

Perceived Racial Efficacy and Voter Engagement Among African-Americans: A Cautionary Tale from 2016

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Abstract: Political efficacy plays an important role in mediating the relationship between constituents and their government and positively influences turnout in elections. This paper investigates the effect blacks' perceptions of racism in American institutions and society have on their propensity to vote in the presidential election. We call this measure *racial efficacy*. We hypothesize that blacks with high feelings of racial efficacy, the perception that American institutions and society operate and disburse justice in a racially equitable manner, the more likely they will be to vote in 2016. Conversely, blacks with low feelings of racial efficacy, who believe that government and society are racially unjust were discouraged from voting. However, we posit that confidence in in-group leaders and movements can counteract the demobilizing effect of low racial efficacy.

Our analysis uses data from an African American Research Collaborative (AARC) survey which surveyed 1,200 African American registered voters nationally, with oversamples in Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. Regression analysis of voter turnout in 2016 finds that blacks with low feelings of racial efficacy are statistically less likely to vote, all else being equal. We also find support for our in-group confidence theory where having highly favorable attitudes toward Barack Obama, Black Elected Officials, and BLM recovers the propensity to vote for low racial efficacy blacks almost to the levels of their racially optimistic counterparts. This contributes to the literature by further examining the intersections of efficacy, discrimination, and political behavior.

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Introduction

It is now well documented that African American voter turnout was lower in 2016 than in 2012 (Krogstad and Lopez 2017). Simplistic political analysis suggested this was the result of a lack of investment in outreach in black communities, the lack of enthusiasm with Barack Obama's departure from the political stage, and increased feelings of distrust over high profile police shootings of unarmed black men. One of the earliest scholarly accounts of post-Obama African American engagement comes from Block and Collins (2018) who find evidence of a decline in enthusiasm related to Obama leaving office. However, we wish to push this finding further, to explore the extent to which diminished turnout may have been the result of declining efficacy, not just political efficacy as traditionally defined, but specifically in efficacy of political institutions and society to uphold racial equality. We call this concept *racial efficacy*, and argue that in 2016 racial efficacy was a primary factor in understanding degree of black voter turnout.

Decades of scholarship suggests political efficacy plays an important role in mediating the relationship between constituents and their government and positively influences turnout in elections (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Morrell 2003). Prior research shows that blacks feel much less politically efficacious than do whites and that they also feel more political mistrust, which is associated with feelings of alienation (Hughes and Demo 1989; Bobo and Gilliam 1990). When blacks feel that they are unable to make a difference in politics, they essentially tune out, but representation in government may counteract these feelings. With the candidacy of Obama in 2008 and 2012, we saw record

turnout for blacks, but black voter turnout took a dip in 2016 amidst the racially regressive rhetoric of Donald Trump, the racially charged protests and high-profile shootings of blacks, and the absence of Barack Obama on the ballot. In this paper we seek to pinpoint why black turnout declined, and further to establish what factors might increase black turnout in the face of low racial efficacy.

Given the increased attention to police misconduct, officer involved shootings, and the resulting protest movement by BLM and others, it is important to take note of the political moment that black Americans find themselves in following eight years of the Obama presidency. The constant and coordinated undermining of Obama's presidency by conservative politicians and right-wing media served to further foment racial hostility against minorities (Parker and Barreto 2013; Tesler 2012; Efron, Cameron and Monin 2009). At the same time, police shootings of unarmed black men – or at least media attention to them – seemed to be increasing at an alarming rate (Lopez 2017). Dozens of states rolled back early voting and Sunday voting and proposed voter photo ID laws that many African American leaders decried as the new Jim Crow (Ingraham 2016).

This paper asks what effect blacks' perceptions of racism in American institutions and society have on their propensity to vote in the presidential election. We evaluate the effect of attitudinal support for prominent black politicians and black activist organizations on black voter turnout. We hypothesize that blacks with high feelings of racial efficacy – the perception that American institutions and society operate and disburse justice in a racially equitable manner – the more likely they will be to participate in government through voting. Conversely, blacks with low feelings of racial efficacy – who believe that government and society are racially unjust – are discouraged from political participation

through voting. However, we posit that confidence in in-group leaders and movements can counteract the demobilizing effect of low racial efficacy.

Our analysis uses data from an African American Research Collaborative (AARC) survey which surveyed 1,200 African American registered voters nationally, with oversamples in Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. Regression analysis of voter turnout in 2016 finds that blacks with low feelings of racial efficacy are statistically less likely to vote, all else being equal. We also find support for our in-group confidence theory where having highly favorable attitudes toward Barack Obama, Black Elected Officials, and BLM recovers the propensity to vote for low racial efficacy blacks almost to the levels of their racially optimistic counterparts. To supplement the observational survey data, we conclude with an RCT survey experiment to demonstrate that low levels of racial efficacy does reduce political participation among black voters. This contributes to the literature by further examining the intersections of efficacy, discrimination, and political behavior.

Political Efficacy and Participation

Political efficacy is one of the most studied concepts in political science. How citizens feel about their government, their voice and representativeness, and their agency has received considerable attention since *before* the classic, *The American Voter*. Using the 1952 sample from the ANES, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) define political efficacy as follows:

“the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e., that it is worthwhile to perform one’s civic duties. It is the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change.”

Political efficacy plays an important role in mediating the relationship between constituents and their government. It fosters increased electoral political participation and positively affects people's satisfaction for governmental policies (Almond and Verba 1963; A. Campbell et al. 1960). Balch (1974), Campbell and Converse (1972), and Coleman and Davis (1976) built on this early work by recognizing that political efficacy can be internal, one's own belief about their ability to understand and participate effectively in politics, and/or external, one's belief in the responsiveness of government and institutions to citizens' demands. Political efficacy does vary starkly between economic and racial groups. Socioeconomic status plays an important role in individuals' feelings of efficacy, so higher income voters are much more likely to participate than are lower income voters (Verba and Nie 1972).

