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American Dream versus American Reality: How Information about Structural Racism Can Prompt Support for Race-Based Policies

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Abstract

Negative racial stereotypes routinely work together with myths about American equality to undermine public support for policies that would reduce inequality. But what happens when white Americans are confronted with information about structural racial inequality, which contradicts the myth of equal opportunity? Evidence from an original survey experiment conducted among approximately 4,000 white Americans demonstrates that emphasizing the systemic origins of racial inequalities in the COVID-19 pandemic makes respondents more accepting of policies aimed at reducing racial inequalities in a variety of domains. Qualitative insights from post-treatment reflections further show that facing the reality of structural inequality disrupts blame-based narratives and generates support for policies meant to confront inequality. The findings suggest that discussing structural inequality can disrupt individualistic understandings and increase approval for policies that promote equality across multiple domains; they also illuminate why opponents of equality see discussions of structural inequality as so threatening.

Existing scholarship argues that racial narratives and stereotypes undermine support for egalitarian policies among white Americans (for a review, see Valenzuela and Reny, 2020). This pattern is especially evident in racialized domains where white people reject (or embrace) certain policies because they are seen as primarily affecting minoritized ethnoracial groups (Gilens, 2009; Tesler, 2016;

Winter, 2008). To undermine support for egalitarian policies, politicians often promote the racialization of certain issues, play up racial stereotypes, and activate whites' racial attitudes (Mendelberg, 2001; Murji et al., 2005; Valentino et al., 2002).

At the same time, the idea of the American Dream, which permeates American educational systems and civic life, promotes the myth that all Americans have the same chances, regardless of race or identity (Hochschild, 1996; Wolak and Peterson, 2020). This myth contributes to perceptions that any differences in outcomes are to be blamed on individual failings, not on society or policy. Typically, these two processes—racializing egalitarian policies and constructing a myth of equality—work in tandem to undermine support for policy efforts that might confront structural inequalities.

But what happens when white Americans are confronted with information that contradicts the myth of equal opportunity? Can exposure to realities concerning the entrenched, pervasive, and systemic nature of racial inequality engender support for egalitarian policies? White Americans typically hold both egalitarian norms *and* racially unequal policy preferences by conceiving racism as individual rather than structural. This allows them to "explain away" unequal outcomes by attributing them to individual failings rather than systemic faults (Adams et al., 2008; O'Brien et al., 2009). Thus, learning about structural inequality, which directly contradicts the myth of equal opportunity, may motivate greater support for egalitarian policies.

We investigate this possibility by evaluating how white Americans respond to information about the structural origins of inequalities that emerged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the bulk of existing research suggests that dominant racial narratives and anti-Black stereotypes pervade American policy debates and are, therefore, readily accessible, enabling white Americans to easily justify any racial inequalities by drawing on explanations rooted in individual failings. This literature anticipates that any information drawing attention to racial inequalities in the pandemic would undermine support for egalitarian policy solutions. On the other hand, emphasizing a *structural* explanation for racial inequalities may disrupt ingrained racial narratives. Because racial narratives typically obscure the systemic nature of racial disparities and instead rely on blaming individuals for social problems, calling attention to the structural origins of inequalities could highlight how these disparities are in conflict with egalitarian ideals and thereby generate support for policies designed to counteract racial inequality.

We test these competing expectations using a survey experiment in which treated respondents read about the ways entrenched and systemic inequalities produced racial disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately hurt Black Americans. We find that exposure to this information about the structural origins of racial inequalities increases support for policies aimed at reducing racial inequalities in healthcare as well as more generally, indicating a spillover effect to other policy domains.

Additional insights from participants' post-treatment reflections show that the underlying thought processes are consonant with the argument—exposure to information about structural inequality disrupts established understandings and prompts white people to grapple with the way entrenched racial hierarchies contradict the American myth of equality. These reflections show that facing the contradiction between the realities of structural inequality on the one hand and the

meritocratic ideal on the other prompts increased support for policies meant to confront inequality. Together the findings suggest that emphasizing the structural origins of racial inequality has the capacity to disrupt racial narratives of individual blame, undermining the myth of an egalitarian America and thereby prompting increased support for policies that might move reality toward greater alignment with the egalitarian ideal.

Below, we begin with a discussion of how information about racial inequality might shape white support for race-conscious policies. Drawing on two theoretical foundations, we develop competing expectations for how information about racial disparities that emphasizes the *structural* nature of inequality shapes attitudes toward race-based policies. Next, we describe a survey experiment that tests these expectations and present the results. The findings demonstrate that framing racial inequality as structural leads to an increase in support for race-based policies across a variety of domains. Then, we analyze open-ended qualitative responses from the experiment to shed light on the mechanisms that drive these core results. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of this study.

The Racialization of Policies

Americans, especially white Americans, have strong cognitive narratives and stereotypes associated with race-based policies (Brader et al., 2008; Gilens, 2009; Hancock, 2004). While deeply rooted psychological factors predisposing humans to group-based thinking contribute to these patterns, elite cues often activate these predispositions in intentional efforts to undermine support for certain policies by racializing them. White Americans tend to support policies seen as "universal" more than policies targeted to ameliorate racial inequalities, which are cast as privileging a racially minoritized group over their own (Hamilton, 1977; Gillespie, 2010, 2012; McIlwain and Caliendo, 2011, but see Stout 2015, 2020).

Racialization refers to the process by which issues and policies become linked—consciously or subconsciously—with racially minoritized groups in the eyes of the public. A canonical example is welfare policy. Elites worked to promote the idea that welfare programs only benefit "undeserving" and "lazy" Black Americans, and opposition grew as a result (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2021; Gilens, 2009; Hancock, 2004; Soss et al., 2011). Racialization of health care reform using the label of "Obamacare" is another example in which tying health reform to a Black president contributed to the activation of racial predispositions when expressing health policy attitudes and fomented public opposition (Tesler, 2016).

By linking policies with particular (minoritized) ethnoracial groups, politicians and other elites activate whites' racial animus to depress support for such policies (Hutchings and Jardina, 2009; Mendelberg, 2001; Valenzuela and Reny, 2020). Survey experiments fielded during the 1990s and early 2000s found that subtle references to race were especially effective at mobilizing opposition to race-based policies. Implicit appeals, such as those that rely on code words or racial imagery, worked to cue whites' hostile racial attitudes and activate their use in opinion formation. Recent work has demonstrated that whites have come to use racial attitudes frequently in evaluating policies regardless of how subtle or overt the racial cues may be (Christiani, 2021; Reny et al., 2020; Valentino et al., 2018). As explicit

racial appeals have become less stigmatized and more effective for those who wield them, racial attitudes appear to be constantly activated, especially among whites (Engelhardt, 2021; Valentino et al., 2018).

