

# **The Spectrum of Disenchantment: Examining the Effects of Race and Skin Tone on Perceptions of Corruption in the U.S.**

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## **Abstract**

This study analyzes how a person's identity influences their perception of corruption. Building on extensive research on corruption, identity and critical race theory, we develop a Racial Disenchantment Theory proposing that racially minoritized individuals' exposure to disadvantageous racial hierarchy in the U.S. influences them to perceive that political institutions and leaders are corrupt. The authors' analyses of national survey data over time reveal limited support for this theory. Relative to Whites, Blacks are significantly more likely to perceive corruption among political leaders and in government yet only when Republicans lead the executive branch of government. Latinxs' and Asian Americans' perceptions of corruption do not differ significantly from that of Whites and at times, Hispanics were significantly less likely to perceive corruption than their White counterparts. Finally, different surveys produce contradictory findings for the effect of skin tone on perceived corruption, although the difference between self-reported and interviewer-reported tone may explain the contradiction. This study's results suggest that many Whites and Blacks adopt disparate meanings to corruption based on their distinct individual experiences and political commitments.

When a democratic government unfairly favors some groups of people over others, it could be considered a form of political corruption. Corruption is conventionally defined as the abuse of public office for private gain,<sup>1</sup> and harming some groups for the benefit of others is a plausible abuse of public office if done without an earnest and authentic justification

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linking the action to collective welfare. Such actions might be particularly emblematic of corruption if they duplicitously exclude some people from having a proportional influence on democratic decision-making (Warren 2004, 2006). But this kind of corruption may only be perceived by those at the sharp end of unequal treatment; the people who benefit may be oblivious or not perceive any harm created for others as an abuse of public office. In the United States, race is a major locus of unjustifiably unequal treatment. Therefore, perception of corruption among Americans may be systematically different by racial and ethnic identity.

Building on critical race theory, we hypothesize that those from minoritized backgrounds and dark-skinned people will perceive more corruption in government compared to White and light-skinned people. We think this will happen because people in minoritized groups experience a lifetime of exposure to political and cultural reminders of their low standing in the American racial, ethnic hierarchy. Furthermore, we suspect that a relationship between race and perception of corruption is plausible because existing work already suggests that other facets of identity can shape the perception of corruption. For example, a growing body of research finds that gender is related to individuals' conceptualization and perception of corruption (Bauhr and Charron, 2020; Melgar et al. 2010). Indeed, twenty years of research have firmly established that a causal relationship exists between gender and corruption: women, at least in some contexts, are less tolerant of corruption and less willing to engage in it (Wängnerud 2015) although the mechanism by which this relationship operates is a matter of continuing and intensive study. Finally, while unequal treatment of people in different groups is arguably corruption in and of itself, it is unarguably a form of inequality. Greater inequality reduces trust of government

and of other people, which in turn fosters increased perception of corruption (Uslaner 2008; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). If some racial groups perceive more (race-based) inequality than others, this might manifest in higher perceived corruption by those groups.

In this study we ask new questions inspired by this previous work. How much does race influence the perception of corruption in America? To what extent do individuals from minoritized groups—Blacks,<sup>2</sup> Hispanics,<sup>3</sup> Asian Americans, and those with dark skin tone—perceive more corruption than their White and light-skinned counterparts? Our answers come from a statistical analysis of time-series cross-sectional data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and the American National Election Study (ANES).

Our study makes multiple empirical and theoretical contributions. First, our study is among the first to measure the effect of racial and ethnic identity on perceived prevalence of corruption in the United States over time using large and representative panel data sets. Second, our findings contribute to a sizable body of research on trust in government by explaining how visible identity characteristics impact a person's perception of their government. Third, our theory bridges three literatures that are seldom linked: corruption, identity, and critical race theory. Finally, we raise important questions about the measurement of corruption, already recognized as a challenging concept to measure (e.g., Sampford et al. 2006; Heywood 2015). Because corrupt activities are typically secret by nature, it is difficult to directly observe them; it is therefore common to measure the *perception* of corruption in a country using expert or mass survey instruments (Galtung 2006; Heywood, 2015). But if people from different groups perceive different levels of corruption in a government, this measurement strategy requires reconsideration and adjustment.

### **Individual Characteristics, Inequality and Corruption**

There is a growing body of research that examines the relationship between individual characteristics and corruption and finds a strong link between the two. Demographic attributes that are associated with a marginalized status—like being a woman, divorced, unemployed or uneducated—are positively related to discerning corruption in cross-national survey data (Melgar et al. 2010). A study of the perception of corruption in road-building projects throughout Indonesia (Olken 2009, 959) reinforces these findings:

Individual-level biases in reported perceptions appear quite significant. ...better educated respondents and male respondents tend to report more corruption; those who participate in the types of social activity where the project was likely to be discussed, those who live near the project, and (naturally) those who are related to the head of the project all tend to report less corruption. Taken together, these individual-level biases are highly significant... [and] large in magnitude as well.

As another example, Bauhr and Charron's (2020) analysis of data from the third wave of the European Quality of Government Index Survey (Charron et al. 2019) finds that women and men in the European Union perceive corruption differently, with men perceiving more greed corruption (i.e., corruption to gain unfair advantages, benefit one's financial standing) and women perceiving more need corruption (i.e., corruption to gain access to essential public services). This pattern of findings suggests that both the perception of corruption and what counts as corruption may be influenced by aspects of a person's identity that affect their treatment by society and the government.

