Historical Information and Beliefs About Racial Inequality

Albert H. Fang*
Independent Scholar

Steven White†
Syracuse University

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Abstract

Does exposure to historical information cause systemic policy thinking? Despite the importance of this question across multiple research traditions, there is a dearth of empirical research assessing it. We evaluate this question by studying the case of how arguments about the historical and structural roots of racial inequality affect beliefs about racial inequality. Analyzing data from a novel survey experiment fielded on two nationally representative samples of American adults, we find compelling evidence that such arguments can increase beliefs in the existence of Black-white racial inequality and increase beliefs in structural causes of racial inequality. These results, while evident across partisan subgroups, are strongest among white Republicans and Independents. In addition, we find suggestive evidence that historical information has the potential to reduce racial resentment. Overall, our study provides evidence that exposure to historical information can induce greater systemic and historical thinking about contemporary racial inequalities in the United States.

*Independent Scholar, New York, NY (ahf2116@columbia.edu; https://albertfang.com)

†Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Syracuse University (swhite10@maxwell.syr.edu; https://swhite10.expressions.syr.edu)

Political theorists, historians, and racial justice activists have argued that exposure to historical information—specifically information about the historical and structural roots of contemporary racial inequalities—is necessary to perceive contemporary racial inequalities as systemic policy problems that require systemic policy solutions. Despite the ubiquity of this claim across multiple scholarly traditions, the extent to which Americans accept (or reject) historical information when making sense of contemporary racial inequality and how this information affects policy beliefs and attitudes regarding racial inequality are questions that are not well-understood empirically.[1]

Understanding this question empirically has become increasingly important as the United States becomes increasingly polarized and sorted along racial lines. Scholars have documented how overlapping partisan and social identities have become mutually reinforcing in a way that can amplify out-group animus (Mason, 2018), induce ideological and racial motivated reasoning (e.g., Morin-Chasse, Suhay and Jayaratne, 2017), and result in either ignoring factually correct (historical) information that conflicts with one's view or doubling down on misperceptions in spite of exposure to correct historical information (e.g., Nyhan and Reifler, 2010). If information about the historical and structural roots of racial inequality has divergent effects on racial policy beliefs and attitudes, then such information may fail to persuade and cause convergent beliefs, and instead may amplify intergroup conflict between partisans and racial groups.

Experimental studies of the effects of historical information on beliefs in racial inequality are scarce.[2] To our knowledge, only two previous experimental studies exist on this causal effect. In a small survey experiment (n=369), Bonam et al. (2019, Study 2) present experimental evidence that historical information about past government-sanctioned racial housing discrimination delivered in an audio clip can lead whites to report being more

[1] A notable exception in the broader domain of intergroup conflict is Nyhan and Zeitzoff (2018) who study the effects of correcting historical misperceptions in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[2] Our study also complements a related observational research program in psychology on the "Marley hypothesis": the idea that historical knowledge about racism is greater in marginalized communities than among whites and that this difference partly accounts for differential perceptions of contemporary racism (see, e.g., Nelson, Adams, and Saltery 2013; Bonam et al. 2019; Strickhouser, Zell, and Harris 2019).

certain that the portrayal of Black people in the American media was racist. In two survey experiments (n's=701 for Study 1; 903 for Study 2), Onyeador et al. (2020) test whether providing white Americans with information about the persistence of racial disparities affects evaluations of progress toward racial economic equality since the 1960s, and find that their treatment causes participants to view the past more equitably. Building on this nascent line of research, we contribute new experimental evidence from two studies involving large, nationally representative samples about the effect of historical information on beliefs about Black-white racial inequality. Moreover, in a key departure from existing research, we directly examine how an individual's partisanship and race condition how historical information affects belief formation, given the close association between race and party in contemporary American politics (Mason 2018).

Specifically, we designed and analyze data from an experiment fielded on two nationally representative samples of American adults (n = 702 for Study 1; 2,570 for Study 2) where subjects are randomly assigned to read information about the historical and structural roots of racial inequalities that grew out of landmark public policies in one of two policy domains (housing or jobs), their immediate effects on racial inequalities in the past, and the processes by which those effects endured to affect racial inequalities in the present. We assess how this information affects two main sets of policy beliefs that are arguably central for shaping durable policy attitudes: (1) belief in the existence of racial inequality (i.e., belief in the existence of the problem) and (2) beliefs in structural versus individualistic (or cultural) causes of racial inequality today (i.e., belief that the problem is systemic).

Across two studies, we find evidence that arguments emphasizing the historical and structural roots of contemporary racial inequalities can increase beliefs in the existence of Black-white racial inequality and increase beliefs in structural causes of racial inequality, specifically that racial inequality is mainly due to discrimination against Black Americans. These results, while evident across all partisan subgroups, are particularly strong among white Republicans and Independents. In addition to providing compelling evidence that

exposure to historical information can induce believing that structural racial inequality exists, we also find suggestive evidence that exposure to historical information has the potential to reduce racial resentment. Taken together, our results provide evidence that exposure to historical information can induce systemic and historical policy thinking about contemporary inequalities.

1 Responses to Historical Arguments about the Causes of Racial Inequality

1.1 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 and Fair Deal eras, caused by the demands of southern legislators, are "consistent with this requirement" (160). He points to specific examples like the Social Security Act (1935) and the G.I. Bill (1944). The former excluded farmworkers and maids, "race-laden" provisions which meant that a majority of African Americans were not eligible for benefits (44). The latter, too, was written "under southern auspices" and administered with local discretion, meaning that the "gap in educational attainment between Blacks and whites widened rather than closed" (114, 134).

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).

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

1.3 Psychological Theoretical Frameworks

There are compelling theoretical reasons to think that each account has merit. Research showing that individuals update their attitudes in accordance with counter-attitudinal information suggests that Katznelson's claim is empirically plausible (e.g., Guess and Coppock, 2020). 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 (Cole, 2018; Feldman and Huddy, 2018).

2 Beliefs in the Existence and Causes of Racial Inequality

Rather than focusing on how historical information affects policy attitudes, in this paper we focus on the effects of historical information on beliefs that shape policy attitudes, specifically

the extent to which individuals see racial inequality as a problem or not, and the extent to which they view it as primarily resulting from structural factors or individualistic/cultural ones. We do this because one prerequisite for *durable* policy attitude change arguably is changing beliefs about the nature of the policy problem itself. When it comes to racial inequality, a major question is whether individuals perceive it as originating from structural causes or more individualistic and/or cultural ones. To the extent that individuals see racial inequality as being the result of structural factors, they will be more likely to see the solution as requiring structural responses. However, to the extent that they see racial inequality as being the result of individual or cultural factors, they are more likely to be suspicious of policy solutions to redress racial inequities.

Public opinion researchers have measured these kinds of racial attitudes in a couple of standard ways. Perhaps most familiar to political scientists is the "racial resentment" scale. In contrast to measures of "old-fashioned racism" that focus more on preferences for social distance, beliefs about biological inferiority, and support for formalized segregation and discrimination policies (Tesler, 2012), racial resentment instead taps into "a moral feeling that Blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience, and discipline" (Kinder and Sears, 1981; Tesler, 2012). The questions that make up the scale, which we describe in more detail later, are in fact closer to measures of structural vs. individualistic attributions for the causes of racial inequality. Indeed, recent research by Kam and Burge (2018) argues that based on an investigation of how respondents actually understand these questions, "racial resentment" should be thought of instead as "Structural versus Individual Attributions for Black Americans' Economic and Social Status."

Importantly, scholars generally use racial resentment as a predictor variable. This implicitly assumes that racial resentment is a stable attitude. We advance this literature by instead looking at racial resentment as an outcome variable and seeing whether it is in fact endogenous to learning about historical information regarding the origins of racial inequality. If racial resentment is stable in the face of new information, this might be indicative of motivated

reasoning. By contrast, if respondents update in a Bayesian manner, this has important implications for the malleability of racial attitudes in the face of certain types of information, as well as larger theoretical implications for the way scholars use the racial resentment scale itself.

3 Design

We first conducted a pilot experiment that randomly exposed subjects to information about the historical roots of present-day racial inequalities and assessed whether this information affected beliefs about the causes of present-day racial inequality (Study 1). We then replicated the experiment with a larger sample (Study 2).

3.1 Subjects

Subjects for Study 1 were recruited on March 27, 2019, from Lucid, an online vendor that provides respondents from multiple online respondent pools that have been shown to validate the demographic, political, psychological, and experimental results of prior studies (Coppock and McClellan, 2019). Respondents recruited for the study comprised a census-balanced sample of U.S. adults. The experiment includes 702 subjects. Subjects for Study 2 were recruited on June 10 and June 15, 2019, from Lucid, with respondents again comprising a census-balanced sample of U.S. adults. The second sample includes 2,570 subjects.

3.2 Treatments and Randomization

Subjects were randomly assigned with equal probability to one of three conditions: (1) a pure control condition, in which no information was shown, (2) a treatment script about racial inequality in housing (which we label the "housing" treatment), or (3) a treatment script about racial inequality in jobs and income (which we label the "jobs" treatment).[3]

[3]We verify that the randomization procedure is valid using randomization inference. The probability of obtaining a log-likelihood statistic (from a multinomial logistic regression of treatment assignment on pre-treatment covariates) at least as large as the observed test statistic is p=0.691 in Study 1 and p=0.727 in Study 2. The pre-treatment covariates are: gender, race/ethnicity, party identification (3-point), education, urban/rural, household income, region, age, age-squared, political interest, religion, born again, and ideology

Table 1 displays the full text of the treatment scripts. Both treatments were constructed to convey similar information using the same succinct, three paragraph structure while being of similar length. The treatments were crafted to capture realistic arguments of the sort that might appear in an op-ed piece.[4] To introduce the topic, subjects are told in the first paragraph of the treatment script that in their assigned policy area ("housing" or "jobs and income"), "important public policies discriminated against African Americans" seeking economic opportunities ("seeking to buy or rent homes" for the housing treatment; "seeking educational and employment opportunities" for the jobs treatment). The second paragraph of the treatment script then provides a historical example of a policy in that issue area (the National Housing Act for the housing treatment and the G.I. Bill for the jobs treatment), states the policy's general aim, but points out that it also generated immediate racial inequalities between Black and white Americans by discriminating against potential Black recipients and by allowing whites to be the main beneficiaries of the policy. The third paragraph further explains the processes through which each policy created immediate racial disparities, as well as the how those immediate policy impacts have led to enduring, long-term racial inequalities between Black and white Americans that persist to this day.