Shingles (1981) asks why black people engage more in political participation than their white counterparts of similar socioeconomic status. His theory states that there is a psychological state linking black consciousness with political involvement and that this state of consciousness is unique to black people. He argues that black consciousness increases political efficacy, influencing political participation more than class alone. Shingles says that Verba and Nie do not explain why black Americans specialize in some forms of participation, like campaign work and community projects, but not in other forms. Using evidence from a 1967 survey of 3095 21-year-olds conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, he concludes that blacks make a greater effort to influence public policy than poor whites who have no equivalent group "consciousness". Shingles further refines Verba and Nie and argues that political mistrust and internal political efficacy are conditional on black group consciousness. That is, black group consciousness translates

into higher internal efficacy and lower mistrust, and subsequently higher participation, depending largely on the context (activation of group consciousness). He argues that internalized racism led African Americans to blame the political system for lower socioeconomic status, which increase their political efficacy and participation. Tate (1991) also argues this point but finds that black participation is heavily influenced by context rather than efficacy. She finds that more feelings of racism or lower feelings of system responsiveness are associated with lower turnout in presidential primary in 1984 and 1988 for African Americans, in the context of potentially nominating the first black major party candidate for the Presidential race. Cohen and Dawson (1993) find that personal efficacy is generated through experiences determined by their interactions between social status and systems of inequality.

Political Alienation:

Political alienation among African Americans is also linked with political participation. Seeman (1959) broke alienation up into five meanings in order to better study this phenomena: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Middleton (1963) argues that these five types of alienation are highly correlated with each other and also argues that they are all products of social conditions which limit and block attainment of culturally-valued objectives. His evidence from a small survey of a Florida city supports this argument. Studies that investigate the link between political alienation and behavior find evidence that political alienation in general can lead to political withdrawal, protest, riot, or even terrorism (Muller, Jukam, and Seligson 1982; Schwartz 1973; Wright 1976). Moreover, Finifter (1970) investigates political alienation's

influence on different behaviors. She examines the ways in which Seeman's modes of alienation may be useful in studying attitudes toward the political system. She argues that the variables used to construct the measures of these modes of alienation are different significantly across each mode and finds that these modes lead to different behavior. Most relevant to our study, she points out that individuals who participate in groups aimed at correcting social conditions that keep subgroups from full participation in the system are likely to feel little political powerlessness but perceive a higher degree of norm violation along Seeman's five dimensions of alienation.

Mangum (2003) tests how individual and group level black political behavior is influenced by trust in government, political engagement, and political efficacy. Using the 1996 National Black Election Study, he finds evidence that group political efficacy matters a great deal in black voting behavior but individual efficacy does not factor into this decision-making process. He also finds that there is an inverse relationship between trust in government and turnout for blacks. Hetherington (2006) investigates how political trust matters for support for racial policy and argues that whites do not generally trust the government to effectively or fairly administer race-targeted programs. Using political trust as an independent variable, he provides convincing evidence for this claim. In his study on black youth in the South, Jackson (1973) finds high levels of high personal morale and high levels of political efficacy coupled with very low levels of trust toward those in government. He argues that young black people do not expect a response let alone a satisfactory response from government in regard to the social situations of Jackson's respondents.

Political Behavior:

Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) find that age, income, education, religious affiliation, occupation, information level, and class all predict individuals' likeliness to vote. Building on this, Verba and Nie (1972) link socioeconomic status to levels of political participation without acknowledging the significance of ethnicity in this phenomena. Nelson (1979) goes beyond this earlier work in studying the role of ethnicity, defined roughly the same way that we define race today, in political behavior. Nelson looks at is "communal" rather than voting behavior and is partitioned by four types of action: contacting local public officials about community problems, joining community problem-solving organizations, signing petitions for neighborhood improvement, and attending community political protest demonstrations. The theory at work is that political culture is highly related to problem-solving action. The author argues that differences between ethnic groups' political culture causes them to participate at different rates. He uses data from the 1973 survey of Manhattan by the New York City Neighborhood Project, Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) and conducts a correlation analysis on these data and find that ethnicity has a greater effect than socioeconomic status on levels of participant political culture. Nelson's main conclusion is that ethnicity plays a role in political behavior.

Bobo and Gilliam (1990) ask to what extent does political context matter for black voters. They evidence of increased participation as a function of black empowerment, which is that African Americans are more trusting and have greater political efficacy, thereby greatly increasing black attentiveness to political affairs, when they live in areas with descriptive representation.

Group Consciousness:

Research on group consciousness finds extensive evidence that marginalized groups are conscious of their membership to that group and that this consciousness is demonstrated in individuals' political behavior and political decisions. Group consciousness developed out of Durkheim's (1893) idea of a collective consciousness, "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society." Dawson (1995) analyzes data from the National Black Election Study (1984 and 1988), the 1989 Detroit Area Study, and Gallup Polls (from 1961-1985) and finds that group consciousness for black people plays a role in the political process. He coins this the "black utility heuristic", the tendency of blacks to put the interests of the collective group of blacks before their individual interests when developing political preferences and evaluating candidates. From this study comes the concept of linked fate, which stems from the question: "Do you think that what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?"

Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) formulate a theory for explaining political behavior which emphasizes the effects of positive affect. They coin it as "Affective Intelligence Theory" and state that feelings of enthusiasm restore existing patterns of attitudes and political behavior for individuals. Building on Affective Intelligence Theory, Davin Phoenix (2017) argues that pride plays an important role in black political behavior. He investigates the relationship between emotions and political behavior in the United States and finds that heterogeneity between whites and black people. He further argues that anger is a powerful force in driving white electoral participation, but not black participation. Using the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post- Election Survey (CMPS), he finds that anger is a weaker mobilizing force for black people than it is for white people. His

findings hold across a wide domain of political engagement, ranging from protest and collective action, to discussing politics in person and on social media, to volunteering and contributing to campaigns, to voting in elections and contacting elected officials. Moreover, his main finding is that pride is much better at mobilizing black people across these domains of action than it is in doing so for white people.

Data and approach

To assess the relationship between racial efficacy and voter participation we rely on two datasets of African American registered voters. The first is a national survey of blacks¹ (n=1200) in October 2016 before the presidential election which included a baseline national sample and then oversamples in Georgia, Pennsylvania and Nevada and implemented by the African American Research Collaborative² (AARC). This survey asked blacks about their interest and intended participation in the 2016 election, alongside a series of questions on perceptions of racial issues and institutions in America. The second dataset, also implemented by AARC, is a survey experiment among black registered voters³ (n=400) that was fielded in October 2017 in Virginia before the gubernatorial election held in November 2017. In this study we randomly assigned respondents to a condition with low racial efficacy (i.e. racial injustice), versus high racial efficacy (i.e. racial equality) and then assessed how respondents across each condition reported their level of faith in government.

