Does Learning about Racial Injustice Affect Policy Beliefs and Attitudes among White Americans?*

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Abstract

Does learning about racial injustice, particularly the historical roots of contemporary inequalities, lead white Americans to think differently about both the origins of, and potential solutions to, contemporary inequality? While research showing that individuals update their attitudes in accordance to counter-attitudinal information suggests that it might, research on motivated reasoning suggests that, if anything, the opposite might be true. To assess these competing possibilities, we fielded a survey experiment on a nationally representative sample of American adults where respondents were exposed to an argument providing information about a cause of inequality that randomly varied (1) whether the cause was a structural, cultural, or individual factor; (2) whether the cause was historical or contemporary; and (3) whether the cause was explicitly racialized (emphasizing racial inequality), emphasized nonracial group differences (i.e., class inequality), or did not emphasize group differences (i.e., individual factors). Analyzing how white partisans respond to different combinations of issue frames, we find that white Republicans, despite being unlikely to agree with some arguments they viewed, are nonetheless more likely to support liberal economic policies and certain pro-Black policy proposals redressing past racial discrimination against African Americans when they receive such information (but they tend to increase support for conservative policy items as well). Somewhat puzzlingly, we find that exposure to a range of argumentation about inequality causes white Democrats to express less support for liberal policy items (but not greater support for conservative policy items) and does not affect attitudes toward pro-Black policy proposals that redress past racial injustice.

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Political theorists, historians, and racial justice activists have argued that learning about historical racial injustices is necessary for white Americans to perceive contemporary racial inequalities as systemic policy problems that require systemic policy solutions. However, as an empirical question, the extent to which white Americans accept (or reject) historical information when making sense of contemporary racial inequality and how this information affects white Americans' policy beliefs and attitudes regarding inequality are not well-understood.

To assess how white Americans respond to information about the historical roots of inequality, as well as the racial and systemic dimensions of inequality, we designed and analyze data from a pilot experiment fielded on a nationally representative sample of American adults where subjects read and evaluate a randomly assigned argument that varies how it frames the issue of inequality. Specifically, we vary how the argument attributes the difficulty of social mobility in America to structural, cultural, or individualistic causes; to group-based inequalities defined in racial or nonracial (class) terms; and to historical or contemporary causes. In light of growing affective, ideological, and racial polarization between the two parties, our analyses focus specifically on understanding partisan differences among whites in how these arguments affect their beliefs and attitudes about inequality in general and racial inequality and injustice in particular.

Descriptively, we find that white Republicans are more likely to hold conventionally conservative beliefs about what explains limited upward mobility, while white Democrats hold a mix of liberal and conservative beliefs. White Democrats are more likely to support government intervention to address inequality, while white Republicans are more opposed. With respect to the arguments they are assigned to read, white Republicans are, on average, less likely to agree with any of the arguments presented to them, with arguments emphasizing individual-level causes of inequality and arguments attributing inequality to the historical legacies of cultural practices of low-income Americans eliciting the highest rates of agreement (near 50 percent). A majority of white Democrats, by contrast, agreed with all variants of structural arguments presented, but were less supportive of arguments that low economic

mobility is caused by group cultural and individual-level factors.

Our experimental analyses focus on four sets of outcomes related to subjects' beliefs and attitudes about inequality: (1) subjects' beliefs that low upward economic mobility currently exists in the country; (2) subjects' beliefs about the factors causing low economic mobility; (3) subjects' attitudes toward policy proposals affecting inequality and pro-Black policies in particular; and (4) subjects' attitudes about the role of government in improving economic mobility. We report four sets of findings.

First, with respect to subjects' beliefs about the existence of low upward economic mobility, we find that that white Republicans are more likely to agree that lack of upward mobility exists and is a problem today when given any type of argument that attributes inequality to non-individual-level causes, while Democrats are not affected by the treatments.

Second, with respect to beliefs regarding the factors causing low economic mobility (and, by extension, inequality), white Republicans are less likely to attribute inequality to the free market naturally producing winners and losers when presented with nearly any argument. Structural class-based arguments and arguments highlighting contemporary class inequality decrease white Republicans' attributions to individual responsibility, while individualism-based arguments increase such attributions. Arguments highlighting legacies of historical class inequalities, as well as arguments emphasizing the legacies of historical racial inequalities, increase beliefs that today's inequality is partly a function of the legacy of historical discrimination by private actors. For white Democrats, exposure to arguments about inequality generally decrease the likelihood of attributing inequality to individual responsibility. Arguments that frame inequality in racial terms and that emphasize the causal effects of historical legacies also increase the perception that legacies of past government discrimination affects inequality today. However, arguments emphasizing race also seem to increase perceptions that inequality is partly a function of cultural dysfunctions.

Third, we find evidence that arguments about inequality can increase support among white Republicans for liberal, conservative, and pro-Black policies. Specifically, among white

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Republicans, arguments that emphasizing historical legacies of racial inequalities increase support for liberal policies, but also increase support for conservative policies. Arguments about the cultural causes of racial inequality seem to drive this rather than arguments about the structural causes of racial inequality. Arguments emphasizing the structural causes of class inequality and the cultural causes of racial inequality increase support for pro-Black policy proposals among white Republicans as well. Puzzlingly, white Democrats respond to nearly all types of arguments by offering less support for economically liberal policy items (but do not increase their support for conservative policy items).

Finally, we find that cultural arguments in general seem to be the only ones that increase beliefs in the need for a government role in addressing the lack of upward economic mobility in the nation today, but only among white Republicans.

1   Policy Arguments and the Formation of Policy Beliefs and Attitudes

There is wide interest in how policy arguments affect policy attitudes, both in general and specifically as it pertains to attitudes about inequality and race. Different kinds of arguments are often deployed with persuasion in mind, specifically to affect beliefs and attitudes in a particular direction.

At the same time, there is a need to further understand the effects of such arguments not only on policy attitudes but also on policy-related beliefs – how people think about policy problems, how people think about policy solutions, and how people's thinking about social systems informs both beliefs about problems and solutions. This is important because it can shed light on the types of information people, for whatever reason, consider relevant to understanding a policy issue and forming attitudes on that issue.

We focus on three common aspects of how arguments about inequality are framed: whether the arguments link inequality to structural, group cultural, or individual-level

causes; whether the argument is explicitly racialized; and whether the argument is framed in historical or contemporary terms.

1.1 The Salience of Structural, Group Cultural, and Individual Causes

One variable dimension of arguments about inequality has to do with whether its origins are structural, group cultural, or individualistic. Structural arguments, for example, tend to emphasize factors like public policies and discrimination as the primary roots of inequality. Group cultural arguments, by contrast, tend to discount such factors, emphasizing instead supposed cultural failings of disadvantaged groups, particularly issues related to work ethic and family structure. Individualistic arguments share with cultural arguments the rejection of structural causes, but focus on the failings of indiviuals themselves rather than a larger cultural group to which they might belong.

1.2 The Salience of Racial Injustice and Inequality

Another dimension that varies is whether inequality is framed as a racial issue or not (or, in some cases, an issue that is focused on Black Americans or one that emphasizes the plight of poorer white Americans). For example, a structural argument that emphasizes race might point to housing discrimination against African Americans as an important root of economic immobility, while a less racialized structural argument might instead focus on public policies that allow the wealthy to transmit their resources across generations.

1.3 The Salience of Historical versus Contemporary Causes

Finally, both structural and group cultural arguments can also be broken down into historical versus contemporary claims. A structural argument about housing discrimination, for example, could be made historically (e.g., redlining practices in the middle of the twentieth century prohibited the development of Black wealth over multiple generations) or with a contemporary focus (emphasizing instead current-day examples of discrimination in housing

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markets, without any mention of historical factors). Group cultural arguments can similarly be broken down into historical and contemporary causes, with some arguments about perceived cultural failings tracing their origins to history (e.g., the Moynihan Report's focus on slavery and Jim Crow as being factors that created a culture of poverty among African Americans), while other accounts might not seek such a historical explanation, treating such perceived cultural failings as "just-so."

2 Group Identity and White Americans' Responses to Arguments about Inequality

2.1 Historical accounts

Normative arguments about addressing racial inequality often invoke specific historical wrongs as a justification for present-day policy interventions. Katznelson (2006), for example, argues that affirmative action for African Americans can be justified by pointing to particular types of past discrimination. He criticizes the limits of "generalized history' as a justification for contemporary policy decisions, preferring instead Supreme Court Justice Lewis S. Powell's opinion in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), which included "quite demanding stipulations" for race-conscious policy prescriptions (Katznelson 2006, 150,154). Affirmative action, by this standard, is justified when the past discrimination is "specific, identifiable, and broadly institutional." Katznelson argues that the racial exclusions in the New Deal, caused by the demands of southern legislators, are "consistent with this requirement" (160).

Coates (2014) similarly uses concrete historical examples to argue for the moral necessity of reparations for African Americans. "From the 1930s through the 1960s, black people across the country were largely cut out of the legitimate home-mortgage market through means both legal and extralegal," he writes. "Chicago whites employed every measure, from 'restrictive covenants' to bombings, to keep their neighborhoods segregated" (2014). Coates

then links this history directly to contemporary work on racial wealth inequality and the geospatial concentration of Black poverty. Rejecting the argument that "these depressing numbers partially stem from cultural pathologies that can be altered through individual grit and exceptionally good behavior," Coates instead emphasizes how past discrimination created the structural conditions for the perpetuation of racial inequality.

While Coates is less focused on whether such arguments are persuasive to white Americans, Katznelson suggests that they might be. While executive and bureaucratic discretion provides certain opportunities to achieve such goals, Katznelson (2006) argues that extensions of affirmative action of the sort that he advocates "must move through the democratic process on the basis of a broad and popular constituency" (169). "Within the public at large," he argues, his approach "offers the best chance to make it possible to win backing for what inevitably is a difficult set of policies to persuade non-beneficiaries to approve" (Katznelson 2006, 160)

2.2 Normative theoretical perspectives

Some work in normative political theory, however, is more cynical about the possibility of white racial attitudes changing in light of such new information. Hayward (2017), for example, is skeptical that providing factual knowledge will, in itself, solve the problem of what Mills calls "white ignorance" (p. 404; see also Mills (2007)). Such ignorance, she argues, is "[n]ot reducible to an objective difficulty in seeing or knowing," but rather "a social and a structural phenomenon: a failure to see and to know that can be motivated, even when not fully conscious, and that is often resilient in the face of evidence and reason" (Hayward 2017, 404). The tendency of many high school textbooks to not accurately reflecting contemporary historiography, for example, might be solved simply via exposure to higher quality historical information. But Hayward suggests that even if more white Americans were to "read a more accurate history text, for example, one that detailed the ways racial oppression was produced and is maintained in my society," their "own internalized beliefs and assumptions" might

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help to maintain their ignorance even in the face of this new information (Hayward 2017, 404-405).

