

How Overt Racial Prejudice Hurt Obama in the 2008 Election

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Abstract

Some commentators claim that white Americans put prejudice behind them when evaluating presidential candidates in 2008. Previous research on the question of white discrimination against black candidates has yielded mixed results, and suffers from such methodological limitations as hypothetical candidates, local samples of respondents, and racial attitude measures that fail to account for social desirability bias. Fortunately, the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, combined with a methodological innovation in the measurement of racial stereotypes in the 2008 American National Election Studies, provides an unprecedented opportunity to examine more rigorously whether prejudice disadvantages black candidates. I find that negative stereotypes about blacks significantly eroded white support for Barack Obama; indeed, the effect of stereotypes may have been sufficient to cost Obama the popular vote among whites. Further, racial stereotypes do not predict support for previous presidential candidates or current prominent white Democrats, indicating that white voters punished Obama for his race rather than his party affiliation or policy platform. This finding indicates that white Americans have not put prejudice behind them after all.

INTRODUCTION

Political scientist Abigail Thernstrom argues that Barack Obama's election to the office of the presidency "will allow black parents to tell their children, it really is true: the color of your skin will not matter" (2008a). Thernstrom's interpretation is consistent with many accounts of the election in the popular media, which share the belief that the color of Barack Obama's skin did not matter to white voters (Curry 2008; Gibbs 2008; Schneider 2008; Steele 2008).

To be sure, pundits disagree about the reasons that Obama escaped the ill effects of prejudice; some argue that Obama "seduced whites," capitalizing on their longing "to escape the stigma of racism" (Steele 2008), while others hold that Obama attracted white voters by presenting himself as centrist and "post-racial" (Thernstrom 2008a). Still others claim that the poor state of the economy (Curry 2008) or other crises (Gibbs 2008) caused Americans to realize that they could not afford to evaluate the candidates on the basis of race. Regardless of these differences, many agree that white Americans put racial prejudice behind them when voting in the presidential election.

However, it is possible that Obama won the presidential election without neutralizing the effect of prejudice among whites. As Ansolabehere and Stewart (2009) report, exit polls show that Obama did not win the popular vote among whites. Rather, strong support among blacks (95%) and Latinos (67%) was enough for Obama to win the election, despite the fact that he only obtained the support of a minority of whites (43%).¹

¹ The American National Election Studies 2008 time series provides even higher estimates of Obama's support among blacks (98%) and Latinos (75%).

Previous work on the question of whether white voters discriminate against black candidates has yielded contradictory findings. Fortunately, the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama provides an unprecedented opportunity to examine more rigorously the effect of prejudice in the voting booth. Using data from a nationally representative sample through the American National Election Studies time series surveys, and exploiting a methodological innovation designed to mitigate social desirability problems, I find that racial prejudice significantly eroded white support for Barack Obama. I also demonstrate that racial stereotypes do not predict support for previous presidential candidates or current prominent white Democrats, indicating that Obama was punished as a result of his race, not his party affiliation or policy platform. White Americans have not put prejudice behind them after all.

Has White Prejudice Hurt Black Candidates?

Scholars attempting to determine whether white voters discriminate against black candidates have used a variety of approaches, including experimental designs, surveys, and techniques of ecological inference. The results have been mixed. Some studies find that white voters discriminate against black candidates (Bullock and Dunn 1999; Moskowitz and Stroh 1994; Reeves 1997; Terkildsen 1993), but others find no evidence of discrimination (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Highton 2004; Sigelman et al. 1995; Voss and Lublin 2001).

The limitations of previous research designs may be driving the contradictory findings. Some studies ask respondents to evaluate fictitious candidates (Moskowitz and Stroh 1994; Reeves 1997; Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993), a strategy that allows tight control over candidate characteristics but may lead to results that do not generalize to the real world. Others do not measure racial attitudes (Bullock and Dunn 1999; Highton 2004; Voss and Lublin 2001), making it impossible to tie prejudice directly to vote choice. Those studies that do measure racial attitudes often ask respondents to report those attitudes to an interviewer (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Highton 2004; Terkildsen 1993), despite the fact that racial prejudice is often underreported due to social desirability pressures (Huddy and Feldman 2009). Finally, almost no studies analyze a national sample of white Americans (but see Highton 2004).

The historic presidential candidacy of Barack Obama provides an opportunity to build on previous work. To do so, I use the 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) time series survey. The survey interviews a nationally representative sample of adults, measuring both vote choice and racial attitudes. Particularly useful for my purposes is a methodological innovation introduced in 2008. In an attempt to reduce social desirability pressures, survey respondents were asked to enter their answers to racial stereotype questions directly into a computer, out of sight of the interviewer. By analyzing the vote choices of a national sample of white Americans who evaluated real-life candidates, and making use of a self-administered measure of racial stereotypes, this study overcomes many of the limitations of previous research.

Racial Stereotypes: A Conservative Measure of Prejudice

Why focus on stereotypes rather than some other measure of racial prejudice? After all, many social scientists argue that it has become socially unacceptable in most circles to express negative generalizations about racial groups, and that consequently overt measures will result in an underestimate of contemporary racism.² Such scholars often focus instead on symbolic racism (Sears and Kinder 1971; Sears 1988), also called racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996) or modern racism (McConahay 1983). Defined as the conjunction of anti-black affect and traditional values related to the Protestant ethic, this form of racism is expressed not in the belief that blacks are innately inferior but in resentment toward blacks based on the perception that they get special, undeserved treatment from government (Bobo et al. 1997; Henry and Sears 2002; McConahay and Hough 1976; Sears et al. 2000). Other scholars argue that even the more subtle measures of symbolic racism do not capture its extent, since there is evidence that racism operates at an unconscious level through automatic psychological processes (Devine 1989; Baron and Banaji 2006). Accordingly, psychologists have developed measures of “implicit” racism (Greenwald et al. 1998, Payne et al. 2005).

