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The Increasing Racialization of American Electoral Politics, 1988-2016

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Abstract

In this article, we examine the relationship between racial resentment and a host of political attitudes, predispositions, and behaviors across 28 years and 7 presidential elections. We find, contrary to the suggestions of recent work of the role of race in the Obama era, that the racialization of seemingly nonracial political issues began many years before the debut of Barack Obama and extends beyond his presidency. More specifically, we find, controlling for other factors, that the relationships between racial resentment and partisan and ideological self-identifications, evaluations of the major party presidential candidates, and attitudes about health insurance and governmental services have strengthened each subsequent year beginning in 1988 through 2016. This trend reflects the growing extent to which racial considerations are brought to bear on individual evaluations of and orientations toward the political world.

Keywords

race, racial resentment, partisanship, ideology, polarization

Recent work on racial prejudice and other types of racial orientations, such as ethnocentrism, has noted an increasing role of racial and group-based

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predispositions in American politics. Tesler (2012, 2015, 2016), for instance, demonstrates the “spillover” of racial considerations into other seemingly nonracial political attitudes and predispositions such as attitudes about health care policy and partisanship. Kam and Kinder (2012) similarly find an effect of ethnocentrism on vote choice in 2008, but limited or no effects of this orientation in previous U.S. presidential elections. This work and similar ones demonstrate that the explosion of Barack Obama onto the political scene in 2008 was without a doubt a significant factor in the racialization—the increasingly strong linkage between racial considerations and other political attitudes and orientations—of modern American politics.

Although the Obama presidency presents a prime opportunity to understand racialized politics today, it is certainly not a new phenomenon, nor was it during the 2008 presidential campaign. Since at least the implementation of the “Southern strategy,” race has been discretely linked to a number of issues to influence public opinion and party loyalty (García Bedolla & Haynie, 2013; Mendelberg, 2001). Scholars uncovered the substantial effects of implicit and explicit racial attitudes on individual judgments of and reactions to the political world long before Obama erupted onto the political stage (Huddy & Feldman, 2009; Krysan, 2000). Furthermore, elites have effectively employed implicit racial cues as part of a political strategy (Edsall & Edsall, 1992; Jamieson, 1993; Mendelberg, 1997) to sway White voters’ evaluations of even White candidates in previous elections (Stephens-Dougan, 2016; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Finally, direct comparisons of the 2008 and 1988 elections reveal much more stability than change when it comes to Whites’ racial attitudes (Hutchings, 2009). Thus, the ever-expanding narrative of Obama, with respect to the racialization of American national politics, cannot be fully considered without examining his presidency in the context of previous studies and events in American political history.

In this article, we connect recent work on racial spillover effects and the racialization power of Barack Obama with previous work on the linkages between racial considerations and a myriad of political attitudes, evaluations, orientations, and choices by examining such relationships *over time*. We place the focus of our analysis on racial resentment—A general orientation toward Blacks characterized by a feeling that Blacks do not try hard enough and receive too many favors. Using public opinion data captured in the American National Election Study (ANES) that spans 28 years and 7 presidential elections, we show that Whites have increasingly brought racial considerations to bear on partisan and ideological self-identifications, affective evaluations on major candidates, and attitudes about health care and government spending since the late 1980s. Indeed, the correlation between racial resentment and

each of these variables has increased monotonically since 1988. Importantly, we find that this trend persists past 2012 and into 2016, suggesting that Obama's presidency is an installation in a general trend, rather than a disruption to one.

Background

Although much of the racial prejudice literature has focused on measuring the association between racially targeted policies and the racial resentment concept, the link between an issue and race need not be explicit for racial considerations to manifest (Alvarez & Brehm, 1997; Bobo, 1999; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). In other words, the connection between a given issue and racial attitudes may manifest absent an explicit mention of race (Gilens, 1996, 1998; Tesler, 2013; Valentino, 1999). This is the case in large part due to the continuous association of certain issues with a particular racial group. For instance, the news media frequently frames Blacks as the primary beneficiaries of welfare policies, a broad issue domain with which Blacks have come to be (negatively) associated over time (Gilens, 1999; Winter, 2008). Experiments in which implicit racial cues such as coded words or images of Black people are manipulated have also revealed the power of racial orientations to shape political choices (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; Valentino et al., 2002; White, 2007).