Inequality is also associated with higher perceived corruption. Although inequality is not an individual identity characteristic, greater income inequality in a country can cause reduced trust in institutions and each other by the residents of that country. It also “adversely affects social norms about corruption and people’s beliefs about the legitimacy of rules and institutions” (Jong-sung and Khagram 2005, 136). These individual-level beliefs can in turn result in more perceived—and actual—corruption (Morris and Klesner 2010; Uslaner 2008; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). As a result, those who perceive greater (racial) inequality in the United States may also perceive greater corruption in its government and reduced confidence in its legitimacy.

### **The Effects of Racial, Ethnic Identity**

While existing research has made some headway in uncovering how identity and socioeconomic status can shape perceptions of corruption, one significant aspect of identity that has been overlooked by most corruption studies is race and ethnicity. One’s race can play a significant role in shaping their political behavior in addition to their perception of their status in society. At the heart of racial, ethnic politics research is critical race theory positing that a racial hierarchy exists in the U.S. where Whites are at the top and Blacks are at the bottom with Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans in between. This hierarchy is sustained through covert and overt social, institutional racism, which benefits Whites by maintaining their social, political, and economic power (Delgado and Stefancic 1995). A considerable amount of research on racial and ethnic politics integrates critical race theory.

Relative to other racial, ethnic groups, African Americans have some of the lowest levels of trust in government and in government decision makers. The concept of political trust for African Americans is distinct from that of Whites. For Blacks, political trust is less concerned with individuals' satisfaction with political leaders and specific policies but more about racial group consciousness, the sense of common fate with other group members and belief that one's group's limited sociopolitical opportunities and power relative to that of the dominant group creates illegitimate inequality. Blacks' racial group consciousness is negatively related to their trust in government (Avery 2006). This racial group consciousness even translates to political behavior. The adversities of slavery, segregation and continuous exposure to racism forge robust social bonds among African Americans producing and enforcing political norms resulting in firm identification with the Democratic party and support for its candidates (White and Laird 2020). Still, high political efficacy, policy satisfaction, and satisfaction with government's ability to address discrimination is positively related to Blacks' trust in government (Mangum 2012).

Research on Latinxs also touches upon the determinants of their political trust and highlights the disparities within the Hispanic community in the United States. Blacks and Latinxs are less trusting of government than their White counterparts (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010). Noncitizen Hispanics are more trusting of government than citizen Hispanics, shedding light on the corrosive effect that acculturation has on Hispanics' political trust (Michelson 2003). Further, being foreign-born is related to Hispanics' government trust with foreign-born Hispanics being more trusting of government than their native-born counterparts (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010). Interestingly, the longer many Latinxs are in the U.S., the more they experience discrimination and racism which are

directly related to increased cynicism and depressed government trust (Michelson 2003; see Abrajano and Alvarez 2010).

Research on political trust in White government officials yield some intriguing results. When political trust is attributed to Whites (such as trust in White government officials' decision making), being a racial, ethnic minority matters. Identifying as American Indian, African American, Hispanic and Asian is negatively related to trust in White government officials' spending and hiring (Koch 2019). These results suggest that racially minoritized groups regard White government leaders as discriminatory and unfair.

### **Theoretical Expectations**

Racially minoritized groups' distinct views of government, experiences with discrimination, and attribution of Whites at the top of the sociopolitical ladder develops a disenchanted mindset toward government institutions and officials. We build on existing research on government trust and Black and Latinx political identity and behavior and extend it to individuals' perceptions of corruption with a new Racial Disenchantment Theory. This theory posits that undergoing discrimination, perceiving that others do not regard them as equal to others simply for their racial or ethnic identity (thus constantly being reminded of the fixed racial hierarchy), creates a sense of disenchantment with government that manifests itself in the perception that government institutions and their respective leaders are unethical and deviant. Thus, if this logic based on the arguments of existing literature is correct, we expect that:

**Hypothesis 1: Individuals from minoritized backgrounds (i.e. Blacks, Latinxs, and Asian Americans) are more likely to perceive corruption in the United States government than their White counterparts.**

Like racial or ethnic identity, skin tone is another form of visible identity that one carries every day. While many Americans claim that they are colorblind, skin tone is still a significant factor in shaping Blacks' and Latinxs' economic success, racial attitudes, exposure to discrimination and treatment by the police (Hill 2000; Hunter 2002; Wilkinson and Earle 2013; Gonzalez-Barrera 2019). As established in previous decades, individuals with lighter skin tone tend to hold a higher socioeconomic status in comparison to those with a darker skin color (Edwards, 1973; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). Notably, African Americans endure more discrimination in the work force when compared with Mexican Americans even though both racial groups experience more discrimination than Whites (Verdugo & Verdugo, 1984). The inequality that individuals experience because of their skin tone translates to depressed trust (see Avery 2006). Thus, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2: Dark-skinned individuals are more likely to perceive corruption in the United States government than those who are light skinned.**

### **Data & Methods**

To test our hypotheses, we employ data from the American National Election Study (ANES) and the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS data come from surveys conducted in 2000, 2004, 2006, 2014 and 2016. ANES data come from biennial surveys between 1984 and 2016.

#### **GSS Measures**

The variables we use from the General Social Survey are shown in Table 1. Our key dependent variables are measures of corruption, all on a 1-5 scale (where 5 indicates the most corruption). The items corresponding to these variables are:

1. To get all the way to the top in America today, you have to be corrupt.
2. How widespread do you think corruption is in the public service in America?
3. In your opinion, about how many politicians in America are involved in corruption?
4. And in your opinion, about how many government administrators in America are involved in corruption?