2.3   Psychological theoretical frameworks

There are compelling theoretical reasons to think that each account has merit. Research showing that individuals update their attitudes in accordance to counter-attitudinal information suggests that Katznelson's claim is empirically plausible (e.g., Guess and Coppock 2018). Even if most Americans are not perfect Bayesians, Bullock (2009) argues that individuals' responses to new information is often more consistent with Bayesian rationality than more cynical perspectives have acknowledged (see also Gerber and Green 1999).

However, there are also reasons to think that Hayward (2017) and Mills (2007) might be correct. This expectation is grounded in research on partisan motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Lodge and Taber 2013). When affective polarization is high and parties are racially polarized, whites who encounter and construe information about past racial injustices as counter-attitudinal will aim to preserve and enhance their esteem vis-à-vis their self-image or group-image. Thus, among racially conservative whites, exposure to such information might actually reinforce their pre-existing policy beliefs and attitudes rather than cause updating in accordance with the information. Motivated reasoning is perhaps especially likely among white Americans when the issue is related to the extent of racial discrimination that exists in society (Feldman and Huddy 2018).

2.4   Why Whites' Reactions May Vary by Partisanship

Overlapping social and partisan identities have led to Republicans becoming more racially homogeneous and racially conservative (Mason 2018), which suggests that attention to partisan variation in motivated reasoning might be especially important for our purposes here (Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Given polarization around racial issues, we focus on white partisans and separately analyze white Democrats and white Republicans.

3 Research Design

To assess the effects of arguments emphasizing different causal factors affecting inequality and mobility, we designed a pilot experiment fielded on a nationally representative sample 2,006 of U.S. adults recruited from Lucid, an online survey respondent vendor, in August, 2018.[1] Our main analyses focus on white partisans (including leaners), which includes 547 white Democrats and 624 white Republicans.

3.1 Treatments

After providing consent, subjects were randomly assigned with equal probability to one of 11 experimental conditions (10 treatment conditions and a pure control condition), where each of the treatment conditions presented an argument that emphasized different causal forces affecting inequality and mobility. Treatment arguments are designed to vary (1) whether the articulated cause of inequality today emphasizes structural, (group) cultural, or individual factors; (2) whether inequality is framed in terms of racial group differences, nonracial (income-based) group differences, or without a group-based frame; and (3) whether the articulate cause of inequality emphasizes either the legacies of historical factors or contemporary factors affecting the present. Subjects in pure control condition saw no argument.

Table 1 summarizes the set of treatment conditions and how they vary across these three dimensions. Importantly, we do not employ a factorial design for our study in order to capture realistic arguments that have been made in American political discourse. Instead, we first read scholarly and popular commentary to identify common arguments about the causes of inequality, classified these arguments into types, identified archetypal arguments, and then classified each archetypal argument along these three dimensions. Through this inductive process, we are able to maintain treatment realism while avoiding contrived arguments that, despite possessing certain combinations of features, are ultimately nonsensical.

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[1]Coppock and McClellan (2018) show that demographic and experimental results replicated on Lucid samples track well with benchmarks from national probability samples.

Table 1: Overview of Treatment Arms

	Aspect of Causal Factor Emphasized in Argument		
Arm	Structural/Cultural	Group Dimension	Historical/Contemporary
0 (pure control)	None	None	None
1	Structural (government/public actors responsible)	Racial Group	Historical
2	Structural (private actors responsible)	Racial Group	Historical
3	Structural	Nonracial Group (Income)	Historical
4	Structural	Racial Group	Contemporary
5	Structural	Nonracial Group	Contemporary
6	Group Cultural	Racial Group	Historical
7	Group Cultural	Nonracial Group	Historical
8	Group Cultural	Racial Group	Contemporary
9	Group Cultural	Nonracial Group	Contemporary
10	Individual	Non-Group	Contemporary

Subjects assigned to a treatment (non-control) condition are instructed to "read a common argument that some people make in American society today" and to evaluate it. The argument is then presented. All treatment conditions begin with the following text to introduce inequality and economic mobility as a public policy issue: "America is often described as a nation where everyone has the chance to get ahead, but this view has not been widely held by the American public in the last three decades. According to the Pew Research Center's American Values Survey, 3 out of 4 Americans believe that the rich just get richer while the poor get poorer. Many Americans just can't get ahead of where they started, especially those at the lower end of the economic spectrum." Then, subjects assigned to a treatment condition are shown their assigned argument, which is of modest length. The treatment text begins with a short paragraph summarizing the argument and ends with a sentence emphasizing that economic mobility is only possible if the cause of inequality articulated by the argument is addressed. Sandwiched between the two is a paragraph, of modest length, that illustrates the argument to make it concrete. Table 2 shows, for each treatment condition, the treatment text as well as the source motivating the archetypal argument and the illustrative paragraph.[2] To encourage subjects to read their assigned treatment argument, subjects are only allowed to proceed to the next page of the survey after 20 seconds elapse.

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[2]In most cases, we adapted language from the source to construct the treatment scripts.

Table 2: Argument Text by Treatment Condition

Treatment Arm	Treatment Text	Source
Structural (public action), historical, racial	Particularly disadvantaged are African Americans, who disproportionately face limited opportunities for economic and social mobility in the United States today. This is largely the historical legacy of persistent structural racial inequalities produced by government policies that sanctioned discrimination, social exclusion, and violence against African Americans. For example, starting in the 1930s, the government-sponsored Home Owners' Loan Corporation rated neighborhoods to denote how desirable it was to underwrite a mortgage there. Areas with growing black populations were disproportionately marked in red and given the lowest possible grade. Lines like these, drawn in cities across the country to separate 'hazardous' and 'declining' from 'desirable' and 'best,' codified patterns of racial segregation and disparities in access to credit. Now economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, analyzing data from recently digitized copies of those maps, show that the consequences lasted for decades. The maps became self-fulfilling prophecies, as 'hazardous' neighborhoods — 'redlined' ones — were starved of investment and deteriorated further in ways that most likely also fed white flight and rising racial segregation. Today many of these neighborhoods remain segregated and offer few opportunities for residents to move up the economic ladder. Thus economic mobility is only possible if longstanding inequalities caused by racially discriminatory public policies are directly addressed.	Emily Badger, "How Redlining's Racist Effects Lasted for Decades," The Upshot/*New York Times*, April 24, 2017
Structural (private action), historical, racial	Particularly disadvantaged are African Americans, who disproportionately face limited opportunities for economic and social mobility in the United States today. This is largely the historical legacy of persistent structural racial inequalities produced by widespread discrimination, social exclusion, and violence against African Americans. For example, in 1921 the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa (sometimes referred to as "Black Wall Street") was looted, set ablaze and literally burned off the map. All 35 blocks were gone; more than $1.5 million in damage (about $20 million in contemporary dollars) had been done; as many as 300 people were killed; and thousands of black families were left homeless, with nothing but rubble and ash to call home. Insurance companies denied claims from African-Americans, leaving them with nothing but the clothes on their backs, forced to start over or leave. Blacks tried to sue the city and state for damages but had their claims blocked or denied, according to the official report. What happened in Tulsa was one of many places where white violence against African Americans destroyed black wealth or prevented it from emerging in the first place, which had lasting effects making it nearly impossible for many African Americans in subsequent generations to move up the economic ladder Thus economic mobility is only possible if longstanding inequalities caused by racial discrimination in society are directly addressed.	Dexter Mullins, "Survivors of infamous 1921 Tulsa race riot still hope for justice," *Al Jazeera America*, July 19, 2014

(continued)

Table 2: Argument Text by Treatment Condition (continued)

Treatment Arm	Treatment Text	Source
Structural, historical, non-racial	Particularly disadvantaged are lower-income Americans, who disproportionately face limited opportunities for economic and social mobility in the United States today. This is largely the historical legacy of persistent structural economic inequalities produced by government policies that have allowed, to this day, the rich to get richer without creating and protecting economic opportunities for lower-income Americans. For example, the owner-renter divide is a result of statecraft designed to protect and promote inequality. A significant part of this divide can be explained by the historical development of the mortgage interest deduction and the way that it generated compounding inequalities over time between those who could take advantage of it and those who could not. Although the mortgage interest deduction can be traced all the way back to 1913, it wasn't until the Second World War that most Americans paid income taxes. In the war's aftermath, home ownership rates began to grow rapidly. These two trends — the rise of an income tax paid by a large number of Americans and the rise in home ownership rates — made the mortgage interest deduction a valuable policy for those that could afford to buy homes. It helped to prop up home values and allowed home buyers to collect more after-tax savings if they took on more mortgage debt, which incentivized them to pay more for properties than they could have otherwise. But not everyone could afford to do so and government policy exacerbated the difference between the haves and the have nots. By inflating home values, the mortgage interest deduction benefited Americans who already owned homes — and made joining their ranks harder. Thus economic mobility is only possible if longstanding inequalities caused by public policies biased against lower-income Americans are directly addressed.	Matthew Desmond, "How Homeownership Became the Engine of American Inequality," *New York Times*, May 9, 2017
Structural, contemporary, racial	Particularly disadvantaged are African Americans, who disproportionately face limited opportunities for economic and social mobility in the United States today. This is largely the result of pervasive structural racial inequalities that are reinforced by present-day government policies and persistent racial discrimination. For example, just 23 percent of blacks raised in the middle class surpass their parents' family wealth, compared to 56 percent of whites. To a large extent, this is the result of residential segregation. Two thirds of African-American children are being raised in high poverty neighborhoods, compared to just six percent of white children. It isn't the case that two thirds of African-American families are poor, but a lot of even middle-class African-American families are living in high poverty neighborhoods and research shows that that environment in childhood increases a person's chance of downward mobility by 52 percent. From underfunded public schools to the lack of affordable healthy food options, the effects of racial segregation constrain the opportunities that African Americans of all economic backgrounds have for upward mobility. Thus economic mobility is only possible if inequalities caused by racially discriminatory public policies are directly addressed	Jessica Cumberbatch Anderson, "Economic Mobility For African Americans May Be A Myth, Pew Report Shows," *Huffington Post*, July 17, 2012

