Racial Inequality and the Fragility of Democracy: How Unequal Citizenship Threatens Democratic Legitimacy

Jana Morgan, Professor, University of Tennessee
Leah Christiani, Assistant Professor, University of Tennessee
Nathan J. Kelly, Professor, University of Tennessee

February 10, 2022

Abstract

This paper argues that systemic racial inequalities undermine support for democracy in the United States. Focusing on exposure to information about racial inequalities in the context of a survey experiment, we present causal evidence that support for democracy declines when people are made aware of (or reminded about) systemic inequalities. Then, using observational data we show that negative associations between racial inequality and democratic support are present beyond the context of the survey experiment. We develop and evaluate two theoretical mechanisms linking exposure to systemic inequality and attitudes toward democracy. We find that some respondents see systemic inequality as evidence that democracy is ineffective (poor performance mechanism), while others legitimate the systemic inequalities they encounter and dislike the egalitarian aspirations of democracy (hierarchy enhancement mechanism). Analysis of qualitative data from the survey experiment illuminate these mechanisms at work. Together the findings suggest that dismantling hierarchy could reinvigorate Americans' democratic commitments.

Structural racism is a constitutive element of the American political order, influencing who gets heard, what issues get debated, how institutions work, which policies pass and how they are implemented (Du Bois, 1903; Myrdal, 1944; Bell, 1973; King and Smith, 2005; Hawkesworth, 2003; Alexander, 2010; Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011; Dawson and Francis, 2016; Gillion, 2016; Hanchard, 2018; Strolovitch, Wong and Proctor, 2017). The coronavirus pandemic has offered yet another stark reminder of the ways racialized hierarchies are endemic to our economy, our social systems, and our politics, illuminating the sometimes deadly consequences these inequalities impose and emphasizing government's seeming lack of concern or capacity for redressing the problem (Lieberman, 1998; Bartels, 2008; Hamilton and Darity Jr, 2009; Kelly, 2020; Hacker et al., 2021; Thurston, 2021).

As racialized hierarchies remain remarkably resilient, American democracy appears increasingly fragile. While some who recognize or experience structural inequalities are demanding a more equitable sociopolitical order and more meaningful democracy, others have openly embraced anti-egalitarian, non-democratic, and violent ways of doing politics. What's more, the norms and procedures of established institutions and the political elite embedded within them seem incapable of combatting the surging anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian wave just as they have long failed to confront inequalities in power and resources.

These two realities do not simply exist in parallel; rather, racial hierarchy and the vulnerability of American democracy are deeply intertwined. And while strengthening democracy requires dismantling hierarchy, hierarchies are often self-reinforcing. The perpetuation of hierarchy works not only through institutional forms, policy processes, organizational structures, and resource allocations, as previous work has documented, but also in the ways hierarchies shape people as democratic citizens (Tilly, 1998; Bruch, Ferree and Soss, 2010; Mettler, 2011; Ray, 2019; Kelly, 2020). In this paper, we specify how structural inequalities disrupt the construction of robust democratic citizenship by undermining people's support for democracy.

Previous work has repeatedly shown that racist systems and racial bias shape how

people formulate attitudes concerning a range of issues in racialized domains such as social welfare, criminal justice, immigration, and affirmative action (Sears, 1988; Kinder, Sanders and Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007; Gilens, 2009; Pérez, 2016). However, this work has rarely intersected with analyses aiming to understand deficits in democratic legitimacy. When it has, scholars have understandably emphasized the attitudes and experiences of those directly harmed by racial injustice. Thus, in arenas that are not overtly racialized such as institutional legitimacy and political trust, we have considerable evidence detailing how experiences of racial inequalities in political representation, policy impacts, and state violence matter for the political attitudes of Black Americans and other people of color (Cohen and Dawson, 1993; Abrajano and Alvarez, 2010; Nunnally, 2012; Burch, 2013; Lerman and Weaver, 2014). But we know far less about the ways racial hierarchies may influence these sorts of attitudes among the privileged as well.

We concur with extant literature that racial hierarchies influence political attitudes among marginalized groups and within racialized issue domains, but we argue that the impact of racial inequality also reaches across society and shapes fundamental democratic commitments. Drawing on insights from political theory as well as social psychology (e.g. Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Hooker, 2017), we theorize that structural inequality is detrimental for the ways people understand and practice democratic citizenship. Entrenched and pervasive inequalities, like racialized systems of exclusion, directly harm those situated at the bottom of the hierarchy and distort how those at the top think about and practice democracy.

Our central outcome of interest is the legitimacy of democracy within the American mass public, which we conceptualize as public support for the democratic system in abstract and in practice (Linz, 1978; Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson, 1995). Although democracy may carry different meanings for different groups or individuals and across different kinds of contexts (Prothro and Grigg, 1960; Dalton, Shin and Jou, 2007; Carlin and Singer, 2011; Canache, 2012; Spry and Nunnally, 2021), the comparative democratization literature has long argued that having citizens who are committed to democratic ideas and practices pro-

motes the resiliency of democratic regimes (e.g. Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1999). Conversely, weak democratic legitimacy in the mass public opens the door to democratic erosion (Norris, 1999; Seligson and Booth, 2010). Thus, we aim to understand how structural hierarchies, which defy the core democratic principle of equality, might undermine people's commitments to democracy.

Our core argument is that exposure to racialized social inequality undermines democratic legitimacy. We expect this effect to reverberate throughout society and to be particularly strong for members of racially minoritized groups who are directly harmed by exclusion and oppression. We also consider whether partisanship conditions these effects, and we examine how different kinds of policy responses might work to disrupt or intensify the negative relationship between structural inequality and support for democracy.

We employ a three-pronged empirical approach to investigate this relationship. We begin with a pre-registered survey experiment that evaluates how exposure to information about racial inequalities in the pandemic influences support for democracy and evaluations of democratic institutional performance and how these attitudes are further affected by policy responses that either ignore or address these inequalities. Conducted online with a total sample of nearly 8,000 respondents divided about evenly between non-Latinx Black and white respondents and nationally representative on key demographics within each racial group, the experiment helps identify the causal effect that being reminded (or made aware) of racial inequality can have on democratic legitimacy both in the population as a whole and within racial and partisan subgroups. We complement the survey experiment with observational data drawn from four waves of the American National Election Study (ANES), which we use to assess the relationship between racial inequality and satisfaction with the democratic system. This portion of the analysis enables us to evaluate the broader validity of our argument using data that reflect real-world experiences of racial inequality within nationally representative samples. Finally, as part of our experimental design, which we elaborate more fully below, we gathered participants' post-treatment reflections. We use these surprisingly

frank responses as qualitative data to consider the mechanisms through which racial inequality works to undermine democratic legitimacy and to understand reactions to government policy efforts that either promote greater equity or undermine it.

The findings suggest that racial inequality weakens democratic legitimacy in the mass public. In the experiment, information that highlighted the coronavirus pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black Americans undermines support for and satisfaction with democratic governance, among both Black and white respondents. Observationally, we also find that satisfaction with democracy is lower in contexts characterized by deeper economic divides between Black and white residents, and this dissatisfaction emerges among white as well as Black survey respondents. The qualitative data reveal two basic mechanisms at work: for some, racialized hierarchies raise questions about the validity of democracy, while for others such information works to justify a hierarchical (i.e. non-democratic) political order.

Through experimental, observational, and qualitative analyses, we demonstrate that systems of marginalization inhibit support for democracy and provide evidence illuminating the mechanisms that prompt people's democratic commitments to deteriorate when they are exposed to structural inequality. The paper also demonstrates how studies of attitudes in the mass public benefit from engaging with theoretical scholarship that has called attention to the society-wide consequences of persistent race-based hierarchies and highlighted the challenges associated with building robust democratic citizenship in contexts of entrenched and reinforcing inequalities. In doing so, the arguments and evidence here contribute to advancing our understanding of the ways racialized exclusion harms democratic communities. Racial hierarchies threaten democracy by raising questions about the value and viability of democratic governance for those citizens who are troubled by hierarchy while simultaneously helping to legitimate less democratic ways of doing politics for others. Finally, our work builds on policy feedback studies by elucidating how broad, structural patterns that are connected to policy choices have repercussions for the practice of democratic citizenship.

Racial Inequality and Decay of Democratic Legitimacy

Our central argument is that racialized exclusion delegitimizes democratic governance. Systems of marginalization and harm that extend across spheres, reinforce entrenched hierarchies, and impede opportunities for entire groups are undemocratic (Hayward, 2003) and likely to structure how people experience and think about political institutions and processes (Cruikshank, 1999; Tilly, 1998). Racial hierarchies in the United States follow these patterns — they are difficult to traverse, reflect deep and persistent inequalities in access to resources and power, and infiltrate multiple facets of life (Du Bois, 1903; Myrdal, 1944; Murray, 1953; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Mills, 1997; Shapiro, 2004; Alexander, 2010; Pettit, 2012; Lerman and Weaver, 2014; Omi and Winant, 2014; Rothstein, 2017; Acharya, Blackwell and Sen, 2018). Racial inequalities are, thus, a central organizing feature of American social and political life (King and Smith, 2005), and we expect these inequalities to be consequential for people's attitudes toward democracy, particularly given their less-than-democratic content.

Racial Inequality Delegitimizes Democracy among the Marginalized

Democratic theorists have emphasized how systems of marginalization are not only unjust in their expression but also produce potentially harmful consequences for how people think and behave as democratic citizens (Douglass, 1955; Mills, 1997; Hayward, 2003; Cohen, 2009; Aslam, 2017). Existing empirical scholarship has detailed many of these effects for those situated at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. For instance, in a classic study analyzing the effects of neighborhood poverty on Black political attitudes and behavior, Cathy Cohen and Michael Dawson found that deep structural marginalization made Black community members less efficacious about finding solutions to neighborhood problems, more likely to identify and express dissatisfaction with inequalities in political influence, and less likely to participate in conventional political activities (Cohen and Dawson, 1993). More recent studies have shown

how institutional racism and racialized policy structures, such as those pertaining to welfare and criminal justice, have less than salutary effects among Black and other minoritized populations, undermining trust in the institutions of government, provoking alienation from conventional democratic practices like voting, and raising fundamental questions about the relationship between democracy and equality (Cohen, 2010; Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011; Nunnally, 2012; Lerman and Weaver, 2014; Michener, 2018; Bruch and Soss, 2018; Posey, 2019). While these studies have not typically analyzed the specific outcome of diffuse support for democracy as we do here, their findings suggest that racialized exclusion influences the democratic citizenship of the marginalized.

In addition to this empirical scholarship, there is a long-standing tradition among Black intellectuals and activists, ranging from W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X to Kimberlé Crenshaw and Alicia Garza, of drawing attention to structural inequalities and their implications for how democracy is understood and practiced. These critiques have not stopped with simply identifying the persistence of profound racial inequalities within American democracy, rather they have extended to calling out the ways these inequalities mar the democratic citizenship of minoritized communities and delegitimize American democracy. Their trenchant criticism further underscores how structural hierarchies make the marginalized doubt American democracy by "decreasing support not only for politicians and policies *but for the fundamental political order* meant to ensure equality, justice, and opportunity" (Cohen, 2010, p. 111; emphasis added). Thus, the idea that racialized exclusion and oppression may undermine democratic legitimacy among those who belong to marginalized groups has strong theoretical as well as empirical foundations.

Can Racial Inequality Also Delegitimize Democracy among the Privileged?

Here we build on these insights but we widen the scope, arguing that entrenched hierarchies may undermine the democratic commitments of the privileged as well. Democratic theorists

provide the scaffolding underpinning this possibility by highlighting how injustice and oppression may harm democratic citizenship writ large (e.g. Young, 1990; Cruikshank, 1999; Cohen, 2009). Entrenched hierarchies, like the racialized inequalities that characterize the United States, are "embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols" (Young, 1990, 41). Citizens are formed by the systems of power in which they are enmeshed (Cruikshank, 1999), and when these systems operate in ways that are hierarchical and exclusionary rather than egalitarian and democratic, citizenship-formation processes occur in a way that "de-democratizes the citizenry" (Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011, 16). Especially relevant for our argument here is the idea that the collective consciousness that stems from being immersed in these oppressive systems can disrupt the "moral capacities" of those at the top of the hierarchy while simultaneously inflicting harm on those at the bottom (Hooker, 2017, 135). These theoretical arguments suggest that the political ideas and practices of people throughout society are likely to be shaped by structures of inequality like racial hierarchies, which systematically allocate different degrees of power and agency to different groups (Cohen, 2009).

This basic idea has found some resonance in previous work focused on understanding political attitudes and behaviors with evident racial content. Scholarship concerning attitudes toward crime and punishment has been particularly attentive to the potential attitudinal consequences of racial inequalities. Studies using natural, field and survey experimental approaches provide evidence that exposure to information about racial inequalities in the carceral system tends to make white people more accepting of punitive (and racially-unequal) criminal justice policies (Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007; Hetey and Eberhardt, 2014, but see Bobo and Johnson 2004; Butler et al. 2018) and that learning about anti-Black violence makes whites less supportive of gun policies that might mitigate this violence (Walker, Collingwood and Bunyasi, 2020). Likewise studies that analyze white attitudes toward redistribution as well as a variety of specific social policies including welfare, affirmative action, and employment policies have found that the racialization of socioeconomic inequality and

poverty undermines support for policies that benefit poor or minoritized populations and limits egalitarian policy implementation (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Gilens, 2000; Avery and Peffley, 2003; Branton and Jones, 2005; Schram et al., 2009).

These lines of scholarship provide some empirical support for the theoretical intuition that racialized hierarchies have attitudinal consequences that push people toward less egalitarian views, at least in domains that are clearly racialized.[1] But apart from studies examining how racial inequalities shape abstract support for redistribution (Hero and Levy, 2017; Morgan and Kelly, 2017), existing scholarship has typically stopped short of evaluating how systems of racial inequality may influence how those from dominant racial groups think about and engage with dimensions of politics that are not explicitly (or implicitly) racialized.

We see the potential for racial hierarchies to influence people's political attitudes and behaviors beyond racialized domains. Following the theoretical literature on democratic citizenship formation, we argue that racialized inequalities have the potential to weaken the legitimacy of democratic ideas and institutions. Moreover, we expect these delegitimizing consequences to manifest not only among the historically marginalized as previous research has found, but also among those who presumably benefit from racial inequality. Just as racialized hierarchies have been shown to limit support for public policies that aim to advance social or economic equality, we theorize that racial inequalities may attenuate commitments to a democratic system that is supposed to promote political equality.

---

[1]In addition to these studies on the attitudinal consequences of racial hierarchy, much scholarship examining racial attitudes and behaviors among whites has considered the concept of "racial threat" which essentially expects white racism to be particularly pronounced when the context is racially threatening in some way. But much of this work has focused on demographic heterogeneity or change as the primary driver of whites' racial anxiety and racialized policy attitudes (Glaser, 1994; Hopkins, 2010; O'Brien, 2017) and has not provided direct empirical tests of V.O. Key's original conceptualization of racial threat, which emphasized the importance of racial *hierarchies* for understanding whites' racial attitudes (Key, 1949). Here, we are less interested in the relative size of different racial groups as the cause of racialized attitudes and behaviors and more concerned with Key's original idea which emphasized the attitudinal consequences of racial inequalities.

Thus, our core hypothesis is that *racial hierarchies undermine support for democracy*.[2] We evaluate this expectation most directly through data from an original survey experiment, which allows us to identify how information about racial inequalities in the pandemic affect commitments to and satisfaction with democracy. We further validate these findings using observational data to evaluate the relationship between racial inequality and democratic satisfaction using actual levels of inequality experienced by respondents in nationally representative survey samples.

To this point, we have emphasized how encounters with *social* systems of racialized inequality may contribute to democratic delegitimation. But politics and policy have often been implicated as major forces in the creation and maintenance of racial inequality (Alexander, 2010; Epp, Maynard-Moody and Haider-Markel, 2014; Rothstein, 2017; Shapiro, 2017; Trounstine, 2018), and they are occasionally leveraged as instruments for promoting racial justice (e.g. Fraga and Merseth, 2016).

When policies aim to promote equality, they can work to disrupt patterns of exclusion. Previous research suggests that substantive representation advancing the interests of marginalized groups has the capacity, at least under some circumstances, to strengthen institutional legitimacy (Pitkin, 1967; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005; Scherer and Curry, 2010; Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo, 2019). Conversely, the failure of government to acknowledge and confront systems of inequality may serve to intensify processes of delegitimation (White et al., 2007). Thus, we consider how democratic legitimacy might be shaped by policies that either acknowledge and confront racial inequalities or ignore and reproduce them.

