disparities in the welfare sanction regime.

This paper therefore makes three contributions. Firstly, it presents the first spatial analysis of racial disparities in the UK welfare sanction regime. Combining 7 years of Jobseeker Allowance Sanction (JSA) decision data in England (2012–2019), our analysis demonstrates that the implementation of sanctions in this period was both institutionally racist and spatially uneven. JSA claimants from racially-minoritised (excluding White minority) backgrounds were more likely to be referred for a sanction by Jobcentre workers and for this sanction referral to result in an 'adverse decision' at the hands of the DWP 'decision-maker' than their White counterparts. But important racial geographies are concealed in a national analysis of welfare sanctions, and our findings draw attention to the regional, county and district-level variations in the rate by which different ethnic groups are sanctioned. From this, we identify 'hotspots' where the disparity between ethnic minority and White sanction rates is most acute, and of which the vast majority are in rural areas.

Secondly, instead of conceptualising the uneven geography of sanctioning (and 'hotspots') simply as a postcode lottery, we offer a series of interpretative frameworks that connect longstanding literature on rural racism (Chakraborti & Garland, 2011; Cloke, 2004; Cloke & Little, 1997; Neal & Agyeman, 2006) with more recent geographies of welfare, austerity, and racial capitalism (Hawthorne, 2019; Tyler, 2020). Rural austerity has occupied a provincial position in UK geographic scholarship on austerity and welfare retrenchment (Gray & Barford, 2018; Hall, 2019) and in the subdiscipline of rural geography till relatively recently (see Clelland, 2021; May et al., 2020; Milbourne, 2015; Vera-Toscano et al., 2023). Meanwhile, rural geography scholarship has increasingly drawn on relational understandings of rural space (Heley & Jones, 2012) to consider the ways representational, material and lived aspects of the rural are intertwined and constantly being re-made in hybrid and differentiated ways. Within this, there have been growing debates over the rise of rural cosmopolitanism and the contested politics of rural life (Woods, 2018) in relation to rapidly changing ethnic and cultural diversity in rural Britain (Lymperopoulou, 2020), and fragile and highly variable support for Brexit among different rural spaces (for a critical review of these debates see Neal et al., 2021). We contribute to this debate by providing evidence of welfare racism in the English countryside, highlighting important urban–rural and intra-rural differences. Following others (MacKrell & Pemberton, 2018; Moore, 2021; Woods, 2022), we likewise express caution over unduly celebratory articulations of rural cosmopolitanism that do not account for structural racism. To this end, we interpret racial disparities in the welfare sanction regime as a practice of rural place-making, one that reproduces 'racialised ecologies of power, including, for example, the extension (or denial) of welcome and recognition to non-white locals and newcomers' (Stead et al., 2023, p. 5).

Finally, and relatedly, rather than positioning the welfare sanction as an otherwise fair institutional mechanism that can be remedied, it is vital to situate welfare conditionality—and the logics underpinning it—in the context of domestic and colonial histories of welfare. Here, we embrace the insights of Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw & Gotanda, 1995) in arguing against the belief that fixing the problem can be achieved simply through development of 'better' policies and appropriate guidance to decision-makers—in this case, DWP staff. Rather, we contend that deeper, more penetrative analyses of contextual historicity, cultural legacy and institutional process are necessary to understand the production and manifestation of systematic racial disadvantage. In this, we concur with Patel and Price (2016, p. 62), who suggest that 'the sources of injustice must be adequately named and theorised to then determine how to interrupt those injustices and build possibilities for realities beyond them'. Our core contention in this regard is that racial discrimination in the application of welfare sanctions is not a localised 'aberration' but an integral part of racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Gilmore, 2007; Robinson, 2000). Importantly, these patterns of injustice connect to longstanding processes of expropriation, domination, and discipline of racialised populations in ways that restrict access to adequate socio-economic resources, while generating conditions for capital accumulation. Reflecting on the ways rural places are 'enfolded with spatial legacies of colonialism, enslavement, segregation, diasporic relations and emplaced forms of resistance' (Stead et al., 2023, p. 6), we reflect on the variegated and changing relationship between racial capitalism and rural settings in an English context, and the implications of welfare conditionality in everyday rural life.

2 | METHODOLOGY

Following de Vries et al. (2017), we used the Department of Work and Pensions data to analyse the total number of sanctions and referral decisions for Jobseekers Allowance claimants made in each local authority (LA) for different ethnic groups for the period November 2012 to October 2019. This period was used for consistent comparison as a new sanction regime was introduced in October 2012 and by October 2019 the number of JSA claimants had been largely replaced by Universal Credit, although there are claimants who remain on legacy benefits.

Our analysis is based on calculation and comparison of 'risk ratios', identifying whether claimants from minority ethnic backgrounds are at greater 'risk' of exposure to welfare referral and sanctions than White majority claimants. For the numerator, we used 'Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Sanctions: Number of Decisions' which counts all decisions by ethnic group and LA. Measuring the total number of sanction decisions was preferred to the total number of persons sanctioned because the latter does not account for people who receive multiple sanctions (Webster, 2014c), which is important when examining potential racial discrimination. For the denominator, we used ONS 'Jobseeker's Allowance stocks and flows by ethnicity, age and duration', which provides the total claimant months for each combined ethnic group. Monthly totals from November 2012 to October 2019 were aggregated to give the proportion of claimant months constituted by each ethnic group.

Two specific rates were then calculated: firstly the 'referral rate', the percentage of all claimant months per ethnic group referred for a sanction between November 2012 and October 2019; and secondly the 'sanction rate', the total number of claimant months per ethnic group sanctioned divided by the total claimant months in each ethnic group in the same period. We also examine the 'conversion rate', calculated as the proportion of sanction referrals that result in a sanction. The conversion rate measures the decision outcomes once a referral has been made to a decision-maker, which is manually recorded on the Decision Making and Appeals System (DMAS). This measure isolates the discretionary judgement of the 'decision-maker' and controls for the possibility that racial disparities in the sanction regime reflect higher proportions of ethnic minority claimants failing to comply with the 'claimant commitment'. We then calculated 'risk ratios', whereby rates of referral, sanction and conversion for each minority ethnic group were divided by the corresponding rates for White claimants. Thus, in the case of sanctions, for example, a risk ratio equal to one means that the risk of a sanction is identical between the White group and a given minority ethnic group; a risk ratio greater than one signals the risk of a sanction is higher for the minority group vis-à-vis the White group; and a risk ratio less than one indicates that the risk of a sanction is lower for the minority group vis-à-vis the White group. Risk ratios take account for variability in sanction and referral rates to show the disparity between ethnic groups. However, risk ratios alone do not account for areas where claimants face higher referral and sanction rates irrespective of ethnicity. Raw data and maps of these are available in Appendix S1.

