On Assessing the Political Effects of Racial Prejudice

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Key Words

racism, racial attitudes, political attitudes, discrimination, implicit prejudice

Abstract

There is still no broad consensus on the extent to which racial prejudice influences white Americans’ political attitudes, in part because of an ongoing dispute over the nature and measurement of racial prejudice. We review measures of new, subtle forms of racism toward African-Americans and consider criticism that such views do not clearly constitute racial prejudice despite their political impact. We then evaluate a number of ways in which explicit prejudice can be assessed in surveys, highlighting the continued existence and successful measurement of overt prejudice. We also consider ways to measure prejudice other than direct survey questions. Social psychologists have gravitated to the measurement of implicit racial attitudes, an approach that we review critically as potentially interesting but with unknown payoff for political researchers. Finally, we discuss the value of experiments as a way to gain direct evidence of politically potent racial discrimination and assess the prejudicial nature of explicit racial attitudes.
INTRODUCTION

To what extent does racial prejudice continue to influence Americans’ political attitudes, driving white opposition to racial policies and black candidates? The answer to this question has been vigorously debated by researchers of American race relations (Bobo 2000, Kinder & Mendelberg 2000, Sniderman & Carmines 1997, Sniderman et al. 2000). Controversy over the political role of racial prejudice has been most heated in regard to race-conscious policies such as affirmative action, which are opposed by a majority of white Americans. The contested political role of racial prejudice has continued relevance, fueled by accusations that some white Democrats would not vote for Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential primaries or general election. Moreover, the debate concerning the political impact of contemporary racial prejudice extends to other racial policy areas, including welfare assistance, Head Start, the death penalty, housing integration, and support for African-American political candidates other than Obama.

Despite considerable effort by numerous researchers over several decades, there is still no widely accepted answer as to whether or not prejudice against blacks remains a potent factor within American politics. The issue has been raised in the news media, debated on the pages of academic journals, and perhaps even discussed around the dining room table. In this review, we consider why it has been so difficult to determine the effects of racial prejudice on contemporary American politics, discuss the research strategies commonly employed to assess these effects, evaluate the strengths and limitations of these approaches, and explore new research strategies. We do not claim to provide a comprehensive review of all research on racial prejudice or its political effects, which is a large and growing field especially within social psychology (see Quillian 2006, Fazio & Olsen 2003, Hutchings & Valentino 2004 for related articles in Annual Reviews series).

In grappling with the question of continued racism in American politics, it is instructive to recall Allport’s (1954, p. 9) definition of prejudice:

Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a group member.

This definition underscores several key features of racial prejudice that guide our discussion of extant research. First, we examine the measurement and consequences of explicit racism at some length to assess whether specific political attitudes and behavior can be considered a consequence of overt “antipathy” toward blacks. In doing so, we raise questions about how negative racial attitudes can best be measured and consider the ways in which this is complicated by egalitarian norms and related social desirability pressures. Second, we review studies, especially experimental studies, in which the information provided about a group of policy recipients or a political candidate is altered in order to assess whether opposition to racial policies or candidates can be considered “faulty” or “inflexible.” Third, we take seriously Allport’s interest in racial antipathy that is “expressed” to further underscore the value of experiments, including survey experiments, as evidence of racial negativity in action. This type of research has found greater white opposition to policies experimentally altered to help blacks than to similar policies aimed at whites, as well as greater white opposition to policies targeting a subgroup of blacks than to a comparable subgroup of whites. We believe this research provides direct evidence of racial discrimination. In a similar vein, varied reactions to political candidates who differ only in racial or ethnic characteristics, in experiments described by Hutchings & Jardina elsewhere in this volume, can also provide direct evidence of expressed racial negativity. Of course, such experiments need to be conducted with care, as has been made clear by recent criticism of survey experiments (Gaines et al. 2007).
So far so good. But some researchers see Allport's definition as an overly restrictive definition of prejudice in an age when overt racial antipathy may be difficult to assess (Banaji et al. 2004). Do whites need to feel negatively about blacks to act or think in a prejudicial manner? Might such prejudice operate at a less conscious level and be considered implicit? Can people be prejudicial unintentionally or outside conscious awareness and yet be nonprejudicial in their expressed beliefs and intentional behavior? And does someone need to be consistently prejudicial (both at the implicit and explicit levels) to qualify as prejudiced (Arkes & Tetlock 2004, Blanton & Jaccard 2008)? In addition to examining explicit measures of racial prejudice and their political effects in this review, we also consider research on unintentional, implicit prejudice. On the one hand, unintentional prejudice may well be inflexible, and thus qualify as prejudice under Allport's definition. On the other hand, if implicit and explicit racial beliefs conflict, it is more difficult to say that implicit prejudice is based on racial antipathy (Arkes & Tetlock 2004).

NEW RACISM AND THE COMPLEXITY OF RACIAL PREJUDICE

To a very considerable extent, the debate over the continued political effects of racial prejudice hinges on an ongoing dispute over the nature and measurement of racial prejudice. Contention centers on the distinction between two different forms of racial prejudice: an overt form that is readily detected and an indirect form that is more difficult to assess. Overt prejudice is reflected in negative feelings toward blacks and a belief that blacks are inherently inferior to whites. The major problem in measuring this form of racism is that it has declined substantially over time, raising the suspicion that white prejudice is no longer readily assessed by agreement with blatantly racist statements. This leads to the concept of “new racism,” in which a subler racial prejudice is conveyed through white opposition to black demands and resentment of their special treatment (Bobo et al. 1997, Henry & Sears 2002, Kinder & Sanders 1996, McConahay & Hough 1976, Sears & Henry 2005). There are a number of different measures of the new racism, including symbolic racism, modern racism, and racial resentment. All share a common definition as support for the belief that blacks are demanding and undeserving and do not require any form of special government assistance (Henry & Sears 2002, Kinder & Sanders 1996, Kinder & Sears 1981, McConahay & Hough 1976). New racism is more prevalent than overt prejudice, but unlike overt prejudice, it has proven difficult to both define and measure without inviting impassioned research criticism.

Contention Over the Nature of New-Racism Measures

There is no question that measures of new racism are politically consequential. They powerfully predict white opposition to a vast array of racial policies, and do so to a greater degree than measures of overt prejudice (see, e.g., Bobo 2000, Sidanius et al. 2000, Sniderman & Piazza 1993, Sniderman et al. 1991, Stoker 1998). The contentious issue is whether they measure racial prejudice or other, nonracial ideological beliefs (Schuman 2000, Sniderman & Tetlock 1986). Measures of new racism may be confounded with the expression of conservative ideology because they draw heavily on the language of individualism. Consider an item in the racial resentment scale, one of the most common measures of the new racism within political science, which states that “if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites” (Kinder & Sanders 1996). A strong
individualist would agree with this statement. But the individualist would also agree with any statement that referred to the positive effects of hard work, regardless of the target person’s race, gender, or other characteristics. Kinder & Sanders (1996) believe that individualism has become entwined with racism, so that agreement with the notion that blacks are unwilling to work hard is a form of racism. But this leaves no room for racial policy opposition grounded in general, nonracist individualism.