We expect that exposure to substantive policy efforts to counter racial inequality will increase democratic legitimacy while exposure to policies that do not redress racial inequality will further undermine legitimacy. In essence, we aim to evaluate whether policies have the capacity to counteract inequality's delegitimizing effects if they aim to somehow

---

[2]This expectation was pre-registered with Open Science Framework — and can be found in the appendix.

disrupt them. We also expect these substantive representation effects to be stronger for non-dominant than for dominant racial group members.[3]

Mechanisms: How Racial Inequality Delegitimizes Democracy

We have theorized that racial inequalities have the potential to undermine democratic legitimacy, but exactly how do encounters with inequality work to weaken people's commitments to democracy? We contemplate two distinct pathways through which this process of democratic delegitimation may occur. The first mechanism follows from scholarship emphasizing how poor performance undermines institutional legitimacy. A core premise of and rationale for democracy is that it aims to promote justice and equality (Shapiro, 1999). But in practice, democratic systems often fall short of this goal. One of the most glaring violations of these democratic ideals occurs when durable inequalities between social groups are allowed to persist and are sometimes reproduced by democratic political institutions and processes.

We suggest that egregious failures to live up to the democratic ideal may have tangible consequences for how people value democracy. A vast literature has shown that various dimensions of performance influence how citizens evaluate the incumbent government and even the regime (MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson, 1993; Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson, 2002; Hetherington and Rudolph, 2008; Mattes and Bratton, 2007; Booth and Seligson, 2009; Andersen, 2012). While much of this previous literature has emphasized the aggregate or personal dimensions of performance (e.g. sociotropic and pocketbook economic evaluations), here we consider how people may also consider *distributional* dimensions in formulating their assessments of the system of government. If people expect democratic institutions and processes to promote equality, then the persistence of inequality has the potential to undermine democratic legitimacy (Andersen, 2012). Racialized inequalities, in particular, may work to delegitimize democracy because they reflect systemic processes of exclusion that extend across spheres, reinforce entrenched hierarchies, and impede life chances for entire

---

[3]Our expectations concerning policy effects were pre-registered. See the appendix for details.

groups of people (Myrdal, 1944; Tilly, 1998). As Michael Hanchard has noted, "inequality poses challenges to [democracy's] ideological legitimacy" (2018: 188). Thus, being confronted with racialized hierarchy may make people wonder whether democracy is truly capable of promoting its egalitarian ideals, thereby undermining democratic legitimacy. We call this the *poor performance mechanism* of delegitimation.

In elaborating the second way that racial inequality may undermine democratic legitimacy, we draw insights from the social dominance theory of inter-group relations. This body of scholarship suggests that exposure to hierarchical contexts and messages, such as those imbued with racialized inequalities, promotes acceptance of inegalitarian systems of social and political order and thereby has the potential to delegitimize the democratic ideal of equality (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). When individuals are presented with evidence that substantial inequalities exist within an ostensibly democratic system, they may become more likely to assent to a wide array of inegalitarian ideas and have their commitments to democracy deteriorate as a result. As social dominance theory has argued, people enmeshed in hierarchy-accentuating contexts are likely to accede to and even *rationalize* marginalization and oppression (Levin et al., 1998; Pratto, Tatar and Conway-Lanz, 1999; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Exposure to racialized hierarchy makes people more likely to justify power inequalities — and this rationalization weakens their commitments to democracy, which is seen as being concerned with equality. That is, pervasive inequalities help normalize inegalitarian social and political systems and undermine support for purportedly egalitarian systems, like democracy, at the same time. Learning about democracy's failure to produce equality provides individuals who are untroubled by inequality a cognitive narrative that they can use to reject democratic principles.

We expect this mechanism to be most operative among dominant group members who are not strongly committed to upending existing power structures. For these individuals in particular, the failure of democracy to promote equality may provide justification for a broader rejection of egalitarian principles. Evidence from multiple branches of social psy-

chology has shown how inequalities between ethnoracial groups undermine between-group solidarity by reinforcing difference and creating barriers to empathy and understanding between groups (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Building on these theoretical foundations, studies analyzing attitudes toward (re)distributive policies and outcomes have demonstrated how racialized inequality mutes public demand for pro-poor policies and enables the maintenance of inequitable resource distributions (Alesina, Baqir and Easterly, 1999; Baldwin and Huber, 2010; Morgan and Kelly, 2017; O'Brien, 2017). The core contention in these studies is that the racialization of inequality helps justify unequal outcomes in the minds of citizens. We suggest that this process by which racialized inequalities promote acquiescence to the hierarchical status quo may extend beyond the realm of material resource distribution and into the ways people think about the distribution of political rights, the organization of political power, and democracy more broadly. Where inequalities are racialized, moves away from democracy toward less egalitarian forms of government would be seen as primarily harming minoritized groups and perhaps furthering the advantage of those in the dominant group. As a result, exposure to racialized inequality would be expected to undermine support for political equality among dominant group members who are comfortable with the status quo, weakening their commitments to democracy and its egalitarian ideals. Previous research has certainly found this to be the case when thinking about the negative effects racialized hierarchies have on support for economic equality, and we expect a similar effect here on support for political equality in the form of democracy.

The essential argument here is that exposure to hierarchy erodes the value people place on equality of all sorts, including the democratic ideal of political equality. This process can be thought of as democratic delegitimation occurring by way of a *hierarchy enhancement mechanism.*

Both the hierarchy enhancement mechanism and the poor performance mechanism predict that exposure to racial inequality will have negative consequences for democratic legitimacy, as our core theoretical argument anticipates. But these two mechanisms suggest

different thought processes through which exposure to racialized hierarchies produce democratic delegitimation — and given the contrasting responses to inequality that drive each of these mechanisms, we suspect that individuals will carry one of these logics or the other, not both simultaneously. The hierarchy enhancement mechanism expects that some people will use information about racial inequality to rationalize inegalitarianism, leading them to further reject democracy, which is seen as an agent for equality, at least in the abstract. The poor performance mechanism suggests that other people confronted with racial inequality may lose faith in democracy for a somewhat different reason—because it has failed to live up to its egalitarian ideals. Thus, while both mechanisms produce the same overarching negative relationship between racial inequality and democratic legitimacy, we can specify alternative observable implications for other outcome variables according to the mechanism at work.

Namely, where the hierarchy enhancement mechanism is operating, we would expect people exposed to racial inequality to respond by embracing and attempting to justify the inegalitarian status quo. This thought process may also prompt people to become more positive in their evaluations of specific political institutions that may have helped to preserve or promote racially unequal outcomes even while they simultaneously become less committed to the democratic *ideal* because it contradicts the hierarchical logic they want to sustain. On the other hand, where the poor performance mechanism is at work, we would expect people exposed to racial inequality to respond by questioning the social or political system more broadly. Here the process of delegitimation could go beyond undermining the value people place on democracy generally and could also weaken their evaluations of the specific institutions that may have contributed to the racially unequal outcomes they have encountered. We gain insight into the underlying mechanisms linking racial inequality to the delegitimation of democracy primarily by examining the qualitative reflections shared by our survey experiment participants.

Potential Heterogeneity by Race and Partisanship

To this point, we have focused our theoretical discussion on the overall relationship between racial inequality and democratic legitimacy. But previous research suggests that the effects of racial inequality may vary across racial groups and partisan divides. We consider these possibilities here as well.

As detailed above, much of the existing political behavior research examining the consequences of racial hierarchies has understandably focused on the ways marginalization and oppression influence the political attitudes and behaviors of Black Americans or other minoritized ethnoracial groups. This body of work offers numerous nuanced insights, but a common through-thread emphasizes how encountering racial injustice undermines efficacy, contributes to political dissatisfaction, erodes trust in government, and often provokes alienation from conventional forms of participation while sometimes stimulating extra-institutional activism (Cohen and Dawson, 1993; Soss, 1999; Harris, Sinclair-Chapman and McKenzie, 2005; Nunnally, 2012; Burch, 2013; Lerman and Weaver, 2014; Walker, Roman and Barreto, 2020; Walker, 2020). Examining the consequences of inequalities in the health policy realm specifically, Jamila Michner has delineated the impact of Medicaid policy design for recipients, who are disproportionately Black and Latinx. Her work demonstrates that marginalizing and racialized health policy frameworks tend to demobilize and disempower and that some program dimensions, like work requirements, are particularly damaging for the democratic citizenship of Black beneficiaries (Michener, 2018, 2021).

Building on this work, we consider how encountering racial inequalities in the impact of the pandemic may have particularly deleterious consequences for the ways Black Americans think about democracy. Essentially, we argue that racial hierarchies harm democratic legitimacy across both privileged and marginalized groups, and racialized inequalities may be *especially* damaging for those who bear the weight of exclusion.[4] However, racial inequality is not a temporary phenomenon produced by the pandemic but a deeply rooted reality

---

[4]This hypothesis was pre-registered as part of the broader project; see the appendix.

that fundamentally structures innumerable facets of the American existence, and for the many Black Americans who are directly harmed, racialized marginalization and oppression comprise central elements of life (e.g., Cohen and Dawson, 1993; Nunnally, 2012; Lerman and Weaver, 2014). Thus, for Black people, the realities of ongoing exclusion may already be factored into the legitimacy that they accord to democracy. If this is case, Black respondents may have lower overall levels of support for a democratic regime that has often failed to address their ongoing marginalization, but their reactions to information about racial inequality in the pandemic may be no stronger than those of whites.

We also consider how the effects of exposure to racial inequality may vary depending on respondents' partisan predispositions. Because race, racial attitudes, and race-based policies often map onto partisanship in the United States (Lowndes, 2008; Schickler, 2016; Engelhardt, 2021), partisan identity may shape how whites, in particular, respond to racialized marginalization during the pandemic. Namely, Republicans may be especially motivated to reject information about racial inequalities in the pandemic (Bartels, 2002; Taber and Lodge, 2006) or they may view racial inequalities as entirely acceptable or desirable (Stephens-Dougan, 2021; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007; Banks and Hicks, 2019). Democrats, on the other hand, might be more willing to acknowledge the realities of racial inequality and to view such outcomes unfavorably (Chudy, 2021; Engelhardt, 2021). Thus, we consider the possibility of heterogeneous effects by partisanship. Our expectation is that Democrats will experience steeper declines in their support for democracy when exposed to racial inequalities while Republicans' attitudes may be less negatively (or even positively) affected by racial inequality treatments.[5]

---

[5]These expectations about heterogeneity by race and partisanship were preregistered and can be found in the appendix.

Empirical Strategy

To understand how racial inequality shapes democratic commitments, we employed a multifaceted empirical strategy incorporating experimental and observational evidence as well as insights from qualitative data gathered as part of our survey experiment. Together these elements of the analysis offer a picture of the way racial inequality delegitimizes democracy that is precise, nuanced, and expansive. We provide more details concerning each component of the analysis in the relevant empirical sections below. For now we focus on the ways each element fits into a broader empirical strategy designed to evaluate and unpack the way racial hierarchies delegitimize democracy.

The survey experiment assesses how being immersed in information about racial inequalities affects people's thinking about democracy and assesses whether this relationship might be affected by government policy efforts that either ignore these inequalities or attempt to address them. The most evident advantage of the experimental component of the analysis is that it helps us identify a causal relationship between exposure to inequality and people's commitments to democracy. It also offers insight into the capacity of simple policy interventions to alter this relationship.

But using an experimental approach to evaluate the link between structural inequality and commitments to democracy poses some challenges. For one, commitments to democracy are often deeply held values that do not sway easily, making it difficult to detect an isolated causal effect for racial inequality on democratic commitments, especially in an inherently artificial experimental setting. Second, structural inequalities based on race are constitutive elements of the American economy, society, and polity, fundamentally shaping many facets of people's lives. As such, experiences of structural inequality are more comprehensive than can be mimicked with a typical, brief experimental intervention. Relatedly, a survey experiment tells us something quite specific based on the manipulations it employs, but the relevance of those precise findings to broader processes at work outside the experimental setting can be unclear. Finally, while survey experiments can provide concrete evidence that a causal

relationship exists, they often struggle to specify why or how the underlying process operates.

Our overarching empirical strategy addresses each of these potential limitations, strengthening both the depth and breadth of the inferences we can draw. First of all, we designed the treatments in the survey experiment with the goal of generating an immersive and meaningful encounter with the realities of racial inequality in order to better imitate the kinds of causes we have theorized. We immersed respondents in stories about racial inequalities and their consequences, and to further heighten the relevance of the treatment, we focused their attention on concrete inequalities within a domain that has affected the lives of all Americans—the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we asked respondents to reflect emotionally and cognitively on the material in the treatment before measuring their democratic commitments. These elements of the treatment sought to make racial inequality tangible and meaningful for respondents and pushed them to stop and think about the inequalities they encountered. Given the difficulties of shifting core democratic values in an experimental setting, our hope was that these strategies would uncover at least some experimental evidence that exposure to racial inequality causes democratic commitments to weaken.

Second, we paired the survey experiment with analysis of observational data to evaluate the real-world relationship between racial inequality and attitudes toward democracy. Using data that measures racial inequality in people's actual environment captures a more complete picture of their ongoing encounters with racial hierarchy and enables us to evaluate whether people living in contexts of deeper structural inequality display weaker commitments to democracy. This component of the analysis bolsters the external validity of experimental findings by suggesting that they are not unique but consistent with more general patterns in the relationship between racial inequality and democratic values.

Third, as part of the experiment, we asked respondents to provide written reflections on the information and images they encountered in the treatment. The overwhelming majority of participants shared meaningful reactions that offered significant insight into their

thinking about the pandemic, its impact on different groups of people, and the government's response. Given the richness of these reflections as well as their raw intensity, we use them as qualitative data to help illuminate precisely how exposure to racial inequalities influenced their thought processes. This element of the analysis provides powerful insight into the mechanisms through which racial inequality works to undermine democratic commitments.

In the empirical discussion that follows, the survey experiment, the observational analysis, and the qualitative reflections work together to provide a multifaceted picture of racial inequality's negative consequences for democratic legitimacy—a picture that is clear in terms of the causal effects it identifies, nuanced in its elaboration of the underlying causal mechanisms, and expansive in its application beyond the experimental setting and within the actual systems of inequality where people go about their day-to-day lives.

Survey Experiment Design

We designed a survey experiment with treatments meant to submerse respondents in stories about inequality, asked them to emotionally and cognitively reflect, and then measured democratic commitments in a variety of ways. The experiment included a control group and three treatment conditions, briefly described below with full details provided in the appendix. We contracted with Lucid Marketplace to field this survey in the summer of 2021.[6] Because we are interested in racial differences that may condition the link between inequality and democratic commitments, the sample was split evenly between non-Latinx white and non-Latinx Black respondents. We chose to examine white and Black participants because we wanted to know how members of both dominant and subjugated racial groups would respond, and the racial hierarchy in the United States situates whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom, with other groups between and beside (Kim, 2000). While we would have liked to include members of all racial groups, resource constraints prohibited this, as

---

[6]Survey was in the field from June 25, 2021 to July 24, 2021. 90% of responses were attained within the first four days.

respondents were recruited to match national averages on age, gender, education, and region — *within* racial groups. In total 7,873 respondents completed the survey; 4,113 white people and 3,758 Black people.

Respondents who consented to the survey first answered a series of pre-treatment questions.[7] Then, they completed two attention checks included to encourage respondents to be especially alert immediately before the treatment, but they were not terminated if they failed.[8] After the attention checks, respondents were block randomized (within racial group) to one of the four conditions described below. After interacting with the treatment and writing a response, the dependent variables were measured.

In the control condition, respondents read a news story about the COVID-19 pandemic that made no mention of race or racial disparities. It reported on the number of deaths resulting from COVID and the initial slow roll-out followed by increasing supply of vaccines, making no mention of race or disparities. The inequality treatment condition (treatment 1) was designed to mirror the control, but with a discussion of race and racial disparities. This treatment emphasized that Black people were hit particularly hard and that vaccine access for Black people was still lagging, while taking care *not* to imply that any of these disparities resulted from reasons that fed into negative racial stereotypes. The equity policy treatment (treatment 2) mirrored the inequality treatment in terms of its discussion of racial disparities in COVID-19 deaths and vaccine access and then supplemented this information

---

[7]These questions included demographic items (e.g., number of children), measures of their partisan and racial attitudes as well as some questions about their experience of the pandemic. Based on insights gleaned from pre-tests in which we evaluated the effects of measuring racial attitudes pre-treatment, we used the two-item racial resentment battery from the CCES and located it after the basic demographic questions but before the battery of COVID-related questions that immediately preceded the attention checks and treatment. This placement enabled us to ask the racial attitudes questions without tipping off respondents about the underlying intention of the survey.

[8]We follow Berinsky, Margolis and Sances (2014), who demonstrate the importance of multiple forms of attention checks and caution against terminating responses for attention check failure. We conduct analyses with and without conditioning on these pre-treatment variables.

with a discussion of the ways the government was attempting to combat this inequality, describing recent government policies emphasizing equitable distribution of vaccines. The reproducing inequality treatment (treatment 3) mirrored the equity treatment but discusses a government policy that is making disparities worse.

At the end of each condition, we asked the respondents to reflect on what they just read and write two to five sentences in response (see appendix for the specific prompts). Asking that respondents emotionally and cognitively reflect on information can deepen the effect of the treatments (Condon and Wichowsky, 2020). Respondents engaged meaningfully in their written reactions and provided surprisingly frank reflections based on the information they had read about the pandemic's impact as well as their own pandemic experiences. Nearly 80 percent of respondents produced meaningful responses to this prompt and almost everyone wrote something—a high number, especially considering we did not force written responses and did not exclude respondents based on a pre-treatment attention check.[9] Asking for written reflections also made respondents feel as though reading the story had a purpose unrelated to the democracy dependent variables that came later as we did not want them to catch on to the link between the story and democracy attitudes measures.