Several additional features of the treatment scripts are notable. First, we designed the treatments to provide specific policy information (i.e., specific policies, short-term impacts, and information about processes that cause both historical and present-day racial inequality) rather than abstract arguments in order to reduce the likelihood that the information and argument presented to subjects would be ambiguous or vague. Second, we designed two different treatments that vary by issue, rather than a single treatment providing information about a single policy-specific historical cause of present-day racial inequality, in order to explore whether effects might differ by the policy (and associated argument) present and by the relative salience of the policy and argument in contemporary political discourse. The housing

(7-point).

[4]Similar styles of treatments have been shown to have effects on a range of other kinds of attitudes (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018).

Table 1. Treatment Scripts

Housing Treatment	Jobs Treatment
In housing, important public policies discriminated against African Americans seeking to buy or rent homes. For example, the National Housing Act (1934) was passed during the Great Depression to help make housing and home mortgages more affordable. However, this policy also allowed for the "redlining" of many black neighborhoods, which severely restricted housing opportunities for African Americans but not whites. This is because black homebuyers were marked as bad credit risks and lenders were discouraged from lending in predominantly African American neighborhoods. At the same time, many black homebuyers were excluded from more favorable neighborhoods inhabited by whites. Studies have found that the long term effect of such discriminatory policies is that black households remain disproportionately located in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates, lower home values, declining infrastructure, and fewer employment opportunities compared to predominantly white neighborhoods.	In jobs and income, important public policies discriminated against African Americans seeking educational and employment opportunities. For example, the G. I. Bill (1944) encouraged long-term economic growth by offering job training and educational support to large numbers of returning World War II veterans. However, this policy offered substantially more benefits to white veterans than it did to black veterans. This is because black veterans did not have access to the same segregated schools and training opportunities as whites. Black veterans from the southern states – where three-quarters of African Americans lived – made no gains in educational attainment. Studies have found that the ultimate outcome of the policy was to increase inequality in economic and educational attainment between black and white Americans. This gap in educational and employment opportunities for African Americans compared to whites has largely endured despite recent efforts to close it.

treatment makes salient the long history of redlining and racial housing discrimination in the United States, topics which have garnered considerable media attention in the United States in recent years (e.g., Coates, 2014), whereas the jobs treatment script concerns Black-white inequalities and intergenerational racial stratification created by the G.I. Bill, topics and arguments which are virtually absent from recent U.S. political discourse, but are important components of Katznelson's (2005) argument.

3.3 Outcomes

We examine two main sets of outcome measures: (1) subjects' belief in the existence of Black-white inequality and (2) subjects' beliefs in various structural versus individual or cultural causes of present-day racial inequality.

To measure subjects' belief in the existence of Black-white inequality, we ask: "Do you believe that racial differences in jobs, income, and housing between African Americans and whites exist?" Response options are "Yes", "No", and "Don't Know", which are coded 1, 0, and 0.5, respectively.

We operationalize subjects' beliefs in various structural versus individual or cultural causes of present-day racial inequality in two ways.

First, we employ the racial resentment scale (Kinder and Sanders, 1996), which consists of the following items and which we interpret as a measure of structural versus individual attributions for Black Americans' economic and social status following Kam and Burge (2018):

- Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
- Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.
- Over the past few years Blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
- It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try

harder they could be just as well off as whites.

For each item, which is presented in a randomized order, subjects rate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale (-2=strongly disagree to 2=strongly agree). The second and third items are reverse coded, then all items are combined into a mean index scale ranging from -2 to 2 ($\alpha = 0.75$ in the control group in Study 1 and $\alpha = 0.82$ in the control group in Study 2).

Second, we directly measure subjects' belief in structural versus individual (or cultural) causes of Black-white inequality using an augmented battery of items that the General Social Survey (GSS) has asked since 1977 and that have long been studied by social scientists (e.g., Kluegel, 1990). Each question begins with the statement: "On average, African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people." Subjects are then asked if they think these differences are:

- Mainly due to discrimination
- Because most African Americans have less in-born ability to learn
- Because most African Americans don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty
- Because most African Americans just don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty
- Because there is more family instability in the African American community

The first four of these are directly from the GSS[5], and the fifth item is based on a cause explored in a modified version of the GSS battery developed by Lopez Bunyasi and Smith (2019). For each of these items, which are randomly ordered, subjects can respond "Yes", "No", or "Don't Know". We recode each item into a binary variable where 1=Yes and 0=otherwise. In this battery, the first and third items are commonly interpreted as belief in structural explanations of racial inequality whereas the second, fourth, and fifth items are commonly

[5]These items correspond to the GSS variables named `racdif1`, `racdif2`, `racdif3`, and `racdif4`.

interpreted as belief in individualist or cultural explanations of racial inequality (Kluegel, 1990; Lopez Bunyasi and Smith, 2019). While other scholars have previously combined these items into two scales (one for belief in structural explanations and another for belief in individualist explanations) (Kluegel, 1990; Lopez Bunyasi and Smith, 2019), we choose not to do so because the items exhibit poor internal consistency in our samples (in the Study 1 control group, α=0.49 for the structural explanation items and α=0.44 for the individualist/cultural explanation items; in the Study 2 control group, α=0.62 for the structural explanation items and α=0.51 for the individualist/cultural explanation items). Instead, for our main analysis we treat each item as a separate outcome variable for the sake of transparency.[6]

By employing two different operationalizations of beliefs in structural versus individual causes of racial inequality, we are able to assess the degree to which our findings are robust to alternative measurement strategies. Consistent evidence of effects across similarly-defined measures would provide greater confidence in the validity of results. We randomize the order in which the racial resentment battery and the modified GSS battery are asked in case one set of outcome questions affects responses to the other by priming different considerations.[7]

4 Results

Does exposure to information about the historical and structural roots of racial inequality affect the incidence of belief in the existence of racial inequality, the incidence of belief in structural causes of racial inequality, and racial resentment?

To answer these questions, we regress each outcome of interest on a binary indicator for assignment to the housing treatment and a binary indicator for assignment to the jobs treatment (omitting assignment to the control group as the comparison group). For each quantity of interest, we conduct two-sided tests of the null hypothesis that the effect is zero.

[6]In the appendix, we present additional analyses where the outcome measures are the index scales and find qualitatively similar results.

[7]We find no order effects in Study 1. However, we do find order effects in Study 2, which affirms our choice to randomize the order. See Tables S7-S9 in the appendix for estimates from the order effects analysis. Since the order effects finding is not consistent across studies, we are unable to offer a clear interpretation here, although this might merit future study.

Our main analyses are conducted on the pooled sample and by partisan subgroup (i.e., Democrats, Independents, and Republicans) where leaners are included with partisans. We partition by party in this analysis for two substantive reasons. First, because the Democratic and Republican parties are racially polarized and sorted where Democrats are more likely to be and support racial minorities and Republicans are more likely to be homogeneously white (Mason, 2018), we expect partisanship to be a primary dimension along which baseline beliefs about racial inequality are likely to vary (Engelhardt, 2020a). That is, we expect the baseline incidence of belief in racial inequality and belief in structural causes of racial inequality to be high among Democrats and low among Republicans. Second and relatedly, given expectations of qualitative differences in baseline levels of these beliefs by party, we may also expect treatment effects to vary by party, as well as a potential ceiling effect for Democrats who are expected to have a high baseline level of belief in structural racial inequality.

We present results from Study 1 and Study 2 in the same sections to allow for comparisons.

4.1 Does Exposure to Historical Information Affect Belief in the Existence of Black-White Racial Inequality?

Does exposure to information about the historical and structural roots of racial inequality generate belief in the existence of Black-white racial inequality?

We begin by assessing the baseline incidence of belief in the existence of Black-white inequality by examining group means in the control condition. As Table S1 shows, the level of belief in the existence of Black-white inequality in Study 1 is highest among Democrats (0.803), followed by Independents (0.587), and lowest among Republicans (0.423). The difference in the mean level of belief in the existence of Black-white inequality is both substantively and statistically significant between Democrats and Independent (-0.216, s.e.$=0.07$, $p=0.001$) and between Democrats and Republicans (-0.381, s.e.$=0.06$, $p<0.001$). Table S2 shows similar baseline pattern in Study 2: belief is highest among Democrats (0.849), followed by

Independents (.678), and lowest among Republicans (0.638).[8] The difference in the mean level of believe in the existence of Black-white inequality is again significant between Democrats and Independents (-0.170, s.e.=0.035, p=0.001) and between Democrats and Republicans (-0.210, s.e.=0.028, $p<0.001$). These descriptive results comport with theoretical expectations about differences in baseline levels of belief in structural racial inequality between partisan subgroups and provide face validity.

Next, we evaluate whether the housing and job treatments altered beliefs in the existence of Black-white inequality. Figure 1 plots the estimated mean effect of each treatment (as compared to the control group) with 95% confidence intervals in Study 1. In the pooled sample, the housing treatment increases mean levels of belief that Black-white inequality exists by 0.099 points (s.e.=0.038, $p<0.01$). This positive effect is driven by Independents, for whom the treatment increases mean levels of belief by 0.201 points (s.e.=0.091, $p<0.05$), and by Republicans, for whom the treatment increases mean levels of belief by 0.176 points (s.e.=0.072, $p<0.05$). We also estimate a positive mean effect of the housing treatment among Democrats but, likely due to a ceiling effect, the effect's magnitude is small and is not distinguishable from zero. By contrast, we do not find statistically significant effects of the jobs treatment. It is notable, though, that the estimated mean effects of the jobs treatments are generally positive (0.039 in the full sample, 0.058 among Democrats, and 0.105 among Republicans). Among Republicans in particular, the mean effect of the jobs treatment is about 60% of the magnitude of the housing treatment effect.

Figure 2 shows that in Study 2, in the pooled sample, the housing treatment increases mean levels of belief that Black-white inequality exists by 0.042 points (s.e.=0.0109, $p<0.05$). This positive effect is driven by Independents, for whom the treatment increases mean levels of belief by 0.115 points (s.e.=0.046, $p<0.05$), and by Republicans, for whom the treatment increases mean levels of belief by 0.078 points (s.e.=0.035, $p<0.05$). The estimated effect for Democrats, by contrast, is almost zero. These results are consistent with the findings in

[8] One notable difference is that baseline levels were lower among Republicans in Study 1.