Main study

¹ https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8b2f7d_dfb86cf8723d473984f8fe72f5149499.pdf

² <https://www.africanamericanresearch.us/about>

³ https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8b2f7d_bee85592c5fd45babdbf79d3679ebc5a.pdf

The AARC included several items that allowed us to construct our key independent variable, racial efficacy. Racial efficacy is a continuous variable indexed from five questions asking about blacks' perceptions of racism in the government and society. The index is coded such that highest values represent a respondent who is completely racially efficacious and perceives no racism in government or society, while low values indicate a low racial efficacy and the perception that the government and society are highly racist against blacks. The first question asks, "The passage of laws that require you to acquire all of the underlying documents and show a valid photo ID in order to vote are directly aimed at weakening the voting power of the African American community," with allowable responses strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree. The second question asks, "Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the police? Is that a very or somewhat favorable/unfavorable opinion?" The third question asks, "Some people say that the criminal justice system is generally fair to all people without regard to race, while others say that there is systemic racism in the criminal justice system such that African Americans, Latinos and other people of color are often treated unfairly. Which is closer to your opinion?" The fourth question asks, "Over the last 8 years, would you say that race relations have improved a lot, improved a little, stayed the same gotten a little worse, gotten a lot worse?" The fifth question asks, "We'd like to know how you would rate relations between various groups in the United States these days. Would you say relations between blacks and whites are very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad?"

We constructed three variables to proxy a feeling thermometer for Barack Obama, black elected officials, and black lives matter, which we use as key interaction terms moderating the effect of racial efficacy on vote propensity. For each figure, (Obama, black

elected officials, and black lives matter) we indexed two questions, one asking about how these three figures impact a respondent's desire to vote, and another asking how they impact a respondent's desire to get involved in other ways such as contacting elected officials or protesting. The first question asks, "We would like to know how effective different spokespeople and groups are at helping to mobilize the African American community to participate in politics. Please rate each on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "no impact on my desire to vote at all" and 10 being "make me more likely to vote." The second question asks, "We would like to know how effective different individuals and groups of people are at helping to mobilize the African American community to take action on important issues by contacting elected officials, attending rallies and protests or joining community efforts for change. Please rate each on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "no impact on my desire to get involved at all" and 10 being "make me want to get involved to help improve an important issue."

Our dependent variable, vote propensity, is an index of three items asking about respondents' intentions to vote and how enthusiastic they were about the 2016 election. The first question asks, "A lot of people vote early before Election Day, through an absentee ballot, a mail ballot, or at an early voting location. Have you already voted in the 2016 election, or like most people we have talked to, have you not had a chance to vote just yet? If you've already voted—was that by mail, or at an early voting location?" The second question asks, "Many people are busy and don't get a chance to vote in every election. Thinking about the election coming up on Tuesday November 8th, what would you say the chances are that you will vote in the election - are you absolutely certain to vote, will you probably vote, are the chances 50-50, or do you think you will not vote?" And the third

question asks, "Please rate your level of enthusiasm about voting in this year's election for President on a scale from zero to ten, where zero means you are not at all enthusiastic about voting this year and ten means you are extremely enthusiastic about voting this year."

To investigate our hypotheses, we first use multivariate regression models using vote propensity as our key dependent variable and racial efficacy as our key independent variable along with various statistical controls. We then include three sets of regressions interacting our feeling thermometer proxies for Barack Obama, black elected officials, and black lives matter with our racial efficacy variable to show how attitudes toward these figures moderate perceptions of racism. Within these interaction models we subset for a young age cohort (aged 18-39) and older age cohort (aged 40 and up) to show how attitudes toward black elected officials and black lives matter are differently moderated by racial efficacy in determining voting intentions.

Survey Experiment

The survey experiment was fielded in Virginia in October 2017, in advance of the November 2017 gubernatorial election between Democrat Ralph Northam and Republican Ed Gillespie. At the end of the survey, after asking basic questions about the Virginia election, we placed a split-sample priming experiment where we exposed respondents to information intended to induce high racial efficacy or low racial efficacy. Because we are primarily interested in the difference between high and low efficacy, we opted to not include a blind control and instead compare whether or not respondents exposed to high or low racial efficacy are statistically different from one another. The outcome measure we are most interested in is the concept of faith in government, which we think is the

mechanism doing the work in our observational study. The question wording for our experiment was as follows:

[TREATMENT A: HIGH RACIAL EFFICACY] According to a recent study, blacks and whites in the state of Virginia are very likely to be treated equally today. Studies show that the rates of arrests and criminal convictions of blacks are equal to that of whites. Blacks now have the same likelihood of being approved for a home loan as whites. And, Blacks and whites in Virginia have the exact same voter registration and turnout rate.

[TREATMENT B: LOW RACIAL EFFICACY] According to a recent study, blacks in the state of Virginia are very likely to be treated less equal than whites today. Studies show that the rates of arrests and criminal convictions of blacks are 5 time higher than for whites. Blacks are way more likely to be denied a home loan than are whites. And, Blacks have lower voter participation rates than whites due to targeted voter suppression efforts.

Thinking about what you just heard, how would you describe your faith in government: extremely strong, somewhat strong, somewhat weak, extremely weak, or not sure?

We also attempt to tease out the mediating role of racial consciousness, through a series of other questions on the front-end of the survey related to the importance of race and group consciousness, expecting to find the low racial efficacy prime would more strongly impact those with higher levels of race consciousness.

Findings

[Table 1/Figure 1 about here]

The columns 1 of Table 1 we present the result of our main regression analysis measuring the relationship between racial efficacy and the propensity to vote in the 2016 presidential election. The 'All Ages' regression presented in column 1 of Table 1 indicates that the relationship between racial efficacy and vote propensity is especially strong ($p < .001$) despite moderate sample size and numerous controls. As we hypothesized, higher feelings of racial efficacy are significantly correlated with a higher propensity to vote. This is

consistent with our theoretical framework above positing that those who have higher racial efficacy, more positive feelings about race relations in both American institutions and society are more likely to want to participate politically in the form of voting. Moreover, we note that this positive relationship between racial efficacy and vote propensity remains meaningfully unchanged after controlling for a host of competing explanations for intention to vote.

We observed throughout our models in Table 1 that the inclusion of a plethora of controls does not diminish the strong statistical significance of our key relationship. Given the strategic importance of black voters within the democratic party we are aware that they are a highly targeted group for mobilization from campaigns and political organizations, especially in the battleground states oversampled in our survey. Thus, we included a control for respondents who were contacted by a campaign or campaign organization in an attempt to mobilize them for the 2016 vote, which is a method that has been known to have a positive relationship with voting in the past (Masket 2009, Philpot, Shaw et al. 2009). Additionally, we combined two items from our survey to serve as a proxy for religiosity, to mitigate against the potential explanation that blacks' increased activity at church or in worship could be the motivating variable, as consistent with prior research (Calhoun-Brown 1996, Harris 1999, McClerking and McDaniel 2005, McDaniel 2008). Regardless, after controlling for these factors and other more common socioeconomic factors, we observe significant durability in our results.

