

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



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# Motivation

How does fairness affect attitudes towards trade?

How do perceptions of fairness vary across groups?

What do we mean by fairness?

- Equality
  - Outcomes are balanced
- Equity
  - Outcomes are proportionate to inputs
- Different from “fair trade”
  - Concern for labor, environment, and human rights

# Motivation

Earlier research:

Lu et al. (2012): Inequity aversion influences support for trade

Brutger and Rathbun (2021):

- Americans view trade through an “asymmetric fairness” lens
  1. View equal agreements as most fair
  2. View favorable outcomes to the U.S. as next most fair
  3. View it as especially *unfair* if they “fall behind”

**However, this theory overlooks important  
heterogeneity!**



# Connecting Race and Trade

Racial divides in support for trade:

- Guisinger (2017): Women and minorities face discrimination
  - Trade volatility has higher risks for women and minorities
- Mutz et al. (2021): Psych factors → minorities more pro trade
  - Lower national attachment
  - Less prejudiced to out groups
  - Widening racial gap in support for trade in recent years

# Connecting Race and Trade

Argument:

Distinct histories of sociopolitical & distributional disadvantage

Historical social position → distinct conceptions of fairness

# Connecting Race and Trade

Argument: White Americans have been socialized to a position of structural privilege

- White skin became the basis of property rights that guaranteed sources of privilege and protection (Harris, 1993; Tillery, 2009)
- Law and democratic politics typically reflect the supremacy of white privilege (Bell, 1992; Matsuda, 1987)
- Racial progress in civil rights is inexorably linked to promotion of white self-interests (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 2003)

→ On average, whites think it is unfair when they “fall behind”



# Connecting Race and Trade

Argument: Black Americans have been socialized to a position of structural disadvantage

- Continued systemic racism under the law (Wiecek, 2011-12; Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022)
- Greater distrust of and alienation from the American state (Avery, 2006; Green-Riley & Leber, 2023)
- Liberal egalitarian collectivist ethos focused on “linked fate” and advancement of the race (Baker, 1971; Dawson, 1994; Smith, 2014)

→ On average, Blacks adopt a “principled fairness” outlook

# Connecting Race and Trade

Do Black Americans view fairness differently than whites?

Which of these comes closest to capturing what fairness means to you?<sup>1</sup>

- Treating everyone equally
- Rewarding those who contribute most and work hardest
- Helping those most in need so they can have the same opportunities as everyone else

Black respondents are:

- 5% more likely to choose “treating everyone equally”
- 3% more likely to choose “helping those most in need”

<sup>1</sup>Survey Sampling International survey of nearly 6,000 Americans

# Methodology

Experimental setup:

*The U.S. is considering negotiating a trade agreement with one of its trading partners. The trade agreement will decrease the average tariffs – that is the tax charged by the American government on foreign goods entering the United States – by [30, 60, or 90] percent. In return the trade partner will decrease their tariffs on imports from the U.S. by [30, 60, or 90] percent.*

# Methodology

Tariff concession treatments:

- Equal: 30/30, 60/60, 90/90
- Unfavorable: 60/30, 90/60, 90/30
- Favorable: 30/60, 60/90, 30/90

Dependent variable:

- Fairness: -2 = very unfair . . . 2 = very fair

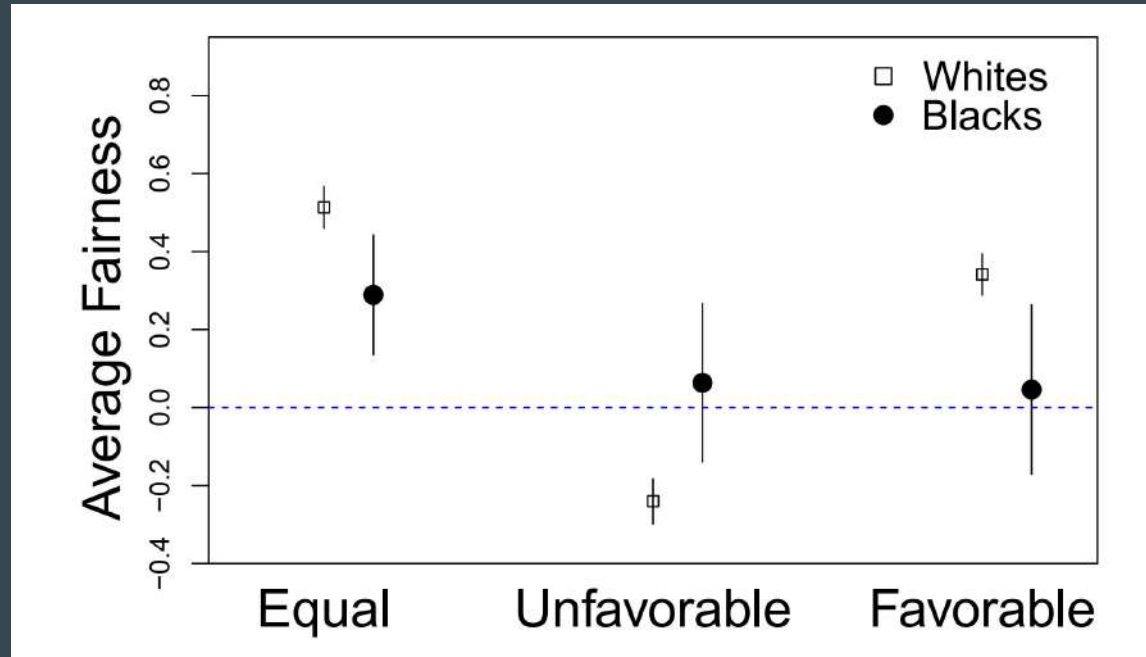
# Methodology

Hypotheses:

1. Black Americans will exhibit significantly less asymmetric fairness than white Americans.
2. Black Americans will exhibit a principled fairness logic, viewing favorable and unfavorable treatment conditions as equally (un)fair.

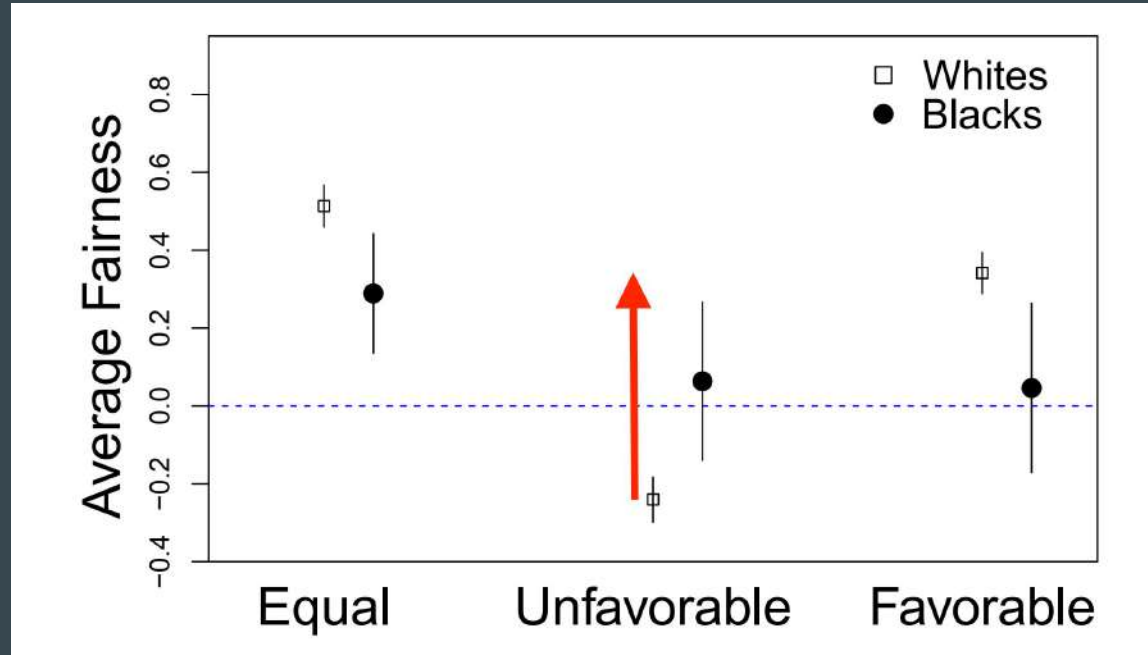
# Results

H1: Black Americans will exhibit significantly less asymmetric fairness than white Americans.



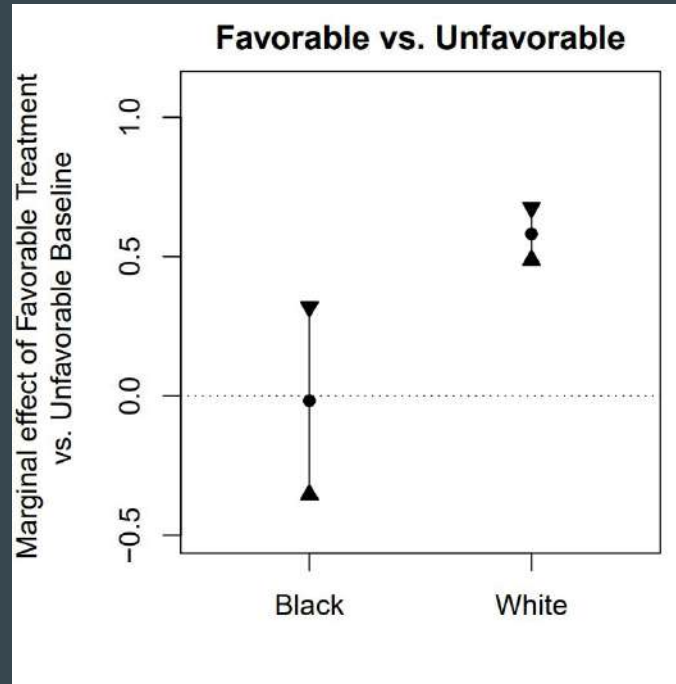
# Results

H1: Black Americans will exhibit significantly less asymmetric fairness than white Americans.