Our approach to pooling data across a relatively large timespan is justified on the grounds that it facilitates spatial rather than temporal analysis, providing sufficiently large cell counts to enable analysis of ethnic differentials at a range of geographic scales. While the paper does not address trends over time, which have been documented elsewhere (de Vries et al., 2017; Loopstra et al., 2015; Webster, 2018a), it provides fresh insights into the risk of exposure to welfare sanctioning faced by different ethnic groups at regional, county and LA scales. Analysis by LA districts is preferable to

analysis at Jobcentre Plus level, given the low ethnic group counts in some areas. To mitigate low numbers of ethnic minority claimants in some rural LAs, it was necessary to combine claimants who identified as 'Black or Black British', 'Asian or Asian British', 'Mixed', or 'Chinese or other ethnic group' into a composite 'ethnic minorities (excluding White minorities)' category. Correspondingly, claimants who identified as 'White-British', 'White-Irish' and 'White-Other' were aggregated into a single category of 'White' claimants.

The category of 'ethnic minorities (excluding White minorities)' is not preferred on substantive grounds but is defensible given that low numbers of minority ethnic groups in some authorities would distort results. We are aware that this form of statistical aggregation risks reproducing majoritarian assumptions (Gillborn, 2010) and cannot adequately reflect specific experiences of discrimination and their distinct historical, socio-cultural and political realities. Our use of 'ethnic minority' is heuristic, enabling us to reveal concealed patterns of racialised injustice and inform political struggle, while eschewing any notion of its being a homogeneous or self-evident category. Where it allows at regional and county level, we disaggregate the data to draw attention to the distinct experience of claimants from 'Black or Black British', 'Asian or Asian British', 'Mixed', or 'Chinese or other ethnic backgrounds'. Similarly, the small numbers of claimants classified as 'White-Irish' and 'White-Other' in each LA prevented granular analysis of the racialisation of claimants from Central and Eastern European backgrounds, although earlier research has highlighted the 'othering' of Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants who deviate from constructions of whiteness as Englishness (Dwyer et al., 2019). We note here that our findings corroborate, and also refine, analysis conducted at a UK level (excluding Northern Ireland) (de Vries et al., 2017; Webster, 2018b), which shows a statistically significant difference in the sanction regime between ethnic groups. DWP data incur lower cell counts at the LA level and thus utilise 'Introduced Random Error'[3] to reduce the risk of identifying individuals in the data. In addition, data on number of decisions made was manually entered into the database by decision-makers, which may cause discrepancies. ONS data cells between 1 and 5 are rounded to the nearest 5. Our analysis highlights the cases we have omitted where there are discrepancies or an incomplete dataset.

Caution needs to be exercised when interpreting disparities based on areas with small numbers of ethnic minority claimants. Therefore, we include the 'raw data' on the total number of ethnic minority claimant months in lower-tier LAs and the total number of sanction decisions in each area. We also address concerns that racial disparities may be exaggerated in some lower-tier LAs through small counts of minority ethnic groups resulting in large proportional differences in referral and sanction rates. To overcome this problem, we replicate the analysis at upper-tier LA and regional levels. In this way, larger spatial aggregations allow more granular analysis of ethnic group experiences, while also confirming the existence of significant urban and rural variations.

Finally, as a measure of rurality, we use the ONS 2011 Rural–Urban Classification at the level of lower-tier LA (comprising 326 LA districts, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs), upper-tier LA (comprising 94 counties, metropolitan counties, inner and outer London and unitary authorities), and region (comprising London, the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, South East, East of England and the South West). Conducting the same analysis across these three scales illustrates the scale and effect of the modifiable areal unit problem (Wong, 2009) and the risks of assuming homogeneity within each spatial aggregation. Areas classified as 'predominantly rural', for example, may contain elements of the 'urban' and vice versa. While we acknowledge the scalar and spatial boundaries between the 'urban' and 'rural' are porous, and constructions of 'rurality' vary significantly, we use the existing ONS classification of 'Predominantly Rural', 'Urban with Significant Rural' (USR), and 'Predominantly Urban' on the grounds that further disaggregation would prevent comparative analysis given the low number of JSA claimants in some rural LAs. The rationale for limiting analysis to England was methodological, given the ONS urban–rural classification of LAs is available only for England and is not directly comparable with Welsh and Scottish Governments' own classification of rurality. We aim to replicate this study in the devolved nations in due course, but stress that in this paper use of 'national' refers to England only. For simplicity, maps produced only highlight areas classified as 'Predominantly Urban' and, to prevent missing data, are constituted at the level of county and unitary authority and classified by natural breaks for ethnic minority referral and sanction rates.

3 | RACIAL INJUSTICE AND THE UNEVEN GEOGRAPHIES OF WELFARE SANCTIONING IN ENGLAND

The distribution of sanctioning is largely proportional to the geography of JSA claimants, with 78.26% of sanctions and 78.02% of referrals coming from 'Predominantly Urban' areas which make up 78.49% of all claimant months in this

period. In rural areas, White claimants comprise 97.56% (5,793,130) of all claimant months and 97.41% (210,445) of all sanction decisions. They also represent 72.58% (26,452,635) and 93.55% (3,788,750) of total claimant months in 'Urban' and 'USR' areas, accounting for 71.46% (957,956) and 93.30% (145,876) of sanction decisions respectively. Such figures give the appearance of marginal bias against ethnic minority claimants who, in rural areas, comprise 2.44% (145,015) of all claimant months but 2.57% (11,884) of referrals and 2.59% (5599) of sanction decisions (Appendix S1). However, this conceals a much more problematic racialised geography in sanction and referral rates.

