

## **Effects of Levels of Implicit Association, Symbolic Racism, and Explicit Racial Resentment on Evaluation of White and Black Candidates**

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For decades, scholars have struggled to measure levels of racism. The question is characterized by unique complexity as a result of the “norm of equality.” Because Americans overwhelmingly believe in racial equality in the abstract, capturing latent racism is challenging. In this paper, we examine the relationship of three measures—Implicit Associations, Symbolic Racism, and Explicit Racial—on evaluation of Black and White candidates in a fictitious biracial legislative election. This initial examination focuses on evaluation of candidates by participants who saw ads from both candidates, neither of which contained a racial appeal. Results are inconclusive and preliminary, serving as a baseline for future analysis of ads that contain both implicit and explicit race-based messages.

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For decades, scholars have struggled to measure levels of racism. The question is characterized by unique complexity as a result of what Mendelberg (2001) has called the “norm of equality.” That is, because Americans overwhelmingly believe in racial equality in the abstract, capturing latent racism is challenging. In this paper, we examine the relationship between three measures—Implicit Associations (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998), Symbolic Racism (Henry and Sears 2002), and Explicit Racial Resentment (Wilson and Davis 2011)— and how potential voters evaluate Black and White candidates in a fictitious biracial legislative election. Participants viewed campaign ads from each candidate and were asked a series of questions to capture their level of support for and evaluation of each. Discussion centers on the relationship between each of these constructs and evaluation of the candidates.

### Previous Literature

For decades, scholars—as well as the general public—have been interested in developing a deeper understanding of “racism.” The term has evolved over the last half century, partly due to advances in behavioral science research. Most Americans have come to embrace what Mendelberg (2001) has called the “norm of equality,” (Mendelberg 2001), yet persons of color in America continued to struggle for access to prosperity. We are left searching for a way to understand the evolution of this once-clear concept. Overtly white supremacist attitudes are rare when compared to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and those who hold them tend not to express themselves publicly very often. Social psychologists in particular have begun, then, to look for ways to describe how racism has worked since the middle part of the last century. Advances in cognitive psychology and neuroscience pointed the way to deeper understanding of the complexities of these attitudes and concomitant latent beliefs. In our review of this literature, we primarily focus on efforts to apply these constructs to candidate evaluation and vote choice.

#### Symbolic Racism

Symbolic racism (Sears and Kinder 1971; Henry and Sears 2002) remains a resilient and long-standing construct that seeks to determine why Whites who adhere to egalitarian norms nevertheless resist policies that mitigate racial discrimination and widen opportunities, particularly from Blacks. Given, the strong relationship between political ideology and racial attitudes, however, some have speculated that symbolic racism measures may tap Whites’ opposition to race-based policies and/or opinions favoring limited government rather than the anti-Black sentiment and/or racial resentment replete within both the concept of symbolic racism as well as the questions researchers have used to measure it. Most recently, Rabinowitz, Sears, Sidanius and Krosnick (2009) sought to determine whether this was the case by controlling for a greater number of indicators of conservatism and libertarianism than have previous studies. Still, however, they found that symbolic racism predicted Whites’ opposition to policies that benefit Blacks over both racially ambiguous citizens and women. Consistent with the longstanding construct, symbolic racism argues that while old-fashioned racism may not adequately explain present-day

White racial attitudes, the anti-black affect and resentment get expressed in opposition to policy that benefit blacks – an outcome that cuts against White adherence to American values of hard work, rugged individualism, and bootstrapping.

### Implicit Attitudes

The notion of implicit attitudes and association are consistent with symbolic racism in that both assume that individuals' political behavior frequently contradict their stated ideals when it comes to race and racial equality. The two differ, however, in the assumptions underlying the methods used to diagnose and measure this contradiction. As Greenwald et al. (2009) point out, symbolic racism and its associated measures assume that participants are cognizant of and can accurately report their attitudes in general, and racial attitudes in particular. Theories of implicit association, however, assume that these attitudes are not cognitively assessable and therefore may not adequately measure and/or predict political behavior connected to how we cognitively process racial stimuli. These authors demonstrated that not only were implicit association measures distinguished from symbolic racism and measures of conservatism, but that implicit associations that revealed themselves in preference for Europeans over African Americans (independent of symbolic racism and conservatism measures) predicted Whites' intentions to vote for the White candidate in the 2008 election over the Black candidate.