# Results

H2: Black Americans will exhibit a principled fairness logic, viewing favorable and unfavorable treatment conditions as equally (un)fair.





# Robustness Checks

Could the results be driven by factors other than race?

We rule out the following competing explanations:

- National attachment
- Partisanship or ideology
- Level of education

# Conclusion & Implications

White and Black Americans view fairness differently

- Blacks: “principled fairness” lens conditioned by structural disadvantage
- Whites: “asymmetric fairness” lens conditioned by structural privilege
  - Theory is generalizable to other majority-minority divisions

Fairness perceptions are important for international trade

- Balanced deals viewed as fairest and receive strong support

Important to consider how race and racism matter in IR (Green-Riley & Leber 2023; Zvobgo & Loken, 2020)

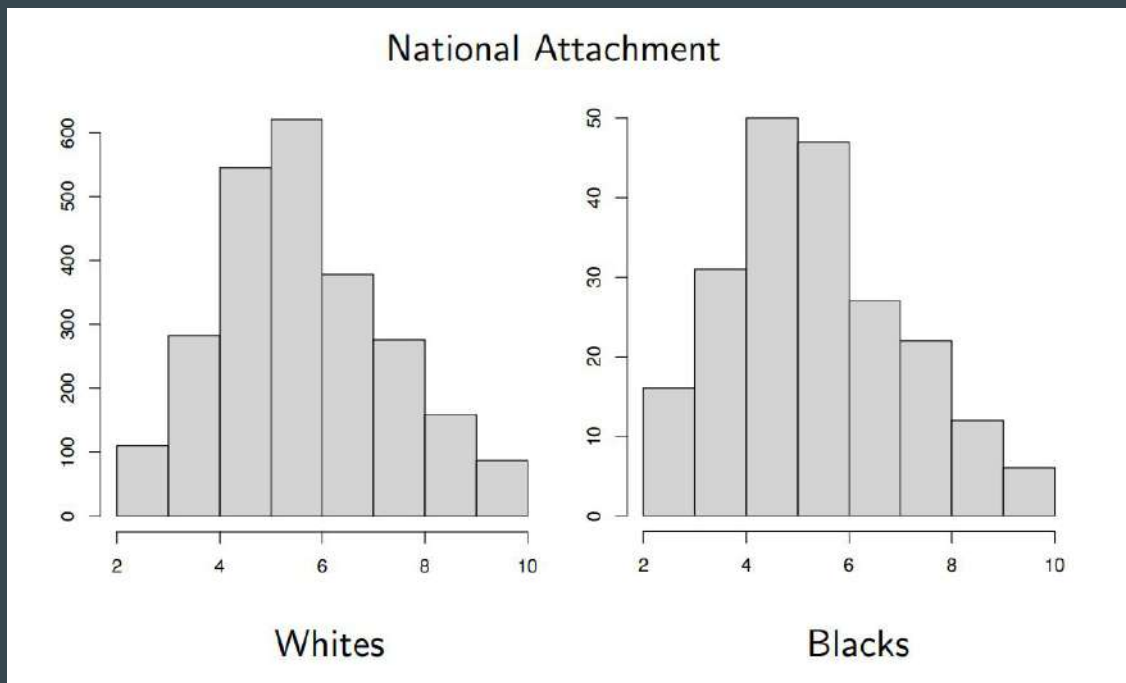
**Thank you**

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# Appendix

# Robustness Checks

Are the results driven by nationalism?



# Robustness Checks

Are the results driven by nationalism?

Table: Treatment Interaction - Controlling for Nationalism

Favorable	-0.005 (0.171)
White	-0.312** (0.126)
National Attachment	0.396*** (0.107)
White * Favorable	0.589*** (0.178)
Constant	-0.134 (0.133)
Observations	1,768

Note: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , Baseline is Unfavorable Condition

# Robustness Checks

Are the results driven by partisanship or ideology?

Do white liberals see through principled or asymmetric lens?

	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: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , Baseline is Unfavorable Condition  
Table consists only of respondents who identify as white.

# Robustness Checks

Are the results driven by level of education?

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