Study 1, although the estimates in the second study are smaller in magnitude (and more precisely estimated given the larger N). We also find a positive and statistically significant effect of the jobs treatment. Overall, the estimated effect is 0.034 (s.e.=0.019, $p<0.1$). In this case, though, this effect is driven by Democrats, where the estimated effect is 0.053 (s.e.=0.022, $p<0.05$).

Figure 1. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in the Existence of Black-White Inequalities (Study 1)

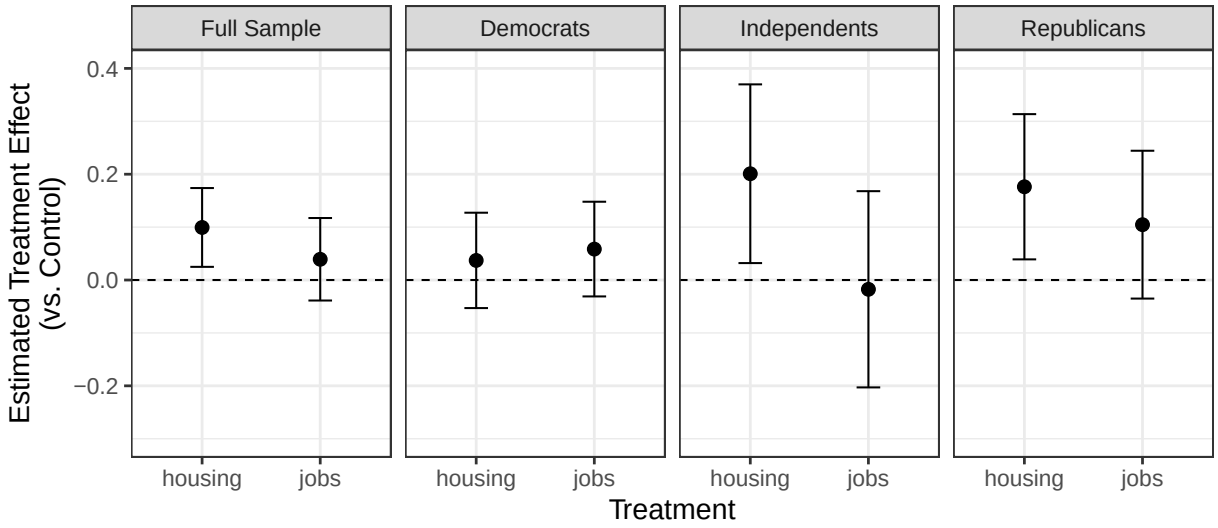
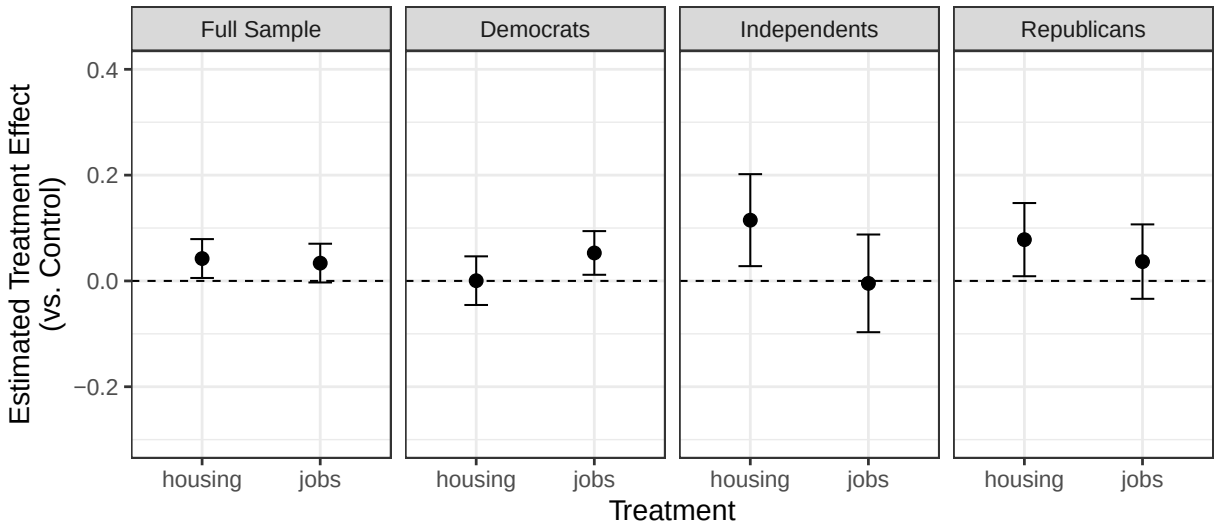


Figure 2. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in the Existence of Black-White Inequalities (Study 2)



4.2 Does Exposure to Historical Information Affect Racial Resentment?

Having established the effects of historical information on belief about the existence of Black-white inequality, we now examine whether information about the historical and structural roots of racial inequality affects levels of belief in structural or individualist causes for racial inequality. We begin with our first operationalization of this outcome, the racial resentment scale interpreted as levels of belief in individualist (as opposed to structural) attributions for Black Americans' economic and social status. Given the coding of the racial resentment scale, negative treatment effect estimates (i.e., reducing racial resentment) can be interpreted as increasing belief in structural explanations for Black-white racial inequality.

At baseline, partisan subgroups exhibit varying levels of racial resentment. The intercept estimates in Table S3 present control group mean levels of racial resentment, which are measured on a -2 (lowest) to 2 (highest) scale. The baseline level of racial resentment is highest among Republicans (0.732), followed by Independents (0.087), and then Democrats (-0.344). The differences in baseline levels of racial resentment between Independents and Democrats (0.431, s.e.=0.164, p=0.009) and between Republicans and Democrats (1.077, s.e.=0.141, $p<0.001$) are both substantively and statistically significant. As Table S4 shows, in Study 2, baseline levels of racial resentment are again highest among Republicans (0.648), followed by Independents (0.102), and then Democrats (-0.592). The differences in baseline levels of racial resentment between Independents and Democrats (0.694, s.e.=0.090, $p<0.001$) and between Republicans and Democrats (1.240, s.e.=0.073, $p<0.001$) are both substantively and statistically significant, and again offer face validity for the data. These patterns, too, offer face validity for the data.

In Study 1, Figure 3 shows a general pattern that both the housing and jobs treatments have negative estimated mean effects on racial resentment. In the pooled sample, the housing treatment reduces racial resentment by -0.170 points (s.e.=0.098, $p<0.1$). Breaking this out

by party, the housing treatment reduces racial resentment by −0.203 points among Democrats (s.e.=0.127, n.s.), −0.193 points among Independents (s.e.=0.222, n.s.), and −0.235 points among Republicans (s.e.=0.142, $p<0.1$). While these estimates are not statistically significant at a 5% level, the magnitude of the effects substantively large and relatively consistent across partisan subgroups, which suggests the need for an adequately powered experimental replication to generate more precise estimates. In contrast to the housing treatment, the jobs treatment has a smaller negative mean effect on racial resentment in the pooled sample (−0.061 points, s.e.=0.099, n.s.). Examining conditional effects by party, the jobs treatment reduces racial resentment among Democrats by −0.251 points (s.e.=0.130, $p<0.1$) but does not appear to have an effect on racial resentment among Independents (0.038, s.e.=0217, n.s.) or among Republicans (−0.086, s.e.=0.140, n.s.).

Turning to Study 2, in the pooled sample, Figure 4 shows that the estimated effect of the housing treatment is again negative but not statistically significant this time. Among Independents, however, the housing treatment reduces racial resentment by −0.273 points (s.e.=0.116, $p<0.05$). The estimated effect for Republicans is −0.093, but this is not statistically significant. Although there are some different results across studies, the sizable reduction in racial resentment among Independents is consistent across both. The estimated negative mean effect for the jobs treatment in the pooled sample is almost zero. Examining conditional effects by party, though, we find that the jobs treatment reduces racial resentment among Republicans by −0.204 points (s.e.=0.075, $p<0.01$). In the first study, the estimated effect among Republicans was negative, but smaller and not statistically significant.

4.3 Does Exposure to Historical Information Affect Beliefs in Structural versus Individual or Cultural Causes of Racial Inequality?

Next, we examine the same question using an alternative set of outcome measures: direct measures of subjects' belief in specific structural, individualist, or cultural causes of Black-white inequality from the modified GSS battery.

Figure 3. Treatment Effects on Racial Resentment (Study 1)

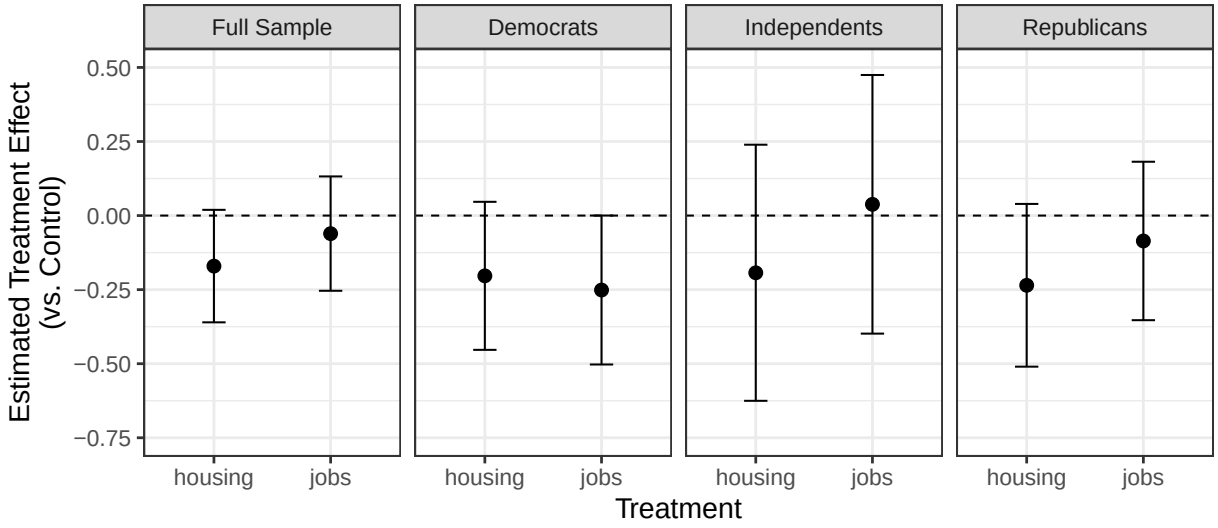
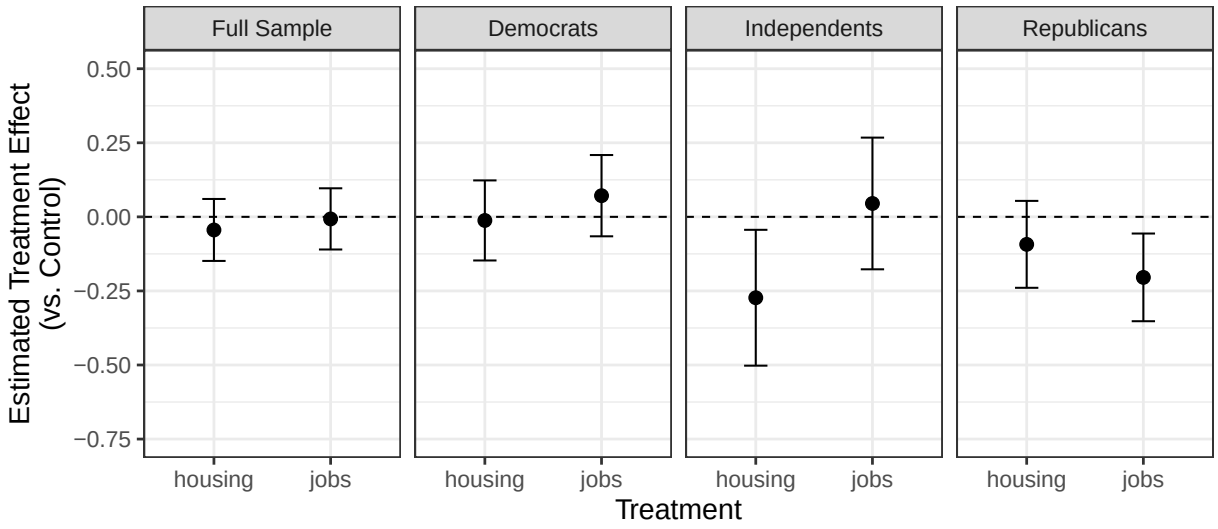