Contradicting these findings, however, a study by Pasek et al. (2009) found that measures of "explicit racism" (symbolic racism) predicted both Whites' lower job approval ratings of President Obama in 2010 and voters' intention to vote for Mitt Romney, the White candidate in the 2012 election, while implicit attitude measures accounted for no significant additional amount of the variance in the predictive models. This was despite the fact that the levels of both symbolic racism and implicit pro-white attitudes increased over the time period. As an aside, the authors point out the possibility that political ideology other potentially confounding variables may play some role in the study's findings.

Nevid and McClelland (2010) found that despite the fact that explicit measures such as symbolic racism, and implicit measures "assess distinct sources of variance that cannot be accounted for by a single factor" (992, citing Cunningham, Preacher, and Banaji, 2001), findings suggest that individual factors such as authoritarianism, political ideology, party identification and others may mediate individuals' negative associations to racial stimuli connected to political figures. These findings suggest that even with implicit association measures (and as with symbolic racism) such individual factors may play some role in people's political behavior in ways not heretofore shown.

### Explicit Prejudice and Racial Resentment

Recognizing the impasse, Feldman and Huddy (2005) focus more specifically on the operationalization and management of the concept of racial resentment as a way to disentangle anti-Black affect from adherence to ideological positions, particularly conservatism. At bottom, racial resentment is the belief that Blacks are undeserving of government assistance purported to lift them out of their poor socioeconomic circumstances compared to Whites and other ethnic groups. To “disentangle principles from prejudice” (171), the authors test three hypotheses about Whites’ opposition to race-conscious scholarship program: resentment as racial prejudice, as principled ideology, and among liberals as distinctive from conservatives. In the end, the authors find that racial resentment explains racial program support for liberals, not conservatives, further clouding the validity and usefulness of racial resentment as a construct.

Wilson and Davis (2011) seize upon this seeming discrepancy, arguing that previous conceptualizations of racial resentment were inconsistent with the actual survey items used to tap it. They allege that previous racial resentment items in symbolic racism and other scales do not connect the conceptual foundation of racial resentment – unfair advantage – to Blacks specifically. Further, they assert that previous items merely allege rather than actually measure racial sentiment. Finally, the authors point to a number of confounding issues replete within the wording of several important items. Wilson and Davis propose a measure strongly tied to their conceptualization of resentment as connected to both a sense of unfairness (at Blacks receiving assistance) and to a range of negative feelings ranging from anger to concern about purported Black advantage. The authors argue that conceptualizing resentment more explicitly enhances their measure’s ability tap actual resentment in ways previous measures could not.

In their most recent use of their racial resentment scale, Wilson, Owens and Davis (2015) demonstrate that racial resentment is the most significant factor influencing individuals’ support for voting rights restoration for convicted felons. They further find that while conservative principles do moderate conservative support for such policies, conservatives are nevertheless negatively affected by Black antipathy. Finally, they show that contrary to expectations, liberals tend to mirror conservatives’ opposition to restoring felons’ voting rights as their level of racial resentment increases. These results lend weight not only to the validity of the authors’ racial resentment measure in general, but also to the sense in which it is independent from previous measures of racial resentment.

One additional recent study bears mentioning as it connects to our present study with respect not only in trying to understand how racism and resentment influence political behavior, but understanding the role that racial exposure plays in this process. Goldman (2012) splits the divide in many ways by utilizing less controversial measures of racial resentment found in symbolic racism scales. These items are more explicitly worded (like the Explicit Resentment Scale), yet unlike that scale tap respondents’ attitudes rather than affect toward African Americans by

asking them to assess African Americans on a number of character traits (correlated longstanding prejudices).

