

Fairness According to Whom?:  
Divergent Perceptions of Fairness Among White and Black Americans  
and its Effect on Trade Attitudes

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**Abstract**

What explains racial divides in American attitudes toward trade? Leading research proposes that discrimination in the labor market and differences in traits, such as nationalism, contribute to the racial divide in trade support. However, recent work finds that American support for trade is significantly influenced by perceptions of fairness, with Americans exhibiting “asymmetric fairness” concerns that lead them to be especially concerned about “falling behind” other countries. We argue that connecting these two lines of inquiry provides important insights domestic divides in American attitudes toward trade. Drawing on critical race theory and the literature on Black politics, we theorize that Black Americans do not think of international trade in terms of asymmetric fairness, like their white counterparts. Since Black Americans have not been privileged in the social, economic, and political hierarchy, we argue they do not have the same concern for falling behind. We theorize that Black Americans evaluate trade in “principled fairness” terms, meaning they are likely to view as most fair, and be most supportive of trade agreements when they are relatively equal for both parties. We test our theory using a national survey experiment and find strong support for our theory.

## **Introduction**

Fairness concerns are important for politics in many areas; however, different social groups have different perceptions of fairness, which can dramatically shape their political views and preferences. For example, political support for redistribution reflects, in part, a difference in perceptions regarding the fairness of market outcomes and the underlying sources of income inequality, whether they be individualistic or systemic (Alesina & Angeletos, 2005). Indeed, the public's perceptions of fairness and belief that luck, rather than hard work, determines one's income has been found to be correlated with a country's social spending (Alesina, Glaser & Sacerdote, 2001). With regards to taxation, one's perception of the fairness of their own outcome relative to others is an important determinant of tax policy preferences. In both France and the U.S., the perception that others are better off than oneself is associated with greater support for progressive income tax policies (Lu & Scheve, 2016). Welfare policy preferences are also shaped by perceptions of fairness. In particular, the beliefs that Black Americans' poverty reflects a lack of effort and that, economically, Blacks have gotten what they deserve are strong predictors of whites' opposition to welfare programs like food stamps and unemployment (Gilens, 1995). This line of work emphasizes the importance of race, racial groups, and moral values in shaping support for domestic policies. However, international relations (IR) scholars have been relatively slow to theorize how race influences foreign policy and public support for foreign policy (Zvobgo and Loken, 2020). Though scholars have recently begun to examine how race affects support for trade (Guisinger, 2017; Mutz et al., 2021) and security issues (Green-Riley & Leber, 2023), we argue that connecting the moral values literature to critical race theory is essential for beginning to understand the causal mechanisms driving Black Americans' distinct interpretation of political fairness and its effects on support for international trade.

We know that moral values, like fairness, play a role in shaping foreign policy preferences (Kertzer et al., 2014), but how these interact with racial groups' distinct interpretations of morality remains an open question. Recent work in political science has established that standard conceptions of ideology, like "liberal" and "conservative," may be understood differently by different racial groups, leading to imprecise or incorrect inferences about political preferences among such groups (Jefferson, 2023). We expect the same to be true with the concept of fairness. We argue that those sociodemographic groups that have experienced histories of sociopolitical and distributional disadvantage are likely to have a distinct perception of fairness than those who have typically occupied a dominant or privileged role in society. In the U.S. context, we focus on the different perceptions of fairness held by Black and white Americans, with a particular interest in how these groups' perceptions of fairness affect their assessments of U.S. trade policy. This research builds on an expanding literature in American politics that emphasizes the importance of understanding how different racial groups interpret core political concepts (Jefferson, 2023) and takes up the call for a broader research agenda on race and Black preferences in international relations and foreign policy (Green-Riley & Leber, 2023, Zvobgo and Loken, 2020).

When it comes to concerns for fairness, behavioral economists have identified inequality aversion as a mechanism by which the perceived fairness of one's outcome relative to others leads to systematic differences in trade policy preferences (Fehr & Schmidt, 1999).<sup>1</sup> This form of inequality aversion has two distinct parts. Advantageous inequality aversion is the loss individuals incur when others have worse material outcomes, whereas disadvantageous

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<sup>1</sup> Many behavioral economists use the term "inequity aversion" to refer to concern for inequality. We adopt the term "inequality aversion, since it is most consistent with our theoretical concept of interest. This builds from Brutger and Rathbun's (2021, 895) recognition that "Most inequity aversion models are in this sense infelicitously named. They should be called inequality aversion."

inequality aversion is the loss individuals incur because others have better outcomes than they do. Lu, Scheve, and Slaughter (2012) find that U.S. support for sector-specific trade protection depends on both advantageous inequality aversion and disadvantageous inequality aversion. However, we argue that white and Black Americans view inequality through divergent lenses that were shaped by the country's well-documented history of systemic racism.

To understand how whites and Blacks distinct perceptions of fairness shape trade preferences, we build from recent work by Brutger and Rathbun (2021), who argued that Americans have an egotistically biased sense of fairness, what they call "asymmetric fairness." For our purposes, the most important point of Brutger and Rathbun's theory of asymmetric fairness is that Americans are concerned with "falling behind" and view it as especially unfair if they receive less, or give up more, than another country. The mechanism underlying asymmetric fairness is consistent with the concept of disadvantageous inequality aversion, namely, "individuals don't want to feel as though they are being left behind" (Brutger & Rathbun, 2021:17). The American public, they argue, views it as much more unfair when they are at a disadvantage, as opposed to when others are at a disadvantage.

However, we expect that Black Americans do not share white Americans' concerns for falling behind. To understand how Black and white Americans view fairness and inequality, and its relevance for international trade, we ask how race moderates the relationship between American conceptions of fairness and support for U.S. trade policy? We build on existing work of racial divides in trade policy preferences by incorporating the cultural, historical, and political context that constructed divergent psychological and political predispositions of whites and Blacks in the United States (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). First, drawing on critical race theory and Black politics scholarship, we argue that the causal mechanism underlying asymmetric fairness---disadvantageous inequality aversion---is applicable to white

Americans but less plausible for Black Americans. We then outline our hypotheses and present the data and methods we use to test our theory. We find that Black Americans do not exhibit asymmetric fairness like their white counterparts, and instead view trade through a more principled perception of fairness, which results in a stronger preference for trade policies that benefit both the home and foreign country, as opposed to an “America First” trade agenda.