After the treatment and reflection, we asked respondents two questions designed to capture their commitments to democracy. We have conceptualized democratic legitimacy in the mass public as people's support for the democratic system in abstract and in practice (Linz, 1988; Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson, 1995), and the measures we employ reflect this logic. The first captures support for democratic governance in the abstract, asking respondents their level of agreement with the statement: "Democracy may have problems, but it's better than any other form of government" (4-point scale). This item reflects Juan

---

[9]These response rates compare favorably to other online survey experiments that included written reflections as part of the treatment. For instance, in a series of experiments examining people's reactions to economic inequality, Meghan Condon and Amber Wichowsky *required* participants to reflect on an imagined social interaction with someone above or below them on the economic ladder, and this exercise produced about 20 percent non-response (Condon and Wichowsky, 2020).

Linz's classic conception of democratic legitimacy as "the belief that, in spite of shortcomings and failures, [democratic] political institutions are better than any others that might be established" (Linz, 1988, 65). The second item considers the value people place on democracy in practice and captures their degree of satisfaction with how democracy works, a less diffuse and more specific form of legitimacy (Clarke, Dutt and Kornberg, 1993). The question asks: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way that democracy works in the United States?" Both variables were coded so that higher values indicate more support for democracy.[10]

Because democratic commitments are often deeply held and challenging to move, we also asked items that are not core democratic values but that capture more specific attitudes toward government. These measures included trust in government and satisfaction with democratic institutions in terms of their handling of the pandemic, which was the substantive focus of the treatment text. These items read:

- When thinking about the well-being of people like you, how much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government to do what is right? (4-point scale)

- Please indicate how you feel toward each group in terms of how they have handled the coronavirus pandemic. 1 means not a good job and 10 means a very good job.

  1. Local government officials
  2. Congress
  3. Health agencies in the federal government, like the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

---

[10]While both items capture dimensions of democratic legitimacy, they are conceptually and empirically distinct. Conceptually, the first item measures abstract or diffuse support for democracy as a regime, while the second measures more specific support for the democratic system as it actually functions in the United States. Empirically, the measures are related but far from redundant with the correlation between the two equalling 0.31. Note that the answer options have relatively small scales, which may make movement difficult. But to maintain comparability with other studies, we opted to construct questions based on similar items used in established public opinion studies such as the ANES, AmericasBarometer, Eurobarometer, and Pew Research Center surveys.

Effects of Racial Inequality on Democratic Legitimacy

Experimental evidence. Table 1 reports the results from a series of ordinary least squares regressions predicting belief in and satisfaction with democracy, trust in government, and satisfaction with governmental handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only respondents who passed at least one of two attention checks (about 70% of the sample) are included in these analyses, but results are robust to the inclusion of all respondents, regardless of attention checks.[11] Balance tests reveal that randomization was successful (overall and within racial groups) and manipulation checks confirm that respondents understood and absorbed the treatment.[12]

Table 1: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments

| | Democratic Support | Democratic Satisfaction | Trust in Gov't | Pandemic performance rating for: | | |
				Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
T1: Inequality	−0.09***	−0.07***	−0.00	−0.00	0.06	0.08
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
T2: Equity	−0.09***	−0.05*	−0.01	−0.11	0.01	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
T3: Reproducing	−0.06**	−0.07***	−0.06*	−0.21**	−0.15	−0.13
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Intercept	3.21***	2.05***	2.36***	6.10***	6.30***	4.93***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Adj. R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Num. obs.	5535	5536	5537	5536	5527	5523
RMSE	0.85	0.67	0.84	2.78	2.81	2.81

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.10$

Note: All models are ordinary least squares regressions. They include all respondents who passed at least one attention check. Regressions are weighted to reflect national averages. Columns in gray represent key dependent variables.

On the whole, respondents who received one of the three treatment conditions re-

---

[11]See the appendix for a replication with all respondents. All models include weights to ensure that the sample is nationally representative for the white and Black U.S. population on race, gender, age, education, and region.

[12]See the appendix for details.

ported lower levels of support for democracy and lower levels of satisfaction with democracy. Almost all effects are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level with the exception of the second treatment's effect on satisfaction with democracy, which is significant at the 90% confidence level ($p = 0.06$). Across all three conditions, respondents' views of democracy were significantly depressed. Respondents who read about how the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened racial disparities were less likely to agree that democracy is better than any other form of government and less likely to report satisfaction with the way that democracy works in the United States. Figure 1 plots the predicted value for our two key dependent variables: support for democracy and democratic satisfaction. Each treatment condition reduces the respondent's level of commitment to and satisfaction with democracy. Although most effects are equivalent to just a tenth of a standard deviation for each variable, the fact that respondents moved at all is noteworthy because attitudes about democracy are fundamental and thus, difficult to move, especially in the context of a survey experiment.[13]

Figure 1: Predicted democratic commitment and satisfaction

(a) Support for Democracy

(b) Democratic Satisfaction

---
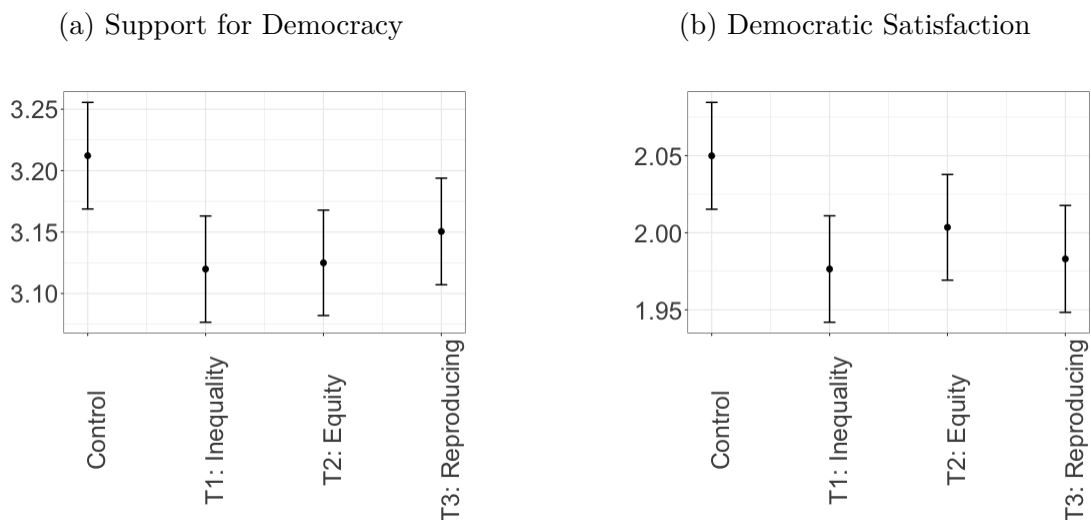
[13]By way of comparison concerning effect sizes, a quasi-experimental study, which examined how a historic earthquake in Chile shook legitimacy there, found that experiencing the most extreme level of earthquake damage as compared to no damage at all resulted in a legitimacy decline of just slightly more than one-tenth of a point on a 0 to 1 scale.(Carlin, Love and Zechmeister, 2014, 10).

As our theoretical argument anticipated, exposure to racial inequality in these treatments led to a depression of democratic values across the board, but we do not observe comparable effects on satisfaction with the way that the COVID-19 pandemic has been handled by various government agencies or trust in government with two exceptions. Both exceptions center on the effect of the third treatment, which emphasized racial inequalities during the pandemic as well as a (fabricated) failed government effort to address them. This condition led to respondents reporting lower levels of trust in government and lower ratings for their local government's performance during the pandemic. It makes sense that the third treatment, which is the one that relates most closely to government failure, would be most likely to produce a reduction in trust in government. We included these more concrete outcome variables measuring trust in government and government performance because we thought these indicators might be more malleable than the measures of core democratic commitments which are the outcomes we are most concerned with theoretically. Interestingly, however, information about racial inequality undermines diffuse commitments to democracy but has little observable impact on these more specific attitudes toward government. Below we consider whether respondents' race and partisanship condition these effects, but the central experimental results here are consistent with our expectation that racial inequality produces deleterious consequences for democratic values.

Observational evidence on racial inequality and support for democracy. The experimental results discussed above show that respondents who interact with treatments emphasizing racial inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic subsequently express weaker commitments to democracy than those who encounter information about the pandemic more generally. We seek to ensure, however, that these experimental results also align with broader observational patterns in a fully representative sample beyond the pandemic context specifically. Theoretically, we argue that being embedded in unequal social structures undermines support of democracy. The informational manipulations used in our experiments simulate a

fleeting engagement with unequal social conditions, so it is also helpful to examine whether there is correlational evidence that people who live in contexts with deeper racial inequality have less support for democracy.

To shed light on this question we use survey data from the American National Election Studies, which includes an item tapping respondent satisfaction with democracy in the United States in four separate nationally-representative samples from 2004 to 2016.[14] We examine this dependent variable in a multilevel model with respondents embedded within states. We structure the model in this way in order to assess whether state-level racial inequality is associated with democratic satisfaction. We operationalize racial inequality using the ratio of white median household income to Black median household income.[15] In addition to the primary explanatory variable of racial inequality, at the state level we also control for the percent of population that is Black. At the individual level, we control for age, education, family income, race/ethnicity, gender, and whether the respondent voted for the winner in the presidential election. We also include an indicator variable for the 2016 election since Donald Trump's presence in that election was associated with dramatic reductions in satisfaction with democracy across the board.

The full results from the multilevel model are reported in the appendix.[16] Figure 2

---

[14]The item is VCF9255 from the ANES cumulative time series dataset: How satisfied is R with the way democracy works in the U.S. Original response categories are recoded to range from 1 to 4 with 1 being "Not at all satisfied" and 4 being "Very satisfied."

[15]Income data come from the U.S. Census IPUMS database. We exclude Vermont, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, New Hampshire, Maine, Alaska, Hawaii, and Idaho because median income within racial categories in these states is estimated with insufficient precision in the available Census data. We focus on state-level racial inequality in part because we believe the state level to be the most meaningful political geography in this context and in part because income data by racial group in geographies smaller than states are not sufficiently reliable to measure racial economic inequality.

[16]We estimated a linear model despite using a dependent variable with only four categories for ease of interpretation. Results were substantively similar in an ordered model. We also estimated a fixed-effects version of the model with the addition of a time trend as a robustness check. The results remain very similar, and provide further evidence that unmeasured state-level variables (such as general inequality and

visually summarizes our central results.

Figure 2: Predicted Level of Satisfaction with Democracy as Racial Economic Inequality Increases
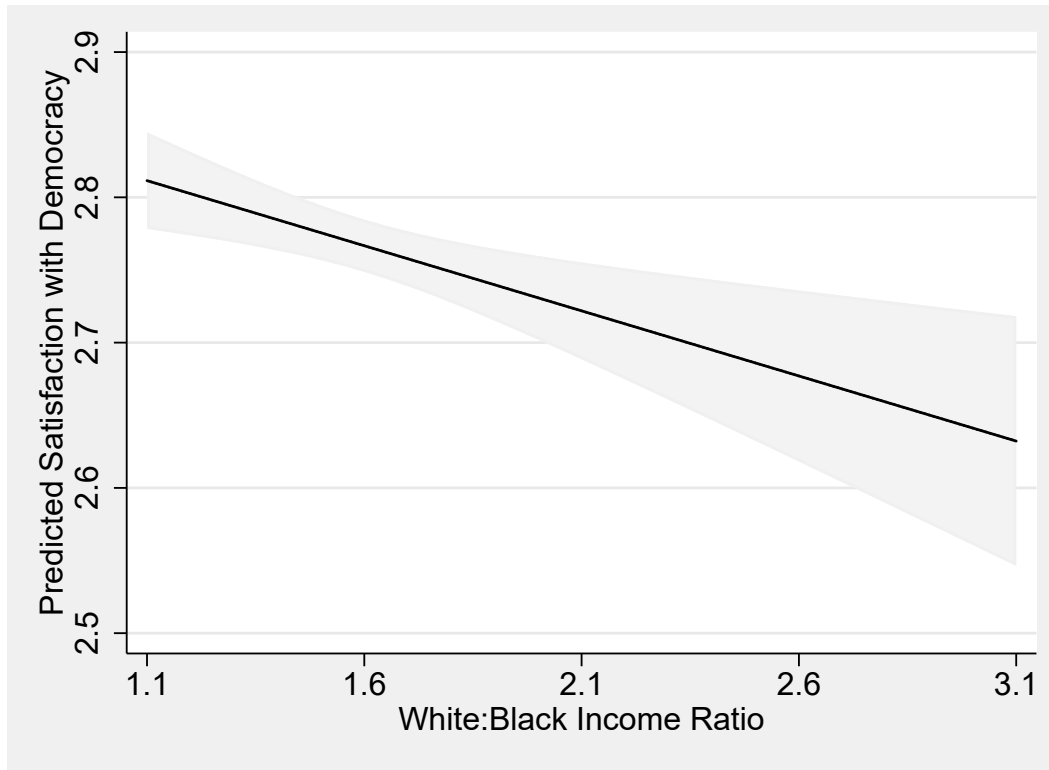
The observational evidence aligns with the experimental results reported above. As the ratio of median white household income to Black household income increases, satisfaction with democracy declines. Where racial economic inequality is lowest (with white household income only 10 percent higher than income in Black households), the predicted average satisfaction with democracy is 2.8. At the highest level of racial economic inequality (where white income is about 3 times higher than Black income), predicted satisfaction with democracy declines to about 2.6. As in the experimental results, this is a moderate effect, which in this analysis equals about a quarter of a standard deviation in satisfaction with democracy.[17] Overall, then, the experimental and observational findings both indicate that

---

other economic conditions) are not driving the reported results.

[17]The full results also demonstrate, as in the experimental results discussed in the next section, no significant subgroup differences along either racial or partisan lines.

commitments to democracy are weaker when people are exposed to more pronounced racial inequality.

How Racial Inequality Works to Undermine Democracy

Thus far, we have seen how racial inequality undermines democratic commitments across the population as a whole, both in an experimental context that identifies causal effects and in observational data that capture real-world inequalities. This evidence aligns with our core hypothesis concerning the presence of a negative relationship between racial hierarchy and support for democracy. Here we consider the underlying *processes* that link inequality to the erosion of democratic commitments.

To gain more insight into the mechanisms through which exposure to racial inequality produces democratic delegitimation, we leverage the qualitative reflections that our participants shared as part of our survey experiment. After interacting with the information in the treatment or control conditions, respondents were asked to write about how the article made them "feel or think about the pandemic and its affect on different groups of people in the United States." Because we do not ask directly about inequality in the prompt, these written reflections offer an unvarnished window into people's thought processes, and by comparing responses across the treatment versus control conditions, we can examine how exposure to racial inequality alters these thought processes.

People engaged with this component of the study in meaningful ways and offered reflections that were remarkably candid and sometimes quite personal. While requests for written responses within survey experiments sometimes yield low levels of substantive engagement, the vast majority of our respondents shared meaningful reactions to the information they read and about their own experiences of the pandemic. Nearly all respondents wrote something, and close to 80 percent provided substantive written comments, which we were able to code for a variety of factors. As previous researchers have noted, the anonymous online environment where the respondent is removed from the researcher can create a sense

of privacy that prompts openness and may even create a cathartic experience for partici-
pants as they share (Condon and Wichowsky, 2020). This was our intention in designing
our post-treatment prompt, and the richness of respondents' reflections suggest that we were
successful.

We examined these reflections to understand precisely how people responded to the
information about racial inequality in the treatment. We have elaborated two possible
mechanisms through which racial inequality might undermine democratic legitimacy—a hi-
erarchy enhancement mechanism and a poor performance mechanism. To consider whether
these mechanisms were at work in respondents' reactions to racial inequality, we hand coded
their written reflections. Our coding process also allowed for the possibility of identifying
other mechanisms that we had not previously specified. Although this process revealed other
themes in the data as we discuss below, these two mechanisms were the central substantive
themes in respondents' reactions about racial inequality specifically. We coded written re-
flections from the first 200 Black respondents and the first 200 white respondents in each
of the four conditions, or 1,600 reflections total, and we draw comparisons between those
exposed to racial inequality in the treatment and those in the control condition who were
not. Below we also use these written reflections to make comparisons across the different
treatment conditions to better understand responses to government policy efforts. There
we expanded our analysis to nearly 600 additional responses from Black participants in the
policy conditions. In all, we read and coded 2,162 qualitative reflections, approximately
one-fourth of the 7,873 respondents in the sample. Note that we quote directly from these
written reflections and only introduce edits in brackets or punctuation when necessary for
clarity; we caution that some of the comments may be distressing.