Figure 4. Treatment Effects on Racial Resentment (Study 2)



At baseline, Democrats are more likely than Independents, who are more likely than Republicans, to believe that racial inequality is caused by a structural cause. As the estimated intercepts in Table S5 show for Study1, the belief that Black-white inequality is mainly due to discrimination against Black Americans is held by 59.8% of Democrats as compared to 37.0% of Independents (D-I difference: -0.229 percentage points, s.e.=0.08, p=0.005) and 14.1% of Republicans (D-R difference: -0.457 percentage points, s.e.=0.05, $p<0.001$). For the belief that Black-white inequality is because African Americans don't have the chance to receive the education it takes to rise out of poverty, this belief is held by 55.6% of Democrats as compared to 45.7% of Independents (D-I difference: -0.100 pp, s.e.=0.08, p=0.24) and 19.7% of Republicans (D-R difference: -0.358 pp, s.e.=0.072, $p<0.001$). Table S6 shows that in Study 2, Democrats are again more likely than Independents and Republicans to believe that racial inequality has a structural cause, although the differences between Independents and Republicans are smaller than in Study 1. For the belief that Black-white inequality is mainly due to discrimination against Black Americans, this belief is held by 71.4% of Democrats as compared to 39.5% of Independents (D-I difference: -0.319 percentage points, s.e.=0.043, $p<0.001$) and 28% of Republicans (D-R difference: -0.433 percentage points, s.e.=0.035, $p<0.001$). For the belief that Black-white inequality is because African Americans don't have the chance to receive the education it takes to rise out of poverty, this belief is held by 60.6% of Democrats as compared to 34.4% of Independents (D-I difference: -0.262 pp, s.e.=0.045, $p<0.001$) and 32.8% of Republicans (D-R difference: -0.278 pp, s.e.=0.037, $p<0.001$).

By contrast, we find evidence that belief in individualist causes of racial inequality are more similar across partisan groups at baseline. Across partisan subgroups, the incidence of the belief that there is less in-born ability to learn among Black Americans is relatively low at 14.5% among Democrats, 10.9% among Independents, and 7% among Republicans in Study 1.[9] Across parties, more American adults are likely to believe that African Americans don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty: 24.8% among

[9]These between-party differences are not statistically significant at a 10% level.

Democrats, 30.4% among Independents, and 45.1% among Republicans. On this measure the difference between the baseline level of belief incidence between Republicans and Democrats is large and statistically significant (0.203 percentage points, s.e.=0.07, p=0.002). The baseline incidence of belief that Black-white inequalities are due to greater family instability in the African American community is also prevalent across parties: 49.6% of Democrats, 26.1% of Independents, and 50.7% of Republicans believe that this is the case. Independents are significantly less likely than Democrats or Republicans to believe that greater family instability in the African American community is a cause of Black-white inequality.[10] Belief in individualist causes of racial inequality are again more similar across partisan groups at baseline in Study 2. Across partisan subgroups, the incidence of the belief that there is less in-born ability to learn among Black Americans is relatively low at 9.9% among Democrats, 6.4% among Independents, and 12.3% among Republicans.[11] Across parties, more American adults are likely to believe that African Americans don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty: 20% among Democrats, 26.1% among Independents, and 47.8% among Republicans. On this measure the difference between the baseline level of belief incidence between Republicans and Democrats is large and statistically significant (0.278 percentage points, s.e.=0.034, p<0.001). The baseline incidence of belief that Black-white inequalities are due to greater family instability in the African American community is also prevalent across parties: 45.8% of Democrats, 43.3% of Independents, and 58.7% of Republicans believe that this is the case. In contrast to Study 1, Democrats and Independents are not statistically distinguishable at baseline, but the difference between Democrats and Republicans is 0.129 (s.e.=0.37, p=0.001).

Figure 5 presents the estimated mean effects of each treatment on belief in each cause of Black-white racial inequality (outcomes by row) for the pooled sample and each partisan subgroup (subgroups by column) in Study 1, while Figure 6 shows this for Study 2.

[10]The difference between Independents and Democrats, for example, is −0.235 percentage points (s.e.=0.09, p=0.006).

[11]These between-party differences are not statistically significant at a 10% level.

The first two rows of Figure 5 show treatments effects on belief in different structural causes of racial inequality in Study 1. Focusing first on the first row in Figure 5, we see that the housing treatment increases the proportion believing that discrimination against Black Americans is the main cause of racial inequality. This increase is 16.8 percentage points (s.e.=0.046, $p<0.01$) in the pooled sample, 11.7 percentage points among Democrats (s.e.=0.062, $p<0.1$), 29.7 percentage points among Independents (s.e.=0.112, $p<0.01$), and 23.1 percentage points among Republicans (s.e.=0.072, $p<0.01$). The jobs treatment also increases the proportion believing that discrimination against Black Americans is the main cause of racial inequality in the pooled sample (0.096 percentage points, s.e.=0.046, $p<0.05$). Analyses by subgroup shows that this effect is driven by a large effect among Republicans who are 19.6 percentage points more likely to believe that discrimination against Black Americans is the main cause of racial inequality when exposed to the jobs treatment (s.e.=0.07, $p<0.01$). For Democrats and Independents, the jobs treatment also has positive mean effects on the proportion believing discrimination against Black Americans is a main cause but those estimates are not statistically distinguishable from zero. Turning to the second row in Figure 5, we observe that both the housing and jobs treatments increases the proportion of Republicans that believe that Black-white inequality is due to African Americans not having access to the education needed to rise out of poverty. The housing treatment increases the proportion of Republicans holding this belief by 15.6 percentage points (s.e.=0.073, $p<0.05$) and the jobs treatment increases the proportion of Republicans holding this belief by 12.9 percentage points (s.e.=0.072, $p<0.1$). We also find suggestive evidence that the jobs treatment increases the incidence of this belief among Democrats by about 12.1 percentage points (s.e.=0.066, $p<0.1$).

The remaining rows in Figure 5 present the estimated mean effects of the housing and jobs treatments on the incidence of belief in individualist or cultural causes of racial inequality. For Democrats and Independents, neither treatment affects the proportion holding beliefs that racial inequality is caused by less in-born ability to learn among Black Americans, a

lack of motivation or willpower among Black Americans, or greater family instability in the Black community. However, we find evidence that the jobs treatment increases the share of Republicans who report believing that racial inequality is caused by Black Americans having less in-born ability to learn (0.114 percentage points, s.e.=0.052, $p<0.01$) and who report believing that racial inequality is caused by greater family instability in the Black community (0.156 percentage points, s.e.=0.078, $p<0.05$).

The first two rows of Figure 6 show treatments effects on belief in different structural causes of racial inequality in Study 2. Focusing first on the first row in Figure 6, we see that the housing treatment increases the proportion believing that discrimination against Black Americans is the main cause of racial inequality. This increase is 5.7 percentage points (s.e.=0.024, $p<0.05$) in the pooled sample. The increase is 11.6 percentage points among Independents (s.e.=0.059, $p<0.05$) and 9.6 percentage points among Republicans (s.e.=0.038, $p<0.05$). Among Democrats, the estimated effect is a 3.1 percentage point increase, but this is not statistically significant. The estimated effects for the jobs treatment are also positive but not statistically significant in Study 2. Turning to the second row in Figure 6, we find weaker results in Study 2 for the treatments' effectiveness in increasing the belief that Black-white inequality is due to African Americans not having access to the education needed to rise out of poverty. In the second study, none of the estimates are statistically significant.

The remaining rows in Figure 6 present the estimated mean effects of the housing and jobs treatments on the incidence of belief in individualist or cultural causes of racial inequality in Study 2. For the belief that racial inequality is caused by less in-born ability to learn among Black Americans, we find that the housing treatment increases this belief by 3.8 percentage points (s.e.=0.016, $p<0.05$). We also find that the jobs treatment increases this belief by 2.9 percentage points, although this is only significant at the 0.10 level. For the lack of motivation or willpower belief, we find no statistically significant effects. For the greater family instability belief, we find that the housing argument reduces this belief by 4.5 percentage points overall, although this is only significant at the 0.10 level. Looking at partisan subgroups, we find

that this is driven by a reduction in this belief among Independents of 14.7 percentage points (s.e.=0.057, $p<0.01$).