Table 2: Argument Text by Treatment Condition (continued)

Treatment Arm	Treatment Text	Source
Structural, contemporary, non-racial	Particularly disadvantaged are lower-income Americans, who disproportionately face limited opportunities for economic and social mobility in the United States today. This is largely the result of pervasive structural economic inequalities that are reinforced by present-day government and corporate policies that allow the rich to get richer without creating and protecting economic opportunities for lower-income Americans. For example, wealth inequality is transmitted across generations. People who receive large gifts and inheritances from their family are better able to accumulate assets that outstrip their debts, advantages that are reinforced through the tax code. The decisive factor in their advantage in acquiring wealth is their favorable luck of the draw with respect to the family into which they were born. The net effect has been a grossly unequal distribution of wealth. The top 1 percent of households own a staggering 40 percent of the nation's wealth. The bottom 90 percent hold only 30 percent of the nation's wealth and also 70 percent of the debt. Wealth matters because it yields a much wider range of opportunities and options than income. Wealthier families can have a greater impact on the political process, purchase homes in higher-amenity neighborhoods, and provide their kids with higher-quality education. Wealthier families have assets they can draw on to handle emergencies like the loss of a job or a serious medical condition, emergencies that can devastate families with no assets. And, of course, wealthier families can leave bequests to the next generation, often in the form of a trust fund. Working-class families, by contrast, have taken on more debt and have fewer assets; they are less able to purchase homes in desirable neighborhoods; and they are less likely to be able to pass money down to their children." Thus economic mobility is only possible if inequalities caused by public policies biased against lower-income Americans are directly addressed.	William Darity Jr. and Darrick Hamilton, "Make Every Child a Trust Fund Baby," *News & Observer*, January 18, 2018
Group cultural, historical, racial	Particularly disadvantaged are African Americans, whose circumstances are largely the result of longstanding, multi-generational cultural practices that limit the ability of many Blacks to do what is necessary to be upwardly mobile. For example, past racism can create cultural legacies, where behaviors persist even when what originally caused them has receded or even disappeared. One speaks the language one grows up hearing, and culture is not different in this regard. This is hardly cause for dismissal of the problems in question; however, it means that changing conditions is often only part of the battle. It was natural in 1964 to suppose that what ailed the black community was lack of opportunity — because, quite simply, this indeed was the problem. However, what ails the black community today is partly lack of opportunity, but also (dare we say) cultural orientations that this lack of opportunity conditioned decades ago. The challenge is that after such cultural orientations have set in, merely pointing people to opportunity can be insufficient as a social uplift strategy — more creative strategies are required. These men are often quite industrious within the context of their own lives, but have grown up in communities in which it is not considered abnormal for a man not to work regularly for a living, in a way that it is not in, for example, an affluent white suburb. This norm did not exist before the late 1960s, and began with how much harder it became to get a low-skill factory job at that time; it then was reinforced by a new ideology that questioned buying into the norms of an inherently racist system. All of this was understandable, but one outcome is that today, generations of poor black men have never known anything different. Thus economic mobility is only possible if African Americans, despite their longstanding cultural practices and attachments, change their behavior.	John McWhorter, "Why the War on Poverty Failed — And What to Do Now," *Vox*, December 29, 2016

(continued)

Table 2: Argument Text by Treatment Condition (continued)

Treatment Arm	Treatment Text	Source
Group cultural, historical, non-racial	Particularly disadvantaged are lower-income Americans, whose circumstances are largely the result of longstanding, multi-generational cultural practices that limit their ability to do what is necessary to be upwardly mobile. For example, many lower-income towns in middle America developed a unique culture over time, a historical development valued by many of those that remain living there. But even if their attachment to this culture is understandable, it is now standing in the way of their own economic progress. If you spend time in these hardscrabble places, and you take an honest look at the welfare dependency, the drug and alcohol addiction, the family anarchy, you will come to an awful realization: Millions of Americans aren't doing their best. Indeed, they're barely trying. Churches have made a determined attempt to reach kids and families that were falling between the cracks, and it was consistently astounding how little effort most parents and their teen children made to improve their lives. If they couldn't find a job in a few days — or perhaps even as little as a few hours — they'd stop looking. If they got angry at teachers or coaches, they'd drop out of school. If they fought with their wife, they had sex with a neighbor. And always — always — there was a sense of entitlement. And that's where disability or other government programs kicked in. They were there, beckoning, giving men and women alternatives to gainful employment. You don't have to do any work (your disability lawyer does all the heavy lifting), you make money, and you get drugs. Of course we should have compassion even as we call on people to do better. But compassion can't make us avoid the need to change the culture in places like these. Thus economic mobility is only possible if lower-income Americans, despite their longstanding cultural practices and attachments, change their behavior.	Kevin D. Williamson, "The Father-Führer," *National Review*, March 28, 2016; and David French, "Working-Class Whites Have Moral Responsibilities — In Defense of Kevin Williamson," The Corner/*National Review*, March 14, 2016
Group cultural, contemporary, racial	Particularly disadvantaged are African Americans, whose circumstances are largely the result of common cultural practices that limit the ability of many Blacks to do what is necessary to be upwardly mobile. For example, increasing the employment rate among young black men will require more than connecting them with jobs, for the simple reason that today, many such men do not work even when jobs are available. Objections that this claim is naive or even racist are understandable, but the weight of evidence for it is so crushing that to disregard it could be seen as racist in itself. No effort to bring poor black men into the workforce will bear real fruit under the pretense that the only problem is unavailability of work. Research on black poverty openly describes black men saying they won't take a job because it would require getting up too early. Other research has documented and statistically tabulated interviews with young black men, in which large numbers say plenty of jobs are available that they do not take. Thus economic mobility is only possible if African Americans, despite their cultural practices and attachments, change their behavior.	John McWhorter, "Why the War on Poverty Failed — And What to Do Now," *Vox*, December 29, 2016

(continued)

Table 2: Argument Text by Treatment Condition (continued)

Treatment Arm	Treatment Text	Source
Group cultural, contemporary, non-racial	Particularly disadvantaged are lower-income Americans, whose circumstances are largely the result of common cultural practices that limit their ability to do what is necessary to be upwardly mobile. For example, no feasible amount of income redistribution can make up for the fact that the rich are working and marrying as much or more than ever while the poor are doing just the reverse. What types of cultural practices and behavior are we talking about? Three are critical. The first is education; the second is family formation; and the third is work. These have always been the sources of upward mobility in advanced democracies. Those who graduate from high school, wait until marriage to have children, limit the size of their families, and work full-time will not be poor. Growing gaps between rich and poor in recent decades have been exacerbated by a divergence in the behavior of these two groups. Unless the poor adopt cultural practices and behaviors conducive to upward mobility and public policies are designed to move them in this direction, economic divisions are likely to grow. Thus economic mobility is only possible if lower-income Americans, despite their cultural practices and attachments, change their behavior.	Isabel V. Sawhill, "The Behavioral Aspects of Poverty," Brookings, September 1, 2003
Individual	An important reason why some individuals just can't get ahead is that their behavior limits their ability to do what is necessary to be upwardly mobile. For example, some people try hard in school, go to a good college, and avoid drug use, whereas others put in no effort to make good choices that allow them to succeed in life. The strongest evidence for this comes from the fact that in some households where multiple children are raised in exactly the same circumstances, one makes smart choices and succeeds, while another simply doesn't. And while it's tempting to try to find a complicated explanation for this, in the end it's fairly simple: Some people, for some reason, simply don't work as hard in life as others in the same situation. And there's no public policy that can solve that. Thus economic mobility is only possible if individuals change their behavior to improve their station in life.	Created by the authors of this paper

As a manipulation check, subjects assigned to receive a treatment argument are asked (1) reading comprehension style questions to assess whether they understood the passage they read[3]; and (2) whether they agree with the argument they read (7-item scale: strongly disagree to strongly agree) and are asked, using an open-ended item, to briefly explain why they agree or disagree with the argument they read. To avoid introducing post-treatment bias, our main analyses do not condition on these variables.[4]

3.2 Outcome Measures

The following outcomes are measured for all subjects.

First, subjects are asked whether they think that the lack of upward economic mobility in the U.S. today (as a key feature of inequality more broadly) is a problem. Specifically, they are asked they agree with the statement: "Many Americans just can't get ahead of where they started, especially those at the lower end of the economic spectrum" (7-item scale: strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Subjects are then presented with a list of factors that are commonly believed to contribute to the lack of economic and social mobility in the U.S. today, and are asked to select the factors that they believe contribute to this issue. The purpose of this question is to assess how subjects think about policy issues and their beliefs about the causes of inequality. The factors are randomly ordered and are:

- Individual responsibility and choices
- The legacies of historical inequalities perpetuated by government actors
- The legacies of historical inequalities perpetuated by private individuals and groups
- Modern-day government policies that discriminate against Black people

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[3]Specifically, we ask subjects whether they think the passage they read argues that the lack of economic and social mobility in the U.S. is (a) a racial issue, (b) a problem created by government policies, (c) the result of the persistence of historical inequalities, (d) a result of individual choices and behavior, and (e) a result of cultural practices in some communities that prevent them from getting ahead (response options are yes, no, maybe, and not sure)

[4]We do, however, conduct experimental analyses of differences in agreement with assigned arguments across treatment conditions and observational differences between white Democrats and white Republicans.

- Government policies that encourage people to rely too much on government handouts

- Some communities and cultures do not value work enough to get ahead

- Some businesses engage in predatory behavior, taking advantage of poor people to make money

- Competition in the free market naturally produces some winners and some losers

The options that are selected are shown in a follow-on question, which ask subjects to rate the relative importance of each selected factor (5-item scale: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, or extremely important).