However, symbolic racism and implicit racism theories have faced numerous criticisms. Some scholars have argued that measures of symbolic racism are confounded with conservative ideology (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986), and others have taken issue with implicit racism research on a number of grounds, ranging from the argument that conscious intent is required for prejudice to exist (Arkes and Tetlock 2004) to concerns about variability and stability in

² See Hutchings and Valentino (2004) for a review.

the IAT, the most common measure of implicit racism (Blanton and Jaccard 2008). One virtue of using racial stereotypes as the measure of prejudice in this study, therefore, is that social scientists who may disagree about the nature of contemporary racism will still agree that negative stereotypes constitute a form of racism. Of course, using negative stereotypes runs the risk of underestimating the extent and impact of racism, given that measures of symbolic racism are more strongly associated with opposition to racial policies than are measures of overt racism (Bobo 2000, Sidanius et al. 2000, Sniderman and Piazza 1993, Stoker 1998). This study's test of racial discrimination in the 2008 election is therefore a conservative one.

An additional benefit of using an overt measure such as negative stereotypes is its focus on an understudied aspect of contemporary racism. As a result of increased attention to more subtle forms of racism, some have argued that the role of overt prejudice in American politics "has been prematurely dismissed" (Huddy and Feldman 2009). Indeed, although overt prejudice has declined over the past several decades, substantial proportions of white Americans still hold negative stereotypes about blacks (Peffley and Shields 1996; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Furthermore, recent studies have found that overt prejudice is linked with opposition to black candidates, housing integration policies, and government assistance to blacks, as well as with support for punitive criminal justice policies and miscegenation laws (Feldman et al. 2009; Kinder and McConaughy 2006; Kluegel 1990; Huddy and Feldman 2001; Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). In short, previous work gives us reason to suspect that overt prejudice is still a powerful force in American politics, though its influence is rarely examined in contemporary political science research.

A “POST-RACIAL” CANDIDATE?

Though previous work has shown that anti-black stereotypes are prevalent and linked to public opinion about a wide range of policies, this does not necessarily mean that white voters will apply these stereotypes to a given black candidate. Rather, the candidate could be viewed as an exception to the rule. Kinder and McConaughy (2006) find, for example, that negative stereotypes predict white opposition to former presidential candidate Jesse Jackson but not Colin Powell. Noting that Colin Powell differs from the prevailing image of blacks in many ways, such as his light skin, his Jamaican heritage, his membership in the Republican party, and his status as a victorious military general, Kinder and McConaughy suggest that Powell is immunized from racial stereotyping “because he deviates so markedly from the prototype.” Other research also indicates that stereotypes are less likely to influence evaluations for individuals who violate stereotypic expectations (Golebiowska 1996). In fact, under some circumstances those who violate the stereotype in positive ways might be rewarded; one study found that violators of negative racial stereotypes were viewed more favorably than members of groups that were not stereotyped negatively to begin with (Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman 1997).

If deviation from the prototype is a sufficient condition to avoid the consequences of prejudice, Barack Obama may be well-positioned. Obama is light-skinned, his mother is white, and his father is from Kenya. Moreover, during his presidential campaign Obama seldom referred to himself as black and indeed rarely mentioned race at all. He frequently deployed white surrogates to vouch for him to white audiences, and his

management team consisted primarily of white veteran Democratic Party insiders. At several points, media pundits actually debated whether Obama was “black enough” for black voters to support him (Fraser 2009).

Obama also attempted to present himself to white voters as non-threatening on racial issues. He denounced prominent black leader Louis Farrakhan and even his own pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, for their controversial stances on racial issues. Emphasizing racial reconciliation over justice and equality, Obama arguably gave “equal weight to black demands for the full privileges of citizenship and white resentment toward those very demands” (Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008). In sum, Obama went to great lengths to become one of what Abigail Thernstrom (2008a) calls “not-Jesse Jackson, post-racial candidates – the kind of candidates who traditionally appeal to white voters as well as black voters.”

Although Obama’s efforts to attract white voters were certainly more effective than Jesse Jackson’s, Obama still may have failed to neutralize the prejudice of a substantial proportion of whites. Moskowitz and Stroh (1994) found that switching the race of a hypothetical candidate from white to black resulted in white respondents attributing to the candidate both unfavorable personality traits and policy positions with which the respondent disagreed, suggesting that Obama’s attempts to portray himself as “post-racial” may have faced an uphill battle. One study suggests that the information-rich environment of a presidential election might make voters more likely to rely on stereotypes to save themselves the cognitive effort of making a comprehensive judgment (Riggle et al. 1992), though other work suggests that stereotypes might have more of an

impact in elections in which little information is available (Banducci et al. 2008; Golebiowska 2001).

In sum, it is not clear from previous research whether we should expect to find that white voters applied stereotypes about blacks as a group to Obama as an individual.³ However, it does appear that Obama presents a conservative test case for white discrimination against black candidates. Given Obama's extensive efforts to reassure whites, and given the extent to which he may deviate from whites' prevailing images of blacks, if I still find that prejudice led to a significant loss of support from white voters, it will be hard to imagine that many other black candidates will escape its effects.

METHOD AND RESULTS

To determine whether overt prejudice influenced white voters in the 2008 election, I use survey data from the May 2009 release of the American National Election Studies (ANES) 2008 time series survey. The ANES has a number of favorable properties: in particular, the response rate is high, and the interviews are conducted face-to-face in order to produce high-quality data. Further, the core time series element of the ANES, in which identical questions are asked over the course of many presidential elections, makes it possible to analyze past ANES surveys to compare the effect of prejudice to its effect (if any) in previous elections.