New-racism researchers proffer several different kinds of evidence to rebut such claims. Kinder & Mendelberg (2000) report evidence that racial resentment drives opposition to racial policy attitudes such as government assistance to blacks and college quota programs but has no effect on nonracial policies. In contrast, abstract individualism predicts opposition to social welfare policies such as food stamps and a government-guaranteed standard of living, but it has no impact on opposition to racial policies. On the basis of such evidence, Kinder & Mendelberg conclude that racial resentment is a racially specific measure distinct from general ideological principles. Their conclusion is supported by a number of other studies. Sears & Henry (2003) demonstrate that opposition to racial policies is a function of individualism solely couched in terms of race, not more general principles. Reyna et al. (2005) report greater conservative opposition to affirmative action for blacks than for women. Moreover, they report that this greater conservative opposition to affirmative action is mediated by symbolic racism, suggesting that such opposition is racial, not ideological.

Nonetheless, other findings continue to suggest that new racism is complexly intertwined with ideology. As evidence of the ideological nature of the new racism, we find that racial resentment is more ideological among conservatives than liberals (Feldman & Huddy 2005a). Among liberals, resentment conveys the political effects of racial prejudice by predicting support for an experimentally altered college scholarship program for black but not white students, and is better predicted by overt measures of racial prejudice. Among conservatives, however, racial resentment is closely tied to opposition to race-conscious programs regardless of recipient race and is only weakly tied to measures of overt prejudice. Racial resentment, therefore, is not a clear-cut measure of racial prejudice for all Americans and may convey ideological principles for conservatives.

Recent findings and persistent criticism of racial resentment and other measures of new racism place the current political relevance of racial prejudice in some doubt. From a measurement perspective, new-racism questions remain ambiguous indicators of prejudice because they ask white Americans to agree with complex statements that could garner support for reasons other than racial prejudice. It is not our intention to deny the existence of politically relevant racism. Indeed, in our study on support for a hypothetical college scholarship program, racism is apparent on both the political left and right (Feldman & Huddy 2005a). Our purpose is to advance research on the political effects of racial prejudice by attempting to identify common empirical ground rules on its assessment.

**EXPLICIT MEASURES OF RACIAL PREJUDICE**

In this section, we examine various approaches to the assessment of the political effects of racial prejudice. We first examine explicit survey questions. We then assess the measurement of implicit racial attitudes, and finally consider ways in which experiments can help to identify racial prejudice.

**Overt Prejudice**

We begin by going back in time to reconsider the role and measurement of overt prejudice—a belief in the inherent inferiority of blacks—which we think has been prematurely dismissed as a politically relevant measure of racial prejudice (Huddy & Feldman 2001, Virtanen & Huddy 1998). Support for overt racism has declined over time within American public opinion, as widely noted. Nonetheless, our own
work finds moderate levels of overt racism that is politically consequential. To assess overt racism, and several other explicit racial beliefs, we modified a long-standing battery of questions from the General Social Survey (GSS) that present respondents with possible explanations for racial differences in standardized test scores and socioeconomic outcomes (Feldman & Huddy 2005a). These explanations sort into three dimensions in our data: overt racism (e.g., racial differences in intelligence, fundamental genetic differences), black motivation (e.g., the failure of black families to teach their children appropriate values and skills), and societal discrimination (e.g., lack of opportunity for a good education). We modify the GSS questions by allowing respondents to indicate how likely each statement is as an explanation of racial differences; the original format required a blunt yes or no answer to each question (Apostle et al. 1983).

Overt racism persists in our data. Between one fifth and one quarter of white Americans in the national American Racial Opinion Survey (AROS; see Huddy & Feldman 2006) think that racial differences in intelligence or fundamental genetic differences between the races explain some or a great deal of the economic and educational gap between blacks and whites. When whites who think that such explanations might account for a little of the gap are also included, the figure rises to >40%. These are startling numbers (Table 1). We find similar levels of overt racism in a New York state survey in which fully 35% of white respondents believed that racial differences in intelligence helped to explain some or a great deal of black-white economic differences, and 27% felt negative about a family member marrying someone who is black (Feldman & Huddy 2005a).

Overt prejudice is linked to support for segregationist policies such as miscegenation laws; it also drives opposition to general government assistance to blacks (Kluegel 1990). It increases opposition to popular opportunity-enhancing programs such as enterprise zones (Virtanen & Huddy 1998). And it has even broader effects in our study of New York state residents. It drives white opposition to housing integration policies, especially among low-income individuals who are most likely to live in areas that could be affected by such integration policies. It has a sizeable impact on racial policies such as government assistance to blacks and spending on black schools, as well as on social welfare issues on which the new racism is typically thought to have its greatest effects (Huddy & Feldman 2001). Overt racism is also strongly linked to racial resentment (a measure of the new racism), but only among white liberals, not white conservatives (Feldman & Huddy 2005a). These findings point to the continued political relevance of overt racism.

For further evidence that overt racism continues to shape political behavior, we turn to the Democratic primaries in the 2008 presidential election. The impact of race is more difficult to assess in the general election because racial antipathy becomes conflated with partisanship and ideology. In contrast, the policy differences between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were relatively narrow, and variance in ideology is smaller in the Democratic primary electorate than in the voting public overall. In most states, the exit polls in the Democratic primaries asked whether “race was a factor” in the respondent’s vote. Across all 31 states in which this question was asked, 14% of white voters said yes. This percentage varied substantially from a low of 8% in New Mexico and Oregon to a high of 24% in Mississippi. On balance, race was more likely to hurt than help Obama. There were only three states (Oregon, Vermont, and Illinois) in which at least 50% of respondents for whom race was a factor said that they voted for him (see Table 2). Among all Democratic primary voters, including those who said race was not a factor, there were only two

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2The effects of overt racism occur with controls for racial resentment and negative racial stereotypes in regression analyses.
3State exit poll data are combined and weighted to comprise a nationally representative sample of 2008 Democratic primary voters.
Table 1 Frequency distributions of explanations for racial differences: whites only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>% Answered “a great deal”</th>
<th>% Answered “some”</th>
<th>% Answered “a little”</th>
<th>% Answered “none”</th>
<th>% Answered “don’t know” or did not answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occurs because most blacks do not have the chance to get a good education?</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be explained by discrimination against blacks?</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurs because most blacks just don’t have the motivation or will power to perform well?</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurs because most blacks do not teach their children the values and skills which are required to be successful in school?</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is due to racial differences in intelligence?</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurs because of fundamental genetic differences between the races?</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, African-American students get lower scores on standardized tests than do whites. How much of the difference in test scores:

<table>
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<td>13.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be explained by discrimination against blacks?</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occurs because most blacks do not teach their children the values and skills which are required to be successful in school?</td>
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<td>37.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is due to racial differences in intelligence?</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurs because of fundamental genetic differences between the races?</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, African-Americans have lower income and worse housing than white people. How much of the economic difference between blacks and whites:

<table>
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<th>Explanation</th>
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<th>% Answered “some”</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


states—Vermont and Illinois, Obama’s home state—in which 5% or more voted for Obama for racial reasons.