Most recently, Tesler (2012, 2015, 2016) has revealed that not only can implicit racial cues affect individual attitudes about a target policy area, the effects of implicit racial cues can “spillover” into other attitudinal domains. Tesler finds, for instance, that orientations toward Barack Obama affected Whites' attitudes about health care after the issue became a major policy innovation of the administration with the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Though this work focuses on the Obama-induced spillover, Tesler notes that “source-cue spillover effects are likely to extend beyond race and Obama so long as the source's social background is an important factor in how the public evaluates them” (Tesler, 2015, p. 103).

In addition to influencing attitudes about public policy issues, numerous studies have also demonstrated a relationship between racial cues and electoral outcomes (e.g., Kam & Kinder, 2012). For example, the presence of a Black candidate in a given electoral race increases average voter turnout among White voters high in racial resentment (Petrow, 2010), and these voters are also more likely to experience a conflict in vote choice when the Black candidate shares their partisan identification (Krupnikov & Piston, 2015). Even Obama paid a racial cost at the polls because of the salience of race among some White voters (Schaffner, 2011)—an effect that is consistent

across studies (Donovan, 2010; Lewis-Beck, Tien, & Nadeau, 2010; Piston, 2010). All together, the literature is clear that race presents a barrier in winning support from White voters.

Finally, White orientations toward Blacks are also related to partisan and ideological self-identifications. Conflict extension, for instance, works to transfer party divisions along racial attitudes to average individuals, thereby connecting partisanship with racial orientations (Layman & Carsey, 2002; Layman, Carsey, Green, Herrera, & Cooperman, 2010). As Blacks are widely perceived as an integral component of the Democratic Party coalition (Pantoja, Ramirez, & Segura, 2001), it may also be the case that party identification has become more racialized in nature irrespective of the composition of electoral coalitions (Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2016). The connection between race and ideology has sparked a vivid debate about the measurement of racial attitudes (see Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). Although discussion about measures of symbolic racism continues, there is an undeniable correlation between racial resentment and liberal-conservative ideology (Neblo, 2009; Rabinowitz, Sears, Sidanius, & Krosnick, 2009).

Racialization Over Time

Although a great deal of research exists on the influence of racial attitudes when it comes to a wide variety of political attitudes, predispositions, and behaviors, very little of such work considers the changing connections between these constructs over time (Kellstedt, 2003; Tesler, 2012; Valentino & Sears, 2005). Racialization, like polarization, is a state and a process—It is a heightened connection between racial considerations and other seemingly nonracial political objects, and it is a process by which those connections strengthen over time. In this article, we seek to investigate the temporal dynamics by which racial resentment has come to influence other political objects over time. Where others have considered the racialization of certain policy areas (Tesler, 2012), or focused on changes in certain regions (Valentino & Sears, 2005), we consider the racialization process as it pertains to a wide variety of political orientations, attitudes, and choices—partisan and ideological self-identifications, affective evaluations of the parties, attitudes about health care and government spending, and vote choice—over the course of 28 years and 7 presidencies.

Although recent work has shown the racializing effect of Obama, for example, race came into play more than usual during his presidency, we show that these considerations toward the first Black president stem from a growing undercurrent of racial prejudice in American politics. In congruence with a wealth of work conducted during previous political contexts and in

accordance with conventional wisdom, we hypothesize that the connection between racial orientations such as racial resentment have become more intimately tied to other political predispositions, evaluations, attitudes, and choices over time. Racial considerations became an increasingly important—perhaps, the most important—issue dimension along which the major parties restructured their policy positions and major coalitions during the Civil Rights era. It is the “evolution” of racial issues that Carmines and Stimson (1989) contend drove the party realignment of the 1960s, and that Hetherington and Weiler (2009) assert contributed to the sorting of authoritarians and moral conservatives into the Republican Party over the course of subsequent decades.