### **Connecting Race, Fairness, and Trade**

The central premise of the asymmetric fairness argument is that “individuals don’t want to feel as though they are being left behind” (Brutger & Rathbun, 2021:17). However, there exists substantial evidence to suggest that in the U.S. this phenomenon is primarily relevant to white American culture, which has maintained hegemonic dominance given the centrality and pervasiveness of racism in American society (Crenshaw, 1988, 2011; Gramsci, 1971). Scholars of critical race theory take seriously that the law, racial hierarchy, and democratic politics have been intertwined since the country’s founding, and that race is one of the most important cleavages in American life. Expectation of social privilege among white Americans can be traced back to the era of chattel slavery, when white identity and white skin became the basis of property rights that guaranteed sources of privilege and protection (Harris, 1993; Tillery, 2009). Awareness of their protected status under the law gave whites living in the colonial era an expectation of privilege in social relations as well. Thus, we observe white American fear of being left behind, or losing such privilege gained from the country’s founding, continuing through the Civil Rights movement.

#### *White Privilege under the Law*

Critical legal scholar, Derrick Bell, advances two theories that help us understand how white American interests were prioritized during and following the Civil Rights era, and why white Americans are more likely to view the world through an asymmetric fairness lens. First, in

accordance with Tocqueville's ([1835]1988) view on how the law plays a central role in the construction of racial categories and group inequalities in America, Bell advances a theory of "Racial Realism," which argues that to be realistic about American society, one must realize that the law and outcomes in democratic politics typically reflect the supremacy of white privilege (Bell, 1992). According to racial realists, racial equality through the law is not a realistic goal because the courts were designed to preserve a status quo with racist origins. Instead, proponents of Racial Realism argue that civil rights activists should understand and respond to the recurring aspects of Black people's subordinate status in American society, marked by higher rates of poverty, joblessness, and insufficient healthcare compared to other ethnic populations. Scholars of critical race theory point to moments when the cultural imperative to preserve white privilege encouraged American institutions to abandon basic principles of fairness towards minority groups (Bell, 1980; Matsuda, 1987). Thus, we can observe how white American's interest in not falling behind relative to other groups was perpetuated and protected by American legal and democratic institutions, while similar protections were denied to Black Americans.

Second, Bell advances a theory known as "interest convergence" theory, which argues racial progress in civil rights is inexorably linked to white self-interest (Bell, 1980; Graham, 2007). According to Bell, civil rights gains come about solely when the interests of white Americans would be either advanced or not harmed, and thus whites' privilege was maintained. For example, in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court's break with its long-held position on racial segregation cannot be understood without consideration of white policymakers' realization that state-sponsored segregation served as a barrier to further industrialization in the American South (Bell, 1980). Dudziak (2000) further develops Bell's interest convergence theory by arguing that racial justice was not in the self-interest of white Americans until the Soviet Union used the race issue in anti-American propaganda. Furthermore,

Delgado (2003) argues that contemporary civil rights law and discourse are used to promote white self-interest and psychic comfort rather than to improve the material conditions of people of color. We argue that interest convergence theory suggests the process by which white Americans have been socialized to having their interests prioritized by the State during moments of policy change, relative to the interests of Black Americans. Thus, we expect that white Americans will exhibit greater disadvantageous inequality aversion than Black Americans, who have been socialized to a position of structural disadvantage.<sup>2</sup>

*From Privilege to Preferences – Racial Divides in Support for Trade*

Existing evidence on Black-white differences in trade preferences is congruent with critical race theory. Guisinger (2017) argues that support for U.S. trade protection is driven by sociotropic concerns about benefits that accrue to others. Political ad campaigns over the last three decades have overwhelmingly presented working-class white males as the beneficiaries of trade protection. Results from a survey experiment show that when white workers are presented as the beneficiaries of trade protectionism, white Americans are 11 percentage points more likely to support trade protectionism than when Black workers are presented as the beneficiaries of trade protectionism (Guisinger, 2017. Chp 6). These results are consistent with interest convergence theory and demonstrate white Americans preference to have their status and interests protected.

Though there are important racial differences in campaign advertisements, which can influence support for trade, Mutz, Mansfield, and Kim (2021) underscore the psychological

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<sup>2</sup> Our theory expects that individuals who are members of groups that have experienced histories of social, economic, and/or political disadvantage are less likely to view the world through an asymmetric fairness lens. Given the long history of gender discrimination in the U.S., including trade policy (Betz, Fortunato, O'Brien, 2021), we expect women to exhibit less asymmetric fairness when evaluating trade agreements than their male counterparts. In section A.1 of the appendix, we show that women do exhibit less asymmetric fairness than men in their evaluation of trade agreements.

underpinnings of racialized trade opinions, namely the mechanisms of prejudice, social dominance, and national attachment. Minority group members are generally more accepting of majority group members than majority group members are of minorities. For example, Blacks are over 20 percentage points more accepting of whites than whites are of Black people (Davenport, 2018). Mutz et al. (2021) argue that because minorities exhibit less prejudice towards racial out-groups than whites, they tend to be more supportive of trade. Furthermore, members of the nation's dominant group tend to feel more ownership of the nation than those of lower-status groups (Sidanius et al., 1997). Thus, Black Americans see themselves as less "typically American" than whites and exhibit lower levels of national pride (Citrin et al., 2007; Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Theiss-Morse, 2009). A greater sense of national attachment generally reduces support for trade and other means of economic globalization (Mansfield & Mutz, 2013; Mayda & Rodrik, 2005; O'Rourke & Sinnott, 2001). While Mutz, Mansfield, and Kim (2021) argue that nationalism is a mechanism through which racial differences in support for trade are reproduced, we argue that race, as a social construct, exhibits its own effect on fairness assessments of trade policy, in addition to the effect of national attachment. Similarly, even though Black Americans have predominantly voted for Democrats and supported more liberal policies (Luks and Elms, 2005), we demonstrate that partisanship and political ideology cannot explain the white-Black divide in evaluations of international trade.

