

Race Attitude Measures Predicted Vote in the 2008 U. S. Presidential Election

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Abstract (86 words)

In the week before the United States Presidential Election of 2008, visitors to an educational website completed a study that assessed relations of race attitude measures to choice between the two chief contenders. Two implicit measures of White race preference (using Implicit Association Test and Affective Misattribution Procedure methods), along with a measure of symbolic racism and two self-report measures of White race preference, all significantly predicted intention to vote for the White candidate, John McCain, and did so independently of a measure of political conservatism.

Race Attitude Measures Predicted Vote in the 2008 U. S. Presidential Election

In the week before the United States Presidential Election of 2008, visitors to an educational website completed a study that assessed relations of race attitude measures to one of the most consequential outcomes that American citizens can control — choice of the President of the United States.

Participants were visitors to <http://implicit.harvard.edu> during the week before polls opened on November 4, 2008. Analyses were limited to 1,057 (64.9% female; 81.3% White, 6.3% Black, and 12.4% other racial categories) who identified themselves as U.S. citizens over age 18 (mean age=35.1, SD=14.7), reported intention to vote for either Barack Obama (84.2%) or John McCain (15.8%), and completed all of the measures described in this report.¹

Procedure overview. A questionnaire (see Nosek, 2005) administered on volunteering to participate obtained self-reports of citizenship, age, race, and liberal–conservative political ideology. Volunteers randomized into this study next received two implicit race attitude measures and several self-report measures, with counterbalanced order of implicit and self-report measures.

Implicit measures. The Brief IAT (BIAT — Sriram & Greenwald, in press) is an abbreviated variant of the standard IAT (Implicit Association Test; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; see overview in Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007). In each trial block of the BIAT, only two of the standard IAT’s four categories are *focal*. Subjects gave a right-key response for stimuli in either of two focal categories and a left-key response for “anything else”. Counterbalanced sequences alternated blocks in which

the categories *Black people* and *good words* were focal with ones in which *White people* and *good words* were focal. There were six trial blocks, two with 12 trials each, followed by four with 18 trials each. The BIAT's *D* measure (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003) was scored so that faster performance when *White* and *good* were focal yielded positive scores, indicating implicit preference for White race.

The Affect Misattribution Procedure (AMP — Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005) obtained key-press judgments to indicate *pleasant* or *unpleasant* for 72 Chinese ideographs (250-ms duration), each preceded by an even briefer (75-ms) racially Black or White face. Implicit White race preference on the AMP is indicated to the extent that subjects judged White-preceded ideographs as pleasant more frequently than Black-preceded ideographs.

Self-report measures. Subjects responded to two thermometer scales (0=very cold; 10=very warm), one each for feelings toward racial Black and White, and a 7-point Likert-format measure of preference for White relative to Black (1=strongly prefer Black; 7=strongly prefer White). The difference between the two thermometer scales comprised one explicit White preference measure. The Likert item provided a second.

The preliminary demographic questionnaire included a liberalism–conservatism scale (1=strongly liberal; 7=strongly conservative). Subjects were also asked for their voting intention. Only those reporting intent to vote for Obama (scored 0) or McCain (scored 1) were included in analyses.² Lastly, subjects completed a four-item measure of symbolic racism (Sears & Henry, 2005; higher scores indicated White preference).

Intercorrelations among measures. The uniformly positive correlations in Table 1 revealed that intention to vote for McCain was predicted by greater White preference,

greater symbolic racism, and greater conservatism. Table 1 also shows that the sample's strong liberal bias reduced correlations among measures, as confirmed in analyses of multiple samples that were thinned to equate the Obama-voting and McCain-voting fractions in size (results in parentheses; see Table 1 note)

Prediction of vote by race attitude measures. Those intending to vote for McCain generally displayed greater White preference. As a set of four variables entered into logistic regression, the two implicit and two explicit White preference measures predicted 10.0% of variance in voting intention (Nagelkerke R^2 ; thinned samples: 14.2%). The two implicit attitude measures (BIAT and AMP) together explained 6.1% (8.4%) when used as sole predictors, and the two explicit race preference measures together explained 7.9% (thinned: 11.5%). Each of these pairs of measures significantly predicted voting intention when entered after the other pair in logistic regression. The four race attitude measures also incrementally explained significant variance in vote when entered after conservatism in logistic regression ($p=.00009$; thinned samples median $p=.00008$).

Understanding symbolic racism and conservatism. The strong prediction of intention to vote for McCain by symbolic racism (see Table 1) can be understood partly in terms of symbolic racism's large correlation with conservatism ($r=.50$), which was itself strongly correlated with intention to vote for McCain ($r=.70$).

There has been a long-running debate as to whether symbolic racism involves racial attitude (cf. Sears & Henry, 2005) or is a measure only of conservative political ideology (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). Present findings indicated that symbolic racism includes a substantial component of racial (pro-White) attitude in addition to conservative political

ideology. In regression analyses, the two implicit and two explicit race attitude measures together accounted for 11.9% (thinned: 17.9%) of variance in symbolic racism, while conservatism accounted for 25.2% (thinned: 29.8%) of variance. In a multiple regression, entered after conservatism, the four race attitude measures incrementally explained 6.1% (thinned: 9.5%) of symbolic racism's variance.

Variance in voting intention explained by race attitude measures was substantially reduced when those measures were entered as predictors in logistic regression after conservatism (dropping from 10.0% when entered alone to 2.3%) or after symbolic racism (dropping to 1.8%). These findings support Sears and Henry's (2005) conclusion that symbolic racism can be understood as a "blend" (p. 118) of conservative ideology and racial attitude.

Conclusion. Implicit and explicit measures of White race preference, assessed in the last week before the U.S. 2008 Presidential Election, significantly predicted intention to vote for John McCain and did so independently of political conservatism. The study capitalized on an unprecedented historical moment to investigate Americans' racial attitudes.

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Table 1. Correlations of Voting Intention with Implicit Race Attitudes,
Self-Reported Race Attitudes, and Conservatism

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. McCain vote (0=Obama; 1=McCain)	0.158	0.37	—					
2. BIAT White preference (range: -2, 2)	0.06	0.42	.170 (.226)	—				
3. AMP White preference (range: -1, 1)	-0.02	0.17	.113 (.146)	.218 (.236)	—			
4. White preference thermometer difference (2-item; range: -10, 10)	0.35	1.63	.211 (.275)	.362 (.404)	.220 (.247)	—		
5. White preference Likert (range: -3, 3)	0.35	0.86	.124 (.169)	.297 (.319)	.208 (.221)	.725 (.733)	—	
6. Symbolic Racism (4-item; range: 4,15)	7.58	2.31	.421 (.527)	.254 (.294)	.196 (.255)	.282 (.350)	.205 (.300)	—
7. Conservatism (range: -3, 3)	-1.28	1.65	.703 (.804)	.188 (.242)	.088 (.119)	.166 (.189)	.082 (.105)	.502 (.436)

BIAT = Brief Implicit Association Test; AMP = Affect Misattribution Procedure. N = 1,057. The smallest correlation in the table ($r = .082$) is significant at $p = .008$, two-tailed. Values in parentheses are averages of correlations for 10 samples derived from the main sample by thinning — randomly dropping 80% of those reporting intention to vote for Obama. These correlations show that the full sample's politically liberal bias artificially reduced correlation magnitudes.

Footnotes

¹Additional details of procedures and results are available at:

http://faculty.washington.edu/agg/Election_2008_race_attitude_study_materials&data.zip.

²Although it is an imperfect measure of voting behavior, voting intention has been used for decades as a proxy for actual vote in both election polling and national surveys.