

ABSTRACT

We believe that the way individuals perceive the justice system impacts their opinions about related policy. We separate perception into two components, beliefs and experiences, and use questions measuring each of these factors to ordinarily score citizens' view of the state. Understanding race as a key explanatory factor of perception, we measure the impact that each variable has on a specific aspect of punitive policy: stripping felons of the right to vote. We predict that blacks are more likely to support felons' voting rights than are whites, while increasingly negative experiences with and beliefs about the justice system will decrease support for stricter disenfranchisement laws across races.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Sources

- Race and the Carceral State Survey (2017)

Analysis: Regression Models

Dependent Variables

- Support for felon disenfranchisement

Independent Variables

- Aggregate beliefs about criminal justice system
- Aggregate experiences with criminal justice system

Covariates: income; education; state; gender; partisan ideology

RESULTS: EFFECTS OF PERCEPTION ON OPINIONS BY RACE

Findings

1. Variance in opinions regarding felon disenfranchisement by race can be explained by overall perceptions of fairness.
2. Blacks have **more negative experiences** with the criminal justice system than do whites, causing less support for laws that disenfranchise felons.
3. Blacks have **more negative beliefs** about the criminal justice system than do whites, causing less support for disenfranchising felons.
4. Experiences are a more **salient** causal factor in overall perceptions than are beliefs for both racial groups.