³ I lack the space here to discuss whether events in the 2008 campaign primed racism. Instead I note only that priming may not have been necessary, since awareness of racial stereotypes is widespread and because such stereotypes are often activated automatically, though they can sometimes be controlled (Blair et al. 2004; Devine 1989; Lepore and Brown 1997).

I examine the attitudes and vote choice of 1,110 non-Hispanic white respondents⁴ interviewed through the 2008 ANES. Consistent with other ANES studies conducted during years of presidential elections, interviews were conducted in two waves. The pre-election wave was conducted during the two months preceding the November election, and the post-election wave was conducted during the two months following the election. Among non-Hispanic whites, only 95 of the 1,110 (8.6%) interviewed in the pre-election wave dropped out before the post election wave.

Measuring Racial Stereotypes

There are two racial stereotype questions on the ANES. The first asks the respondent to rate the extent to which blacks are lazy rather than hardworking on a seven-point scale.⁵ The second question asks the respondent to rate the extent to which blacks are unintelligent rather than intelligent on an identical scale. Respondents are also asked to evaluate whites⁶ along these two dimensions, and the order in which the racial groups are presented to the respondent is randomized. These stereotype questions were originally developed for the General Social Survey by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center and were also used in the 1991 Race and Politics Survey.

I construct a difference measure for both the “lazy” question and the “unintelligent” question by subtracting the score the respondent gave blacks from the score for whites. I do so in order to account for respondent characteristics. That is, if a

⁴ I exclude those respondents who, though listing their primary racial group as white, also either identified themselves as belonging to the ethnic group of Hispanic/Latino (n=61) or identified themselves as being of Hispanic descent (n=14). Results are robust to including either or both groups.

⁵ Exact wording for all questions examined in this study can be found in the Appendix.

⁶ Respondents are also asked to evaluate Asians and Hispanic-Americans.

respondent codes blacks as a “5” on a 1 to 7 scale from hardworking to lazy, this coding may be a reflection of her pessimistic view of people in general—as will be evident if she codes whites as a “5” as well. The difference measure therefore allows me to examine how a given respondent views blacks *relative* to whites.⁷

The 2008 ANES contains a useful methodological innovation. The racial stereotype questions described above were administered in both the pre- and post-election waves, and the form of the questions was identical across waves in all respects except one. In the pre-election wave, the questions were administered by Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (ACASI). That is, although the rest of the interview was conducted in a face-to-face context, for questions about stereotypes (and other sensitive subjects such as religious beliefs and sexual orientation), respondents entered their responses directly into the computer, out of the view of the interviewer. ACASI has been shown to reduce social desirability bias in a number of settings (Ghanem et al. 2005; Tourangeau and Smith 1996; Villarroel et al. 2006). Since the same respondents answered the questions through ACASI in the pre-election wave and then reported answers to the exact same questions to the interviewer in the post-election wave (minus attrition), I can assess whether social desirability pressures decreased reporting of racial prejudice. If so, I can conclude that the ACASI measure is better suited than previous measures to capture the effects of prejudice in the 2008 election. I compare the two difference measures in Figures 1a and 1b.⁸

⁷ The difference measure is potentially subject to the criticism that it also captures the effects of esteem toward blacks (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2008). However, excluding those respondents who rated whites more negatively than blacks on the stereotype scales yields substantively equivalent results.

⁸ When examining the ACASI measure of stereotypes, I exclude those respondents who did not participate in the post-election wave in order to ensure comparability.

[Insert Figures 1a and 1b about here]

Figures 1a and 1b show that racial stereotypes remain alive and well among substantial portions of the white public. Regardless of measure used, at least 45 percent of the ANES' nationally representative sample of white respondents rate blacks as lazier than they rate whites, and at least 39 percent rate blacks as less intelligent than they rate whites. Additionally, given that social desirability bias has been shown to lead to the underreporting of racial prejudice and of opposition to racial policies and black candidates (Berinsky 1999, Gilens et al. 1998, Kuklinski et al. 1997), we might expect that the ACASI measure will reveal greater levels of prejudice than could be detected using the interviewer measure. The results presented in Figures 1a and 1b are in line with this expectation. When moving from the interviewer measure to the ACASI measure, the percentage of white respondents who rate blacks lazier than they rate whites increases by 5 percentage points, from 45 to 50 percent. Further, the percentage of white respondents who rate blacks less intelligent than they rate whites jumps by 5 percentage points, from 45 to 50 percent. Both differences are statistically significant at the $p < .03$ level (two-tailed). Negative stereotypes about blacks are more prevalent than is suggested by measures failing to account for social desirability.⁹

⁹ An alternative interpretation exists for the drop in negative stereotypes between the self-administered and interviewer measures. That is, since the interviewer measure was implemented in the pre-election wave, and the self-administered measure was used in the post-election wave, the election of Obama, which occurred between the two waves, might have caused a decrease in overt prejudice. However, such an interpretation is inconsistent with other evidence. First, I compare levels of other anti-black attitudes between ANES surveys in 2000 and 2004 to levels of these same attitudes measured in the 2008 ANES wave after Obama's election. For all of the five measures I analyze, the feeling thermometer for blacks and each of four questions that comprise the racial resentment index (Kinder and Sanders 1996), I find no change in racial attitudes between the years preceding Obama's election and the two months following his election. Obama's election therefore does not appear to have changed racial attitudes among whites, at least in the short term. Second, I regress the interviewer measure of racial stereotypes on race of interviewer, and

Since the ACASI measure mitigates social desirability problems, I use this measure in most of the analyses of the 2008 election that follow. In cases where I compare 2008 to previous years, however, I use the interviewer measure to facilitate an apples-to-apples comparison, since the ACASI measure was not used before 2008.¹⁰