This literature about racialization and the attitudes that follow from linking issues to minoritized groups suggests that any mention of race within a policy domain would immediately map onto longstanding racial narratives and undermine white Americans' support for policies in that domain. Hearing about racial inequalities that emerged during the pandemic may simply prompt white people to draw on existing and pervasive narratives rooted in anti-Black stereotypes. Such a process would enable them to readily justify racial inequalities with rationalizations rooted in negative racial stereotypes about individual failings on the part of Black Americans, depressing support for race-based policies as a result.

This is how prompting attention to race, and especially racial differences, has been shown to operate time and again across a wide array of policy domains ranging from immigration and criminal justice to welfare and health policy. In fact, LaFleur Stephens-Dougan (2023) found this precise pattern with specific reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. She shows that simply highlighting how Black Americans suffered disproportionate COVID mortality reduced support for COVID mitigation efforts among whites with higher levels of racial prejudice, presumably because such efforts came to be seen as a burden that primarily benefited Black Americans. Although Stephens-Dougan (2023) did not aim to evaluate reactions to information about the structural origins of pandemic disparities as we do here, her findings suggest that white Americans with higher levels of racial prejudice readily deployed their existing racial narratives within this new policy domain. Similarly, white Republicans have been found to harbor higher levels of racial resentment (Engelhardt, 2021) and to have more exposure to racial stereotypes (Reese, 2005; Stefancic and Delgado, 1996). When individuals receive new information, they are not taking it in as a blank slate or as individuals with specified knowledge about each individual policy item. Instead, part of the way people receive information is through the lens of their prior beliefs (Zaller, 1991, 1992). Thus, these preconceptions, exposures, and beliefs may motivate resistance to this new information, especially among white Republicans who are more likely to encounter and adhere to negative racial narratives.

If this is the process at work, then encountering information about racial disparities in the pandemic—even if the information emphasizes the structural roots of these inequalities—would increase white opposition to policies designed to ameliorate racial inequality. Moreover, this process would likely be most pronounced among white respondents with higher levels of racial resentment and among white Republicans.

Structural Racism and the American Dream

But perhaps the way we talk about race and racial inequalities makes a difference for people's attitudes. Thus far, there is limited experimental evidence examining what happens when individual-level racial narratives are countered by structural accounts of racism and inequality. Can such an intervention interrupt the cognitive processes associated with racialization, which often depend on directing individualized blame

toward members of minoritized groups? The theoretical framework below fleshes out such a possibility.

Despite the fact that many white Americans support policies designed to make racial inequality worse, they often hold onto egalitarian norms rooted in the myth of the American Dream (Bobo, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Hochschild, 1996; Wolak and Peterson, 2020). While people's understandings of the "American Dream" are multifaceted and continuously in flux (Allen, 2019; Hanson and White, 2011), here we define it as the belief that anyone can succeed in America as long as they work hard (Wolak and Peterson, 2020). This is a widely held ideology throughout the population (Hanson and White, 2011; Hochschild, 1996; Vasilogambros, 2016; Wolak and Peterson, 2020). Moreover, the tenets of this ideology are consequential for structuring political attitudes (Hochschild, 1996; Wolak and Peterson, 2020). While belief in the American Dream is widespread, Wolak and Peterson (2020) demonstrate that adherence to this idea varies over time and responds to economic and social change. As inequality increases, fewer Americans subscribe to the notion that hard work results in success. Inequality challenges the myth of the American Dream and functions to erode beliefs in its tenets. These findings suggest that inequality poses a challenge to meritocratic values.

White Americans often ease the cognitive dissonance associated with this contradiction by blaming individuals for societal inequalities rather than finding fault with society as a whole. The individualization of blame enables white people to rationalize patterns of racial inequality through stereotypes based on race. Thus, people may only become cognizant of the challenge systemic inequalities pose to the myth of the American Dream when they come to understand disadvantage as operating structurally—consistently harming certain groups of people in ways that result from the place they occupy in a social hierarchy rather than individual failings.

But structural understandings of racism do not arise naturally from typical American ideals and myths, and many white Americans avoid grappling with the realities of the racial inequalities that pervade American society. Indeed, white Americans rarely encounter information that describes racism as structural (Adams et al., 2008; Lopez et al., 1998). Even when they do hear about racial inequalities, a desire to maintain a positive view of their own racial group can result in an unwillingness to accept this information (Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013). For instance, Kraus et al. (2019) demonstrate that "willful ignorance" leads Americans to vastly underestimate the racial wealth gap because they *want* to see society as "fair, just, and merit-based" (906). When people are confronted with information that contradicts this perception, they are motivated to explain away racial inequality either as statistical noise or as justifiable (Kraus et al., 2019). Similarly, Feldman and Huddy (2018) find that whites are motivated to deny the existence of racial discrimination as a result of "racial prejudice, political ideology, and plain ignorance" (189). Mueller (2017) identifies four "epistemic maneuvers" that white college students use to reestablish ignorance even when confronted with assignments that specifically engage with structural inequality, allowing them ultimately to maintain their commitment to colorblindness. These studies demonstrate the pervasiveness of Charles Mills (1997)'s "epistemology of ignorance," which he argues is central to the maintenance of white supremacy (93).

Nevertheless, the prominence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement during the mid to late 2010s[1] did push conversations about structural racism forward. Recent observational work has sought to understand whether this movement was able to shift attitudes, largely to mixed findings. On the one hand, some work has found that BLM protests increased perceptions that Black Americans experience discrimination, but only among politically liberal and lower-prejudice white Americans (Reny and Newman, 2021). Somewhat similarly, Sawyer and Gampa (2018) showed that BLM helped make white people less pro-white in their attitudes, and Engelhardt (2021, 2023) found that racial attitudes are increasingly polarized by party among whites and that white Democrats are expressing lower levels of racial resentment. However, there is some doubt about the extent to which these changes can last. Chudy and Jefferson (2021) found that support for Black Lives Matter faded quickly, and careful qualitative analyses from Smith (2023) demonstrate that colorblind ideologies are still dominant, even in the wake of the BLM movement's attempt to advance a more structural account. Despite BLM's attempt to shift the discourse away from racism being individual and toward it being more structural, the extent to which this message has been received appears mixed. This pattern may again point to the dominance of an epistemology of ignorance among white Americans (Mills, 1997).

