

Rage Against the Page: Race-Conscious Education and the Emotional Mobilization of White Americans

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Abstract

Why do some white Americans mobilize against race-conscious education? We argue that educational content, challenging colorblind ideology—the belief that merit, not race, determines life outcomes—triggers anger among white Americans, and anger drives political participation. Using an original survey experiment (N = 1,300), we randomly assign white respondents to textbook excerpts that describe the Black-white unemployment gap as either an open question or the product of racial (dis)advantage. We find that structural attribution induces cross-partisan anger that mediates intent to engage with local school boards and to donate their survey reward. Open-ended responses reveal that while white Democrats and Republicans express comparable quantities of anger, the quality of anger differs: some Democrats are angry that racial inequality persists; others, like Republicans, reject structural explanations entirely. A companion experiment confirms that non-racial forms of discrimination elicit no comparable increases in anger, isolating racial colorblindness as the mechanism.

Word Count: 8,787

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Compliance with Ethical Standards This study was deemed exempt by the institutional review board at the authors' institution on 08/28/2022, and the authors confirm that participants gave informed consent to participate and to have the results of this study published. The authors also report no conflicts of interest.

Introduction

Why have some white Americans engaged in political action to oppose the teaching of “critical race theory” in public schools? The dominant narratives surrounding the anti-CRT movement cast these battles as one more front in a familiar partisan war: Republicans mobilize against initiatives like Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) as well as what they believe to be CRT, while Democrats support these policies. But existing work relies on the assumption that mobilization against race-conscious education stems from partisan-elite messaging rather than deeply held ideological beliefs. Since at least the 1980s, white racial attitudes have increasingly sorted along partisan lines, especially on racial resentment (Engelhardt, 2021; Jardina and Ollerenshaw, 2022). But within political science, far less attention has been given to a different ideology of race, an ideology that goes directly to the heart of debates concerning critical race theory: colorblindness.

Colorblindness (or colorblind racism) is a racial attitude that rejects or *minimizes* structural racism as an explanation for racial disparities between Blacks and whites. (BonillaSilva, 2006; Mills, 2017). In a post-Civil Rights, post-Obama America, the notion that merit matters more than race enjoys widespread support among white Americans, including liberal white Democrats. (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011). A core feature of this ideology is meritocratic individualism: that is, the belief that hard work, not race, determines life outcomes. Meritocratic individualism is not just the foundation of colorblind ideology; it is also the explicit target of federal, state, and local legislation designed to restrict how racism is discussed in schools. For example, President Donald Trump’s 2020 “Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping” in federal workforce training explicitly prohibits materials that claim “Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by a particular race to oppress another race” (Trump, Donald J., 2020). According to data compiled by UCLA Law School, analogues of this language appear in hundreds of bills, statements and policies introduced across state legislatures and school boards throughout the country since 2020 (Alexander et al., N.d.).

Given the cross-party prevalence of colorblind racial attitudes among white Americans and the explicit relationship between colorblind ideology and policies that restrict discussion of race and racial discrimination in schools, we propose there is more to the story of antiCRT mobilization than partisan sorting (Safarpour et al., 2024; Deshpande et al., 2024) or elite cues (Giersch, 2025) alone.

Building on research in political psychology about the racially asymmetric effects of anger on mobilization (Banks, 2014; Phoenix, 2019), we argue that white Americans become angry when confronted with the prospect of colorblind ideologies being challenged in public schools through textbooks that introduce the idea of structural racial (dis)advantage. It is this anger (not shame, fear, or any other negative emotion) that then drives an increase in white participation. The key cleavage, in our account, is not partisan disagreement over *whether* race matters, but divergent emotional reactions to explanations of *how* it matters. When the discussion turns from the general existence of racial inequality to the implication that white Americans benefit from racial advantages, this provokes anger among some whites whose meritocratic beliefs are threatened. Because this anger operates through racial ideology (colorblindness) rather than partisanship, we expect it to mobilize white Democrats and white Republicans alike. We further expect the substance of that anger to differ: some white Democrats will be angry that white racial advantage harms Black Americans, while others will be angry because the claim that race shapes outcomes challenges their belief in meritocratic individualism.

We test these expectations using an original survey fielded on a nationally diverse sample (N =1,300) of U.S. adults. Leveraging real-world disputes about the racial content of textbooks, we induce anger in white Americans by randomly assigning them to read a fictional textbook excerpt that either describes the causes of a Black-white gap in unemployment as an open question or as the express result of structural racial (dis)advantage. We then measure the quantity of anger using standardized emotion measures and estimate the mediation effects of anger on two participation outcomes using the framework developed by Imai et al. (2011)

and Tingley et al. (2014). We further assess the quality of induced anger using text analysis of open-ended reflections.

We find that a textbook excerpt that identifies structural racial (dis)advantage as the cause of the unemployment gap between white and Black Americans induces cross-partisan increases in anger among white Americans. We further find this anger mediates both intent to engage with local school boards and the intent to donate their survey reward. While we observe symmetric increases in the quantity of anger across parties, we find substantial heterogeneity in the *quality* of anger among white Democrats. Quantitative analyses of open-ended reflections show that some white Democrats express anger that structural racism harms Black people while others (much like white Republicans) reject any link between employment and race, invoking work ethic or other individual- or group-level factors instead. Our results are robust to a number of checks, including a sensitivity analysis of the correlation of error terms in our mediation model. Finally, to validate our theoretical claim that challenges to colorblindness (rather than challenges to discrimination or disparate treatment more generally) are the trigger for anger, we conduct a secondary experiment where national origin rather than race is identified as the basis of discrimination. Strikingly, we find no evidence that a textbook excerpt describing an unemployment gap between foreignborn (Canadian) and U.S.-born citizens elicits anger among white people, consistent with our argument that racial advantage is the trigger for threats to colorblindness.

Our findings challenge existing literature that characterizes white racial attitudes as being sorted neatly by partisanship. While white Democrats and Republicans remain divided on many racial issues, anger triggered by challenges to colorblind beliefs emerges as a cross-partisan force that mobilizes political participation. Many white Democrats, like their Republican counterparts, hold colorblind beliefs about racial inequality. These beliefs come into direct conflict with the stated goals of race-conscious education and training programs that call for more attention to the ways in which the benefits of hard work and effort are conditional on race. Thus, the school board battles described at the outset are expressions of a racial, not partisan, anger that party labels obscure rather than explain. In identifying the

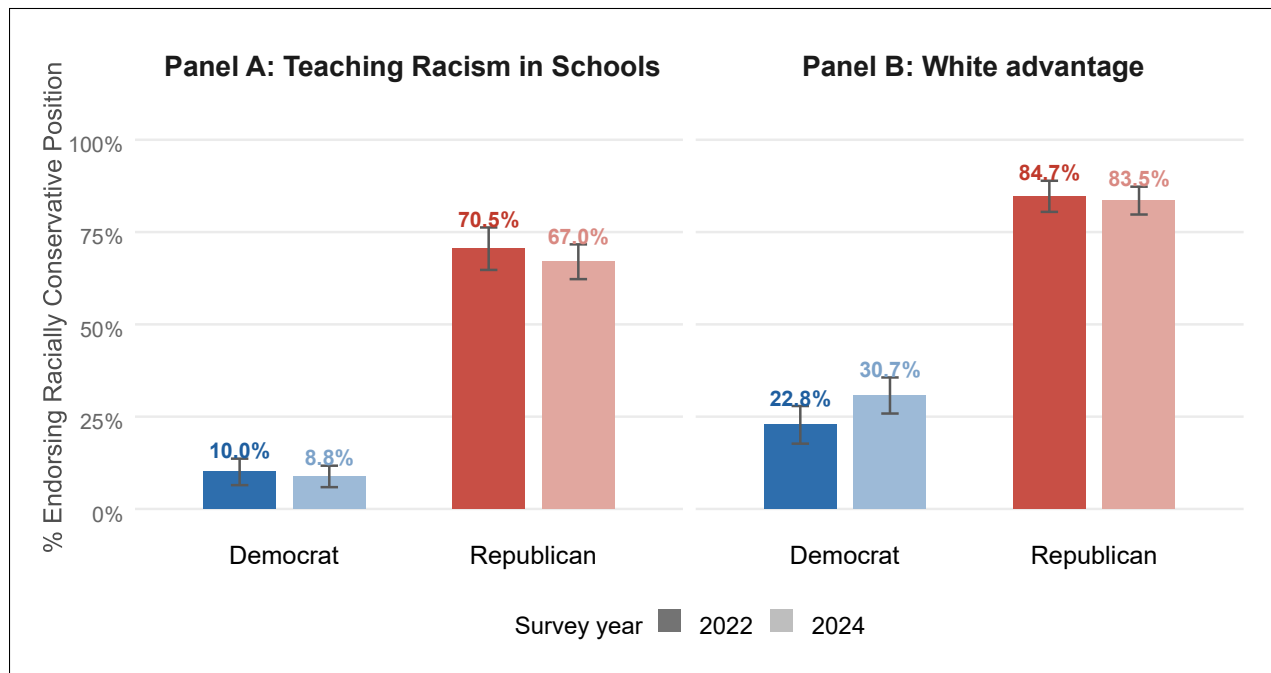
limits of partisanship as a proxy for racial politics, the paper calls for a more nuanced approach to the study of white racial attitudes and for more attention to the role of anger in mobilizing political behavior around race-conscious policies.

Racial Attitudes Beyond Partisan Sorting

Over the past several decades, white Democrats have become increasingly supportive of race-conscious policies, while white Republicans have become increasingly opposed to them (Engelhardt, 2021, 2023; Mikkelsen, 2025; Jardina and Ollerenshaw, 2022). But contemporary conflicts over race-conscious education are not simply disagreements over whether race matters politically; they are disagreements about *how* much weight should be given to structural racism as the cause of racial inequality *today*. Partisanship alone cannot fully explain where white Americans fall on this question. To illustrate the basis for this claim empirically, we turn to data from the 2022 and 2024 ANES pilot studies (American National Election Studies 2022, 2024). First, consider Figure 1 which shows white Democrats and Republicans' support for teaching about racism in schools and agreement with the position that white Americans have advantages in society due to their race. Panel A reproduces the familiar pattern documented throughout the literature on partisan sorting. White Republicans are substantially more likely than white Democrats to endorse minimizing discussions of race and racism in public schools. Viewed in isolation, these results suggest that racial attitudes surrounding education have become sharply polarized along partisan lines.

But Panel B reveals a different pattern, however. When respondents are instead asked whether being white confers structural advantages, endorsement of a opposition increases substantially among white Democrats. Although white Democrats remain less likely than Republicans to reject structural advantage, they become considerably more divided than they appeared on the school curriculum question. If partisan sorting alone explained white

Figure 1: White Democrats are More Divided About White Advantage than About Teaching “Racism”