Recall that the hierarchy enhancement mechanism anticipates that environments and
messages characterized by deep racial inequalities will encourage acceptance of exclusion
and oppression and foster ambivalence toward more egalitarian forms of social and politi-
cal order. Through this mechanism, racial inequality undermines people's commitments to

democracy by legitimating hierarchical alternatives. We found evidence of this process at work in people's written reflections. Often this mechanism presented as respondents blaming Black Americans for the racial inequalities described in the treatment, thereby justifying the hierarchical order that they encountered. One white Republican in the social inequality condition wrote, "I feel the disparity is because the blacks are not willing to help themselves. They have a sense of entitlement." Another wrote extensively blaming Black people for the inequalities they experience: "The deterioration of the Black nuclear Family also plays a direct role in relation [to] levels of poverty and young people being caught up in crime. Social conditions which must be addressed by the Black population itself has a direct bearing on so many issues that negatively affect them. Too many Black people blame others for the social conditions that they make for themselves." Or more starkly, "...'They' need to stop abusing the race card, blaming everyone else for their contemptuous behavior..."

One white Republican went so far as to draw direct parallels between racial inequalities in the pandemic and racial inequalities in the criminal justice system, which they saw as entirely justifiable: "Well I see the blacks approach [to] this warning of staying home that everybody got as they do when the law tell them to stop—they do what they want and then when they are punished for it, then they blame the world. I'm not a racist man, I'm not at all, but this is what's happening—they can't follow orders so they have to pay the consequence..." Comments that made explicit this link between racial inequality and justifying undemocratic and oppressive government practices, as this one did, were not common, but many respondents reacted to racial inequality by defending the hierarchy seeing inequalities as entirely justifiable due to the faults of Black Americans themselves. These kinds of reflections suggest that thinking about racial inequality can legitimate inegalitarian systems and by extension de-legitimize egalitarian ideals and practices associated with democratic forms of government.

In a related vein, some respondents viewed the racial disparities described in the treatment as natural and entirely acceptable. In normalizing inequality, their comments re-

vealed thought processes consistent with hierarchy enhancement. One emblematic comment comes from a conservative white Republican in the social inequality condition who wrote "disparities will always exist due to sociatal [*sic*] differences." Similarly, a white independent commented: "I think that this article gives the facts. The facts are what they are and there is nothing we can do to change it." These comments reflect acceptance or even approval of the hierarchical status quo. Overall, then, we see evidence of the hierarchy enhancement mechanism at work in people's thought processes. When encountering racial inequality, some respondents reacted by justifying or normalizing the hierarchy and legitimizing undemocratic practices. Through these thought processes their democratic commitments became more tenuous.

The second mechanism we contemplated suggests that some people may see racial inequalities as an indication that democracy has not lived up to its egalitarian ideals, and this perception of poor performance reduces the legitimacy of democracy. This line of thought also emerged frequently among respondents exposed to racial inequality in the treatment. One white Democrat said that the article "made me sad and disgusted if i am being honest. there should be no gap in availability for vaccines or healthcare for anyone. This is the United States of America where we are all equal under god. no should have to suffer because of the color of theur [*sic*] skin or nationality. America we need to do better." A white participant who identified as an independent said that the government "probably don't even realize how badly they're hurting our whole country by either purposely, or subcontiously [*sic*], being discriminative towards blacks." These respondents and many other who made similar comments read information about racial inequality in the pandemic and saw it as a failure of the political system and even linked this information to other facets of poor democratic performance.

Black respondents were even more direct in calling out inequality as an indicator of systemic failure and raising questions about democracy as a result. For instance, one Black participant observed that "Nothing has changed, blacks are still being treated unfairly."

And he went on to link this unfair treatment to basic democratic rights: "It's like voting," he said, "they don't want us to get the vaccine [either]." And in a particularly reflective comment, another Black respondent said that "african American still get the short end of the stick. [We] African Americans should really think about the freedoms [that] the United States said we have." These comments not only reveal frustration with racial inequality, but also link these frustrations to the failure of the democratic system to accomplish its goals of promoting freedom and providing basic political rights for all. Together these comments provide support for the idea that racial inequality can undermine democratic legitimacy by prompting discontent with democracy's ability to level hierarchy.

In contrast, respondents in the control condition focused more on the impact of the pandemic itself. They rarely sought to blame those who got sick or died from the virus, which was a frequent reaction among treated respondents who displayed thinking consistent with hierarchy enhancement. Likewise participants in the control condition were unlikely to express discontent with the system of government, a common response among those in the treatment condition.

Here is a typical comment from a respondent in the control condition, which comes from a white Democrat: "I feel the coronavirus has devastating effects upon individual people and communities across the country. I feel the vaccine is a strategy to get rid of the virus and more people need available access to this vaccine." Similarly, a white Republican in the control condition noted that "The pandemic has been cruel." A Black respondent also in the control group wrote, "I am very sad that so many people have lost their lives to this virus. I would like to know who is responsible." These reflections acknowledge the harm caused by the coronavirus, but they do not display an effort to blame the victims or to normalize the harsh reality of the pandemic. Occasionally respondents in the control condition placed blame with individual leaders, but their remarks did not extend culpability to the entire system of government as we saw above from respondents who were exposed to information about racial inequalities. For instance, a comment from a Black respondent in the control

condition blamed President Trump for the pandemic's devastation: "The loss of lives could have been prevented and the infections reduced had Trump reacted more quickly to the pandemic." But this respondent does not link their negative evaluation of President Trump to the kinds of deeper concerns about the overarching political order that often emerged among respondents who encountered racial inequality in the treatment.

And as the quantitative analysis above makes evident, the sorts of reactions that were common in the control condition—feeling upset about the harm caused by the pandemic or blaming individual leaders—did not have the same negative effect on respondents' democratic commitments as the kinds of reactions common among those exposed to racial inequalities in the pandemic. Exposure to racial inequality undermined respondents' commitments to democracy in a way that information about the pandemic alone did not. Together the insights from respondents' qualitative reflections alongside the experimental and observational evidence presented above indicate that racial inequalities undermine democratic commitments and that this process operates through two pathways—one that encourages acceptance of inegalitarian (i.e. undemocratic) systems and one that raises questions about democracy's ability to accomplish its egalitarian aspirations.

Finally, a particularly attentive reader may have noticed a pattern emerging in the kinds of respondents who reacted to racial inequality with reflections in line with the hierarchy enhancement mechanism versus those who had reactions that aligned with the poor performance mechanism. Specifically, white Republicans were especially likely to display thought processes that reflected hierarchy enhancement—blaming victims and justifying inegalitarian systems. They were about twice as likely as white Democrats to respond in this way. Conversely, the poor performance mechanism emerged somewhat more often among Democrats and especially predominated among Black respondents who were about twice as likely as whites to see racial inequality and respond with democratic discontent. These patterns offer some initial evidence that exposure to racial inequalities may produce different kinds of thought processes among people with different partisan and racial identities,

even if the overarching outcome is democratic delegitimation. We examine the possibility of heterogeneous effects more systematically next.

Effects of Racial Inequality on Democratic Values by Partisanship

We consider heterogeneity by partisanship and race. As attitudes about race, social issues, and government intervention vary greatly by party, partisans may have diverse reactions to a news report that engages these issues. In particular, Democrats may be more likely to respond negatively to treatments emphasizing racial inequality, while Republicans may respond less negatively or even positively to information about racial disparities during the pandemic. Table 2 reports results from a series of OLS regression models that predict the dependent variables using a treatment indicator and interacting that indicator with the partisanship of the respondent. Respondents who leaned toward one party or another are included as partisans. Independents are omitted from this analysis. Thus, the models compare Republicans (and leaners) to the baseline category of Democrats (and leaners).

On our core dependent variables concerning democratic commitments, we see little evidence of partisan differences. Both Democrats and Republicans tend to express weaker support for democracy after being exposed to information about racial inequality in the treatment. Republicans' satisfaction with democracy was slightly less affected by the treatment articles about inequality than their Democratic counterparts, as evidenced by the positive interaction term between the first treatment and Republican identity ($p = 0.08$). But overall, racial inequality has a negative relationship with democratic commitments among Republicans as well as Democrats. These parallel trends can be visualized in Figure 3, which plots the predicted level of (a) support for democracy and (b) democratic satisfaction by treatment condition and partisanship. Democrats on average exhibit more support for democracy than Republicans, but both Democrats and Republicans support democracy less when they are exposed to treatments emphasizing racial inequality.

Table 2: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments, by political party of the respondent

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't	Pandemic performance rating for: Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
T1: Inequality	−0.11***	−0.13***	−0.10**	−0.32**	−0.29**	−0.23*
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)
T2: Equity	−0.09**	−0.06*	−0.09**	−0.18	−0.25**	−0.25*
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)
T3: Reproducing	−0.08*	−0.05	−0.11***	−0.23*	−0.22*	−0.09
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Republican	−0.09*	−0.15***	−0.46***	−0.84***	−2.20***	−1.63***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.16)
T1 * Republican	−0.01	0.10*	0.20***	0.57**	0.75***	0.50**
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)
T2 * Republican	−0.02	−0.00	0.17**	0.05	0.42*	0.35
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)
T3 * Republican	0.08	−0.02	0.12	0.04	0.15	−0.14
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)
Intercept	3.26***	2.15***	2.59***	6.53***	7.33***	5.86***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
R^2	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.11	0.07
Adj. R^2	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.11	0.06
Num. obs.	4550	4551	4551	4550	4542	4545
RMSE	0.80	0.65	0.80	2.65	2.49	2.61

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.10$

Note: All models are ordinary least squares regressions. They include all respondents who passed at least one attention check. Respondents who lean toward a party are included as partisans, independents are excluded.

Figure 3: Predicted democratic commitment and satisfaction, by party of the respondent

(a) Support for Democracy

(b) Democratic Satisfaction
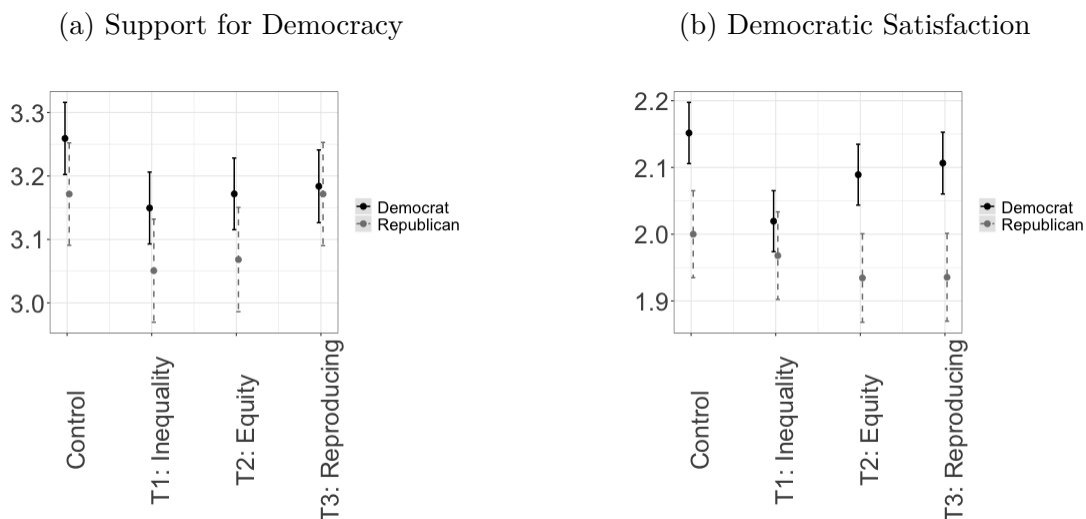
Evidence of partisan differences becomes more pronounced when we move toward our dependent variables measuring specific evaluations of government performance as opposed to support for the democratic regime. When we consider trust in government and satisfaction with the way various government bodies handled the COVID-19 pandemic, Republicans who read information about racial inequalities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic were less likely to punish the government. Indeed among respondents who read the article about racial inequality Republicans responded less negatively than Democrats as evidenced by the positive and statistically significant interaction terms between Republican partisan identity and the first treatment condition. In fact, Republicans who heard about racial inequalities in the pandemic became significantly more trusting of government and more positive in their evaluations of the congressional pandemic response than their partisan counterparts in the control condition. And while Republican respondents in our sample generally reported more negative evaluations of government than Democrats, predicted values for evaluations of local government among the two partisan groups in the first treatment condition are not statistically distinguishable.

In other words, Republicans who heard about racial inequality in the treatment became less committed to democracy but more favorable in their evaluations of the government. These patterns align with the hierarchy enhancement mechanism that we delineated above. As these respondents were exposed to racial inequality, they became more supportive of the government institutions that presumably contributed to the unequal outcomes described in the treatment while simultaneously becoming less supportive of a democratic political order with its egalitarian ideals. Both of these responses align with our expectations derived from social dominance theory, which anticipate that exposure to unequal and exclusionary systems can further legitimate hierarchical institutions and logics while delegitimizing more egalitarian ones. Given that Republican study participants were especially likely to react to the treatment with hierarchy-enhancing logics in their written responses, it makes sense that we would also find quantitative treatment effects among this group that consistently

manifest acquiescence to hierarchy.

On the other hand, Democrats were consistently negative in their response to information about racial inequality in the treatment. They reacted with weaker commitments to democracy, less trust in government, and more critical evaluations of government handling of the pandemic. This uniformly negative response to racial inequality aligns with the poor performance mechanism that we discussed above, which was a line of thinking that emerged more often among Democratic partisans and especially Black respondents who are predominantly Democrats. If respondents see racial inequality as an indicator that democratic governance is failing to accomplish what it has supposedly set out to do, then we would expect their evaluations of government to deteriorate alongside the decline in support for democracy generally. This is the precisely the pattern that we find among Democrats.

Overall, the insights from the qualitative reflections as well as the evidence from analyzing partisan heterogeneity in the treatments suggest that both the hierarchy-enhancement mechanism and the poor performance mechanism are at work in linking racial inequality to weaker democratic commitments, but that each mechanism may be more relevant within different groups. Namely, although racial inequality consistently undermines support for democracy across both groups, the patterns of Republicans' responses to the treatment point to hierarchy enhancement at work, while Democrats' responses are more consistent with the logic of penalizing democratic governance for poor performance.

Effects of Racial Inequality on Democratic Values by Race

In addition to partisan differences, responses to racial inequality may vary according to the race of the respondent. In particular, we hypothesized that exposure to information about racial inequalities would provoke more negative reactions from Black respondents who are directly harmed by these inequalities than from whites. Table 3 reports results from OLS regression models that predict the dependent variables using a treatment indicator that is interacted with race of the respondent. Recall that the sample was restricted to non-Latinx

white and Black respondents so the results in the table compare across these two groups.

Table 3: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments, by race of the respondent

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't	Pandemic performance rating for:		
				Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
T1: Inequality	−0.09**	−0.07**	0.01	0.02	0.09	0.11
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
T2: Equity	−0.08**	−0.04	0.01	−0.09	0.07	0.06
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
T3: Reproducing	−0.06	−0.08**	−0.06	−0.26*	−0.17	−0.18
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Race: Black	−0.18***	−0.02	0.04	−0.30**	0.32**	0.57***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
T1 * Black	0.00	−0.05	−0.09	−0.20	−0.26	−0.34
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
T2 * Black	−0.03	−0.03	−0.11*	−0.09	−0.38*	−0.40*
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
T3 * Black	0.01	0.05	0.00	0.25	0.05	0.16
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Intercept	3.23***	2.05***	2.35***	6.13***	6.26***	4.88***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
R^2	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Adj. R^2	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Num. obs.	5535	5536	5537	5536	5527	5523
RMSE	0.82	0.65	0.82	2.69	2.69	2.69

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.10$

Note: All models are ordinary least squares regressions. They include all respondents who passed at least one attention check.

Contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence that the information about racial inequality in our treatment undermined Black respondents' democratic commitments any more than it affected whites. The insignificant interaction terms for all three treatment conditions on both of our core dependent variables make this clear. We do note that Black respondents overall have lower levels of support for democracy than whites, as depicted in Figure 4. Thus, it is possible that the direct experiences of racism and racialized hierarchies that Black Americans routinely encounter may already be captured in their democratic

commitments, making it harder for new information about racial inequalities to shift this equilibrium response, and as a result we see no more change among Black respondents than among whites. In their qualitative reflections, many Black participants indicated that the information about racial inequality conveyed in the treatment was far from surprising, while whites' responses more often suggested they were learning something new. Regardless of the reason, the negative effects of the racial inequality treatment on democratic commitments is similar across racial groups.