In contrast, almost 10% of Democratic primary voters said that race was a factor and did not vote for Obama in the Democratic primaries. In several states, the fraction of racially motivated voters was substantially higher than this. As seen in Table 2, the percentage of Democratic primary voters who did not support Obama for racial reasons was roughly 15% in six states, reaching a maximum of 21.6% in Mississippi. The obvious racial nature of this question probably renders it an underestimate of the effects of overt racism in the Democratic primaries.
Table 2  Impact of race on vote choice in 2008 Democratic primaries: whites only (reported in exit polls)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Race important (%)</th>
<th>Race important: % voted for Obama</th>
<th>Race important: % did not vote for Obama</th>
<th>Total %: vote against Obama for racial reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KY</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 31 states</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aIncludes entries for all states that were at or above average in the negative influence of race on vote choice. The race question was asked of voters in Democratic primaries in a total of 31 states. The specific question was: “In deciding your vote for president today, was the race of the candidate: The single most important factor, One of several important factors, Not an important factor?”

Findings from our research and the 2008 Democratic primaries suggest that researchers should continue to ask questions that tap overt racist sentiments. We believe the success of our overt racism measure is due, in part, to the fact that it is somewhat indirect—asking about the causes of racial differences than racial qualities per se. We also allowed respondents to give a graded response to overt racism questions, making certain statements easier to endorse without respondents feeling as if they have been classified as racist by an interviewer. We believe more research is needed on overt racism and its political consequences before its obituary is written.

Negative Racial Stereotypes

The endorsement of racial stereotypes provides an alternative measure of negative racial attitudes that has become more popular in recent years. This measure is included in a number of contemporary national surveys, such as the 1991 Race and Politics Survey (http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+natrace), the GSS (http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website/), and the American National Election Study (ANES) (http://www.electionstudies.org/, Sniderman & Carmines 1997, Sniderman & Piazza 1993). Racial stereotype measures have one clear advantage over measures of the new racism: They provide a more direct assessment of negative racial views that is not confounded with political ideology. But the obvious racial content of stereotypes also means that they arouse substantial concerns about social desirability (discussed in the section “The Problem of Social Desirability” below), weakening their ability to measure racial negativity. Survey respondents often complain about the blatant nature of racial stereotype items, and a sizeable number simply rate blacks at the scale midpoint to avoid any appearance of racial bias.4

Nonetheless, racial stereotypes are pervasive and have political clout. A sizeable minority of whites agree that most blacks are

4In both the 2000 ANES and the 2002 GSS studies, 43% of all respondents rated blacks at the midpoint (4) of a 1–7 scale in which 1 represented the view that most blacks are lazy and 7 meant most are hard working (http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm).
lazy, complaining, and “have a chip on their shoulder” (Peffley & Shields 1996, Sniderman & Piazza 1993). Furthermore, Sniderman & Piazza (1993) find that whites who believe “if blacks would only try harder, they would be just as well off as whites” or that “blacks who are on welfare programs could get a job if they really tried” are much more likely to oppose government spending for programs either to help blacks or to guarantee their fair treatment in the work force. Likewise, Peffley et al. (1997) find that whites who believe that most blacks violate the “work ethic” are more inclined to oppose a government program to assist blacks who have trouble keeping their jobs, are more likely to believe that blacks and poor blacks prefer government assistance to working, and are less likely to believe that a black mother who has dropped out of high school and is on welfare would look for work. Negative racial stereotypes play an especially prominent role in shaping opposition to social welfare programs and a range of criminal justice policies (Hurwitz & Peffley 1997, Hurwitz & Peffley 2005, Peffley et al. 1997, Peffley & Hurwitz 2002, Sniderman & Piazza 1993).

There is also a substantial connection between negative racial stereotypes, such as perceived black willingness to work, and measures of overt racism. In our research on racial attitudes (from the AROS study; Huddy & Feldman 2006), we include a number of explanations for racial differences in economic and educational outcomes that tap internal attributions for black poverty and lower educational performance (see Table 1). We ask respondents the degree to which such differences are due to a lack of willpower and motivation or black parents’ failure to teach their children the right values. In our data, such internal attributions are substantially correlated with overt prejudice and in that sense appear to serve as a more clear-cut measure of prejudice than new racism (Feldman & Huddy 2005b). Questions that assess the degree to which whites attribute a lack of black success to deficient internal motivation also seem to evade respondents’ social desirability concerns more readily than blunt stereotype questions and elicit much less missing data (or scores at the midpoint of a 1–10 scale).

The view that blacks lack sufficient motivation to get ahead is politically consequential and deserves continued attention as a measure of prejudice (see also Sears & Henry 2003). We do not, however, regard the traditional 0–10 rating scale (e.g., from lazy to hard working) as the best way to assess such views. Our modified wording of the GSS attribution questions more successfully evades egalitarian norms; 40%–50% of our respondents indicate that a lack of sufficient internal motivation accounts “a great deal” or “some” for disparate educational and economic racial outcomes. As with overt racism, we believe more can be done to better assess negative racial stereotypes in order to provide a clear measure of racial prejudice.

### Perceived Discrimination

The denial of discrimination is a key component of prejudice in all of the new-racism scales. As legal barriers to black participation in American society were removed in the 1960s, questions arose about the extent to which racial discrimination continued to play a major role in American life. Surveys found that significant numbers of white Americans rejected the belief that blacks were still held back by discrimination. The view that racial discrimination no longer affected blacks was incorporated as a part of the new racism by McConahay & Hough (1976), and items have been included in various new-racism scales to assess this belief (Kinder & Sanders 1996, Henry & Sears 2002). Some researchers have suggested that a denial of discrimination may provide a better way than the overall measures of new racism to get at racial prejudice (Schuman 2000). A denial of discrimination clearly shapes political reactions to a range of policies, including opportunity-enhancing programs such as enterprise zones, government efforts to improve blacks’ standard of living, and general government assistance to blacks (Apostle et al. 1983, Bobo & Kluegel 1993, Kluegel 1990, Sniderman & Hagen 1985).
Table 3  Predicted values for racial resentment by internal and external attributions for racial disparities: whites only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame blacks lack motivation</th>
<th>Perceived racial discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.74 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0.70 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.67 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Entries are predicted values based on regression coefficients not shown here, calculated at the first, 50th, and 99th percentile on a scale assessing perceived racial discrimination and the belief that blacks lack the motivation to get ahead (see Feldman & Huddy 2005b). Standard errors are in parentheses. Racial resentment is scored on a 0–1 scale where 1 represents the highest level of resentment.

The political importance of perceived discrimination can be seen in our national AROS survey. We included racial discrimination as a reason for racial disparities in economic and educational outcomes in the battery of questions described above (see Table 2). Unlike internal attributions, such external attributions are essentially unrelated to overt racism and thus lack an obvious foundation in racial prejudice (at least as assessed by overt racism). Moreover, the denial of racial discrimination is a key underpinning of racial resentment. We examined the determinants of racial resentment in multivariate analyses with predictors that included ideology and values, basic demographics, and measures of perceived discrimination (external) and black motivation (internal). We also included the interaction between perceived discrimination and motivation. From the regression estimates, we computed predicted values for racial resentment at the first, fiftieth, and ninety-ninth percentiles of perceived discrimination and motivation (see Table 3). Racial resentment is consistently high among those who deny racial discrimination (ranging from 0.67 to 0.74 on a 0 to 1 scale) regardless of whether the respondent believes that blacks lack the motivation to succeed. The denial of racial discrimination is thus sufficient to produce high scores on the racial resentment scale.5

5In a parallel analysis, we found the same pattern for a summary measure of support for policies to remedy racial inequities.