In addition to accounting for various controls and potential alternative explanations for our findings with racial efficacy, we also include models in columns 2 and 3 of Table 1 to display separate cohort effects for different age groups within our sample. Column 2 displays the model for the subset of respondents between ages 18 and 39, roughly 45% of

the entire sample, while the column 3 displays the effects for those age 40 and older constituting the remaining 55%. We observe that the effect of racial efficacy on vote propensity remains the same, however, in Figure 1 we more easily interpret that slopes for both age cohorts are nearly identical, indicating that the effect of racial efficacy on vote propensity is similar for both the younger and older groups.

[Table 2/Figure 2 about here]

The above results show that blacks with high levels of racialized distrust in government avoid participating in an electoral system that they believe excludes them, however, Table 2 and Figure 2 present data which suggests that increased levels of support for Barack Obama, the first African-American President who arguably represents the ultimate inclusion of blacks in government, has a powerful recovering effect for vote propensity on low racial efficacy blacks. In all 3 columns of Table 2 we observe that support for Obama has a strongly positive effect on the propensity to vote, and proves a remarkably potent mediator for black respondents who have very low feelings of racial efficacy. Panel 1 in Figure 2 shows that those with the lowest levels of racial efficacy, those who believe that American institutions and society are the most racist, can have their propensity to vote almost completely recovered if they have high feelings of support for Obama. This is consistent with our above hypothesis that having highly positive feelings of support for Obama is associated with higher propensity to participate in politics, and that the effect is

long lasting even in election when Barack Obama is no longer on the ballot (Masket 2009, Philpot, Shaw et al. 2009). This effect holds true for both the younger and older cohort as well, as evidenced by columns 2 and 3 of Table 2 and Panels 2 and 3 of Figure 2.

[Table 3/Figure 3 about here]

Similar to the interactive effect of Barack Obama on racial efficacy, we hypothesized that attitudes toward black elected officials, members of congress and government that represented an earlier inclusion and acceptance of blacks in government, might have positive effects on vote propensity as well. Table 3 provides some interesting insight into the relationship between blacks' attitudes toward black elected officials and feelings of racial efficacy and voting. Similar to the effect of support for Barack Obama, we observe that higher feelings of support for black elected officials is significantly correlated with a higher propensity to vote. Again, the effect is powerful enough that for the respondents with the lowest feelings of racial efficacy, high support for black elected officials recovers their voting propensity to near the same level as those with the highest feelings of racial efficacy. This is visually presented in Panel 1 in Figure 3. As we hypothesized, blacks who have strongly positive attitudes toward black politicians are more cognizant of black political elite's role in American government, and perhaps feel more connected to government through their inclusion. However, though we observe significant interactive effects with the Black Elected Official's variable, we observe in Panel 2 of Figure 3 in the younger cohort regressions that this effect is not significant, but in Panel 3 of Figure 3 we observe significance for the older cohort. This is again consistent with our above

hypothesis that older African-American voters would have more memory of what an achievement it is to be a black elected official, and that they would have a stronger effect on their vote propensity. We do not observe a significant relationship here between support for Black Elected Officials and racial efficacy for the younger cohort. This is perhaps because the younger cohort does not have a salient memory of civil right's struggles for attaining inclusion in government (cite).

[Table 4/Figure 4 about here]

In our final models, we examine the relationship between support for the Black Lives Matter movement, racial efficacy, and voting. Contrary to what we find with Black Elected Officials, support for Black Lives Matter only statistically significantly recovers vote propensity for the younger age cohort, ages eighteen to thirty-nine. This is evidenced in column 2 on Table 4. These results show that for the younger age group, the more you support Black Liver Matter the more likely you are to vote in 2016 even given low feelings of racial efficacy. Similar to how we had theorized the effect of Black Elected Officials support would interact with racial attitudes in the older cohort, those who are between the ages of 18 and 39 who do not have salient memories of older black politicians getting elected and advocating for their rights are perhaps more affected by the powerful messaging and symbolism associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. The stark contrast between the effect of the Black Lives Matter movement on the younger cohort as compared to older cohort is evident in contrasting Panels 2 and 3 from Figure 4 where the slope for the younger cohort is drastically steeper, indicating a larger recovering effect of

Black Lives Matter support. These more modern examples of black activism and strives for efficacy seem to more readily activate feelings of faith in governmental that recovers the propensity to vote for a disaffected youth to a higher level. As well, we do not observe statistically significant relationships between support for Black Lives Matters and racial efficacy for the older cohort, as evidenced in column 3 of Table 4.

Survey experiment

The observational data presented in the 2016 AARC survey is suggestive that low levels of racial efficacy are correlated with low levels of voting among African Americans. However, even after controlling for other relevant covariates such as religiosity, socioeconomic status and partisanship, some readers may have questions about endogeneity and the direction of the causal arrow. That is, do people who have no interest in voting or politics, justify this by concerns over racial equality as part of their larger sense of distrust of politics? Or, do blacks eventually develop a sense of racial efficacy which has an independent effect on someone's faith in government and likelihood of voting? We have laid out our theoretical argument that suggests racial efficacy does impact vote intention, and using the 2017 Virginia data we experimentally assess the relationship.