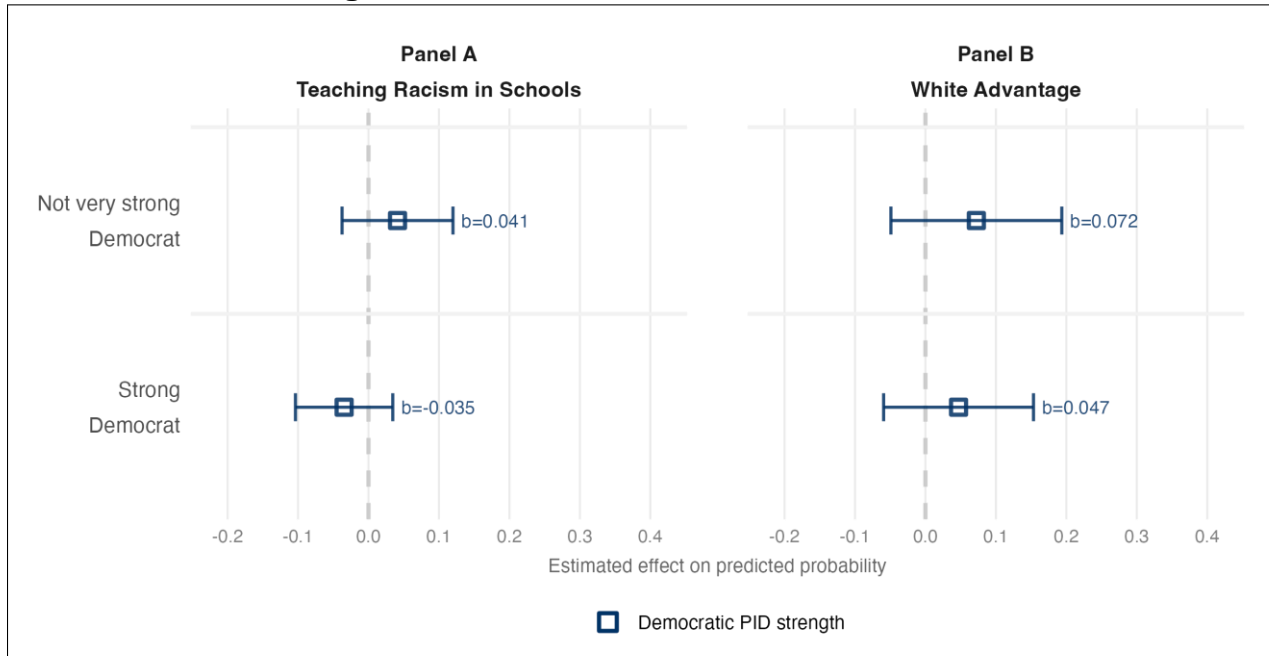
White respondents’ endorsement of racially conservative positions on two ANES pilot questions. White partisan gaps in racial attitudes depend on question framing. Panel A reports the percentage of white respondents who believe schools place too much emphasis on race and racism in ANES 2022 or that schools should place little to no emphasis on racism’s impact in society in ANES 2024. Panel B reports the percentage denying that being white confers structural advantages. Party identification is measured using the seven-point ANES scale, with partisan leaners grouped with their respective parties and pure independents excluded. Darker shaded bars indicate 2022 estimates and lighter shaded bars indicate 2024 estimates. Bars represent survey-weighted percentages and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. White respondents only. *N*: 2022—Democrats = 374, Republicans = 320; 2024—Democrats = 412–416, Republicans = 501–505, depending on item nonresponse.

racial attitudes about the effects of structural racism, we would expect Democratic respondents to exhibit comparable levels of agreement across both questions. Instead, substantial heterogeneity emerges once attention shifts from whether schools should discuss racism to whether racial inequality reflects structural advantage.

Figure 2 takes a step toward explaining this heterogeneity. Using white Democrats from the 2024 ANES Pilot Study, we estimate survey-weighted linear probability models predicting endorsement of the two attitudes shown in Figure 1. Specifically, we model support for minimizing schools’ emphasis on racism and denial that whites benefit from structural

advantage as functions of Democratic partisan strength. If the heterogeneity observed in Figure 1 simply reflects differences in partisan commitment, stronger Democratic identifiers should be less likely to endorse colorblind positions than Democratic leaners.

Figure 2: Democratic Partisanship Strength Does Not Predict White Attitudes About Teaching Racism or White Advantage



The likelihood of white Democrats adopting racially conservative positions on two substantive dimensions, teaching about racism in schools and white structural advantage, modeled as a function of Democratic partisan strength. Democratic partisan strength is measured using the three Democratic categories of the seven-point ANES party identification scale, with Lean Democrat serving as the baseline. Points show coefficient estimates from survey-weighted linear probability models estimated among white Democrats in the 2024 ANES Pilot. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Panel A models support for minimizing schools' emphasis on racism's impact in society; Panel B models denial of white structural advantage. Models include age, education, and gender as controls. Sample restricted to white Democrats, including Democratic leaners (N=412–414, depending on item nonresponse).

The results provide little support for this expectation. Democratic partisan strength is not significantly associated with either outcome. Strong Democrats are no less likely than Democratic leaners to reject structural accounts of racial inequality or to oppose emphasizing racism in schools. These findings suggest that the heterogeneity observed in Figure 1 is not simply a consequence of weaker Democratic identification or tighter partisan sorting.

Importantly, this does not imply that established measures of racial attitudes have become uninformative. These measures remain useful for identifying respondents who reject structural explanations of racial inequality. Our argument is not that biological racism or racial resentment have ceased to matter. Rather, we propose that contemporary debates over race-conscious education activate a broader ideological conflict concerning how racial inequality should be understood, a conflict rooted in values that are deeply held across party lines.

Research on the asymmetric nature of partisan coalitions further suggests why this variation should be especially consequential among white Democrats. Republican identity increasingly sorts onto a relatively narrow set of social identities, whereas the Democratic coalition remains substantially more heterogeneous (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016; Mason and Wronski, 2018). Thus, shared partisan identity does not necessarily imply agreement on a number of issues among Democrats, including the causes of and consequences of racial disparities. White Democrats may share preferences for Democratic candidates and broad support for policies like considering race as one among other factors in college admissions (affirmative action). But, the ideological foundations of these preferences can vary widely and lead to heterogeneity in attitudes about how and when to bring structural racial advantages to the fore.

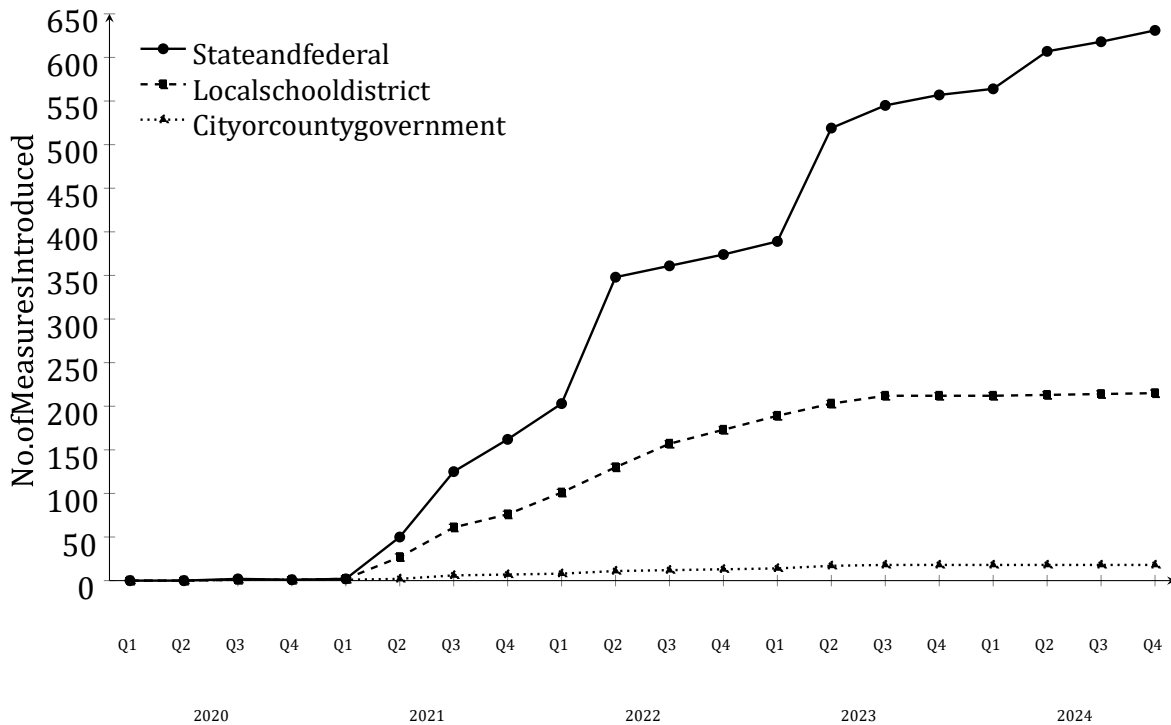
Our theoretical framework introduces colorblind racism as the appropriate lens for evaluating white emotional and behavioral reactions to the question of structural racial (dis)advantage. Colorblind ideology is grounded in principles of abstract liberalism, emphasizing individual responsibility, meritocracy, and equal treatment while minimizing the role of structural discrimination in producing racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Mills, 2017). Rather than denying that racial disparities exist, colorblind ideology attributes those disparities primarily to differences in effort, culture, or individual behavior. The widespread appeal of these principles allows colorblind beliefs to persist across partisan coalitions, including among many white Democrats (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011). As a result, individuals who otherwise identify with the Democratic Party may nevertheless reject structural explanations of racial

inequality *when* those explanations challenge their deeply held belief in meritocratic individualism.

This framework is particularly relevant for contemporary conflicts surrounding raceconscious education and training tools like DEI initiatives and what is popularly known as critical race theory content. While public education has long served as a political battleground over race (from resistance to school desegregation to conflicts over bussing and affirmative action), the resurgence of *local* school board politics beginning in 2020 renewed latent disagreements over *how* Americans should understand racial inequality in a nation that is ostensibly free and meritocratic (Watson, 2023). But the CRT debate is not just rhetorical. Disagreement about what children are taught with regard to racism and its continuing consequences has been the catalyst for a sharp increase in *anti*-Critical Race Theory policies (L’opez and Sleeter, 2023).

We can see evidence for this rise in anti-CRT policymaking in Figure 3, which plots the number of state, federal, county, city, and local school district measures introduced between 2020 and 2024 seeking to prohibit or restrict educational materials. These prohibitions specifically targeted content that: invokes Critical Race Theory or the 1619 Project, describes the U.S. as fundamentally racist or sexist, or content which suggests that traits such as hard work or the concept of meritocracy are racist or sexist. (Alexander et al., N.d.). More than 800 such measures have been introduced or enacted during this period. Debates over how schools explain racial inequality have thus become a substantive arena of policymaking, with downstream consequences for the design and implementation of educational content across the country.

Figure 3: Policies Restricting Discussion of Racism in Education by Level of Government, 2020– 2024



Note: Table produced from data compiled by the University of California CRT Forward Project (Alexander et al., 2023).

Colorblindness, Anger, and Political Participation

If partisanship alone cannot explain preferences for discussing racism in schools or attitudes about structural racial advantage, what accounts for mobilization against race-conscious educational content? We argue, educational content that attributes racial inequality to structural, racial advantages mobilizes white Americans by activating anger. This expectation builds on work showing that white Americans' beliefs about the causes of racial inequality are closely tied to emotional reactions, especially anger (Banks and Valentino, 2012; Banks, 2014). However, our argument shifts the emphasis away from racial resentment as the primary trigger. Rather than stemming from resentment towards Black Americans, we argue that anger can emerge when colorblind beliefs about merit, effort, and deserved status are challenged. In this sense, the relevant threat is not only that Black Americans are portrayed as disadvantaged, but that White Americans are portrayed as advantaged. At this stage, our

theory concerns the *quantity* of anger rather than its *quality*: white respondents may become angry for different reasons, but we expect anger to increase across the board when schools are described as teaching that racial discrimination shapes socioeconomic outcomes. Thus, we expect anger activation to be symmetric across parties. That is, both white Democrats and white Republicans should express increased anger when educational content refers to structural racial advantages. This leads to our first hypothesis “*Anger activation*”:

Hypothesis 1: Cross-Partisan Anger Activation *White respondents who learn that local schools may teach students that racial discrimination contributes to racial inequality will experience more anger than those who do not receive this information.*

Second, to verify that challenges to colorblindness are triggering emotional reactions, we consider the *quality* of anger expressed by white Americans. We argue that anger should be especially pronounced when racial inequality is framed in terms of white advantage rather than Black disadvantage. This is because colorblind ideology rests on the claim that race should not matter and that social outcomes largely reflect individual effort, ability, and merit (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Mills, 2017). Information that attributes racial inequality to discrimination challenges this worldview by shifting responsibility away from individual behavior and toward social structure. In the context of public education, this challenge is especially politically charged because schools are not merely presenting information; they are authorizing a particular explanation of racial inequality for children. If respondents hold colorblind understandings of race, they should experience such curricula as threatening because the material disputes the legitimacy of meritocratic explanations for white advantage.

This logic is consistent with appraisal theories of emotion. Anger arises when individuals perceive a threat or violation, identify an external source of blame, and feel motivated to confront or control the threat (Lazarus, 1991; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985; Lerner and Keltner, 2001). When textbook material attributes racial inequality to discrimination, respondents

who reject structural explanations may blame schools, educators, or political actors for promoting an account of inequality they view as illegitimate. In this context, anger is not simply a response to racial inequality itself. It is a response to the institutional endorsement of a structural explanation that challenges colorblind and meritocratic beliefs. A Black disadvantage frame emphasizes harms experienced by an outgroup, while a white advantage frame directly implicates the advantaged ingroup and challenges meritocratic self-understandings.