Most relevant to our work, Goldman seeks to measure the moderating effect that exposure to candidate Obama in 2008 may have on racial resentment, and subsequently, participants' opinion of Obama. In this way, the measure is conceptually akin to measurements of implicit association, though the author tests self-reported, rather than actual exposure to Obama. Regardless, the author found that exposure to Obama, in national news, and especially through political advertisements, decreased expressed levels of racial prejudice. On the other hand, Tesler and Sears (2010) found that Barack Obama's candidacy actually served to solidify racial resentment among Whites such that the presence of the first presidential nominee of color served to divide the electorate – both in the Democratic nomination contests and the general election – in ways that transcended ideology.

This compelling contemporary work exemplifies a desire among researchers in recent years to find some convergence of these distinct, but clearly related constructs of symbolic racism, racial resentment, and implicit associations (see also Block, 2011; Glaser and Finn, 2013; Huddy and Feldman, 2009, Redlawsk, Tolbert and Franko, 2010; Redlawsk, Tolbert, and McNeely, 2014; and Schaffner, 2011)

### **Current Study**

The vast majority of studies that correlate these constructs with vote choice do so in the context of an actual election. While such work has external validity and helps us to understand potential real-world applications of political attitudes and behavior, we are left speculating as to the nuances of interaction between race-based attitudes and candidate evaluation (and eventual vote choice). An experimental design with carefully produced stimuli sacrifices generalizability in favor of isolating elements that are of interest. In our study we use a stimulus-posttest design to determine whether race-based attitudes and latent beliefs correlate with candidate evaluation in the context of a fictitious election contest. Because participants have no prior knowledge of the candidates, their evaluations must be based solely on the stimuli they encounter during the experience. This design allows us to assess the effect of a candidate message and image, apart from other confounding factors.

This paper is part of a larger study designed to estimate the effects of race-based messages on candidate evaluation. Participants are presented with candidates in a bi-racial (White/Black) election and assigned to three different conditions: one in which the White candidate makes no racial appeal, one in which he makes an explicit racial appeal, and one in which he makes an implicit racial appeal. Each condition includes the target advertisement from the White candidate, as well as an advertisement from the Black candidate (which is constant across all conditions).

For the purposes of this paper, we focus only on the “no racial appeal” condition. Doing so allows us to establish a baseline of sorts, as well as provide deeper exploration into one of the key findings of our earlier work, which found that participants tended to attribute race-based appeals to Black candidates even when care was taken to produce advertisements that included no such appeal (McIlwain and Caliendo 2011). Understanding the nature of the relationship between established racial attitude constructs and candidate evaluation in a fictitious biracial election where no racial appeal is made provides a strong basis for future exploration into the power of race-based appeals in similar contexts. Given that candidate skin color is the only potential cue at work in ads that otherwise contain no racial message, our focus here provides a first step to better understanding the role that visual images of candidates in particular may play in how viewers evaluate candidates.

Our hypotheses are derived from the extant literature:

H1: Higher levels of symbolic racism will correlate with more positive evaluations of and a tendency to vote for the White candidate.

H2: Higher levels of explicit racial resentment will correlate with more positive evaluations of and a tendency to vote for the White candidate.

H3: Greater tendency to prefer Whites over Blacks on the Implicit Associations test will correlate with more positive evaluations of and a tendency to vote for the White candidate.

There is not enough previous literature to suggest a direction or magnitude in the relationship between these constructs and belief that one, either or both candidates invoked a race-based appeal, so we offer the following research question:

RQ1: What relationship, if any, exists between established racial attitude constructs and belief that either the White candidate, the Black candidate, both candidates or neither candidate invoked a race-based appeal in his advertisement?