In keeping with Webster's (2018b) aggregated analysis of sanction rates by ethnicity, Figure 1 shows Mixed and Black claimants are most likely to be sanctioned, and in most parts of the country, Chinese and other ethnic group claimants are less likely to receive a sanction than White claimants (see Appendix S1 for referral rate and sanction rate tables). However, there are considerable urban/rural and regional differences. In the East Midlands, Mixed group claimants are 1.34 times more likely to be sanctioned in rural areas than their White counterparts, while in urban areas it is 1.26 times more likely. In the North West, Black or Black British claimants in predominantly rural areas are 3.06 times more likely to be sanctioned than White claimants, while only marginally more likely to receive a sanction in urban areas.

From Figure 1 the differences between Mixed heritage and White claimants and between Black/Black British and White claimants appear starker than spatial differences within and between regions. The pattern for Black and mixed heritage claimants is mostly consistent across rural as well as urban areas, but some of the most significant 'hotspots' of welfare racism are rural rather than urban: in the rural North West and to a lesser extent, rural Yorkshire and Humber, USR West Midlands and USR South West. Such variability suggests the need to disaggregate the data further so that it brings rural space within the scope of analyses of welfare racism, and also begins to identify what is happening in rural 'hotspots' such as the rural North West.

County-level analysis provides a level of ethnic group aggregation that allows a more granular analysis of differences between ethnic groups across rural–urban classification. We can identify key 'hotspots' where disparities between White and ethnic minority claimants are most stark: (i) Cumbria, where Black/Black British claimants are almost three times (2.94) and Mixed group claimants are 1.94 times more likely to be referred for a sanction than their White counterparts; (ii) Dorset, where Asian/Asian British are 2.74 times more likely to receive a sanction referral, Mixed group 2.11 times, Black/Black British 1.33 times, and Chinese or other ethnic groups 1.89 times, compared with White claimants; and (iii) North Yorkshire, where Mixed claimants are 2.02 times, Black/Black British 1.66 times, and Asian/Asian British 1.26 times more likely to be referred for a sanction.

Mixed group claimants in Rutland are almost three times (2.92) more likely to be referred for a sanction than White claimants in the same area; over twice as likely in Bath and North Somerset (2.31) and Dorset (2.11); and over 1.5 times more likely in Torbay (1.78), Hartlepool (1.76), Southend-on-Sea (1.68), Warwickshire (1.62), Somerset (1.62), Herefordshire (1.60), Lincolnshire (1.59), Medway (1.57) Staffordshire (1.56), Slough (1.55), Central Bedfordshire (1.55), Cheshire East (1.54) and North Bedford (1.50).

But even within urban metropolitan counties (West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, West Midlands), there is significant variation in the sanction and referral rates for different ethnic groups. For example, in South Yorkshire (metropolitan county) the sanction risk ratio for all ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) ranges from marginally higher than White claimants in Barnsley (1.09); between 1.31 and 1.51 times more likely in Doncaster and Sheffield, respectively; and twice as likely to be sanctioned than White claimants in Rotherham (2.05) (see Appendix S1 for other examples and maps of metropolitan areas).

Alongside identifying hotspots, the county-level analysis also shows referral and sanction rates for ethnic minority claimants in rural areas tend to be higher than their urban counterparts. Predominantly rural areas had an average referral rate for 'ethnic minority' claimants of 9.52% compared with 8.56% in predominantly urban areas, while the average referral rate for White claimants was 8.10% and 8.13%, respectively (Figure 2). While there are notable outliers, the interquartile range shows clear rural/urban differences in the distribution of the data. The difference in sanction rates was slightly less pronounced, with an average sanction rate of 4.72% for 'ethnic minority' claimants in predominantly rural areas compared with 3.83% for White claimants. In urban areas, ethnic minority claimants faced an average 4.23% sanction rate while the average sanction rate for White claimants was 3.70%. The average risk ratio for ethnic minority claimants is marginally higher in rural areas (1.22) than in urban areas (1.15) (Appendix S1).

The maps in Figure 3 highlight the spatial variation between 'White' and 'ethnic minority' claimants, with higher referral rates for 'ethnic minority' claimants notable in predominantly rural counties in the East of England, parts of the South West and North West. The spatial variation in sanction rate is more dispersed, with particularly sharp contrasts between 'White' and 'ethnic minority' sanction rates in the South West as well as rural West Midlands and the North West. The risk ratios show the times more likely 'ethnic minority' claimants will be referred to the decision-maker and sanctioned, respectively, and

	MIXED	BLACK OR BLACK BRITISH	ASIAN OR ASIAN BRITISH	CHINESE OR OTHER ETHNIC
EAST OF ENGLAND				
Rural East	1.43	1.10	1.03	0.94
Urban East	1.46	1.17	1.30	1.19
USR East	1.36	1.03	1.10	0.80
EAST MIDLANDS				
Rural East Midlands	1.34	1.34	0.91	0.72
Urban East	1.26	1.00	0.95	1.43
USR East	1.38	0.94	0.69	0.64
SOUTH EAST				
Rural South East	1.13	1.02	1.04	0.74
Urban South East	1.29	1.15	0.96	1.07
USR South East	1.40	0.96	1.08	0.96
SOUTH WEST				
Rural South West	1.14	1.33	1.35	0.99
Urban South West	1.28	1.28	0.94	0.90
USR South West	2.60	1.36	0.49	0.83
LONDON				
Inner London – East	1.35	1.24	1.30	0.96
Inner London – West	1.43	1.39	1.23	1.04
Outer London – East & North East	1.22	1.13	0.96	0.88
Outer London – South	1.40	1.42	0.95	0.95
Outer London – West & North West	1.22	1.29	1.07	1.05
WEST MIDLANDS				
Rural West Midlands	1.30	1.05	1.19	0.70
Urban West Midlands	1.26	0.99	1.08	0.95
USR West Midlands	1.55	1.13	1.83	1.20
YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER				
Rural Yorkshire & The Humber	1.71	1.47	1.21	0.41
Urban Yorkshire & The Humber	1.47	1.02	1.21	1.28
USR Yorkshire & The Humber	1.28	1.21	1.31	1.35
NORTH EAST				
Rural North East	1.17	1.03	0.97	0.56
Urban North East	1.19	0.92	1.20	0.95
USR North East	1.01	0.54	0.99	0.60
NORTH WEST				
Rural North West	2.52	3.06	1.36	1.17
Urban North West	1.31	1.09	1.18	0.89
USR North West	1.45	1.25	0.77	0.79

FIGURE 1 Times more likely ethnic minority claimants are sanctioned (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore, 2020; ONS Nomis, 2020).

the maps demonstrate the particularly higher risk areas of the rural North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, West and East Midlands, and the South West. These maps are interactive and can be explored here: http://tinyurl.com/benefits-sanctions.