Thus, when racial inequality is framed as reflecting Black disadvantage rather than White advantage, we argue that white respondents will differ in the amount of anger they experience. Whereas information about Black disadvantage emphasizes the costs that discrimination imposes on Black Americans, information about white advantage highlights the benefits that discrimination confers on white Americans. We argue that the latter frame poses a more direct threat to meritocratic beliefs by implying that whites' social position may reflect unearned structural advantages rather than individual effort alone. Prior work shows that whites often respond defensively to information about white privilege by denying its relevance, emphasizing personal hardship, or distancing themselves from group advantage (Knowles et al., 2014; Phillips and Lowery, 2015). We therefore expect White advantage frames to elicit stronger anger than Black disadvantage frames. This logic motivates our second hypothesis, *"Meritocratic Threat"*:

Hypothesis 2: Meritocratic Threat *White respondents, regardless of partisanship, who learn that local schools may teach students that racial discrimination advantages White Americans will experience more anger than those who learn that racial discrimination disadvantages Black Americans.*

Third, we argue that anger, long understood as an approach-oriented and mobilizing emotion (Lazarus, 1991; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985; Lerner and Keltner, 2001), should increase political participation. Unlike fear, which often produces uncertainty and motivates information seeking, anger encourages individuals to confront perceived threats directly

(Valentino, Gregorowicz and Groenendyk, 2009; Valentino et al., 2011; Vasilopoulos, 2018). In the context of school politics, anger should therefore increase willingness to engage with the institution perceived as responsible for promoting educational content that challenges core beliefs about individual merit and effort. Consequently, respondents who become angry in response to race-conscious curricula should be more likely to express intentions to attend school board meetings, speak during public comment, volunteer, run for school board, or donate their survey reward. Given this, we present our third hypothesis, “*Anger Mobilization*”:

Hypothesis 3: Anger Mobilization *White respondents who experience increased anger after exposure to race-conscious education material will be more likely to express intention to participate in school board politics and to donate their survey reward.*

Finally, we argue that the effects of race-conscious curricula should not depend primarily on partisan identification. Three considerations motivate this expectation. First, although media coverage of opposition to race-conscious education has focused largely on conservatives, most school board elections are officially nonpartisan.¹ Party cues in local school board politics are therefore weak, giving respondents little reason to interpret these educational issues through a partisan lens. Second, substantial evidence suggests that white Democrats and white Republicans overlap in their beliefs about the extent to which racial inequality reflects structural versus individual causes (Feldman and Huddy, 2005). In particular, both groups endorse core elements of colorblind ideology, albeit to differing degrees (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011; Davis and Wilson, 2021). Finally, if anger arises when individuals perceive information as threatening deeply held meritocratic beliefs, then political mobilization should depend more on adherence to those beliefs than on partisan

¹ According to data collected by Ballotpedia, approximately 90% of school boards across the country are elected in nonpartisan elections.

identity itself. We therefore expect exposure to race-conscious curricula to increase anger and political engagement among white respondents across party lines. This logic motivates our final hypothesis, “*Cross-Partisan Anger Mobilization*”:

Hypothesis 4: Cross-Partisan Anger Mobilization *Anger will mediate the effect of race-conscious education material on school board participation for both white Democrats and white Republicans.*

Experimental Design & Estimation Strategy

To estimate the causal effects of whites’ racial attitudes and anger on school board political participation, we designed and implemented a survey experiment ($n=2000$) fielded through a YouGov sample in the summer of 2023. 63% of our sample identified solely as non-Hispanic white, leaving us with a total of 1,300 respondents for analysis. The sample was evenly split between men and women.² Before random assignment to one of our three experimental conditions, we obtained consent from each respondent, asked basic demographic questions, and probed for partisanship with the ANES measure that includes partisan strength and the typical “leaner” questions.

Our design represents two important innovations in studies of white racial attitudes around education policy. First, existing experimental work in this area (Safarpour et al., 2024; Deshpande et al., 2024; Collins, 2024) uses stimuli with vague references to teaching about the legacy of racism to assess white support for teaching about racism in schools. This phrasing leaves room for the possibility that whites might enthusiastically support material on historical topics like chattel slavery and Jim Crow laws, but could altogether reject educational materials that identify present-day examples of racism creating disparities between Blacks and whites. Second, our design omits any overt references to “CRT” (Critical Race Theory) or “DEI” (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). These descriptive terms have proved

² Appendix B summarizes the demographics of our white sample.

to be of little use for assessing racial attitudes because they are so heavily partisan-coded. When someone says they oppose (favor) CRT, we learn very little about them beyond their partisan affiliation (Deshpande et al., 2024). Our design thus presents a novel test of how language about race that is not partisan-coded elicits emotional responses from white Americans.

For our experimental intervention, we informed respondents that a textbook company is considering changing one of its textbooks and is soliciting opinions on those changes. Respondents viewed one of three randomly assigned excerpts from a hypothetical middle school social studies textbook.³ Each excerpt includes the same bar chart depicting the gap in unemployment rates for White and Black Americans in 2020, reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In all three conditions, we kept the length of the excerpt roughly similar. Table 1 summarizes the manipulations in each condition. First, our control condition treats attribution for the racial gap in unemployment as an open question, framing the cause as a debate among economists. This condition allowed us to prime race without attributing the unemployment gap to racial discrimination.

Table 1: Summary of Experimental Stimuli (Social Studies Textbook Module)

Condition	Module Title	Framing
Control	What causes differences in unemployment by race?	No mention of racial discrimination
Easier for Whites	Does racial discrimination cause differences in unemployment by race?	Discrimination makes it easier for White Americans to get jobs
Harder for Blacks	Does racial discrimination cause differences in unemployment by race?	Discrimination makes it harder for Black Americans to get jobs

Note: All conditions included an identical image depicting the unemployment gap between Black and white Americans. Conditions vary *only* in whether and how the racial employment gap is attributed to *racial discrimination*. See Appendix C.1 for full treatment modules.

³ See the Appendix B for sampling procedures and consent procedures.

Next, our two treatment conditions include the same title for the bar chart, “Figure 5.6: Does racial discrimination cause differences in unemployment by race?” In the “Easier for whites” condition, we add an explanation about the unemployment gap by stating in bold font: “Economists find that racial discrimination makes it easier for White Americans to get jobs.” This graphic includes a “key term” defining “racial discrimination” as “when one group gets *better* opportunities than another group because of the color of their skin”.

In the “Harder for Blacks” condition, the explanation about the unemployment gap reads: “Economists find that racial discrimination makes it harder for Black Americans to get jobs.” Here, the key term defines racial discrimination as “when one group gets *worse* opportunities because of the color of their skin.”

Following the textbook intervention, we immediately measured our mediating variable: anger. Although some scholars caution against experimental designs that aim to identify mediators (Gerber and Green 2012), directly randomizing an emotion like anger runs the risk of altering the treatment itself. Following a well-established work on the mediating role of emotions (Valentino and Neuner 2017; Brader, Valentino and Suhay 2008, 2023; Valentino et al. 2008; Valentino, Gregorowicz and Groenendyk 2009; Izatt 2025), we incorporated design features that should help with reducing bias and strengthening causal inference. First, we randomized the order in which the eight emotion items appeared in the survey. While not equivalent to randomizing the mediator, this step helps minimize order effects, priming, or demand characteristics that could contaminate measurement. Second, immediately after the emotion battery, we asked respondents in an open-ended item to describe how the textbook made them feel. Following Pirlott and MacKinnon (2016)’s recommendations, this manipulation should enable us to gauge if the treatment increased negative affect in the theorized direction and provide evidence of the construct validity of our mediator.

Participants reported their intensity of emotion (from *not at all* to *extremely*) across eight emotions.⁴ Standard measures of emotions have exhibited that it is good practice to have two indicators on each emotional dimension (Valentino and Neuner, 2017; Mintz, Valentino and Wayne, 2021). As such, we operationalize anger by averaging how “angry” and “outraged” a respondent was.⁵ Likewise, we measure eight discrete emotions spanning both positive and negative valences, a common approach in political psychology that allows respondents to differentiate among related emotional reactions (e.g., anger versus fear) rather than simply reporting overall positive or negative affect (Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000). We then ask participants to write about how the excerpt made them feel in an open-ended format to allow us to identify with greater clarity *why* their emotions arose.

After testing for an emotional reaction, we measure our primary outcome variable, political engagement, with a battery of 6 questions. We ask how likely a participant is to attend a hypothetical school board meeting, make a comment in the next school board meeting, donate to the school board, run for the school board, and volunteer for the school board. We also asked respondents whether they would like to donate their YouGov reward to one of two fictitious organizations aimed at changing school curricula content.⁶

Results

Overall, we find strong support for our cross-party anger activation, anger mobilization and cross-party mobilization hypotheses but slightly weaker support for our meritocratic threat hypothesis. White Americans, Republican and Democrat alike, unambiguously express anger

⁴ Those eight emotions map onto 4 distinct ones, including happiness, shame, fear, and anger. The current paper centers on anger, thus the remaining emotions are beyond its scope. However, we report coefficients for this emotions in the Appendix. An example of how the emotions slider question appears is included in Appendix C.2.

⁵ We create an emotional index scale where 0 is a required click to distinguish between no emotion present and a non-response, 1-3 is “a little”, 4-5 “moderate”, and 6-7 “extreme”.

⁶ We asked if participants would donate their YouGov rewards. Those who agreed were directed to a screen explaining that they could keep their reward. The question gauges a more realistic probability of a respondent’s willingness to donate without requirements respondents to forego payment for their time.

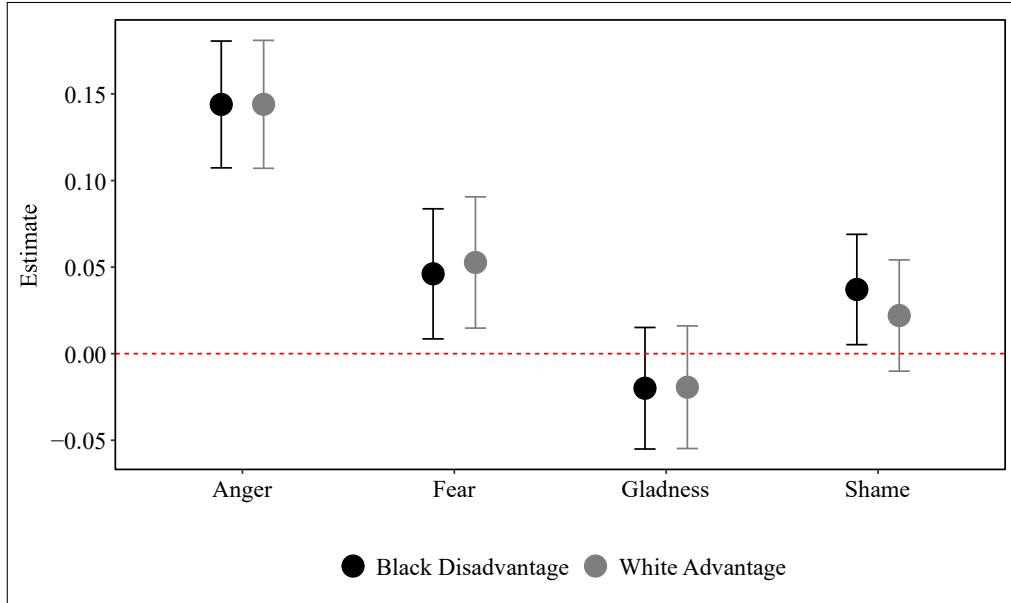
more than any other emotion when exposed to our treatments. Even though our control condition describes a substantial gap in unemployment between whites and Blacks, it is our treatment conditions, which attribute this gap to structural racial (dis)advantages that trigger large increases in anger and only marginal increases in fear and shame. We further find some evidence that this anger is motivated by challenges to colorblind beliefs among some white respondents, while others appear to be angered by racial *injustice*. Finally, we find a positive and significant mediating effect of anger on intent to participate in school board politics and to donate one's survey reward.

Cross-Partisan Anger Activation

Recall that Hypothesis 1 predicts that white respondents across the board will experience increased anger when learning that a textbook module will discuss how racial discrimination advantages whites. In Figure 4, we report the main treatment effects on four composite emotions among white respondents. The whiskers extending from the shape correspond to a 95% confidence interval; meaning we can be reasonably confident that respondents' emotional reactions were the product of which treatment condition they were exposed to as long as the whiskers do not cross the 0.0 threshold.