### *The Entrenchment of American Subcultures*

The concept of political subcultures establishes the need to examine variation in beliefs about fairness along well-entrenched racial cleavages in American society. Racialized political subcultures, reflected in segregated social networks, are a mechanism for the reproduction of contrasting political attitudes, values, and beliefs within larger American culture (Walton & Smith, 2000). Recent data from the American Values Survey shows that the average white



American's social network is 91 percent white and one percent Black. In fact, 75 percent of white Americans have entirely white networks without any minority presence (Jones, 2014). Meanwhile, for the average Black person living in a metropolitan area like Detroit, Chicago, or Washington, DC, eight out of every ten people the Black person is likely to come in contact with will also be Black (White & Laird, 2020).

Black Americans, given their aforementioned history of struggle for liberation and their subordinate position in the social structure, maintain subcultural attitudes, values, and beliefs that are antithetical both to individualistic fear of being left behind and to American hegemony. The concept of community, based on shared history and memory that spans the African diaspora, is central to Black American culture. Evidence from survey data on racial group consciousness and identity shows that more than 90 percent of Black Americans say they “feel close to a Black person in this country,” while 69 percent say they share a “linked” fate with other Black Americans and that “what happens generally to Blacks in this country will have something to do with what happens in their life” (Dawson, 1994). More recent research in the Black politics literature has elucidated the complexities of the concept of linked fate among Black Americans in an era marked by an influx of Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, and African immigrants to the United States. Although ethnic attachments constrain the homogenization of African American and Black immigrant identities, experiences of racial discrimination within the U.S. serve to reinforce the salience of Black racial identity across ethnic groups (Smith, 2014).

Limitations of intersectionality notwithstanding, Houston Baker (1971) argues that the “collectivist ethos” and the “ethos of repudiation” is what distinguishes Black American culture from white American culture. This collectivist ethos rejects the “fantasies” of individual advancement in favor of collective advancement of the race as a whole based on changes in societal rather than individual behavior (Walton & Smith, 2000). A liberal egalitarianism is

central to this collectivist ethos, which should manifest in Blacks placing a greater emphasis on equality than whites. Survey data show that, in response to the statement, “the government should reduce income inequality between the rich and poor,” 73 percent of Black Americans agree compared to 44 percent of white Americans (Baker, 1971). Through our original data collection of a sample of nearly 6,000 Americans, we find that perceptions of what constitutes fairness are fundamentally different between whites and Blacks.<sup>3</sup> When asked “which of these comes closest to what fairness means to you,” Blacks were significantly more likely than whites to select “treating everyone equally” ( $p < 0.025$ ), whereas whites were significantly more likely to select, “rewarding those who contribute the most and work the hardest” ( $p < 0.001$ ).<sup>4</sup> These results affirm that white and Black Americans understand fairness in different ways. But how does the collectivist ethos of Black Americans, compared to the out-group resentment of white Americans (Kinder & Winter, 2001), translate to differences in trade policy preferences? If lower levels of prejudice and greater openness to outgroups contribute to pro-trade views among minorities (Mutz et al., 2021), we should expect the Black American collectivist ethos to lead to higher levels of support for trade agreements that benefit both countries equally, as opposed to white Americans preference for protectionism and an “America first” trade agenda.

### *(Dis)Trust of the State*

Another key component of contemporary Black American political subculture is a pervasive and deep sense of alienation from, or distrust of, government. For example, a Pew Research Poll regarding the U.S. federal government response to Hurricane Katrina revealed that 66 percent of Black respondents thought the government’s response would have been faster if

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<sup>3</sup> This sample was compiled using Survey Sampling International in the fall of 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The question offered a third response, which was “helping those most in need so they can have the same opportunities as everyone else,” which did not have a significant difference between whites and Blacks ( $p < 0.182$ ).

most of the victims had been white, compared to only 17 percent of white respondents (Walton & Smith, 2000). Although political efficacy and trust in government tends to be shaped more by class than race for white Americans, Black Americans at all class levels tend to display relatively low levels of political trust (Avery, 2006). Contrary to white Americans, government distrust among Black Americans follows more from racial group consciousness than from short-term political and policy evaluations. More recent work in IR has shown that Black political alienation may vary with presidential administration due, in part, to the mechanism of linked fate. Under the Bush administration, greater Black alienation from the U.S. presidency accounted for a substantial portion of the racial difference in support for the use of force. Under the Obama administration, however, Black Americans were substantially less likely to report feelings of alienation from the presidency, exhibiting greater trust in the American political system because they trusted the figurehead with whom they shared racial background and Democratic partisanship (Green-Riley & Leber, 2023). Considered alongside Brutger & Rathbun's (2021) idea of asymmetric fairness in assessments of the nation's trade imbalances, we suspect that Black Americans' general distrust of the State affects the way they assess the fairness of trade outcomes that are favorable and unfavorable to the U.S. compared to whites. Given Black and white Americans' unique histories with the State, we expect that whites, on average, will be more concerned with the national well-being, and thus exhibit much greater disadvantageous inequality aversion than Black Americans when thinking about national trade balances or trade concessions in international negotiations.

## **Data and Methods**

To test our expectations, we rely on the replication data from Brutger and Rathbun's survey experiment (2021), with the addition of individual-level respondent characteristics. This data allows us to examine how whites and Blacks perceive the fairness of international trade

agreements that result in favorable, unfavorable, or equal tariff concessions.<sup>5</sup> The experiment was fielded on a diverse population of Americans using Survey Sampling International (SSI) in the fall of 2017. The sample of Americans is broadly representative based on demographics such as age, education, income, and gender, and additional details about the survey and sample are provided in Brutger and Rathbun’s article (2021).