Disaggregating these figures for ethnic groups at county level reveals further racial and spatial disparities (see Appendix S1 for ethnic-group specific maps and tables). Figure 4 shows the proportion of claimant months referred for a sanction by ethnicity and rurality. In predominantly rural counties, the mean 'Mixed' referral rate (11.93%), 'Black or Black British' referral rate (10.47%) and 'Asian or Asian British' referral rate (11.03%) are higher than the 'White' referral rate (8.10%). Take

Rural-Urban Classification	Group	Cases (missing)	Minimum	Maximum	Lower quartile	Mean	Median	Upper quartile	Std. Deviation
Predominantly Rural	Ethnic minority Referral rate	20(1)	5.34%	13.93%	7.84%	9.52%	9.79%	11.37%	2.41%
	White Referral Rate	21	6.19%	10.64%	6.71%	8.10%	8.55%	9.06%	1.36%
	Ethnic minority Sanction rate	19(2)	2.45%	7.31%	3.89%	4.72%	4.78%	5.70%	1.20%
	White Sanction Rate	21	2.85%	5.31%	3.29%	3.83%	3.93%	4.25%	0.64%
Urban with Significant Rural	Ethnic minority Referral rate	21	6.05%	12.20%	7.22%	8.56%	8.00%	10.10%	1.83%
	White Referral Rate	21	5.96%	13.97%	6.80%	8.19%	7.65%	9.04%	1.83%
	Ethnic minority Sanction rate	21	3.13%	6.52%	3.38%	4.21%	4.03%	4.97%	0.94%
	White Sanction Rate	21	2.70%	6.46%	3.10%	3.71%	3.54%	3.96%	0.86%
Predominantly Urban	Ethnic minority Referral rate	52	5.38%	15.80%	6.61%	8.56%	8.06%	9.93%	2.35%
	White Referral Rate	52	4.47%	14.47%	6.55%	8.13%	8.02%	9.00%	2.03%
	Ethnic minority Sanction rate	52	2.53%	7.37%	3.23%	4.23%	4.19%	5.02%	1.17%
	White Sanction Rate	52	2.12%	6.40%	3.04%	3.70%	3.67%	4.11%	0.92%

FIGURE 2 Ethnic minority and White referral and sanction rate, 2012–2019, county and unitary authority level, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore, 2020; ONS Nomis, 2020). *Missing complete ethnic group data for Isles of Scilly and Rutland.

Cornwall, for example. Of 1100 'Black or Black British' claimant months, 118 were referred for a sanction (10.70%) compared with 19,654 of 317,570 'White' claimant months (6.20%). If referred to the 'decision-maker', 68.64% 'Black or Black British' claimants received an adverse decision compared with 54.31% for 'White' claimants—a 14.30% gap.

There are particularly glaring outliers among LAs in predominantly rural areas. In Allerdale (Cumbria), ethnic minority claimants are 5.98 times more likely to be referred for a sanction than 'White' claimants. Forty of 150 ethnic minority claimant months received a sanction, making ethnic minority claimants 7.53 times more likely to be sanctioned than 'White' claimant months. Other rural areas that have the highest difference between 'ethnic minority' and 'White' claimant referral rates include West Dorset where ethnic minority claimants are 2.76 times more likely to be referred. In Mid Devon, Purbeck and Forest Heath the figure is 2.34, 2.18 and 1.76 times, respectively (Appendix S1).

Care is needed when interpreting disparities based on areas with small numbers; however these racial disparities hold for LAs with much larger claimant counts, and hold when 'scaled up' to county, regional and England-wide level of analysis, thereby addressing concerns that racial injustices in sanction regimes are due to the small numbers concerned.

3.1 | Decision-makers and the myth of 'impartiality'