Figure 4: Predicted democratic commitment and satisfaction, by race of the respondent

(a) Support for Democracy   (b) Democratic Satisfaction
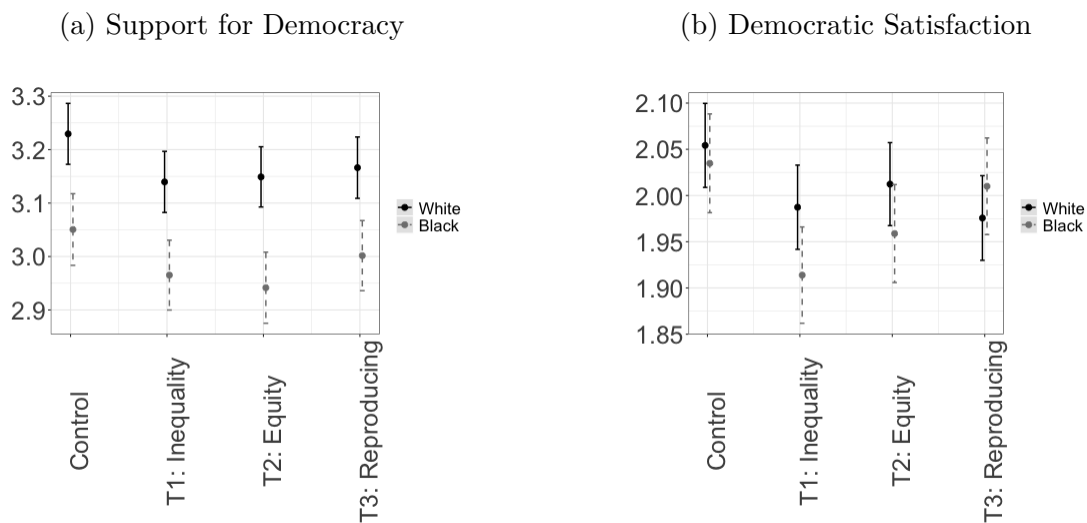
We do see *some* differences between the way that white and Black respondents reacted on the secondary dependent variables. Specifically, the article about the government's efforts to *combat* racial inequality affected white and Black respondents differently (treatment 2). After reading this article, Black respondents actually reported lower levels of trust in government ($\beta = -0.11, p = 0.07$) and lower ratings of Congress ($\beta = -0.38, p = 0.06$) and federal health agencies ($\beta = -0.40, p = 0.05$) as compared to whites. This result initially seemed counter-intuitive—this treatment condition provided participants information about policy efforts that aimed to *reduce* racial inequalities in the pandemic, yet Black participants became *less* rather than more positive about government after hearing about these efforts.

To better understand why Black respondents would react negatively to government

efforts that aimed to combat racial inequality, we turned to their post-treatment reflections. This exploratory analysis revealed that although some Black participants in the second treatment condition had favorable views of the government effort to reduce racial disparities in vaccine access as described in the treatment (e.g. "I feel that the government is doing a good thing by enacting this bill"), many others did not. Instead they considered the effort to be too late, too slow, or insufficient in comparison to the depths of inequalities that Black Americans confront. Indeed the policy described was not transformational in its design or scope, and this failure to deal with structural issues that perpetuate racial disparities was frustrating or disillusioning for some Black participants. For instance, one Black respondent wrote: "Although the government has begun to address the racial disparites [*sic*] in distribution of the covid-19 vaccine it is not going fast enough resolving the issue. This is not a surprise. Blacks and other minorities have always been at a disadvantage in regards to major health related issues. This article just brings this disparity more into light." Another commented that "the government's response is like usual, too little too late in some respects. It is like they are just now understanding how hard healthcare is for black people." These comments indicate that the respondents saw the policy effort as quite meager and superficial when contrasted with deep and persistent racial inequalities in the health system.

Other Black respondents in this condition characterized the government's response as inadequate in some way. As too small, for example: "I still don't think the government is doing everything possible to get this under control." Or too late: "We've known since almost the beginning of this getting bad that black people were affected in disproportionate numbers. It took way too long for the government to intervene." And some Black participants questioned the government's motives for promoting vaccine distribution in Black communities. As one Black respondent wrote, "I feel like I would never trust the goverment [*sic*] with a vaccines. Black people already gets [*sic*] the worst healthcare," and another thought "...this experimental drug has a negative agenda." While some participants in other conditions also expressed skepticism about the COVID-19 vaccine, for Black respondents the

reaction of distrust was especially prevalent in this treatment condition.

We did not anticipate these responses to the treatment, but perhaps we should have. Black Americans have many justifiable reasons to be skeptical of government generally and even of government policies that are supposedly designed to combat racial disparities (Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011; Goldrick-Rab, 2020). This is particularly the case within the healthcare domain where policies targeting racial disparities have often been ineffective or superficial rather than structural and successful (Geronimus and Thompson, 2004), and where legacies of exploitation are abundant. Insights from policy feedback studies tell us that encounters with ineffective or stigmatizing policy systems intensify distrust and apprehension about government, especially among those in historically marginalized groups who the state has repeatedly failed (Bruch and Soss, 2018; Cookson, 2018; Michener, 2018) Thus, while our theoretical argument did not anticipate this result, it makes sense that Black respondents reacted with skepticism toward government after reading about a simple policy response to a complex problem concerning racial disparities.

Our analysis of heterogeneity suggests that exposure to racial inequality weakens democratic commitments across the board, undermining support for democracy among Black and white Americans, Democrats and Republicans. These patterns reiterate the findings from the observational analysis as well. We do see heterogeneity in Black Americans' skepticism about superficial government policies to redress racial disparities. We also see that Democrats' respond negatively to racial inequality with regard to their democratic attitudes as well as their evaluations of government; whereas Republicans actually evaluate government more favorably when they hear about racially unequal outcomes even though their support for democracy deteriorates. Thus, we find some heterogeneity in our experimental results, but not in the core relationship between racial inequality and democratic legitimacy.

Discussion and Conclusion

Racial inequality is harmful for democratic legitimacy. This negative relationship is evident in the experimental and observational evidence here, and it is an effect that manifests consistently across different groups in society. Although it may be especially obvious to conceive of how racial inequality would undermine support for democracy among groups that the system continues to marginalize, racial hierarchy also has negative consequences for democratic commitments among white Americans whom the system privileges.

Moreover, inequality undermines democratic legitimacy regardless of partisan identification. When Democrats are exposed to racial inequalities, they are more likely to see government as performing poorly and less likely to support democracy as a result. And while Republicans become more positive about government institutions when they learn about the prevalence of racial disparities, they become less committed to democracy. These patterns help us understand how racial inequality poses a fundamental threat to democratic legitimacy, both among those it harms directly and among those it supposedly benefits. Previous work has demonstrated the many ways that racialized systems and hierarchies shape how Black Americans and other marginalized ethnoracial groups think about and engage democratic institutions and practices. And our analysis contributes additional evidence to this line of theoretical and empirical scholarship.

Our more novel contribution is to demonstrate that the negative consequences of racial inequality extend throughout society, not only shaping attitudes within racialized policy domains, as existing work has found, but weakening democratic legitimacy across the board. Theoretical work concerning the construction of democratic citizenship has argued that entrenched and reinforcing hierarchies generally and race-based inequalities specifically have the capacity to undermine democratic commitments by distorting the "moral capacities" (Hooker, 2017) of those at the top of the hierarchy while perpetuating oppression among those at the bottom (Cruikshank, 1999; Cohen, 2009; Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011). The findings here lend empirical support to these ideas.

Moreover, our evidence suggests that racial inequality delegitimizes democracy by activating two distinct thought processes, one that follows from studies emphasizing the link between performance and legitimacy (e.g. Mattes and Bratton, 2007; Hanchard, 2018) and another that aligns with the expectations of social dominance theory (e.g. Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Tracing how these seemingly divergent responses to hierarchy can both undermine democratic commitments sheds some light on the ways that racialized exclusion contributes to different forms of democratic delegitimation across the political spectrum. For those who see structural inequalities as unjust, entrenched racial hierarchies raise questions about American democracy and its capacity to dismantle entrenched systems of exclusion. When these Americans encounter racial disparities, they see democratic institutions and processes as falling short, and they raise demands for a better and deeper democracy. Conversely, for those who respond to racial inequalities by attempting to justify them, government institutions that reproduce racialized exclusion are perfectly acceptable even while their commitments to democracy itself deteriorate precisely because of democracy's ideational association with equality. Those in the first group want more democracy. Those in the latter group want less. But for both, encounters with racial inequality cause the democratic order to lose legitimacy.

We also acknowledge that structural inequalities are not limited to race but exist on multiple dimensions, such as social class, gender and sexual orientation. We focused in this paper on racial inequality, in large part because inequalities built around race are arguably the most durable and consequential forms of hierarchy in the United States. However, it is quite possible that the theoretical framework outlined here could be relevant for inequalities organized around other categories such as class and gender, and future research could fruitfully consider how this framework might apply to different forms of structural inequality in varying contexts within the United States and in other countries.

Finally, this paper calls attention to one of the many potential long-term consequences that may follow from the coronavirus pandemic and the disparate impacts it has had across

American society. The highly disparate experiences of different groups has long meant that the realities of our lives (and deaths) are often misunderstood and even unrecognizable across social divides. But the pandemic has laid bare some of these profound inequalities and exposed entrenched patterns of raced, gendered, and classed marginalization. The findings here suggest that exposing these hierarchies in this way raises fundamental questions about the American political and social order and at least carries the potential to disrupt the status quo. Whether we respond to this disruption in a way that deepens and expands democracy or in a way that aims to validate exclusion remains uncertain.

References

Abrajano, Marisa A. and R. Michael Alvarez. 2010. "Assessing the Causes and Effects of Political Trust among US Latinos." *American Politics Research* 38(1):110–141.

Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell and Maya Sen. 2018. *Deep roots.* Princeton University Press.

Alesina, Alberto, Reza Baqir and William Easterly. 1999. "Public Goods and Ethnic Divisions." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 114(4):1243–1284.

Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* New York: The New Press.

Allport, Gordon W. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Andersen, Robert. 2012. "Support for democracy in cross-national perspective: The detrimental effect of economic inequality." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 30(4):389–402.

Aslam, Ali. 2017. *Ordinary Democracy: Sovereignty and Citizenship Beyond the Neoliberal Impasse.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Avery, James M and Mark Peffley. 2003. *Race and the politics of welfare reform.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press chapter Race matters: The impact of news coverage of welfare reform on public opinion, pp. 131–150.

Baldwin, Kate and John D. Huber. 2010. "Economic versus Cultural Differences: Forms of Ethnic Diversity and Public Goods Provision." *American Political Science Review* 104(4):644–662.

Banks, Antoine J and Heather M Hicks. 2019. "The effectiveness of a racialized counter-strategy." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(2):305–322.

Bartels, Larry M. 2002. "Beyond the running tally: Partisan bias in political perceptions." *Political Behavior* 24(2):117–150.

Bartels, Larry M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of a New Gilded Age.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bell, Derrick A. 1973. *Race, racism, and American Law.* Little Brown & Co.

Berinsky, Adam J, Michele F Margolis and Michael W Sances. 2014. "Separating the shirkers from the workers? Making sure respondents pay attention on self-administered surveys." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3):739–753.

Bobo, Lawrence D and Devon Johnson. 2004. "A taste for punishment: Black and white Americans' views on the death penalty and the war on drugs." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 1(1):151–180.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 1997. "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation." *American Sociological Review* 62(3):465–480.

Booth, John and Mitchell A Seligson. 2009. *The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America.* Cambridge University Press.

Branton, Regina P and Bradford S Jones. 2005. "Reexamining racial attitudes: The conditional relationship between diversity and socioeconomic environment." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2):359–372.

Bruch, Sarah K and Joe Soss. 2018. "Schooling as a formative political experience: Authority relations and the education of citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 16(1):36–57.

Bruch, Sarah K, Myra Marx Ferree and Joe Soss. 2010. "From policy to polity: Democracy, paternalism, and the incorporation of disadvantaged citizens." *American Sociological Review* 75(2):205–226.

Burch, Traci. 2013. *Trading democracy for justice: Criminal convictions and the decline of neighborhood political participation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Butler, Ryden, Brendan Nyhan, Jacob M Montgomery and Michelle Torres. 2018. "Revisiting white backlash: Does race affect death penalty opinion?" *Research & Politics* 5(1):1–9.

Canache, Damarys. 2012. "Citizens' conceptualizations of democracy: Structural complexity, substantive content, and political significance." *Comparative Political Studies* 45(9):1132–1158.

Carlin, Ryan E, Gregory J Love and Elizabeth J Zechmeister. 2014. "Natural disaster and democratic legitimacy: The public opinion consequences of Chile's 2010 earthquake and tsunami." *Political Research Quarterly* 67(1):3–15.

Carlin, Ryan E and Matthew M Singer. 2011. "Support for Polyarchy in the Americas." *Comparative Political Studies* 44(11):1500–1526.

Chudy, Jennifer. 2021. "Racial sympathy and its political consequences." *The Journal of Politics* 83(1):122–136.

Clarke, Harold D, Nitish Dutt and Allan Kornberg. 1993. "The political economy of attitudes toward polity and society in Western European democracies." *The Journal of Politics* 55(4):998–1021.

Clayton, Amanda, Diana Z O'Brien and Jennifer M Piscopo. 2019. "All Male Panels? Representation and Democratic Legitimacy." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(1):113–129.

Cohen, Cathy J. 2010. *Democracy remixed: Black youth and the future of American politics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, Cathy J and Michael C Dawson. 1993. "Neighborhood poverty and African American politics." *American Political Science Review* 87(2):286–302.

Cohen, Elizabeth F. 2009. *Semi-citizenship in Democratic Politics.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Condon, Meghan and Amber Wichowsky. 2020. *The Economic Other: Inequality in the American Political Imagination.* University of Chicago Press.

Cookson, Tara Patricia. 2018. *Unjust Conditions: Women's Work and the Hidden Cost of Cash Transfer Programs.* University of California Press.

Cruikshank, Barbara. 1999. *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dalton, Russell J, To-chŏl Shin and Willy Jou. 2007. "Understanding democracy: Data from unlikely places." *Journal of democracy* 18(4):142–156.

Dawson, Michael C and Megan Ming Francis. 2016. "Black politics and the neoliberal racial order." *Public Culture* 28(1):23–62.

Diamond, Larry. 1999. *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation.* JHU Press.

Douglass, Frederick. 1955. The Lessons of the Hour. In *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass, Vol. IV: Reconstruction and After*, ed. Philip S. Foner. New York: International Publishers pp. 491–523.

Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. "The souls of black folks: Essays and sketches." *Chicago: AC McClurg and Co* .

Engelhardt, Andrew M. 2021. "Racial attitudes through a partisan lens." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(3):1062–1079.

Epp, Charles R, Steven Maynard-Moody and Donald P Haider-Markel. 2014. *Pulled over: How police stops define race and citizenship.* University of Chicago Press.

Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. MacKuen and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fraga, Bernard L and Julie Lee Merseth. 2016. "Examining the causal impact of the voting rights act language minority provisions." *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 1(1):31–59.

Fuchs, Dieter, Giovanna Guidorossi and Palle Svensson. 1995. Support for the Demcoratic System. In *Citizens and the State*, ed. Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Dieter Fuchs. Oxford: OUP Oxford pp. 323–353.

Geronimus, Arline T and J Phillip Thompson. 2004. "To denigrate, ignore, or disrupt: racial inequality in health and the impact of a policy-induced breakdown of African American communities." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 1(2):247–279.

Gilens, Martin. 2000. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy.* C: University of Chicago Press.

Gilens, Martin. 2009. "Preference Gaps and Inequality in Representation." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42(2):335–341.

Gillion, Daniel Q. 2016. *Governing With Words: The Political Dialogue on Race, Public Policy, and Inequality in America.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Glaser, James M. 1994. "Back to the black belt: Racial environment and white racial attitudes in the South." *The Journal of Politics* 56(1):21–41.

Goldrick-Rab, Sara. 2020. *Food insecurity on campus: Action and intervention.* JHU Press.

Hacker, Jacob S, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Paul Pierson and Kathleen Thelen. 2021. The American Political Economy Confronts COVID-19. In *The American Political Economy: Politics, Markets, and Power.* Cambridge University Press pp. 407–418.

Hamilton, Darrick and William Darity Jr. 2009. "Race, Wealth, and Intergenerational Poverty: There will never be a post-racial America if the wealth gap persists." *The American Prospect* 20(7):A10–A12.

Hanchard, Michael G. 2018. *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Harris, Fredrick C, Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Brian D McKenzie. 2005. *Countervailing forces in African-American civic activism, 1973–1994.* Cambridge University Press.

Hawkesworth, Mary. 2003. "Congressional Enactments of Race–Gender: Toward a Theory of Raced–Gendered Institutions." *American Political Science Review* 97(4):529–550.

Hayward, Clarissa Rile. 2003. "The difference states make: Democracy, identity, and the American city." *American Political Science Review* 97(4):501–514.

Hero, Rodney E and Morris E Levy. 2017. "The Racial Structure of Inequality: Consequences for Welfare Policy in the United States." *Social Science Quarterly* .

Hetey, Rebecca C and Jennifer L Eberhardt. 2014. "Racial disparities in incarceration increase acceptance of punitive policies." *Psychological Science* 25(10):1949–1954.

Hetherington, Marc J and Thomas J Rudolph. 2008. "Priming, performance, and the dynamics of political trust." *The Journal of Politics* 70(2):498–512.

Hooker, Juliet. 2017. *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hopkins, Daniel J. 2010. "Politicized places: Explaining where and when immigrants provoke local opposition." *American Political Science Review* 104(1):40–60.

Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kelly, Nathan J. 2020. *America's Inequality Trap.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Key, V.O. 1949. *Southern Politics in State and Nation.* New York: Knopf.

Kim, Claire Jean. 2000. *Bitter fruit: The politics of black-Korean conflict in New York City.* Yale University Press.