These results underscore the political centrality of perceived discrimination to racial resentment, which, as already noted, is a powerful determinant of opposition to various racial policies. New-racism researchers typically view perceived discrimination as a reflection of prejudice—i.e., whites who deny discrimination against blacks willfully ignore reality because of their negative racial attitudes. The lack of clear connection between perceived discrimination and overt racism suggests to us that the correct interpretation may be more complicated. Substantial differences in racial outcomes are an undeniable reality of contemporary life in the United States. From health outcomes to income, joblessness, college graduation rates, incarceration rates, and housing opportunities, blacks fare worse than whites, sometimes by a staggering margin (National Research Council 2004). But as noted in the extensive report on the assessment of discrimination conducted by the National Research Council, “Differences in outcomes by race do not themselves provide direct evidence for the magnitude or even the presence of racial discrimination in any particular domain” (p. 48). Indeed, it is often exceedingly difficult to demonstrate the existence of discrimination in a given situation—even for social science researchers—because it depends on the unique identification of race, and not other factors, as the reason for a person’s specific treatment. Moreover, discrimination can occur in different forms, some of which are more subtle than others, making it even more difficult to...
prove that differential treatment is due to race (National Research Council 2004).

If discrimination is difficult for experts to conclusively demonstrate, can we flatly state that the denial of racial discrimination among ordinary people reflects racial prejudice? Isn’t it possible that the denial of discrimination is due to the inherent difficulty in attributing unequal racial outcomes specifically to differential treatment, especially for individuals unschooled in scientific research methods? Some whites may feel they have never witnessed or seen direct evidence of such categorical discrimination. The denial of discrimination could also arise from ideological considerations that make it more difficult for political conservatives to accept the existence of discrimination as a determinant of an individual’s economic and educational outcomes. In the same way, the willingness to blame black poverty on discrimination could arise from an ideological belief in the pervasiveness of structural inequities in American society.

Several recent studies suggest that common psychological processes may in fact limit people’s willingness and ability to attribute unequal outcomes to discrimination. A series of studies by Swim et al. (2003) explores the process by which research subjects judged an instance in which an actor treated two people (a man and a woman) differently. Subjects were significantly more likely to say that the behavior was discriminatory when there was clear evidence of intent on the part of the actor. Interestingly, subjects in these studies were less likely to conclude that the actor was prejudiced than that the act was discriminatory when intent was at least somewhat unclear. The amount of harm also had an effect but only when intent was unclear. The researchers conclude that people place “more weight on information about intent than information about harm” (p. 952) when assessing discrimination.

The role of information in perceived discrimination can also be seen in a study by Nelson et al. (2007). This experimental study examines the effects of elite messages on perceptions of racism. A scenario was described in which a white policeman shot a black male. The description of the incident, which was held constant, was combined with a charge of racism made by a politician described in one of four ways: white Democrat, black Democratic, white Republican, or black Republican. White respondents were more likely to view the shooting as racist when the charge of racism was made by a white than a black politician, suggesting that a white politician’s statement conveys more information and is seen as more credible than that of a black politician. Consistent with this interpretation, black subjects were more likely to accept claims that the shooting was racist when such claims were made by a black Republican politician than a black Democrat, another unexpected outcome. Given the inherent difficulty in judging another’s motivation, some sources of information are more persuasive than others. If whites believe that blacks exaggerate their experience of discrimination, such claims may be discounted.

If attributions of discrimination are plagued by ambiguity and dependent on the credibility of the accuser, it is possible that some people are simply better able to make those judgments than others. Gomez & Wilson (2006) argue that the attribution of racial inequities to societal factors such as discrimination requires more cognitive ability than attributions to blacks’ individual failings. Using the 1986 and 2000 ANES, they find that political sophistication—measured by questions about major political figures and key political facts—predicts greater support for societal discrimination and less support for blacks’ personal failings on the racial resentment scale, even when the authors control for key predictors including ideology, values, and antiblack affect. Given the nature of their data, it is not possible to determine exactly how a lack of sophistication affects the ability to make societal attributions for the conditions of blacks in society. But the answer is important and requires further investigation.

Of course, it is also possible that a denial of discrimination reflects racial prejudice, as argued by McConahay & Hough (1976).
From this new-racism perspective, a denial of discrimination serves as a convenient way to reject racial policies designed to improve African-Americans’ outcomes. Consistent with this argument, Nelson et al. (2007) find that whites are less likely than blacks to accuse a white police officer who shoots a black man of racism. Racial stereotypes may be partly responsible for these different attributions. Nelson and colleagues note that in their study, whites were more likely than blacks to report that the hypothetical black victim was involved in illegal activity and posed a threat to the police officer—even though respondents were given no such information.

Although it is possible that the denial of discrimination is a valid indicator of prejudice, there are certainly grounds for questioning whether everyone who denies that blacks are still discriminated against is doing so out of racial animosity. More research is necessary to examine why many whites deny the continued existence of discrimination in American society. It is also critical to distinguish, in future research, between the origins and consequences of perceived discrimination. Even if denials of discrimination have diverse origins, they may have the same political consequences by reducing support for government actions to remedy racial inequities.

THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL DESIRABILITY

There is a long tradition within psychology, sociology, and political science of viewing with suspicion white responses to explicit survey questions about race, especially questions that hold implications for the respondent’s own racial egalitarianism (Crosby et al. 1980). Americans are considerably more racially tolerant in their responses to survey questions now than they were in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Page & Shapiro 1992, Schuman et al. 1997). Researchers working from a social desirability perspective regard explicit racial questions as subject to heavy normative pressure that prevents people from honestly reporting negative racial views (Berinsky 1999, Jackman 1994, Kuklinski et al. 1997a, Kuklinski et al. 1997b). From this vantage point, it is difficult to uncover the political effects of prejudice because it is not well measured by typical survey questions and must be uncovered through special techniques designed to evade desirability concerns.

Pervasive race-of-interviewer effects provide clear evidence that social desirability affects the expression of negative racial attitudes in surveys, especially in an interviewer-mediated setting (Anderson et al. 1988a,b; Davis 1997a,b; Finkel et al. 1991; Kinder & Sanders 1996). In both face-to-face and phone surveys, respondents evince less prejudice when the interviewer is black than white. Race-of-interviewer effects have been best documented for black respondents but have also been observed among whites, and seem to depend on respondent assumptions that black interviewers are more likely to hold problack views. Race-of-interviewer effects can be sizeable, especially for questions about one’s own or the other major racial group, although they are not apparent for all race-related questions. Anderson and colleagues report a difference of almost 30 percentage points in blacks’ reported closeness to blacks (from 71% in response to a white interviewer to 100% in response to a black interviewer). It is a little more difficult to gauge the degree of impact among whites, among whom there are fewer studies. Krysan & Couper (2003) report a difference of 35 percentage points in whites’ closeness to other whites when asked by a black (30%) versus a white interviewer (65%). Social desirability pressures also affect survey respondents’ willingness to answer racially sensitive questions and can lead to a serious underestimation of white opposition to racial policies and black political candidates (Berinsky 1999, Gilens et al. 1998, Kuklinski et al. 1997a).