### Procedure and Measures

Candidates were recruited for participation through courses at a medium-sized Midwestern public university. They were not compensated for participation, though some instructors offered extra credit in their courses. They were encouraged to bring friends and family members so that the participant pool was not entirely comprised of college students. As a result, participant ages ranged from 18 to 57 (mean=26.52) and one-fifth of the participants were adults who did not have a high school diploma. Fifty-four percent were female; 73% were White. There were more self-identified Republicans than Democrats, though the modal category (41%) was independent or “other.” The mean value of the political ideology measure is nearly

dead centered at “neither liberal nor conservative.” A profile of the participants appears in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

After reading and signing an informed consent document, participants were, in groups of up to fifteen, provided a Dialsmith Perception Analyzer<sup>®</sup> response dial<sup>1</sup> and introduced to the experiment by a facilitator. All questions were displayed on a large screen at the front of the laboratory, and responses were recorded through the system, with participants moving the dials (using numerical cues on the device) to indicate answers to the questions.

Participants were shown two product commercials to familiarize them with the response dials and establish baseline measures. After answering two questions about each of these stimuli, participants were presented with each of the two campaign advertisements.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately after viewing both spots, participants were prompted with the questions that will comprise our three dependent variables. The first item asks participants, “If you were able to vote in the election between David Jackson [the Black candidate] and Jim Herbert [the White candidate], for whom would you be most likely to vote based on what you know of the two candidates?” To be sure that the participants remembered which candidate was which, photos of the candidates (screen shots from the advertisements) accompanied their names on the screen.

The second dependent variable is constructed from the responses to the next two questions. Participants were asked to rate each of the candidates on a 101-point feeling thermometer.<sup>3</sup> In order to account for the possibility of variance among participants, we follow others (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Smith et al. 1999) by creating a measure of net support. In this case, we created a scale that indicates net individual-level support for Jackson (the Black candidate) by subtracting the feeling thermometer score for Herbert from the score for Jackson.

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<sup>1</sup> Response dials allow participants to fluidly indicate their feelings about a stimulus by moving the dial throughout the experience. The primary benefit of such a system is the ability for researchers to identify portions of a stimulus (in this case, a campaign advertisement) that are affecting participants’ evaluation of the candidates. We do not include analysis of those data in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The description of the text and visuals from each of the ads are detailed in Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Borrowing from the American National Election Studies question, we altered the language of this question to read as follows: “We’d like to get your feelings toward David Jackson and Jim Herbert, the candidates who are running in the race, using something called a “feeling thermometer.” Ratings from 51 degrees to 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the candidate. Ratings from 0 degrees to 49 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorable toward him. You would rate him at the 50-degree mark if you don’t feel particularly warm or cold toward him.” Participants were asked to rate each candidate in turn. Images of the candidate accompanied both the stem portion of the question, as well as each individual thermometer prompt.

The third dependent variable is a measure of whether the participant believed that either, neither or both candidates made a racial appeal in the campaign ad that they viewed. Response options were on a four-point Likert scale (“definitely,” “maybe,” “definitely not,” and “I’m not sure”).

Measures of racial attitudes and beliefs include the Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale, the Explicit Racial Resentment Scale, and the Race (White/Black) Implicit Associations Test. Demographic indicators (age, race, party identification, political ideology, and level of education completed) were also collected.

### Results

As reflected in Table 2, participants were relatively evenly divided with respect to candidate preference, with 54% indicating that they would vote for Jackson and 46% revealing that Herbert would be their choice. With respect to feeling thermometer scores, Jackson also holds a slight edge in the aggregate with a mean of 48.23, compared to Herbert’s mean score of 46.75. Even though both spots were carefully produced to contain no appeals to race, most participants thought one or the other (or both) candidates did, in fact appeal to race. Only 36% of participants were certain that Herbert did not make a race-based appeal; only 20% of participants were certain that Jackson did not make a race-based appeal. Most participants did not indicate with any certainty that a race-based appeal was made (13% and 14% for Jackson and Herbert, respectively), but a sizeable plurality were willing to consider that it was possible: 30% thought that “maybe” Herbert did, while 48% believed that Jackson might have done so (20% of participants indicated “I don’t know” for each of the candidates). Further, only nine percent of participants indicated that they were sure that neither candidate made a race-based appeal (even though that’s what was intended by the producers of the spots). A majority (54%) believed that both candidates were appealing to race, while 11% thought that only Herbert did and 27% thought that only Jackson did.