But this prior work on the effects of structural narratives has largely focused on Black Lives Matter, specifically by name, which is a term, movement, and diffuse organization that has been unfortunately demonized by segments of the mass media (Smith, 2023). What remains unclear is the extent to which information concerning structural racism that is not connected to an already polarized topic like BLM might be able to shift policy attitudes.

We theorize that encountering information emphasizing the systemic origins of racial disparities—information that explicitly rejects racial inequalities as justifiable or random—could cause white people to become more supportive of policies that aim to redress these inequalities. While individual-level explanations of racial disparities do not create tension with the egalitarian ideals of the American Dream, structural understandings help expose the gap between these ideals and the reality of entrenched inequalities. If people are conscious of the ways racial disparities result from a fundamentally unequal playing field, then racial inequalities directly impugn the core myth of the American Dream. The resulting conflict between ideals and reality may prompt greater acceptance of policy efforts that aim to combat racial inequalities. Further intuition supporting this possibility comes from psychological theories suggesting that framing racism as individual, rather than emphasizing structural processes, has contributed to misunderstanding and curbed support for equitable ideas and policies (Payne et al., 2017; Rucker and Richeson, 2021). Therefore, promoting structural understandings of racial inequality may have the capacity to motivate support for policies designed to level the playing field.

While the underlying logic for this process is in place and, as discussed above, observational work has examined the effect of the Black Lives Matter movement specifically, experimental support remains sparse. In one experimental study, Adams et al. (2008) found that providing white college students intensive classroom instruction about structural racism motivated support for more egalitarian policies. In a recent piece, Fang and White (2022) showed that exposing white respondents to

information about *historical* racial inequality can prompt a greater belief in structural Black-white inequality.

Thus, although the bulk of empirical evidence concerning discussions of racial disparities supports the racialization hypothesis, we have some findings to suggest that framing racial inequality as structural rather than individual has the potential to intervene in the process of racialization and motivate support for race-based policies. Under this view, white people may be willing to support race-based policies when the structural roots of racial inequality are emphasized. Such an intervention may disrupt typical processes of racialization and motivate support for racially egalitarian policies by emphasizing how America is not living up to the ideals of equality embedded in the myth of the American Dream—prompting recognition that policy interventions may be necessary to make this dream accessible for everyone.

Of course, there is heterogeneity in the extent to which white Americans conceive of racism as structural. As racial attitudes increasingly polarize (Engelhardt, 2021) and left-leaning social movements emphasize systemic racism (Sawyer and Gampa, 2018), white Democrats may be more likely to recognize the structural facets of racism than white Republicans. Segregated media environments that silo information about racism likely limit white Republicans' exposure to evidence of structural racism and make them more inclined to view racial inequalities through an individualistic lens (Zell and Lesick, 2021). These patterns suggest that encountering information that calls attention to the systemic nature of racial inequality may vary across partisan groups with particularly pronounced effects among white Republicans.

Competing Expectations

We expect that exposure to information about racial inequalities will affect support for race-based policies. But we have laid out two theoretical accounts that lead to divergent sets of empirical expectations.

On the one hand, hearing about racial inequalities may simply activate longstanding racial narratives rooted in anti-Black stereotypes and individual blame, which help to justify racial disparities in all sorts of policy domains. From this perspective, we would expect information about racial inequality in the pandemic to depress whites' support for egalitarian policies. We call this the *racialization hypothesis*. If this is the dominant process at work, we should also see whites' racial attitudes moderate the effect of the treatment such that they rely on their underlying racial attitudes for judgment formation when they are primed to think about race. In particular, whites with higher levels of racial resentment as well as those identifying as Republican should become more opposed to race-based policies after exposure to any treatment cueing race.

On the other hand, emphasizing the structural nature of racial disparities could cross-pressure white individuals' beliefs in the American Dream and its associated egalitarian ideals. When inequalities are understood as systemic—rooted in an uneven playing field—racial disparities are fundamentally in conflict with meritocratic ideas. If this is the dominant process at work, encountering information about the systemic origins of racial inequalities will increase support for policies aimed at addressing them. We call this the *structural hypothesis*. Further,

this theoretical logic anticipates that partisanship will moderate this relationship because there are differences across partisan groups in the extent to which people routinely encounter information casting inequality as structural. Specifically, white Republicans, who likely have not adopted a structural understanding of racism, may be especially prone to see such information as new, surprising, or counter to their established beliefs and be most inclined to increase their acceptance of race-based policies as a result. This partisan pattern would be in line with findings from Fang and White (2022) who show that exposing respondents to information about historical racial injustice prompts greater belief in the existence of structural inequality and that this effect is most prominent among Republicans and Independents.

Data and Methods

To evaluate the above expectations, we turn to a survey experiment fielded with the firm Lucid in the summer of 2021.[2] The survey itself was funded and designed to test another research question,[3] which is the subject of a different manuscript. We decided to include race-based policy-dependent variables on the survey as well—all of which we analyze here.[4] In order to meet the stipulations of the granting agency that funded the survey, we had to preregister the project early on—and thus, the preregistration did not include the secondary dependent variables that were added later and are the subject of this manuscript. As this survey experiment was designed for another purpose, we encourage readers to interpret the analyses presented here as largely exploratory. In that spirit, the theory presented above outlined competing expectations that could explain *either* positive or negative effects of information about racial inequality on support for race-based policies. Despite these considerations, we believe that this survey experiment provides us with a unique opportunity to start to unpack how structural understandings of racism may affect whites' attitudes about race-based public policies.

The experimental treatments exposed participants to news stories emphasizing the structural origins of racial inequalities that emerged during the pandemic. We then asked respondents to reflect on those stories and report their support for a range of race-based policies. The experiment included three versions of the treatment conditions as well as a control group. These four conditions are summarized below and fully reported in the appendix.

In total, 4,113 white respondents completed the survey.[5] Respondents were recruited to match national distributions on age, gender, education, and region. Descriptive statistics are in the appendix. Respondents first answered a series of pre-treatment questions about demographics, ideology, and racial attitudes. Then they completed two attention checks, but they were not terminated if they failed.[6] After the attention checks, respondents were randomly assigned to read one of four news stories, representing three versions of the treatment condition and the control. These stories were fabricated, but they mirror real news articles and report accurate information.