Kinder, Donald R, Lynn M Sanders and Lynn M Sanders. 1996. *Divided by color: Racial politics and democratic ideals.* University of Chicago Press.

King, Desmond S and Rogers M Smith. 2005. "Racial orders in American political development." *American Political Science Review* 99(01):75–92.

Lerman, Amy E. and Vesla M. Weaver. 2014. *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Levin, Shana, Jim Sidanius, Joshua L. Rabinowitz and Christopher Federico. 1998. "Ethnic Identity, Legitimizing Ideologies, and Social Status: A Matter of Ideological Asymmetry." *Political Psychology* 19(2):373–404.

Lieberman, Robert C. 1998. *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Linz, Juan J. 1978. Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequillibration. In *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes.* Vol. 1 JHU Press.

Linz, Juan J. 1988. Legitimacy of democracy and the socioeconomic system. In *Comparing pluralist democracies*, ed. Mattei Dogan. Boulder: Westview pp. 65–113.

Linz, Juan J and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lowndes, Joseph E. 2008. *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson and James A. Stimson. 1993. "Peasants or Bankers? The American Electorate and the U.S. Economy." *American Political Science Review* 86(3):597–611.

Mattes, Robert and Michael Bratton. 2007. "Learning about democracy in Africa: Awareness, performance, and experience." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(1):192–217.

Mendelberg, Tali. 2001. *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Michener, Jamila. 2018. *Fragmented democracy: Medicaid, federalism, and unequal politics.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Michener, Jamila D. 2021. "Politics, Pandemic, and Racial Justice Through the Lens of Medicaid." *American Journal of Public Health* 111(4):643–646.

Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The Racial Contract.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Morgan, Jana and Nathan J. Kelly. 2017. "Social Patterns of Inequality, Partisan Competition, and Latin American Support for Redistribution." *The Journal of Politics* 79(1):193–209.

Murray, Pauli. 1953. "The historical development of race laws in the United States." *The Journal of Negro Education* 22(1):4–15.

Myrdal, Gunnar. 1944. *An American dilemma; the Negro problem and modern democracy.* Harper.

Norris, Pippa. 1999. Introduction: The growth of critical citizens? In *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government*, ed. Pippa Norris. Oxford University Press pp. 1–27.

Nunnally, Shayla C. 2012. *Trust in Black America: Race, discrimination, and politics*. NYU Press.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2014. *Racial formation in the United States*. Routledge.

O'Brien, Rourke L. 2017. "Redistribution and the new fiscal sociology: Race and the progressivity of state and local taxes." *American Journal of Sociology* 122(4):1015–1049.

Peffley, Mark and Jon Hurwitz. 2007. "Persuasion and resistance: Race and the death penalty in America." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4):996–1012.

Pérez, Efrén O. 2016. *Unspoken Politics: Implicit Attitudes and Political Thinking*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pettigrew, Thomas F. and Linda R. Tropp. 2006. "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90(5):751.

Pettit, Becky. 2012. *Invisible men: Mass incarceration and the myth of black progress*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Pitkin, Hannah F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley, CA: University o.

Posey, Patricia. 2019. Refinancing the American Dream: The Consequences of Targeted Financial Policy for Political and Racial Inequality in the United States PhD thesis University of Pennsylvania.

Pratto, Felicia, Deborah G Tatar and Sahr Conway-Lanz. 1999. "Who Gets What and Why: Determinants of Social Allocations." *Political Psychology* 20(1):127–150.

Prothro, James W and Charles M Grigg. 1960. "Fundamental principles of democracy: Bases of agreement and disagreement." *The Journal of Politics* 22(2):276–294.

Ray, Victor. 2019. "A Theory of Racialized Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 84(1):26–53.

Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America.* Liveright Publishing.

Scherer, Nancy and Brett Curry. 2010. "Does Descriptive Race Representation Enhance Institutional Legitimacy? The Case of the US courts." *Journal of Politics* 72(1):90–104.

Schickler, Eric. 2016. *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932–1965.* Princeton University Press.

Schram, Sanford F, Joe Soss, Richard C Fording and Linda Houser. 2009. "Deciding to discipline: Race, choice, and punishment at the frontlines of welfare reform." *American sociological review* 74(3):398–422.

Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A and William Mishler. 2005. "An integrated model of women's representation." *Journal of Politics* 67(2):407–428.

Sears, David O. 1988. Symbolic racism. In *Eliminating racism.* Springer pp. 53–84.

Seligson, Mitchell A and John A Booth. 2010. "Trouble in Central America: Crime, hard times, and discontent." *Journal of Democracy* 21(2):123–135.

Shapiro, Ian. 1999. *Democratic Justice.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shapiro, Thomas M. 2004. *The hidden cost of being African American: How wealth perpetuates inequality.* Oxford University Press, USA.

Shapiro, Thomas M. 2017. *Toxic inequality: How America's wealth gap destroys mobility, deepens the racial divide, and threatens our future.* Basic Books.

Sidanius, Jim and Felicia Pratto. 1999. *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Soss, Joe. 1999. "Lessons of welfare: Policy design, political learning, and political action." *American Political Science Review* pp. 363–380.

Soss, Joe, Richard C Fording and Sanford Schram. 2011. *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spry, Amber and Shayla Nunnally. 2021. "A Modern American Dilemma: American Identity and Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement." *Working Paper* .

Stephens-Dougan, LaFleur. 2021. "Backlash Effect? White Americans' Reactions to Racial Disparities in COVID-19." *Presented at the Minority Politics Seminar Series* June 1, 2021.

Strolovitch, Dara Z, Janelle S Wong and Andrew Proctor. 2017. "A possessive investment in white heteropatriarchy? The 2016 election and the politics of race, gender, and sexuality." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5(2):353–363.

Taber, Charles S and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3):755–769.

Thurston, Chloe. 2021. Racial Inequality, Market Inequality, and the American Political Economy. In *The American Political Economy: Politics, Markets, and Power*, ed. Jacob S Hacker, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Paul Pierson and Kathleen Thelen. Cambridge University Press pp. 133–157.

Tilly, Charles. 1998. *Durable Inequality.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Trounstine, Jessica. 2018. *Segregation by design: Local politics and inequality in American cities.* Cambridge University Press.

Walker, Hannah L. 2020. "Targeted: The Mobilizing Effect of Perceptions of Unfair Policing Practices." *The Journal of Politics* 82(1):119–134.

Walker, Hannah, Loren Collingwood and Tehama Lopez Bunyasi. 2020. "White Response to Black Death: A Racialized Theory of White Attitudes Towards Gun Control." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 17(1):165–188.

Walker, Hannah, Marcel Roman and Matt Barreto. 2020. "The ripple effect: The political consequences of proximal contact with immigration enforcement." *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics* 5(3):537–572.

White, Ismail K, Tasha S Philpot, Kristin Wylie and Ernest McGowen. 2007. "Feeling the Pain of My People: Hurricane Katrina, Racial Inequality, and the Psyche of Black America." *Journal of Black Studies* 37(4):523–538.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Online Appendix for: *Racial Inequality, Pandemic, and Democracy: Covid-19 and Unequal Citizenship in Times of Crisis*

Contents

A   The Experiment

A.1   Design

In the inequality treatment condition (treatment 1), respondents read about the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways in which racial disparities were exacerbated. The treatment was designed to mirror the control, but with a discussion of race and racial disparities. Respondents read an article titled: "COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020 — Especially for Blacks. Vaccine Inequities Don't Help." This story discussed the number of deaths that resulted from COVID, but emphasized that Black people were hit particularly hard. Further, it emphasized that while vaccine supply has increased, Black people still struggle to gain access. We were careful *not* to imply that any of these disparities resulted from reasons that fed into negative racial stereotypes. Instead, we noted that "black Americans are just as willing to get the vaccine as whites" and that these disparities resulted from structural inequalities, saying: "Challenges for black Americans that limit vaccine access include difficulty getting time off work, finding transportation to distant clinic sites, and barriers to using online scheduling portals." Finally, the treatment noted that these racial gaps in health outcomes are not unique to the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead emblematic of "longstanding inequalities in American society." We wanted to make sure that respondents were not only thinking about racial disparities in this particular pandemic, but that they were thinking more broadly about the way that American society is unequal.

The equity policy treatment (treatment 2) mirrored the inequality treatment in terms of its discussion of racial disparities in COVID-19 deaths and vaccine access. Then, it supplemented this information with a discussion of the ways the government was attempting to combat this inequality. The title read: "COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020 — Especially for Blacks. Government Response Increases Equity in Vaccine Distribution." Here, we noted that "recent government policy emphasizes more equitable distribution of vaccines to support access for those most affected by the pandemic, including blacks," by doing things like setting up vaccination sites in convenient locations and extending hours. We note that this "recent policy should offset some underlying problems that make black people especially vulnerable to COVID-19." The intention here was to draw the reader's attention to the racial disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine roll-out, but to convey that the government is attempting to work against these inequalities.

The third condition, the reproducing inequality treatment, mirrored the equity treatment, but emphasizes government policy that is making the racial disparities *worse*, not better. Like the equity treatment, it mirrored the inequality treatment in its discussion of the racial disparities that have deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine roll out. However, it reported on government policy that is only making disparities worse. The title of the article reads: "COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020 — Especially for Blacks. Government Response Ignores Inequity in Vaccine Distribution." Respondents are told that recent government policy increases the number of available vaccines, but it does not support equitable distribution that would get those vaccines to the Black community. Respondents are told: "In failing to address some of the challenges that limit vaccine access, like difficulty getting time off work or finding transportation to distant clinic sites, the government effort is likely to widen this racial gap." We wanted to emphasize that the policy is

not only perpetuating racial disparities, but that it is exacerbating them.

All three treatment conditions exposed people to information about the COVID-19 pandemic that emphasized racial inequalities while the control condition emphasized non-racial facets of the pandemic's impact. The first treatment gave only the information about racial inequality (racial inequality condition). The second treatment added information about a government policy effort to address these racial inequalities (pro-equity policy condition), and the third added information about a government policy effort to address the pandemic that ignored its disparate racial impacts (reproducing policy condition). In all four conditions, we designed an interactive and immersive experience meant to mimic an online news article. We also wanted to make sure that the control matched the treatments in terms of tenor, which we did by acknowledging that some people did have trouble accessing vaccines initially. Further, because we were fielding the survey in June of 2021, when vaccine supply truly had started to increase, we wanted to include that so that the news story seemed relevant and believable. Everything in this story was true, but the precise content was constructed from a variety of news outlets.

Respondents clicked through four pages that contained brief segments of text as well as relevant images, which together produced a participatory and multi-sensory experience that we hoped would engage them fully in the treatment. Each image was accompanied by a caption designed to convey the most pertinent information so that even respondents who only looked at the pictures would understand the essential ideas in each treatment. And while there were multiple pages to encourage interaction, we made sure that the crux of the content was conveyed on the first page, for those respondents whose attention may decrease as the story progressed.

After respondents read their respective news articles, they were asked to reflect on the content. In order to deepen the treatment, the text for these reflections mirrored that of the treatment. In every condition, respondents were asked to write 2-5 sentences about how they were feeling or thinking after reading the article. They were initially prompted: "Now, take a moment to reflect on what you just read." Then, in the control condition, respondents saw, "How did the article make you feel or think about the way the coronavirus pandemic has been affecting the United States." In the inequality condition, we wanted to cue the respondent to think about racial disparities, but we did not want to be overt about the intention of the survey. Respondents in the inequality condition were asked: "How did the article make you feel or think about the way that the coronavirus pandemic has been affecting different groups of people in the United States?" Respondents are encouraged to think about group difference, but not overtly told to consider race. This allows for their reflection on the treatment to deepen its effects. In the policy conditions, the writing prompt mirrored that of the inequality condition but it also added, " — and about how the government is responding." This encouraged respondents to think not only about inequality, but also the policy response, without directly emphasizing whether the policy was combating or reproducing inequality.

The full text and images of the treatments is reported below:

COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020
Vaccines Aim to Help

By: Mike Larson

June 10, 2021

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, approximately 30 million Americans have contracted the virus. More than half a million have died.

The virus has impacted the health and longevity of many Americans. As the virus spread across the country in 2020, overall life expectancy declined by about a year as compared to 2019. And in early 2021, COVID-19 was the leading cause of death in the United States.

COVID-19 is the Number One Cause of Death in the U.S. in Early 2021

Average daily deaths in the U.S. from COVID-19 (Jan. 2021)
and other leading causes (2020)

Cause	Deaths
COVID-19	3,049
Heart Disease	2,068
Cancer	1,639
Alzheimer's & Dementia	826
Stroke	434
Chronic Lower Respiratory	414
Diabetes	273
Other Respiratory Diseases	181
Influenza & Pneumonia	146
Renal Failure	140
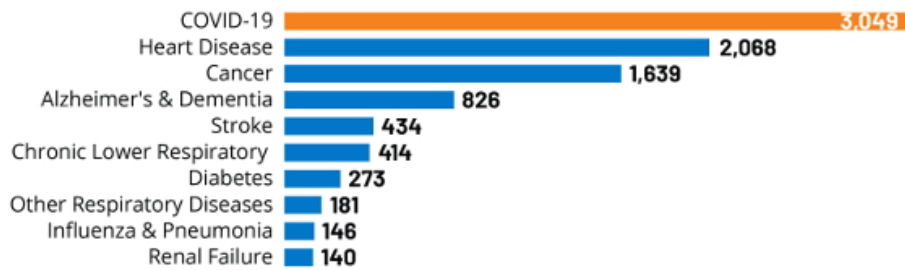
NOTES: The COVID-19 mortality rate is the daily average for January 2021 through January 26, 2021 using the KFF COVID-19 Tracker data. Mortality rates for causes other than COVID-19 are the average of Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) weeks 1-52 in 2020 reported by CDC. Heart disease refers to all circulatory diseases except stroke. Accidents are not included in the data source, but typically rank as the 3rd leading cause of death.
SOURCE: KFF analysis of 2020 CDC mortality data

Peterson-KFF
Health System Tracker

The vaccine effort aims to reduce the impact of the virus. Approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, but accessing the vaccine initially proved challenging for some.

Photo: A school where a community vaccine clinic has been established

At first, vaccination appointments could sometimes be hard to come by. But more recently, vaccine supply has been keeping up with demand, and a majority of eligible American adults have now received a COVID shot.

Right now, people across the country are focused on distributing the shots as quickly as possible because the vaccines have the potential to prevent infection, save lives, and eventually bring the pandemic to an end.

Photo: COVID-19 vaccine distribution aims to bring the pandemic to an end

COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020 – Especially for Blacks
Vaccine Inequities Don't Help

By: Mike Larson

June 10, 2021

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, approximately 30 million Americans have contracted the virus. More than half a million have died.

The virus has hit black people especially hard. Black Americans comprise 13% of the U.S. population, but they represent 25% of COVID-19 deaths. In every age category, blacks have died at rates higher than whites who are ten years older.

The Pandemic's Racial Disparity

Covid-19 deaths per 100,000 people in the U.S.
by race or ethnicity (as of July 30, 2020)

Race or ethnicity	Deaths per 100,000
Black or African American	74
American Indian or Alaska Native	40
Hispanic or Latino	40
Asian	31
White	30
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	29
Other	29

Source: The COVID Tracking Project

statista ◢

The vaccine effort aims to reduce the impact of the virus. Approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, but accessing the vaccine has proven especially challenging for black Americans.

Photo: People line up outside the only vaccine clinic in a predominantly black community

Vaccination appointments were initially hard to come by. And while vaccine supply is now keeping up with overall demand, several factors continue to make access difficult for some, especially for black Americans.

Although studies show that black Americans are just as willing to get the vaccine as whites, a recent report found that due to difficulty obtaining access, "the vaccination rate among white people has been... twice as high as the rate among black people." Challenges for black Americans that limit vaccine access include difficulty getting time off work, finding transportation to distant clinic sites, and barriers to using online scheduling portals.

These experiences of racial gaps in health outcomes are not unique to the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, they are the result of longstanding inequalities in American society. Blacks are far less likely to have access to health care than whites, and they tend to receive worse care and die earlier from the same diseases.

These kinds of inequalities put black Americans at increased risk of illness and contribute to their disproportionate deaths from COVID-19.

Photo: Family and friends mourn a loved one lost to COVID-19; high death rates and lagging vaccine access for black Americans continue to put them at higher risk despite increases in supply.

COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020 – Especially for Blacks
Government Response Increases Equity in Vaccine Distribution
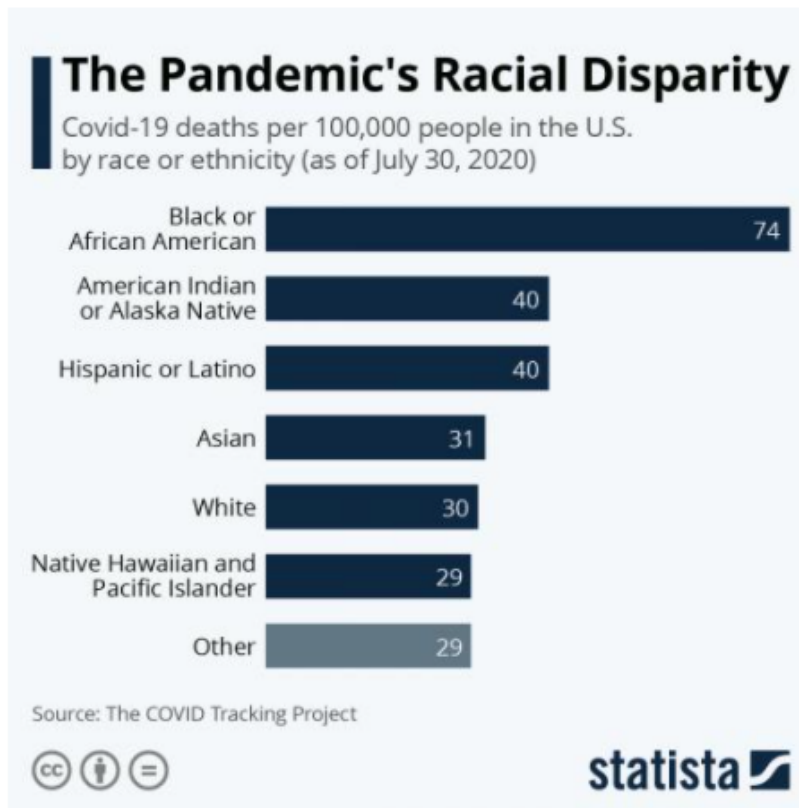
By: Mike Larson

June 10, 2021

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, approximately 30 million Americans have contracted the virus. More than half a million have died.

The virus has hit black people especially hard. Black Americans comprise 13% of the U.S. population, but they represent 25% of COVID-19 deaths. In every age category, blacks have died at rates higher than whites who are ten years older.

The Pandemic's Racial Disparity

Covid-19 deaths per 100,000 people in the U.S. by race or ethnicity (as of July 30, 2020)

Race or Ethnicity	Deaths per 100,000
Black or African American	74
American Indian or Alaska Native	40
Hispanic or Latino	40
Asian	31
White	30
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	29
Other	29

Source: The COVID Tracking Project

statista

The vaccine effort aims to reduce the impact of the virus. Approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, but accessing the vaccine has proven especially challenging for black Americans.

In response, recent government policy emphasizes more equitable distribution of vaccines to support access for those most affected by the pandemic, including blacks.

Photo: People line up outside the only vaccine clinic in a predominantly black community

The government aims to make sure everyone has equal access to the vaccine by locating vaccination sites in places where citizens have struggled to get appointments and offering extended hours.

Not only has the virus been particularly devastating for blacks, they have also found it especially hard to get access to the vaccine. Although studies show that black Americans are just as willing to get the vaccine as whites, a recent report found that due to access issues "the vaccination rate among white people has been...twice as high as the rate among black people."

By addressing some of the challenges that limit vaccine access, like difficulty getting time off work or finding transportation to distant clinic sites, the government effort aims to reduce this racial gap.

Photo: Vaccine distribution: Recent policy aims to promote access for hard-hit groups, like blacks

The government effort to promote vaccine equity takes account of broader experiences of racial gaps in health outcomes, which are not unique to the coronavirus pandemic. These racial gaps are the result of longstanding inequalities in American society. Blacks are far less likely to have access to health care than whites, and they tend to receive worse care and die earlier from the same diseases. These kinds of inequalities put blacks at increased risk of illness and contribute to their disproportionate deaths from COVID-19.

Recent policy should help offset some of the underlying problems that make black people especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

Photo: Family and friends mourn a loved one lost to COVID-19; high death rates and lagging vaccine access for black Americans spur government effort to promote more equal vaccine distribution.

COVID-19 Reduced Life Expectancy in 2020 – Especially for Blacks
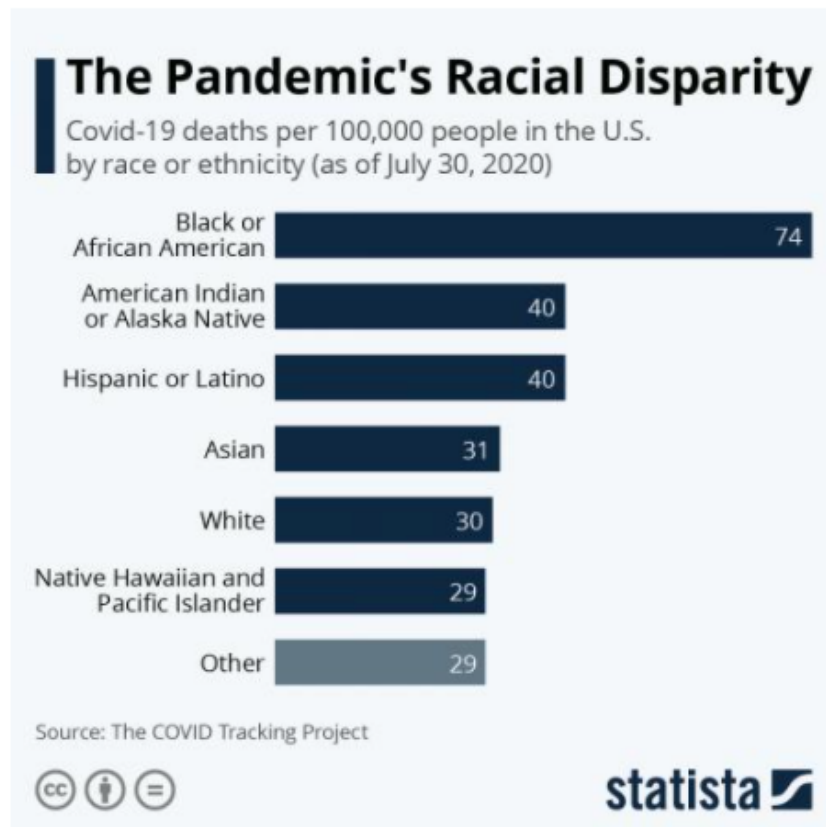## Government Response Ignores Inequity in Vaccine Distribution

By: Mike Larson

June 10, 2021

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, approximately 30 million Americans have contracted the virus. More than half a million have died.

The virus has hit black people especially hard. Black Americans comprise just 13% of the U.S. population, but they represent 25% of COVID-19 deaths. In every age category, blacks have died at rates higher than whites who are ten years older.

The Pandemic's Racial Disparity

Covid-19 deaths per 100,000 people in the U.S. by race or ethnicity (as of July 30, 2020)

Race or ethnicity	Deaths per 100,000
Black or African American	74
American Indian or Alaska Native	40
Hispanic or Latino	40
Asian	31
White	30
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	29
Other	29

Source: The COVID Tracking Project

statista
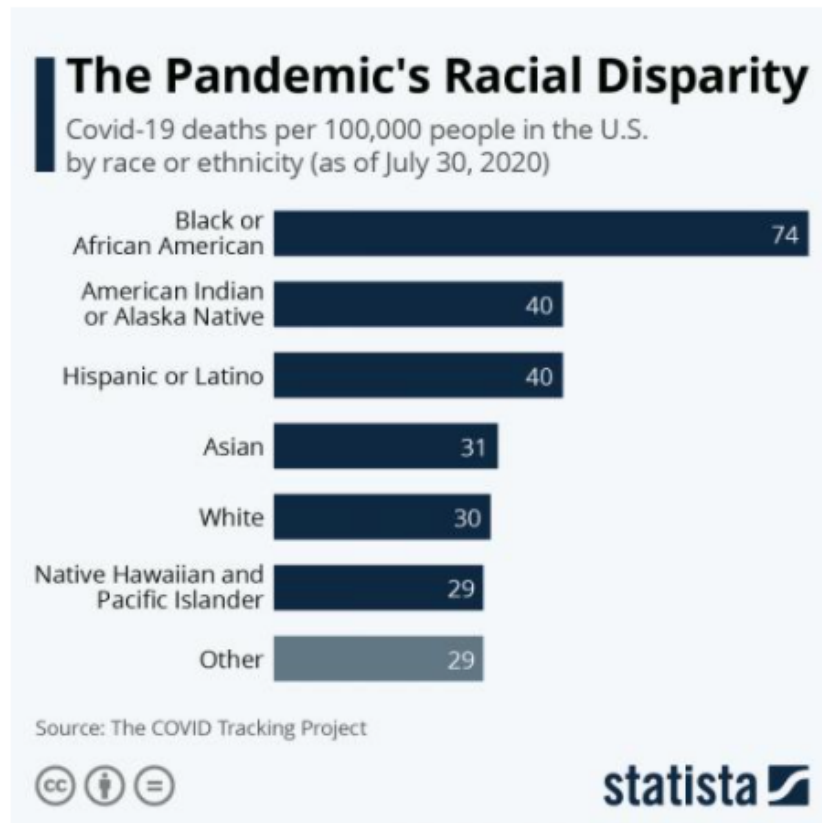
The vaccine effort aims to reduce the impact of the virus. Approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, but accessing the vaccine has proven especially challenging for black Americans.

Recent government policy has increased the number of available vaccines, but it does not support access for those groups most affected by the pandemic, such as blacks.

Photo: People line up outside the only vaccine clinic in a predominantly black community

The government aims to facilitate vaccine distribution, but has done little to help citizens who tend to live and work in places where vaccine clinics are scarce or hours are limited. Ignoring these kinds of access issues will likely make racial gaps worse, not better.

Not only has the virus been particularly devastating for blacks, they have also found it especially hard to access the vaccine. Although studies show that black Americans are just as willing to get the vaccine as whites, a recent report found that due to access issues "the vaccination rate among white people has been...twice as high as the rate among black people."

In failing to address some of the challenges that limit vaccine access, like difficulty getting time off work or finding transportation to distant clinic sites, the government effort is likely to widen this racial gap.

Photo: Vaccine distribution: Recent policy expands vaccine access, but will likely widen racial gaps

The government effort does not take account of broader experiences of racial gaps in health outcomes, which are not unique to the coronavirus pandemic. These racial gaps are the result of longstanding inequalities in American society. Blacks are far less likely to have access to health care than whites, and they tend to receive worse care and die earlier from the same diseases. These kinds of inequalities put blacks at increased risk of illness and contribute to their disproportionate deaths from COVID-19.

Recent policy would not offset the underlying problems that make black people especially vulnerable to COVID-19, and will likely deepen inequity in vaccine access.

Photo: Family and friends mourn a loved one lost to COVID-19; high death rates and lagging vaccine access for black Americans continue to be overlooked by vaccine policy

A.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of respondents in the sample — for continuous variables

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Party Identification	7030.00	3.15	2.32	1.00	7.00
Ideology	7860.00	3.85	1.69	1.00	7.00
Education	7795.00	6.09	2.25	1.00	11.00
Age	7873.00	45.89	17.38	18.00	99.00
Income	7873.00	10.10	7.94	1.00	27.00

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of respondents in the sample — for categorical variables

	N
Female	4217
Male	3656
White	4113
Black	3758

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for key dependent variables

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Democratic Support	7856.00	2.99	0.86	1.00	4.00
Democratic Satisfaction	7858.00	2.01	0.67	1.00	3.00
Trust in Gov't	7858.00	2.35	0.85	1.00	4.00
Rating Local Gov't	7856.00	5.72	2.75	1.00	10.00
Rating Congress	7835.00	6.17	2.72	1.00	10.00
Rating Health Agencies	7824.00	5.15	2.72	1.00	10.00

A.3   Balance Tests and Manipulation Checks

Balance tests and manipulation checks are reported in the tables below for the full sample. Results are robust to within-race analyses as well.

Table 4 reports results from a series of OLS regression which predict continuous demographic variables (education, income, age, 7-point party identification, and 7-point ideology with the treatment conditions. None of these produce statistically significant coefficients, confirming that there are no imbalances by treatment group. Table 5 conducts a series of chi-squared tests for categorical variables (race, gender, whether the individual voted, and the region where the individual resides). Again, no p-value is small enough to indicate statistically significant differences at any conventional level of confidence, indicating that the treatment groups do not contain imbalances on these traits.

Table 4: Balance tests for continuous variables (OLS regression results)

	Education	Income	Age	Party ID	Ideology
Intercept	6.14***	9.41***	45.58***	3.12***	3.85***
	(0.05)	(0.17)	(0.39)	(0.05)	(0.04)
T1: Inequality	−0.08	−0.21	0.44	0.00	−0.03
	(0.07)	(0.24)	(0.55)	(0.08)	(0.05)
T2: Equity	−0.07	0.03	0.14	0.00	0.03
	(0.07)	(0.23)	(0.55)	(0.08)	(0.05)
T3: Reproducing	−0.08	−0.23	0.68	0.11	0.01
	(0.07)	(0.24)	(0.55)	(0.08)	(0.05)
R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Adj. R^2	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
Num. obs.	7794	7521	7871	7029	7859
RMSE	2.25	7.22	17.38	2.32	1.69

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 5: Balance tests for categorical variables (chi-squared test results)

Variable	X-squared	DF	P-value
Race	0.39	3	0.94
Gender	3.81	3	0.28
Voted	0.50	3	0.92
Region	6.61	9	0.68

Finally, Table 6 presents a series of logistic regressions, in which respondents' answers to the manipulation checks are predicted with their treatment condition. There were two items that measured whether respondents understood the article that they read. They were:

1. Which of the following statements is consistent with the news story you read earlier?

    (a) All Americans have found it equally challenging to obtain vaccination appointments

    (b) Black people have found it particularly challenging to obtain vaccination appointments

2. Which of the following statements is consistent with the news story you read earlier?

    (a) Recent policy promotes more equity in vaccine access, especially for black people

    (b) Recent policy expands vaccine distribution but ignores issues of unequal vaccine access

    (c) I did not read about recent government policy

Each manipulation check variable (the dependent variables) have been coded such that a 1 indicates a correct response to that specific treatment condition. So, those in the control condition who answer the manipulation check in a way that indicates that they read the control article results in a value of 1. The same is true for each subsequent dependent variable. Results indicate the respondents read and understood the content of their particular articles.

Table 6: Manipulation tests

	Control	Inequality	Equity	Reproducing
Intercept	0.46***	−0.46***	−0.61***	−0.58***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
T1: Inequality	−1.20***	1.20***	−0.14*	0.35***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
T2: Equity	−1.12***	1.12***	0.73***	−0.26***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
T3: Reproducing	−1.09***	1.09***	−0.11	0.60***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
AIC	10149.53	10149.53	10217.29	10387.09
BIC	10177.40	10177.40	10245.16	10414.96
Log Likelihood	-5070.76	-5070.76	-5104.64	-5189.54
Deviance	10141.53	10141.53	10209.29	10379.09
Num. obs.	7851	7851	7852	7852

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

A.4   Additional Model Specifications

A.4.1   Models without attention checks

Table 7: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments — for the full sample (no attention checks)

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't	Pandemic performance rating for:		
				Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
Intercept	3.12***	2.05***	2.35***	5.95***	6.23***	5.01***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
T1: Inequality	−0.09***	−0.07***	−0.00	−0.04	−0.01	0.07
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
T2: Equity	−0.08***	−0.04*	0.01	−0.13	−0.03	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
T3: Reproducing	−0.07**	−0.05**	−0.03	−0.15*	−0.15*	−0.09
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Adj. R^2	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Num. obs.	7855	7857	7857	7855	7834	7823
RMSE	0.86	0.67	0.85	2.75	2.75	2.75

Note: ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$. All models are ordinary least squares regressions. They include all respondents. Regressions are weighted to reflect national averages.

Table 8: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments, by political party of the respondent — for the full sample (no attention checks)

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't	Pandemic performance rating for:		
				Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
Intercept	3.16***	2.14***	2.57***	6.31***	7.06***	5.83***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
T1: Inequality	−0.06	−0.10***	−0.06*	−0.26**	−0.21*	−0.15
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
T2: Equity	−0.06	−0.02	−0.05	−0.18	−0.20*	−0.19*
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
T3: Reproducing	−0.06	−0.01	−0.05	−0.16	−0.11	−0.02
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Republican	−0.13***	−0.14***	−0.38***	−0.75***	−1.84***	−1.38***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
T1 * Republican	−0.07	0.08	0.15**	0.36*	0.48**	0.30
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)
T2 * Republican	0.01	−0.03	0.07	0.01	0.29	0.25
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)
T3 * Republican	0.05	−0.03	0.06	−0.03	−0.02	−0.19
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)
R^2	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.09	0.05
Adj. R^2	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.08	0.05
Num. obs.	6344	6346	6346	6342	6328	6326
RMSE	0.84	0.66	0.83	2.71	2.56	2.64

Note: ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$. All models are ordinary least squares regressions. They include all respondents. Regressions are weighted to reflect national averages.