In this way, racialization is concomitant with polarization and mass sorting. Issue evolution and sorting based on social issues—many of which had salient racial components—are a key explanation for the racialization of American mass politics. The increase in the implicit racial cues discussed above and advent of “dog whistle” politics ushered in with the Southern strategy also serve as explanations for such a racialization. George H. W. Bush’s 1988 presidential campaign, for instance, marked a sharp turning point with respect to the invocation of race in presidential campaigns (Mendelberg, 2001). Racial symbols such as Willie Horton and the menacing Black convict staring into the camera during the “Revolving Door” ad enjoyed a prominent place in the campaign strategy of Lee Atwater, the Republican operative most famous for reinventing the Southern strategy through the use of implicit, rather than explicit, racial cues.¹

The symbolic, abstract language and imagery of Bush’s 1988 presidential campaign continued during subsequent presidential campaigns that focused on crime and expanding welfare, denigrated the “liberal” label, and argued for the repeal of supposedly antiquated Civil Rights and affirmative action policies. More than use during presidential campaigns, however, the symbolic racial appeals became highlights of the common political rhetoric espoused by elected representatives at all levels of government. The destruction of the policies this rhetoric was used to refer to—governmental services aimed at strengthening social safety nets and reducing the effects of racial discrimination—quickly became the centerpiece of the Republican Party platform. Thus, the new Southern strategy has, over the past 30 years, permeated all forms of political discourse, strategy, and behavior.

Although we cannot be certain that such implicit racial appeals in political communications—whether they originate from candidates, parties, or news media—have actually increased in *number* since 1988, it strikes us that they have certainly not subsided. Regardless, it is the *cumulative* impact of these racial cues over the past 28 years that has caused a racialization of political

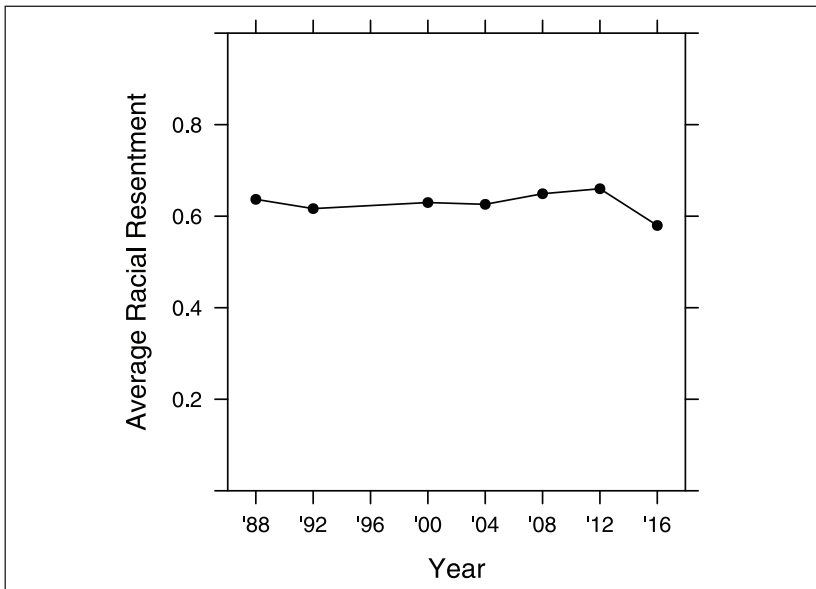


Figure 1. Average level of racial resentment among Whites, 1988-2016.

attitudes and predispositions. Thus, we posit that racial resentment has become increasingly tightly connected with other, previously nonracial political predispositions, attitudes, and evaluations from 1988 to 2016.

Note that we do not contend that racial orientations have actually changed much over time. In Figure 1, we plot the mean scores of the Kinder and Sanders (1996) racial resentment scale—as measured by an additive index of the four questions appearing on the ANES—by presidential election year for White respondents.² The scale has been recoded to range from 0 (*least racially resentful*) to 1 (*most racially resentful*). It is readily apparent that racial resentment among Whites, at least as measured, has not systematically changed over time. Rather, it is remarkably stable, with a small decrease from 2012 to 2016. Confirmation of our theory of the increased racialization of American electoral politics does not, however, require that we observe an average increase in the level of racial resentment in the mass public. Rather, our theory posits that the *connections* between racial resentment and other political, though not inherently racial, attitudes, behaviors, and orientations have strengthened over time.

In other words, we expect that the Obama presidency, arguably the most racialized era in modern American politics (e.g., Kam & Kinder, 2012;

Kinder & Dale-Riddle, 2011; Tesler, 2012), to be an instillation in a longer trend of racialization of American electoral politics. This entails both a steady temporal increase in the association between fundamental racial orientations and other political predispositions and attitudes leading up to the Obama presidency, as well as greater associations between racial orientations and these same predispositions and attitudes in 2016—a year with no racial minority major party presidential nominees. It is testing this theory to which we turn next.