Figure 5. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Structural versus Individual or Cultural Causes of Inequality (Study 1)

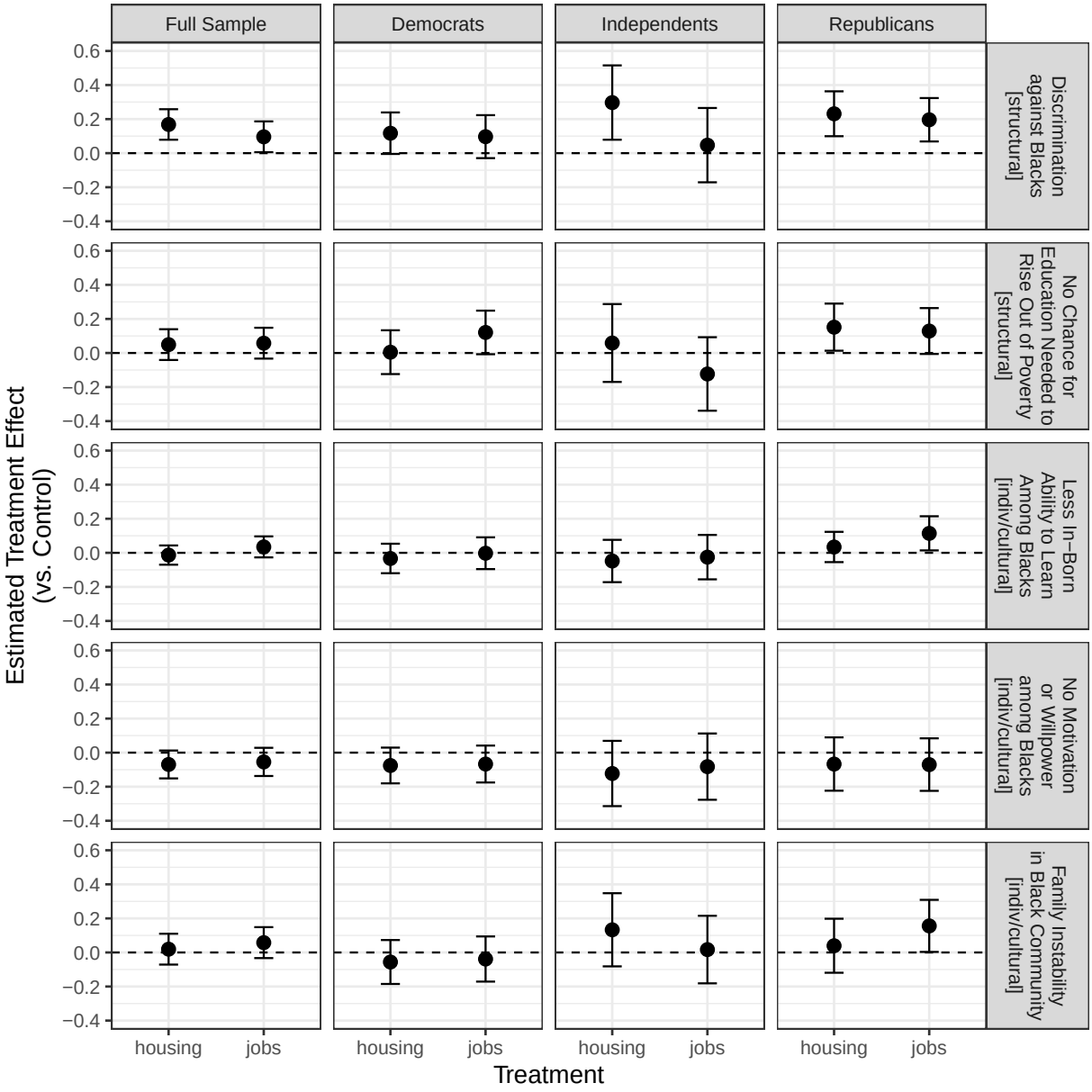
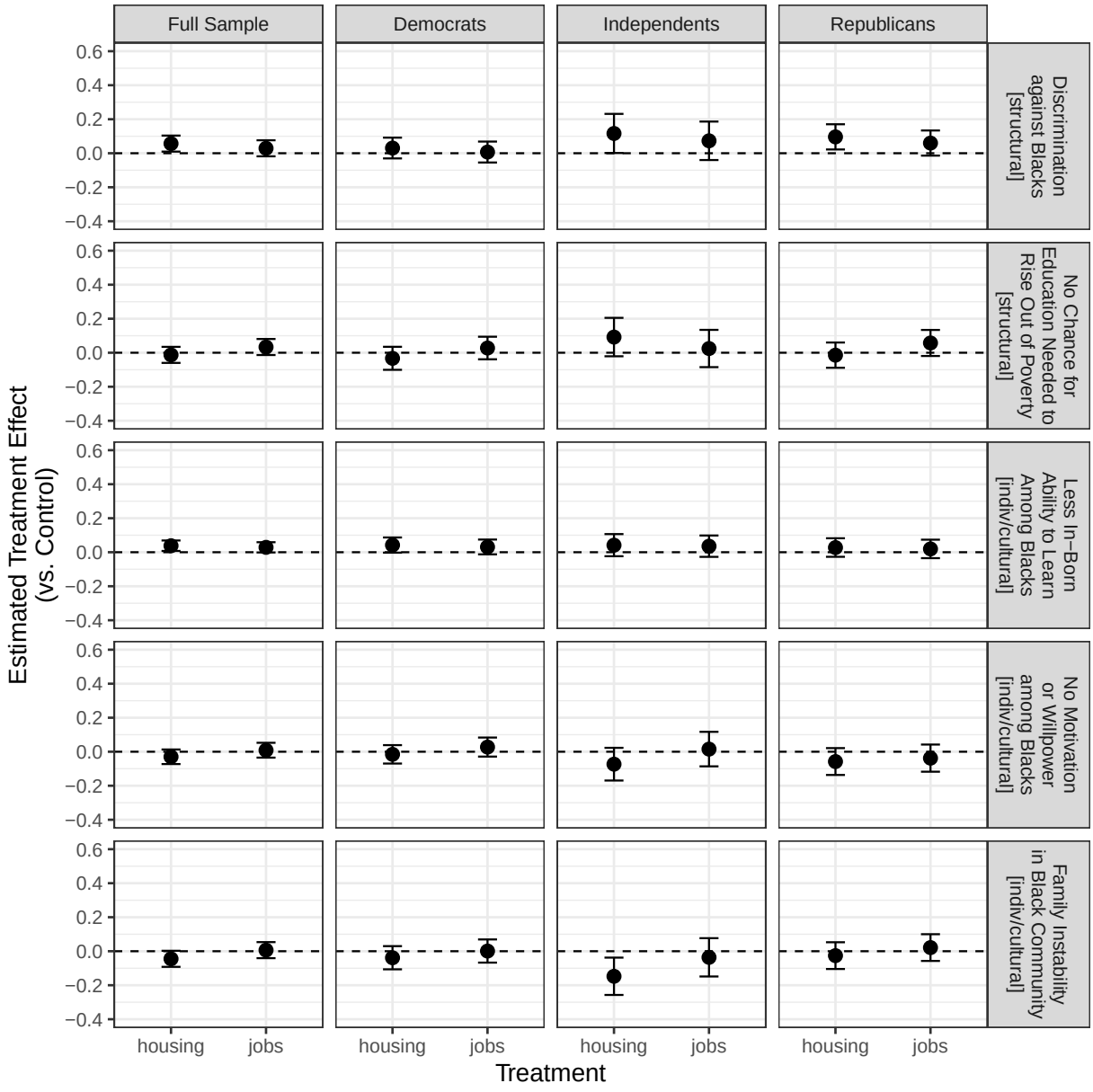


Figure 6. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Structural versus Individual or Cultural Causes of Inequality (Study 2)



4.4 Examining Treatment Effects among White Americans

Taken together, the above results provide compelling evidence that the housing treatment is effective at increasing the incidence of believing that racial inequality exists across partisan subgroups; may be effective at reducing racial resentment, particularly among Republicans; and is effective at increasing the incidence of believing the structural argument that discrimination against Black Americans is the main cause of racial inequality between Black and white Americans. However our main results do not condition on the racial background of the subject, and therefore do not offer an exact test of several theories motivating this study, which focus specifically on white Americans (and more specifically, white conservatives).

To provide a more exact test that can speak to these motivating theories, we further partition the sample to include only subjects who identify as white Americans, re-conduct the main analysis on this sample, and assess the robustness of our main findings among whites.[12] We report full results from this analysis in Tables S14, S15, S16, S17, S18, and S19 in the appendix.

As Table S14 shows for Study 1, the magnitudes of the housing treatment effects on the belief in the existence of Black-white inequality remains statistically significant and are even larger in magnitude for white Independents and white Republicans (as compared to all Independents and all Republicans). In Table S16, we similarly find negative treatment effect estimates of similar magnitudes for both the housing and jobs treatments on racial resentment when restricting the analysis to include only white Americans. In Table S18, when considering the alternative measures of belief in structural versus individualistic or cultural causes of racial inequality that employ the modified GSS battery, we find qualitatively similar results when conditioning the analysis on white Americans. The estimated effects of the housing treatment on the belief that discrimination against Black Americans is the main cause of

[12]In Study 1, 70.9% of the pooled sample identify as white. By party, 59.5% of Democrats, 71.3% of Independents, and 86.3% of Republicans in the original sample identify as white. In Study 2, 69.7% of the pooled sample identify as white. By party, 58.5% of Democrats, 67.7% of Independents, and 85.6% of Republicans identify as white.

racial inequality remain statistically significant and are even larger in magnitude among white Americans across partisan subgroups (as compared to not conditioning on whites). We observe a similar pattern (statistically significant and a larger estimated magnitude) for the estimated effect of the jobs treatment on this belief among Republicans. By contrast, we find that the effect of either treatment on the belief that racial inequality is due to lack of access to quality education to get out of poverty becomes smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant when we only examine white Americans.

In Study 2, Table S15 shows that the results for the housing treatment effects on belief in the existence of Black-white inequality are similar and now slightly larger in size when looking only at whites. The jobs treatment effect, though, is no longer statistically significant, although the estimated effect among Democrats is similar in size. As shown in Table S17, the results for both treatments on racial resentment is similar for whites (the housing treatment reduces racial resentment among Independents by an even larger -0.406 points and the jobs treatment reduces racial resentment among Republicans by -0.195 points). Turning to the modified GSS battery, Table S19 shows that the results for the discrimination outcome are almost identical to the full sample. We find more evidence of treatment effects among partisan subgroups for the education variable when looking at whites only: the housing treatment is associated with a 12.9 percentage points increase among Independents and the jobs treatment is associated with a 7.9 percentage points increase among Republicans, although these results are only significant at the 0.10 level. Turning to the individual and cultural arguments, we find similar results for the ability variable in the pooled sample, but also see that the subgroup effect among Independents is now significant at the 0.10 level. The results are somewhat different for the motivation variable (check, though, if in the same direction but not sig in full sample): Nothing was significant in the full sample, but among whites, we find a negative effect of the housing treatment for Independents and a positive effect of the jobs treatment for Democrats, but both are significant at only the 0.10 level. Finally, for the family variable, the overall effect of the housing treatment is reduced in magnitude and is no

longer statistically significant, but the effect among Independents is now larger in magnitude (19.7 percentage points reduction in this belief).