Comparing the Effect of Prejudice Across Presidential Elections

Recall that the goal of this project is to establish whether Barack Obama was punished for his race. Given that the Democratic party routinely obtains the support of a vast majority of blacks and pursues a policy platform that is more liberal on racial issues, we might expect that prejudice affects vote choice even if both candidates are white. How, then, can we assess the effect of Barack Obama's race? The ideal comparison is between the support Obama received from whites and the support he would have received had he been white. As an approximation to such a comparison, I assess the effect of prejudice in 2008, and compare that to the effect of prejudice in past elections. Previous white Democratic presidential candidates stand in for a counterfactual Barack Obama. I conduct this analysis using ANES time series data from previous years.

find that the movement from a white interviewer to a nonwhite interviewer is associated with a three percentage point decrease in the stereotype index, which is described further later in the paper. This effect is statistically significant at the $p < .02$ level (two-tailed). Social desirability pressures appear to have depressed reporting of racial prejudice when respondents interacted with an interviewer.

¹⁰ The stereotype index (interviewer measure) shows a high degree of stability, dating back to 1992, the first year in which the stereotype questions were asked, and also reveals perhaps a slight decline of about 5 percentage points in negative stereotypes about blacks.

I conduct a series of multivariate logistic regression analyses¹¹ of presidential elections from 1992 to 2008. I start with 1992 because it was the first year in which stereotype questions were included in the ANES. The dependent variable, vote choice, is coded 1 if the respondent reports voting for the Democratic candidate in that year and 0 if the respondent voted for any other candidate. An index consisting of the summation of the difference measure for the “lazy” question and the “unintelligent” question. The index is then standardized from 0 to 1. For example, a score of 1 on the index indicates that the respondent rated blacks as both lazy and unintelligent (scores of 7 on each seven-point scale) and rated whites as both hardworking and intelligent (scores of 1 on each scale), while a score of 0 on the index indicates the inverse. I use an index for a few reasons: 1) because the variables are conceptually related as measurements of common negative stereotypes about blacks (Devine 1989), 2) because the two stereotype questions are highly correlated, and 3) for ease of exposition.¹² Since the index constitutes the primary independent variable of interest, it is important to note that breaking the index into its components reveals that each stereotype question makes an independent contribution to the results that follow.¹³

Control variables for the initial model, hereafter referred to as Model 1, include party identification,¹⁴ age, education, and income, all of which are coded from 0 to 1. I choose these variables because we have reason to believe they might be both correlated

¹¹ All regressions in the paper are weighted in order to approximate national representativeness, though unweighted regressions do not substantively change the results.

¹² Pearson's $r = .61$ for the ACASI measure and $.52$ for the interviewer measure.

¹³ More precisely, the “lazy” question has a somewhat stronger effect on vote choice than does the “intelligent” question. The ratio of the size of the coefficients is about 3:2, and the “lazy” question is more robust to controls.

¹⁴ As Mebane and Wand (1997) have argued, using the seven-category interval variable for party identification is suboptimal, as it assumes that the effect of moving from any one category to the category next to it is equivalent to any other such effect. The interval variable is easier to present, however, and the substantive results I am interested in are similar for either form of the variable.

with prejudice and associated with candidate choice for reasons other than prejudice. It is well known that Republicans are more likely to hold negative stereotypes about blacks (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1997), exit polls and media reports suggested that young people preferred Obama, the well-educated might also prefer Obama due to his self-presentation as an intellectual and his Harvard pedigree, and those who view the economy to have gotten worse over the past year might be inclined to vote for Obama to punish the incumbent party (Fiorina 1981). I do not control for character trait evaluations and perceived policy distance between the respondent and the candidate because previous work demonstrates that prejudice can work through precisely these mechanisms. As described above, Moskowitz and Stroh (1994) found that white voters attributed both undesirable personality traits and policy positions with which they disagreed to hypothetical black candidates.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 presents suggestive, though not definitive, results. The effect of prejudice on vote choice is statistically equivalent to zero for all presidential elections dating back to 1992 save one—the 2008 election. Further, the magnitude of the coefficient on the stereotype index in 2008 is large, ranging from two to ten times the size of the coefficients on stereotypes in other election years; indeed, the effect is half the size of the party identification variable. However, the coefficient on the stereotype index in 2008 is statistically indistinguishable from the other coefficients. Moreover, the 95 percent confidence interval on the stereotype coefficient for the 2008 election includes numbers

very close to zero, suggesting that a different specification might lead to a less impressive result.

I examine this possibility in an analysis of the 2008 election alone in Model 2, which consists of both the variables in Model 1 and an additional set of variables. These variables are 1) residence in the political South (defined as the eleven states that seceded), 2) approval of Bush as president, 3) approval of Bush's handling of the Iraq war, and 4) the view that the economy has gotten better rather than worse over the past year. All variables are again coded 0 to 1.¹⁵

I save ideological self-identification for my final model of vote choice in the 2008 election, Model 3. A problem with including this variable is that the concepts of "conservative" and "liberal" appear to have very little meaning for many Americans (Converse 1964; Knight 1985). Indeed, 250 out of 1,110 non-Hispanic white respondents in the 2008 ANES refrained from placing themselves on the conservative/liberal scale, resulting in a significant decrease in sample size for the analysis of Model 3. Since there is evidence that ideological self-identification has increased meaning among the well-educated (Jacoby 1991), I also include a variable representing the interaction of education and ideology.¹⁶ The results for all models are presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

As Table 1 indicates, adding controls for views about Bush, the war in Iraq, and the economy, as well as residence in the political South (Model 2), does not have an

¹⁵ Question wording can be found in the Appendix.