Not every question is asked in every year, so our analyses indicate the years for which data is available at the top of the results column.

**Table 1: Summary Statistics for the GSS Dataset**

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Corruption: Get to the Top	1,193	2.393	1.103	1	2	5
Corruption: Public Service	2,612	3.132	0.931	1	3	5
Corruption: Politicians	2,826	3.309	0.978	1	3	5
Corruption: Government administrators	2,802	3.130	0.965	1	3	5
Age	6,617	47.384	17.167	18	46	89
Party ID (7-point scale, D to R)	6,492	2.755	1.975	0	3	6
Race: White	6,616	0.769	0.421	0	1	1
Race: Black	6,616	0.149	0.356	0	0	1
Race: Hispanic	6,616	0.036	0.185	0	0	1
Race: Asian	6,616	0.027	0.162	0	0	1
Race: Other	6,616	0.019	0.135	0	0	1
Born Outside the USA	5,155	0.106	0.309	0	0	1
Sex: Female	6,641	0.556	0.497	0	1	1
Years of Education	6,630	13.552	2.949	0	13	20
Income (in 10k USD, inflation-adjusted)	5,944	5.055	4.283	0.036	3.970	17.827
Interviewer Assessed Skin Tone (1 = lightest)	2,271	2.325	1.806	1	2	10
Region: Northeast	6,641	0.167	0.373	0	0	1
Region: North Central	6,641	0.239	0.426	0	0	1
Region: South	6,641	0.373	0.484	0	0	1
Region: West	6,641	0.221	0.415	0	0	1
Year: 2000	6,641	0.180	0.384	0	0	1
Year: 2004	6,641	0.216	0.411	0	0	1
Year: 2006	6,641	0.223	0.416	0	0	1
Year: 2014	6,641	0.178	0.382	0	0	1
Year: 2016	6,641	0.204	0.403	0	0	1

Our key independent variables are racial self-identification and skin tone. Respondent skin color was measured with one item: “Interviewer: please record the color from the color card that most closely corresponds to the respondent’s facial coloring” on a 1-10 scale, 1 being the lightest coloration. Participants were also asked “What is your race? Indicate one or more races that you consider yourself to be.” This variable allowed respondents to identify as Hispanic. Using the data obtained from that variable, we created individual dummy (0-1) variables for respondents who identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other (including Native Americans). Our multivariate analyses control for other demographic characteristics including age, education, partisan identification, income, gender, and region.

#### ANES Measures

Our ANES data come from the ANES cumulative data set and includes surveys fielded between 1982 and 2018. Table 2 shows the number of observations corresponding to each year in the data.

**Table 2: Observations per Year in the ANES Cumulative Data Set**

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year	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2008	2012	2016
N	1,379	1,896	1,062	1,760	1,947	2,243	1,759	1,529	1,274	1,549	1,344	1,063	2,091	5,891	4,213

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Table 3 shows summary statistics for the key variables taken from the ANES. Three corruption-related variables make up an index that we use to measure each respondent's view of corruption in America:

1. "Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?" Responses were coded on a three-point scale: 1 = hardly any of them are crooked, 2 = not very many are crooked, and 3 = quite a few are crooked.
2. "Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?" Responses were binary, either 1 = "few big interests" or 2 = "benefit of all".
3. "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, only some of the time or none of the time?" Responses were coded on that four-point scale.

We recoded all three measures so that higher numbers for the response indicated greater perception of corruption. Then, because these variables were not available for all subjects at all times in the data, we created a composite corruption measure from these three variables using probabilistic principal components analysis (PPCA) to extract a common factor (Stacklies et al. 2007). PPCA allows imputation of missing values for the constituents

of the index when at least one of the three measures is available (Roweis 1997). As indicated in Table 4, all three variables loaded positively on the first principal component (PC1) which explains more than 60% of the variation in these variables. We label this principal component PC1 as “Corruption PCA Score” in Table 3. Higher values of this score indicate a higher perception of corruption by the respondent.

**Table 3: Summary Statistics for the ANES Cumulative Data Set**

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Corruption PCA Score	31000	0.000	1.143	-3.725	0.405	2.183
Crooked	23518	2.384	0.650	1	2	3
Benefit of a Few	28851	0.728	0.445	0	1	1
What is Right	22752	2.635	0.577	1	3	4
Age	30751	47.285	17.430	17	46	96
Party ID (7-point scale, D to R)	30765	3.695	2.092	1	3	7
Race: White	30810	0.721	0.449	0	1	1
Race: Black	30810	0.131	0.338	0	0	1
Race: Hispanic	30810	0.107	0.309	0	0	1
Race: Other	30810	0.041	0.199	0	0	1
Sex: Male	30952	0.457	0.498	0	0	1
Sex: Female	30952	0.543	0.498	0	1	1
Education: Grade School or less	30700	0.048	0.215	0	0	1
Education: High School	30700	0.385	0.486	0	0	1
Education: Some College	30700	0.291	0.454	0	0	1
Education: College or More	30700	0.276	0.447	0	0	1
Income (5 ordered categories)	27642	2.857	1.143	1	3	5
Region: Northeast	31000	0.167	0.373	0	0	1
Region: North Central	31000	0.248	0.432	0	0	1
Region: South	31000	0.372	0.483	0	0	1
Region: West	31000	0.213	0.409	0	0	1

The two main independent variables in our analyses are racial self-identification and skin tone. Self-identified race is coded into four categories: White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and Other or multiple races non-Hispanic.<sup>7</sup> Perceptions of skin tone were not available in the ANES cumulative data file but were available in the 2012 and 2016 individual time series files; summary statistics for these individual files are available in Tables A1 and A2 in the online appendix.<sup>8</sup> These variables were based on a self-assessment on a ten-point scale of colors where the respondent was asked to select the color most closely corresponding to their skin.<sup>9</sup> The measure ranges from 1 to 10, 1 being the lightest skin tone. Our multivariate analyses control for the effects of demographic characteristics including age, education, partisan identification, income, gender, and region.