Our results show that anger is the dominant emotional response to the racial discrimination treatments. Both treatment conditions increase anger by about 14 percentage points relative to the control, moving anger from 0.3 in the control condition to ≈ 0.47 in both treatment conditions. The treatments also significantly increased two other emotions, fear (about 4%) and shame (about 5%), but these increases are much smaller in magnitude compared to anger. In other words, textbooks attributing racial disparities to white advantage and Black disadvantage make respondents a little more ashamed and afraid but *much* more angry. This result is consistent with our theory: challenges to colorblind ideology significantly (p-value $< .001$) increase white anger more than any other emotion.

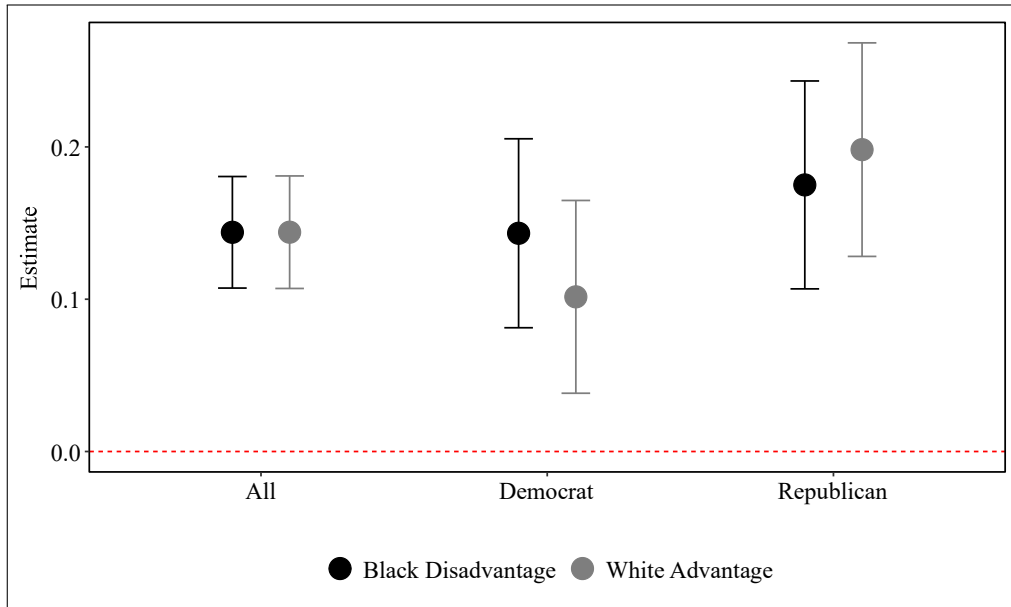
Figure 4: Effects of Attributing Unemployment Gap to White Advantage and Black Disadvantage on All Emotions



Note: Control (reference) condition for all models was bar chart of Black-white unemployment gap with no attributions to discrimination. Points are point estimates (OLS), bars are 95% confidence intervals. Red line indicates threshold for statistical significance at $p < .05$. Complete results in Appendix C.6

We further find that this anger activation persists when we disaggregate results by partisanship. Figure 5 plots the average treatment effect on anger for all white respondents, white Democrats, and white Republicans. White advantage and Black disadvantage treatments significantly ($p\text{-value} < .001$) increase anger among both white Democrats ($\beta = 0.14$) and white Republicans ($\beta = 0.18$). Although Republicans exhibit somewhat larger increases in anger relative to Democrats (18% v. 14%), white Democrats also respond with significantly greater anger when exposed to the White advantage frame. The quantity of anger is therefore broadly bipartisan, but its quality, as revealed by the open-ended responses, differs substantially within the Democratic coalition.

Figure 5: Effects of Attributing Unemployment Gap to Discrimination on Anger by Partisanship



Note: Treatment stimuli were textbooks describing discrimination *against* Black Americans (dark) and discrimination *in favor of* white Americans (gray) as the cause of the Black-white unemployment gap. Points are point estimates (OLS), bars are 95% confidence intervals. Red line indicates threshold for statistical significance at $p < .05$. Complete results in Appendix C.6 Points are point estimates (OLS). Bars are 95% Confidence Intervals. White respondents only.

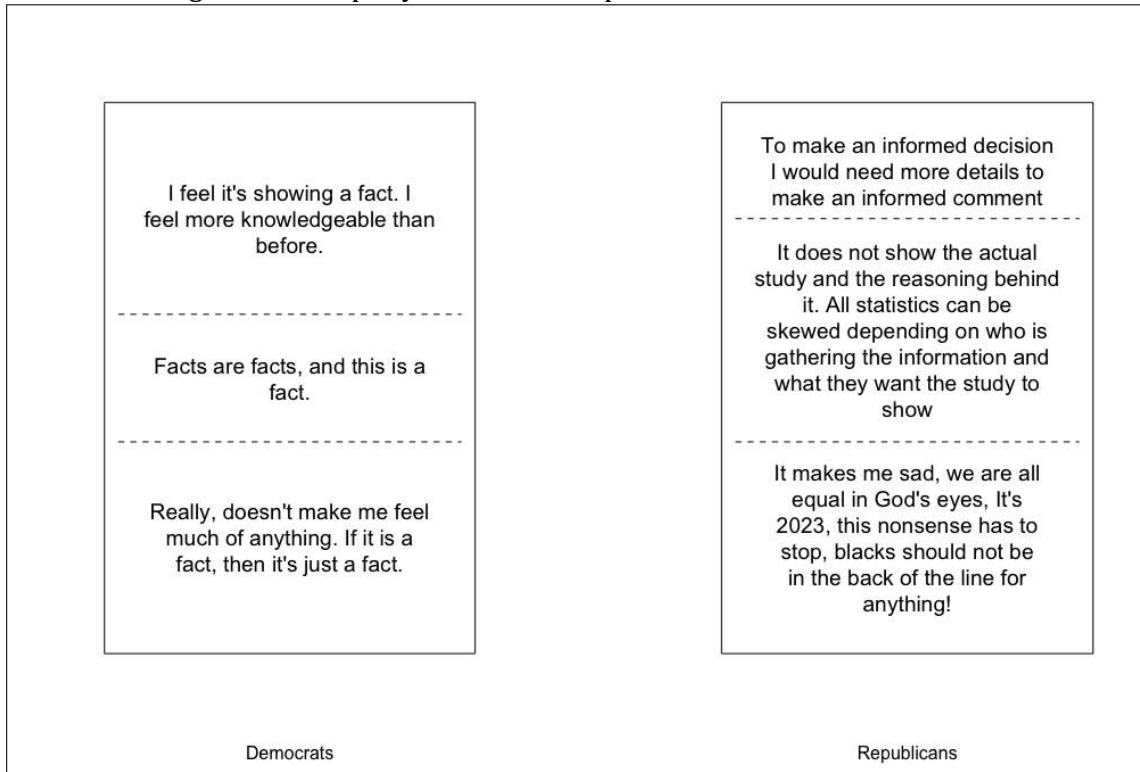
Surprisingly, we find that the white advantage and Black disadvantage conditions increase anger at the same rate. Thus, we do not yet find support for Hypothesis 2 on this first measure of anger. However, we will revisit Hypothesis 2 later when we examine the openended reflections. Overall, we can confirm Hypothesis 1 that anger is the dominant emotion among white respondents, regardless of partisanship.

Meritocratic Threat

To better understand the nature of respondents' anger, we asked each participant to describe, in their own words, how the textbook excerpt made them feel. These open-ended responses provide ample qualitative evidence about the underlying appraisals driving anger, allowing us to distinguish anger rooted in perceived challenges to meritocratic beliefs from anger arising for other reasons.

To demonstrate that the excerpts presented below are representative rather than selectively chosen, we identify *exemplary responses* using Structural Topic Modeling (STM).⁷Formally, exemplary responses are those that maximize the estimated prevalence of the dominant topic within each experimental condition. Let θ_{ik} denote the estimated prevalence of topic k in response i . For each condition c , we identify the dominant topic as $k_c^=$ $\text{argmax}_k \bar{\theta}_{ck}$. We then rank responses within condition c by θ_{ik_c} and present the three highest-ranked responses as exemplary cases. The excerpts below therefore represent the responses most characteristic of the dominant discourse within each experimental condition rather than illustrative quotations selected by the authors.

Figure 6: Exemplary Emotional Responses in the Control Condition

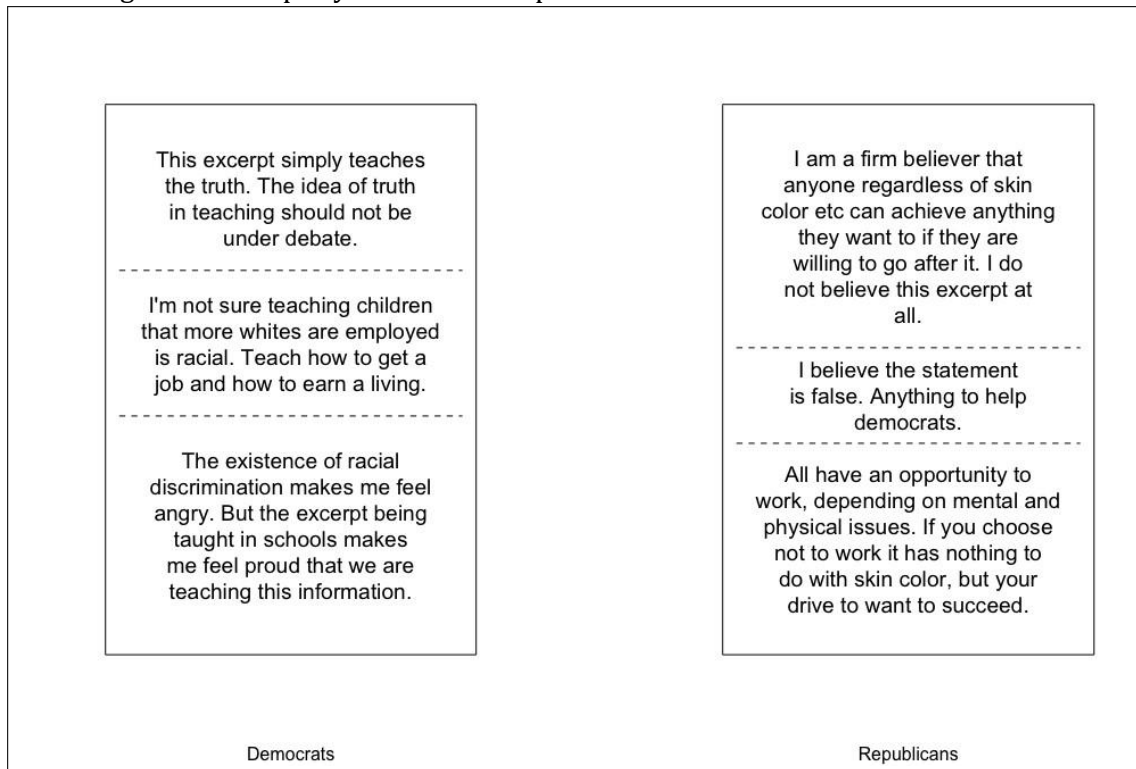


We present those exemplary responses by partisanship in Figures 6, 7, and 8. In the *control* condition (Fig 6), exemplary responses from both parties simply register the information as factual: a white Democrat notes that ‘*Facts are facts and this is a fact,*’ while a

⁷ See Roberts, Stewart and Tingley (N.d.) for details of the methodology.

white Republican explains that to make an informed decision *‘I would need more details to make an informed comment.’* Neither expresses threat, confirming that unqualified information about the unemployment gap does not, on its own, activate a defensive reaction.