To evaluate whether white and Black Americans differ in their concern for disadvantageous inequality, we begin by analyzing data from the experiment that randomized the relative concessions made by the U.S. and another country during a trade negotiation. The study had three treatment conditions of interest—whether the tariff concessions are *Equal*, *Favorable*, or *Unfavorable*. In the equal treatment condition, both parties make the same concessions. In the favorable treatment condition, the other country makes a larger concession than the U.S., whereas in the unfavorable treatment condition the U.S. makes a larger concession than the other country. To create these treatment conditions, the study randomly varied the concessions each side made, such that each party could make a 30 percent, 60 percent, or 90 percent cut to their tariffs. Thus, the equal treatment includes equal concessions of 30/30, 60/60, and 90/90 by both sides. The favorable treatment includes concessions of 30/60, 60/90, and 30/90, where the first number is the percent tariff cut by the U.S. and the second is the percent cut by the other country. The unfavorable treatment is the inverse of the favorable treatment. After reading the brief text about the trade agreement, participants were asked how fair they thought the trade agreement was, with responses ranging from “very unfair” to “very fair” on a five-point scale. Respondents

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<sup>5</sup> Like Brutger and Rathbun (2021), we recognize that from an economic perspective where trade liberalization can create gains from trade, asymmetric reductions in tariffs may not necessarily be economically favorable or unfavorable, however, we use these terms since they are consistent with the political rhetoric surrounding the issue.

were also asked whether they would support or oppose the agreement, with responses ranging from “strongly oppose” to “strongly support” on a five-point scale.

As discussed earlier, the literature on critical race theory suggests that white Americans have been socialized to exhibit greater disadvantageous inequality aversion than Black Americans, who have been socialized to being behind in society on a number of material and political dimensions. Thus, we test the following hypotheses in our analysis.<sup>6</sup> First, we expect that Black Americans will exhibit significantly less asymmetric fairness than white Americans (H1), meaning that the gap in perceived fairness between favorable and unfavorable agreements should be larger for whites than Blacks. In its purest form, the theory also implies that Black Americans will exhibit a principled fairness logic (H2), rather than an asymmetric fairness logic. This should manifest in Black Americans evaluating favorable trade balances and unfavorable trade balances to be equally (un)fair.

## **Findings**

We begin our analysis by comparing white and Black respondents’ perceptions of fairness across the treatment conditions in the first study. To formally test whether the treatments have divergent effects amongst whites and Blacks, we regress the fairness measure on the equal and favorable treatment conditions, along with an interaction term for the treatment and respondent race. The results of these OLS regressions are shown below in Table 1, where the baseline is the unfavorable treatment, and the average fairness scores are displayed in Figure 1.

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<sup>6</sup> The lead author of this paper theorized about the differential fairness perceptions by race after reading Brutger and Rathbun (2021). Brutger and Rathbun made the original data available to the lead author to conduct this analysis. Given the serendipitous origin of this new analysis of old data, we do not have a pre-analysis plan.

Table 1: OLS Regression of Fairness Assessment on Equal and Favorable Treatment Conditions and Race

	Model 1	Model 2
Equal Treatment Condition	0.226 (0.162)	
Favorable Treatment Condition		-0.017 (0.172)
White	-0.304** (0.127)	-0.304** (0.127)
Treatment*White	0.528*** (0.178)	0.599*** (0.178)
Constant	0.063 (0.122)	0.063 (0.122)
Observations	1,786	1,771

*Note:* Fairness assessment based on a scale from -2 (Strongly Oppose) to 2 (Strongly Support). Standard errors included in parentheses. The sample consists of those who identify as white or Black.

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

Our first hypothesis expects that Black Americans will exhibit significantly less asymmetric fairness than white Americans, which means that the gap in perceived fairness between the favorable and unfavorable agreements should be larger for whites than Blacks. Model 2 of Table 1 tests this difference, and provides strong support for hypothesis 1. As predicted, we find that white Americans' exhibit a large asymmetry in their fairness evaluations of favorable and unfavorable trade agreements, and this asymmetry is much larger amongst whites than Blacks, as illustrated with the significant interaction term in Model 2 (0.599, p < 0.01). Consistent with the idea that white Americans are concerned with falling behind, we find that whites view it as especially unfair when the U.S. makes larger concessions than the other country. However, it is worth noting that white Americans are not simply justifying any outcome

that favors them as being fair. Consistent with Brutger and Rathbun's aggregate results (2021), we find that white Americans view the trade agreement with equal concessions to be the fairest, as shown in Model 1 and Figure 1. White respondents rate the equal agreement as significantly fairer than the favorable trade agreement (0.17,  $p < 0.001$ ), which is consistent with the asymmetric fairness theory.

We also find evidence in support of our more demanding second hypothesis, which is that Black Americans engage in a principled fairness assessment, and thus they should view the favorable and unfavorable agreements as being equally (un)fair. Indeed, we find that there is not a significant difference between Blacks' fairness evaluations of the favorable and unfavorable trade agreements (0.017,  $p < 0.92$ ). These results are in line with our argument, in that we observe Black Americans exhibiting more of a principled fairness logic than whites, where trade deals with equal outcomes are considered to be (slightly) more fair than favorable deals, and the fairness of favorable and unfavorable deals is assessed equally, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>7</sup>