Next, we ask subjects a series of questions about their attitudes toward policies that are common proposals to address inequality. Of particular interest are pro-Black policy proposals that explicitly redress historical racial injustices against African Americans, including reparations, for which opposition among whites is notoriously high (Dawson and Popoff 2004), and housing vouchers for the descendants of African Americans who experienced government sanctioned housing discrimination. Subjects are asked whether they favor or oppose each of the following policy proposals, conceptually organized into the following sets, that are randomly ordered in the survey (7-item scale: strongly oppose to strongly favor):

- **Pro-Black policy proposals**
  - Reparations to Black people in the form of cash payments to redress historical wrongs
  - Housing vouchers for the descendants of African Americans who faced government-sanctioned housing discrimination

- **Liberal policy proposals**
  - A federal jobs guarantee program, where the government provides jobs for people who can't find employment in the private sector
  - The government provides everyone with a guaranteed basic income
  - Raise the federal minimum wage
  - Increase taxes on the richest 1 percent of Americans

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- **Conservative policy proposals**

  – Use corporate tax cuts to incentivize businesses to create jobs

  – Require food stamp recipients to undergo drug testing

  – Impose more stringent work requirements for people receiving public assistance

- **Group-targeted policy proposals** (randomize group targeted by policy)

  – Allow (race/class)-based affirmative action in college admissions and hiring

  – Encourage marriage in (Black/low-income) communities with low marriage rates

  – Encourage greater entrepreneurship in (Black/low-income) communities

  – Encourage (Black/low-income) people to have fewer kids and smaller families

- **Other policy proposals**

  – Employer-initiated automatic savings programs for employees

To reduce the number of comparisons we make, we (1) analyze attitudes toward each pro-Black policy proposal separately (as the politics of reparations is plausibly distinct from the politics of other racial justice proposals), (2) a pro-Black policy index (including the 2 pro-Black proposals), (3) a liberal policy index (including the 4 liberal policy proposals), and (4) a conservative policy index (including 3 conservative proposals). Index measures are calculated as the mean of the items in each set. Group-targeted proposals are excluded from the index measures because the target-group-of-interest randomly varies across subjects and may alter whether the policy proposal is interpreted as pro-Black, liberal, or conservative. Moreover, due to limited statistical power, we exclude analyses of these items from this paper but include them in the presentation of research procedures in the interest of transparency.

Finally, subjects are asked to consider a pair of statements regarding the issue of the lack of economic and social mobility in the U.S. today. Specifically, subjects are asked to place themselves on a 7-point scale, where 1 means they agree the most with the statement "No government solution can solve this issue" and 7 means they agree the most with "The issue cannot be solved without government involvement." This outcome aims to measure subjects' beliefs about the role of government to address inequality.

4 Descriptive Facts

We begin by documenting some descriptive facts about partisan differences in beliefs about inequality and social mobility among white Americans. To do so, our descriptive analyses focus on the beliefs among white partisans assigned to the control group who received no treatment argument.

First we examine partisan differences in beliefs about whether a key feature of inequality, the lack of upward economic mobility at the bottom of the distribution, exists. Figure 1 shows, white Democrats (mean=4.98) are more likely than white Republicans (mean=3.45) to agree that many Americans, especially those at the lower end of the economic spectrum, just can't get ahead of where they started (difference=1.53, s.e.=0.31, p<0.001).

Figure 1: White Democrats are more likely than White Republicans to believe that the lack of upward economic mobility in the U.S. today is a problem. Sample restricted to white partisans in the control group.
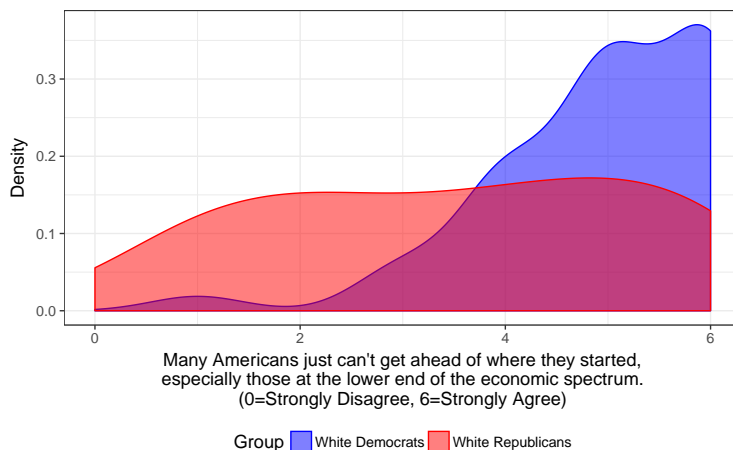
Second, we examine partisan differences in beliefs about the causes of limited upward economic mobility among whites. Figure 2 presents the proportion of white Democrats and white Republicans who believe that various factors contribute to the lack of economic and social mobility that exists in the United States.

Majorities of white Republicans believe that the lack of upward economic and social mobility in the U.S. today is due to individuals' responsibility (79.6%) and choices and

Figure 2: Differences between White Democrats and White Republicans in beliefs about which factors contribute to the lack of economic and social mobility in the U.S. today. Sample restricted to white partisans in the control group. The figure displays group proportions.
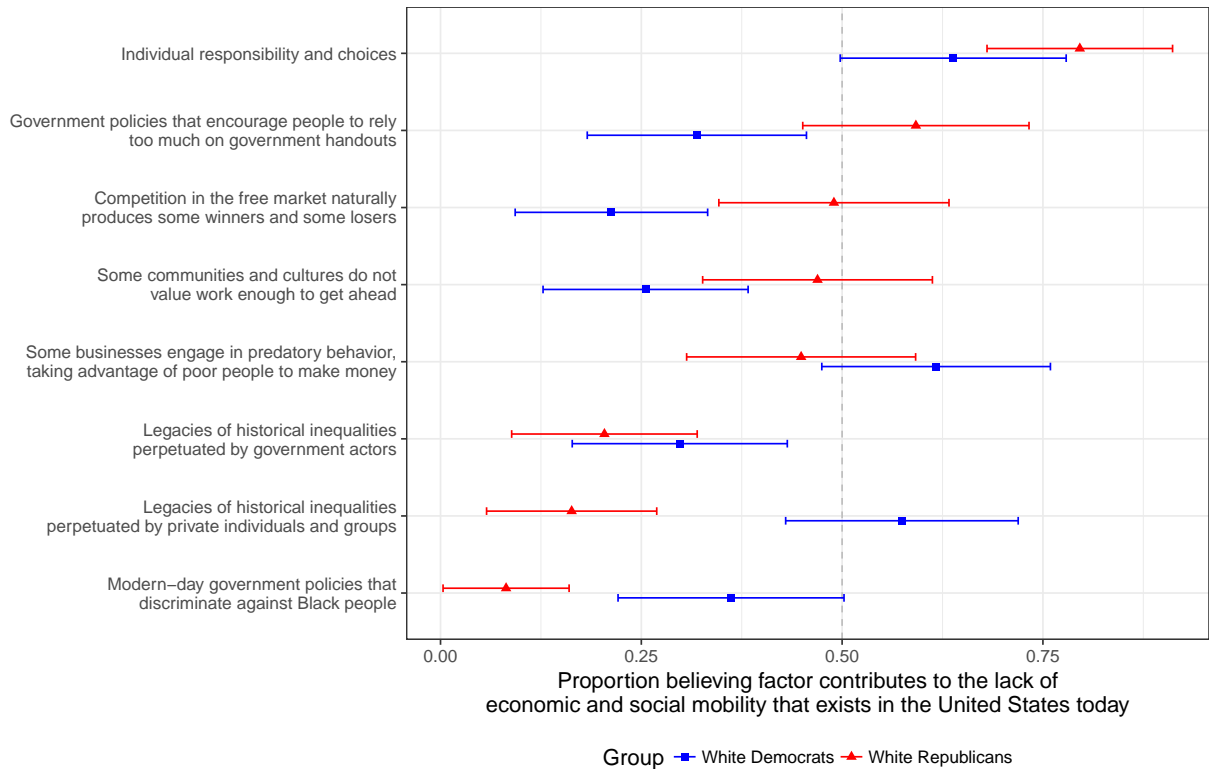
government policies that encourage people to rely too much on handouts (59.2%). About half of white Republicans attribute the lack of mobility to competition in the free market, which naturally produces winners and losers (49.0%); group cultural explanations such as some communities and groups who don't value work enough to get ahead (46.9%); and predatory business practices that take advantage of the poor (44.9%). Less than a quarter of white Republicans believe that legacies of historical inequalities, either by government actors or by private individuals and groups (20.4 and 16.3%, respectively), or modern-day government policies discriminating against Black people (8.2%) contribute to the lack of mobility in the U.S. today.

Among White Democrats, beliefs that the lack of upward mobility in the U.S. is due to individuals' responsibility and choices are prevalent (63.8%), as are beliefs that predatory

business practices that take advantage of the poor (61.7%) and legacies of historical inequalities caused by private individuals and groups (57.4%) are contributing factors. Perceptions that other factors — including modern-day government policies that discriminate against Black people (36.2%), government policies that encourage people to rely too much on handouts (31.9%), legacies of historical inequalities caused by government actors (29.8%), group cultural explanations such as some communities and groups who don't value work enough to get ahead (25.5%), and competition in the free market, which naturally produces winners and losers (21.3%) — contribute to the lack of upward economic mobility, while less prevalent, are nonetheless held by a non-trivial share of white Democrats.

We note two patterns in these descriptive results. First, white Republicans are more likely to hold typically conservative beliefs about what explains limited upward economic mobility than typically liberal beliefs. Second, white Democrats exhibit a mix of "liberal" beliefs and "conservative" beliefs about explanations for limited upward economic mobility and importantly do not have beliefs that simply mirror those of white Republicans. This raises the question of the extent to which white Democrats hold racially and ideologically conservative beliefs about the causes of inequality, especially as compared to the views held by racial minority Democrats. As Figure 3 demonstrates, additional descriptive analysis of differences in beliefs between white Democrats and non-white Democrats assigned to control show that among Democrats, whites are less likely than non-whites to think about present-day inequality in racial terms and and are less likely to think of present-day inequalities as the result of either historical or present-day government actions.

Third, we examine partisan differences among whites in their beliefs about the role government should play in addressing limited upward economic mobility in the U.S. As Figure 4 shows, white Democrats on average slightly support government involvement to address inequality and mobility whereas white Republicans are slightly opposed to government involvement (white Democrat mean=0.872; white Republican mean=−0.286; D-R difference=1.15, s.e.=0.32, $p<0.001$).