The conversion rate—the proportion of referrals which receive an adverse sanction decision by the decision-maker—should be relatively equal between ethnic groups to signal the absence of bias among decision-makers. Yet, in almost
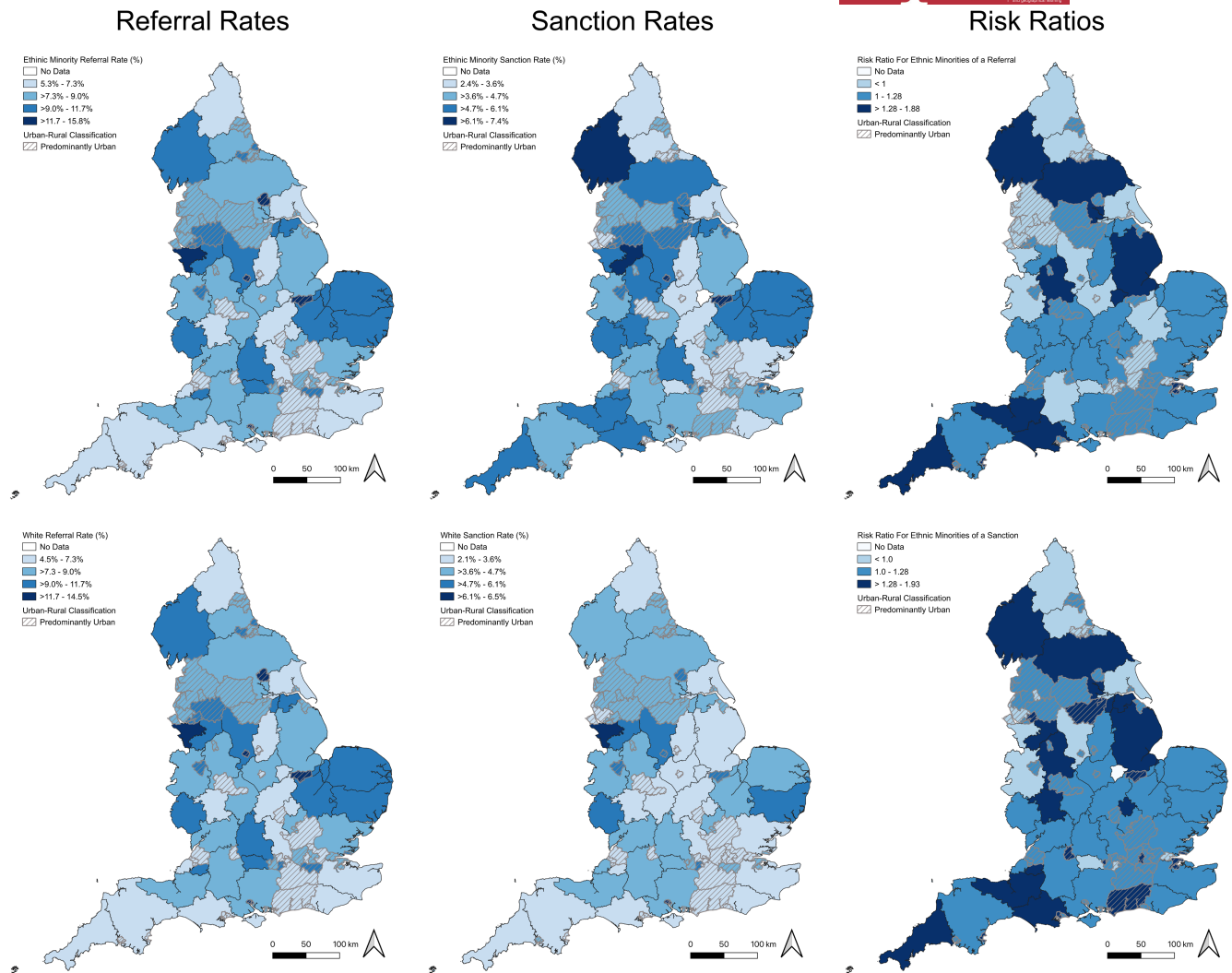
FIGURE 3 'Ethnic minority' and 'White' referral rates, sanction rates and risk ratios, 2012–2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore, 2020; ONS Nomis, 2020; Click here for interactive map http://tinyurl.com/benefits-sanctions).

all county and unitary authorities (excluding the Isles of Scilly and Rutland which do not provide comparable data), the aggregated 'ethnic minority' group were more likely to receive a sanction at the hands of the decision-maker (Appendix S1). In only five areas—Suffolk, Darlington, Cheshire West and Chester UA, Bracknell Forest UA, Thurrock UA, North Yorkshire—did White claimants face a higher conversion rate than ethnic minorities. While it is important to acknowledge ethnic minorities in 51 upper-tier authorities were only marginally more likely to receive an adverse decision (between 1.01 and 1.09 times), 30 counties or unitary authorities had a conversion rate of over 1.1. In West Berkshire, for example, there is a 12% difference between the White and ethnic minority conversion rate, with ethnic minority claimants 1.28 times more likely to receive an adverse sanction decision once referred to a decision-maker. Given the larger total number of 'White' referrals, one could argue a higher number of 'White' claimant months referred to the decision-maker would be made in error, resulting in the issuing of non-adverse sanction decisions. If this were the case, we would expect to see similar degrees of error for ethnic minority referrals, yet we do not. All other things being equal, once referred to the decision-maker one would expect a fairly even proportion of adverse sanction decisions between ethnic groups. Yet in rural areas, the median proportion of an adverse sanction decision made against 'White' referrals is 47%, with the maximum only 54% (Appendix S1). Meanwhile, the median average conversion rate for Black or Black British is approximately 49.5% (max 69%), Asian or Asian British referrals 50% (max 73%).

	Rural-urban classification and ethnic group	Cases (missing)	Min	Max	Lower quartile	Mean	Median	Upper quartile	Std. Dev
Predominantly Rural	'White' Referral Rate	21	6.19%	10.64%	6.71%	8.10%	8.55%	9.06%	1.36%
	'Mixed' Referral Rate	20(1)	6.67%	20.00%	8.44%	11.93%	11.61%	14.50%	3.77%
	'Black or Black British' Referral Rate	20(1)	4.14%	26.51%	8.40%	10.47%	9.80%	11.55%	4.60%
	'Asian or Asian British' Referral Rate	20(1)	4.05%	33.33%	7.76%	11.03%	9.76%	12.41%	6.28%
	'Chinese or Other Ethnic Group' Referral Rate	20(1)	2.63%	13.03%	3.96%	6.96%	6.60%	9.38%	3.24%
Urban with Significant Rural	'White' Referral Rate	21	5.96%	13.97%	6.80%	8.19%	7.65%	9.04%	1.83%
	'Mixed' Referral Rate	21	8.06%	21.11%	9.03%	11.16%	10.09%	12.61%	3.07%
	'Black or Black British' Referral Rate	21	4.75%	12.93%	7.15%	8.45%	8.04%	9.58%	2.22%
	'Asian or Asian British' Referral Rate	21	4.46%	12.78%	6.09%	7.55%	6.42%	8.74%	2.23%
	'Chinese or Other Ethnic Group' Referral Rate	21	3.16%	9.43%	4.67%	6.34%	6.40%	7.59%	1.67%
Predominantly Urban	'White' Referral Rate	52	4.47%	14.47%	6.55%	8.13%	8.02%	9.00%	2.03%
	'Mixed' Referral Rate	52	5.85%	17.80%	8.09%	10.27%	9.39%	11.91%	3.10%
	'Black or Black British' Referral Rate	52	4.04%	18.78%	6.96%	8.81%	8.22%	9.98%	2.82%
	'Asian or Asian British' Referral Rate	52	4.98%	15.33%	6.19%	8.02%	7.70%	9.52%	2.31%
	'Chinese or Other Ethnic Group' Referral Rate	52	3.38%	17.93%	5.13%	7.11%	6.40%	7.85%	3.08%

FIGURE 4 County and unitary authority JSA referral rates, 2012–2019, by broad ethnic group and rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore, 2020; ONS Nomis, 2020). *Excludes local authorities where data are not available for all ethnic groups.