**Table 4: PPCA Factor Loadings for Corruption**

Variable Name	PC1	PC2
Crooked	0.514	-0.820
Benefit of a Few	0.662	0.565
What is Right	0.546	0.087
PC R squared	0.607	0.211

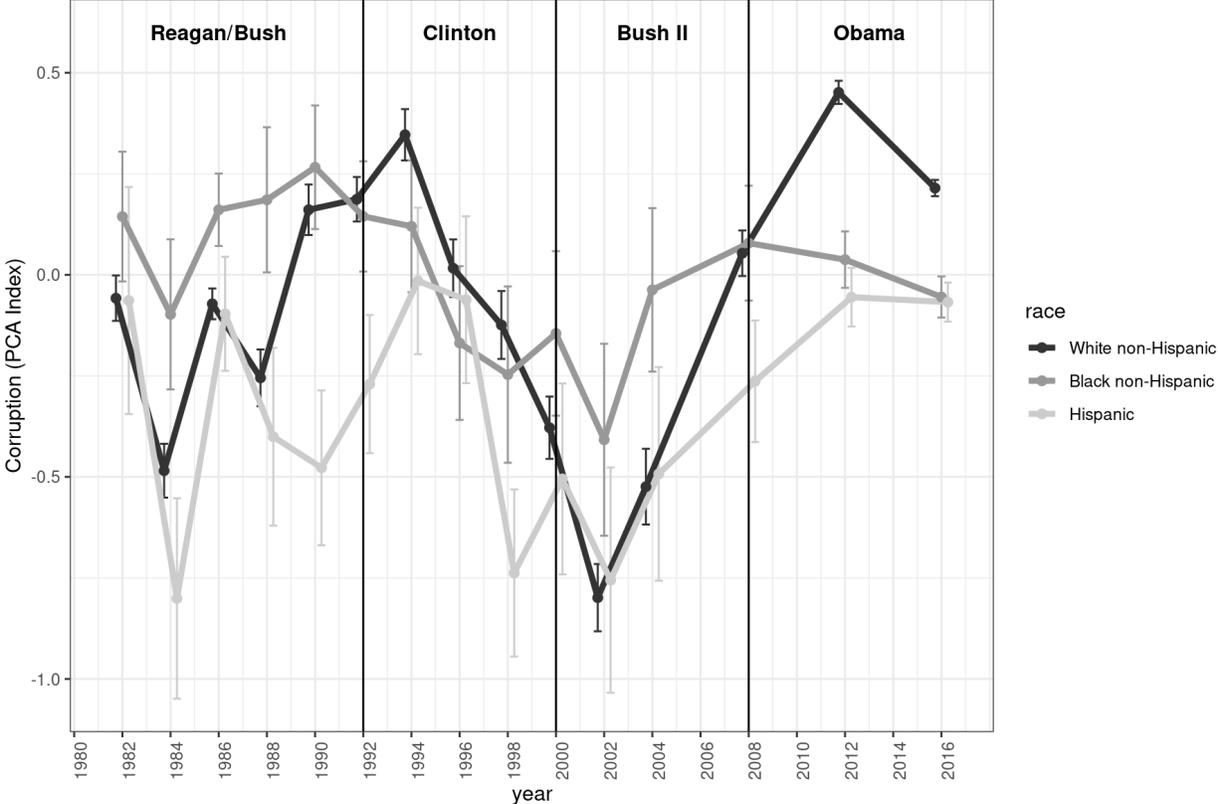
Our analyses are based on the results of linear regressions. In every case, these regressions are calculated using the observation weights included in the ANES and GSS data sets. Additionally, analyses of individual year ANES data files in 2012 and 2016 use design-based weights in a regression model estimated by maximum likelihood using the `svyglm` function in the survey library for R (Lumley 2020; 2004).

## **Results**

We begin by surveying respondent assessment of corruption over the twenty-eight years spanned by the ANES. This assessment is shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows predicted corruption scores for three racial/ethnic groups (White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, and Hispanic) calculated via OLS regressions run separately for each year of the ANES in the cumulative data file to track the evolution of racial differences over time.<sup>10</sup> This figure reveals that perceptions of corruption are not stagnant over time for any racial, ethnic group and the perception of corruption among Whites and Blacks seems to be systematically related to the partisanship of the presidential administration. When Republicans are in office, Black non-Hispanics tend to perceive more corruption in government compared to Whites; when Democrats are in office, the opposite is true. Hispanics typically have a perception of corruption equal to or lower than either of the other two groups.



**Figure 1: Corruption Perception by Race, Ethnicity and Presidential Administration**



We are not the first to find that a citizen's evaluation of government depends on partisan control of that government. Specifically, a line of research has established that survey respondents are more satisfied with the way that democracy works when the party for which they voted wins the election (Blais and Gelineau 2007; Singh et al. 2012; Martini and Quaranta 2019) and when that winning party is ideologically close to the voter (Curini et al. 2012), although satisfaction with democracy is less dependent on control of government when democratic institutions are stronger (Nadeau et al. 2021).