Table 5: Experimental results – Relationship between Racial Efficacy & Faith in Government

Full Sample	Treatment condition		Diff
	A: High Racial Efficacy	B: Low Racial Efficacy	
Strong faith in government	37.8	30.9*	6.9
Weak faith in government	53.7	56.8*	-3.1
Net degree of faith in govt	-15.9	-25.9*	9.9
N	202	198	400
High Race Conscious			
	A: High Racial Efficacy	B: Low Racial Efficacy	Diff
Strong faith in government	35.8	22.4**	13.4
Weak faith in government	54.4	71.0**	-16.6
Net degree of faith in govt	-18.6	-48.6**	30.0
N	81	74	155
Lower Race Conscious			
	A: High Racial Efficacy	B: Low Racial Efficacy	Diff
Strong faith in government	39.1	35.4	3.7
Weak faith in government	53.3	49.3	4.0
Net degree of faith in govt	-14.2	-13.9	-0.3
N	121	124	245

* p < 0.050 ** p < .010 *** p < .001

Our experiment suggests that priming low racial efficacy does indeed result in lower levels of faith in government among black registered voters. However we should note that faith in government was already low among blacks in Virginia, those in the high racial efficacy condition reported 37.8 strong faith versus 53.7 weak faith, for a net deficit of -15.9 in overall faith in government as reported in table 5, column A “High Racial Efficacy.” In contrast those randomized to the low racial efficacy condition (column B) had an overall net faith in government of -25.9, or about 10 points lower. These differences were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Interestingly, the effect was most pronounced among those who with high race consciousness measured by three other items on the survey administered before experiment. Among blacks who indicated race issues, or race consciousness were important to them, the low racial efficacy condition had a much more negative impact on their degree of faith in government, as reported in the middle section of table 4. High race conscious blacks in the positive treatment condition where we primed racial equality still reported an overall net faith in government of -18.6 points, but faith in government plummeted to -48.6 in the condition where we primed racial inequality, a different of 30 points and significant at the 99% level. Thus, for blacks already thinking about issues related to race, a very strong effect is found for low racial efficacy and demobilization.

Regression Results

Table 1: The Relationship Between Vote Propensity and Racial Efficacy With Age Cohorts

	Dependent Variable: Propensity to Vote in 2016 Election		
	All Ages	Ages 18 to 39	Ages 40 and Older
Racial Efficacy	0.014*** (0.004)	0.015** (0.006)	0.015*** (0.005)
Reported GOTV Contact	0.0002 (0.027)	0.065 (0.045)	-0.058* (0.033)
Religiosity	0.015*** (0.004)	0.031*** (0.007)	0.005 (0.005)
Democrat	0.280*** (0.033)	0.223*** (0.052)	0.323*** (0.045)
Age	0.007*** (0.001)	0.007** (0.004)	0.007*** (0.001)
Female	-0.029 (0.025)	-0.052 (0.043)	-0.012 (0.031)
Education	0.023* (0.012)	0.035 (0.023)	0.020 (0.015)
Income: 20k-40k	0.027 (0.041)	-0.013 (0.064)	0.046 (0.055)
Income: 40k-60k	0.019 (0.042)	0.054 (0.065)	-0.008 (0.055)
Income: 60k-80k	-0.041 (0.048)	-0.034 (0.083)	-0.036 (0.061)
Income: 80k-100k	0.062 (0.057)	0.022 (0.099)	0.124* (0.073)
Income: More than 100k	0.076 (0.048)	0.195** (0.085)	0.003 (0.062)
Income: Declined to State	0.026 (0.045)	0.084 (0.076)	0.006 (0.057)
Georgia Voter	0.093*** (0.035)	0.078 (0.060)	0.107** (0.043)
Nevada Voter	0.133*** (0.036)	0.105* (0.064)	0.139*** (0.044)
Pennsylvania Voter	0.045 (0.035)	0.070 (0.058)	-0.002 (0.045)
Constant	0.459*** (0.087)	0.327** (0.164)	0.580*** (0.139)
Observations	966	425	508
R ²	0.259	0.165	0.205
Adjusted R ²	0.246	0.133	0.180
Residual Std. Error	0.313 (df = 949)	0.338 (df = 408)	0.289 (df = 491)
F Statistic	20.689*** (df = 16; 949)	5.051*** (df = 16; 408)	7.935*** (df = 16; 491)

Note:

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

Table 2: Interaction Between Obama's Influence and Racial Efficacy

	Dependent Variable: Propensity to Vote in 2016 Election		
	All Ages	Ages 18 to 39	Ages 40 and Older
Racial Efficacy	0.040*** (0.010)	0.048*** (0.019)	0.038*** (0.013)
Obama Influence	0.061*** (0.017)	0.065** (0.030)	0.061*** (0.023)
Racial Efficacy*Obama Interaction	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.005** (0.002)	-0.003* (0.002)
Reported GOTV Contact	0.004 (0.031)	0.080 (0.055)	-0.039 (0.039)
Religiosity	0.011** (0.005)	0.027*** (0.009)	0.001 (0.006)
Democrat	0.233*** (0.042)	0.200*** (0.063)	0.243*** (0.059)
Age	0.008*** (0.001)	0.009** (0.004)	0.006*** (0.002)
Female	-0.040 (0.030)	-0.069 (0.055)	-0.020 (0.036)
Education	0.017 (0.014)	0.033 (0.028)	0.012 (0.017)
Income: 20k-40k	0.015 (0.049)	0.023 (0.081)	-0.005 (0.064)
Income: 40k-60k	0.014 (0.049)	0.031 (0.080)	-0.018 (0.064)
Income: 60k-80k	-0.095* (0.057)	-0.167 (0.103)	-0.070 (0.071)
Income: 80k-100k	0.067 (0.067)	0.081 (0.116)	0.053 (0.086)
Income: More than 100k	0.029 (0.057)	0.123 (0.105)	-0.046 (0.074)
Income: Declined to State	0.015 (0.053)	0.134 (0.092)	-0.054 (0.067)
Georgia Voter	0.072* (0.041)	-0.016 (0.074)	0.116** (0.051)
Nevada Voter	0.119*** (0.042)	0.053 (0.076)	0.147*** (0.051)
Pennsylvania Voter	0.011 (0.042)	-0.014 (0.072)	-0.016 (0.053)
Constant	0.141 (0.160)	-0.042 (0.287)	0.329 (0.226)
Observations	682	290	368
R ²	0.281	0.185	0.226
Adjusted R ²	0.261	0.131	0.186
Residual Std. Error	0.310 (df = 663)	0.337 (df = 271)	0.288 (df = 349)
F Statistic	14.384*** (df = 18; 663)	3.423*** (df = 18; 271)	5.661*** (df = 18; 349)

Note:

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

Table 3: Interaction Between Black Elected Officials' Influence and Racial Efficacy