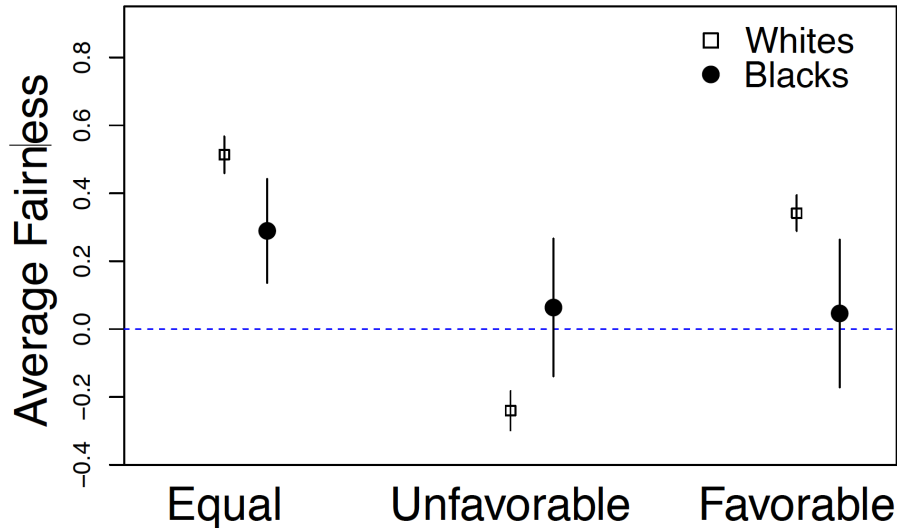
Another important result from Table 1, is that whites view the baseline unfavorable treatment condition as being significantly less fair than Black respondents do (-0.304,  $p < 0.02$ ). This is consistent with whites believing it is especially unfair when they are falling behind or placed in an unfavorable position. The effect of the interaction term of the equal treatment condition and our indicator for white respondents on fairness assessment is 0.53 ( $p < 0.00$ ) while the effect of the interaction term of favorable treatment and white race on fairness assessment is 0.60 ( $p < 0.00$ ). The magnitude of this moderating effect is substantial given that fairness is measured from -2 to 2 scale. The significance of these interaction effects confirms that

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<sup>7</sup> Some may be concerned that the null effect of the favorable treatment, compared to the unfavorable condition, among Black respondents could be due to varying levels of education or numeracy amongst white and Black respondents. We examine this by testing our effects among those with lower and higher levels of education, as shown in the appendix, section A.3. We find that those with, and without, a college have strong responses to our treatment, so it is very unlikely that the racial difference can be explained by levels of education or numeracy.

asymmetric fairness evaluations are prominent amongst whites and that Black Americans do not view trade through an asymmetric fairness lens, since they do not appear to have the same fear of falling behind as white Americans.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1: Fairness Evaluations of Whites and Blacks



*Note:* Figure 1 displays the average fairness score by treatment type, measured from -2 to 2, with 95 percent confidence intervals. Higher values represent greater perceived fairness of the trade agreement. The results are divided based on whether respondents identified as white or Black.

### *Evaluating Competing Explanations*

We next connect our results to the line of work that focuses on support for trade, moving to our second dependent variable, which is a five-point measure of support for the trade agreement. We find that the favorable treatment results in the highest level of support from whites, as shown in Figure 2. Whites support for the favorable condition is 0.09 ( $p < 0.06$ ) higher than the equal treatment and 0.65 ( $p < 0.001$ ) higher than the unfavorable treatment.

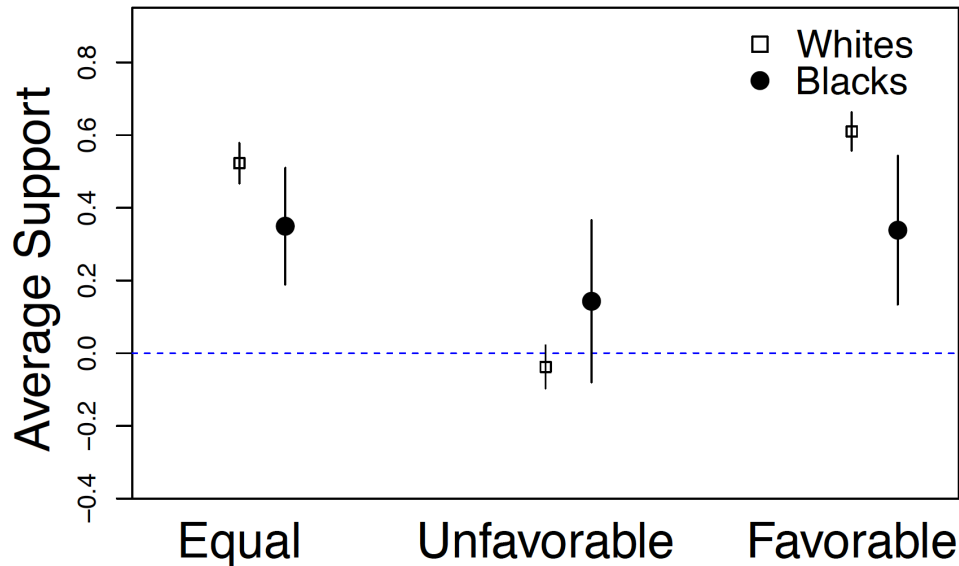
Interestingly, there is no difference in support for the favorable and equal treatments amongst Blacks (-0.01,  $p < 0.95$ ). Though interpretation of the results amongst Blacks warrants some

<sup>8</sup> The marginal effects of the favorable treatment, compared to the unfavorable condition, are displayed in section A.4 of the appendix.



caution, given the sample size, this is a clear case where the two estimates of support are substantively identical, and so we feel confident that Black Americans do not have higher support for the favorable trade concessions compared to the equal concessions.

Figure 2: Support for Trade Agreement of Whites and Blacks



*Note:* Figure 2 displays the average support score by treatment type, measured from -2 to 2, with 95 percent confidence intervals. Higher values represent greater levels of support for the trade agreement. The results are divided based on whether respondents identified as white or Black.

Next, we re-analyze the first study with a focus on disentangling the influence of nationalism from the effect of the distinct historical experiences of whites and Blacks. Our initial results are broadly consistent with the findings of Mutz et al. (2021:560), who note that whites view trade through a nationalistic lens (Mutz et al., 2021:560), and thus they prefer deals that favor the U.S. However, we are also interested in whether race has an additional effect, even after controlling for individuals' level of nationalism. To disentangle these effects, we use a measure of national attachment that is a composite of two frequently used measures (Hermann, 2009), which ask "When someone says something bad about American people, how strongly do

you feel it is as if they said something bad about you?” and “How much do you feel that what happens to America in general will be your fate?” Each question has a five-point response scale with higher values corresponding to greater national attachment. We sum the responses from the two questions, which creates our measure of national attachment. The distributions of national attachment for white and Black respondents are displayed in section A.2 of the appendix, which shows that national attachment is relatively similar between the two groups, with each group having the same quartile and median cut-points, though average national attachment is 0.29 higher amongst whites than Blacks. For the remaining analysis, we sum the national attachment responses and rescale them from zero-to-one for ease of interpretability.