[Table 2 about here]

Another way to examine evaluation of the candidates is to look at the difference in feeling thermometer scores for individual participants. This approach eliminates the possibility of the aggregate means masking individual-level differences between the two candidates. The mean of this measure is 1.48. The slightly greater net support for Jackson is consistent with both vote choice, as well as the stand-alone feeling thermometer averages. The scores, however, range from -100 to 85. Twenty percent of the participants rated the candidates with exactly the same feeling thermometer score, however. In fact, the median of this measure is 0, which means that equal numbers of participants felt comparatively more warmly toward Jackson and Herbert.

Our primary questions, however, center on the relationship between each of the three racism measures and these evaluations of the candidates. We begin with simple bivariate correlations, and learn that while there is no statistically significant



relationship between vote choice and symbolic racism, symbolic racism does correlate with the difference-in-feeling-thermometer-score measure (and in the expected direction) ( $r = -.288, p=.032$ ). Neither explicit racial resentment nor implicit associations correlate significantly with any of the dependent variables. In one sense, this is to be expected. After all, there were no intended race-based messages in either of the advertisements, so we would be surprised to find that measures of explicit or implicit racism led participants to different evaluations of the candidates. We are somewhat surprised, however, given our previous findings (McIlwain and Caliendo 2011) that the only significant correlation between perception of making a race-based appeal and any of the measures of evaluation of the candidates is not in the expected direction. Specifically, belief that Herbert might have used a race-based appeal correlates negatively with Jackson's feeling thermometer score ( $r=-.351, p=.008$ ), which means that not only was Herbert not punished for his tactic, Jackson was harmed when a participant perceived Herbert to have invoked race.

Given these curious results and the relatively early stage of our data collection, we probe further into the composition of the participants to see if there are any explanations. After all, this is a convenience sample, and with only fifty-six participants, there could very well be sample biases that are manifesting in some of the responses. Younger participants were more likely to leave open the possibility that one of the candidates invoked race in his advertisement. We did not hypothesize a correlation between these measures, and a closer look reveals that the relationship is likely the function of another significant correlate—the assignment of participants to the different experimental group. While all participants in this study saw the same two spots, we rotated the order of the advertisements in approximately half of the sample. This had a significant effect on evaluation of the candidates, as reflected in Table 3. Participants who were exposed to Herbert's ad before Jackson's were more likely to vote for Jackson than those who saw Jackson's ad first. Those who saw Herbert's ad first also had a much greater net feeling thermometer in favor of Jackson (15.35) compared to those who saw Jackson's ad first (-8.18, which is net support for Herbert) (not reported in Table 3). However, those who saw Herbert's ad first were also much more likely to believe that Jackson appealed to race than those who saw Jackson's ad first, and they were less likely to believe that Herbert appealed to race—in fact, none of the participants who saw Herbert's ad before they saw Jackson's ad thought that Herbert invoked race. In other words, participants reacted much more favorably to the candidate whose ad was more proximate to their being asked to evaluate the candidates, even though they were more likely to suspect the latter candidate of invoking race. As noted above, students were encouraged to bring friends and family members to the sessions, and because the experiences happened in groups, those who did affected the mean age in the conditions unevenly. The mean age of participants was significantly higher in the condition that saw Herbert's advertisement first (30.3) compared to those who saw Jackson's ad first (23.9).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>  $F=4.072, p=.042$  ( $df=54$ ), equal variances not assumed.

[Table 3 about here]

## Discussion

We are ultimately interested in comparing what these three related measures of racial attitudes might tell us about how race influences Black and White candidate evaluations and vote intentions when participants are exposed to varying forms of racial messages. In this first iteration, we attempt to establish a baseline by focusing only on the effect of being exposed to candidate messages with no intended racial content. Our findings suggest some relationship between symbolic racism measures and outcomes when compared to implicit association or racial resentment, but these results might not be reliable given the nature of the participant pool to date.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is one we did not expect to focus on here, but one that continues to raise a nagging question: Why do Whites attribute racial messaging to candidates when care is taken to avoid such cues? This suggests the need to better understand the ways in which the images of candidates may work independently or in conjunction with other messages cues (ideological, class, party, policy) to make race accessible to political advertising viewers. Future analysis of responses from conditions where stimuli contain carefully produced race-based messages will more fully flesh out the story and provide valuable insight as to the ways that latent and overt race-based attitudes and beliefs affect evaluation of candidates of color.