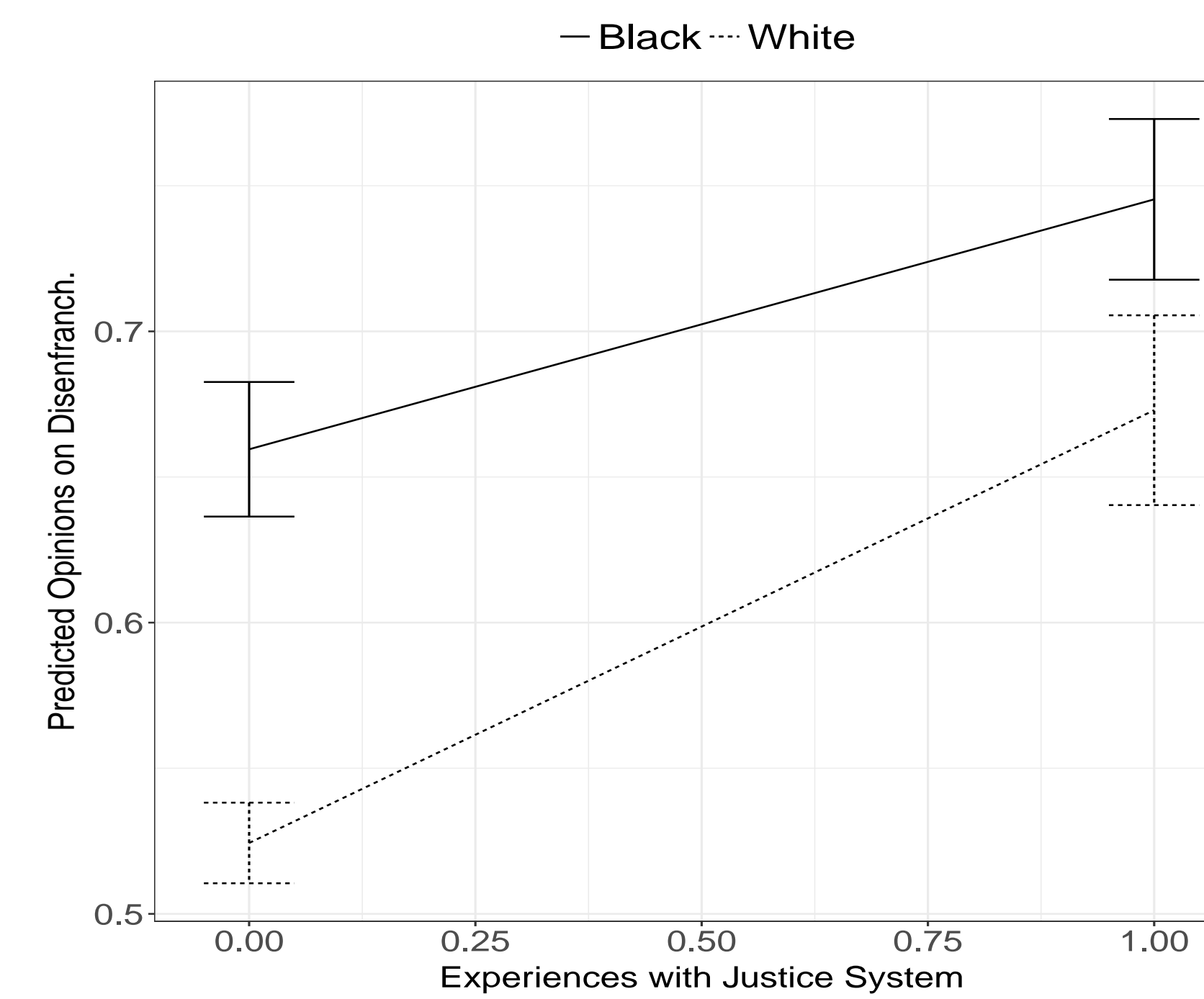


Figure 1: Pred. Opinion by Experience