The main effects of our treatments are remarkably robust, even when controlling for nationalism, as shown in Table 2. We find that the main effects and interaction effects all maintain their signs and significance with the additional control. We do find that nationalism exerts a significant effect on its own, but it does not undermine the significant interactions between race and our treatment effects.

We also test whether nationalism has significant interaction effects with our treatments, and the relative magnitude of the interaction effects, with the interactions reported in Table 1A of the appendix. We find that nationalism does *not* have significant interaction effect with the equal treatment, compared to the unfavorable baseline (0.155,  $p < 0.476$ ). This suggests that race is not simply proxying for levels of nationalism, and instead we find that considering the effects of race on trade provides new insights into how the American public thinks about fairness and trade. We also interact nationalism with the favorable treatment condition and find that those who are highly nationalistic do believe the favorable condition is fairer than respondents who are low in nationalism (0.473,  $p < 0.028$ ). The magnitude of this interaction effect is about 20 percent

Table 2: OLS Regression of Fairness Assessment on Equal and Favorable Treatment Conditions and Race, Controlling for Nationalism

	Model 1	Model 2
Equal Treatment Condition	0.232 (0.162)	
Favorable Treatment Condition		-0.0005 (0.171)
White	-0.309** (0.127)	-0.312** (0.126)
Treatment*White	0.524*** (0.169)	0.589*** (0.178)
Nationalism	0.229** (0.108)	0.396*** (0.107)
Constant	-0.051 (0.133)	-0.133 (0.133)
Observations	1,784	1,768

*Note:* Fairness assessment based on a scale from -2 (Strongly Oppose) to 2 (Strongly Support). Standard errors included in parentheses. The sample consists of those who identify as white or Black.

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

smaller than the interaction effect between race and the favorable condition. Taken together, our analysis demonstrates that nationalism plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of the fairness of trade agreements, but race, and specifically the distinct histories of whites and Blacks, also plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of international trade.

Though the evidence suggests race plays an important role in determining how individuals evaluate fairness, another alternative explanation that could potentially explain our results stems from the political orientations of Black Americans. We know that Black Americans

are more likely to vote for Democrats than Republicans and embrace liberal ideology,<sup>9</sup> so it may be that our racial indicators are proxying for the ideological or political preferences of respondents. Furthermore, Democrats and liberals in the U.S. are more likely to embrace liberal egalitarianism and evaluate fairness in terms of equality (Brutger 2021; Powers et al, 2022). This raises the possibility that race is not the driving force behind the different fairness evaluations of whites and Blacks, and instead ideological or political preferences may be the primary causal mechanisms. If this alternative explanation is true, then we would expect that white liberals and white Democrats would view the world (and trade) through a principled fairness lens, similar to their Black counterparts. We test this alternative explanation by comparing the favorable to the unfavorable conditions amongst whites, with the results shown in Table 3.

We find that the fairness evaluations of white Americans across the political and ideological spectrum are inconsistent with an evaluation based on principled fairness. Instead, we see that whites---even those who identify as liberals and/or democrats---consistently view the world through an asymmetric fairness lens, as shown by the significant positive effects of the favorable treatment across all models in Table 3. Though we find white liberals and democrats exhibit somewhat less asymmetric fairness than their more conservative counterparts, there is no question that even liberal white Americans evaluate trade through an asymmetric fairness lens, as opposed to a principled fairness lens. These results affirm the dominance of the of asymmetric fairness lens amongst white Americans and demonstrate that political orientation and ideology do not account for the difference between white and Black Americans perceptions of fairness.

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<sup>9</sup> Jefferson (2023) finds that the terms “liberal” and “conservative” do not take on significant meaning for many Black Americans, and so typical ideology measures may not reflect Blacks’ true political orientations.

Table 3: OLS Regression of Fairness Assessment of Whites by Partisanship and Ideology

	Democrats	Republicans	Liberals	Conservatives
Favorable Treatment	0.477*** (0.091)	0.693*** (0.085)	0.455*** (0.101)	0.814*** (0.085)
Constant	-0.188*** (0.066)	-0.199*** (0.059)	-0.213*** (0.073)	-0.257*** (0.059)
Observations	488	533	403	570

*Note:* Table 3 displays the results for respondents who identify as white, broken into subgroups based on political party and ideology. Fairness assessment based on a scale from -2 (Strongly Oppose) to 2 (Strongly Support). Ideology is measured on a five-point scale from 1 (extremely liberal) to 5 (extremely conservative). Those who selected 1 or 2 are considered liberals, and those who selected 4 or 5 are considered conservative. Standard errors included in parentheses.

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

## Discussion

Social perceptions of fairness shape policy preferences in many areas of politics.

Building on recent work on trade policy preferences, this study asked, how does race affect the relationship between American conceptions of fairness and support for U.S. trade policy? Using experimental evidence from a national survey experiment, we show how contrasting perceptions of fairness among white and Black Americans lead to distinct evaluations of trade policy.

Consistent with the findings of Brutger and Rathbun (2021), we find that white Americans exhibit “asymmetric fairness” in their assessment of U.S. trade deals. They consider equal trade deals between the U.S. and another country to be the most fair, followed closely by trade deals that are more favorable to the U.S. than another country. Trade deals that are unfavorable to the U.S. are considered to be unfair. Ultimately, white Americans are most supportive of trade deals that are most favorable to the U.S.

In contrast to white Americans, we find that Black Americans consider trade deals with equal outcomes to be the most fair, while showing no differences in fairness assessment between

trade deals that are favorable or unfavorable to the U.S. Thus, Black Americans exhibit a principled fairness logic, rather than an asymmetric fairness logic, in their assessment of trade policy. Leveraging the literature on critical race theory and Black politics, we argue that Blacks' historically subordinate position in systemically racist American society has made them less susceptible to disadvantageous inequality aversion, an individual fear of being further behind than someone else, which drives asymmetric fairness. The experience of being further behind in American society, often because of the actions of the State, makes Black Americans less supportive of "America first" trade policies. Meanwhile, that white Americans have been socialized to having their interests privileged and protected by the State makes them more supportive of trade policies that keep America, and themselves, ahead. Put simply, one does not exhibit a fear of falling behind if one has been behind from the start.