Our discovery of this pattern in our data, and the fact that partisan moderation of corruption perception seems to vary by racial, ethnic group, leads us to conjecture that partisanship of the presidential administration may be related to perception of corruption by race. Given the patterns we observe in Figure 1, Republicans' long history of unfriendly rhetoric and policies toward Blacks (Thurber 2013; White and Laird 2020) and in the well-known fact that African Americans are an exceptionally loyal constituency of the Democratic party, we conjecture that:

**Hypothesis 3a: African Americans will perceive more corruption than Whites when a Republican administration is in power, and the reverse when a Democratic administration is in power.**

**Hypothesis 3b: Darker skinned people will perceive more corruption than lighter skinned people when a Republican administration is in power, and the reverse when a Democratic administration is in power.**

Our further analysis will therefore account for this possibility.

## Inferential Statistics

In this section we present our results from analyses examining the effects of race, skin tone and party of presidential administration on perceptions of corruption. We begin discussing the extent that race (H1) and skin tone (H2) are related to perceiving corruption and then summarize the results associated with the extent that the party of the presidential administration is related to the recognition of corruption (H3a, H3b). This section ends with supplemental analyses exploring the interactive effects of being Latinx and foreign born on perceptions of corruption.

Table 5 presents the results of OLS regression analysis of the Corruption PCA score in the ANES cumulative data set. The results in Models 1 and 2 present mixed support for H1. While being Black is positively related to perceiving corruption, this relationship only holds for when Republicans control the White House. We find the opposite relationship when a Democrat controls the presidency, in accordance with H3a. Interestingly, being Latinx or from another race is negatively related or not related (respectively) to perceiving corruption regardless of who is in power. A possible reason for these findings is that the demographic and political diversity that exist among Hispanics and non-Black non-Hispanics (particularly Asian Americans) affect their behavior and opinions. Further, racial group consciousness may matter (see Avery 2006; White and Laird 2020). Blacks relative to other races and ethnicities may have a more developed racial group consciousness, which in turn may influence their views toward political institutions.

**Table 5: Results from OLS Regression Analyses on the ANES Cumulative Data File**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Corruption PCA Score	
	Republican Administrations 1981-1992 and 2001-2008 (1)	Democratic Administrations 1993-2000 and 2009-2016 (2)
Black	0.107*** (0.036)	-0.176*** (0.028)
Hispanic	-0.343*** (0.042)	-0.332*** (0.028)
Other race	0.065 (0.065)	-0.047 (0.037)
Age	0.002*** (0.001)	-0.0002 (0.0005)
Female	-0.020 (0.022)	0.007 (0.016)
Education: High School	0.068 (0.046)	0.140*** (0.051)
Education: Some College	0.103** (0.051)	0.168*** (0.052)
Education: College or More	0.002 (0.052)	0.047 (0.053)
Party ID (1 = Strong Democrat)	-0.068*** (0.005)	0.041*** (0.004)
Income (5 percentile categories)	-0.012 (0.011)	0.020** (0.008)
Northeast Region	0.099 (0.077)	-0.035 (0.069)
North Central Region	0.087 (0.076)	-0.003 (0.067)
South Region	0.072 (0.073)	-0.004 (0.067)
West Region	0.105 (0.078)	-0.030 (0.068)
Observations	12,000	14,937
R <sup>2</sup>	0.062	0.089

*Note:*

\*p\*\*p\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Our analysis of GSS data, presented in Table 6, largely confirms our findings from the ANES.<sup>11</sup> While we find some support for the fact that being Black is positively related to increased perceptions of corruption relative to Whites (see H1), the results in the entire table suggest that it is related to the party in control of the White House. During the George W. Bush administration (2004 and 2006) or the year of his election (2000), Blacks perceive higher corruption than Whites for all four of our dependent variables. During the Obama administration (2014 and 2016), however, Blacks and Whites have comparable perceptions of corruption (with the interaction term between Black and Obama's presidential administration approximately cancelling out the main effect of Black for all models). As before, being Latinx or Asian is negatively related or not (statistically significantly) related to perceiving corruption regardless of who is in power.

**Table 6: Results from OLS Regression Analysis of the General Social Survey**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
	Get to the Top 2000	Widespread 2004 and 2014		Politicians 2006 and 2016		Administrators 2006 and 2016	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Black	0.205*	0.122**	0.302***	0.121**	0.253***	0.104*	0.187**
	(0.111)	(0.059)	(0.079)	(0.061)	(0.085)	(0.061)	(0.084)
Hispanic	-0.060	0.121	0.191	-0.378***	-0.368**	-0.173	-0.085
	(0.197)	(0.105)	(0.162)	(0.106)	(0.145)	(0.105)	(0.143)
Asian	0.069	-0.258**	-0.115	-0.179	-0.187	-0.112	-0.010
	(0.195)	(0.103)	(0.132)	(0.120)	(0.187)	(0.121)	(0.194)
Other race	0.391*	-0.078	0.220	-0.001	0.007	0.152	0.411**
	(0.213)	(0.153)	(0.238)	(0.134)	(0.211)	(0.132)	(0.209)
Black x D Admin			-0.376***		-0.260**		-0.163
			(0.110)		(0.114)		(0.114)
Hispanic x D Admin			-0.133		-0.023		-0.189
			(0.207)		(0.208)		(0.207)
Asian x D Admin			-0.352*		0.007		-0.171
			(0.206)		(0.242)		(0.246)
Other race x D Admin			-0.522*		-0.023		-0.439
			(0.309)		(0.273)		(0.270)
Age	-0.006***	0.0003	0.0003	-0.001	-0.001	-0.002**	-0.002**
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	-0.041	0.128***	0.131***	0.050	0.046	0.058	0.058
	(0.066)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.039)
Party ID	-0.023	0.004	0.004	-0.016	-0.015	-0.014	-0.014
	(0.018)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Years of Education	-0.056***	-0.036***	-0.034***	-0.003	-0.003	-0.012	-0.012*
	(0.013)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Income (x 10k)	-0.021***	-0.018***	-0.018***	-0.014***	-0.014***	-0.013***	-0.013***
	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Democratic Admin		0.176***	0.253***	0.015	0.054	0.076*	0.120***
		(0.038)	(0.043)	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.039)	(0.045)
Northeast	3.729***	3.620***	3.563***	3.454***	3.438***	3.392***	3.373***
	(0.229)	(0.129)	(0.130)	(0.130)	(0.130)	(0.128)	(0.129)
North Central	3.592***	3.484***	3.437***	3.467***	3.451***	3.413***	3.396***
	(0.222)	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.124)	(0.124)	(0.123)	(0.123)
South	3.463***	3.514***	3.460***	3.468***	3.454***	3.430***	3.410***
	(0.219)	(0.124)	(0.124)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.120)	(0.121)
West	3.677***	3.461***	3.409***	3.436***	3.423***	3.341***	3.323***
	(0.229)	(0.127)	(0.128)	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.124)	(0.124)
Observations	1,041	2,308	2,308	2,428	2,428	2,417	2,417
R <sup>2</sup>	0.840	0.923	0.924	0.920	0.920	0.913	0.913