Their findings are drawn from an adult volunteer sample in the Ann Arbor area.
Self-Monitoring Scale

Although it is clear that the expression of racial attitudes is affected by social desirability concerns, not all individuals are affected equally. Some researchers have employed individual difference measures to gauge susceptibility to tolerant norms in order to assess the political effects of racial negativity among those least subject to normative pressures. Snyder’s (1974) self-monitoring scale is one of the most commonly used scales, although there are others, such as Crowne-Marlow (see Reyna et al. 2005). High self-monitors are chronically concerned about the appropriateness of their behavior; they are highly attuned to social context and seek to adjust their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior on the basis of immediately salient norms and social expectations (Gangestad & Snyder 2000; Snyder 1974, 1987).

Terkildsen (1993) uses Snyder’s self-monitoring scale to assess individual differences in responsiveness to social context. She exposed respondents to information about one of three fictitious political candidates—a white, dark-skinned black, or light-skinned black candidate. Low self-monitors reacted as expected to the candidate’s skin color, rating the dark-skinned candidate more negatively than the light-skinned candidate. But this effect was unexpectedly reversed among high self-monitors, who went out of their way to rate the dark-skinned candidate more positively. Terkildsen’s study demonstrates the obvious impact of racial prejudice on white reactions to dark-skinned African-American candidates, but only among low self-monitors. This is an intriguing example of the use of the self-monitoring scale to illuminate the political impact of negative racial beliefs. Self-monitoring also conditioned the link between overt racism and racial resentment among liberals in research by Feldman & Huddy (2005a). Racial resentment had a strong prejudicial basis among low but not high self-monitor liberals, suggesting that high self-monitors may have underreported their level of resentment. Others have also employed the self-monitoring scale to get at the effects of racial prejudice with some modest success (Berinsky 2004, Berinsky & Lavine 2006).

Randomized Response Technique

Kuklinski and colleagues have assessed the impact of social desirability by using a randomized response technique (RRT). They reduce respondent concern about an interviewer labeling them as racist through the inclusion of what they call a list experiment (Gilens et al. 1998, Kuklinski et al. 1997a). In this method, respondents are randomly assigned to a list of questions with or without a racially sensitive item. For example, half of the respondents in the 1991 Race and Politics Survey were asked how many of the following made them angry: the government increasing gas prices, professional athletes getting million-dollar contracts, or large corporations polluting the environment. The other half was given the same list plus a fourth item: a black family moving in next door or black leaders asking for affirmative action. Kuklinski and colleagues found remarkably high levels of racially aroused anger, especially among whites in the South, and suggest that the list experiment provides an unobtrusive way to assess prejudice that evades social desirability. Others have begun to use the technique to profitably study other forms of prejudice such as sexism (Streb et al. 2008).

Overall, racism effects can be masked by social desirability pressures. Current approaches provide some sense of the magnitude of these effects, and we look forward to a growing body of future research along these lines.

MEASURES OF IMPLICIT RACIAL ATTITUDES

Researchers interested in automatic or implicit attitudes believe that negative stereotypes are

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1Specifically, they estimate that 1 out of 10 nonsouthern whites expressed anger about a black family moving in next door. In contrast, 42% of whites in the South were estimated to be angry.
pervasive within a culture and can influence attitudes or behavior even among those who personally reject them (Baron & Banaji 2006). This perspective was first articulated by Devine (1989) in her now classic study of racial attitudes. From Devine’s vantage point, the political effects of racial prejudice are difficult to discern because they vary among individuals and across social contexts. Given sufficient time or explicit racial cues, racial liberals will reject the influence of negative racial stereotypes. But under time pressure or in situations where race is present but not salient, cultural stereotypes can dominate individual reactions to political issues, campaign ads, or political speeches even among racial liberals. We refer to this as the “implicit prejudice” perspective. It suggests that the political effects of prejudice vary across situations and individuals, requiring a special research tool kit.

The political context in which racial negativity is evoked and expressed takes on greater importance once we consider the political impact of implicit or automatic prejudice that may be outside of conscious awareness, and thus potentially evoked by subtle imagery or language that does not receive conscious scrutiny. Implicit attitudes are typically thought to have at least some of the following features: uncontrolled, unintentional, stimulus driven, unconscious, and fast (De Houwer & Moors 2007). This is comparable to Burdein et al.’s (2006) definition of automatic attitudes as spontaneous, unconscious, uncontrollable, and requiring few cognitive resources. Although critics question whether implicit measures such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) can be considered a form of unconscious racism (Blanton & Jaccard 2008), and others question whether they really assess racism (Amodio & Devine 2006, Arkes & Tetlock 2004), they are at the center of a vibrant research program on prejudice within social psychology and deserve the consideration of political behavior researchers.

Implicit racial attitudes are typically measured with two distinct paradigms: priming and implicit attitudes. A variety of techniques are employed within the priming paradigm (Devine 1989, Lepore & Brown 1997, Wittenbrink et al. 1997). Typically, an attitude is primed outside subjects’ conscious awareness and evaluation of the prime or its cognitive associations are assessed in a second phase of the study. The second task could involve interacting with a black or white confederate, or making a judgment about whether a string of letters is a word, whether a word is positive or negative, whether one belongs to a named group, or whether someone’s behavior is aggressive (Devine 1989, Fazio et al. 1995, Wittenbrink et al. 1997). The degree to which the subsequent judgment is influenced by the prime is of key interest, allowing primed attitudes to be observed unobtrusively. In one of the most common tasks, evaluative association, subjects are briefly exposed to the target prime (e.g., the word black) and then make a judgment about the positive or negative valence of a subsequent target word. The time taken to make this judgment is used to assess the valence of one’s attitude toward the prime. If the prime and target word share similar valence, the valence decision is made more rapidly (Fazio et al. 1995; see also Burdein et al. 2006 for a description of priming techniques). Thus a subject who decides more quickly that “bad” is negative than that “good” is positive after being primed with the word “black” holds a negative implicit attitude toward blacks. It is difficult to report actual response effect sizes for priming studies because the data are subject to a number of adjustments and transformation. This is also true for IAT studies, discussed below.

The IAT is the second key method used to assess implicit attitudes (Greenwald et al. 1998). The test has attracted considerable research and public interest and has been taken by millions of individuals on the IAT web site: [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/). In essence, the test determines the speed with which objects are classified into positive and negative categories. For example, subjects might be asked to classify names or faces into specific racial groups, then classify words as positive or negative, and finally in a combination of the two tasks decide if a word is both black
and positive, white and negative, or on a second set of trials black and negative or white and positive. The speed with which subjects respond on these two types of trials is used to gauge implicit prejudice. Faster response times to black/negative and white/positive than black/positive and white/negative results indicate prejudice.

The magnitude of IAT effects can be difficult to gauge in exact terms because, though measured in milliseconds, findings are often standardized and/or presented as log transformations of the reaction time data (see Blanton & Jaccard 2008 for a critique of IAT measurement). Cunningham et al. (2004) report straight reaction-time data and record a difference of roughly 160 msec between white student response times to the paired concepts of white/good and black/bad (805 msec) and white/bad and black/good (965 msecs) on the IAT (Study 1). They find slightly greater implicit prejudice on the rich-poor IAT (a difference of 209 msec) and lower on the Christian-Jewish IAT (107 msec difference; Study 2). In all cases, however, the variability in measurement is huge, with the standard error of each difference score roughly equivalent to its mean.

There are a vast number of studies on the IAT and implicit attitudes. The findings are intriguing, and we suggest readers turn to other sources for a more complete account (see Fazio & Olsen 2003, Wittenbrink & Schwarz 2007).