The control condition reported on the pandemic and the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine without mention of racial disparities. The treatment conditions mirrored the control but added information about racial disparities—that Black communities were

hit particularly hard by the pandemic and that they were less likely to have access to vaccines. Respondents were explicitly informed that this fact was *not* a result of individual choices or failings, but instead that disparities were related to other forms of structural oppression faced by the Black community. Respondents were told that Black Americans are "just as willing to get the vaccine as whites" and that difficulties "getting time off work, finding transportation to distant clinic sites, and barriers to using online scheduling portals" were producing the racial differences.

Further, respondents in the treatment conditions read that these disparities were not particular to COVID, but instead rooted in structural inequalities that disadvantage Black communities. The treatment informed respondents that: "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." As such, treated respondents not only read about racial disparities in the pandemic but also about how these gaps were the result of structural inequality. Because the treatment text was designed to emphasize how these systemic inequalities contributed to unequal life chances for Black Americans, it directly contradicts the meritocratic myth of the American Dream and has the potential to undermine white Americans' use of individualistic narratives to explain away these disparities.

The first treatment condition (the inequality condition) stopped with this information about the structural origins of racial inequalities. The second and third treatment conditions built on the first, but added further information about policy responses to the pandemic. The second treatment (the equity treatment) talked about a fabricated policy designed to ameliorate racial gaps in the pandemic through a program that aimed to promote greater equity in vaccine access. The third treatment condition (the reproducing inequality treatment) mirrored the equity treatment, but instead of reporting on a policy designed to increase vaccine equity, it reported on a policy that would increase access to the vaccine but not in an equitable way, likely leading to deeper racial disparities in access. These additional treatments were designed primarily to test hypotheses pertaining to other dependent variables which we analyze in another paper, and the first inequality treatment condition provides the cleanest test of the competing hypotheses that we lay out above—as it is solely focused on reporting about structural inequality without additional policy information. We nevertheless present the results for the second and third treatment conditions separately, both for reasons of transparency and because it is possible that these conditions may produce similar directional effects as the first treatment, but with different magnitudes. To be precise, the second treatment condition, which emphasizes a government policy that will likely be successful in redressing some of the inequalities discussed, may produce stronger effects—as this treatment not only reports on structural inequality but also on government policies that may successfully address such inequalities. Whether the racialization or structural hypothesis are at work, this should be the strongest treatment. The third treatment condition reports on structural inequality, but also mentions a failed government policy that will probably make inequality worse. As such, this third condition may

result in the weakest effects on policy attitudes, as the government is painted as incapable of redressing inequality.

After reading the news story, respondents reflected on what they read by writing two to five sentences about the feelings or thoughts the article prompted for them. In our survey, respondents engaged meaningfully, writing surprisingly frank reflections based on the information they had read as well as their own experiences with the pandemic. Nearly 80% of respondents produced meaningful responses to this prompt and almost everyone wrote something—an especially high rate considering that we did not force a response to this (or any) item on the survey and that we did not exclude respondents based on pre-treatment attention checks (Condon and Wichowsky, 2020). After presenting the quantitative results, we draw on these responses as a source of qualitative insights into participants' reactions to the information they encountered.

Following this reflection, respondents were asked to report a variety of social and political attitudes, including their support for race-based public policies. The first two race-policy-dependent variables are directly related to the specific policy domain discussed in the news story, while the next three are more general race-based policy items. The first question asked respondents the extent to which they agreed that: "The government should implement policies that reduce racial inequalities in health care in our country" (6-point scale). The second asked respondents: "Some have suggested that the government should make more efforts to guarantee vaccine access for black people. Do you approve or disapprove of this policy proposal?" Respondents reported their approval or disapproval on a 4-point scale. Next, participants answered three items drawn from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) asking whether they favored or opposed three policies designed to "deal with the problems of poverty and unemployment among black Americans." The policies were as follows: (1) government giving business and industry special tax breaks for location in black neighborhoods; (2) spending more money on black schools; and (3) providing scholarships for black students who maintain good grades.[7] Respondents indicated the extent to which they favored or opposed each of these policies on 4-point scales. The purpose of including these more general race-based public policies was to tease out whether effects of learning about racial inequalities in one policy domain would spill over and affect attitudes in others.[8] While none of these policy items would fully address structural racial inequality, just as no single policy produced it, these items tap support for race-based public policies that are often discussed as potential strategies for addressing racial inequality and in ways that are more direct than universal programs.

Information about Structural Racism Increases Support for Race-based Policies

To test the competing theoretical expectations laid out above, we regress this series of dependent variables on indicators for each experimental condition.[9] Table 1 reports the results. These analyses use only respondents who passed at least one attention check (about 70% of the sample), but the findings are robust to analyzing the full sample (reported in the appendix). We also note that balance tests confirm that randomization was successful and manipulation checks demonstrate that

Table 1. Effects of reading about structural inequality on support for race-based policies

	Health Disparities	Vaccine Access	Tax Breaks	Fund Schools	Scholarships
Intercept	4.40***	3.02***	2.59***	2.70***	2.96***
	(.05)	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)
T1: Inequality	.22**	.16***	.18***	.12*	.11*
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
T2: Equity	.27***	.16***	.13**	.10*	.08
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
T3: Reproducing	.14	.08	.12*	.06	.06
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
R^2	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Adj. R^2	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Num. obs.	3,176	3,173	3,172	3,172	3,171
RMSE	1.48	.94	.97	1.01	.97

Note: ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$. Dependent variables are coded so that higher values indicate more support for race-based policies. Results from OLS regressions predicting support for the dependent variable. Includes white respondents who passed at least one attention check.

respondents read and understood the information from the treatment conditions (results in the appendix).

Table 1 demonstrates that reading a story about racial inequalities during the pandemic—specifically one describing these disparities as rooted in structural disadvantages—increases whites' support for race-based policies designed to address racial inequality. Respondents in all three treatment conditions encountered information about the structural origins of racial inequalities in the pandemic, and they were more likely to favor government efforts to address racial disparities than those in the control. Further, the results in the last three columns demonstrate that these effects are not confined to policies that relate specifically to the pandemic or healthcare. Rather, we see spillover to other policy domains.