4 | MORE THAN A 'FEW BAD APPLES': WELFARE SANCTIONS, RACIAL CAPITALISM AND RURAL RACISM

From this analysis, we wish to offer three interpretative frameworks through which spatial and racial disparities might be explained. The first of these is to focus on the organisational cultures of Jobcentres and the individual attitudes of case-workers and decision-makers, and there is good reason to do so given previous legal settlements and scandals involving racism and discrimination by Jobcentre staff (see Barnes, 2016; Gayle, 2020), and experimental design research has exposed implicit racialised judgements of employment caseworkers (Pedersen et al., 2018; Schram et al., 2009). Addressing the racial disparities in the sanction regime might entail reviewing the effectiveness of DWP's mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training for Jobcentre staff. At the very least, the DWP should introduce anonymised assessment of claimant cases to eliminate potential decision-maker bias.

Such an intervention, despite its ameliorative aims, typifies a liberal approach to racial justice that gives the impression that institutional racism stems from a lack of diversity or effective training among the people who work in said institutions (see Ahmed, 2012). This approach works on the premise that there are a 'few bad apples', whose behaviour is licensed by defective administrative procedures that can be remedied with the right policy 'fix'. This is a technocratic vision of institutional reform that individualises problems of racism and gives the illusion of effective action while structural racial injustices are left intact. A more effective policy would be to abolish the sanction system entirely. Racial disparities in welfare sanctioning regimes are not an aberration but represent the normal functioning of state institutions that have long been predicated on racial logics of deservingness and processes of capital accumulation (Elliott-Cooper, 2023). As such, the sanction regime itself requires much wider contextualisation in relation to the deep-veined dynamics of racial capitalism and histories of welfare racism. Correspondingly, given that many of the 'hotspots' are in rural settings, there

is a need for geographers to theorise the interdependencies—past and present—between racial capitalism, welfare conditionality and rurality in the UK.

Racism in welfare conditionality is not new. It is the latest mutation in the history of racialised welfare in the UK that dates back at least to racialised exclusion from the old Poor Law to the Liberal reforms of the 1900s (Feldman, 2003), the centuries-old 'hostile environment' for immigrants (El-Enany, 2020), the racist 'colour bars' in welfare, employment and housing (Shilliam, 2018), and the malign neglect and restrictive universalism of the post-war welfare state (Jacobs, 1985). Colonial subjects were largely denied welfare citizenship despite the Welfare State apparatus being financed through colonial extraction and taxation (Bhambra, 2022), and as was the case with *Welfare Foods Service*, tied to the creation of new extractive plantation economies in Jamaica (Durbach, 2018).

Drawing on the concept of racial capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson, 2000), geographic scholarship has foregrounded the multiple ways in which capitalist modernity is constituted by the differentiation, domination, displacement and destruction of Black and Indigenous bodies and spaces (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Gilmore, 2007; Goldberg, 2002; Hawthorne, 2019; McKittrick, 2011). Whether one sees racial exploitation as a necessary or contingent aspect of the historical development of capitalist economies, there has been a recurrent historical tendency for capitalist economic, political and social formations to create and articulate forms of racial fracture that have proved remarkably durable. It becomes clear that a more supple, non-reductive theorisation is necessary that neither subsumes race as an epiphenomenon or residue of economic process, nor reifies it as a transcendent, ahistorical category, woven deterministically into the 'iron laws' of capitalist development.

The discipline and impoverishment of racialised populations through welfare sanctions generate conditions for capital accumulation and must be contextualised alongside racialised processes of austerity and welfare retrenchment more broadly. There is now considerable evidence substantiating the ways in which members of racially minoritised groups, already marginalised by the wider effects of societal racism, have been disproportionately affected by austerity measures in the UK (Emejulu & Bassel, 2015). Black and minority ethnic women have been disproportionately affected by welfare reforms—being more likely to live in low-income households and with dependent children—while also facing gender and racial discrimination in the labour market (Hall et al., 2017). Black and ethnic minority groups face a disproportionate risk of persistent poverty (JRF, 2023), food insecurity (Loopstra et al., 2019) and homelessness (Bramley et al., 2022), with homelessness application rates for Black-headed households 5.1 times higher in London, 3.5 times higher in the South West and 2.5 times higher in the North East, than that of White British households, respectively (ibid., p. 21).

In the words of Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007, p. 28) '[r]acism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies'. The sanction constitutes a form of forced destitution producing and compounding vulnerability by stripping away resources needed to live. It compels submission to economic insecurity, precarious employment and indebtedness. Sanctioned claimants on income-based JSA can apply for JSA Hardship Payments (usually 60% of JSA), but only after the first 2 weeks of a sanction (unless they are in a defined 'vulnerable' group), and with proof of destitution (bank statement, arrears, letter from foodbank), resulting in less than half of claimants receiving such support (Webster, 2015). While these hardship payments were non-repayable, Universal Credit hardship payments are repayable and deducted once benefit payments are reinstated. Given the insufficiency and inaccessibility of hardship payments, many people in this period turned to charitable organisations such as food banks (Loopstra et al., 2015), which in rural areas are geographically uneven, difficult to access, and actively avoided by some rural dwellers in fear of having a 'spoiled identity' in close-knit communities (May et al., 2020). Sanctioned individuals often resort to credit as a means of survival, but access to credit itself varies on one's location, leading some to turn to high-cost, short-term credit that can result in long-term indebtedness, insolvency and bankruptcy (Demos, 2022). This is all the more pertinent given 78% of the population in England and Wales do not have access to a welfare legal aid provider leaving them less resourced to challenge or appeal DWP sanction decisions (The Law Society, 2022). Sanctioning therefore represents another guise of accumulation by dispossession, not only sustaining markets for payday loans and fringe lenders (including illegal loan sharks) but extending debt collection in the public sector that deducts loan repayments from benefit income (Dagdeviren et al., 2020).