Figure 3: **White Democrats are less likely than non-white Democrats to think that the lack of economic and social mobility in the U.S. today is a racial issue and that government action (either historical or present-day) contributes to present-day inequality.** Sample restricted to white and non-white Democrats in the control group. The figure displays group proportions.
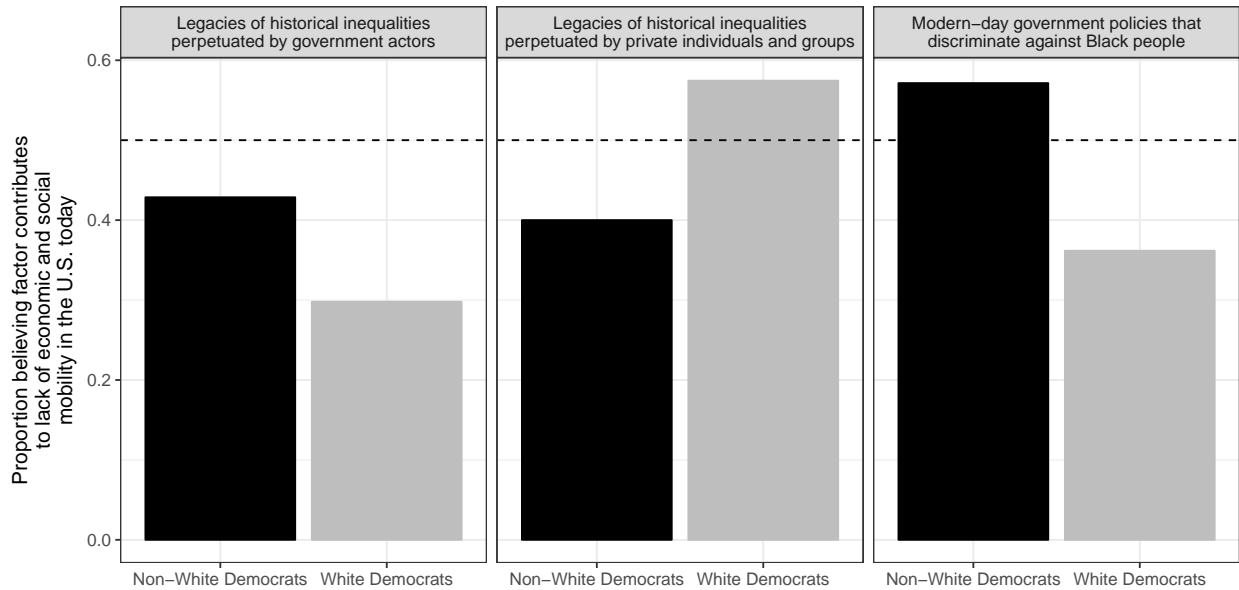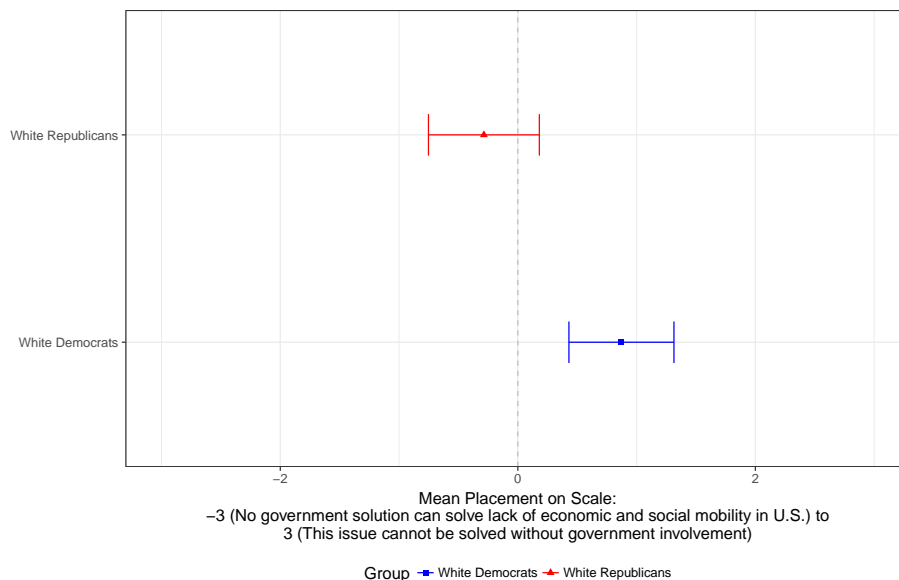

Figure 4: **Differences between White Democrats and White Republicans in beliefs about government's role in addressing the lack of economic and social mobility in the U.S. today.** Sample restricted to white partisans in the control group. The figure displays group means.

5   Partisan Differences among Whites in Agreement with Assigned Arguments about Inequality

Next, we assess whether there are partisan differences between white Democrats and white Republicans in whether they agree with the argument they were assigned to read about the causes of inequality. Figure 5 presents the proportion of each white partisan subgroup that agrees or strongly agrees with the argument they were assigned to read (Panel A) and the proportion of each white partisan subgroup that disagrees or strongly disagrees with the argument they were assigned to read (Panel B).

Panel A of Figure 5 shows that less than 50% of white Republicans (red triangle markers) agree with any of the arguments they are shown, and are most likely to agree with explanations of inequality that either focus on individual responsibility and choices or on the historical legacies of cultural practices by low-income Americans (e.g., arguments put forth by conservative commentators like Kevin Williamson and J.D. Vance). Panel B shows that White Republicans are also more likely to disagree with explanations of inequality highlighting structural causes than with explanations of inequality highlighting group cultural and individual causes.

By contrast, Figure 5 Panel A shows that a majority – between 50 and 75% – of white Democrats (blue circle markers) agree or strongly agree with structural explanations of inequality they are shown. A lower but nonetheless non-trivial percentage – about 30 to 40% – of white Democrats agree with explanations of inequality that emphasize group cultural and individual level factors as causal forces contributing to the lack of upward economic mobility. On the whole, few white Democrats disagree or strongly disagree with the argument they were shown, with the highest levels of disagreement observed for explanations of inequality that highlight individual causes, the historical legacies of cultural practices among low-income groups, and contemporary racial cultural explanations.

Figure 5: Agreement with Assigned Argument about Inequality, among Subjects Assigned to a Treatment Arm (Excluding Control)

(a) Agreement
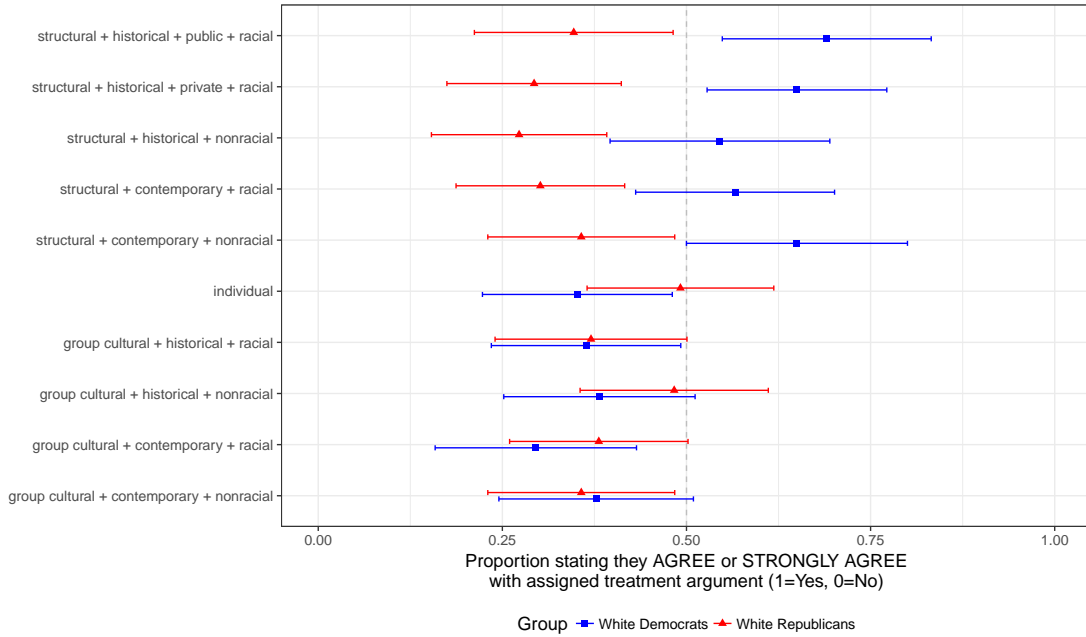
(b) Disagreement
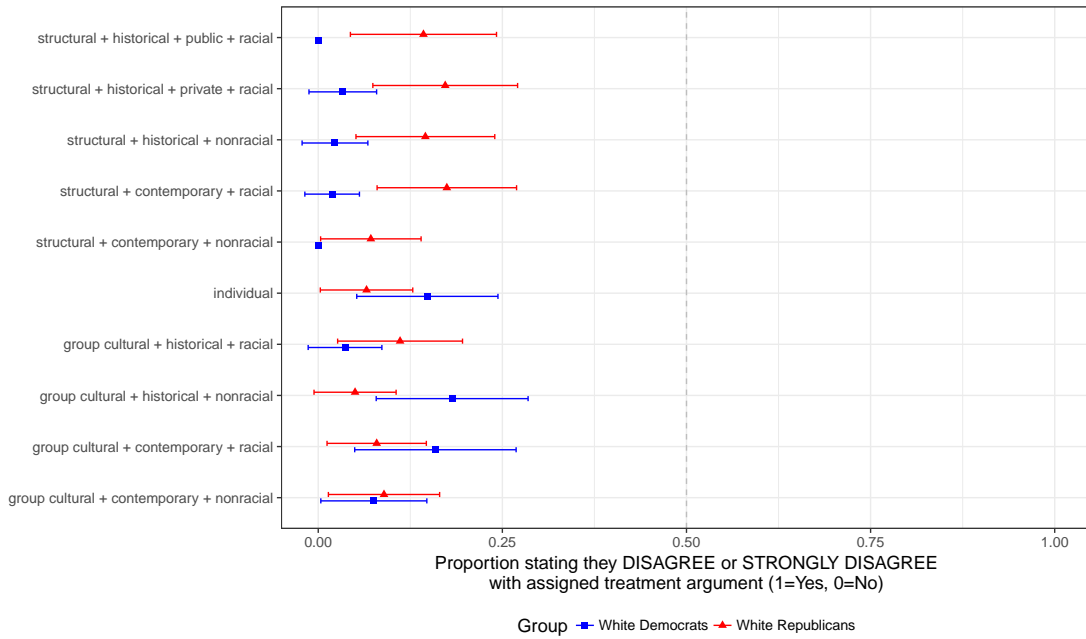
6 Experimental Results

We now report experimental findings from our pilot study assessing how arguments that vary in their framing of the causes of inequality and limited upward economic mobility affect (1) beliefs that limited upward mobility exists; (2) beliefs about the factors causing limited upward mobility and, by extension, a key component of inequality; (3) attitudes toward pro-Black, liberal, and conservative policies that are often proposed to remedy inequality; and (4) attitudes about the role of government in addressing the issue of limited upward economic mobility.