Across the three treatment conditions and five dependent variables, fifteen relevant coefficients were estimated, ten of which are statistically significant at or above the 95% confidence level. Respondents who read either of the first two treatments emphasizing the structural origins of racial inequalities during the pandemic were more likely to support a variety of affirmative-action-like programs. They were not only more supportive of policies aiming to reduce health disparities and facilitate vaccine access for Black people but also of government tax breaks for businesses in Black neighborhoods and of spending more money on Black schools. Those in the first treatment condition were also more favorable toward providing scholarships to Black students, and those in the reproducing inequality position (T3) were more supportive of government tax breaks to businesses in Black neighborhoods.
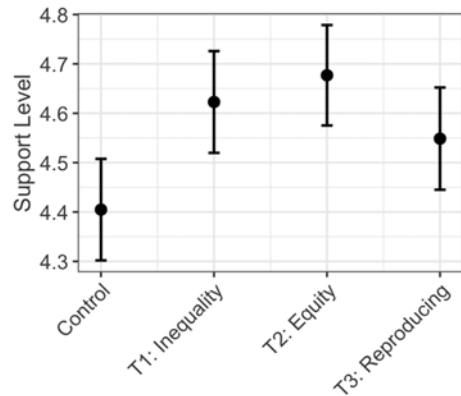
Figure 1. Support for government efforts to reduce racial disparities in health outcomes
Note: Based on the first model in Table 1 which predicts agreement that government should implement policies to reduce racial inequalities in health care. Includes only white respondents who passed at least one attention check.

Across every dependent variable, the reproducing inequality treatment (T3) moves respondents' commitments to race-based policies the least. Although the effects of this treatment are not statistically distinguishable from those of the first and second treatments, only one coefficient achieves conventional levels of statistical significance, relative to the control condition. Given that this treatment reports on a new policy that does not aim to address racial disparities, but is instead colorblind in design, this version of the treatment essentially emphasizes policy solutions that follow a logic contrary to the race-based policies that are the subject of the dependent variables here. Thus, while respondents may be motivated to address racial inequality after reading this article, the focus on a colorblind policy solution may make them less likely to favor government policies as effective vehicles.

To illustrate the treatment effects, Figure 1 plots the predicted level of support for government efforts to reduce racial disparities in health outcomes (the first dependent variable) by experimental condition. This visualization drives home the points above: white respondents who read about the systemic roots of racial inequality were more supportive of government policies aimed at addressing these inequalities. As is common in experimental studies, the size of the effects is relatively small. Compared to the control condition, receiving information about structural inequality increases support for government efforts to reduce racial disparities in health outcomes by about .20–.30 points on a 6-point scale. While these are not huge effect sizes, the treatments were relatively mild compared to real-world encounters that individuals may have with this information, as well as compared to previous experimental studies that focused on stronger treatments like college courses. Similarly, as effects from survey experiments tend to fade over time, it is unlikely that such effects would persist over months or years. Nevertheless, the fact that a brief news article is able to increase support for race-based policies indicates a connection between encountering information about the structural nature of racial inequalities and support for public policies designed to redress these inequalities.

These aggregate results appear to support the *structural* hypothesis, rather than the racialization hypothesis. When race is injected into the news article in a way that emphasizes the structural nature of racial inequalities, respondents become more

supportive of government efforts to address inequality, not less supportive as the racialization hypothesis would expect.

But perhaps we have not yet given the racialization hypothesis its best shot. Recall that the racialization hypothesis also anticipates that bringing up race (as the three treatments do, compared to the control) would activate whites' racial attitudes for use in judgment formation. If the racialization hypothesis is correct, we might find heterogeneity such that people with particularly hostile racial attitudes would become less supportive of race-based policies when exposed to the treatment. In other words, even if the overall treatment effects are positive, the effect may work in the opposite direction for people with strong anti-Black attitudes. To test this possibility, we interact the treatment indicators with the pre-treatment measure of racial resentment. Negative interactions between the treatment and racial resentment would provide evidence in line with the racialization hypothesis. We present the results from regressing the same five dependent variables on this interaction in Table 2.

Support for the racialization hypothesis in these models is sparse. The racialization hypothesis would anticipate that *any* treatment that brings up race, as all three do here, should activate racial attitudes in a way that encourages people to translate racist views into less support for race-based policies. But this is not what we observe. Of the fifteen relevant interaction coefficients in Table 2, only three are statistically significant, and these are signed in the opposite direction from what was anticipated by the racialization hypothesis. Neither the treatment effects alone nor these interaction effects with racial resentment align with the empirical patterns anticipated by the racialization hypothesis. It seems that encounters with information that specifically emphasizes the structural nature of racial inequalities operate differently than conventional expectations concerning racialization.

But we have more work to do before concluding that promoting systemic rather than individualistic understandings of racial disparities really works to advance support for race-based policies. To scrutinize the structural hypothesis further, we take two additional steps. First, we evaluate whether partisanship moderates the relationship between confronting information about structural inequality and support for race-based policies in the way the structural hypothesis expects. Second, we examine our qualitative data to consider whether people's responses to the treatment evidence thought processes are in line with this hypothesis.

We turn now to evaluating the extent to which there are partisan differences in the effects of confronting information about structural racism on support for race-based policies.[10] Recall that the structural hypothesis expects white Republicans, who have likely not encountered or adopted a structural understanding of racism, to be especially prone to this "new" information, as findings from Fang and White (2022) also suggest. The racialization hypothesis, on the other hand, would anticipate that white Republicans would become more opposed to race-based policies after any exposure to information cueing race.

Table 3 reports models that test these expectations by regressing the key dependent variables on an interaction between the treatment condition and an indicator for whether the respondent is a Republican (or leans Republican), a "pure" Independent, or a Democrat (or leans Democratic). The baseline party identification used in the models is Democratic.

Table 2. Effects of inequality on support for race-based policies, by racial resentment

	Health Disparities	Vaccine Access	Tax Breaks	Fund Schools	Scholarships
Intercept	6.06***	3.96***	3.55***	3.86***	3.88***
	(.10)	(.06)	(.07)	(.06)	(.07)
T1: Inequality	−.02	.00	.04	−.01	.00
	(.14)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)
T2: Equity	−.27*	−.04	−.07	−.09	−.07
	(.14)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)
T3: Reproducing	−.06	−.06	.02	−.06	.00
	(.14)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)
RR	−2.90***	−1.65***	−1.67***	−2.04***	−1.61***
	(.15)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)
T1 * RR	.32	.22	.18	.17	.13
	(.21)	(.14)	(.14)	(.14)	(.15)
T2 * RR	.86***	.29*	.30*	.24	.19
	(.22)	(.14)	(.15)	(.14)	(.15)
T3 * RR	.33	.22	.16	.19	.07
	(.22)	(.14)	(.15)	(.14)	(.15)
R^2	.27	.22	.22	.32	.22
Adj. R^2	.26	.22	.22	.31	.22
Num. obs.	3,175	3,172	3,171	3,171	3,170
RMSE	1.27	.83	.86	.83	.86

Note: ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$. Dependent variables are coded so that higher values indicate more support for race-based policies. Results from OLS regressions predicting support for the dependent variable. Includes white respondents who passed at least one attention check.