In this context, the racialised effects of austerity and welfare conditionality need conceptualising as embodying relations of racial capitalism: embracing practices that reinforce capital accumulation through the reproduction of racialised scarcity and poverty; through the implementation of racially-skewed state abandonment and neglect (Gilmore, 2007); and through exclusionary, racially segmented 'everyday bordering' (Guentner et al., 2016). Here, a subset of claimants is hit by the 'hostile environment' embodied and 'rendered technical' by bureaucratic functionaries in the Jobcentre.

Claimants with limited English proficiency have limited access to interpretation or translation services—funding for which has been significantly cut and is now at the discretion of the Jobcentre advisor (Dwyer et al., 2019). While mis-understanding might heighten the risk of sanction, Jobcentre staff can also now 'require JSA claimants with limited spoken English to undertake language training to enhance employment opportunities. Benefit sanctions can be applied for refusal to engage with the training or *not making enough effort to improve* English proficiency within a six-month period (HMT and DWP, 2014)' (ibid., p. 145, emphasis added). These problems also bleed into work programme providers in rural areas where a 'lack of funding included an inability to pay for interpreters and for participant transport in rural areas. Some subcontractors felt this also had an impact on their ability to meet the needs of particular groups of participants' (Lane et al., 2013, p. 47). Indeed, from interviews with Jobcentre workers, 'non-English speaking claimants were likely viewed as low-hanging fruit because their lack of cultural resources meant they could be readily penalised on this stipulation and are likely less able to legitimately challenge any adverse decision' (Redman & Fletcher, 2021, p. 319).

In all of this, it is important to address the multiple and spatially contingent interrelationships between racial capitalism, welfare conditionality and rurality. While the English countryside differs from settler colonial contexts characterised by the theft of Indigenous land, slave plantations, sharecropping, prison labour and segregation (Gilmore, 2007), it is undeniably in-tertwined with the workings of racial capitalism. From the production of woollens for export to slave plantations (Williams, 1944) to the receipt of charitable endowments and compensation resulting from the abolition of slavery (Hall, 2018); the financing of iconic country houses to the expansion of cotton mills and mining—rural England's relation to the plantation is no less significant despite efforts to conceal or disavow links to the colonial countryside (Fowler, 2020).

Relations of racial capitalism continue in new, more spatially proximate, guises, including the exploitation of migrant rural workers (Milbourne & Coulson, 2021) and forms of modern slavery in UK agriculture (Shankley, 2023). Despite growing socio-economic and ethnic diversity, perception of who 'belongs' in the English countryside continues to shape differential experiences of rurality. Acceptable diversity is often contingent on racialised subjects engaging in a work ethic of 'productivity' (Moore, 2021), inviting double stigma for ethnic minorities facing unemployment and/or in receipt of welfare benefits. Economic insecurity and scarcity-induced resentment in rural places has been channelled by political elites towards expressions of 'welfare chauvinism' that pit the interests of the 'white' working class against 'less deserving' minority groups (Donoghue & Kuisma, 2022). Support for Brexit—itself understood as a 'melancholic racialised nationalism' driven by 'desire to retrieve the racialised securities of the postwar national compact' (Shilliam, 2018, p. 163, 155)—grew particularly in rural England (Brooks, 2020).

Recent debates over rural cosmopolitanism underscore the fluid, spatially variegated and contested ethics and politics at work in rural places (Neal et al., 2021; Woods, 2018) and fragment the stereotype of a parochial, monocultural and politically conservative countryside. Nevertheless, our findings suggest the need to consider the limits of rural cosmo-politanism in relation to what Imogen Tyler calls the 'austerity stigma machine' (Tyler, 2020) and the racialised effects of austerity that infiltrate and shape processes of racial place-making in the countryside (Stead et al., 2023). Here, stig-matised constructions of 'welfare scrounger', 'hardworking taxpayer' or 'skiver' (Tyler, 2020) connect with discourses of self-sufficiency and rural poverty denial (Milbourne, 2015), alongside the material effects of austerity, to compound and entrench experiences of rural poverty, and in some cases, heighten the risk of sanctioning. The shrinking affordability and accessibility of rural bus routes, for instance, make it harder to attend Jobcentre appointments on time, if at all (May et al., 2020). Racialised experiences of rural poverty, worsened by difficulties in accessing state and charitable support services, must also contend with the uncertainty of racial discrimination especially in the rural labour market and among Work Programme providers.

It is important, therefore, to examine the social and political production of racism in rural Britain (Lumsden et al., 2019), especially in places like Cumbria that have become more diverse in the last 15 years (Crawley et al., 2019), hit hard by austerity (May et al., 2020) and have become poorer (Vera-Toscano et al., 2023). Race and religion-related hate crimes in rural areas have risen sharply despite likely lower reporting rates in areas with fewer ethnic minority popula-tions. In Cumbria—where Black/Black British claimants are 3.46 times more likely to be sanctioned than 'White' claim-ants—there has been a 188% increase in race-related hate crime reported to the Police between 2012/2013 and 2019/2020 (Home Office, 2020) (Appendix S1).