We analyze the effects on these outcomes of *combinations* of issue framing strategies, specifically (1) the combination of racial/nonracial and structural/cultural issue framing and (2) the combination of racial/nonracial and historical/contemporary issue framing. We do so for two reasons. First, these combinations yield substantively interesting comparisons that avoid masking variation within comparison groups. For example, pooling across variation in historical and group-based framings to only examine differences between structural versus group cultural issue framings obfuscates important variation (across two dimensions) within cells; our strategy of examining two-way combinations of issue framing strategies marginalizes across only one other dimension that is examined in the other set of comparisons. Second, given the sample size of the pilot study, doing so allows us to avoid depleting statistical power (as compared to comparing all 10 treatment arms to the control group and to each other).

6.1 Racial and Historical Issue Framing Effects

First, we examine how strategies framing the causes of inequality in varying racial and historical terms affects beliefs and attitudes, relative to the pure control condition.

Table 3 presents estimates from OLS models regressing agreement with the statement that limited upward economic mobility exists in the U.S. today on indicators for being assigned to the (1) racial group and historical, (2) racial group and contemporary, (3) nonracial group

and historical, (4) nonracial group and contemporary, or (5) individual (nongroup) and contemporary issue frame, which are estimated separately for white Democrats and white Republicans.

Table 3: Racial and Historical Issue Framing Effects on Belief that the Lack of Upward Economic and Social Mobility is a Problem in the U.S. Today

	White Dems (1)	White Reps (2)
Individual (Non-group) + Contemporary	−0.331	0.010
	(0.249)	(0.320)
Nonracial Group + Contemporary	−0.119	0.881***
	(0.223)	(0.285)
Nonracial Group + Historical	−0.231	0.429
	(0.221)	(0.284)
Racial Group + Contemporary	−0.102	0.440
	(0.222)	(0.281)
Racial Group + Historical	0.015	0.532*
	(0.208)	(0.272)
Constant	4.979***	3.449***
	(0.182)	(0.238)
Observations	547	624
R^2	0.008	0.025

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variable is agreement with the statement: Many Americans just can't get ahead of where they started, especially those at the lower end of the economic spectrum (0 strongly disagree, 6 strongly agree)

Column 1 shows that for white Democrats, none of the combinations of issue framing strategies increases beliefs that there exists limited upward economic mobility in the United States today. This may be due to a ceiling effect, given the relatively high level of agreement among white Democrats that this phenomenon exists (as reflected by the control group mean of 4.98).

In Column 2, the positive coefficients on each of the treatment indicators other than the "Individual + Contemporary" framing condition suggest that arguments about the causes of inequality framed in group terms increase beliefs among white Republicans that there is a lack of upward economic mobility in the country today. The "Nonracial Group + Contemporary"

issue framing condition has the largest effect of 0.881 points (s.e.=0.285, p<0.01), followed by the "Racial Group + Historical" issue framing condition, which increases mean agreement scores by 0.532 points (s.e.=0.272, p<0.1).

In Table 4, we present OLS estimates from regressions of binary indicators for believing a factor causes low, present-day upward economic mobility on the same set of treatment indicators denoting assignment to combinations of varying racial and historical issue frames about the causes of inequality.

Table 4: Racial and Historical Issue Framing Effects on Beliefs about the Factors Contributing to Low Economic/Social Mobility

	Believes Factor Contributes to Lack of Mobility in U.S. Today							
	Individual Responsibility and Choices	Historical Inequalities by Govt Actors	Historical Inequalities by Private Actors	Modern-day Anti-Black Policies	Govt Policies Encourage Govt Overreliance	Some Cultures Don't Value Work Enough	Some Businesses Take Advantage of Poor People	Free Market Creates Winners and Losers
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	A. White Democrats							
Individual (Non-group) + Contemporary	−0.046	0.110	−0.093	−0.065	0.014	0.097	−0.006	0.065
	(0.100)	(0.096)	(0.100)	(0.094)	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.098)	(0.088)
Nonracial Group + Contemporary	−0.154*	0.003	−0.026	−0.061	−0.050	0.057	0.039	0.067
	(0.089)	(0.086)	(0.090)	(0.084)	(0.081)	(0.082)	(0.088)	(0.079)
Nonracial Group + Historical	−0.083	0.076	−0.150*	−0.079	−0.016	−0.003	−0.102	0.070
	(0.088)	(0.085)	(0.089)	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.081)	(0.087)	(0.079)
Racial Group + Contemporary	−0.164*	−0.009	−0.059	−0.042	0.011	0.147*	−0.071	−0.007
	(0.089)	(0.085)	(0.089)	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.081)	(0.088)	(0.079)
Racial Group + Historical	−0.161*	0.148*	−0.046	−0.005	−0.077	0.006	−0.018	0.087
	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.083)	(0.078)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.082)	(0.074)
Constant	0.638***	0.298***	0.574***	0.362***	0.319***	0.255***	0.617***	0.213***
	(0.073)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.068)	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.072)	(0.065)
Observations	547	547	547	547	547	547	547	547
R²	0.012	0.018	0.009	0.004	0.006	0.015	0.009	0.007
	B. White Republicans							
Individual (Non-group) + Contemporary	−0.107	−0.122*	−0.032	0.0003	−0.051	−0.060	−0.121	−0.195**
	(0.086)	(0.073)	(0.084)	(0.061)	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.092)	(0.092)
Nonracial Group + Contemporary	−0.153**	−0.043	0.105	0.061	0.060	−0.068	−0.128	−0.124
	(0.077)	(0.065)	(0.075)	(0.054)	(0.084)	(0.086)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Nonracial Group + Historical	−0.031	0.039	0.193***	0.005	0.026	0.026	−0.119	−0.133
	(0.077)	(0.065)	(0.074)	(0.054)	(0.084)	(0.085)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Racial Group + Contemporary	−0.050	−0.069	0.075	0.053	−0.012	0.054	−0.068	−0.172**
	(0.076)	(0.064)	(0.073)	(0.053)	(0.083)	(0.084)	(0.081)	(0.081)
Racial Group + Historical	−0.094	−0.005	0.122*	0.030	0.004	0.028	−0.089	−0.123
	(0.073)	(0.062)	(0.071)	(0.052)	(0.080)	(0.082)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Constant	0.796***	0.204***	0.163***	0.082*	0.592***	0.469***	0.449***	0.490***
	(0.064)	(0.054)	(0.062)	(0.045)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.069)	(0.068)
Observations	624	624	624	624	624	624	624	624
R²	0.011	0.016	0.023	0.006	0.004	0.008	0.005	0.009

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variables are binary (1=Believes factor is a cause; 0=Otherwise)

For white Democrats (Table 4 Panel A), any argument framing inequality in group terms decreases the prevalence of beliefs that individual responsibility and choices contribute to

inequality today, with the largest effects observed for arguments that frame inequality in racial terms (-0.164 points for the Racial + Contemporary condition, s.e.=0.09, $p<0.1$; -0.161 points for the Racial + Historical condition, s.e.=0.08, $p<0.1$). Arguments highlighting historical racial inequalities ("Racial + Historical") also increases the perception that the legacies of historical inequalities perpetuated by government actors affects inequality and mobility today (0.148 points, s.e.=0.08, $p<0.1$). A puzzling result is that arguments highlighting racial inequalities in the present appear to increase perceptions that inequality today is partly explained by some communities and cultures not valuing work enough to get ahead (0.147 points, s.e.=0.08, $p<0.1$).

For white Republicans (Table 4 Panel B), arguments highlighting class inequalities in the present ("Nonracial Group + Contemporary") decreases the prevalence of perceptions that individual responsibility and choices explain present-day levels of inequality and economic mobility (-0.153 points, s.e.=0.07, $p<0.05$). Arguments highlighting the legacies of historical class inequalities increases the belief that historical inequalities by private actors explain present-day inequality (0.193 points, s.e.=0.07, $p<0.01$), as do arguments emphasizing the legacies of historical racial inequalities (0.122 points, s.e.=0.07, $p<0.1$). The argument emphasizing individual-level causes of inequality also reduces the belief that legacies of historical inequalities due to government actions contribute to present-day inequalities (-0.122 points, s.e.=0.07, $p<0.1$). Finally, for all treatments, the estimated mean effect on the belief that present-day inequality is the result of winners and losers created by the free market is negative, with statistically significant effects observed for arguments highlighting individual-level causes (-0.195 points, s.e.=0.09, $p<0.05$) and contemporary racial inequalities (-0.172 points, s.e.=0.08, $p<0.05$), suggesting that among white Republicans, some who purport to hold beliefs attributing inequality to "market forces" do not believe this strongly as these views appear to be malleable to a range arguments that frame the causes of inequality differently.

Next, in Table 5, we examine OLS estimates of the effects of arguments with varying

racial and historical issue frames on subjects' attitudes toward liberal, conservative,a and
pro-Black policy proposals.