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**Appendix. Advertisement Scripts and Images**

Experiment group ad	Policy-related language	Election statement	Race-neutral visuals	Racially coded visuals
Jackson control and test group	“crucial choice,” “school choice,” “tough standards,” “right choice”	“You have a crucial choice in this election. I’m David Jackson, and I want to be your choice, because I’m the right choice.”	Jackson, live footage and color still image; Herbert, black-and-white still image	None
Herbert control group	“differences between my opponent and me,” “interests of the citizens of the First District,” “grew up here,” “grew up outside the district,” “went to school here,” “schools outside the district,” “supports vouchers,” “supports public schools”	“Who is really equipped to fight for this district in Washington: Someone who’s been outside it all his life, or someone who has been part of it for all of his?”	Herbert, live footage in park; Jackson, black-and-white still image	None

\* In these ads, Herbert is the White candidate, Jackson is the Black candidate.

**Table 1. Portrait of Participants**

Gender	54% female
Race	
African American	2%
Asian	11%
Caucasian	73%
Hispanic/Latino	4%
Mixed race/other	11%
Age (mean [s.d.])	26.52 (11.05)
Education	
Some high school	21%
High school degree	13%
One year college	14%
Two years college	7%
Three years college	21%
Four years college (no degree)	7%
Bachelor's degree	4%
Some graduate work	9%
Graduate degree	4%
Party ID	
Democratic	25%
Republican	34%
independent/other	41%
Ideology (mean [s.d.])	3.98 (1.51)

Note: Ideology is measured on a seven-point Likert scale where higher values reflect greater levels of conservatism.

**Table 2. Evaluation of Candidates*****Vote Choice***

Jackson	54%
Herbert	46%

***Feeling Thermometer***  
(mean)

Jackson	48.23
Herbert	46.75

***Perception of Making a Race-based Appeal***

Only Jackson did	27%
Only Herbert did	11%
Both candidates did	54%
Neither candidate did	9%

Note: Vote choice is a dichotomous measure. Feeling thermometers are 101-points scales where higher values indicate stronger support for the candidate. Perception of Making a Race-Based Appeal is created from two separate measures of whether each candidate was thought to have appealed to race. Participants ranked on a four-point scale, which was collapsed into a dichotomous measure: certainty that no race-based appeal was made, and belief that a race-based appeal was definitely or possibly made. N=56

**Table 3. Evaluation of Candidates by Order of Exposure to Ads**

	<i>Participants who saw Jackson's ad before Herbert's ad</i>	<i>Participants who saw Herbert's ad before Jackson's ad</i>	<i>significance</i>
<b><i>Vote Choice</i></b>			
Jackson	42%	70%	.045
Herbert	58%	30%	
<b><i>Feeling Thermometer (mean)</i></b>			
Jackson	40.73	59.00	.004*
Herbert	48.91	43.65	.401*
<b><i>Perception of Making a Race-based Appeal</i></b>			
Only Jackson did	12%	48%	.010
Only Herbert did	18%	0%	
Both candidates did	61%	44%	
Neither candidate did	9%	9%	
<b><i>N</i></b>	33	23	56

Note: Vote choice is a dichotomous measure. Feeling thermometers are 101-points scales where higher values indicate stronger support for the candidate. Perception of Making a Race-Based Appeal is created from two separate measures of whether each candidate was thought to have appealed to race. Participants ranked on a four-point scale, which was collapsed into a dichotomous measure: certainty that no race-based appeal was made, and belief that a race-based appeal was definitely or possibly made. Statistical significance is calculated from crosstabulations (chi-square) for vote choice and perception of making a race-based appeal. Statistical significance is calculated from independent samples t-test for feeling thermometers.

\*equal variances assumed