5 | CONCLUSION

In light of the ongoing global proliferation of welfare conditionality and sanctions systems, this paper has made three significant contributions pertinent to both UK and broader international scholarship. First, by presenting the first spatial

analysis of racial disparities in the UK sanction system previously concealed by aggregated levels of analysis, the paper demonstrates the importance of going beyond country-wide analysis and investigating the local geographies of sanction regimes. Whilst inequalities between ethnic groups in England remain starker than spatial differences, there is considerable variation in sanction and referral rates between rural and urban areas, and distinct geographical concentrations—or 'hotspots'—of racism in the sanction regime, most of which are in rural areas. Qualitative research is needed both to assess the extent to which rural spaces are active constituents in the production of these racial disparities and to burrow into the 'hotspots' in search of an explanation. This is not simply an issue of legacy benefits (JSA). A recent poll of 809 Universal Credit claimants by Citizens Advice shows racial disparities in sanction decisions continue: with 9% of White people reporting to have been sanctioned compared with 17% of racially minoritised people (Harrison, 2023). That street-level bureaucrats can operate in prejudicial ways not only shows the fallacy of DWP claims of 'impartiality', but needs to be understood alongside, and constitutive of, systemic relations that generate racialised outcomes (Crenshaw & Gotanda, 1995). Our findings add weight to calls to abolish the sanction system (Webster, 2014d): a cruel, counterproductive and ideological—and we add, institutionally racist—regime. Faced with these challenges the liberal approach to racial injustice is inadequate and is only able to address the outcomes of racial capitalism rather than its origins, and with limited success. This more radical view calls on geographers to understand the welfare sanction regime in the UK and elsewhere not as a discrete institutional domain but as a set of processes intricately entangled in wider contestations over rurality and racial capitalism. Correspondingly, it urges us to explore, both theoretically and empirically, how the dynamics of rural racism are sustained, encountered and challenged in other spaces of welfare, education, recreation and communal life within and beyond the British context.

Secondly, alongside the specific concern to present new evidence on the racialised nature of welfare sanctioning in English rural settings, we call on geographers to document the racially and geographically uneven impacts of welfare retrenchment and austerity in provincial and rural areas more broadly. Just as everyday austerity is classed, gendered and racialised, it is also fundamentally spatial, with comparative work required to trace its lived and intersectional dimensions in urban and rural settings (Hall, 2019). Here, geographers have much to contribute to understanding the interlocking and compounding experiences of poverty, austerity stigma and racism in rural Britain, and in diverse rural contexts worldwide.

Finally, and more hopefully, we argue it is insufficient only to map the disproportionality of injustice (Bhattacharyya et al., 2021) or continue to document the exclusionary power of the 'rural idyll' (Shucksmith et al., 2023). The choice of theoretical framing opens—and closes—possibilities for liberatory and reparative politics in the English countryside, much like it does in other contexts. Here there are glimmers of hope: in the form of anti-racist organising in the UK and elsewhere via the Black Lives Matter movement in rural areas (Mohdin & Campbell, 2020); Refugees Welcome (Schmid-Scott et al., 2020); as well as trade union organising among low-paid migrant workers (Kuhlmann & Vogeler, 2021). Further afield there are precedents of rural racial solidarity movements in 1980s Iowa and 1990s North Carolina underpinned by class consciousness, faith-based organising and challenges to regressive agricultural and anti-union policies (Watson & Wilson, 2020), as well as Indigenous and reparative movements seeking redress for legacies of settler colonialism all too often erased in narratives of rural 'conviviality' (Bulter & Ben, 2021). Geographers are well placed to build alliances among anti-racist organisations and civil society in rural Britain and can help reframe contemporary struggles about immigration, housing and poverty in the longue durée of racial capitalism, amplifying more inclusive, translocal solidarities (Featherstone et al., 2012).

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the public domain: DWP Stat-Xplore (2020) 'Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Sanctions: Number of Decisions' which counts all sanctions decisions (post 22nd October 2012 Sanction Regime) (November 2012 to October 2019) https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml ONS Nomis (2020). "Jobseeker's Allowance stocks and flows by ethnicity, age and duration" (November 2012 to October 2019) https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/ueth.

ORCID

Andrew Williams https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8030-4829

ENDNOTES

[1] The maximum duration of a higher-level sanction period was reduced in November 2019 from 156 weeks to 26 weeks.

[2] Administrative targets for referrals for disqualification or sanction were introduced in 1994 under the Conservative Government (Webster, 2019).

[3] Introduced random error is a technique used to randomly adjust cell values to prevent the release of identifiable data. As a result all cells in the data may be adjusted slightly to stop the release of identifiable data; however the integrating of the data table as a whole is not damaged.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

Table S1. Referral and sanction rates in England, by rurality and broad ethnic group (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S2. Regional referral rates, by broad ethnic group and rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S3. Regional sanction rates, by broad ethnic group and rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S4. Times more likely ethnic minority claimants are referred for a sanction (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S5. Ethnic minority and White sanction referral rate, 2012–2019, county and unitary authority level, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S6. Ethnic minority and White sanction rate, 2012–2019, county and unitary authority level, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S7. Ethnic minority and White risk ratios, 2012–2019, county and unitary authority level, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S8. County and unitary authority JSA sanction rates, 2012–2019, by broad ethnic group and rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S9. The highest ethnic minority referral rates by local authority (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S10. Counties or unitary authorities with the highest difference in the conversion rate between White and ethnic minority claimants.

Table S11. Decision maker conversion rate, constituted by ethnic group, rurality and county level November 2012 to October 2019 (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Table S12. Race hate crime 2012/2013 to 2019/2020 (data source: Home Office (2020) Hate crime, England and Wales, 2019/20) (analysis: author).

Figure S1. Total JSA claimant months in England, November 2012 to October 2019, by broad ethnic group (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Figure S2. Referral rate and sanction rate in England, November 2012 to October 2019, by broad ethnic group (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Figure S3. Referral rate and sanction rate in England, November 2012 to October 2019, by broad ethnic group and

rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020).

Figure S4. Risk ratio for ethnic minorities of a sanction in select metropolitan areas by local authorities (not to scale).

Figure S5. 'Mixed' referral rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white referral rate).

Figure S6. 'Black and Black British' referral rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white referral rate).

Figure S7. 'Asian or Asian British' referral rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white referral rate).

Figure S8. 'Chinese or Other Ethnic' referral rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white referral rate).

Figure S9. 'Mixed' sanction rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white sanction rate).

Figure S10. 'Black and Black British' sanction rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white sanction rate).

Figure S11. 'Asian or Asian British' sanction rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white sanction rate).

Figure S12. 'Chinese or Other Ethnic' sanction rate, November 2012 to October 2019, by rurality (data source: DWP Stat-Xplore 2020, ONS NOMIS 2020, classified by natural breaks for non-white sanction rate).