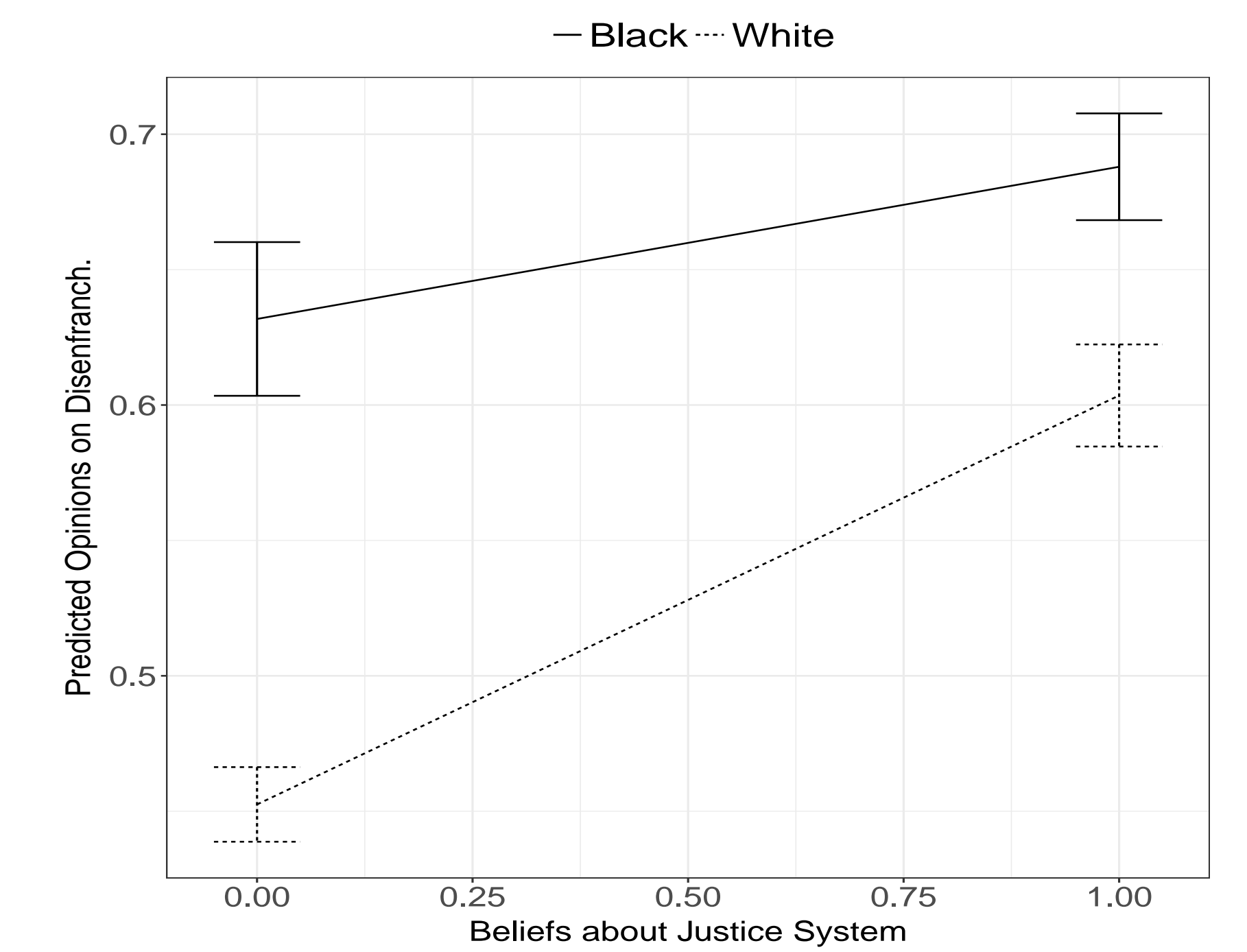
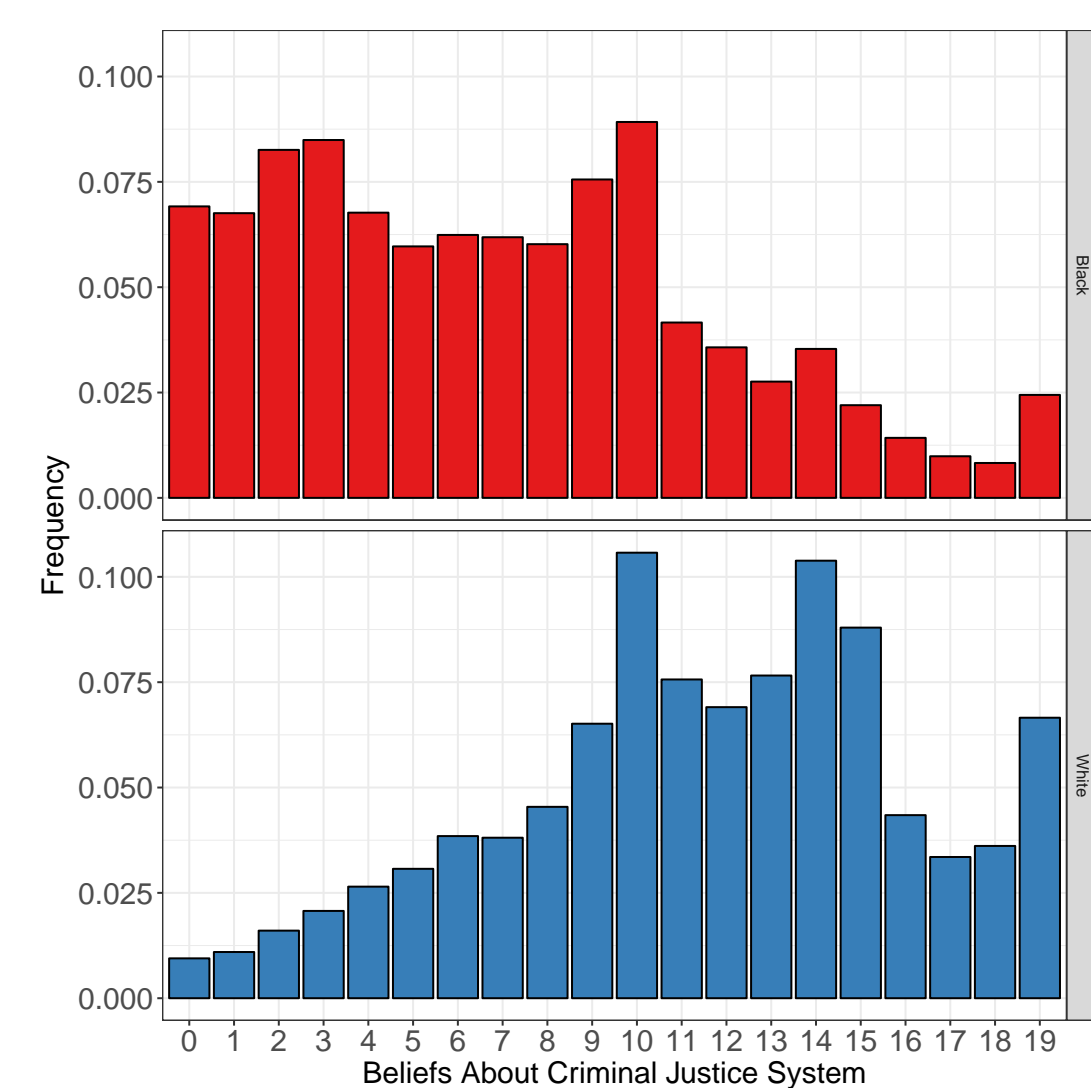