Table 9: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments, by race of the respondent — for the full sample (no attention checks)

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't	Pandemic performance rating for:		
				Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
Intercept	3.15***	2.06***	2.35***	6.02***	6.22***	4.94***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
T1: Inequality	−0.10***	−0.08***	−0.00	−0.03	0.00	0.11
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
T2: Equity	−0.08**	−0.03	0.03	−0.11	0.03	0.07
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
T3: Reproducing	−0.07*	−0.06**	−0.03	−0.18	−0.17	−0.13
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Race: Black	−0.23***	−0.03	0.05	−0.44***	0.05	0.53***
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
T1 * Black	0.08	−0.01	−0.04	−0.07	−0.09	−0.29*
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)
T2 * Black	0.02	−0.03	−0.12**	−0.10	−0.31*	−0.36**
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)
T3 * Black	0.03	0.05	−0.01	0.09	0.06	0.12
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)
R^2	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
Adj. R^2	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
Num. obs.	7855	7857	7857	7855	7834	7823
RMSE	0.86	0.67	0.85	2.74	2.72	2.71

Note: ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$. All models are ordinary least squares regressions. They include all respondents. Regressions are weighted to reflect national averages.

A.4.2 Models by racial resentment

Table 10: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments, by respondent's level of racial resentment — for white respondents only who passed at least 1 attention check

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't	Pandemic performance rating for:		
				Local Gov't	Congress	Health Agencies
Intercept	3.25***	2.08***	2.69***	6.79***	8.05***	6.05***
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)
T1: Inequality	−0.08	−0.11	−0.07	−0.21	−0.30	−0.02
	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.29)
T2: Equity	−0.13	−0.09	−0.03	−0.31	−0.35	−0.34
	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.29)
T3: Reproducing	−0.17*	−0.11	−0.12	−0.52*	−0.34	−0.58**
	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.29)
Racial Resentment	−0.04	−0.04	−0.59***	−1.16***	−3.14***	−2.06***
	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.32)
T1 * RR	−0.01	0.08	0.12	0.38	0.59	0.17
	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.45)	(0.44)	(0.45)
T2 * RR	0.08	0.09	0.05	0.33	0.63	0.63
	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.46)	(0.44)	(0.46)
T3 * RR	0.19	0.06	0.10	0.44	0.25	0.69
	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.46)	(0.44)	(0.46)
R^2	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.09	0.04
Adj. R^2	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.09	0.03
Num. obs.	3174	3174	3174	3173	3170	3169
RMSE	0.82	0.66	0.81	2.69	2.62	2.69

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

A.4.3   Models as ordered logistic regressions

The two key dependent variables in this analysis are 4-item (for democratic support) and 3-item (for democratic satisfaction). The trust dependent variable also consists of 4 response options. As a result, models from the paper (using OLS) are replicated here using ordered logistic regression. The variables regarding rating pandemic performance are 10-item and thus not replicated here. Results from the paper are replicated for overall treatment effects (Table 11), by party identification (Table 12) and by race of the respondent (Table 13). Results are robust.

Table 11: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments as ordered logistic regressions, for respondents who passed at least 1 attention check

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't
T1: Inequality	−0.22***	−0.27***	−0.08
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
T2: Equity	−0.22***	−0.17**	−0.09
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
T3: Reproducing	−0.15**	−0.16**	−0.15**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
AIC	12742.97	10833.47	13345.49
BIC	12782.68	10866.56	13385.21
Log Likelihood	-6365.49	-5411.73	-6666.75
Deviance	12730.97	10823.47	13333.49
Num. obs.	5535	5536	5537

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$

24

Table 12: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments as ordered logistic regressions by party identification, for respondents who passed at least 1 attention check

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't
T1: Inequality	−0.35	−0.98**	−1.22***
	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.40)
T2: Equity	−0.23	−0.14	−1.03***
	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.40)
T3: Reproducing	−0.56	0.01	−0.76*
	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.40)
Republican	−0.13	−0.45***	−1.09***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
T1 * Republican	0.03	0.29*	0.50***
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
T2 * Republican	−0.00	−0.02	0.41**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
T3 * Republican	0.18	−0.07	0.25
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
AIC	10137.90	8828.32	10702.65
BIC	10202.13	8886.13	10766.88
Log Likelihood	-5058.95	-4405.16	-5341.32
Deviance	10117.90	8810.32	10682.65
Num. obs.	4550	4551	4551

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$

Table 13: Average treatment effects of racial inequality on democratic commitments as ordered logistic regressions by race of the respondent, for respondents who passed at least 1 attention check

	Democratic Support	Democratic Satisfaction	Trust in Gov't
T1: Inequality	−0.20**	−0.20**	0.03
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)
T2: Equity	−0.18*	−0.12	0.03
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)
T3: Reproducing	−0.15	−0.23**	−0.13
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)
Race: Black	−0.43***	−0.06	0.11
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
T1 * Black	−0.02	−0.16	−0.24*
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)
T2 * Black	−0.08	−0.10	−0.27*
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)
T3 * Black	0.01	0.16	−0.04
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)
AIC	12672.70	10833.64	13347.92
BIC	12738.89	10893.22	13414.11
Log Likelihood	-6326.35	-5407.82	-6663.96
Deviance	12652.70	10815.64	13327.92
Num. obs.	5535	5536	5537

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

A.5   Pre-registration

Find the pre-registration for this survey experiment on the following page.

(/registries/osf/discover)OSF **REGISTRIES** ▾   **Add New(/registries/osf/new)**

Racial Inequality, Pandemic, and Democracy: Main Study

Public registration ▾

≡   **Metadata**

Preregistration Template from AsPredicted.org   ≡

Data collection

Have any data been collected for this study already? Note: 'Yes' is a discouraged answer for this preregistration form.

No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

Hypothesis

This pre-registration involves three studies: a main study in addition to two pre-tests that will be fielded before (and will likely inform) the main study.

The first pre-test investigates the extent to which the treatments that we have crafted are producing the intended effects within respondents (i.e., manipulation checks), whether participants are engaging with our treatments (i.e., attention checks), whether writing about the treatment influences treatment effects, and the extent to which the relationship we hypothesize is mediated by other factors (and if so, which factors). This pre-test will help us sharpen the particulars of our key treatments, but will not change their substance.

The second pre-test investigates the extent to which asking respondents questions that tap their racial attitudes biases the effects of the treatments that they later receive. This pre-test uses a cropped version of the planned experiment (e.g., only 2 conditions rather than 4). This pre-test is likely of broader interest than the first, as researchers often debate when and how to measure respondents' racial attitudes with the hope that it will not influence the effects of experimental manipulation that often comes later in the survey. This pre-test has its own pre-registration (OSF registration DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/YDN85), as we expect that it will be a standalone piece that speaks to experimental methods.

The main study asks: How does exposure to information about the realities of structural inequality influence people's thinking about democracy? Broadly, we expect that structural inequality and a lack of policy action to confront it undermine people's confidence in government institutions and weaken their support for democratic values and practices. This study tests this expectation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with respect to racial inequality specifically.

Hypotheses:

1.   Priming attention to racialized social hierarchies will reduce satisfaction with governing processes and policy outcomes (both generally and regarding healthcare and the pandemic response specifically) and weaken democratic system legitimacy
a.   These negative effects will be larger for members of non-dominant groups (i.e., non-white racial groups)

2.   Exposure to a substantive policy effort to counter racial hierarchy will increase satisfaction with governing processes and policy outcomes (both generally and regarding healthcare and the pandemic response specifically) and strengthen democratic system legitimacy – compared to the social exclusion condition described in hypothesis 1
a.   These positive effects will be larger for members of non-dominant groups (i.e., non-white racial groups)

3.   Exposure to policies that reinforce racial hierarchy will reduce satisfaction with governing processes and policy outcomes (both generally and regarding healthcare and the pandemic response specifically) and weaken democratic system legitimacy
a.   These negative effects will be larger for members of non-dominant groups (i.e., non-white racial groups)

As secondary expectations, we propose that there could be heterogenous effects by:

4.   Partisanship: White Republicans may be more accepting of racial inequalities and may even react negatively to meaningful policy efforts designed to combat them

5.   Ideology: White conservatives may be more accepting of racial inequalities and may even react negatively to meaningful policy efforts designed to combat them

Dependent variable

Respondents will answer a variety of items intended to tap their commitment to and value for democracy, political efficacy, political participation, views of the government, trust in government, and evaluations of government and health officials. Depending on the results from the second pre-test, we may also include racialized policy attitudes as dependent variables as well. While there could be minor changes to the ways in which the items are worded, the key dependent variables are reported below.

Items:
DEM. Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government." Do
you disagree strongly, disagree, agree, or agree strongly?

DEMSAT. On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied or not at all satisfied
with the way democracy works in the United States?

EFFICACY. Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement. "Public officials don't care much what people like me think." Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

PARTICIP. Thinking about the next 12 months, how likely are you to work or cooperate
with others to try to solve a problem affecting your city, community, or neighborhood?

with others to try to solve a problem affecting your city, community, or neighborhood?

ANGRY. Some people say they are basically content with the federal government, others say they are frustrated, and others say they are angry. Which of these describes best how you feel?

TRUST1. Generally speaking, how much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government to do what is right?

TRUST2. When thinking about the well-being of people like you, how much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government to do what is right?

Please indicate how you feel toward each group in terms of how they have handled the coronavirus pandemic. 1 means not a good job and 10 means a very good job.
LOCALGOV. Local government officials
FEDHEALTH. Health agencies in the federal government, like the Center for Disease Control (CDC)
CONG. Congress

Now consider the following phrases and indicate the degree to which you agree or Disagree with them, using a seven-point scale where 1 represents strongly agree and 7 represents strongly disagree.

GOVHEALTH. The government should implement policies that reduce health disparities in our country. Please indicate your level of agreement on a 7-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

REDIST. The government should implement policies that reduce economic inequality in our country, even if it means increasing taxes for wealthy Americans. Please indicate your level of agreement on a 7-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

PROTFUT. Thinking about the next 12 months, how likely are you to join in a protest, march, rally, or demonstration?

These are the core dependent variables but additional items may be added – specifically, some that are tapping policy attitudes in a conservative direction – in order to assess the full treatment effects.

Conditions
How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?

There will be four conditions. Each condition will have approximately 2,022 subjects with an even split (using block randomization) between non-Latinx Black and white respondents. In each condition, respondents will read a fabricated news article related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific contents of the article will vary, as described below.

1.   Control condition: Respondents will read an article about the COVID-19 health crisis that excludes any discussion of racial disparities or inequalities

2.   Treatment 1 (Social Inequality): Respondents will read an article about the COVID-19 health crisis that emphasizes racial disparities in impact and outcomes.

3.   Treatment 2 (Social Inequality with Counteracting Policy): Respondents will read an article about the COVID-19 health crisis that emphasizes racial disparities in impact and outcomes and about a policy proposal that acknowledges and seeks to limit racial disparities in morbidity and mortality rates

proposal that acknowledges and seeks to limit racial disparities in morbidity and mortality rates (specifically, by improving access to the vaccine for Black Americans).

4.   Treatment 3 (Social Inequality with Reproducing Policy): Respondents will read an article about the COVID-19 health crisis that emphasizes racial disparities in impact and outcomes and about a policy proposal that reinforces racial disparities (i.e., by improving vaccine access but likely not for groups like Black Americans – thus widening the divide).

Analyses

We will evaluate the average treatment effects of each condition on the dependent variables (e.g., regression, difference of means) – for the whole sample and by racial groups. We will also assess whether other identities, such as gender and class, influence the way that people respond to the treatments (again using statistical analyses like regression and difference of means).

We will also assess how these treatment effects may be moderated by pre-treatment political predispositions and demographics (e.g., age, gender, place of residence, education, income, partisanship, news consumption, personal experiences with the pandemic (health and economic well-being), etc.). If the second pre-test finds that asking about racial attitudes pre-treatment does not bias treatment effects, we will assess the treatment effects moderated by racial attitudes for white respondents.

The first pre-test will determine whether we include questions that tap potential mediators (if so, we will use mediation analysis) and whether we include a writing prompt about the treatment (if so, we will analyze the qualitative data produced).

Outliers and Exclusions

Respondents for whom we do not have sufficient information (i.e., those who do not answer all items used in the analysis) will be excluded. The first pre-test will include multiple attention checks in order to evaluate which, if any, will be used for the main study – and whether respondents will be excluded for failing the attention checks used.

Sample Size

Power analysis suggests that each subgroup for analysis should have 337 subjects. This group size permits us to maintain 90% power to detect a relatively small treatment effect of .25 standard deviations while accounting for multiple tests. To evaluate the differences between white and Black respondents and to simultaneously consider heterogeneous effects within each racial group, we need to be able to divide each of the four experimental cells into the two racial groups and then divide again by one other characteristic (e.g. partisanship). Thus, to calculate the full sample size, we multiple 337 by two (Black and white), and then we multiple again by three, which allows us to split each racial group in each treatment cell into three evenly sized groups (e.g. Republican, Democrat, Independent). This calculation (337*4 treatment*2 racial groups*3 subgroups) brings the total number of subjects to 8,088. The precise final sample size could vary slightly.

Other

We will conduct additional secondary analyses:

Racial attitudes: White respondents with hostile racial attitudes may be more accepting of racial inequalities and may even react negatively to meaningful policy efforts designed to combat them. Our ability to conduct this analysis will depend on the results from our second pre-test. If our second pre-test indicates that measuring racial attitudes biases the treatment effects, we will not include measures of

indicates that measuring racial attitudes biases the treatment effects, we will not include measures of racial attitudes on the main study (presented here) and thus would not be able to evaluate these secondary expectations.

Other marginalized identities: Multiply-disadvantaged subjects may respond to the treatments differently than those who do not suffer repeated dimensions of marginalization, and these differences may be especially pronounced between subjects who have experienced the pandemic in personally damaging ways versus those who have not. This group may react particularly negatively to treatments that activate attention to issues of social or political inequality (treatments 1 and 3).

Name

Racial Inequality, Pandemic, and Democracy: Main Study

Finally

Experiment

Other

No response

B   The ANES Analysis

B.1   Full Models

Table 14: Multi-Level Models of Satisfaction with Democracy

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Satisfaction with Democracy			
Racial Income Inequality	-0.090**	-0.086*	-0.209
	(0.034)	(0.042)	(0.121)
Black × Racial Income Inequality		-0.027	
		(0.105)	
Percent Black	0.002*	0.002*	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age	0.004***	0.004***	0.003***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Education	0.013	0.013	0.021
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Family Income	0.027***	0.027***	0.023**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Black	0.065*	0.108	0.000
	(0.029)	(0.170)	
Hispanic	0.159***	0.159***	
	(0.025)	(0.026)	
Other Ethnicity	0.006	0.006	
	(0.042)	(0.042)	
Woman	-0.013	-0.013	0.000
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.019)
Voted for Presidential Winner	0.287***	0.287***	0.276***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.021)
Democrat			-0.163
			(0.221)
Democrat × Racial Income Inequality			0.182
			(0.133)
Republican			-0.091
			(0.250)
Republican × Racial Income Inequality			0.157
			(0.145)
2016	-0.098***	-0.098***	-0.081***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Constant	2.467***	2.461***	2.524***
	(0.076)	(0.086)	(0.226)
States	41	41	41
Individuals	11193	11193	6988

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

B.2 By Party and Race

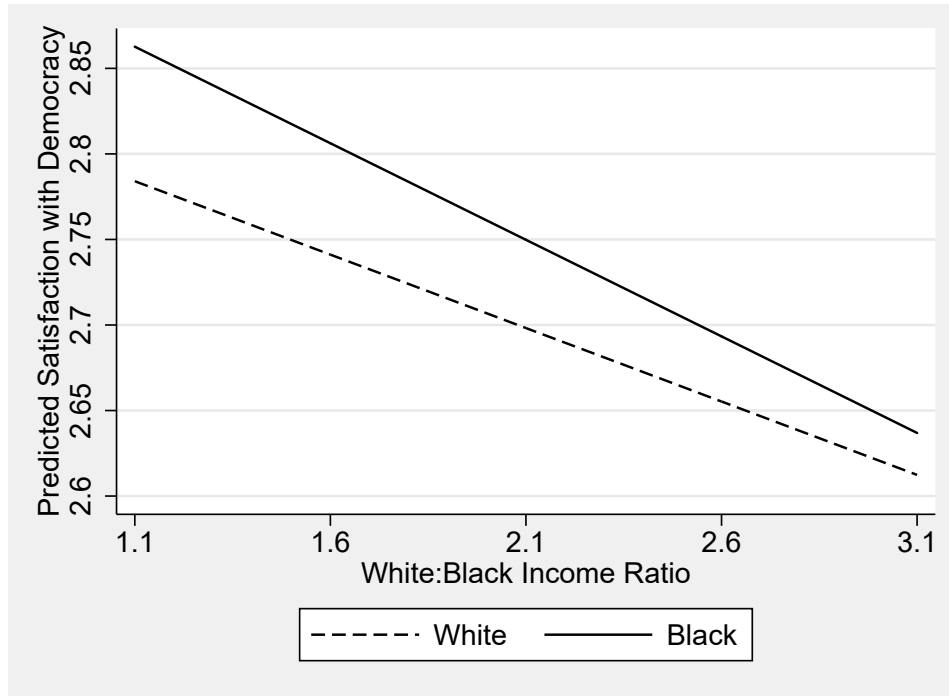Figure 1: The Effect of Racial Inequality by Racial Subgroup

Figure 2: The Effect of Racial Inequality by Party Subgroup (White Non-Hispanic Only)