Table 3. Effects of inequality on support for race-based policies, by party of the respondent

	Health Disparities	Vaccine Access	Tax Breaks	Fund Schools	Scholarships
Intercept	5.31***	3.53***	3.08***	3.25***	3.36***
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
T1: Inequality	.05	.05	.08	.01	.07
	(.10)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
T2: Equity	−.03	.01	−.00	−.07	.00
	(.10)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
T3: Reproducing	.03	.04	.08	−.03	.07
	(.10)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
Independent	−1.18***	−.79***	−.68***	−.76***	−.51***
	(.17)	(.11)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)
Republican	−1.74***	−.93***	−.89***	−1.07***	−.78***
	(.10)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
T1 * Independent	.23	.25	.06	.20	.02
	(.25)	(.16)	(.17)	(.18)	(.18)
T2 * Independent	.57*	.45**	.28	.26	.13
	(.24)	(.15)	(.16)	(.17)	(.17)
T3 * Independent	.13	.11	.18	.09	.03
	(.23)	(.15)	(.16)	(.16)	(.16)
T1 * Republican	.36*	.19*	.18	.22*	.10
	(.15)	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)
T2 * Republican	.58***	.25**	.21*	.33**	.15
	(.14)	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)
T3 * Republican	.33*	.11	.06	.22*	.01
	(.15)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)
R^2	.22	.17	.15	.18	.12
Adj. R^2	.22	.17	.15	.18	.12
Num. obs.	2,895	2,893	2,894	2,892	2,891
RMSE	1.32	.86	.90	.92	.92
R^2	.24	.17	.16	.22	.15
Adj. R^2	.24	.17	.16	.22	.15
Num. obs.	4,549	4,547	4,549	4,545	4,543
RMSE	1.31	.86	.92	.92	.92

Note: ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$. Dependent variables are coded so that higher values indicate more support for race-based policies. Results from OLS regressions predicting support for the dependent variable. Includes white respondents who passed at least one attention check.

Here, we find statistically significant and positive coefficients on the interaction between the treatment condition and Republican partisan identification. This is the empirical pattern anticipated by the structural hypothesis, rather than that anticipated by the racialization hypothesis. In the first treatment condition, Republicans became more supportive of three of five race-based policies after hearing about structural inequality (compared to those in the control condition). Democrats did not significantly change their position on these dependent variables in response to the treatment. Compared to Republicans in the control condition, Republicans who read an article that highlights the consequences of structural racism in the pandemic are significantly more likely to support policies that would redress racial disparities in health care, prioritize access to vaccines for Black people, and increase funding for Black schools. Independents, on the other hand, were not moved by this first treatment condition.

The second treatment condition, the equity condition, inspired even greater effects. For Republicans, these effects were slightly larger and were statistically significant for an additional variable—support for government tax breaks to businesses in Black neighborhoods—which makes sense, given Republicans' general enthusiasm for tax breaks (but note that the positive treatment effect still demonstrates that the treatment boosted this support further among Republicans). Additionally, this second treatment condition inspires support among Independents. Independents who are exposed to the article about structural racism and successful government attempts to confront aspects of this inequality with a race-based policy results in greater support for government efforts to address racial disparities in healthcare (the first dependent variable) and prioritizing vaccine distribution to Black Americans (the second dependent variable).

Statistically significant partisan differences only appear on two of the five dependent variables for the third treatment condition among Republicans—and on none of the dependent variables for pure Independents. Recall that this condition discusses inequality but also reports on a fabricated policy that is likely to reproduce inequality. Perhaps because it reports on a governmental policy that will likely make racial inequality worse, respondents in this treatment condition are turned off from support for race-based policies designed to address racial inequality.

But in all of these models, where there is movement in response to the treatments, it is Republicans and sometimes Independents who are shifting their attitudes—not Democrats. Of course, it may be that white Democrats shift less than others because they already have very high levels of support for race-based policies, even without encountering the treatment. To investigate this possibility of ceiling effects for Democrats, we plot the predicted level of support for government efforts to reduce racial disparities in health outcomes by partisanship and treatment condition in Figure 2. This dependent variable ranges from 1 to 6. As is clear, Democrats in the control condition are quite high on this variable, averaging about 5.25. This persists for all of the conditions—indicating that there are ceiling effects for Democrats.

On the other hand, Republicans and Independents in the control condition are more lukewarm toward race-based policies that would reduce healthcare disparities, only averaging around 3.5 (for Republicans) and a 4 (for Independents) on the 6-point scale. Republican and Independent support for this policy increases by
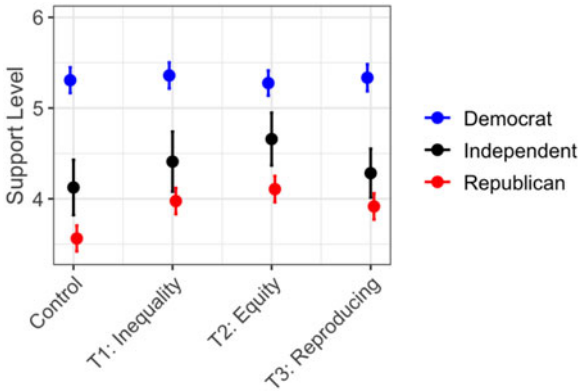
Figure 2. Support for government efforts to reduce racial inequalities in healthcare, by party

Note: These predicted values correspond to the first model in Table 3 that predicts white respondents' agreement that the government should implement policies that reduce racial inequalities in health care.

about .5 points on this 6-point scale in the first and second treatment conditions—with the largest jump in the second treatment condition. Even the third condition inspires an increase in support for this race-based policy among Republicans, though to a lesser degree. For Republicans and Independents, the information about the structural roots of racial disparities in the pandemic appears to disrupt their baseline understandings about the nature and causes of racial inequalities, prompting greater openness to policies that combat these inequalities.

The analysis thus far provides consistent support for the *structural hypothesis*. First, across the full sample of white respondents, information about structural racism inspires an *increase*, not a decrease, in support for race-based policies. Moreover, these positive effects are especially pronounced among Republicans, as the structural hypothesis anticipates. Next, we turn to respondents' qualitative responses to explore whether the logic behind the structural hypothesis—that situating racial inequality as the result of systemic as opposed to individual failings is received as "new" and "surprising" to some (even if this supposed newness results from willful ignorance (Kraus et al., 2019; Mills, 1997)) and that this information about the structural nature of inequality is in conflict with underlying egalitarian ideals.