¹⁶ Results are virtually identical if the interaction term is removed.

appreciable effect on the size of the stereotype index coefficient, and increases its standard error only slightly (two-tailed $p < .07$). Adding a control for ideology, however, has a stronger effect on the stereotype coefficient (Model 3). Though the coefficient only decreases by about one-eighth of its size and retains substantial magnitude, its standard error increases significantly (two-tailed $p < .19$), perhaps due to the decrease in sample size.

A Superior Measure of Prejudice

I now turn to the ACASI (self-administered) measure of racial stereotypes, which mitigated some of the social desirability concerns. Recall that I only departed from this measure in the previous analysis in order to facilitate a comparison of the effects of prejudice in elections from 1992 to 2008. In this section I examine whether the ACASI measure of stereotypes predicts vote choice, and in particular, whether it fares better than the interviewer measure after controlling for ideology. I analyze models identical to those in Table 1, but with the ACASI measure of stereotypes rather than the interviewer measure. These models are presented in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

As Table 2 shows, when the ACASI measure of stereotypes is used, the relationship between prejudice and vote choice survives the addition of the control variables, including ideology. In Model 3, the coefficient is significant at the $p < .03$ level

(two-tailed), and its magnitude is quite large, even bigger than the party identification coefficient.¹⁷

To illustrate the impact of prejudice on the 2008 election, I present Figure 3. The figure shows that those whites who expressed no prejudice against blacks, represented by a score of 0.5 on the stereotype index, have a predicted probability of 51 percent of voting for Obama. Since just over half the sample of whites score greater than 0.5 but less than or equal to 0.75 on the stereotype index, let us consider the effects of movement between those two points. Such movement is associated with a 24 percentage point decrease in the predicted probability of voting for Obama, from 51 percent to 27 percent.¹⁸ Racial prejudice may have cost Obama the popular vote among whites.¹⁹

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

But was prejudice's influence on vote choice a result of Obama's race, rather than his party? The ACASI measure was incorporated into the ANES in 2008, precluding a comparison to white Democratic presidential candidates in previous years. However, the ANES does ask respondents to report their affect toward both Barack Obama and

¹⁷ The feeling thermometer score for blacks subtracted from that for whites is also a statistically significant predictor of vote choice in all three models.

¹⁸ A more fine-grained description of the effects of prejudice is as follows. Of those white respondents expressing prejudice against blacks, about one-half scored greater than 0.5 but less than 0.6 on the stereotype index, and their probability of voting for Obama ranged from about 41 to 47 percent. Another quarter scored greater than or equal to 0.6 but less than .07, and their probability of voting for Obama ranged from 33 to 41 percent. The final quarter scored greater than or equal to .07 and less than or equal to 1, and their probability of voting for Obama ranged from 15 to 33 percent.

¹⁹ To be sure, it would have been no small feat to obtain the support of a majority of white voters, given that no Democrat has done so since Lyndon B. Johnson. Still, as Lewis-Beck, Tien, and Nadeau (2009) argue, Obama enjoyed some advantages that his recent Democratic predecessors did not, such as George W. Bush's record-setting low approval ratings, the economic recession, and the financial meltdown in the months prior to before the election. Indeed, numerous forecasting models overestimated the support Obama would receive (e.g., Abramowitz 2008; Holbrook 2008; Lewis-Beck and Tien 2008; Lockerbie 2008), leading some to suspect prejudice was the cause (Campbell 2008; Lewis-Beck and Tien 2009).

prominent white Democrats through a series of feeling thermometers, in which respondents are asked to rate how warm or cold they feel toward a political figure on a 0 to 100 scale.

In order to compare the effect of prejudice toward evaluations of Barack Obama to its effect on evaluations of other prominent white Democrats in 2008, I conduct a series of ordinary least squares regression analyses, using the independent variables from Model 3, in order to make certain that any effects survive controlling for ideology.²⁰ The dependent variables are feeling thermometer scores, recoded to a 0 to 1 scale, for Joseph Biden, Hillary Clinton, Democrats in general, and Barack Obama. If Obama was punished by voters for his race, rather than for his party, the coefficient on the stereotype index should be negative, while the coefficients on the stereotype index for the other Democrats should be statistically indistinguishable from zero. Figure 4 presents the coefficients, including 95 percent confidence intervals.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Prejudice is associated with affect toward Barack Obama and Barack Obama alone. Prejudiced white Americans were no less likely than the unprejudiced to give high ratings to Joseph Biden, Hillary Clinton, or Democrats in general. Indeed, for the feeling thermometers for Biden and Clinton, the coefficients on the stereotype index are actually slightly positive, while the coefficient on the stereotype index for Democrats in general is barely below zero. For Obama, however, the coefficient on the stereotype is negative and statistically distinct from zero. Further, the effect of prejudice is large: movement from

²⁰ Results are substantively equivalent across models.

the lowest score to the highest on the stereotype index is associated with a decrease in over 30 percentage points on the feeling thermometer.

CONCLUSION

I conduct a conservative test of racial discrimination in the 2008 election by using a measure of prejudice, overt negative stereotypes about blacks, that many social scientists believe does not capture the full extent of racism. Further, in order to ensure that any relationship between prejudice and vote choice resulted from Obama's race rather than from his affiliation with the Democratic party, I compare the effect of prejudice on vote choice for Barack Obama to its effect on vote choice for previous white Democratic presidential candidates and find that prejudice hurt Obama but not previous Democrats. To be sure, the success of this comparison relies on the interviewer measure of stereotypes, which drops from statistical significance after controlling for ideology (though retaining much of its magnitude). Therefore, I move to the ACASI measure of racial stereotypes, which minimizes social desirability bias. I find that the ACASI stereotype measure is strongly associated with vote choice in 2008, even after controlling for ideology. The magnitude of the effect is huge: The impact of moving from the expression of no prejudice to the halfway point on the stereotypex index is a 24 percentage point decrease in the predicted probability of voting for Obama. Since the ACASI measure is new, I cannot use it to compare the 2008 election to previous elections, but I do compare the effect of prejudice on evaluations of Obama to its effect on evaluations of two white Democratic presidential candidates in 2008 as well

as Democrats in general. Again, racial stereotypes only influence evaluations of Obama. In sum, racial stereotypes were not associated with either votes for or affect toward any prominent Democrats, past or present, save one: Barack Obama.²¹