Figure 2: Pred. Opinion by Beliefs

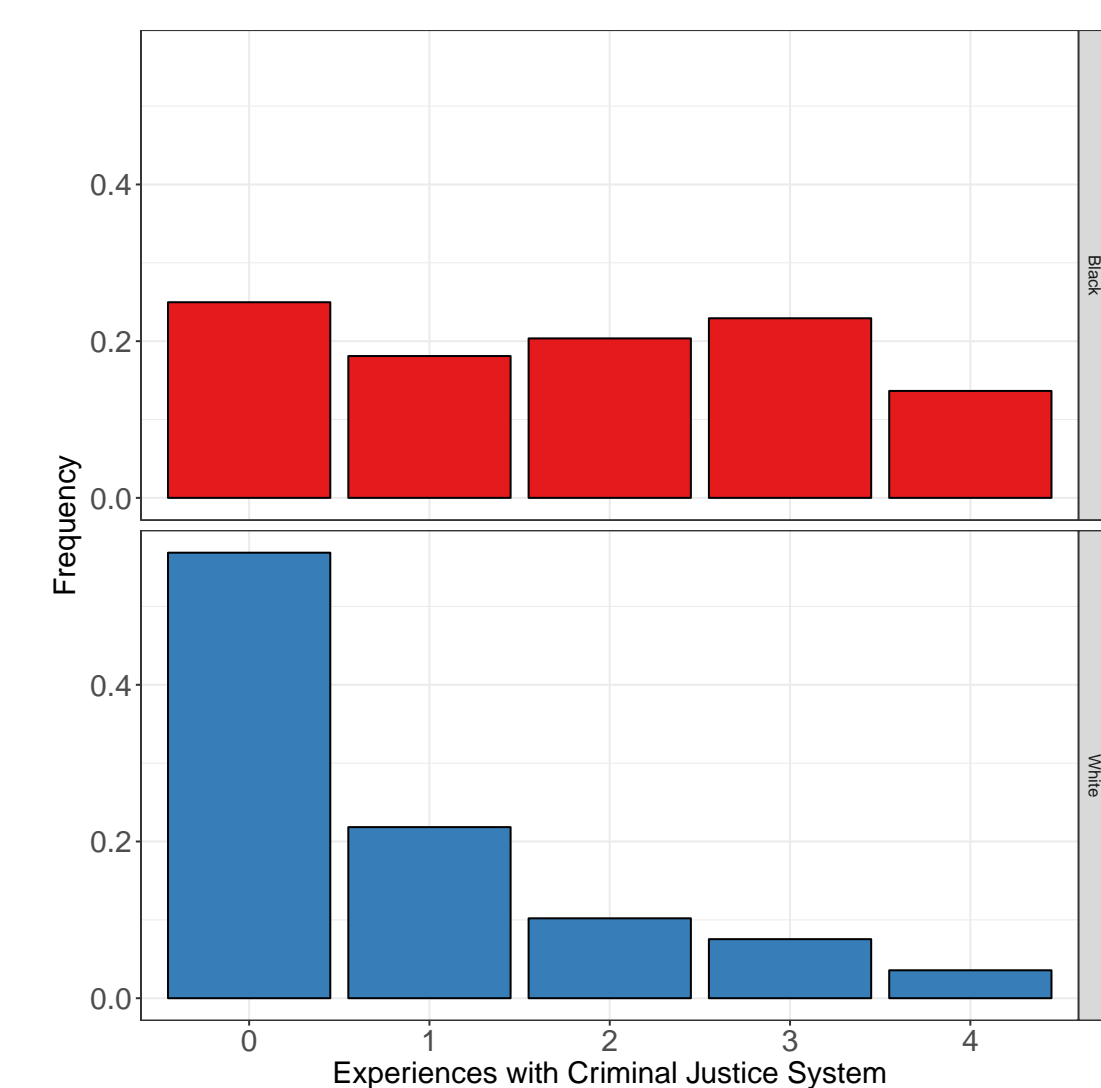
MOTIVATION AND THEORY

What basic worldview differences exist by race?

Notable differences in opinion on disenfranchisement by race inform our decision to separate racial groups in our research; differences in experiences by race follow logically from known experiential disparity across racial groups, and beliefs, while separate from experiences in our analysis, are associated with said difference. Our subsequent analysis uses other descriptors as covariates.