In sum, we generally find qualitatively similar – and sometimes stronger – evidence when only analyzing white Americans (as compared to the main analysis that does not condition on the subject's race or ethnicity). The balance of the evidence provides a compelling case that exposure to historical information can be effective at inducing beliefs in the existence of racial inequality and in attributing racial inequality to structural causes, even among whites.

5 Discussion

In this paper, we contribute new descriptive and experimental evidence to longstanding normative and positive debates about whether providing Americans with information about historical racial injustices affects how they think about contemporary inequality. To do so, we designed and analyze data from a survey experiment fielded on two nationally representative samples of American adults where subjects are randomly assigned to read and evaluate a realistic argument emphasizing the historical, structural cause of racial inequality. One treatment emphasized housing policy, while the other emphasized jobs and income.

Looking at the full samples across two studies, we find that the housing treatment increases belief in the existence of racial differences in jobs, income, and housing between African Americans and whites, which is driven by larger effects among Independents and Republicans. The estimated effect of the jobs treatment, by contrast, is positive, but not statistically significant in Study 1, while it is a similar size but reaches 0.10 significance in Study 2.

We then examine the extent to which responses to the racial resentment scale are malleable based on this information. In the first study, we find suggestive evidence that both the housing and jobs treatments reduce racial resentment. The housing treatment is relatively consistent across partisan subgroups, while the effect of the jobs treatment is substantively smaller in general and seems to be concentrated among Democrats. In the second study, however, the effect in the full sample is not statistically significant. However, we find a

significant effect of the housing treatment for Independents and a sizable effect of the jobs treatment for Republicans.

We also examine the responses to an augmented GSS scale measuring structural vs. individualistic/cultural explanations for racial inequality. Across two studies, we find consistent evidence that the housing treatment increases belief that discrimination is the main cause of Black-white inequality, with especially large effects for Independents and Republicans. In the first study, the jobs treatment also has a (substantively smaller) effect that is driven by the Republican subgroup, but this did not replicate in Study 2. We found little consistent evidence of effects for the other questions that make up the GSS scale.

When we restrict our analysis to white respondents, the results are similar and the substantive size of effects is sometimes even larger. Taken together, these results provide evidence that information about the historical roots of contemporary racial inequality can in fact shape racial attitudes. In particular, we found that respondents in the treatment conditions, rather than engaging in motivated reasoning and exhibiting divergent beliefs, seem to update their beliefs in the direction of the information they receive about the existence of racial inequality and the extent to which it is caused by structural factors when presented with specific information about past discriminatory policies (along the lines advocated by Katznelson (2006)). Whether this pattern holds for harder questions about contemporary public policy solutions to racial inequality, though, remains untested.

Our results also suggest the possibility of variation in this effect across types of historical arguments. Although there is evidence that both the housing and jobs treatments were effective, the housing treatment was more consistently effective across a range of outcomes. Future research will be required to ascertain whether this is a difference that will generally persist (i.e., whether arguments about housing are fundamentally more persuasive), or whether it is a result of the G.I. Bill specifically being less persuasive to respondents than redlining.

We conclude by acknowledging that our survey experiments are inherently examining only one aspect of larger questions about historical knowledge and racial inequality. The

normative theoretical arguments of Mills (2007) and others are more nuanced and critical than our most straight-forward treatments. Although we are inspired by such work, we are not claiming to test them directly. Similarly, the experimental conditions we examine are of course different than the real world, where people are exposed to competing information and can often refuse to consider information that does not interest them (or is contrary to their self-perceptions). Future research might examine these effects in a more complex information environment (Engelhardt, 2020b). Finally, not all historical interventions will lead to the expected outcomes (Onyeador et al., 2020). In our second study, for example, we find some evidence that the treatments increased belief that racial inequality is due to less in-born ability to learn among Black Americans, which is empirically inaccurate and normatively troubling. This suggests the need to consider the unintended consequences of interventions designed to increase knowledge of the structural roots of racial inequality.

With these important caveats in mind, though, we think that the results we present are at least suggestive of the possibility that historical interventions might lead more Americans, particularly white Americans, to acknowledge racial inequality and view its origins in more structural, rather than individual, terms. Although this would hardly be a cure-all for lingering racial inequities in American society, it might offer one way to start to work towards that goal. Future work might build on our survey experimental results by assessing whether such historical treatments have similar effects in the field.

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FOR ONLINE PUBLICATION ONLY

Supplemental Information for:

Historical Information and Beliefs About Racial Inequality

November 12, 2020

A Survey Instrument and Treatment Script Details

A.1 Housing Treatment

treat_housing_inst
Please read the following short passage.

To ensure that you have enough time to read, you will be allowed to proceed to the next page after 20 seconds have passed.

---

treat_housing_text
In housing, important public policies discriminated against African Americans seeking to buy or rent homes.

For example, the National Housing Act (1934) was passed during the Great Depression to help make housing and home mortgages more affordable. However, this policy also allowed for the "redlining" of many black neighborhoods, which severely restricted housing opportunities for African Americans but not whites.

This is because black homebuyers were marked as bad credit risks and lenders were discouraged from lending in predominantly African American neighborhoods. At the same time, many black homebuyers were excluded from more favorable neighborhoods inhabited by whites. Studies have found that the long term effect of such discriminatory policies is that black households remain disproportionately located in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates, lower home values, declining infrastructure, and fewer employment opportunities compared to predominantly white neighborhoods.

---

treat_housing_timer Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

A.2 Jobs Treatment

treat_jobs_inst
Please read the following short passage.

To ensure that you have enough time to read, you will be allowed to proceed to the next page after 20 seconds have passed.

---

treat_jobs_text
In jobs and income, important public policies discriminated against African Americans seeking educational and employment opportunities.

For example, the G. I. Bill (1944) encouraged long-term economic growth by offering job training and educational support to large numbers of returning World War II veterans. However, this policy offered substantially more benefits to white veterans than it did to black veterans.

This is because black veterans did not have access to the same segregated schools and training opportunities as whites. Black veterans from the southern states -- where three-quarters of African Americans lived -- made no gains in educational attainment. Studies have found that the ultimate outcome of the policy was to increase inequality in economic and educational attainment between black and white Americans. This gap in educational and employment opportunities for African Americans compared to whites has largely endured despite recent efforts to close it.

---

treat_jobs_timer Timing
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A.3 Outcome Questions: Racial Resentment Items

Note: These items were presented to subjects in a random order.

rr1

Do you agree or disagree with this statement:

Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

- ○ Strongly agree (1)
- ○ Somewhat agree (2)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ○ Strongly disagree (5)

rr2

Do you agree or disagree with this statement:

Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

- ○ Strongly agree (1)
- ○ Somewhat agree (2)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ○ Strongly disagree (5)

rr3
Do you agree or disagree with this statement:

Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

- ○ Strongly agree (1)
- ○ Somewhat agree (2)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ○ Strongly disagree (5)

rr4
Do you agree or disagree with this statement:

It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

- ○ Strongly agree (1)
- ○ Somewhat agree (2)
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ○ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ○ Strongly disagree (5)

A.4 Outcome Questions: Modified GSS Items

Note: The rows in the grid were presented to subjects in a random order.

racdif On average, African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people.

Do you think these differences are...

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't Know (3)
Mainly due to discrimination (1)	○	○	○
Because most African Americans have less in-born ability to learn (2)	○	○	○
Because most African Americans don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty (3)	○	○	○
Because most African Americans just don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty (4)	○	○	○
Because there is more family instability in the African American community (5)	○	○	○

racdif_exist Do you believe that racial differences in jobs, income, and housing between African Americans and whites exist?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Don't Know (3)

B Full Regression Tables

Table S1. Treatment Effects on Belief in the Existence of Black-White Inequality (Study 1)

	DV: Existence of Black-White Inequality			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	0.099***	0.037	0.201**	0.176**
	(0.038)	(0.044)	(0.091)	(0.072)
Jobs Treatment	0.039	0.058	−0.018	0.105
	(0.038)	(0.045)	(0.089)	(0.070)
Constant	0.645***	0.803***	0.587***	0.423***
	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.059)	(0.053)
Observations	702	338	115	249

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group. The outcome variable is coded 1=Yes, 0.5=Don't Know, 0=No.

Table S2. Treatment Effects on Belief in the Existence of Black-White Inequality (Study 2)

	DV: Existence of Black-White Inequality			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	0.042**	0.001	0.115**	0.078**
	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.046)	(0.035)
Jobs Treatment	0.034*	0.053**	−0.005	0.037
	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.045)	(0.035)
Constant	0.748***	0.849***	0.678***	0.638***
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.031)	(0.025)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group. The outcome variable is coded 1=Yes, 0.5=Don't Know, 0=No.