Figure 7: Exemplary Emotional Responses in the “Easier for Whites” condition

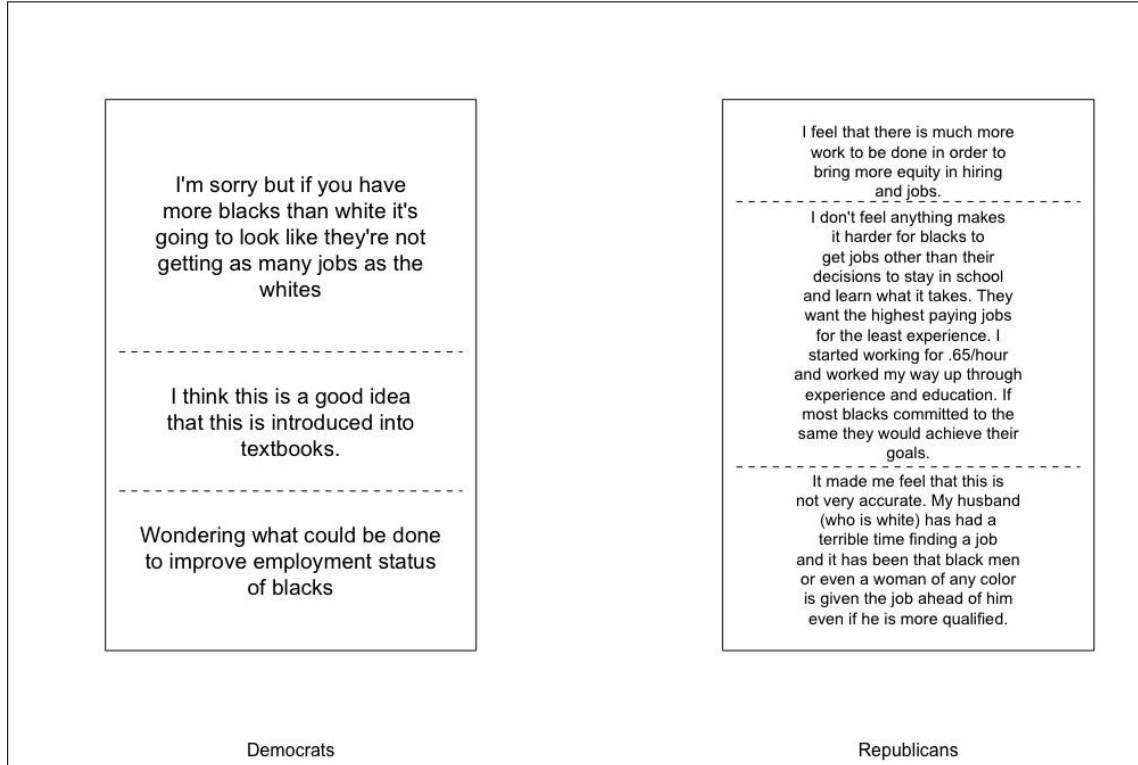


The treatment conditions, and especially the *Easier for Whites* condition (Fig 7), tell a different story. White Republicans in that condition contest the premise outright, insisting race is irrelevant to outcomes: one is a firm believer that *‘anyone regardless of skin color etc can achieve anything they want to if they are willing to go after it’*, and another that *‘...if you choose not to work it has nothing to do with skin color, but your drive to want to succeed’*. These responses are further evidence of backlash in response to any information that challenges the colorblind belief that America rewards effort regardless of race.

Compelling evidence for our argument of white Democrat heterogeneity is that some white Democrats in the survey sound very similar to Republicans in the sample. The white Democrat quoted above (Fig 7) saying *‘Teach how to get a job and how to earn a living’* mirrors the Republican appeal to individual effort almost verbatim, deploying a colorblind individual-

blame frame and denying the role of race in structuring labor market outcomes and showing blindness to the role of structural racism.

Figure 8: Exemplary Responses by White Respondents in the “Harder for Blacks” Condition

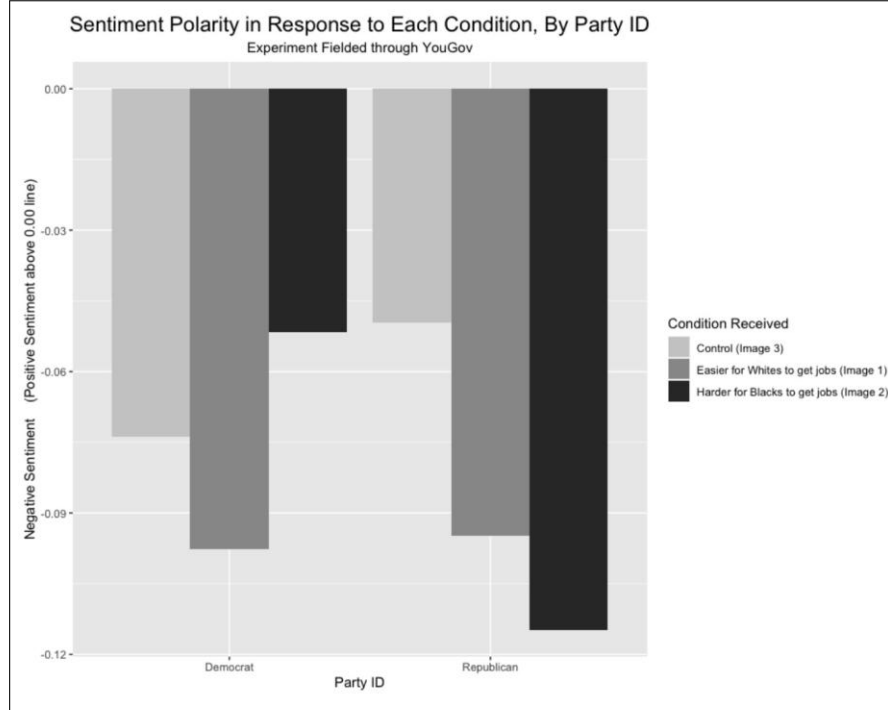


In the *Harder for Blacks* condition (Fig 8), another white Democrat questions the data itself, reasoning that *‘if you have more blacks than white, it’s going to look like they’re not getting as many jobs as the whites.’* Set against the racially liberal Democrat who is *‘proud that we are teaching this information’*, these responses make the heterogeneity unmistakable: white Democrats do not share a single emotional response to challenges to colorblindness and individual blame. Some are angry that white advantage harms Black Americans; others are angry, like Republicans, that the challenge to meritocracy is being made at all.

Sentiment analysis corroborates this pattern at scale. Figure 9 reports sentiment polarity for the open-ended responses using the Harvard-IV dictionary in a lexicon-based sentiment analysis approach. Each response is assigned a polarity score based on the relative frequency

of words coded as positive and negative in the dictionary.⁸ Both partisan groups skew negative across all the treatment conditions, and, consistent with the partisan story, white Republicans are more negative overall, peaking in the *‘Harder for Blacks’* condition.

Figure 9: Negative Sentiment Polarity of Open-Ended Responses by Party



Note: Sentiments are classified using the Harvard-IV dictionary. See Appendix E for details and output.

But the result that matters for our argument concerns white Democrats. Here, we revisit Hypothesis 2. Although the sentiment polarity of white Democrats is less negative on average, they are *more* negative in the *‘Easier for Whites’* condition than in the control, even as they are less negative in the *‘Harder for Blacks’* condition. In other words, the prompt that most directly contradicts meritocratic individualism (the notion that whites have more *because* they worked harder) is precisely the one that pushes white Democrats toward negativity. This

⁸ The Harvard-IV dictionary is a lexicon-based sentiment tool that assigns words to predefined categories, including positive and negative valence. We score each response by tokenizing the text, matching words to the dictionary, and aggregating the number of positive and negative matches into a single polarity measure. This score reflects the relative frequency of positive versus negative language in the response: higher values indicate more positive sentiment, lower values indicate more negative sentiment, and values near zero indicate a more neutral balance.

asymmetry is hard to reconcile with a purely partisan account and supports our framework about the emotional potency of challenges to colorblindness. It is the challenge to earned advantage, not the mere mention of racial disparities (which is the content of our control condition), that provokes the defensive reaction. While the sentiment analysis does not specifically measure “anger”, the negative polarity combined with the evidence from the exemplary answers generated by the topic model indicate *partial* support for Hypothesis 2. While some white Democrats react in ways consistent with a threat to meritocratic beliefs, others express anger that racial discrimination persists.

Cross-Partisan Anger Mobilization

In our first two hypotheses we establish that our racial (dis)advantage treatments significantly increased anger among white respondents and that there are meaningful differences in the sources of anger among white Democrats. We now turn to our final two hypotheses, which examine whether anger mediates the effect of the treatments on political participation (Hypothesis 3: Anger Mobilization) and if partisanship matters (Hypothesis 4: Cross Partisan Anger Mobilization).

Here, we employ causal mediation analysis. Following Imai et al. (2011); Imai, Tingley and Yamamoto (2013); Tingley et al. (2014), we define the ACME within the potential outcomes framework (Rubin 1974). This approach improves on traditional regression methods by formalizing the assumptions necessary for identification, providing nonparametric estimation, and offering sensitivity analyses to assess robustness. We estimate separate models for the mediator and the outcomes and recover the average causal mediation effect (ACME) using 10,000 nonparametric bootstrap simulations. Full results (including the non-hypothesized direct effects and total effects) are presented for both low- and high-cost forms of participation, with the prescribed sensitivity analyses included in Appendix D (Imai, Tingley and Yamamoto 2013).

In adopting this approach, our goal is to isolate the mechanism that links our experimental manipulation to our outcome variables (Druckman 2022, 2022, p. 45). Our design explicitly follows the guidance of scholars who argue that mediation can be credibly identified when design choices are aligned with theory. Consistent with this idea, we treat our experimental manipulations as what Pirlott and MacKinnon (2016) call an “encouragement design”: the race-based excerpts are expected to elevate anger relative to the control, thereby providing leverage to assess whether anger mediates the treatment effect. Likewise, Glynn (2021) emphasizes that mediation analysis is *most* useful when theory posits unobserved psychological processes and when direct effects may be weak or absent (267). Appendix C.5 shows that our treatments do not produce strong direct effects on participation, making it especially plausible (or at least worth testing) that anger is doing the implicit work of linking treatment to behavior.

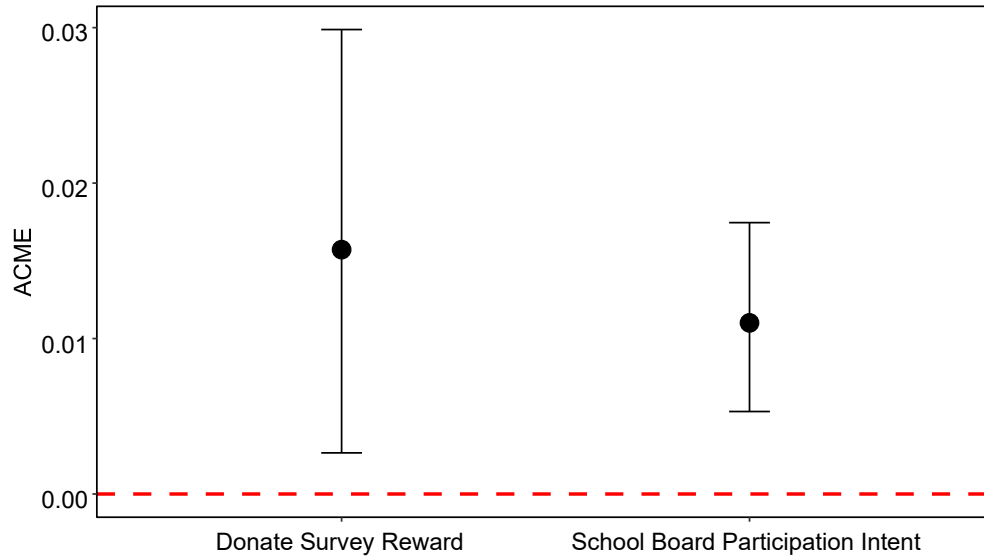
We first consider the mediating effects of anger on our participation outcomes across the full sample of white respondents (Hypothesis 3). Figure 10 exhibits the ACME of anger on participation in school board activities.⁹ We find that on average among the 10,000 counterfactual simulations, anger mediated respondents’ decisions to express intentions to participate in their local school board meetings (low cost) (ACME = 0.011) and donate their survey reward (high cost) and willingness to donate the survey reward (ACME = 0.016).

Finally, we evaluate Hypothesis 4, which asks whether the mediating role of anger extends across partisan groups. Figure 11 presents the mediation analyses estimated separately for white Democrats and white Republicans. Consistent with our expectations, the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME) is positive and statistically significant for the participation index among both partisan groups. The estimated ACMEs are substantively similar (.01 for Democrats and .02 for Republicans), suggesting that anger is a common mechanism motivating political engagement regardless of party identification.

⁹ Tables summarizing the average direct effect and total effect for each model are available in SI C.7.