This finding contributes to a debate in political science over whether white voters discriminate against black candidates in the voting booth. Previous work yielded mixed results but suffered from a number of limitations, relying on evaluations of hypothetical candidates, using samples from a limited geographic area, failing to measure racial attitudes, and/or measuring racial attitudes without accounting for social desirability bias. I analyze racial attitudes of a real-life candidate using a national sample, and I take advantage of a methodological innovation in the measurement of stereotypes that mitigates social desirability problems. These favorable properties of my analysis allow me to conclude that at least in one case, indeed perhaps the most important case to date, many white Americans discriminated against a black candidate in the voting booth.

My findings also contribute to our understanding of the nature of contemporary American racism. Social scientists have by and large turned their attention to symbolic racism or implicit racism, and for good reason—measures of overt prejudice may lead to underestimates of racism’s extent and pernicious effects. However, my findings indicate that overt racism is still widespread and influential and therefore may merit increased attention.

²¹ Further, overt prejudice was not associated with 2008 white respondents’ self-report of whether they voted for John Kerry rather than another candidate in 2004 (not shown).

Appendix: Question Wording

Racial Stereotypes

In the first statement, a score of '1' means that you think almost all of the people in that group tend to be "hard-working." A score of '7' means that you think most people in the group are "lazy." A score of '4' means that you think that most people in the group are not closer to one end or the other, and of course, you may choose any number in between. Where would you rate BLACKS in general on this scale?

The next set asks if people in each group tend to be "intelligent" or "unintelligent". Where would you rate BLACKS in general on this scale?

Bush approval

Do you APPROVE or DISAPPROVE of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

IF R APPROVES/DISAPPROVES OF GW BUSH HANDLING JOB AS PRESIDENT:

Do you approve STRONGLY or NOT STRONGLY? /

Do you disapprove STRONGLY or NOT STRONGLY?

Iraq war approval

Do you APPROVE or DISAPPROVE of the way George W. Bush is handling the war in Iraq?

IF R APPROVES/DISAPPROVES OF GW BUSH HANDLING THE WAR IN IRAQ:

Do you approve STRONGLY or NOT STRONGLY? /

Do you disapprove STRONGLY or NOT STRONGLY?

Retrospective view of the economy

Now thinking about the economy in the country as a whole, would you say that over the past year that nation's economy has gotten BETTER, has stayed ABOUT THE SAME, or gotten WORSE?

IF R THINKS ECONOMY HAS GOTTEN BETTER IN THE PAST YEAR/

IF R THINKS ECONOMY HAS GOTTEN WORSE IN THE PAST YEAR

MUCH better or SOMEWHAT better?

MUCH worse or SOMEWHAT worse?

Ideology

Please look at pg. 3 of the booklet. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative.

Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

1. Extremely Liberal
2. Liberal
3. Slightly Liberal
4. Moderate: middle of the road
5. Slightly Conservative
6. Conservative
7. Extremely Conservative

Feeling Thermometer

I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 50 degrees and 0 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person.

If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.

How would you rate:
BARACK OBAMA
JOE BIDEN
HILLARY CLINTON
DEMOCRATS

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Figures 1a & 1b: Negative Stereotypes about Blacks, by Measure Type
NOTE: Percentages are weighted, and include non-Hispanic Whites only