This study overcomes the limitations of recent work on racial divides in trade preferences by focusing on a single minority group, Black Americans, to understand the distinct cultural, historical, and political bases that informs this group's view on trade policy. This analytical focus moves us closer to understanding the mechanisms underlying divergent policy preferences between social and political groups. Future studies of Black American trade policy preferences might examine how such preferences are influenced by the identity of specific trading partners. If the trading country is a majority Black nation from the global South, for example, how might that shape Black Americans' fairness assessments of different concession arrangements? Future research might also take a more inductive approach to understanding how, exactly, historical experiences of racism have shaped and continue to shape the fairness logics of Black Americans.

Ultimately, our findings provide additional empirical support for the theoretical distinction between white American political subculture and Black American political subculture. The different perspectives and meanings held by groups with different experiences of

distributional disadvantage, even beyond the boundaries of race, has important implications for how both domestic and foreign policies will be received and understood across the U.S. and other stratified societies. More specifically, however, our findings serve as a call to action for IR scholars to consider racism and resulting racial cleavages when examining American support for international policies, especially to the extent that such support is mediated by socially constructed moral principles, like fairness.

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## Supplementary Appendix to:

### Fairness According to Whom?:

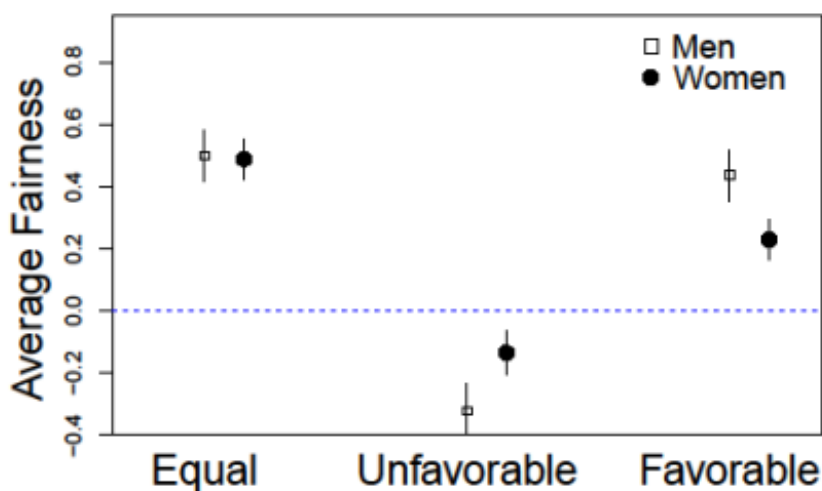
#### Divergent Perceptions of Fairness Among White and Black Americans

#### and its Effect on Trade Attitudes

##### A.1: Fairness Evaluations of Men and Women.

Our theory predicts that the history of gender discrimination in the U.S. should make women less concerned with falling behind, and less likely to view the world through an asymmetric fairness lens than men. To test this, we examine whether the difference in fairness evaluations is greater for men than women when comparing the favorable to the unfavorable treatment conditions. Indeed, we find that men have a much larger increase in their fairness assessments than women (0.401,  $p < 0.004$ ). While women do not employ a principled fairness logic, women do exhibit less of an asymmetric fairness evaluation than their male counterparts. Figure 1A shows that women view the favorable conditions as significantly fairer than the unfavorable condition (0.357,  $p < 0.001$ ), though the magnitude of this effect is smaller than it is for men.

Figure 1A: Fairness for Trade Agreement of Men and Women

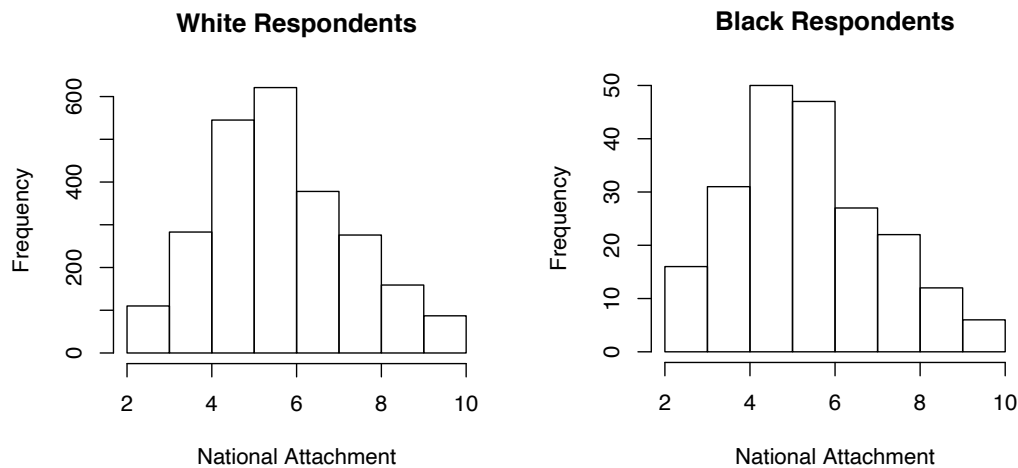


*Note:* Figure 1A displays the average fairness score by treatment type, measured from -2 to 2, with 95 percent confidence intervals. Higher values represent greater perceived fairness of the trade agreement. The results are divided based on whether respondents identified as male or female (omitting those who selected other).

## A.2: National Attachment

We begin our analysis of national attachment by comparing the distributions of national attachment for white and Black respondents. We find that the distributions are quite similar, having the same minimum, maximum and quartile cut-points (minimum=1, 1st quartile=5, median=6, 3rd quartile=7, maximum=10). The average measure of national attachment is slightly higher for whites than Blacks (0.29,  $p < 0.02$ ).