**Complexity of Implicit Attitudes**

Some researchers had hoped that implicit attitudes would provide a panacea for problems of social desirability by indicating a respondent’s “true” racial attitude. But research demonstrates that this view is far too simplistic. The results of implicit racial attitude research can be confusing. We explore here some of the remaining puzzles in this area of work that leave us somewhat uncertain as to its immediate utility for political scientists. The first conundrum is the varying link between implicit and explicit attitudes. Researchers initially reported that the two were distinct, with implicit prejudice being far more pervasive among Americans than explicit racism (Devine 1989). But this conclusion needs to be tempered by evidence that the two often go together. In fact, Cunningham et al. (2001) report that “as many studies have reported relationships [between implicit and explicit racial attitudes] as have not” (p. 164). They find that once measurement error is controlled for, implicit (IAT) and explicit (modern racism) measures of racial attitudes are substantially correlated (at roughly 0.5). This sizeable association suggests that implicit and explicit measures may capture something similar (Cunningham et al. 2004). Some studies report a hefty positive association between implicit and explicit attitudes (Lepore & Brown 1997, Wittenbrink et al. 1997), whereas others do not (Fazio et al. 1995). Karpinski & Hilton (2001) find that the relationship is strongest among those for whom the attitude is most important. At a minimum, implicit attitudes cannot be regarded as totally distinct from explicit measures. Moreover, Karpinski & Hilton’s study suggests that implicit and explicit attitudes can be brought into alignment by subjects who are motivated to do so. This comports with other evidence that individuals can be trained to alter (and make more positive) their implicit attitudes (Kawakami et al. 2000).

Second, there is conflicting evidence on the consequences of implicit and explicit attitudes. Some studies suggest that implicit racial attitudes have greater impact on behavior, such as interracial interactions, whereas explicit attitudes have stronger influence on attitudes and judgments. Blanton & Jaccard (2008) conclude that there is a trend “for some [implicit] measures to predict subtle forms of bias (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions) in laboratory settings” (see also Fazio et al. 1995, Dovidio et al. 2002). Fazio & Olsen (2003) expect explicit racial attitudes to influence attitudes and behavior when respondents are highly motivated to avoid prejudice and there is an opportunity for careful deliberation. In contrast, they believe implicit attitudes should be more likely to influence decisions and behavior when the time and motivation to control prejudice
are absent. These predictions hold potentially intriguing implications for political decisions, suggesting that explicit racial attitudes are more likely to influence attitudes toward a political candidate when there is time to think carefully about one’s vote choice, but implicit attitudes may prevail when there is less time to scrutinize a racial message or challenge subtle racial associations.

Third, there is debate over the stability of implicit attitudes and their susceptibility to context effects (Blanton & Jaccard 2008). Some researchers find that the IAT is especially affected by context effects and conclude that it reflects shared, and potentially early learned, cultural associations concerning race (Karpinski & Hilton 2001). This has provoked debate, in turn, over whether such cultural associations and resultant behavior should be considered prejudicial. Arkes & Tetlock (2004) vehemently challenge this notion based on their view that conscious intent is integral to prejudice (see also Blanton & Jaccard 2008). Devine (1989) has argued that negative implicit racial attitudes reflect culturally shared beliefs that do not necessarily constitute prejudice (Amodio & Devine 2006). Banaji et al. (2004) disagree, arguing that someone who exhibits racially discriminatory behavior based on implicit negative racial views is acting prejudicially even if he or she explicitly rejects the negative cultural associations underlying that behavior. The concerns raised in this review do not fully exhaust the many questions that have been raised about the IAT, including its stability over time and internal reliability (Burdein et al. 2006, Fazio & Olsen 2003).

Obviously, lab-based methods used to assess implicit prejudice are difficult to implement in the context of a telephone survey. They demand specific technical skills and require a substantial understanding of reaction-time data. This makes them costly. To date, there are relatively few published studies that report the political effects of implicit attitudes, making it difficult to assess their current payoff for political scientists. Kam (2007) finds that implicit negative attitudes toward Hispanics undercut support for a Hispanic political candidate apart from the effects of explicit negative stereotypes (in the absence of explicit partisan cues). Other researchers also find that implicit attitudes have relevant political effects (Arcuri et al. 2008, Burdein et al. 2006, Craemer 2008). But continuing disputes in psychology over the meaning of implicit attitudes serve as a cautionary note to political scientists interested in incorporating such measures into their research. As noted by Fazio & Olsen (2003), work on implicit attitudes “has not matured to the point at which many firm conclusions can be drawn” (p. 301).

### USING EXPERIMENTS TO REVEAL PREJUDICE

#### Discrimination in Action

Experiments are a helpful tool in the assessment of the political effects of racial prejudice. A growing number of studies employ scenarios in which race is experimentally altered to determine whether political reactions are uniquely affected by racial information (Federico 2006, Reyna et al. 2005, Sniderman et al. 1991, Sniderman & Carmines 1997, Peffley et al. 1997, Peffley & Hurwitz 2005). This approach has been championed by Paul Sniderman and colleagues. In one common type of experiment, a prospective policy beneficiary is described, her characteristics (e.g., race, deservingness) experimentally varied, and a determination made about her perceived eligibility for government assistance. This design does not provide a clean test of prejudice, however, because it varies the attributes of an individual not a group. If the individual is portrayed in nonstereotypic terms (e.g., a black described as hard working), the experiment provides little information about the broad policy impact of prejudice because

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8Context can substantially alter the magnitude of IAT bias. Karpinski & Hilton (2001) examined the IAT for youth/elderly and found a faster response (by ~200 msec) to elderly-negative and youth-positive than elderly-positive and youth-negative. This difference was reduced to 140 msec when respondents were primed consciously with a series of elderly-good word pairings.
it asks about the treatment of an atypical individual who is less subject to negative racial attitudes than representative group members (Weber & Crocker 1983, Peffley et al. 1997). Experiments in which researchers examine support for policies targeted at different groups, not specific individuals, are more powerful in our view (Bobo & Kluegel 1993, Hurwitz & Peffley 1997, Kinder & Sanders 1996, Peffley et al. 1997, Sniderman et al. 1996). We used this approach in a study of New York state residents to uncover an instance of clear racial bias in response to support for a hypothetical college admissions program. In the experiment, whites learned about a program that gives college scholarships to the top 15% of achievers within a school. The program description was varied experimentally to target either poor or middle-class, black or white students. There was no significant difference in program support when the program was targeted at either white or black children in general. But a different picture emerged when scholarship recipients were described in terms of both race and class. Program support was \(\sim 20\%\) lower for black than white poor students and for black than white middle-class students. There was no difference in support of the program for blacks and whites generally because whites appear to regard blacks as poor and tend to be more supportive of programs for the poor, whereas they regard whites as middle-class and support programs for them less. White discrimination in program support only emerges when social class is controlled and support is examined for black and white students of the same class (Feldman & Huddy 2005a).