Data

To test our theory of the temporal racialization of American electoral politics, we require individual-level data that span multiple time points. The ANES satisfies these requirements as it includes indicators of racial resentment, evaluations of political candidates, voting behavior, and issue attitudes, in addition to standard sociodemographic information from 1988 to 2016. Although the use of racial code words can be traced back to at least the mid-1980s with Reagan’s “welfare queen” rhetoric and the first instantiation of the Southern strategy, the standard racial resentment items were not developed and included on an ANES presidential election year survey until 1988. Furthermore, the racial resentment battery was excluded from the 1996 ANES; as such, we necessarily exclude this election from our analysis as well. Frustrating as these data limitations may be, we do not expect that the exclusion of only a couple of presidential elections will have any consequential impact on our ability to validly test the temporal component of the theory; indeed, these data still span 28 years, including 7 presidential elections.

The key independent variable used in our analyses is racial resentment. The new racism thesis claims that a contemporary discussion of racial prejudice based on racially charged symbols and evocation of implicit prejudices has replaced more overt expressions of anti-Black sentiment (Huddy & Feldman, 2009). These more subtle forms of prejudice (e.g., symbolic racism, racial resentment, and modern racism) are often defined as opposition to Black demands and resentment toward the special treatment of the group (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). We measure new racism using the Kinder and Sanders (1996) racial resentment scale. This scale is designed to capture feelings about how hard Blacks try to get ahead in society and whether they receive too many favors from the government.

This variable is constructed by summing the responses to four separate questions about individuals’ symbolic orientations toward racial minorities.³ The average scale reliability across all 7 presidential election years as measured by Cronbach’s alpha is .80. Furthermore, the first factor estimated by

an exploratory factor analysis explains approximately 88% of the variance shared across the four indicators. Thus, we can be confident that the racial resentment scale we employ is both unidimensional and reliable. Control variables include party identification, ideological self-identification, retrospective economic evaluations, egalitarianism, moral traditionalism, income, education, age, gender, and residence in the South. All analyses are conducted on White respondents only, per tradition in the literature and our theory.

To most comprehensively test our theory of increased racialization of politics, we employ dependent variables that capture a variety of political attitudes, behaviors, and orientations. The first two dependent variables we consider are partisan and ideological self-identifications. Partisanship is probably the most durable and powerful political orientation in American political context (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). Ideological self-identifications are also powerful expressions of one's view of their political values and fundamental attitudes about the role of government in society (Ellis & Stimson, 2012). As such, these orientations present hard tests of our theory of temporal racialization. On one hand, we might expect, as fundamental orientations, the probability of them becoming *increasingly, over time* altered or contaminated by other considerations such as racial prejudice to be low. On the other hand, recent scholarship focusing on the Obama years found that old-fashioned racism and racial resentment predicted changes in partisanship where such changes were observed (Tesler, 2013), and that ethnocentrism superseded partisanship in candidate evaluations (Kam & Kinder, 2012). No work that we are aware of has considered the relationship between racial resentment and ideological self-identifications over time.

Third, we consider the temporal impact of racial resentment on affective evaluations of the major party candidates. Our theory of racialization despite the presence of a racial minority candidate can be cleanly tested using these affective evaluations. If our theory is incorrect, we should observe a strong relationship between racial resentment and candidate evaluations only during the 2008 and 2012 campaigns in which Barack Obama ran. If, however, we observe an increasingly strong relationship between racial resentment and candidate evaluations, we would have evidence supporting our theory. To capture affective evaluations of the candidates, we create a summary measure of differential feelings toward the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates as measured by the popular feeling thermometer items by subtracting the feeling thermometer score for the Democratic candidate from that for the Republican candidate. This new variable ranges from 100, which denotes completely positive feelings toward the Democratic candidates and, simultaneously, completely

negative feelings toward the Republican candidate, to -100 , which denotes both completely positive feelings toward the Republican candidate and negative feelings toward the Democratic candidate. A value of 0 corresponds to identical feelings toward both the candidates.