By contrast, the ACMEs for donating respondents' survey rewards are not statistically significant. Although the point estimates remain positive and consistent with our theoretical

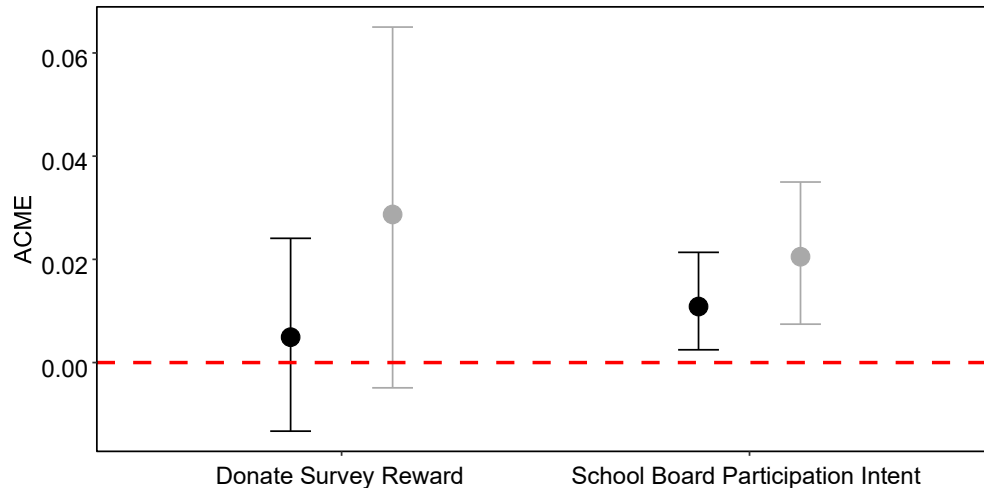
Figure 10: Anger Mediates Effect of Treatment on Intent to Participate and Donate Survey Reward



Note: Points are average causal mediation effect (ACME) of anger on participation. Bars are bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals based on N = 10,000 Monte Carlo Simulations. See Appendix C.7 for full mediation output

expectations, the results suggest that anger is more effective at increasing intentions to participate in school board politics than motivating an immediate financial contribution. Finally, sensitivity analyses indicate that these mediation results are robust to violations of the sequential ignorability assumption (see Appendix D).

Figure 11: Anger Mediates Effect of Treatment on Intent to Participate for White Democrats and Republicans



● Democrat ● Republican

Note: Points are average causal mediation effect (ACME) of anger among white Democrats (light gray) and white Republicans (dark gray) on participation outcomes. Bars are bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals based on $N = 10,000$ Monte Carlo Simulations. See Appendix C.7 for full mediation output.

Testing an Alternative Explanation

One common alternative explanation regarding collective backlash about race-related school curricula is that parents and administrators are concerned about presenting materials to children that might make them feel uncomfortable or guilty about being white (Baldwin Clark 2023). If correct, this account would assume that anger should arise whenever school curricula attribute disadvantage to discrimination in ways that implicate students' identities, regardless of whether those identities are racial.

We test this explanation directly in a companion experiment fielded on CloudResearch ($n = 500$) in 2023. We randomly assigned respondents to one of three experimental conditions: a control condition, a racial discrimination condition, and a national-origin discrimination condition. The national-origin condition preserved the structure of the racial discrimination treatment in our original survey but replaced Black Americans with immigrants from Canada, a group toward which white Americans consistently report warm attitudes (Center, 2016).¹⁰

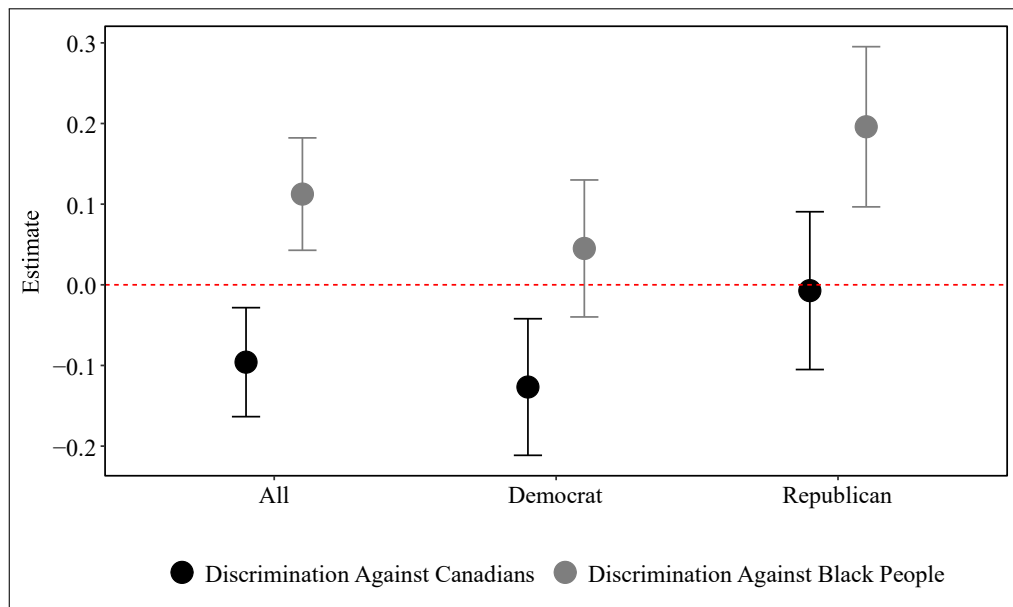
If anger is driven by concern that schools expose children to *any* discussions of discrimination that may make them uncomfortable, then we should see comparable levels of anger when a textbook cues national origin rather than race as being the reason for discrimination. We do not find this. Specifically, anger levels were significantly higher among respondents assigned to the racial discrimination treatment. As shown in Figure 12, white respondents in the racial discrimination condition reported anger levels approximately 0.11 points higher than those in the control condition, which made no mention of discrimination. By contrast, the national origin discrimination treatment produced a negative effect (-0.10),

¹⁰ The full text and images used for each condition can be found in Appendix C.1.

indicating that respondents, if anything, reported slightly lower levels of anger when the textbook discussed discrimination against Canadians. Looking by partisanship, white Republicans reported substantially higher anger in the racial discrimination condition (0.20) relative to the control, while the national origin treatment produced no statistically distinguishable effect (0.02). Among white Democrats, the racial discrimination treatment increased anger only modestly (0.05) and was not statistically distinguishable from zero, whereas the national origin treatment significantly reduced anger relative to the control (−0.13).

Overall, white respondents exposed to information about discrimination against Canadians expressed little anger relative to those exposed to racial discrimination. This companion experiment provides a direct test of a prominent alternative explanation: that white parents oppose race-conscious education primarily because it may make children feel uncomfortable about their identity. If that were the case, respondents should have reacted similarly when children’s identities as Americans were implicated. These results suggest otherwise.

Figure 12: Differential Effects of Racial and National Origin Discrimination Attributions on Anger



Note: Treatment stimuli were textbooks describing discrimination against Black Americans (dark) and Discrimination against Canadian-Born Americans (gray) as the

cause of higher rates of unemployment relative to white Americans. Points are OLS regressions. Bars are 95% confidence intervals. Complete results in Appendix C.4

Conclusion

Since 2020, the partisan divide in white racial attitudes has spilled over into the local politics of education and public school curricula. This study demonstrates that the political activism emerging from these debates is partly driven by emotions that transcend the partisan divide. Across two survey experiments, we show that educational materials that attribute racial inequality to systemic racism (especially framings of racism as a system that advantages whites and disadvantages Black Americans) cause white people to experience anger more than any other emotion. We further demonstrate that mere description of racial inequality is not enough; it is the attribution of that inequality to white Americans' structural advantage that increases anger among both white Democrats and white Republicans. We also find evidence that the quality of anger among white Democrats responds not just to racial injustice, but also to threats to meritocratic beliefs. An examination of nearly 1,000 open-ended responses from white Democrats and Republicans reveals that much of this anger is the result of a meritocratic threat. However, there is substantial heterogeneity among white Democrats in their reasoning, with some even invoking behavioral explanations for racial inequality that mirror those of white Republicans. Finally, we show that the anger induced by challenges to colorblind ideology mobilizes white people to engage in costly political behavior, including donating their survey reward. These findings illuminate how race, emotion, and education intersect to shape political behavior.

We extend research on the relationship between racial attitudes, emotions, and participation in several ways. First, our experimental results show that informational stimuli that challenge colorblind ideology trigger white anger and, to a much lesser extent, fear and shame. The fact that textbook content cuing white advantage and Black disadvantage increases anger but has little effect on shame or fear suggests that this emotional reaction is a response to meritocratic threat rather than to racial injustice, even among Democrats. This finding has implications for how we understand the political significance of colorblind racial

attitudes. Because challenging colorblindness appears to anger white people regardless of partisanship, this could represent a new frontier of emotional mobilization around racial issues.

Second, we introduce nuance to the conclusion that white racial attitudes have become fully sorted along partisan lines in American politics. A white person's partisanship may accurately predict their expressed opinions about partisan-coded language like the phrases "DEI" or "CRT." But our analyses demonstrate that knowing whether someone is Democrat or Republican is a much less reliable indicator of their beliefs about white privilege or how much they believe structural racism shapes life outcomes for Black people. Future work should probe deeper into this ideological heterogeneity among white Democrats. While we have shown evidence here that centering white racial advantages threatens some whites' belief in meritocratic individualism, other work suggests that white Americans respond more positively to these kinds of challenges to their deeply held beliefs about race and meritocracy (Chudy, Piston and Shipper, 2019; Anoll, Engelhardt and Israel-Trummel, 2022). What is clear is that racial ideology continues to be a politically meaningful cleavage among white Americans, even though racial resentment has sorted along party lines. Our findings have peeled back one more layer in the complex of emotions and worldviews that inform white racial attitudes. Future work should continue to unpack variations in white racial attitudes to construct a fuller portrait of this group's political behavior.

Third, our findings contribute to a growing body of literature showing that anger mediates political participation. With polarization in the American electorate at an all time high, it is likely that negative emotions will continue to shape American politics. Anger in particular has the potential to mobilize participation (Izatt, 2023), even in venues that rarely see high political engagement, like school boards, especially when structural racism is on the agenda. Beyond school board politics, the emotional content of white Americans' racial attitudes, and the role of these emotions in mobilizing political participation, warrants

deeper exploration. At the very least, our results suggest that both anger and racial ideology are durable influences on white Americans' political participation

More broadly, our results contribute to scholarship on the politicization of public schools. Education has long been recognized as a mechanism for transmitting civic values and shaping political identity, but the present findings underscore that schools are equally sites of contestation where group status, privilege, and legitimacy are negotiated. These battles are neither new nor novel; they have played out in schools throughout American history. We argue that anger has been central to these debates. When schools adopt materials that foreground structural racism, they do more than educate: they provoke emotional reactions that reverberate through local and national politics.

The current study focuses on white Americans, but limitations remain for understanding non-white minority groups. The test of our theory is therefore incomplete, as we cannot rule out the possibility that Black and other non-white Americans also experience heightened anger when they learn that schools are teaching about structural racial advantages. Future work should oversample Black, Latino, Asian and Native American respondents to explore how structurally disadvantaged groups respond to challenges to colorblind ideology. Whether or not anger emerges as the dominant response, these inquiries will provide insight into the intimate relationship between emotions and racial attitudes in political behavior.

Overall, we show that anger, more than any other emotion, mediates the relationship between white Americans learning about school curricula about racial discrimination, and participation in school board politics. Our findings explain the political potency of debates about diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in public education that continue to dominate public discourse. Instead of becoming angry about the mere discussion of racial differences, white Americans across party lines appear to be angry about the suggestion that racial differences are not driven by innate ability, motivation, or hard work. Simply put, white respondents are angry at the thought of children learning in schools that America is not colorblind. Any book, school material, or curriculum that declares racial disparities stem

from discrimination and racial biases woven into American institutions is likely to draw significant anger from whites and, thereby, lead them to participate more in political actions. Although this study centers on school board politics, anger likely mediates the link between white racial attitudes and participation in broader domains, including presidential elections and support for race-targeted policies. Future research should test these possibilities.