Table S3. Treatment Effects on Racial Resentment (Study 1)

	DV: Racial Resentment			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	−0.170*	−0.203	−0.193	−0.235*
	(0.098)	(0.127)	(0.222)	(0.142)
Jobs Treatment	−0.061	−0.251*	0.038	−0.086
	(0.099)	(0.130)	(0.217)	(0.140)
Constant	0.067	−0.344***	0.087	0.732***
	(0.070)	(0.089)	(0.144)	(0.105)
Observations	702	338	115	249

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S4. Treatment Effects on Racial Resentment (Study 2)

	DV: Racial Resentment			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	−0.044	−0.012	−0.273**	−0.093
	(0.053)	(0.069)	(0.116)	(0.075)
Jobs Treatment	−0.007	0.072	0.045	−0.204***
	(0.053)	(0.069)	(0.114)	(0.075)
Constant	−0.053	−0.592***	0.102	0.648***
	(0.037)	(0.048)	(0.078)	(0.054)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S5. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Different Causes of Inequality (Study 1)

	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DV: Discrimination Against Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.168***	0.117*	0.297***	0.231***
	(0.046)	(0.062)	(0.112)	(0.072)
Jobs Treatment	0.096**	0.097	0.047	0.196***
	(0.046)	(0.063)	(0.109)	(0.071)
Constant	0.415***	0.598***	0.370***	0.141***
	(0.032)	(0.043)	(0.072)	(0.053)
Observations	702	338	115	249
DV: No Chance for Education to Rise Out of Poverty				
Housing Treatment	0.049	0.005	0.059	0.152**
	(0.046)	(0.064)	(0.113)	(0.073)
Jobs Treatment	0.058	0.121*	−0.123	0.129*
	(0.046)	(0.066)	(0.111)	(0.072)
Constant	0.427***	0.556***	0.457***	0.197***
	(0.033)	(0.045)	(0.073)	(0.054)
Observations	702	338	115	249
DV: Less In-Born Ability to Learn among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	−0.013	−0.033	−0.048	0.034
	(0.030)	(0.045)	(0.065)	(0.053)
Jobs Treatment	0.035	−0.002	−0.025	0.114**
	(0.030)	(0.046)	(0.063)	(0.052)
Constant	0.115***	0.145***	0.109**	0.070*
	(0.021)	(0.032)	(0.042)	(0.039)
Observations	702	338	115	249
DV: No Motivation or Willpower Among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	−0.069*	−0.075	−0.123	−0.067
	(0.041)	(0.053)	(0.098)	(0.079)
Jobs Treatment	−0.054	−0.067	−0.082	−0.070
	(0.042)	(0.054)	(0.096)	(0.078)
Constant	0.321***	0.248***	0.304***	0.451***
	(0.029)	(0.037)	(0.064)	(0.058)
Observations	702	338	115	249
DV: Family Instability in Black Community				
Housing Treatment	0.019	−0.056	0.133	0.039
	(0.046)	(0.066)	(0.106)	(0.079)
Jobs Treatment	0.058	−0.039	0.017	0.156**
	(0.046)	(0.067)	(0.103)	(0.078)
Constant	0.453***	0.496***	0.261***	0.507***
	(0.033)	(0.046)	(0.068)	(0.058)
Observations	702	338	115	249

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S6. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Different Causes of Inequality (Study 2)

	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DV: Discrimination Against Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.057**	0.031	0.116**	0.096**
	(0.024)	(0.031)	(0.059)	(0.038)
Jobs Treatment	0.029	0.007	0.073	0.060
	(0.024)	(0.031)	(0.058)	(0.038)
Constant	0.511***	0.714***	0.395***	0.280***
	(0.017)	(0.022)	(0.040)	(0.027)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921
DV: No Chance for Education to Rise Out of Poverty				
Housing Treatment	−0.013	−0.033	0.092	−0.014
	(0.024)	(0.034)	(0.057)	(0.038)
Jobs Treatment	0.034	0.028	0.025	0.057
	(0.024)	(0.034)	(0.056)	(0.039)
Constant	0.466***	0.606***	0.344***	0.328***
	(0.017)	(0.024)	(0.039)	(0.028)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921
DV: Less In-Born Ability to Learn among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.038**	0.042*	0.042	0.028
	(0.016)	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.028)
Jobs Treatment	0.029*	0.031	0.036	0.020
	(0.016)	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.028)
Constant	0.100***	0.099***	0.064***	0.123***
	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.023)	(0.020)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921
DV: No Motivation or Willpower Among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	−0.030	−0.015	−0.073	−0.058
	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.051)	(0.040)
Jobs Treatment	0.009	0.027	0.015	−0.038
	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.050)	(0.041)
Constant	0.304***	0.200***	0.261***	0.478***
	(0.015)	(0.020)	(0.034)	(0.029)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921
DV: Family Instability in Black Community				
Housing Treatment	−0.045*	−0.038	−0.147***	−0.026
	(0.024)	(0.035)	(0.057)	(0.040)
Jobs Treatment	0.006	0.001	−0.036	0.021
	(0.024)	(0.035)	(0.056)	(0.040)
Constant	0.497***	0.458***	0.433***	0.587***
	(0.017)	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.029)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

C Additional Analyses

C.1 Composite Outcome: Belief in Structural Racial Inequality

Believing in structural racial inequality arguably means (1) believing in the existence of racial inequality and (2) believing in a structural cause of racial inequality. In our main analyses, we analyze these outcomes separately without defining a single outcome measure that captures whether both conditions are satisfied. To conduct an exact test of whether exposure to historical information affects beliefs in structural racial inequality, we construct a binary outcome variable equal to 1 if the subject believes that Black-white inequalities exist *and* if they believe in either structural cause of Black-white inequality, and 0 otherwise.

Figure S1. Treatment Effects on Belief in Structural Racial Inequality (Study 1)

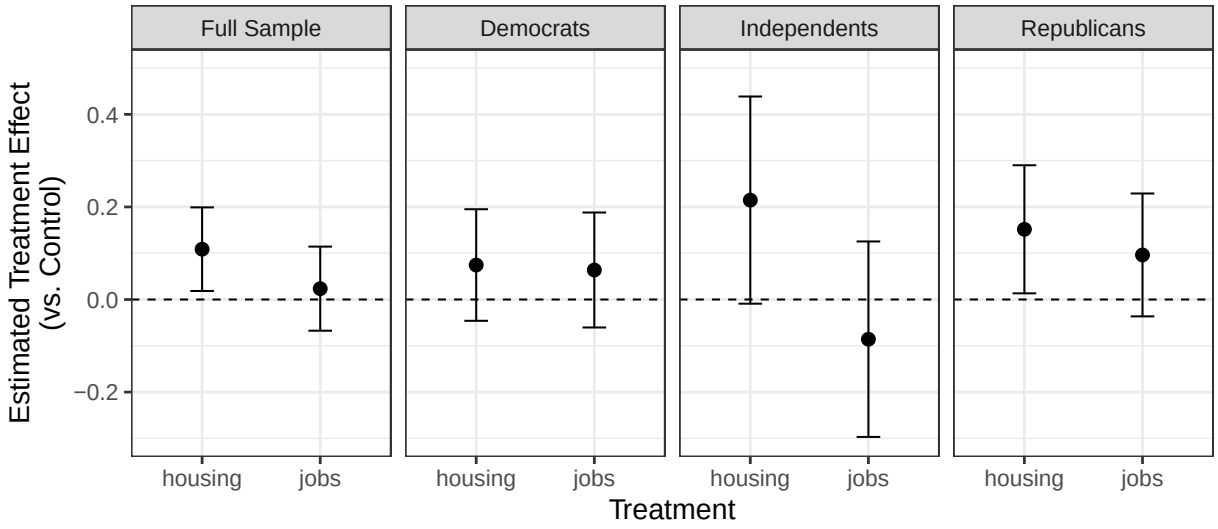
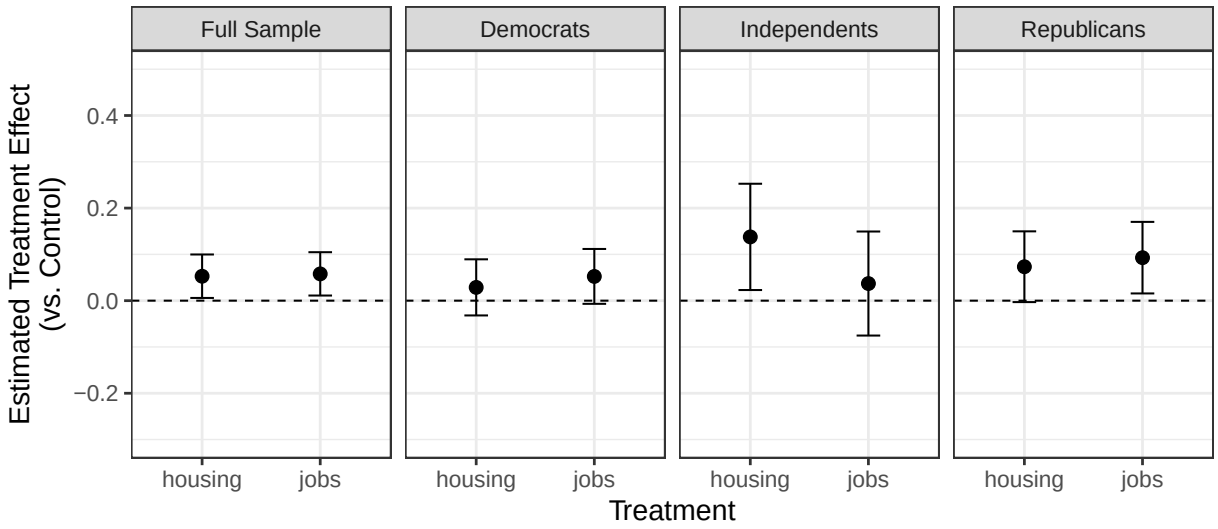


Figure S2. Treatment Effects on Belief in Structural Racial Inequality (Study 2)



C.2 Order Effects: Effect of Asking Racial Resentment Battery Before or After the Modified GSS Battery

Table S7. No Order Effects between Racial Resentment Items and Modified GSS Items (Study 1)

	RR Scale	Discrim	Educ Opp	In-Born Ability	No Motivation	Family Instability
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Order of RR and Modified GSS Items	−0.077	−0.011	−0.044	−0.040	0.021	0.041
	(0.081)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.025)	(0.034)	(0.038)
Constant	0.026	0.508***	0.484***	0.141***	0.269***	0.459***
	(0.056)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.017)	(0.023)	(0.026)
Observations	702	702	702	702	702	702

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The treatment variable is coded 1 if the racial resentment items are asked first (before the modified GSS items) and 0 if asked second (after the modified GSS items).

Table S8. Order Effects between Racial Resentment Items and Modified GSS Items (Study 2)

	RR Scale	Discrim	Educ Opp	In-Born Ability	No Motivation	Family Instability
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Order of RR and Modified GSS Items	0.00004	−0.049**	−0.036*	−0.017	0.026	0.016
	(0.043)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.020)
Constant	−0.070**	0.564***	0.491***	0.131***	0.283***	0.476***
	(0.031)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Observations	2,570	2,570	2,570	2,570	2,570	2,570

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The treatment variable is coded 1 if the racial resentment items are asked first (before the modified GSS items) and 0 if asked second (after the modified GSS items).