	Dependent Variable: Propensity to Vote in 2016 Election		
	All Ages	Ages 18 to 39	Ages 40 and Older
Racial Efficacy	0.033*** (0.010)	0.024 (0.016)	0.038*** (0.013)
Black Official Influence	0.062*** (0.018)	0.037 (0.031)	0.071*** (0.023)
Racial Efficacy*Black Officials Interaction	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)
Reported GOTV Contact	0.004 (0.031)	0.073 (0.055)	-0.033 (0.039)
Religiosity	0.005 (0.005)	0.019** (0.009)	-0.004 (0.006)
Democrat	0.223*** (0.041)	0.179*** (0.062)	0.255*** (0.057)
Age	0.008*** (0.001)	0.010** (0.004)	0.006*** (0.002)
Female	-0.034 (0.029)	-0.071 (0.054)	-0.012 (0.036)
Education	0.019 (0.014)	0.035 (0.028)	0.012 (0.017)
Income: 20k-40k	0.012 (0.049)	0.011 (0.081)	-0.015 (0.064)
Income: 40k-60k	0.014 (0.048)	0.026 (0.079)	-0.011 (0.063)
Income: 60k-80k	-0.093 (0.057)	-0.165 (0.103)	-0.079 (0.070)
Income: 80k-100k	0.074 (0.066)	0.058 (0.117)	0.075 (0.085)
Income: More than 100k	0.043 (0.057)	0.122 (0.105)	-0.039 (0.074)
Income: Declined to State	0.015 (0.053)	0.143 (0.093)	-0.055 (0.066)
Georgia Voter	0.070* (0.041)	-0.008 (0.074)	0.117** (0.051)
Nevada Voter	0.118*** (0.042)	0.040 (0.076)	0.159*** (0.051)
Pennsylvania Voter	0.020 (0.041)	0.008 (0.072)	0.003 (0.052)
Constant	0.214 (0.150)	0.196 (0.265)	0.337 (0.215)
Observations	682	290	368
R ²	0.289	0.183	0.236
Adjusted R ²	0.269	0.129	0.197
Residual Std. Error	0.309 (df = 663)	0.338 (df = 271)	0.287 (df = 349)
F Statistic	14.953*** (df = 18; 663)	3.381*** (df = 18; 271)	5.994*** (df = 18; 349)

Note:

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

Table 4: Interaction Between Black Lives Matter's Influence and Racial Efficacy

	Dependent Variable: Propensity to Vote in 2016 Election		
	All Ages	Ages 18 to 39	Ages 40 and Older
Racial Efficacy	0.026*** (0.008)	0.033** (0.013)	0.020** (0.010)
BLM Influence	0.027* (0.014)	0.041* (0.024)	0.013 (0.018)
Racial Efficacy*BLM Interaction	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)
Reported GOTV Contact	0.0002 (0.027)	0.060 (0.045)	-0.059* (0.034)
Religiosity	0.013*** (0.005)	0.026*** (0.008)	0.003 (0.006)
Democrat	0.280*** (0.034)	0.216*** (0.053)	0.320*** (0.046)
Age	0.008*** (0.001)	0.008** (0.004)	0.007*** (0.001)
Female	-0.029 (0.025)	-0.053 (0.043)	-0.012 (0.031)
Education	0.023** (0.012)	0.034 (0.023)	0.020 (0.015)
Income: 20k-40k	0.027 (0.041)	-0.015 (0.064)	0.046 (0.055)
Income: 40k-60k	0.020 (0.041)	0.056 (0.065)	-0.008 (0.055)
Income: 60k-80k	-0.037 (0.048)	-0.032 (0.082)	-0.034 (0.061)
Income: 80k-100k	0.065 (0.057)	0.041 (0.099)	0.124* (0.074)
Income: More than 100k	0.077 (0.048)	0.212** (0.086)	0.002 (0.062)
Income: Declined to State	0.027 (0.045)	0.083 (0.076)	0.007 (0.057)
Georgia Voter	0.093*** (0.035)	0.075 (0.060)	0.109** (0.044)
Nevada Voter	0.132*** (0.036)	0.100 (0.064)	0.140*** (0.044)
Pennsylvania Voter	0.045 (0.035)	0.063 (0.058)	-0.001 (0.045)
Constant	0.277** (0.131)	0.049 (0.229)	0.505*** (0.187)
Observations	966	425	508
R ²	0.262	0.174	0.207
Adjusted R ²	0.248	0.137	0.177
Residual Std. Error	0.312 (df = 947)	0.337 (df = 406)	0.289 (df = 489)
F Statistic	18.650*** (df = 18; 947)	4.739*** (df = 18; 406)	7.075*** (df = 18; 489)

Note:

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

Figure 1: The Relationship Between Racial Efficacy and Vote Propensity

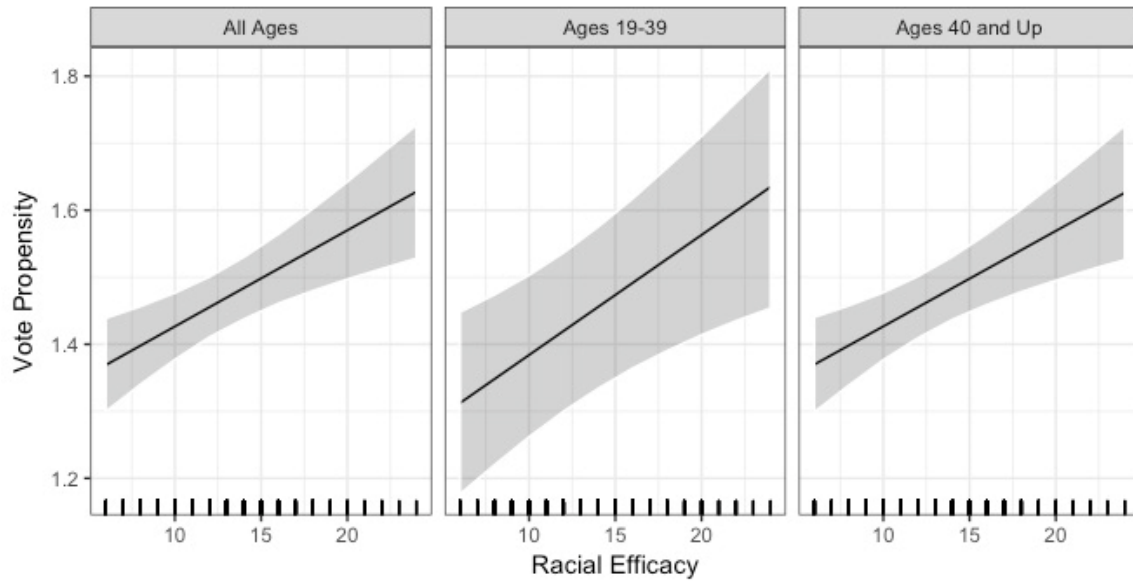


Figure 2: Interaction Plot with Support for Obama and Racial Efficacy

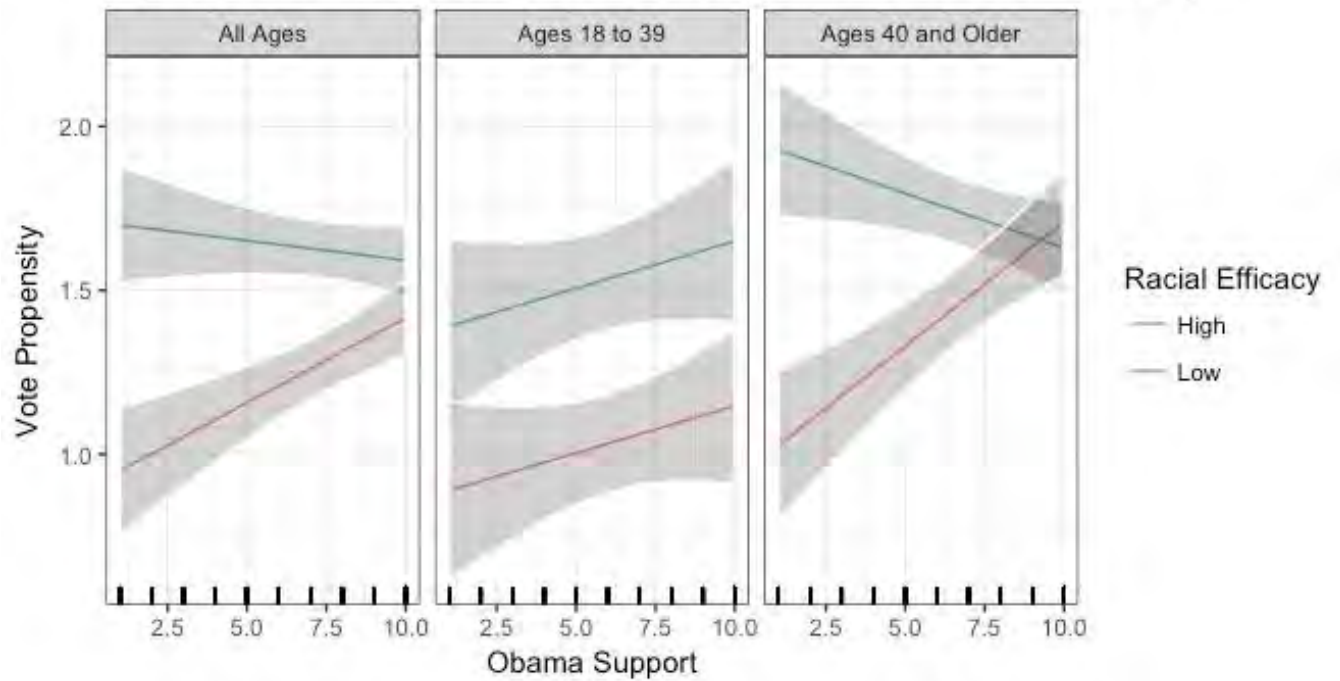


Figure 3: Interaction Plot with Support for Black Elected Officials and Racial Efficacy

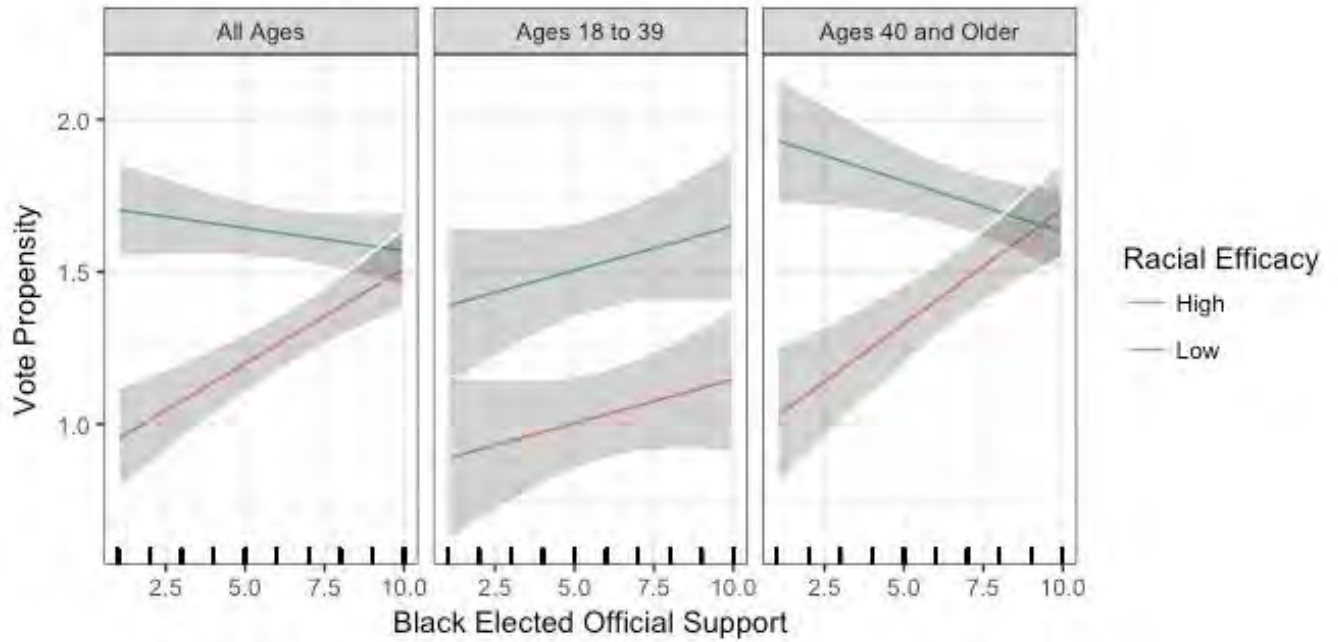


Figure 4: Interaction Plot with Support for Black Lives Matter and Racial Efficacy