Figure 1a: Blacks lazier than Whites

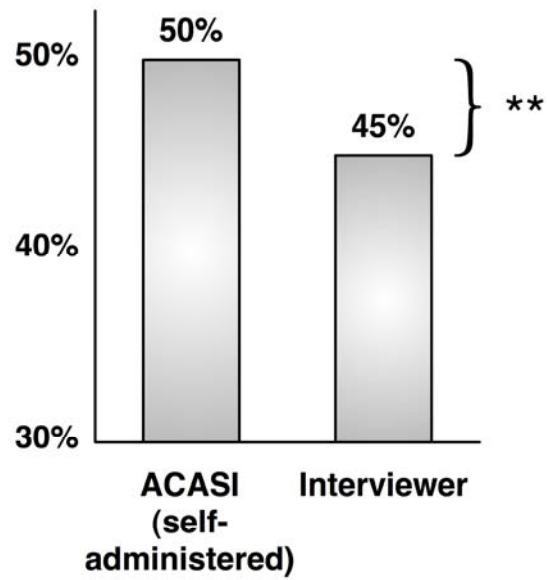
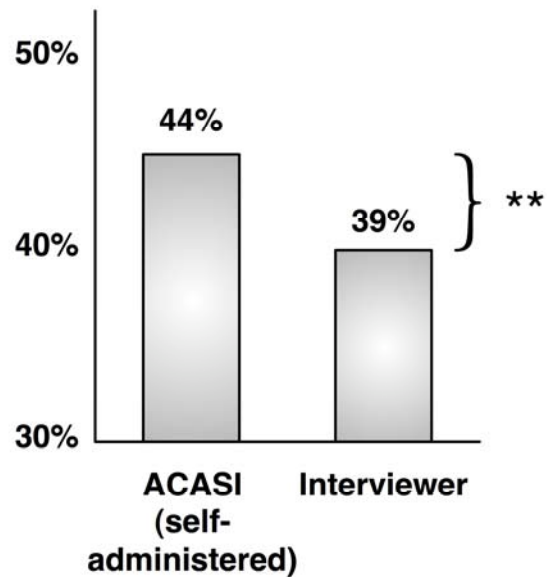
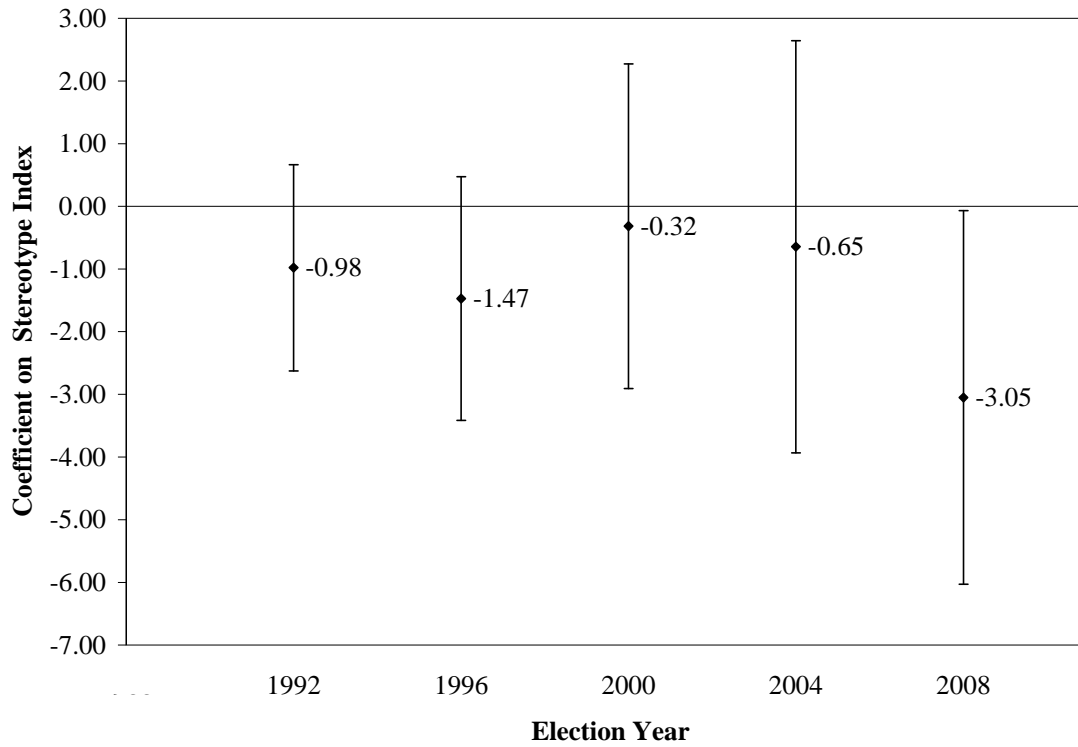