But even when racial groups, not individuals, are varied within an experimental design, the strongest analytic approach combines explicit measures of prejudice and experimental methods. In this combined design, the impact of a subjective measure of prejudice can be assessed across different target groups to determine whether its effects are confined to a specific target group, and thus convey prejudice, or are applied more broadly and ideologically to an array of groups. Consider as an example Peffley et al.’s (1997) analysis of support for welfare programs for blacks and new European immigrants. In their study, negative racial stereotypes influenced support for welfare programs for blacks but not new immigrants, even though levels of support for the two programs were comparable. In this instance, negative stereotypes had a racially specific impact on political attitudes, as expected. A similar approach has been used to verify the racial nature of racial resentment and other explicit racial attitudes (Bobo & Kluegel 1993, Feldman & Huddy 2005a).

The combination of experiments and explicit measures of racial attitudes has also uncovered some complexity in the meaning of new-racism questions. We have used this approach to examine differences between liberals and conservatives in their principled or prejudicial response to race-conscious programs. We find that racial resentment is clearly a measure of prejudice among liberals, but less so among conservatives, because resentment predicts opposition to a college admission program targeted at whites as well as blacks among conservatives. Among liberals, resentment only accounted for opposition when the program targeted black students (Feldman & Huddy 2005a).

Experiments can provide direct evidence of racial discrimination; they can also shed light on the validity of various measures of explicit racial prejudice. There is much room for additional experimental research to examine prejudicial responses to candidates and policies.

**Prejudice in Context**

Experiments have also been used profitably to examine the conditions under which racial prejudice is politically potent, placing special emphasis on racially tinged political rhetoric and campaign ads (see the review in this volume by Hutchings & Jardina 2009). Recent studies have varied the explicit or implicit nature of racial cues in a political ad to identify the conditions under which racial prejudice is most politically effective. According to Mendelberg...
(2008), implicit racial cues share similar semantic content to explicitly racial cues but “use a more subtle and indirect communication style by omitting racial nouns and adjectives such as ‘blacks’ or ‘racial’” (p. 110). Race has been made explicit in various ways: by mentioning race directly, including a dark-skinned stereotypical black face, contrasting images of whites and blacks, or a mix of these elements. In contrast, implicit racial cues include black faces in the absence of any direct reference to race, a stereotypic image of blacks in the absence of a direct racial reference, a light-skinned black face, or the use of racial code words such as “inner-city criminals” (Mendelberg 2001, Huber & Lapinski 2006, Hurwitz & Peffley 2005, Terkildsen 1993, Valentino et al. 2002, White 2007). We should note that although implicit cues likely arouse implicit racial attitudes, they can also evoke explicit racial attitudes, resulting in somewhat confusing terminology (Blanton & Jaccard 2008).

Research on the political effects of implicit racial cues holds special interest for the study of white support of black political candidates because campaign ads often include subtle cues that are designed to arouse implicit attitudes outside of conscious awareness. Mendelberg (2001) pioneered the study of such implicit racial appeals, focusing on the Willy Horton commercials in the 1988 presidential campaign. She argues that racial appeals need to be subtle to be effective in contemporary American politics because when made explicit they are consciously counteracted by Americans’ support for broad-based egalitarian norms. In other words, egalitarianism trumps negative racial attitudes once a racial appeal is made salient. Mendelberg (2001) finds that racial resentment had greater impact on attitudes toward racial policies and the candidates in the 1988 presidential campaign during what she refers to as the implicit phase of Willie Horton coverage—when the story was treated by the media as primarily about crime, not race. This racial basis in candidate evaluation dissipated over time as the Willie Horton ad came to be seen as racist. She finds similar results in an experimental setting in which race is made implicit by the inclusion of a black face without a direct racial reference.

This work has been developed by Valentino et al. (2002). One of their key findings is that implicit racial cues are more successful than explicit cues in creating a racial basis to candidate reactions and policy support. They test this with an experiment in which respondents (local Ann Arbor residents) are exposed to a campaign ad for George W. Bush with embedded implicit racial cues (images of undeserving blacks) and explicit racial cues (counterstereotypic images of deserving blacks). Racial attitudes have a significant impact on Bush support when racial cues are implicit but have no effect when they are explicit.

In an interesting variant on these designs, White (2007) examined the impact of explicit and implicit cues on both African-Americans and whites. He finds that implicit racial cues concerning the possible impact of a war with Iraq on spending on antipoverty and health care programs increased support for the impending war among racially resentful whites. When race was made an explicit concern, however, by emphasizing the possible impact of the war on African-American soldiers, racially resentful whites were actually less supportive of it. In contrast, blacks’ racial identity had a large, positive impact on support for a range of policies when race was explicit, but undercut support for spending on food stamps when race was implicit.

Like most other research on the political effects of racial attitudes reviewed here, this experimental work on racial context has received criticism. Huber & Lapinski (2006) attempt to replicate Mendelberg’s (2001) experiment with a nationally representative sample but fail to find any greater effect of racial attitudes on candidate evaluation when race is implicit. Mendelberg (2008) has challenged their non-findings, arguing that some respondents did not see the ad in their study, and more importantly the resentment questions were asked just before the experiment, thus priming race for everyone. At this point, Huber & Lapinski’s work is one of the few studies to contradict Mendelberg’s
findings, whereas several support her conclusion that implicit racial cues have greater political power than explicit cues (Valentino et al. 2002, White 2007; see also Mendelberg 2008 for a lengthier account of these findings), but more research on this topic is very welcome.

Research on racial context is promising but leaves a number of unanswered questions. What is the process by which an explicit racial appeal undercuts the political effects of racial attitudes? Valentino et al. (2002) find that racial attitudes are more accessible in memory when an appeal is implicit, suggesting that the influence of racial appeals is consciously suppressed as it becomes more apparent. This is an intriguing finding. But does the process works the same way for everyone? Social psychologists have examined individual differences in the desire to suppress racial prejudice (Monteith et al. 1993, Plant & Devine 1998). Do implicit appeals work equally well regardless of one's motivation to avoid prejudice, whereas those motivated to avoid prejudice reject explicit racial appeals? Such evidence would help to explain why some whites continued to oppose Obama on racial grounds in the 2008 Democratic primaries even after his race was made an explicit issue. Work on individual differences in the desire to suppress prejudice also raises the question whether the effects of implicit racial appeals would be even stronger if racial attitudes were assessed implicitly instead of explicitly. Perhaps subtle racial appeals evoke negativity even from those who hold positive explicit racial attitudes, a finding that would have gone undetected in studies to date, which rely exclusively on explicit measures of racial attitudes. We look forward to future research on this interesting topic.

Overall, experiments provide an important addition to research on the political influence of race. They can provide clearer evidence of racial discrimination than surveys by examining support for candidates who vary only by race, or policy programs that are identical except for the race of their beneficiaries. Greater white opposition to racially tinged candidates and policies in these studies fits squarely within Allport’s notion of prejudice as a faulty or inflexible generalization, since opposition is aroused despite information provided in the experimental scenario. Experiments also help to identify the conditions under which racial attitudes are politically effective within the context of an election campaign. The balance of current research evidence indicates that overt racial appeals have less political power than those that remain implicit, attesting to the continued political power of racial attitudes.

