The role of race attitudes in the 2012 Presidential election

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Overview

Conclusion: Race prejudice has changed (but it’s not gone)

Estimating the role of race in the Presidential vote
(puzzling prediction errors in 2008 Democratic Primary polls)
(puzzling prediction errors in the 2008 General Election polls)
(an imaginative use of Google’s search archive)

Analyses of data collected in 2008 & 2012
(measures of race attitudes and voting choices)

Race may be the cause of at least a 10% handicap for Obama
Collaborators

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PROJECT IMPLICIT
Race attitudes have changed


Americans are increasingly willing to vote for a Black president

Source: Gallup. "If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be black, would you vote for that person?"

Source: Can You Trust What Polls Say about Obama’s Electoral Prospects?
Two Important Trends Suggest Americans May Now Be Ready to Elect an African American President

Scott Keeter & Nilanthi Samaranayake
(Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, February 7, 2007)
But how much has changed?
More survey data: 1960–2000

Americans steadily reject assistance to disadvantaged minorities

Percent rejecting the view "that (Negroes/Blacks/African Americans) have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards."

Percent rejecting the view "that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of (Negroes [1970 only]/Blacks) and other minority groups."

What do we learn about Americans’ race attitudes from the unprecedented situation of Americans having the opportunity to vote for an African American for President?
The 2008 Democratic Primaries
Data are from 32 states in which Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton competed and in which pre-election polls were conducted in the week before a primary vote. Sizes of bubbles are proportional to number of voters in each state. Prediction errors of 7% or more in either direction (above or below the dashed lines) are noteworthy — they are well outside the polls’ expected margins of error.

Surprising Errors in Vote Prediction Errors in the 2008 Democratic Primaries

- **Polls predicted Obama would receive less than he got**
- **Polls predicted Obama would receive more than he got**

States with an asterisk had fewer than 1,000 total respondents in polls conducted in the final pre-primary week.

States in red were 53/47 or more Bush/Kerry in 2004. Those in blue were 53/47 or more Kerry/Bush. Those in purple were 52/48 or closer.

Percent Blacks in state population (2000 Census)
Prediction errors for White and Black voters in Democratic primaries — 2008

Prediction errors

White Voters by State

Black Voters by State

Obama got more than predicted

Obama got less than predicted

Percent Blacks in state population (2000 Census)
The 2008 General Election (November)
Prediction errors for White and Black voters in the Presidential Election — Nov 2008

White Voters by State

Black Voters by State

Percent Blacks in state population (2000 Census)

Obama got more than predicted

Prediction errors

Obama got less than predicted
Surprising Errors in Predicting the Presidential Vote — Nov 2008

- Obama got more than predicted
- Prediction errors
- Obama got less than predicted

Percentage of states’ voters voting for Obama
For Comparison: Predicting the Presidential Vote — Nov 2004

All Voters by State

Bush got more than predicted

Prediction errors

Bush got less than predicted

Percentage of states’ voters voting for winner (Bush)

r = .44, weighted regression, p = .008
2004 and 2008 state-level prediction errors compared:

- similar slopes
- larger errors in 2008
- more overprediction of winner in 2008
Internet data collection

Internet data collection
October 29–November 3, 2008

Participant Characteristics

• 2,226 eligible-voter research volunteers at the Project Implicit web site
• 62% women, 38% men
• 65% provided at least partial data
• Average age: 36.0 years (SD = 15.5)
• Race distribution: 79.2% White, 6.9% Black, 13.9% other
• Considerably more politically liberal than U.S. population
  • median (& mode) ideology: “moderately liberal”
• 84% prefer Obama to McCain
• lower than usual White preference on race IAT
Internet data collection

Procedure

• Demographic information obtained prior to participation
• Counterbalanced order of administration of:
  • Self-report measures of candidate attitudes
  • Self-report measures of racial attitudes
  • Race preference Brief Implicit Association Test (BIAT)
  • Race preference Affect Misattribution Procedure (AMP)
• Debriefing included feedback on IAT measure

The Race Implicit Association Test
IAT Demonstration web site:  

https://implicit.harvard.edu

Project Implicit®

Decision 2012 Study

Demonstration

The demonstration site for the Implicit Association Test. Click this button to learn more about implicit associations and try out some sample tasks. Or, go directly to our featured task: Decision 2012 IAT.

Research

The research site for Project Implicit. Click this button to participate in on-going research measuring implicit associations for a variety of topics.