Figure 2A: National Attachment for whites and Blacks



*Note:* Figure 2A displays histograms of the national attachment measure for those who identify as white or Black. The national attachment measure is a composite of two questions, each of which could take a value from 1 to 5, meaning that the total measure can take a value from 2 to 10.

In Table 1A we interact our equal and favorable treatments with national attachment (rescaled from zero to one). We find that national attachment does not have a significant interaction with the equal treatment, though it does have a significant interaction with the favorable treatment (unfavorable is the baseline in both models). The magnitude of the interaction effect is about 20 percent smaller than the magnitude of the interaction between the favorable condition and the indicator for white respondents.

Table 1A: OLS Regression of Fairness Assessment on Equal and Favorable Treatment Conditions and Nationalism

	Model 1	Model 2
Equal Treatment Condition	0.634*** (0.121)	
Favorable Treatment Condition		-0.300*** (0.119)
Nationalism	0.154 (0.155)	0.154** (0.155)
Treatment*Nationalism	0.155 (0.476)	0.473** (0.214)
Constant	-0.299 (0.087)	-0.133 (0.133)
Observations	1,784	1,764

Notes: Fairness assessment based on a scale from -2 (Strongly Oppose) to 2 (Strongly Support). Standard errors included in parentheses. The sample consists of those who identify as white or Black. The unfavorable treatment is the baseline.

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

Figure 3A: Marginal Effect of Equal and Favorable Treatment by National Attachment

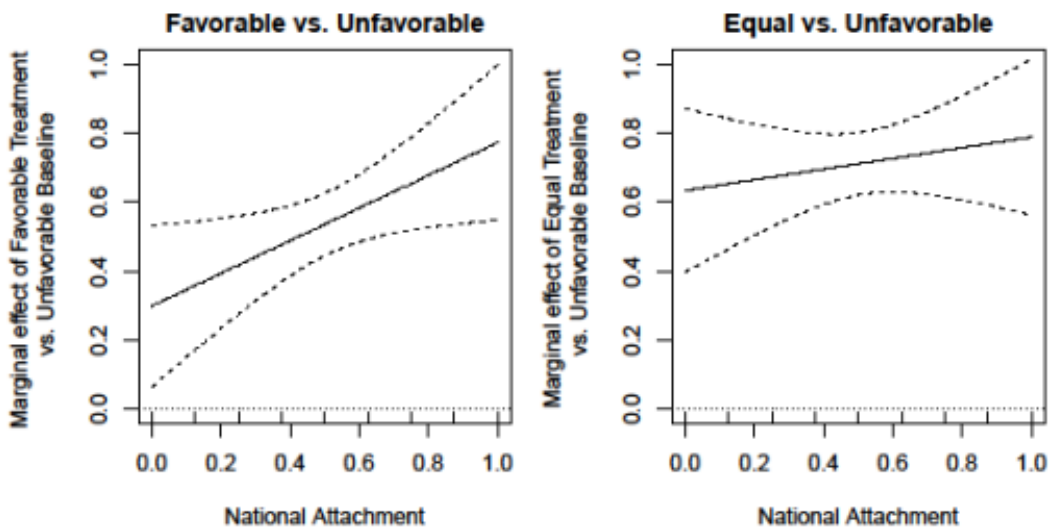


Figure 3A displays the marginal effects of the favorable treatment (left) and equal treatment (right) by respondents' level of national attachment for those who identify as white or Black. The national attachment measure is a composite of two questions, each of which could take a value from 1 to 5, meaning that the total measure can take a value from 2 to 10.

### A.3: Education

In Table 2A we interact our equal and favorable treatments with an indicator for whether the respondent earned a college degree. If education or numeracy are driving our divergent results, we would expect that those without a college degree would have a harder time interpreting the treatments, which would result in a null effect amongst these individuals. We find that having a college education does not have a significant interaction with the equal or favorable treatments. This suggests that even those without high levels of education understood the treatments and viewed the favorable and equal treatments as significantly fairer than the unfavorable condition.

Table 2A: OLS Regression of Fairness Assessment on Equal and Favorable Treatment Conditions and Education

	Model 1	Model 2
Equal Treatment Condition	0.664*** (0.065)	
Favorable Treatment Condition		0.480*** (0.066)
College Degree	-0.021 (0.065)	-0.021 (0.065)
Treatment* College Degree	0.109 (0.092)	0.117 (0.092)
Constant	-0.211*** (0.046)	-0.211*** (0.046)
Observations	1,782	1,768

*Notes:* Fairness assessment based on a scale from -2 (Strongly Oppose) to 2 (Strongly Support). Standard errors included in parentheses. The sample consists of those who identify as white or Black. The unfavorable treatment is the baseline.

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

#### A.4: Marginal Effects of Favorable Treatment by Race

In Figure 4A we report the marginal effects of the favorable treatment from Table 1A for white and Black respondents. We find that Black respondents view the favorable and unfavorable conditions as equally (un)fair, whereas white respondents believe the favorable treatment is much fairer.

Figure 4A: Marginal Effect of Equal and Favorable Treatment by National Attachment

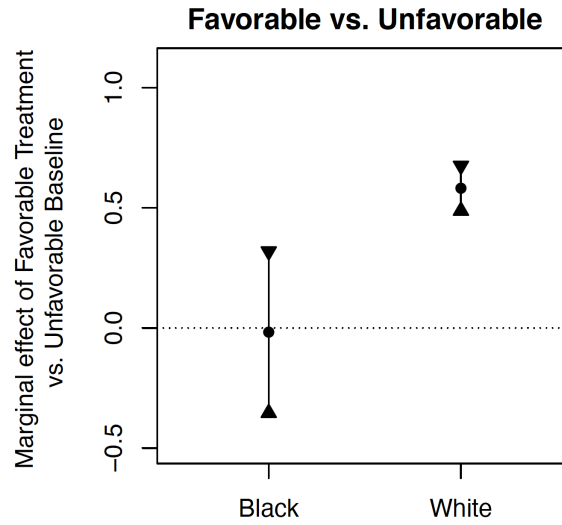


Figure 4A displays the marginal effects of the favorable treatment, compared to the unfavorable condition, by respondents' self-identified race.