CONCLUSION

We focus in this review on difficulties in the assessment of racial prejudice and highlight a number of promising approaches for future political research. But we need to make clear that our concerns over how adequately researchers have isolated the political effects of racial prejudice are distinct from evidence of continuing racial discrimination in American society as reflected in the differential treatment of whites and blacks. Field experiments have demonstrated that blacks are systematically discriminated against in aspects of daily life ranging from access to good housing (Yinger 1993) to automobile purchases (Ayres 2001). Audit or tester experiments have unearthed extensive evidence of discrimination in job hiring (Altonji & Blank 1999). In this experimental design, matched pairs of black and white testers are sent into different situations, or identical resumes for a black or a white job applicant are sent to an employer; the success of white and black job seekers in gaining employment is then used as an indicator of discrimination in a particular field of employment (Pager 2007, Quillian 2006). Bertrand & Mullainathan (2003) varied the names of applicants for jobs in Boston and Chicago to indicate that the applicant was likely either black or white. They found that resumes with white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks than the same resumes with black-sounding names. In addition, a higher-quality resume substantially improved the likelihood of a callback for whites but had little effect for blacks.
As we note above, experiments that provide direct evidence of discrimination have been adapted to the study of politics by, for example, providing voters with a description of a black or white candidate with exactly the same profile, or describing policy beneficiaries in similar terms except for their race. In our New York state study, ~20% more of the white respondents supported a scholarship program that was targeted at white students than supported the same program for black students once social class was controlled for (Feldman & Huddy 2005a). The amount of observed discrimination was not significantly different for liberals or conservatives. These studies make clear the continuing reality of racial discrimination in politics and elsewhere.

Our desire to establish the motivation behind particular white racial beliefs or attitudes concerning the persistence of discrimination, for example, should not obscure the potential effects of those beliefs. Suppose, for example, that someone denies the existence of racial discrimination in order to justify her racial prejudice, whereas another person denies discrimination because she lacks accurate information. If nonbelief in ongoing discrimination leads all people to oppose policies to remedy racial inequities, the consequences will be much the same regardless of the motivation underlying such beliefs. As Feagin & Eckberg (1980, p. 10) note: “Much discrimination may be unintentional—i.e., not motivated directly or immediately by a conscious intent to harm its victims. Acts of unintentional discrimination may nevertheless have harmful effects because of their close linkage to intentionally harmful practices in other areas or in the past.” Attitudes and beliefs that are not directly motivated by prejudice may still have the same social and political consequences.

Nonetheless, we believe the political power of racial prejudice remains an important issue. Returning to Allport’s definition of prejudice, if negative reactions to a black candidate or racial policy are based on inflexible negative racial stereotypes that are resistant to new information and experiences, it is unlikely that positive individuating information about a black political candidate or statistics on the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in the job market will diminish the power of negative racial beliefs. In contrast, racial beliefs that rest on misinformation and are thus not prejudicial by Allport’s definition should be much more amenable to new information.

Overall, this review suggests the need for greater creativity in assessing the continuing political power of racial prejudice. There is a critical need for less reactive measures of racial prejudice within political science. The debate that has raged among race researchers over the extent to which racial prejudice continues to drive white opposition to racial policy views in the United States (Kinder & Sanders 1996, Sears et al. 2000, Sniderman & Carmines 1997, Sniderman et al. 2000) has been muddied by disagreements over how to measure racial prejudice and an inability to accurately assess negative racial views. We highlight several new measures of prejudice that uncover clear effects on white Americans’ racial policy views, including nontrivial levels of overt racism. We believe it is critical to improve the measurement of racial opinions in order to more fully assess the lingering political impact of racial prejudice in contemporary American society.

A greater use of experimental methods can also help to advance our understanding of prejudice. Experiments can detect discrimination that may elude direct questions. More importantly, carefully constructed experiments can help to identify the conditions under which attitudes influence racial policy preferences or support for African-American political candidates. They also help to reveal the conditions under which negative racial attitudes have their greatest power.

Finally, we would like to see greater cross-fertilization between political scientists and social psychologists. To this point, research in each field has had limited impact on the other. With few exceptions, political scientists have not employed social psychologists’ methods to measure racial prejudice unobtrusively. Nor have they tried to determine the political effects
of implicit racial attitudes. Social psychologists, in turn, have done little to establish the effects of implicit attitudes on support for racial policies or black candidates. Although it is certainly useful to determine how implicit racial attitudes influence interpersonal behaviors or explicit measures of racial attitudes, we also need studies designed to examine the political effects of implicit racial attitudes. We noted above conflicting findings on the degree to which implicit and explicit racial attitudes diverge. Political scientists need to determine whether implicit racial attitudes predict political attitudes better than their explicit counterparts. If the answer is no, it may be possible for race researchers within political science to ignore the explosion of research on implicit attitudes in psychology. But if the answer is yes, political scientists will need to quickly adopt new approaches to the measurement of racial attitudes and delineate the conditions under which implicit and explicit attitudes have their greatest political effects.

DEFINITIONS

Overt prejudice: negative feelings toward blacks and a belief that blacks are inherently inferior to whites.

New racism: subtle racial prejudice conveyed through white opposition to black demands and resentment at their special treatment.

Social desirability pressures: internalized egalitarian norms that inhibit people from honestly reporting their views and opinions, in this case on racial matters.

High self-monitors: individuals chronically concerned about the appropriateness of their behavior. They are highly attuned to social context and seek to adjust their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior on the basis of immediately salient norms and social expectations.

Randomized-response technique: In an attempt to reduce the effects of social desirability pressures on answers to survey questions, interviewers are unaware of the respondent’s specific answer to a question, which is established instead by creating a probabilistic relationship between survey question and response.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. New-racism questions, such as those included in symbolic racism or racial resentment scales, remain ambiguous measures of prejudice because they ask white Americans to agree with complex statements that could garner support for reasons other than racism.

2. Overt racism has been prematurely dismissed as a politically relevant measure of racial prejudice.

3. Negative stereotypes provide an alternative assessment of negative racial attitudes. They provide a relatively clear-cut measure of prejudice that is linked to overt racism.

4. A denial of continuing racial discrimination in the United States—a component of new-racism measures—is at best an ambiguous measure of racial prejudice.

5. The effects of racism are masked to some degree by social desirability pressures. Self-monitoring scales and use of the randomized-response technique provide several ways to assess the impact of social desirability pressures on the assessment of racial prejudice.

6. Measures of implicit racism have gained broad popularity in social psychology, but much still remains unclear about their link to explicit racism, their impact on political attitudes, their stability, and their susceptibility to context effects.
7. Experiments are an extremely helpful tool in the assessment of racial prejudice and its political effects.
8. The balance of current research evidence indicates that overt racial appeals have less political power than those that remain implicit.

FUTURE ISSUES
1. More research is needed on the measurement, pervasiveness, and political consequences of overt racism.
2. New approaches to the measurement of racial stereotypes hold some promise in providing alternative measures of prejudice and the assessment of its political effects.
3. It remains unclear why many whites deny the continued existence of discrimination in American society. It is also critical to distinguish in future research between the origins and consequences of the denial of discrimination. Even if denial of discrimination has different origins for different individuals, it may have the same political consequences by reducing support for government actions to remedy racial inequities.
4. Political scientists should consider the incorporation of implicit racial attitudes in their research, though with caution, given continuing disputes in psychology over their meaning and nature.
5. There is a need for greater cross-fertilization between political scientists and social psychologists in the measurement and assessment of racial prejudice. Political scientists need to examine implicit attitudes more closely to gauge their utility to political research; psychologists should examine the effects of implicit racial attitudes on candidate choice, effects of political campaign ads, and so on.

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LITERATURE CITED