*Note:*

\*p\*\*p\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Our analysis of the relationship between skin tone and corruption yields contradictory results. As shown in Tables 7 and 8, some results support Hypothesis 2, some support Hypothesis 3b, and some support neither. All data in these analyses, both for the ANES (Table 7) and the GSS (Table 8), was collected during the Obama administration. For the ANES, one model of the Corruption PCA score<sup>12</sup> indicates that darker-skinned respondents perceive *less* corruption than otherwise similar lighter-skinned counterparts; the other model shows no statistically significant relationship. But for the GSS, two of three models indicate that darker-skinned respondents perceive *more* corruption than similar light-skinned respondents while the third model indicates no (statistically significant) relationship. Although we cannot be certain, it is possible that these inconsistent results are a product of relatively small sample sizes collected for a relatively small number of years relative to our analyses without the skin tone rating. Another possibility is that the different measures of respondent skin tone are capturing distinct concepts. Since the GSS uses an interviewer assessment for skin tone while the ANES uses a self-assessment, it may be the case that in the ANES those people more willing to self-identify as darker-skinned are also more trusting that they would not be discriminated against based on their coloration.

**Table 7: Results from Linear GLM/MLE of 2012 and 2016 ANES Data**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Corruption PCA Score	
	2012	2016
	(1)	(2)
Self-Assessed Skin Tone (1 = lightest)	0.016 (0.037)	-0.048* (0.025)
Black	-0.303 (0.226)	-0.102 (0.155)
Hispanic	-0.377** (0.148)	-0.410*** (0.096)
Other race	0.254 (0.176)	0.035 (0.105)
Age	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004** (0.002)
Female	0.040 (0.088)	0.075 (0.062)
Education: High School	-0.149 (0.113)	0.116 (0.136)
Education: Some College	-0.159 (0.116)	0.224* (0.132)
Education: College or More	-0.416*** (0.132)	-0.153 (0.138)
Party ID (1 = Strong Democrat)	0.076*** (0.022)	0.131*** (0.013)
Income (30 ordered categories)	-0.011* (0.006)	-0.0003 (0.003)
Northeast Region	0.171 (0.242)	-0.197 (0.173)
North Central Region	0.045 (0.250)	-0.163 (0.161)
South Region	0.218 (0.209)	-0.180 (0.175)
West Region	0.092 (0.235)	-0.227 (0.180)
Observations	1,802	3,335
Log Likelihood	-3,411.665	-5,920.638
Akaike Inf. Crit.	6,853.330	11,871.270

*Note:*

\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

**Table 8: Results from OLS Regression Analyses of Selected GSS Data**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Widespread	Politicians	Administrators
	2014	2016	2016
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Interviewer-Assessed Skin Tone (1 = lightest)	-0.004 (0.026)	0.046* (0.024)	0.047* (0.024)
Black, D Admin	0.054 (0.125)	-0.131 (0.125)	-0.079 (0.124)
Hispanic, D Admin	0.003 (0.150)	-0.400** (0.162)	-0.270* (0.162)
Asian, D Admin	-0.558*** (0.182)	-0.172 (0.164)	-0.138 (0.162)
Other race, D Admin	-0.283 (0.204)	-0.026 (0.182)	-0.029 (0.179)
Age	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)
Female	0.071 (0.061)	0.182*** (0.060)	0.191*** (0.059)
Party ID	0.051*** (0.017)	0.024 (0.016)	0.026 (0.016)
Years of Education	-0.026** (0.012)	0.001 (0.012)	-0.021* (0.012)
Income (x 10k)	-0.015** (0.007)	-0.010 (0.008)	-0.008 (0.008)
Northeast	3.713*** (0.214)	3.267*** (0.208)	3.429*** (0.205)
North Central	3.432*** (0.212)	3.156*** (0.200)	3.381*** (0.197)
South	3.529*** (0.211)	3.224*** (0.200)	3.362*** (0.198)
West	3.546*** (0.209)	3.167*** (0.204)	3.299*** (0.201)
Observations	904	1,102	1,100
R <sup>2</sup>	0.930	0.920	0.915

*Note:*

\*p\*\*p\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Our final analysis considers a possible explanation for why Latinx respondents' perception of corruption were consistent with neither Hypothesis 1 nor 3a. Hispanics born outside the United States (and therefore less familiar with American government and more likely to perceive the U.S. as better-governed than their home country) will not be more likely to perceive corruption relative to Whites, but that Latinxs born inside the United States (and therefore exposed to the lifetime of racial hierarchy that we discussed in our theory) will perceive more corruption compared to Whites. We therefore added a binary variable for whether the respondent was born in the United States to our GSS analysis and interacted it with the Latinx self-identification variable. The results are shown in Table 9. Adding the birthplace variable and interaction to the model in Table 9 reduces the sample size due to limited overlap of availability among the variables in the analysis.