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Supplementary Material

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A Conflicts of Interest Disclosure

A.1 Conflicts of Interest Disclosure

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

B Sampling Procedures and Descriptive Statistics

B.1 Experiment Structure

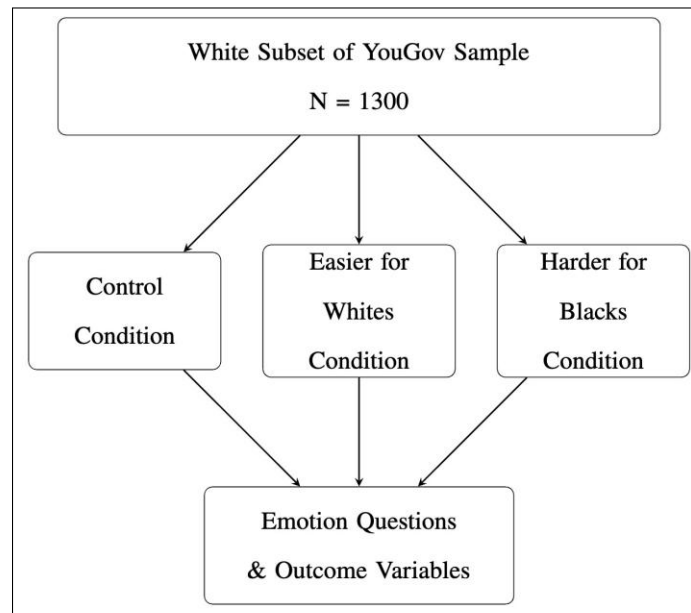


Figure 1: Survey Experimental Design

YouGov interviewed 2031 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The sampling frame is a politically representative "modeled frame" of US adults, based upon the American Community Survey (ACS) public use microdata file, public voter file records, the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll, and the 2020 CES surveys, including demographics and 2020 presidential vote.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, home ownership status, region and Presidential vote choice. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

B.2 Sample Descriptive Statistics

Children under 18	Yes	No				
	22%	78%				
Gender	Female	Male				
	51%	49%				
Party ID	Democrat	Republican	Pure independent	Other/Not sure		
	37%	42%	17%	3%		
Education	No HS	HS Diploma	Some college	Two-year	Four-year	Post-grad
	4%	30%	19%	10%	24%	14%
Ideology	Very liberal	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Very Conservative	Not Sure
	12%	14%	30%	23%	13%	7%
Age	Min	1st Quarter	Median	Mean	3rd Quarter	Max
	19	41	57	54	67	94

Figure 2: YouGov Sample Statistics

B.3 Sample Size in Each Experimental Condition

	Control	Easier for Whites	Harder for Blacks
1st Dimension			
White	<i>n</i> = 432	<i>n</i> = 448	<i>n</i> = 420
2nd Dimension			
White Republican	<i>n</i> = 189	<i>n</i> = 209	<i>n</i> = 182
White Democrat	<i>n</i> = 172	<i>n</i> = 147	<i>n</i> = 155

Figure 3: Analytical Dimensions and Experimental Conditions

C Design

C.1 Stimuli

Figure 4: Cloud Research Pre-Test Stimuli

(a) Control

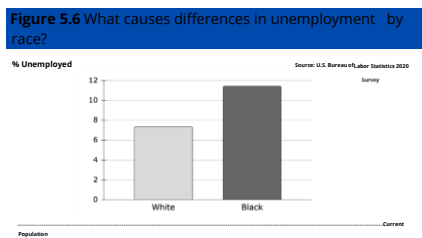


Figure 5.6 shows the average unemployment rates for White and Black Americans in 2020. The unemployment rate is higher for Blacks than it is for Whites. Economists disagree about why the unemployment rate differs by race.

(b) Discrimination by Race



Figure 5.6 shows the average unemployment rates for White and Black Americans in 2020. The unemployment rate is higher for Blacks than it is for Whites. Economists find that **racial discrimination makes it easier for White Americans to get jobs.**

KEY TERM

Racial discrimination occurs when one group gets better opportunities than another group because of the color of their skin.

(c) Discrimination by National Origin



Figure 5.6 shows the average unemployment rates for Canadians living in the U.S. and Americans living in the U.S. in 2020. The unemployment rate is higher for people who were born in Canada than it is for people who were born in America. Economists find that **national origin discrimination makes it easier for American-born people to get jobs and harder for Canadian-born people to get jobs.**

KEY TERM

National origin discrimination occurs when one group gets better opportunities than another group because of where they were born.

(a) Control

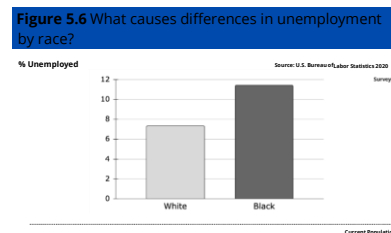


Figure 5.6 shows the average unemployment rates for White and Black Americans in 2020. The unemployment rate is higher for Blacks than it is for Whites. Economists disagree about why the unemployment rate differs by race.

Figure 5: YouGov Stimuli (b)

Easier for Whites

Figure 5.6 Does racial discrimination cause differences in unemployment by race?

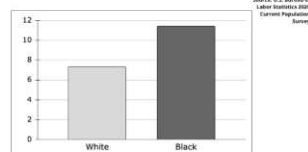


Figure 5.6 shows the average unemployment rates for White and Black Americans in 2020. The unemployment rate is higher for Blacks than it is for Whites. Economists find that **racial discrimination makes it easier for White Americans to get jobs.**

KEY TERM

Racial discrimination occurs when one group gets better opportunities than another group because of the color of their skin.

(c) Harder for Blacks

Figure 5.6 Does racial discrimination cause differences in unemployment by race?

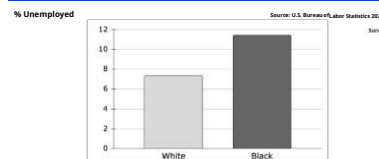


Figure 5.6 shows the average unemployment rates for White and Black Americans in 2020. The unemployment rate is higher for Blacks than it is for Whites. Economists find that **racial discrimination makes it harder for Black Americans to get jobs.**

KEY TERM

Racial discrimination occurs when one group gets worse opportunities than another group because of the color of their skin.

Stimuli for each of the three experimental conditions, each an excerpt from a hypothetical middle school social studies textbook. Note that **(a)** represents the control condition where we do not connect the racial employment gap to racial discrimination. Figure **b** represents the “easier for whites” condition. And Figure **c** represents the “harder for blacks” condition.

C.2 Emotion Measure

We measured all four of our composite emotions using a 7-point scale in the shape of a thermometer. Figure 6 shows how this item appeared in the survey for each emotion. Participants were required to move the slider at least to 0 to indicate no emotion.

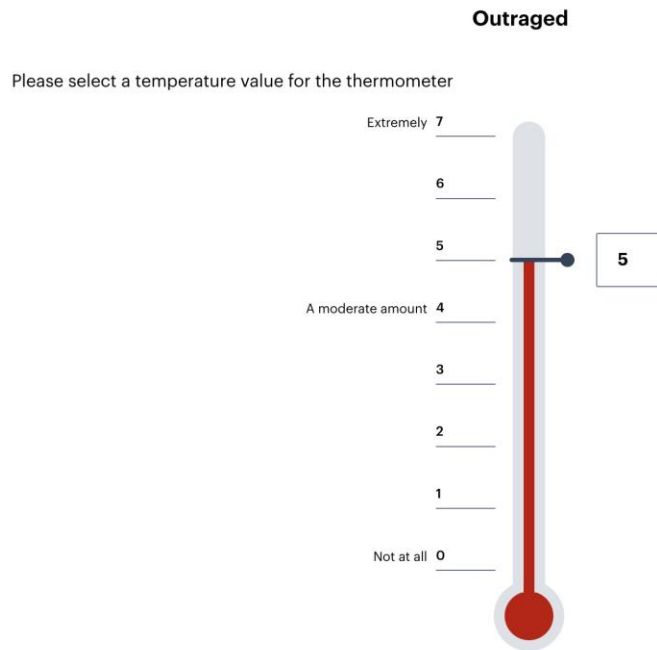


Figure 6: An example of how the slider questions appear measuring each of our 4 composite emotions

C.3 Participation Measure

We measured participation by creating an index of variables gauging intent to participate in 5 activities. Note that all participants were debriefed and informed that their reward would not actually be donated.

Table 1: Distribution of Participation and Intent to Donate Survey Reward

	Not at all	Not very	Somewhat	Very
How interested are you in participating	23%	30%	35%	12%

How likely are you to:	Not at all	Not very	Moderately	Very	Extremely
------------------------	------------	----------	------------	------	-----------

Attend a meeting	46%	29%	15%	7%	4%
Make a comment	52%	26%	13%	6%	3%
Volunteer	52%	27%	13%	5%	3%
Donate	57%	21%	13%	6%	3%
Run for a seat	67%	21%	7%	2%	3%
	No/		Yes, to the		Yes, to the
	Skipped		Equitable		Patriot
			Education Fund		Education Fund
Would you like to donate your reward	74%		16%		10%

Results

C.4 Cloud Research Pre-Test: Main Effects on Anger

Table 1 shows the ATE of our textbook treatments on anger among white participants using OLS as the estimator.

Table 1: Average Treatment Effect of Race and National Origin Discrimination on Anger by Partisanship (Output for Figure 4)

Observations	402	257	208
R ²	0.080	0.063	0.090
Adjusted R ²	0.075	0.055	0.081
Residual Std. Error	0.287 (df = 399)	0.283 (df = 254)	0.297 (df = 205)
F Statistic	17.297*** (df = 2; 399)	8.471*** (df = 2; 254)	10.156*** (df = 2; 205)

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

Dependent variable:

	Anger		
	All	Democrat	Republican
National Origin	-0.096*** (0.034)	-0.127*** (0.043)	-0.007 (0.050)
Race	0.112*** (0.036)	0.045 (0.043)	0.196*** (0.051)
Constant	0.364*** (0.024)	0.432*** (0.031)	0.297*** (0.035)

C.5 YouGov: Main Effects on Intent to Participate

We present estimates of the average direct effects (ADE) of the experimental treatments on the participation index and intent to donate outcomes. Tables 2 and 3 show the direct effects of treatment assignment on participation and donating, respectively.

Table 2: Direct Effects of Treatments on Participation Index by Partisanship

	<i>Dependent variable: Participation Index</i>		
	(Whites)	(White Democrats)	(White Republicans)
		-0.026 (0.023)	0.031 (0.027)
		—	
		0.168***	0.010
	(0.014)	(0.023)	(0.028)
	(0.010)	(0.017)	0.144*** (0.020)
Observations	1,300	445	344
R ²	0.0002	0.004	0.004
Adjusted R ²	-0.001	-0.001	-0.002
Residual Std. Error	0.205 (df = 1297)	0.197 (df = 442)	0.206 (df = 341)
F Statistic	0.106 (df = 2; 1297)	0.815 (df = 2; 442)	0.713 (df = 2; 341)
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Table 3: Direct Effects of Treatment on Intent to Donate by Partisanship

<i>Dependent variable: Donating</i>				
	(Whites)	(White Democrats)	(White Republicans)	
	0.03*	-0.110**	-0.068	
	(0)	(0.050)	(0.058)	
Easier for whites		-0.025	-0.023	
	0.006			
	(0.030)	0.297***	0.294***	(0.059)
Constant	0.279***			
	(0.021)	(0.037)		(0.042)
Observations	1,300	445	344	
R ²	0.004	0.012	0.004	
Adjusted R ²	0.002	0.008	-0.002	
Residual Std. Error	0.440 (df = 1297)	0.432 (df = 442)	0.441 (df = 341)	
F Statistic	2.424* (df = 2; 1297)	2.693* (df = 2; 442)	0.718 (df = 2; 341)	
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

C.6 YouGov: Main effects on other emotions

Tables 4, 5, and 6 present results for the ATE on all four of our composite emotions by analytical dimension (all whites, white Democrat, and white Republican).