Figure 1b: Blacks Less Intelligent than Whites



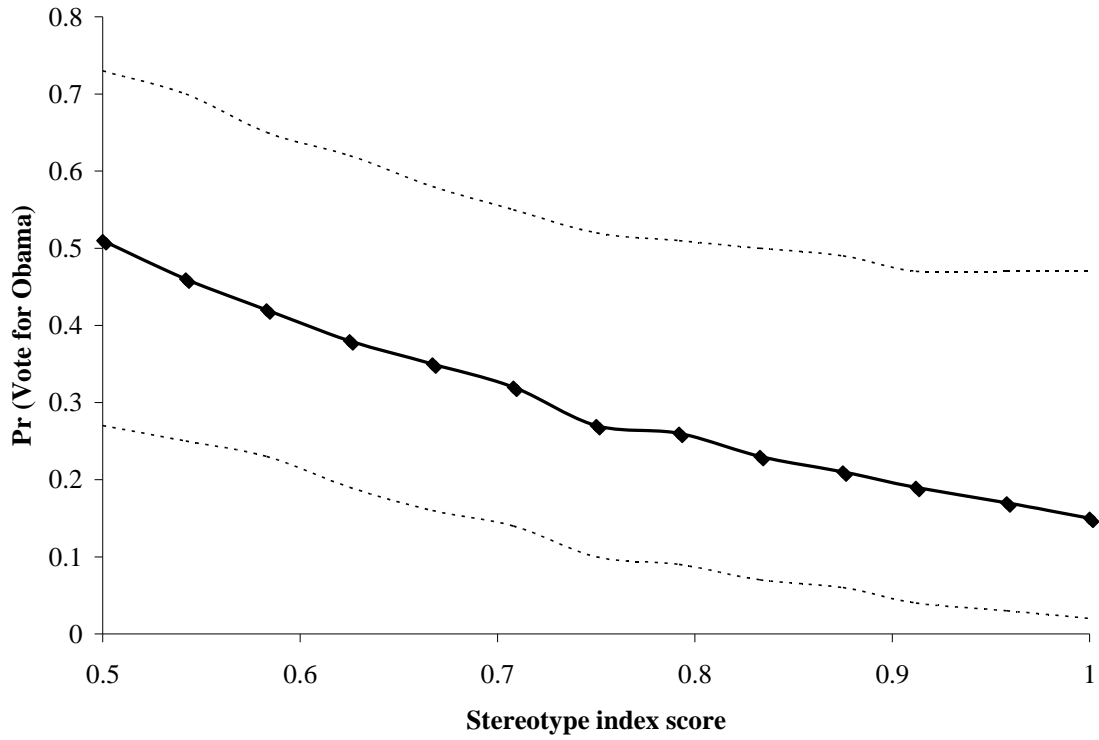
** p < .03

Figure 2. The Effect of Prejudice on Vote Choice, by Election Year



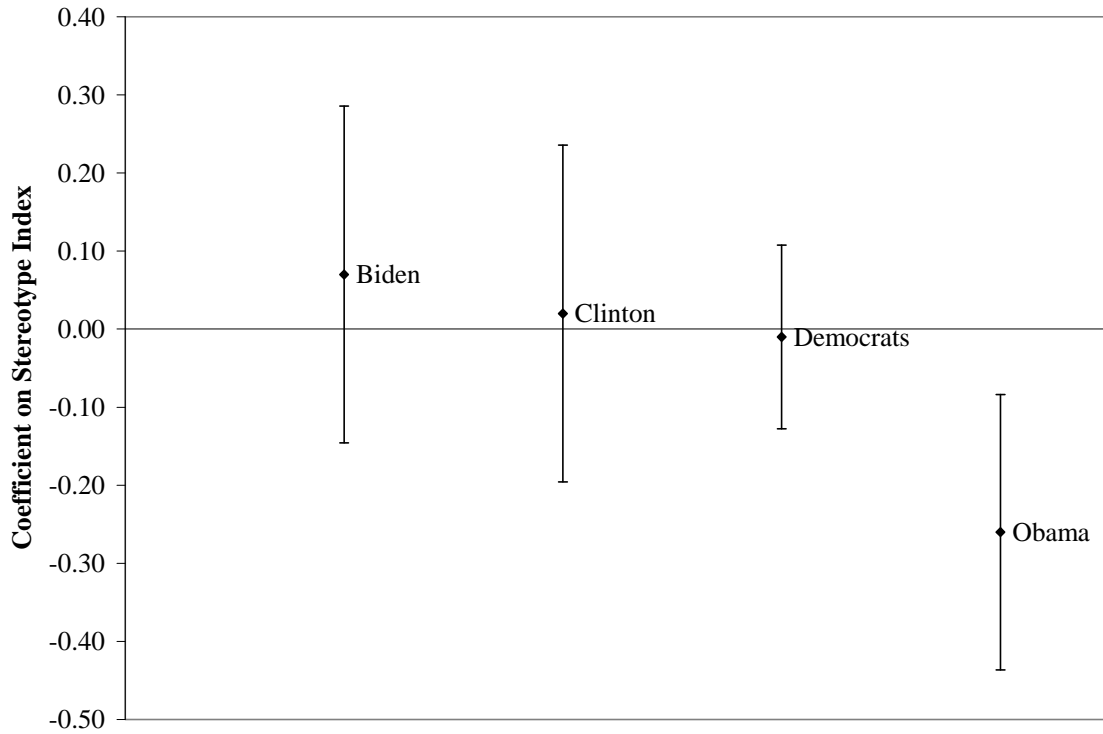
Notes: Logistic regressions. The dependent variables are vote choice for the Democratic candidate of the selected year. Controls include party identification, age, education, and income. All variables coded 0 to 1. Non-Hispanic whites only.

Figure 3. The Predicted Probability of Voting for Obama, by Stereotypes



Notes: Based on Model 3 in Table 2. Explanatory variables are set to the mean with the exception of indicator variables, which are set to the mode.

Figure 4. The Effect of Prejudice on Candidate Evaluations



Notes: Ordinary least squares regressions. The dependent variables are feeling thermometer scores. Controls include party identification, age, education, income, south, approval of President Bush, approval of Bush's handling of the war in Iraq, view of the state of the economy, ideology, and an interaction of ideology and education. All variables coded 0 to 1. Non-Hispanic whites only.

Table 1: Effect of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election, using Interviewer Measure

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Stereotype Index	-3.05**	1.54	-3.10*	1.67	-2.61	1.99
Party Identification	-6.07***	0.49	-4.24***	0.52	-3.35***	0.64
Age	-1.28**	0.51	-1.18**	0.57	-0.59	0.67
Education	-1.44	1.12	-0.93	1.22	-0.22	3.71
Income	-0.15	0.48	-0.41	0.57	-0.41	0.67
South			-0.51*	0.28	-0.33	0.33
Bush Approval			-2.64***	0.54	-2.96***	0.70
Iraq Approval			-1.46***	0.40	-1.07**	0.50
View of Economy			-0.72	0.92	-1.67	1.02
Ideology					-3.00	6.76
Ideology * Education					-0.20	7.56
Constant	6.27***	1.46	6.97***	1.85	7.77*	3.90
Pseudo R-squared	0.46		0.55		0.59	
n	712		677		568	

NOTES: Logistic regressions, Non-Hispanic Whites only,
 All explanatory variables coded between 0 and 1
 * p<.10, ** p<.05, ***p<.01

Table 2: Effect of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election, using ACASI (Self-administered) Measure

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Stereotype Index	-3.89***	1.45	-3.57**	1.54	-4.09**	1.86
Party Identification	-6.16***	0.51	-4.30***	0.55	-3.49***	0.66
Age	-1.26**	0.53	-1.23**	0.59	-0.69	0.70
Education	-1.79	1.20	-0.95	1.30	-0.23	3.70
Income	0.10	0.50	-0.28	0.59	-0.27	0.68
South			-0.58**	0.29	-0.38	0.34
Bush Approval			-2.57***	0.54	-2.86***	0.69
Iraq Approval			-1.45***	0.42	-1.11**	0.50
View of Economy			-0.61	0.91	-1.55	1.00
Ideology					-2.59	6.68
Ideology * Education					-0.51	7.49
Constant	7.02***	1.53	7.23***	1.90	8.56**	3.93
Pseudo R-squared	0.47		0.55		0.60	
n	694		662		556	

NOTES: Logistic regressions, Non-Hispanic Whites only,
 All explanatory variables coded between 0 and 1
 * p<.10, ** p<.05, ***p<.01