**Table 9: Results from OLS Regression Analyses of GSS Data with Birthplace Interaction**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Get to the Top	Widespread		Politicians	Administrators
	2000	2004	2014	2016	2016
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Black	0.208*	0.237***	0.046	0.048	0.093
	(0.111)	(0.081)	(0.086)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Hispanic	0.196	-0.056	0.305	-0.127	-0.219
	(0.263)	(0.211)	(0.195)	(0.211)	(0.209)
Hispanic X Born outside the US	-0.493	0.636*	-0.337	-0.350	0.166
	(0.408)	(0.334)	(0.273)	(0.312)	(0.313)
Asian	0.135	-0.026	-0.437**	-0.084	0.032
	(0.231)	(0.147)	(0.177)	(0.165)	(0.163)
Other race	0.416*	0.211	-0.208	0.046	0.047
	(0.218)	(0.241)	(0.198)	(0.177)	(0.175)
Born outside the US	-0.078	-0.136	-0.046	-0.171*	-0.364***
	(0.146)	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.099)	(0.097)
Age	-0.006***	0.002	-0.001	-0.003*	-0.004**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female	-0.046	0.208***	0.034	0.120**	0.150***
	(0.066)	(0.051)	(0.056)	(0.058)	(0.057)
Party ID	-0.022	-0.030**	0.057***	0.023	0.026*
	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Years of Education	-0.057***	-0.035***	-0.032***	-0.002	-0.023**
	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Income (x 10k)	-0.020**	-0.024***	-0.015**	-0.014*	-0.012
	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Northeast	3.747***	3.559***	3.793***	3.459***	3.633***
	(0.229)	(0.175)	(0.192)	(0.195)	(0.193)
North Central	3.597***	3.539***	3.497***	3.354***	3.570***
	(0.222)	(0.168)	(0.186)	(0.187)	(0.185)
South	3.474***	3.522***	3.580***	3.424***	3.577***
	(0.219)	(0.168)	(0.183)	(0.187)	(0.185)
West	3.689***	3.484***	3.538***	3.396***	3.534***
	(0.229)	(0.174)	(0.186)	(0.190)	(0.189)
Observations	1,040	1,260	1,048	1,185	1,180
R <sup>2</sup>	0.840	0.921	0.930	0.920	0.915

*Note:*

\*p&lt;0.10\*\*p&lt;0.05\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

In the majority of the models of Table 9, there is no statistical support for adding an interaction between birthplace and Hispanic self-identification. In only one model is this interaction statistically significant, and in that case it indicates that Hispanics born outside the United States perceive *more* corruption relative to their native-born counterparts. We therefore find little support for our conjecture about the effect of native status and revert to our earlier conclusion that Latinx respondents generally perceive as much or less corruption in the American government than similar White respondents.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study seeks to broaden the study of how identity beyond gender affects attitudes toward corruption by examining the effects of racial identity and skin tone on perceptions of corruption in the U.S. We develop and test our Racial Disenchantment Theory and find limited support for it. While African Americans are significantly more likely to regard political institutions and leaders as corrupt than Whites, these results only hold when a Republican leads the executive branch of government. Being Asian American, Latinx or dark-skinned is not consistently associated with heightened views of government corruption. These results call into question arguments that directly link physical characteristics such as race and skin tone (and their effects) with views toward government. However, our results portray the significant power that African Americans' racial group consciousness has on their steadfast support of the Democratic Party which then extends to their views about government.

This study makes several notable contributions. First, it is one of the first studies to examine how racial, ethnic identity and skin tone are related to individuals' perceptions of corruption in the U.S. over numerous decades. Most extant research on perceptions of corruption center on the effects of gender and class identity largely neglecting race. Second, this study is consequential for its ability to broaden the scope of critical race theory with a focus on perceptions of government and political leaders' corruption. Third, this study makes significant headway in developing our knowledge of the empirical relationships among racial identity, perception of corruption, and the political party in control of the presidency. While some research has centered on the link between partisan identification and perceptions of corruption, this study spearheads new research on the relationship between African Americans' views toward corruption and racial group consciousness as it interacts with partisanship. Additionally, this study's results suggest that Blacks and Whites may disagree on the meaning of "abuse of public office for private gain" based on their individual experiences and/or political commitments, raising questions about how the perception of corruption maps on to its measurement. Most importantly, this study finds that the effect of racial, ethnic identity on perception of corruption is not context-free or universally consistent. Rather, race and ethnicity can change the effect of the other filters (such as partisanship) through we which perceive corruption.