Our fourth dependent variable captures perhaps the most important political behavior: vote choice. As with the candidate evaluations above, our theory would posit an increasing effect of racial resentment on vote choice across time. This is a dichotomous variable where a value of 1 denotes having voted for the Democratic candidate and a value of 0 denotes having voted for the Republican candidate. Finally, we employ attitudes about two types of public policy issues. The first regards individual preference for governmentally sponsored health insurance versus private health insurance. The second regards the individual preference for the tightening of government spending versus the provision of governmental services. Both of these variables are measured via the familiar 7-point issue attitude scales, and coded such that higher values indicate more conservative attitudes (e.g., private health insurance and less government spending). Again, our theory predicts that the extent to which racial prejudice is brought to bear on attitudes about major governmental policy areas, albeit ones that have no inherent racial content, should increase over time irrespective of the presence of a racial minority candidate such as Barack Obama to link them to racial considerations.

The full question wordings and details regarding the construction of all variables appear in the Supplemental Appendix. All dependent variables have been recoded such that larger numerical values denote more conservative responses. As a submission to the 2016 Election Results Preacceptance Competition,⁴ all data, empirical strategies, and hypotheses associated with this manuscript were outlined in the preregistration plan prior to the public release of the 2016 ANES Time Series data. An anonymized version of this plan can be found in the Supplemental Appendix. Finally, we wish to emphasize that all analyses are conducted on White respondents only.

Empirical Analysis

We begin our empirical analysis with an investigation of the “strengthening” of the relationships between racial resentment and other political attitudes, behaviors, and predispositions. The simplest way this analysis can be carried out is via an examination of the correlations between racial resentment and a host of other political variables over time. These correlations, along with 95% confidence bands, appear in Figure 2. As described above, we consider a broad swath of political variables that represent a mix of context-dependent attitudes (candidate evaluations), deeply held predispositions (partisan and

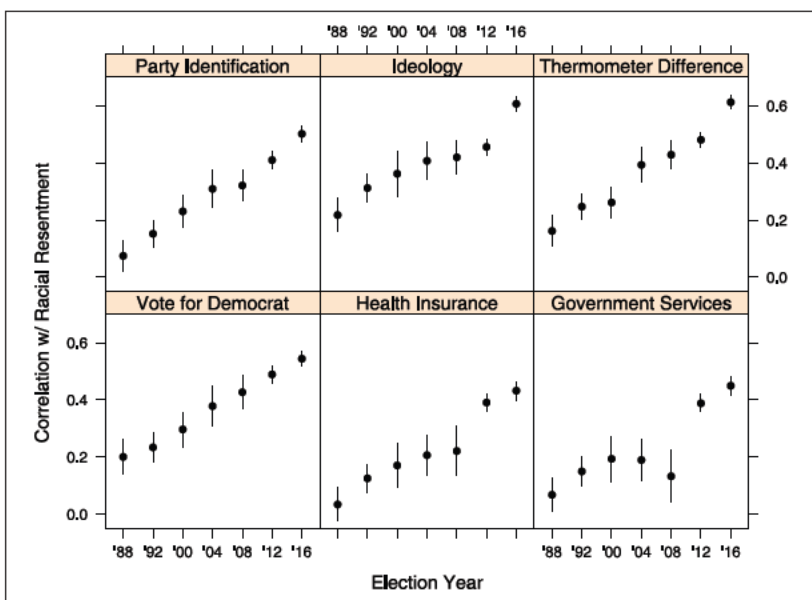


Figure 2. Correlations between racial resentment and political predispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of Whites, 1988-2016.

ideological self-identifications), attitudes about general (services) and specific (health insurance) public policy issues, and actual political behaviors (vote choice). Remarkably, the correlation between racial resentment and each of these variables increases significantly over time, beginning with the change from 1988 to 1992.

Before examining the relationship between racial resentment and any other specific variable, we consider general trends observed across all the variables. First, taking into account uncertainty, we observe a monotonic increase in the correlation coefficients across time for each of the variables. As we have no theoretical reason to expect a nonmonotonic increase in the strength of the relationship between racial resentment and other political attitudes and behaviors, we caution the reader against overinterpreting the minor undulations in the point estimates. Although there is seemingly a slight deviation from monotonicity in the point estimates when it comes to attitudes about government services, a monotonic curve can comfortably be drawn through the confidence bands.