Qualitative Evidence: How Emphasizing Structural Racism Works to Shift Policy Attitudes

We use respondents' open-ended reflections to gain a better understanding of the ways information about structural racial inequality works to strengthen support for policies aiming to counter racial disparities. As discussed above, part of the experimental design asked people to write about their reactions to the information they encountered. To analyze these written reflections, we recruited and trained a team of research assistants to code them. The three-week RA training process started with an introduction to coding procedures and was followed by a series of exercises designed to fine-tune their coding. We determined that training was complete when each RA independently coded the same random sample of reflections and the group collectively produced an inter-coder reliability score of at least .90.[11] The codes produced during the preliminary training phase were

discarded and are not included here. We then pulled random draws of responses for each RA to code, until the entire sample was coded.

We leverage these reflections to illuminate the thought processes through which information about the systemic nature of racial disparities can increase support for policies designed to reduce racial disparities. The structural hypothesis, which anticipated this empirical pattern, postulated that emphasizing the structural origins of racial inequality could contradict the myth of equal opportunity and disrupt narratives that attribute racial disparities to individuals' shortcomings, thereby prompting people to support policies that aim to move American reality into closer alignment with egalitarian ideals. If this theorized process is at work, we should be able to observe two lines of thinking in people's qualitative reflections. First, treated respondents should indicate that they have learned something new or surprising about the nature of racial inequality, disrupting their existing understandings. Second, we would expect people to see the racial inequality described in the article as violating some egalitarian ideal about what America is supposed to be.

Information about Structural Racism Surprises and Disrupts

We find support for the idea that information about the structural origins of racial inequality surprises people, disrupting their established understandings. We coded open-ended responses for whether respondents expressed surprise or found any of the information new. Among those who made statements related to the novelty of the information, none of those in the control group mentioned that there was any new or surprising information about inequality, while 25% of those in the treatment groups indicated that they learned something new or surprising about race and inequality.

We also find evidence of partisan heterogeneity in the frequency of this kind of reaction to the treatment. Republicans were especially likely to express surprise about racial inequality. Nearly 50% of treated Republicans who expressed thoughts about the novelty of the information in the news story said that they found information specifically about racial inequality to be new or surprising—compared with only 20% of Democrats. For instance, one white Republican in the social inequality condition (T1) remarked, "I am amazed that the virus has affected black people like it has. I haven't heard that before and I'm curious as to why." Another white Republican in the reproducing inequality condition (T3) said, "I didn't realize inequalities like this were really still an issue and it sickens me to know this." These and other similar reflections indicate not only that people were receiving this information as new or surprising but also that the treatment made them think or feel differently about inequality. In other words, this information disrupted their existing understandings about racial inequality.

Information about Structural Racism Contradicts the Myth of Equality

Even more importantly for the logic underpinning the structural hypothesis, the qualitative responses are replete with people struggling to square the information about structural inequality with their commitments to the myth of equal opportunity and related egalitarian or meritocratic ideals. Of those coded as making mention of inequality in their open-ended responses, those in the treatment

conditions were about 80% more likely to express that they were bothered by inequality, compared to those in the control.

Again, Republicans were especially struggling with the way that racial inequality violated their ideas of American equality—they tended to express more surprise at the *nature* of racial inequality than their Democratic counterparts (46% of Republicans vs. 20% of Democrats). One white Republican offered a particularly strong statement expressing how racial inequality violates the core American value of equality, saying: "it really bothers me that the gap exist between the races . . . people are people, WE all BLEED RED, GOD MADE US THE SAME! This I learned in combat, we all are going to die the same way. no one is any better than anyone else on earth. This article has disturbed me greatly. Thank you for this information." Similarly, but to a more muted degree, a white Democrat directly acknowledged the contradiction between the reality that the story presented and the myth of equality that they had been taught: "I'd say its disgraceful and I'm ashamed things like this still happens, we *preach equality* but then it comes down to the color of your skin" (emphasis added). While both respondents struggle with the tension between racial inequality and the myth of American egalitarianism, the Democrat seems to file this new information along with what they already know about racism (i.e., "it comes down to the color of your skin"), while the Republican emphasizes more surprise at the article and does not bring up any knowledge about racial inequality beyond the information encountered in the treatment.

Thus, Republicans not only expressed more surprise about the information in the treatment condition than Democrats but also expressed greater dissonance between the evidence concerning structural racism and their underlying assumption that America is a land of equal opportunity. Democrats, on the other hand, often seemed to have already integrated this contradiction into their understanding of American society. As a result, it follows that Democrats' support for race-based policies would be higher overall but less moved by additional information about structural inequality, whereas Republican attitudes toward these policies would be less supportive overall but more responsive to information about the systemic origins of racial disparities. These patterns are consistent with the quantitative findings and lend further support to the structural hypothesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

When white Americans read about racial inequalities in a way that emphasizes the structural nature of such disparities, their support for race-based policies designed to address these gaps increases. Encountering information about systemic racial inequality undermines the myth of the American Dream by exposing the contradictions between this egalitarian ideal and the reality of entrenched group-based inequalities. When people are exposed to this inegalitarian reality, their support for policies designed to counter such disparities grows.

These effects are most prominent among white Republicans, who are less likely than Democrats to have internalized structural understandings of racial inequality.[12] Although it is possible that Republicans are responding to social desirability pressures rather than to the content of the information, it is unlikely. Recent work has demonstrated that Republicans do not back away from politicians accused of

being racist like Democrats do (Banks and Hicks, 2018), and more broadly, they are no longer as averse to hostile racial rhetoric as previously (Valentino et al., 2018). If social desirability were at work, Republicans would be *less* likely to respond to these pressures than Democrats, who are increasingly focused on shifting their racial attitudes in response to outside pressures (Engelhardt, 2023).

Instead, the heterogeneous partisan effects are likely due to how partisans typically think about racism (individually vs. structurally). This was evident in qualitative responses received from many respondents, especially white Republicans, who reported that they were unaware of and surprised by the racial disparities that emerged during the pandemic and particularly how these disparities are related to a broader set of structural disadvantages. Even if this lack of awareness is borne out of a willful ignorance (Kraus et al., 2019; Mills, 1997), direct confrontation with such information appears to disrupt established narratives of individual blame. The structural nature of these outcomes posed a challenge to the usual anti-Black stereotypes deployed to rationalize disparities. As a result, the information about structural racism challenged the myth of equality and prompted increased support for policies that might reduce inequality and presumably bring American reality into closer alignment with this egalitarian ideal.