Table 4: Average Treatment Effect on All Composite Emotions for Whites (Output for Figure 5)

	<i>Dependent variable: Composite Emotion</i>			
	Anger (1)	Fear (2)	Shame (3)	Gladness (4)
Harder for Blacks	0.144*** (0.019)	0.037** (0.016)	0.046** (0.019)	-0.020 (0.018)
Easier for whites	0.144*** (0.019)	0.022 (0.016)	0.053*** (0.019)	-0.019 (0.018)
Constant	0.333*** (0.013)	0.217*** (0.012)	0.276*** (0.014)	0.192*** (0.013)
Observations	1,300	1,300	1,300	1,300
R ²	0.057	0.004	0.007	0.001
Adjusted R ²	0.055	0.002	0.005	-0.0003
Residual Std. Error (df = 1297)	0.275	0.239	0.282	0.264
F Statistic (df = 2; 1297)	38.940***	2.622*	4.404**	0.793
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 5: Average Treatment Effect on All Composite Emotions for White Democrats (Output for Figure 6)

<i>Dependent variable: Composite Emotion</i>					
	Anger			Fear	Shame Gladness
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
	0.143*** (0.032)	0.024 (0.027)	0.012 (0.033)	-0.012 (0.031)	
Easier for whites	0.102*** (0.032)			0.017 (0.027)	0.041 (0.033) 0.012 (0.031)
Constant	0.349*** (0.023)			0.218*** (0.020)	0.301*** (0.024) 0.176*** (0.023)
Observations			445	445	445
R ²			0.046	0.002	0.004
Adjusted R ²			0.042	-0.003	-0.001
Residual Std. Error (df = 442)			0.272	0.231	0.282
F Statistic (df = 2; 442)			10.653***	0.412	0.795
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Table 6: Average Treatment Effect on All Composite Emotions for White Republicans (Output for Figure 6)

<i>Dependent variable: Composite Emotion</i>					
	Anger			Fear	Shame Gladness
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
	0.175*** (0.035)	0.059* (0.032)	0.095*** (0.037)	-0.048 (0.032)	
	0.198*** (0.036)	0.043 (0.033)	0.073* (0.038)	-0.035 (0.033)	
Constant	0.300*** (0.025)			0.195*** (0.023)	0.251*** (0.027) 0.190*** (0.023)
Observations			344	344	344
R ²			0.098	0.010	0.021
Adjusted R ²			0.093	0.004	0.015
Residual Std. Error (df = 341)			0.265	0.244	0.279
F Statistic (df = 2; 341)			18.527***	1.762	3.634**
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

C.7 Mediation Results

The following tables include outputs from the “mediate” package for each of our mediation tests reported.

Table 7: Complete Results for Causal Mediation Effects of Anger on Participation Index (Output for Figure 10)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	<i>p</i> -value
ACME	0.011	0.005	0.020	<0.001***
ADE	-0.016	-0.040	0.010	0.19
Total Effect	-0.005	-0.028	0.020	0.67
Prop. Mediated	-2.134	-13.386	13.340	0.67

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

ACME = average causal mediation effect; ADE = average direct effect. Dependent variable: Participation Index. Mediator: Anger. $N = 1,300$; 10,000 bootstrap simulations.

Table 8: Complete Results for Causal Mediation Effects of Anger on Donating the Survey Reward (Output for Figure 10)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	<i>p</i> -value
ACME	0.016	0.003	0.030	0.02*
ADE	-0.040	-0.093	0.010	0.15
Total Effect	-0.024	-0.075	0.030	0.37
Prop. Mediated	-0.654	-6.759	6.170	0.38

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

ACME = average causal mediation effect; ADE = average direct effect. Dependent variable: Donate Survey Reward. Mediator: Anger. $N = 1,300$; 10,000 bootstrap simulations.

Table 9: Complete Results for Causal Mediation Effects of Anger on Participation Index, White Republicans (Output for Figure 11)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	<i>p</i> -value
ACME	0.021	0.008	0.030	0.001***

ADE	0.001	-0.043	0.050	0.964
Total Effect	0.021	-0.022	0.070	0.346
Prop. Mediated	0.964	-8.155	8.930	0.347

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

ACME = average causal mediation effect; ADE = average direct effect. Dependent variable: Participation Index. Mediator: Anger. Sample restricted to white Republicans ($N = 344$); 10,000 bootstrap simulations.

Table 10: Complete Results for Causal Mediation Effects of Anger on Participation Index, White Democrats (Output for Figure 11)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p -value
ACME	0.011	0.002	0.020	0.011*
ADE	-0.037	-0.078	0.000	0.082.
Total Effect	-0.026	-0.067	0.010	0.220
Prop. Mediated	-0.425	-3.879	3.650	0.229

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

ACME = average causal mediation effect; ADE = average direct effect. Dependent variable: Participation Index. Mediator: Anger. Sample restricted to white Democrats ($N = 445$); 10,000 bootstrap simulations.

Table 11: Complete Results for Causal Mediation Effects of Anger on Donating the Survey Reward, White Republicans (Output for Figure 11)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p -value
ACME	0.029	-0.005	0.060	0.089.
ADE	-0.075	-0.184	0.030	0.168
Total Effect	-0.047	-0.151	0.060	0.373
Prop. Mediated	-0.614	-5.894	5.690	0.435

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

ACME = average causal mediation effect; ADE = average direct effect. Dependent variable: Donate Survey Reward. Mediator: Anger. Sample restricted to white Republicans ($N = 344$); 10,000 bootstrap simulations.

Table 12: Complete Results for Causal Mediation Effects of Anger on Donating the Survey Reward, White Democrats (Output for Figure 11)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	<i>p</i> -value
ACME	0.005	-0.015	0.020	0.61
ADE	-0.074	-0.168	0.020	0.12
Total Effect	-0.069	-0.159	0.020	0.13
Prop. Mediated	-0.072	-1.100	0.870	0.64

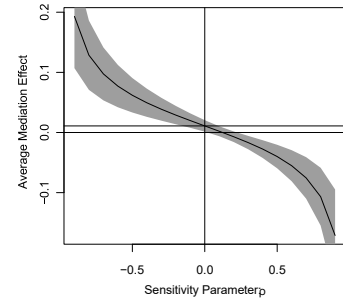
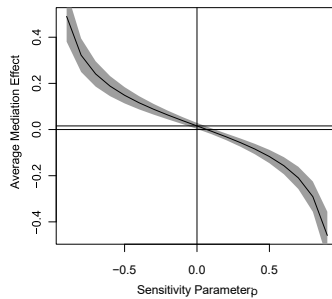
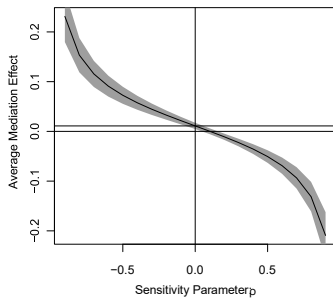
*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

ACME = average causal mediation effect; ADE = average direct effect. Dependent variable: Donate Survey Reward. Mediator: Anger. Sample restricted to white Democrats ($N = 445$); 10,000 bootstrap simulations.

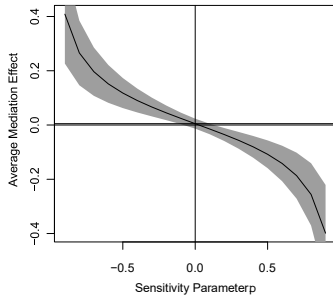
D Sensitivity Analyses of Mediation Effects to Address the Ignorability of Treatment Assignment Assumption

Figure 1: Sensitivity concerning Error Terms

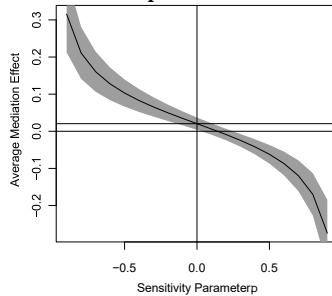
(a) ACME ρ Participation Index for whites (b) ACME ρ Intent to Donate for whites (c) ACME ρ Participation index for white Democrats



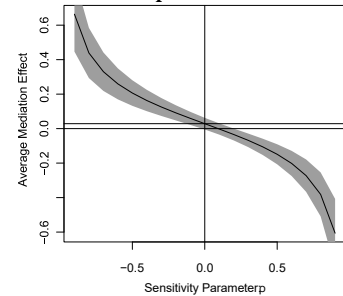
(d) ACME ρ Intent to Donate for white Democrats



(e) ACME ρ Participation Index for white Republicans



(f) ACME ρ Intent to Donate for white Republicans



E Sentiment Analysis and Exemplary Answers

We use the package ‘SentimentAnalysis,’ which employs a dictionary generation approach and utilizes LASSO regularization to identify and select words from texts that are statistically indicative of either positive or negative sentiment. More information about this package is available [here](#).

Additionally, we employ the Harvard IV-4 dictionary to evaluate the sentiment of the responses. More information on the dictionary can be found [here](#). As a second check of our manipulation of anger, we present exemplary responses to the open-ended item. See Roberts, Stewart and Tingley (N.d.) for further details on this method and the ‘stm’ package in R.

Table 1: Sentiment Polarity in Response to Each Condition, By Party ID

Average Sentiment Expressed in the Open Ended Responses
White Respondents Only

Condition	Partisanship	N	word count	sd	ave sentiment
Control (Image 3)	Democrat	155	3087	0.3006879	-0.07382
Control (Image 3)	Independent	68	1607	0.2656269	-0.09251
Control (Image 3)	Not Sure	15	236	0.3566609	0.089945
Control (Image 3)	Republican	182	4098	0.2723651	-0.04954
Easier for Whites to get jobs (Image 1)	Democrat	172	3248	0.3533964	-0.09769
Easier for Whites to get jobs (Image 1)	Independent	64	1512	0.3185054	-0.10235
Easier for Whites to get jobs (Image 1)	Not Sure	7	151	0.2219483	-0.10395
Easier for Whites to get jobs (Image 1)	Republican	189	4372	0.3020592	-0.09477
Harder for Blacks to get jobs (Image 2)	Democrat	147	2664	0.3591952	-0.05156
Harder for Blacks to get jobs (Image 2)	Independent	76	1775	0.3421368	-0.09162
Harder for Blacks to get jobs (Image 2)	Not Sure	16	185	0.2224727	-0.17358
Harder for Blacks to get jobs (Image 2)	Republican	209	4682	0.3232456	-0.11476

F Ethical Considerations and Debriefing

F.1 Deception and Consent

We assess public attitudes toward race-conscious education materials. We are attentive to the fact that race is an emotionally potent issue. We minimize the harm to participants by giving them an opportunity to reflect on any negative emotions they might feel in an open-ended response. While the treatments we present are fictitious (that is, they do not represent a real school textbook) they include fully accurate statistics maintained by the U.S. Bureau of Labor. Thus, while respondents might have negative feelings about the information we

present, this information is widely publicly available and presented in a format that could easily come across in their daily lives. Moreover, our debrief clarifies the purpose of the study and addresses any potential misunderstandings. Participants are required to click “I confirm” to acknowledge understanding. This clarification was delivered respectfully and in line with best practices for addressing misinformation in survey research (Murphy and Greene 2023; Greenspan and Loftus 2022; Greene et al. 2023). One important design element for us to consider in our experiment is its use of deception. Specifically, we inform respondents that the textbook excerpts they read will be considered for adoption in a local public school curriculum. This deception is necessary for us to evaluate how emotions influences school board participation, but we do not wish to misinform individuals permanently. Consequently, our debrief A) informs respondents that they were deceived and B) stresses that the information they read is accurate, though not being considered for school curricula. Additionally, as we mentioned above, participants are required to confirm that they understand the debrief before finishing the survey. Finally, we have received “exempt approval” by our Institutional Review Board for the pilot and follow-up studies.

F.2 Consent Form for Research Participation

REDACTED

Public Affairs Survey

Principal Investigators: REDACTED

Co-Principal Investigator: REDACTED

Before you begin this survey, please read the following:

You are invited to participate in a research study with the REDACTED FOR ANONYMOUS VERSION The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. If you agree to be

part of this research, you will be asked to answer questions about your feelings about politics. REDACTED FOR ANONYMOUS VERSION, researchers at REDACTED, are conducting this research.

The risks involved in these studies are minimal. Findings will be reported in scholarly journals, at academic seminars, and at research association meetings. The data will be stored in a secured location and retained indefinitely, but your responses will remain anonymous. None of your responses can be linked to you. Your participation is voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions or to withdraw from the study at any time.

Please note that the purposes/procedures of this research will not be revealed to you until after completing this survey.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact REDACTED FOR ANONYMOUS VERSION (research.contact.q@gmail.com).

By clicking below, you confirm that you understand the following:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary.
- You are at least 18 years of age.
- You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason.

[I am at least 18 years of age and I consent, begin the study]

F.3 Debriefing

Thank you for your participation in our research study.

We want to discuss with you in more detail the study you just participated in and explain exactly what the purpose of this study is. We are interested in understanding more about racial attitudes and local political participation.

In this study, you read a short prompt about a publishing company's proposed textbook. The information provided to you was **not** based on any actual textbook being considered by a publisher. While the data presented in the excerpt was accurate, it was designed by the researchers solely for the purposes of this project.

If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact the research team at: research.contact.q@gmail.com **Acknowledgement:**

- I understand that the excerpt used in this survey was fake and not based on any actual textbook being proposed by a publisher.

We really appreciate your participation in this study! Please provide any additional comments, thoughts, or questions below. Your feedback will help to develop this research even more.

[NEXT: End survey and record my responses]