On average, the two largest increases in the correlation between racial resentment and any one of the other variables occur between 2008 and 2012

with respect to health care policy and government services attitudes. This is congruent with Tesler's (2012) work demonstrating the Obama-induced "spillover" of racial prejudice to attitudes about seemingly nonracial issues such as health care, though such an effect has not been directly observed with respect to attitudes about government spending and services in general. The second largest increases in the correlations between racial resentment and any other variable occur between 2012 and 2016 with respect to ideological self-identifications and candidate evaluations.

On one hand, this is unsurprising given that the 2016 presidential election, in many ways, focused on individual and societal orientations toward racial and ethnic minorities. The Trump campaign focused messaging efforts on the candidate's stance on the immigration of Mexicans, Muslims, and Syrian refugees to America. Furthermore, Trump's history of race-based housing discrimination, his propagation of the "birther" conspiracy about the birthplace of Barack Obama, and questions about which candidate would best represent the interests of Blacks were regularly discussed in popular media and even during presidential debates. Thus, the role of considerations of race were widely discussed both implicitly and explicitly across the span of the campaign. For all of these reasons, our theory—as described above—posits that the correlation between racial resentment and other political predispositions, attitudes, and behaviors should continue increasing from 2012 to 2016.

On the contrary, works by Kam and Kinder (2012), Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2011), Tesler, (2013), and Tesler and Sears (2010), all note the role of a Black president in racializing American politics in ways not previously observed. The implication of such a claim for our analysis might be observing a relatively large increase in the correlations between racial resentment and other variables between 2004 and 2008, the period during which Obama ran for and assumed the presidency. To the contrary, it is between 2004 and 2008 that we observe the *lowest* average increase in correlations for any pair of presidential election years across all six political predispositions, evaluations, choices, and attitudes considered.⁵

Next, we shift our focus to the specific political attitudes, predispositions, and behaviors we examined. The largest overtime increase in correlations occurs with respect to party identification, which grows from .07 in 1988 to .50 in 2016. The correlation with ideological self-identifications, another fundamental political predisposition, increased from .22 to .61 across the 28-year span. Although this analysis cannot reveal whether partisan and ideological considerations are more strongly being brought to bear on psychological orientations toward other racial groups or vice versa, this trend reveals that even

the fundamental building blocks of individual political identities are amenable to radical change or, perhaps, manipulation.

The correlation between racial resentment and context-dependent political attitudes and behaviors also increase markedly over time. In 1988, differential feelings toward the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates was fairly weakly correlated with racial resentment at .16. By 2016, however, this correlation had nearly quadrupled to .61. A similar, albeit weaker, pattern emerges with respect to (Democratic) vote choice. Here, the value of the correlation with racial resentment doubled from .20 in 1988 to .54 in 2016.

The observed trends when it comes to both affective evaluations of the candidates and vote choice are particularly interesting because they began well before a racial minority of any sort was running for office. Again, our observation runs counter to the narrative of Barack Obama as a lightning rod when it comes to the racialization of politics—these trends harken back to at least the late 1980s, if not earlier. Although we observe relatively large increases in the correlations between 2004 and 2008 for both candidate evaluations and vote choice, the increases were larger moving from 2000 to 2004 with respect to vote choice, or from 2012 to 2016 with respect to candidate evaluations. We, once again, urge the reader to recall decades of research on the ways that public opinion can be primed with respect to concerns of race, most of which was conducted long before the candidacy of Barack Obama.

Finally, we consider the correlations between racial resentment and policy attitudes. Previous works by Gilens (1999), Huber and Lapinski (2006), Kinder and Winter (2001), and Winter (2008) all demonstrate that public policy issues are amenable to racialization in some form. Congruent with recent findings by Tesler (2012), we observe the racialization of attitudes about health care over time. More specifically, the correlation between racial resentment and attitudes about governmental versus private health insurance increased by a factor of nearly 15 from .03 in 1988 to .43 in 2016. We observe a similar increase when it comes to more general attitudes about government spending versus the provision of governmental services. In this case, the correlation increases from .07 to .45 over the 28-year period examined.