This work contributes to our understanding of how race structures public opinion and offers new insights into the conditions that promote increased support for race-based public policies among white Americans, advancing existing work in several ways. First, the theoretical framework details how structural understandings of inequality can contribute to increases in egalitarian policy attitudes, and then, the empirical strategy directly evaluates this intuition. Second, by using news stories as the treatment, the experiment approximates an informational format encountered in the mass public. Third, the scope of analysis extends beyond white college students or observational data and draws on an original experiment conducted among a national sample of about 4,000 white Americans recruited to match population demographics. Fourth, the qualitative analysis illuminates the underlying thought processes through which exposure to information about structural inequality activates support for egalitarian policies, increasing our confidence in the causal mechanisms at work. Finally, the findings demonstrate how emphasizing structural understandings of racism can produce effects that spill over and increase support for race-based policies across a variety of domains.

On the whole, this paper sheds light on the way that race structures and is structured by political discourse. Prevailing American narratives about race and racism (as well as poverty, immigration, and many other topics) tend to place individual stories of success and failure at their center (Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Unlike frames that overlook the structural underpinnings of racial inequality, we show that emphasizing the systemic roots of racial inequality has the capacity to increase support for race-based policy reforms. Calling attention to the structural origins of inequality disrupts individualistic understandings that are commonly used to explain away disparate outcomes and leads to more widespread approval for policies that promote equality.

One caveat to these findings is that we were not able to test the durability of the effects we uncovered. While we do find that support for race-based policies designed to redress racial inequalities increases after exposure to a story about race that

frames inequality as structural, it is unclear how long these effects would last. Further, even if the attitudinal changes did last, it is unclear, and perhaps even unlikely, that such attitudes would translate into behavior (Clemons, 2022). This tends to be a shortcoming of experimental studies—especially those embedded in surveys—as resources often prevent substantial follow-up contact with participants and surveys do not lend themselves to behavioral tests. In the future, we hope that work can examine the extent to which these effects may or may not endure.

While the analyses here focus on the link between being confronted with information about the structural nature of racial inequality and support for race-based policies for white Americans, who are often the least supportive of these efforts, future work might clarify how this link works among other racial groups. Specifically, it would be important to investigate not only how members of other racial groups respond to information about racial inequality but also whether the target group experiencing inequality affects how people respond. For instance, follow-on studies might consider whether reading articles about how structural racism disadvantages other groups, like Latinxs or Asians, also affects race-based policy attitudes.

Importantly, the work here demonstrates that learning about structural inequality in one domain (the pandemic) can have spillover effects on others. We observed increased support for racially egalitarian policies not only in vaccine access and health policy, which are closely linked to the treatment language, but also in other domains such as taxation, school funding, and scholarships. Thus, while the empirical context here focused on the pandemic, countless dimensions of American society, ranging from infrastructure investments to agricultural subsidies, are marred by structural racism. Calling attention to the perpetuation of systemic inequalities in these and other domains could increase support for race-based policies.

Overall, the results from this study suggest that emphasizing the structural nature of racial inequality can challenge a core American belief—that life chances are the same for all Americans, regardless of race. Discussing racial inequality in this way can motivate greater support for egalitarian policies that would help make the American Dream more accessible to everyone.

In some ways, these findings point to a way forward: framing and teaching about racism as structural, rather than individual, can generate awareness about the true origins of racial inequality and generate greater acceptance for race-based policies. However, such a strategy seems increasingly untenable. State legislatures are passing laws that limit teaching about race, racism, and racial inequalities in K-12 classrooms as well as institutions of higher education (Schuessler, 2021).[13] Our results demonstrate that teaching about racism in a way that emphasizes structural inequality is a powerful political instrument: it can motivate increased support for policies that would intervene in, if not fundamentally challenge, the American racial hierarchy. These findings help us understand why opponents of racial equality see efforts to shine light on structural inequalities as a threat—because learning about the systemic nature of ongoing racial inequalities can expand public support for egalitarian policy instruments that some policy actors want to obstruct.

Notes

1 The hashtag went viral in 2013, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for killing Trayvon Martin. Widespread protests began most prominently in 2014, following the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The protests gained even more participation—indeed, worldwide—following the police killing of George Floyd in 2020. The movement itself is part of a much longer history of struggle against racism in the United States, but these dates are commonly understood to be important markers in the contemporary movement (Smith, 2023).

2 Survey was in the field from June 25, 2021, to July 24, 2021. 90% of responses were attained within the first 4 days.

3 The project was funded to test whether information about racial inequality can erode democratic commitments.

4 The only dependent variables that are measured and not presented in this manuscript concern democratic commitments and attitudes about redistribution, which are both the subjects of other manuscripts.

5 The full survey contained 7,873 respondents: 4,113 white respondents and 3,760 Black respondents. Here, we only focus on white respondents because the theoretical expectations largely apply to *white* attitudes. The full sample is split between white and Black participants in order to test the way that racial inequality erodes democratic commitments, the subject of another manuscript.

6 We follow Berinsky et al. (2014) who caution against terminating responses for attention check failure, though we conduct robustness checks with and without conditioning on attention.

7 While these items come directly from the CES, it should be noted that there is some ambiguity in exactly what they are asking about. For example, tax breaks in Black neighborhoods may not go to Black business owners, as white business owners often operate in Black neighborhoods. Further, "Black schools" is conceptually unclear—this could be referring to majority Black K-12 schools or to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

8 Hopkins and Mummolo (2017) find that framing effects are limited but that there is the capacity for such effects to spill over to other areas when those areas are closely linked.

9 Regression models that include control variables are reported in the appendix; the results are nearly identical.

10 Racial attitudes are increasingly intertwined with partisanship (Engelhardt, 2021), but they are not entirely indistinguishable. In our sample, whites' racial resentment and partisanship correlate at 0.46. So, while related, they are distinct.

11 Inter-coder reliability measured using Krippendorff's alpha and percent agreement both reached .90.

12 Recall that Democrats largely encounter a ceiling effect—the treatment does not increase their support for these policies because their support is already quite high, even in the control condition.

13 While these are often said to target "critical race theory," it should be noted that although critical race theory is occasionally taught in some university courses—primarily in law schools—it has never been a component of typical primary or secondary education.

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