Table S9. Order and Treatment Interaction Effects Racial Resentment Items and Modified GSS Items (Study 2)

	RR Scale	Discrim	Educ Opp	In-Born Ability	No Motivation	Family Instability
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
rr_racdif_order	−0.105	0.013	0.012	−0.018	0.004	−0.025
	(0.074)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.034)
treathousing	−0.154**	0.113***	0.038	0.031	−0.047	−0.059*
	(0.075)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.031)	(0.034)
treatjobs	−0.060	0.065*	0.058*	0.032	−0.007	−0.041
	(0.076)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.023)	(0.032)	(0.035)
rr_racdif_order:treathousing	0.215**	−0.113**	−0.102**	0.013	0.035	0.028
	(0.105)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.032)	(0.044)	(0.048)
rr_racdif_order:treatjobs	0.101	−0.070	−0.046	−0.007	0.031	0.092*
	(0.105)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.032)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Constant	0.002	0.505***	0.459***	0.110***	0.301***	0.510***
	(0.053)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Observations	2,570	2,570	2,570	2,570	2,570	2,570

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The treatment variable is coded 1 if the racial resentment items are asked first (before the modified GSS items) and 0 if asked second (after the modified GSS items).

C.3 Alternative Outcome: Belief in Structural Explanations Index

Table S10. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Structural Causes of Inequality Index (Study 1)

	DV: Belief in Structural Causes of Inequality Index			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	0.109***	0.061	0.178*	0.191***
	(0.038)	(0.052)	(0.092)	(0.058)
Jobs Treatment	0.077**	0.109**	−0.038	0.163***
	(0.038)	(0.053)	(0.089)	(0.057)
Constant	0.421***	0.577***	0.413***	0.169***
	(0.027)	(0.037)	(0.059)	(0.043)
Observations	702	338	115	249

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S11. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Structural Causes of Inequality Index (Study 2)

	DV: Belief in Structural Causes of Inequality Index			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	0.022	−0.001	0.104**	0.041
	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.049)	(0.032)
Jobs Treatment	0.031	0.017	0.049	0.059*
	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.048)	(0.032)
Constant	0.489***	0.660***	0.369***	0.304***
	(0.014)	(0.019)	(0.033)	(0.023)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

C.4 Alternative Outcome: Belief in Individual/Cultural Explanations Index

Table S12. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Individual/Cultural Causes of Inequality Index (Study 1)

	DV: Belief in Individual/Cultural Causes of Inequality Index			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	−0.021	−0.055	−0.013	0.002
	(0.029)	(0.040)	(0.064)	(0.049)
Jobs Treatment	0.013	−0.036	−0.030	0.067
	(0.029)	(0.041)	(0.063)	(0.049)
Constant	0.296***	0.296***	0.225***	0.343***
	(0.020)	(0.029)	(0.042)	(0.036)
Observations	702	338	115	249

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S13. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Individual/Cultural Causes of Inequality Index (Study 2)

	DV: Belief in Individual/Cultural Causes of Inequality Index			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	−0.012	−0.004	−0.060*	−0.019
	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.033)	(0.025)
Jobs Treatment	0.015	0.020	0.005	0.001
	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.033)	(0.025)
Constant	0.300***	0.252***	0.253***	0.396***
	(0.010)	(0.014)	(0.023)	(0.018)
Observations	2,570	1,218	431	921

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

*p<0.2; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

C.5 Treatment Effects among White Americans

Table S14. Treatment Effects on Belief in the Existence of Black-White Inequality (Study 1)

	DV: Existence of Black-White Inequality			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	0.107**	0.012	0.272**	0.089***
	(0.048)	(0.060)	(0.110)	(0.027)
Jobs Treatment	0.008	0.026	−0.037	0.037
	(0.047)	(0.062)	(0.101)	(0.027)
Constant	0.612***	0.804***	0.569***	0.633***
	(0.033)	(0.041)	(0.072)	(0.019)
Observations	498	201	82	1,490

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group. The outcome variable is coded 1=Yes, 0.5=Don't Know, 0=No.

Table S15. Treatment Effects on Belief in the Existence of Black-White Inequality (Study 2)

	DV: Existence of Black-White Inequality			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	0.047**	0.003	0.149***	0.049***
	(0.023)	(0.029)	(0.056)	(0.018)
Jobs Treatment	0.013	0.045	−0.037	0.032*
	(0.023)	(0.028)	(0.054)	(0.018)
Constant	0.731***	0.851***	0.674***	0.725***
	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.037)	(0.013)
Observations	1,792	712	292	2,785

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group. The outcome variable is coded 1=Yes, 0.5=Don't Know, 0=No.

Table S16. Treatment Effects on Racial Resentment (Study 1)

	DV: Racial Resentment			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	−0.183	−0.214	−0.368	−0.204
	(0.119)	(0.172)	(0.268)	(0.149)
Jobs Treatment	−0.005	−0.109	−0.188	−0.102
	(0.117)	(0.178)	(0.245)	(0.145)
Constant	0.215**	−0.345***	0.414**	0.790***
	(0.084)	(0.119)	(0.176)	(0.109)
Observations	498	201	82	215

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S17. Treatment Effects on Racial Resentment (Study 2)

	DV: Racial Resentment			
	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Housing Treatment	−0.024	−0.017	−0.406***	−0.089
	(0.063)	(0.094)	(0.140)	(0.079)
Jobs Treatment	0.025	0.084	0.030	−0.195**
	(0.063)	(0.093)	(0.135)	(0.080)
Constant	0.087**	−0.542***	0.291***	0.698***
	(0.044)	(0.062)	(0.093)	(0.057)
Observations	1,792	712	292	788

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S18. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Different Causes of Inequality (Study 1)

	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DV: Discrimination Against Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.216***	0.168**	0.417***	0.248***
	(0.054)	(0.080)	(0.135)	(0.076)
Jobs Treatment	0.093*	0.060	0.109	0.208***
	(0.054)	(0.083)	(0.124)	(0.074)
Constant	0.352***	0.568***	0.310***	0.113**
	(0.038)	(0.056)	(0.089)	(0.055)
Observations	498	201	82	215
DV: No Chance for Education to Rise Out of Poverty				
Housing Treatment	0.014	−0.049	0.075	0.094
	(0.055)	(0.082)	(0.139)	(0.079)
Jobs Treatment	0.009	0.053	−0.057	0.083
	(0.054)	(0.086)	(0.127)	(0.077)
Constant	0.424***	0.608***	0.379***	0.226***
	(0.039)	(0.057)	(0.091)	(0.058)
Observations	498	201	82	215
DV: Less In-Born Ability to Learn among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.008	−0.016	−0.013	0.047
	(0.036)	(0.058)	(0.085)	(0.055)
Jobs Treatment	0.020	−0.030	−0.007	0.084
	(0.035)	(0.060)	(0.078)	(0.053)
Constant	0.109***	0.149***	0.103*	0.065
	(0.025)	(0.040)	(0.056)	(0.040)
Observations	498	201	82	215
DV: No Motivation or Willpower Among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	−0.080	−0.080	−0.163	−0.079
	(0.051)	(0.069)	(0.124)	(0.085)
Jobs Treatment	−0.071	−0.053	−0.119	−0.110
	(0.050)	(0.072)	(0.113)	(0.083)
Constant	0.352***	0.257***	0.345***	0.468***
	(0.036)	(0.048)	(0.082)	(0.062)
Observations	498	201	82	215
DV: Family Instability in Black Community				
Housing Treatment	0.008	−0.045	0.122	−0.002
	(0.055)	(0.084)	(0.132)	(0.086)
Jobs Treatment	0.066	−0.046	0.081	0.138*
	(0.055)	(0.088)	(0.120)	(0.083)
Constant	0.455***	0.486***	0.241***	0.516***
	(0.039)	(0.058)	(0.087)	(0.063)
Observations	498	201	82	215

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

Table S19. Treatment Effects on Beliefs in Different Causes of Inequality (Study 2)

	Full Sample	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DV: Discrimination Against Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.050*	0.041	0.130*	0.095**
	(0.029)	(0.041)	(0.072)	(0.040)
Jobs Treatment	−0.002	0.001	0.042	0.041
	(0.029)	(0.041)	(0.069)	(0.041)
Constant	0.476***	0.709***	0.376***	0.260***
	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.047)	(0.029)
Observations	1,792	712	292	788
DV: No Chance for Education to Rise Out of Poverty				
Housing Treatment	0.005	−0.008	0.129*	0.018
	(0.029)	(0.044)	(0.070)	(0.041)
Jobs Treatment	0.035	0.046	0.006	0.079*
	(0.029)	(0.044)	(0.067)	(0.041)
Constant	0.441***	0.615***	0.330***	0.297***
	(0.020)	(0.029)	(0.046)	(0.030)
Observations	1,792	712	292	788
DV: Less In-Born Ability to Learn among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	0.032*	0.032	0.048	0.018
	(0.018)	(0.026)	(0.040)	(0.030)
Jobs Treatment	0.038**	0.043*	0.066*	0.016
	(0.018)	(0.026)	(0.038)	(0.030)
Constant	0.083***	0.065***	0.046*	0.118***
	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.026)	(0.021)
Observations	1,792	712	292	788
DV: No Motivation or Willpower Among Blacks				
Housing Treatment	−0.010	0.023	−0.117*	−0.054
	(0.026)	(0.033)	(0.064)	(0.044)
Jobs Treatment	0.029	0.055*	0.023	−0.036
	(0.026)	(0.033)	(0.061)	(0.044)
Constant	0.292***	0.135***	0.294***	0.467***
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.042)	(0.032)
Observations	1,792	712	292	788
DV: Family Instability in Black Community				
Housing Treatment	−0.028	−0.049	−0.197***	0.023
	(0.029)	(0.045)	(0.070)	(0.043)
Jobs Treatment	0.021	−0.013	−0.050	0.057
	(0.029)	(0.044)	(0.067)	(0.044)
Constant	0.483***	0.429***	0.468***	0.549***
	(0.020)	(0.030)	(0.046)	(0.032)
Observations	1,792	712	292	788

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Cells contain OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The omitted reference category is the control group.

D Research Ethics Statement

This study is approved by [Institution IRB and protocol # redacted for review]. Participants were not compensated directly by the researchers. Rather, the researchers paid Lucid to recruit respondents through other panel providers. These panel providers compensated their panelists directly. Both studies use diverse, general population samples of U.S. adults. Because we recruit U.S. adult general population samples, the participant pools, study population of interest, and study samples are not comprised primarily of vulnerable or marginalized groups; moreover, all participants were able to opt out of the study at any time. Our research did not differentially benefit/harm particular groups.