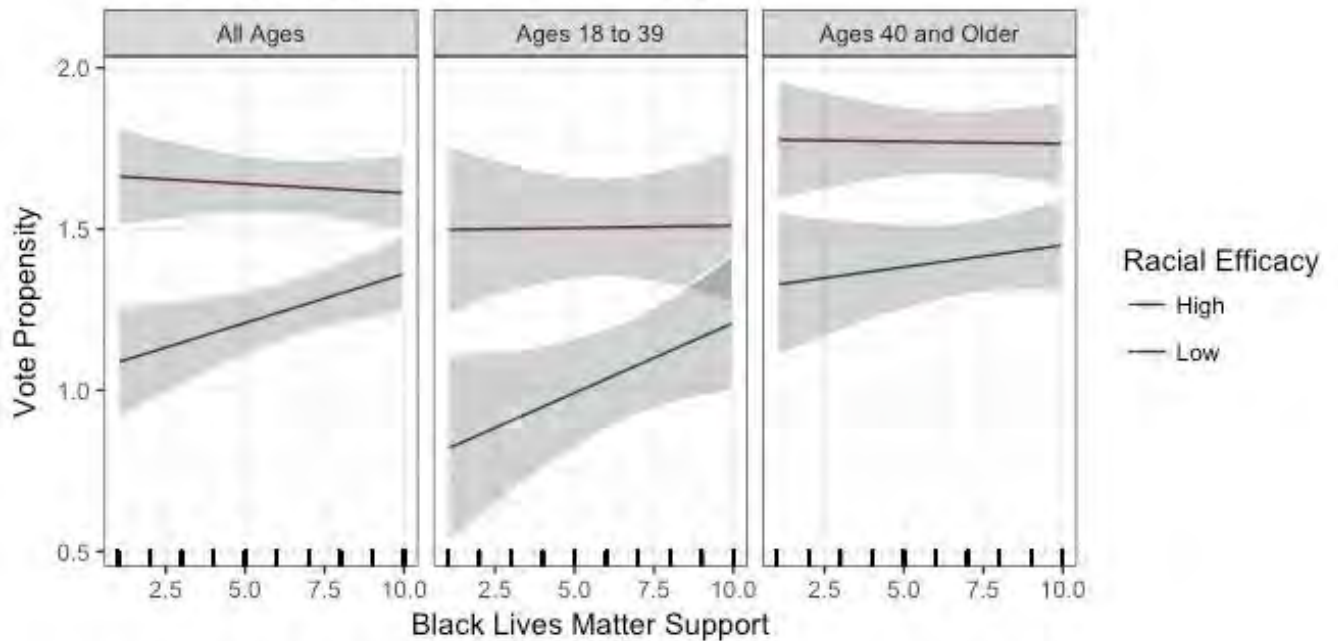


Figure 5:

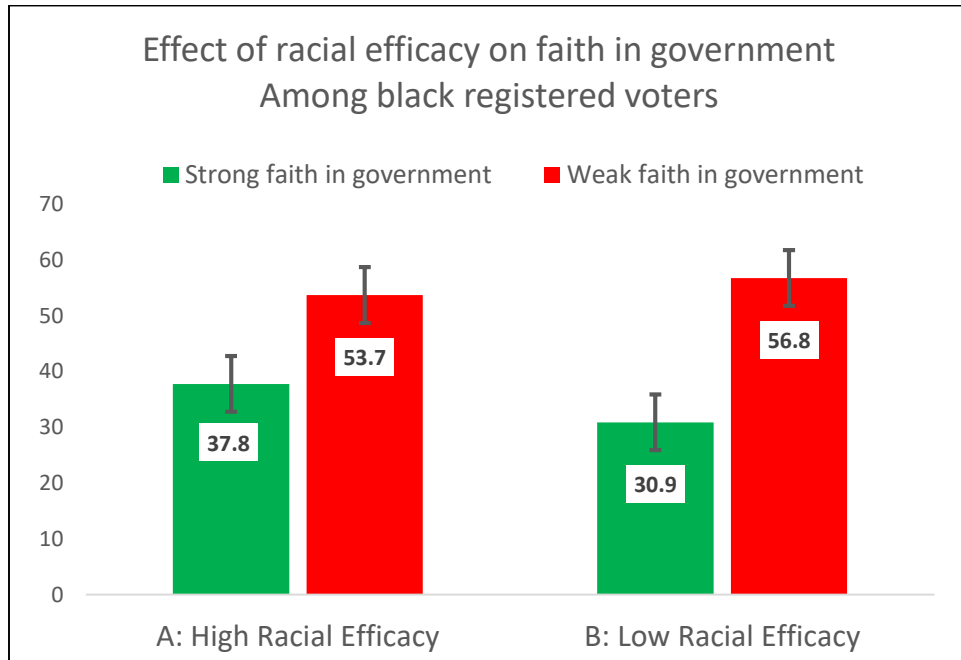
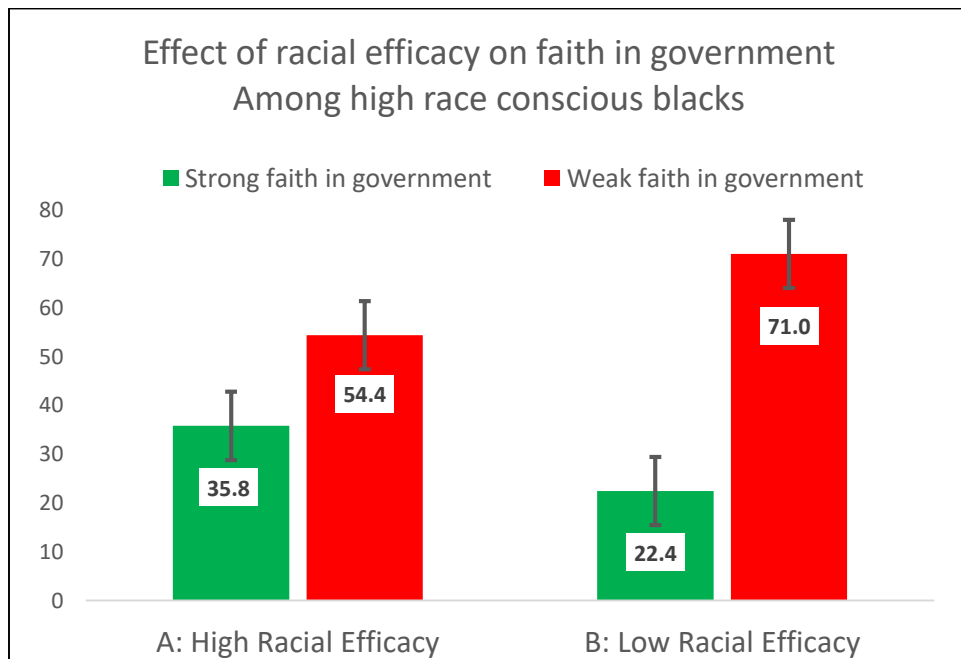


Figure 6:



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