Table 5: Racial and Historical Issue Framing Effects on Policy Attitudes

	Liberal Proposal Index		Conservative Proposal Index		Pro-Black Proposal Index		Reparations		Housing Vouchers	
	White Dems (1)	White Reps (2)	White Dems (3)	White Reps (4)	White Dems (5)	White Reps (6)	White Dems (7)	White Reps (8)	White Dems (9)	White Reps (10)
Individual (Non-group) + Contemporary	−0.370*	0.172	−0.002	0.603***	0.191	0.354	0.191	0.361	0.192	0.347
	(0.206)	(0.306)	(0.301)	(0.209)	(0.324)	(0.315)	(0.387)	(0.332)	(0.344)	(0.363)
Nonracial Group + Contemporary	−0.388**	0.419	−0.247	0.343*	−0.249	0.562**	−0.361	0.339	−0.137	0.786**
	(0.185)	(0.273)	(0.270)	(0.187)	(0.291)	(0.281)	(0.347)	(0.296)	(0.309)	(0.324)
Nonracial Group + Historical	−0.313*	0.361	0.239	0.469**	0.161	0.445	0.082	0.261	0.241	0.629*
	(0.183)	(0.272)	(0.267)	(0.186)	(0.288)	(0.280)	(0.343)	(0.295)	(0.306)	(0.322)
Racial Group + Contemporary	−0.388**	0.342	0.060	0.303*	−0.025	0.361	−0.136	0.175	0.086	0.548*
	(0.184)	(0.268)	(0.268)	(0.184)	(0.289)	(0.276)	(0.344)	(0.291)	(0.307)	(0.318)
Racial Group + Historical	−0.306*	0.482*	−0.018	0.448**	0.319	0.391	0.279	0.248	0.358	0.534*
	(0.172)	(0.260)	(0.251)	(0.178)	(0.270)	(0.268)	(0.322)	(0.282)	(0.287)	(0.308)
Constant	1.894***	−0.209	0.397*	1.184***	−0.191	−1.714***	−0.617**	−2.000***	0.234	−1.429***
	(0.151)	(0.228)	(0.220)	(0.156)	(0.237)	(0.234)	(0.283)	(0.247)	(0.252)	(0.270)
Observations	547	624	547	624	547	624	547	624	547	624
R^2	0.010	0.007	0.009	0.017	0.015	0.007	0.014	0.003	0.010	0.011

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variables are measured on a -3 (strongly oppose) to 3 (strongly favor) scale.

Somewhat surprisingly, Column 1 shows that white Democrats exposed to any of the arguments decreases their support for liberal policy proposals (as measured by the liberal policy index) by about 0.30 to 0.39 points (all effect estimates are statistically significant at a 10% level; the estimated effects for the "Nonracial Group + Contemporary" and "Racial Group + Contemporary" conditions are significant at a 5% level). For white Republicans, we find that arguments emphasizing the historical legacies of racial inequalities increases support for liberal policies by 0.482 points on the liberal policy index (s.e.=0.26, $p<0.1$, column 2).

With respect to effects on attitudes toward conservative policies, we find that the treatments do not affect the attitudes of white Democrats (column 3) but all increase support for conservative policies among white Republicans (column 4). The argument emphasizing individual-level explanations for low upward economic mobility and inequality has the largest effect on support for conservative policies (0.603 points, s.e.=0.209, $p<0.01$), followed by arguments highlighting the legacies of historical inequalities (0.469 points when inequality is

framed in class terms, s.e.=0.186, $p<0.05$; 0.448 points when inequality is framed in racial terms, s.e.=0.178, $p<0.05$).

We then examine effects on pro-Black policies to remedy inequality and racial injustice. With respect to preferences for reparations for Blacks in the form of cash payments to redress historical wrongs, we observe statistically insignificant treatment effects across the board for both white Democrats and white Republicans, but in light of the fact that several estimates are not negligible in magnitude, we note two patterns in the sign of estimates that suggest the need for further exploration in future research. First, for white Democrats, the coefficient on treatments that emphasize the contemporary causes of inequality are negatively signed whereas treatments that emphasize legacies of historical racial inequality are positively signed, suggesting that white Democrats may be more supportive of reparations in information environments that heighten the salience of the historical roots and legacies of racial injustice and downplay present-day inequalities. Second, for white Republicans, the positive coefficients across all treatment indicators suggest the possibility that white Republicans, when exposed to arguments explaining the causes of inequality, may become more supportive of reparations.

We see that this is the case — that arguments about inequality can increase support for pro-Black racial justice policy proposals among white Republicans — when considering attitudes toward housing vouchers for the descendants of African Americans who faced government-sanctioned housing discrimination, a targeted pro-Black policy that redresses racial injustice. For white Republicans, exposure to arguments that highlight group-based inequality increases support for the housing voucher proposal. Arguments emphasizing class inequalities increase support for housing vouchers the most (0.629 points if emphasizing historical legacies, s.e.=0.322, $p<0.1$; 0.786 points if also emphasizing contemporary causes, s.e.=0.324, $p<0.05$), followed by arguments emphasizing racial inequalities (0.534 points if emphasizing historical legacies, s.e.=0.308, $p<0.1$; 0.548 points if emphasizing contemporary causes, s.e.=0.318, $p<0.1$).

Finally, Table 6 presents OLS estimates of the effect of arguments about inequality that vary in their racial and historical framing on attitudes about government's role in solving the issue of economic mobility and inequality. None of the estimated treatment effects are statistically significant at the 10% level, suggesting that varying whether the issue of inequality and economic mobility is framed as a racial issue or as the legacy of historical inequalities has no effect on attitudes about the role of government in addressing inequality.

Table 6: Racial and Historical Issue Framing Effects on Belief about Government's Role in Addressing Lack of Economic/Social Mobility

	White Dems (1)	White Reps (2)
Individual (Non-group) + Contemporary	0.183 (0.306)	−0.124 (0.343)
Nonracial Group + Contemporary	0.343 (0.274)	0.393 (0.306)
Nonracial Group + Historical	0.249 (0.272)	0.407 (0.305)
Racial Group + Contemporary	−0.202 (0.273)	0.222 (0.301)
Racial Group + Historical	0.344 (0.255)	0.360 (0.291)
Constant	0.872*** (0.224)	−0.286 (0.255)
Observations	547	624
R^2	0.018	0.009

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variable is self-placement on the scale: -3 (No government solution can solve this issue) to 3 (This issue cannot be solved without government involvement)

6.2 Racial and Structural Issue Framing Effects

Next, we examine how strategies framing the causes of inequality in varying racial and structural terms affects beliefs and attitudes, relative to the pure control condition.

Table 7 presents estimates from OLS models regressing agreement with the statement that limited upward economic mobility exists in the U.S. today on treatment indicators for

the (1) racial group and structural, (2) racial group and group cultural, (3) nonracial group and structural, (4) nonracial group and group cultural, and (5) individual (non-group) issue frames, which are estimated separately for white Democrats and white Republicans.

Table 7: Racial and Structural Issue Framing Effects on Belief that the Lack of Upward Economic and Social Mobility is a Problem in the U.S. Today

	White Dems (1)	White Reps (2)
Individual (Non-group)	−0.331	0.010
	(0.248)	(0.320)
Nonracial Group + Group Cultural	−0.321	0.577**
	(0.217)	(0.285)
Nonracial Group + Structural	0.009	0.731**
	(0.226)	(0.286)
Racial Group + Group Cultural	−0.161	0.619**
	(0.220)	(0.284)
Racial Group + Structural	0.054	0.404
	(0.207)	(0.271)
Constant	4.979***	3.449***
	(0.181)	(0.239)
Observations	547	624
R^2	0.016	0.020

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variable is agreement with the statement: Many Americans just can't get ahead of where they started, especially those at the lower end of the economic spectrum (0 strongly disagree, 6 strongly agree)

Column 1 shows that, relative to control, these issue framing strategies do not affect white Democrats' beliefs that there is low upward economic mobility in the United States today. Column 2 shows that arguments emphasizing class inequality increases white Republicans' belief that there is low upward economic mobility by 0.577 points (s.e.=0.285, $p<0.01$) when cultural explanations are provided and by 0.731 points (s.e.=0.286, $p<0.01$) when structural explanations are provided. Relative to control, white Republicans are also more likely to perceive low economic mobility exists in the U.S. today when exposed to arguments emphasizing cultural explanations for racial inequality (0.619 points, s.e.=0.284, $p<0.05$).

In Table 8, we turn to OLS estimates of issue framing effects on beliefs that various

factors cause low economic and social mobility in the United States.

Table 8: Racial and Structural Issue Framing Effects on Beliefs about the Factors Contributing to Low Economic/Social Mobility

	Believes Factor Contributes to Lack of Mobility in U.S. Today							
	Individual Responsibility and Choices	Historical Inequalities by Govt Actors	Historical Inequalities by Private Actors	Modern-day Anti-Black Policies	Govt Policies Encourage Govt Overreliance	Some Cultures Don't Value Work Enough	Some Businesses Take Advantage of Poor People	Free Market Creates Winners and Losers
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
A. White Democrats								
Individual (Non-group)	−0.046	0.110	−0.093	−0.065	0.014	0.097	−0.006	0.065
	(0.099)	(0.096)	(0.100)	(0.093)	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.099)	(0.088)
Nonracial Group + Group Cultural	−0.083	−0.011	−0.167*	−0.056	−0.060	0.078	−0.034	0.102
	(0.087)	(0.084)	(0.087)	(0.082)	(0.080)	(0.080)	(0.086)	(0.077)
Nonracial Group + Structural	−0.162*	0.107	0.009	−0.088	0.002	−0.041	−0.034	0.025
	(0.091)	(0.088)	(0.091)	(0.085)	(0.083)	(0.083)	(0.090)	(0.081)
Racial Group + Group Cultural	−0.244***	0.076	−0.080	−0.079	−0.036	0.118	−0.041	0.009
	(0.088)	(0.085)	(0.088)	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.081)	(0.088)	(0.079)
Racial Group + Structural	−0.109	0.096	−0.033	0.019	−0.048	0.022	−0.036	0.078
	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.083)	(0.078)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.082)	(0.074)
Constant	0.638***	0.298***	0.574***	0.362***	0.319***	0.255***	0.617***	0.213***
	(0.073)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.068)	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.072)	(0.065)
Observations	547	547	547	547	547	547	547	547
R^2	0.021	0.010	0.015	0.009	0.003	0.014	0.001	0.007
B. White Republicans								
Individual (Non-group)	−0.107	−0.122*	−0.032	0.0003	−0.051	−0.060	−0.121	−0.195**
	(0.086)	(0.073)	(0.084)	(0.061)	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.092)	(0.092)
Nonracial Group + Group Cultural	−0.055	−0.006	0.095	0.039	0.081	0.039	−0.087	−0.154*
	(0.077)	(0.065)	(0.074)	(0.054)	(0.084)	(0.085)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Nonracial Group + Structural	−0.129*	0.003	0.206***	0.026	0.003	−0.082	−0.161*	−0.102
	(0.077)	(0.065)	(0.075)	(0.054)	(0.084)	(0.086)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Racial Group + Group Cultural	−0.069	−0.042	0.119	0.038	−0.036	0.001	−0.056	−0.174**
	(0.077)	(0.065)	(0.074)	(0.054)	(0.083)	(0.085)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Racial Group + Structural	−0.078	−0.028	0.090	0.042	0.020	0.066	−0.096	−0.125
	(0.073)	(0.062)	(0.071)	(0.051)	(0.079)	(0.081)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Constant	0.796***	0.204***	0.163***	0.082*	0.592***	0.469***	0.449***	0.490***
	(0.064)	(0.054)	(0.062)	(0.045)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.068)
Observations	624	624	624	624	624	624	624	624
R^2	0.006	0.008	0.024	0.002	0.007	0.012	0.008	0.010