Thus, not only does this study break new ground in our understanding of the intersection of racial, ethnic identity, partisanship, and perceptions of corruption but it also paves the way for the development of new research trajectories. New studies should more closely study the reasons why some groups perceive different levels of corruption in the same government. Additionally, the increasing number of strong Black Democratic

candidates losing to White or light-skinned extremist Republican men (Quarshie 2022) raises an important and (to our knowledge) unexplored research question: what effect does supporting losing candidates have on Blacks' perceptions of corruption, trust in government, commitment to the Democratic party, and ultimately their political behavior? This study paves the way for future studies to study perceptions of corruption and disentangle the relationship among racial power, racial group consciousness, political behavior, and perception of government.

## Notes

1. For example, this definition is used by Transparency International (<https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>) and the World Bank (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2020/02/19/anticorruption-fact-sheet>).
2. In accordance with existing research, we use the terms “African American” and “Black” interchangeably.
3. In accordance with existing research, we use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx” interchangeably and as gender neutral terms.
4. Greater corruption in turn results in heightened inequality because those who benefit from a corrupt system adopt practices and policies that disadvantage others in order to maintain their status. This mutually reinforcing cycle constitutes what Uslaner (2008) deems the “inequality trap.”
5. Greater corruption in turn results in heightened inequality because those who benefit from a corrupt system adopt practices and policies that disadvantage others in order to maintain their status. This mutually reinforcing cycle constitutes what Uslaner (2008) deems the “inequality trap.”
6. The “Asian” category encompasses responses 4-14 in the coding for the RACECEN1 variable.
7. This is variable VCF0105b in the ANES cumulative data file. The relatively heterogeneous “Other or multiple races” category exists because further differentiation produces very small samples for each subcategory.
8. The Corruption PCA score is constructed slightly differently in the two individual year data files due to the (un)availability of some variables. In 2012, the PCA score includes the three variables from the cumulative data file and an additional variable asking respondents “How many of the people running the government are corrupt?” on a 5-point scale. In 2016, the PCA score includes the “Benefit of a Few” and “What is Right” questions from the cumulative data file, the 2012 corruption question about the proportion of people running the government who are corrupt, and another question asking “How widespread do you think corruption such as bribe taking is among politicians in the United States?” with responses on a four-point scale.
9. This is variable V162368 in the ANES cumulative data file.
10. Asian Americans and those in the “Other” category were excluded from this graph due to a small N.
11. The  $R^2$  value for models of GSS data is much higher than for ANES data, but this is an artifact of how the  $R^2$  is computed when a grand intercept is omitted in favor of a full set of region dummies. In this case, our model is compared to a model where the DV is predicted to = 0 for every observation (i.e., an empty model on the right-hand side). For the Corruption PCA score in the ANES data, the comparison (empty) model is an excellent model because this score by construction has a mean of zero. For the dependent variables in the GSS data, the empty model is a poor fit because none of the variables has a mean of zero (and thus the apparent  $R^2$  for our model is higher).
12. Recall that the Corruption PCA score is created somewhat differently for these two individual ANES years; the income variable was also coded differently (with more ordinal categories) in these data sets. See note 8 and Tables A1 and A2 in the online appendix for more details.

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## ONLINE APPENDIX

**Table A1: Summary Statistics from the ANES 2012 Individual Data File**

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Corruption PCA Score	5900	0.000	1.256	-4.781	0.128	2.568
Age	5839	49.448	16.806	18	51	90
Party ID (7-point scale, D to R)	5876	3.524	2.112	1	3	7
Race: White	5873	0.597	0.491	0	1	1
Race: Black	5873	0.173	0.379	0	0	1
Race: Hispanic	5873	0.171	0.376	0	0	1
Race: Other	5873	0.059	0.235	0	0	1
Perceived Skin Tone (1 = lightest)	1986	3.465	2.303	1	3	10
Sex: Male	5900	0.481	0.500	0	0	1
Sex: Female	5900	0.519	0.500	0	1	1
Education: Grade School or less	5850	0.106	0.308	0	0	1
Education: High School	5850	0.246	0.431	0	0	1
Education: Some College	5850	0.336	0.472	0	0	1
Education: College or More	5850	0.312	0.463	0	0	1
Income (30 ordered categories)	5707	13.348	8.213	1	13	28
Northeast Region	5900	0.163	0.369	0	0	1
North Central Region	5900	0.212	0.409	0	0	1
South Region	5900	0.386	0.487	0	0	1
West Region	5900	0.239	0.426	0	0	1

**Table A2: Summary Statistics from the ANES 2016 Individual Data File**

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Corruption PCA Score	4262	0.000	1.352	-4.338	-0.078	2.833
Age	4146	49.587	17.580	18	50	90
Party ID (7-point scale, D to R)	4242	3.858	2.153	1	4	7
Race: White	4232	0.717	0.450	0	1	1
Race: Black	4232	0.094	0.292	0	0	1
Race: Hispanic	4232	0.106	0.308	0	0	1
Race: Other	4232	0.083	0.276	0	0	1
Perceived Skin Tone (1 = lightest)	3575	2.452	1.647	1	2	10
Sex: Male	4212	0.472	0.499	0	0	1
Sex: Female	4212	0.528	0.499	0	1	1
Education: Grade School or less	4221	0.067	0.249	0	0	1
Education: High School	4221	0.191	0.393	0	0	1
Education: Some College	4221	0.355	0.479	0	0	1
Education: College or More	4221	0.387	0.487	0	0	1
Income (5 ordered categories)	4064	15.399	8.076	1	16	28
Northeast Region	4262	0.164	0.370	0	0	1
North Central Region	4262	0.235	0.424	0	0	1
South Region	4262	0.382	0.486	0	0	1
West Region	4262	0.220	0.414	0	0	1