Visit our brand new website: Project Implicit Mental Health!
Sample Brief IAT instruction screen

"E"=NO

YES CATEGORIES

Black and Good Faces and Words

"I"=YES

Good, Love, Friend

Place your fingers on the Yes ("I") and No ("E") keys.

Press the Yes key for Black faces and Good words.

Press the No key for White faces and Bad words.

Go as fast as you can. An X appears if you make a mistake. Press the other key to fix it.

Hit space bar to begin
Internet data collection — 2008 (Nov) & 2012 (primaries)

Candidate preferences predicted by liberalism–conservatism (strongly) and race attitude measures (moderately)

Measures of race attitudes

Error bars are 95% confidence intervals
Internet data collection — 2008 (Nov) & 2012 (primaries)

Candidate preferences predicted by race attitudes independently of liberalism–conservatism

Measures of race attitudes

Error bars are 95% confidence intervals
2012: Primary candidate preferences predicted differentially by race attitudes (including all eligible voters)

Predicting Republican Primary Candidate Preference (relative to Obama) from combined race attitude measure (N ≈ 9100, including all eligible voters)

- Raw correlation (no covariates)
- Controlling for Republican preference

Correlation or Part Correlation

- Romney
- Paul
- Santorum
- Gingrich
- Cain
- Bachman
2012: Primary candidate preferences predicted differentially by race attitudes (excluding Black eligible voters)

Predicting Republican Primary Candidate Preference (relative to Obama) from combined race attitude measure (N ≈ 8200, excluding Black eligible voters)

- Raw correlation (no covariates)
- Controlling for Republican preference

Correlation or Part Correlation

Romney  Paul  Santorum  Gingrich  Cain  Bachman
Some other interesting data
“Harvard Study Claims Racism Cost Obama 3 To 5 Percent Of Vote”

THE EFFECTS OF RACIAL ANIMUS ON A BLACK PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: USING GOOGLE SEARCH DATA TO UNCOVER WHAT TRADITIONAL SURVEYS MISS*

Seth Stephens-Davidowitz
sstephen@fas.harvard.edu

June 9, 2012


The New York Times

Sunday Review | The Opinion Pages
“Racially charged search” volume (by state) predicted underperformance of Obama relative to Hilary Clinton in 2008 Democratic Primaries

Figure VII
Obama-Clinton (Whites) and Racially Charged Search

Obama did well relative to Clinton

Obama – Clinton margin

Obama did less well relative to Clinton

Notes: The x-axis is the unrounded value from Table A.1. The y-axis is based on polling data from SurveyUSA. In particular, it is the difference in Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton’s two-party vote shares, among whites, in a hypothetical matchup with John McCain. The polls were conducted in February 2008. They are available for all states but not the District of Columbia. The data were first used by Donovan (2010). I am grateful to the author for providing the data.

Figure VIII
Obama-Kerry and Racially Charged Search, by Race

(a) White Voters
(b) Black Voters

Notes: Both panels of this figure use the unrounded value from Table A.1. Panel (a) compares the difference in the two-party vote share for Obama and Kerry, according to exit polls, among whites. This data were graciously provided by Highton (2011). Exit poll data from 2004 for West Virginia are not available. Panel (b) compares the difference in the two-party vote share for Obama and Kerry, according to exit polls, among African-Americans. I do not include any states for which the number of African-Americans surveyed was fewer than 20 in either 2004 or 2008. There is no significant relationship, though far more noise, among racially charged search and black voters’ support, using all states.
A shrinking minority of White voters favor Democrats
(from polling data: 1968–2008)

The Politikal Blog
Comparing the White Vote and the General Vote
Posted on August 11, 2010

The Spillover of Racialization into Evaluations of Bo Obama
by Michael Tesler in Model Politics

APRIL 10, 2012

As mentioned in a previous Model Politics post, racial attitudes remain a much stronger predictor of attitudes towards Barack Obama than previous presidential candidates. Perhaps even more interesting, a series of findings by social scientists indicate that presidential vote choice isn’t the only thing that has become increasingly polarized by racial attitudes since Barack Obama’s rise to prominence. Indeed, these studies show that racial attitudes’ influence on a number of political evaluations increased significantly after becoming connected to Obama’s presidency—evaluations that include health care opinions, tax policy preferences, approval of Supreme Court nominees, midterm vote choices, and even identification with the Democratic Party (see: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). We have referred to this phenomenon as the spillover of racialization.
Race may be the cause of at least a 10% handicap for Obama

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