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variables are binary (1=Believes factor is a cause; 0=Otherwise)

Among white Democrats (Panel A), arguments highlighting structural explanations for class inequality decrease the belief that individual responsibility and choices contribute to present-day inequality (−0.162 points, s.e.=0.091, $p<0.1$), as do arguments providing cultural explanations for racial inequality (−0.244 points, s.e.=0.088, $p<0.01$).

Among white Republicans (Panel B), we find that arguments emphasizing structural causes of class inequality reduce beliefs that individual responsibility and choices explain limited upward economic mobility today (−0.129 points, s.e.=0.077, $p<0.1$), increase beliefs that the legacies of historical inequalities attributed to the actions of private actors are a cause

(0.205 points, s.e.=0.075, $p<0.01$), and decrease beliefs that present-day inequalities are caused by some businesses employing predatory practices to take advantage of poor people (-0.161 points, s.e.=0.082, $p<0.1$). The argument emphasizing individual-level causes also reduces beliefs that present-day inequalities are due to the legacies of historical inequalities perpetuated by government (-0.122 points, s.e.=0.073, $p<0.1$). Similarly, as before, we observe that all of the issue framing conditions appear to decrease beliefs that winners and losers created by market forces explain present-day inequality.

Next, we turn to our estimates of how racial and structural issue framing affects attitudes toward liberal, conservative, and pro-Black policies in Table 9. As before, we observe the puzzling result that arguments about the causes of inequality generally reduce support for liberal policy proposals on the liberal policy index among white Democrats (column 1). Per Column 2, white Republicans are more supportive of liberal policy proposals when exposed to arguments that emphasize cultural explanations of racial inequality (0.666 points, s.e.=0.270, $p<0.05$). Most combinations of racial and structural issue framing and arguments emphasizing individual-level explanations for inequality also increase support among white Republicans of conservative policies as measured by the conservative proposal index (column 4).

With respect to pro-Black policies, varying whether arguments about inequality are framed in racial or structural terms does not have significant effects on white Democrats' attitudes about reparations or housing vouchers to redress past racial injustices. By contrast, for white Republicans, arguments emphasizing cultural explanations for class inequalities, arguments emphasizing structural explanations for class inequalities, and arguments emphasizing cultural explanations for racial inequalities all increase support for housing vouchers for African Americans who are the descendants of African Americans who experienced government-sanctioned housing discrimination by 0.610 points (s.e.=0.321, $p<0.1$), 0.807 points (s.e.=0.323, $p<0.05$), and 0.770 points (s.e.=0.321, $p<0.05$), respectively. More generally, we find that arguments emphasizing structural explanations for class inequality

Table 9: Racial and Structural Issue Framing Effects on Policy Attitudes

	Liberal Proposal Index		Conservative Proposal Index		Pro-Black Proposal Index		Reparations		Housing Vouchers	
	White Dems (1)	White Reps (2)	White Dems (3)	White Reps (4)	White Dems (5)	White Reps (6)	White Dems (7)	White Reps (8)	White Dems (9)	White Reps (10)
Individual (Non-group)	−0.370*	0.172	−0.002	0.603***	0.191	0.354	0.191	0.361	0.192	0.347
	(0.206)	(0.305)	(0.302)	(0.209)	(0.326)	(0.314)	(0.388)	(0.331)	(0.345)	(0.362)
Nonracial Group + Group Cultural	−0.276	0.382	0.081	0.523***	0.020	0.374	−0.059	0.138	0.099	0.610*
	(0.180)	(0.271)	(0.265)	(0.186)	(0.285)	(0.279)	(0.340)	(0.294)	(0.302)	(0.321)
Nonracial Group + Structural	−0.444**	0.398	−0.096	0.285	−0.112	0.638**	−0.228	0.468	0.004	0.807**
	(0.188)	(0.272)	(0.276)	(0.187)	(0.297)	(0.280)	(0.355)	(0.296)	(0.315)	(0.323)
Racial Group + Group Cultural	−0.444**	0.666**	0.030	0.338*	0.176	0.556**	0.203	0.342	0.150	0.770**
	(0.183)	(0.270)	(0.268)	(0.185)	(0.289)	(0.278)	(0.345)	(0.294)	(0.306)	(0.321)
Racial Group + Structural	−0.269	0.251	−0.0004	0.416**	0.195	0.255	0.069	0.129	0.321	0.382
	(0.172)	(0.258)	(0.252)	(0.177)	(0.272)	(0.265)	(0.324)	(0.280)	(0.288)	(0.306)
Constant	1.894***	−0.209	0.397*	1.184***	−0.191	−1.714***	−0.617**	−2.000***	0.234	−1.429***
	(0.150)	(0.227)	(0.221)	(0.156)	(0.238)	(0.234)	(0.284)	(0.247)	(0.252)	(0.269)
Observations	547	624	547	624	547	624	547	624	547	624
R^2	0.014	0.014	0.001	0.019	0.005	0.012	0.005	0.008	0.005	0.016

*$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variables are measured on a -3 (strongly oppose) to 3 (strongly favor) scale.

and cultural explanations for racial inequality have relatively larger and positive effects on attitudes toward both reparations and housing vouchers among white Republicans.

Finally, Table 10 presents estimated effects of racial and structural issue framing strategies on beliefs about government's role in solving low economic mobility in the United States. We find effects that are non-trivial in magnitude but statistically insignificant among white Democrats (column 1). The estimated effect is negative for arguments highlighting cultural explanations for racial inequality. In contrast, estimated effects are positive for arguments emphasizing class inequality, arguments emphasizing structural explanations for racial inequality, and individual level explanations for inequality.

For white Republicans, we find that cultural explanations of either class or racial inequality increases support for government playing a role in addressing inequality (0.570 points, s.e.=303, $p<0.1$; and 0.525 points, s.e.=0.303, $p<0.1$, respectively). Structural arguments also have positive though smaller effects on white Republicans' (0.145 points when the argument is about racial inequality, s.e.=0.289; 0.223 points when the argument is about class inequality, s.e.=0.305), but are not statistically significant.

Table 10: Racial and Structural Issue Framing Effects on Belief about Government's Role in Addressing Lack of Economic/Social Mobility

	White Dems (1)	White Reps (2)
Individual (Non-group)	0.183	−0.124
	(0.307)	(0.341)
Nonracial Group + Group Cultural	0.202	0.570*
	(0.269)	(0.303)
Nonracial Group + Structural	0.413	0.223
	(0.281)	(0.305)
Racial Group + Group Cultural	−0.024	0.525*
	(0.273)	(0.303)
Racial Group + Structural	0.237	0.145
	(0.257)	(0.289)
Constant	0.872***	−0.286
	(0.225)	(0.254)
Observations	547	624
R^2	0.008	0.017

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Cells report OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome variable is self-placement on the scale: -3 (No government solution can solve this issue) to 3 (This issue cannot be solved without government involvement)

7 Discussion

In this paper, we contribute new descriptive and experimental evidence to longstanding normative and positive debates about whether providing white Americans with information about historical racial injustices — and information about the causes of inequality more generally — affects how they think about contemporary inequality and their attitudes toward policy proposals with implications for present-day inequalities as well as pro-Black policy proposals that aim to redress historical wrongs against African Americans.

To do so, we designed and analyze data from a survey experiment fielded on a nationally representative sample of American adults where subjects are randomly assigned to read and evaluate an argument emphasizing the cause of inequality. Three dimensions of the argument's framing of inequality are randomly manipulated: (1) whether the cause of inequality is a structural, cultural, or individual level factor; (2) whether the cause emphasized

is historical or contemporary; and (3) whether the cause is explicitly racialized (emphasizing racial inequality), group-based but non-racial (emphasizing class inequality), or not group based (emphasizing individual factors). The resulting combinations of issue frames employed are designed to reflect a set of archetypal arguments about inequality, which we previously inductively identified, that exist in contemporary American political discourse.

Focusing our analysis specifically on white partisans, we find that, puzzlingly, exposure to a range of different arguments causes white Democrats to express less support for liberal policy items (but not greater support for conservative policy items) and does not affect attitudes toward pro-Black policy proposals that redress past racial injustice. In light of our descriptive findings that, as a group, white Democrats possess a mix of stereotypically "liberal" and "conservative" beliefs about the causes of inequality, we argue that more research on white Democrats is needed to understand the distribution of policy beliefs among this group and how they respond to policy arguments and appeals about inequality.

By contrast, white Republicans, despite being unlikely to agree with the arguments they read, are more likely to support liberal economic policy items and housing vouchers for African Americans affected by past discrimination when they receive such information (but they also tend to increase support for conservative policy items as well). Somewhat ironically, we find that arguments that frame inequality as a nonracial, class-based issue with structural causes or as a racial issue with group-based cultural causes — i.e., not how advocates of racial justice tend or prefer to frame inequality as a racial issue with structural causes — cause the largest increase in support for pro-Black policies among white Republicans. These results suggest that strategically framed policy arguments about inequality may increase support for pro-Black policies among some white Republicans, but may require the use of discursive strategies and issue frames that are opposed by racial minorities and advocates of racial justice.

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