Higher values are more positive beliefs
Figure 1: Beliefs about Justice System



Higher values are more negative experience
Figure 2: Exp. with Justice System

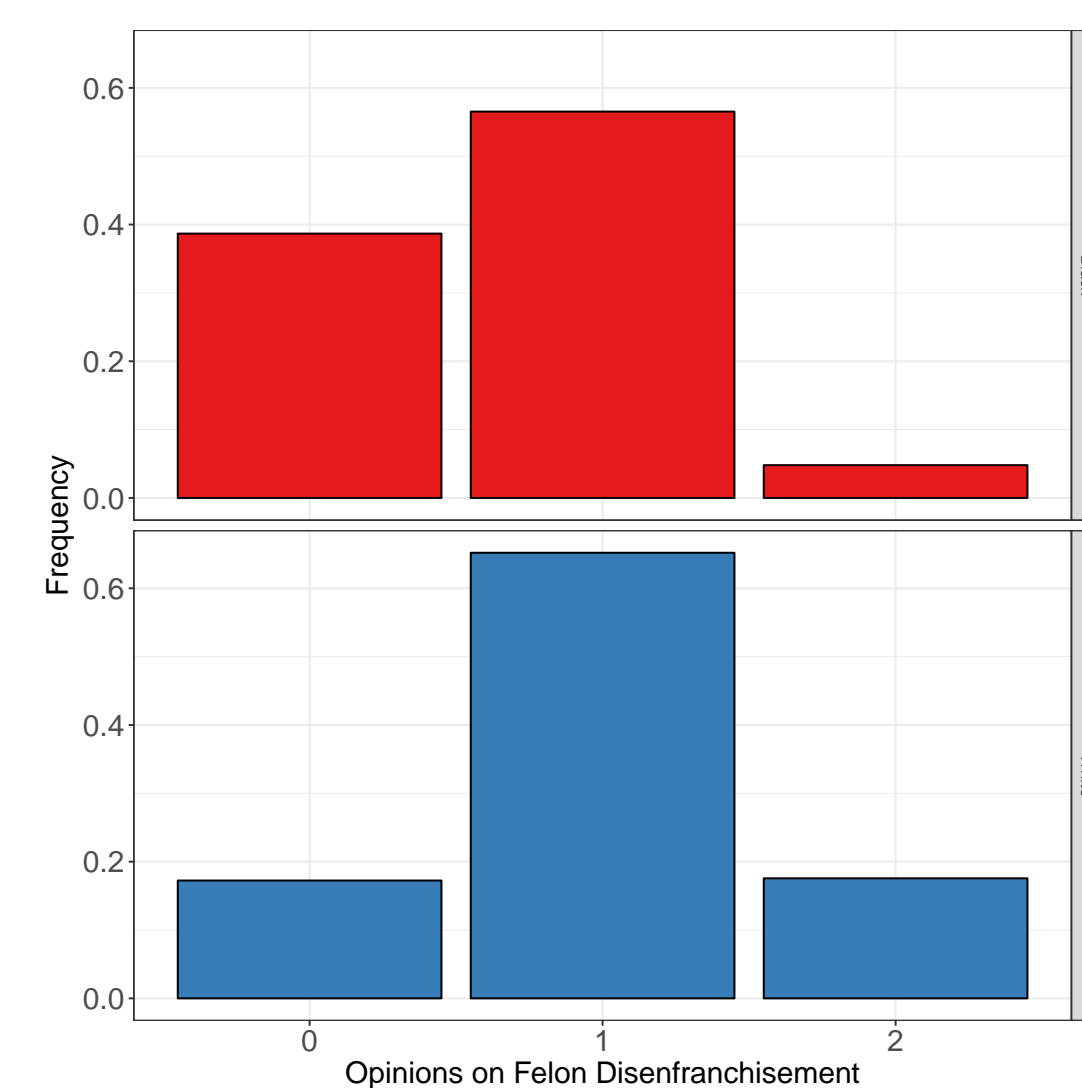
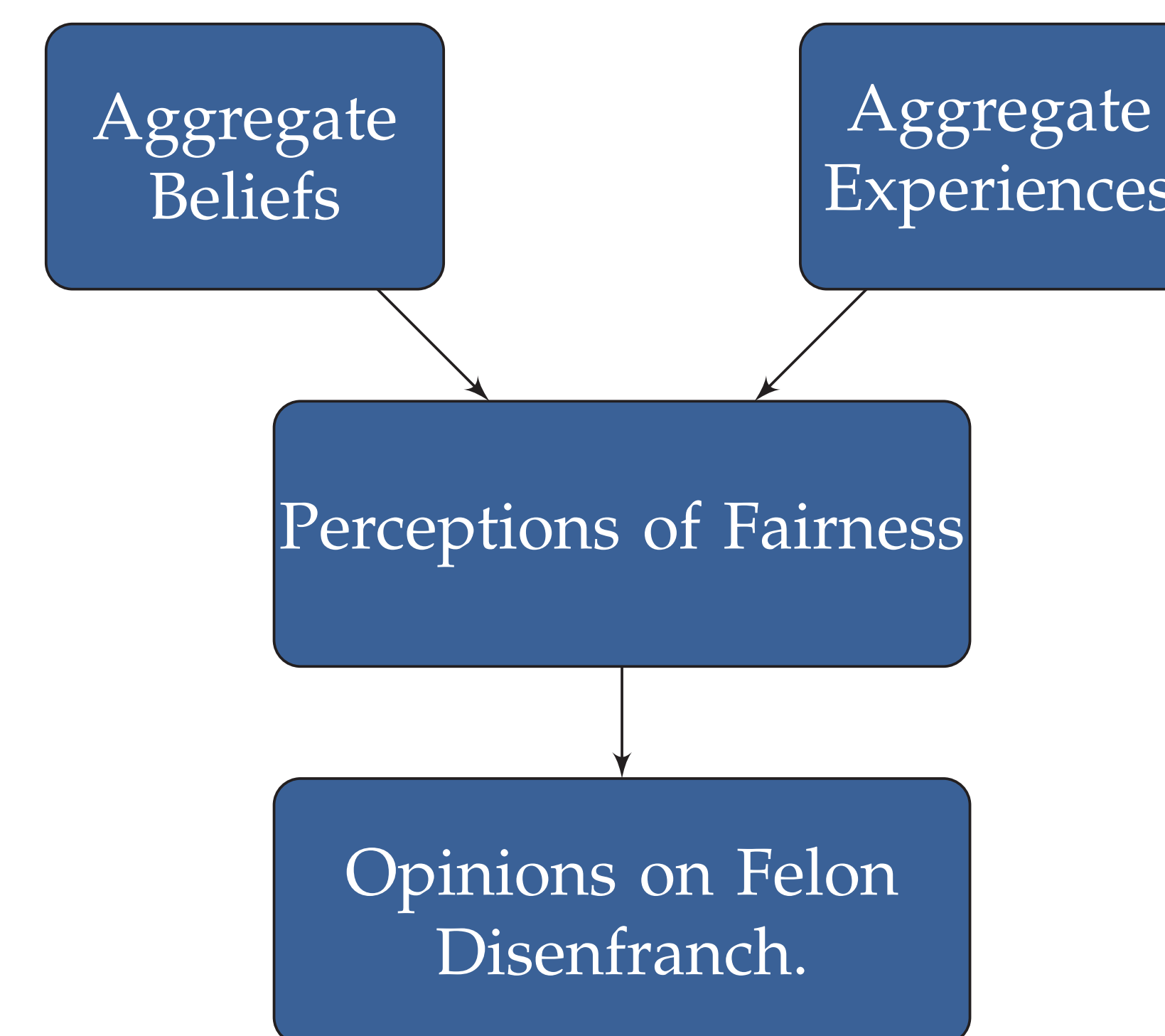


Figure 3: Opinions on Disenfranchisement

CONCLUSION



Our results show consistent skepticism regarding felon disenfranchisement from Blacks. Notable differences in opinion across racial groups can be extrapolated to provide key insights:

- The expected difference in opinion for an individual with wholly negative beliefs or experiences from an individual with policy ones is **distinctly larger** for whites than for Blacks;
- An individual's beliefs are a **more important** causal factor than his or her experiences in impacting opinions on disenfranchisement policy, reflecting the important of secondary sources in perception formation;
- Differences in experiences and beliefs by race reinforce differences in worldview for Blacks and whites.

COMMENTARY

Other Areas of Interest

- Impact of public opinion on policy outcomes
- Ubiquity of disenfranchisement as public opinion item
- Outcomes by state compared to constituent beliefs and experiences

Limitations

- 'Beliefs' and 'Experiences' variables designated after survey design
- Only two racial groups are considered
- Disenfranchisement opinion measured by three choices

CONTACT INFORMATION

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