Racialization in a Multivariate Framework

Although all signs indicate the racialization of politics, when it comes to fundamental predispositions, election-dependent feelings and behaviors, and attitudes about policy issues in the bivariate framework presented above, we move now to a test of our theory in a multivariate framework. In particular, we want to be sure that the relationships observed above are not spurious.

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Therefore, we specify a host of regression models where potential confounders can be controlled for.

This regression framework does not, however, come without problems. In particular, we must now make some assumption about the direction of the causal arrow between racial resentment and our other political variables of interest. As evaluations of the major party presidential candidates and vote choice are, in some sense, election-dependent, we assume that treating racial resentment as both more stable and causally prior is, theoretically, most appropriate. A similar explanation can be applied to attitudes about health insurance and government services. Attitudes are simply less stable than more fundamental predispositions or orientations such as racial prejudice, and more amenable to manipulation via framing (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). A great deal of literature has demonstrated the ability of parties, candidates, and the media to frame various issues in ways that prime certain considerations such as race (e.g., Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; Jacoby, 2000). As such, we feel comfortable assuming that racial resentment can be appropriately specified as an independent variable in models with the aforementioned political attitudes and behaviors as dependent variables.

We are less certain about the relationship between racial resentment and deeply held political predispositions such as partisan and ideological self-identifications. On the contrary, we know that party identification is much more stable over time than it is variable, and that it is relatively difficult to manipulate (Green et al., 2002). Although less research has been done on the stability and malleability of ideological self-identifications, we might expect ideologies, as coherent structures of individual beliefs and values, to influence group orientations such as racial resentment. On the contrary, Tesler (2013) finds that racial prejudice is capable of eroding highly stable partisan identifications.

Ultimately, we are not concerned here with the direction of the causal arrow between racial resentment and the other political variables we are employing. Although we certainly believe that investigating causality of this sort is worth the time of social scientists, our intent is for this research to lay the groundwork for future efforts on this front. Indeed, we are most interested in first establishing that orientations toward members of racial minority groups are becoming more “attached” to relevant political predispositions, attitudes, and behaviors, regardless of the direction of causality. Furthermore, observational data are simply not adequate to fully and completely test causal mechanisms. Although our theory does not require specification of a causal order, we nevertheless want to ensure that our statistical models are specified such that valid inferences about the relationship between racial resentment and other variables can be made. As such, we elect to specify racial resentment as both an independent variable in regressions of partisan and

ideological self-identifications, and vice versa, to ensure that assumptions about causal ordering do not drive substantive results.

In each of the following regression models, we specify partisan and ideological self-identifications, egalitarianism and moral traditionalism, retrospective economic evaluations, income, education, gender, age, and residence in the South as controls.⁶ All variables, including racial resentment, were rescaled to range from 0 to 1 to facilitate interpretation. The ideological self-identification, retrospective economic evaluation, and egalitarianism and moral traditionalism variables are particularly important controls because they allow us to be as confident as possible that we have controlled for the effect of “principled conservatism.” Some have argued that the racial resentment battery is capturing conservative values such as anti-egalitarianism and limited government, rather than racial prejudice (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997; Sniderman & Piazza, 1997). This work also questions whether the racial resentment measure is too conceptually close to the policy attitudes it is oftentimes used to predict. Although the likes of Tarman and Sears (2005) and others across time have demonstrated that neither concern holds any empirical weight, we are confident that the aforementioned control variables coupled with policy dependent variables that do not include explicit racial content will relieve any readers skeptical of the racial resentment construct.

For each dependent variable we specify both an additive and an interactive model. The substantive variables are identical across model types. What differs is our treatment of time. In the additive model, we include fixed effects for election years⁷—These models help establish that racial resentment is, in fact, a predictor of each of the dependent variables controlling for other factors. In the interactive models, we drop the election year fixed effects and include an interaction between racial resentment and a time variable, which is coded 0 for 1988 up to 6 for 2016. This specification allows us to test the inherently interactive process that the strength of the relationship between racial resentment and the other political variables is contingent on—that is, increases with—time.⁸

The first set of regression models appear in Table 1.⁹ Here, we include estimates from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models of partisan and ideological self-identifications on racial resentment and of racial resentment on partisan and ideological self-identifications. As we would expect, racial resentment, party identification, ideological self-identifications, retrospective economic evaluations (which are, themselves, quite partisan), and egalitarianism and moral traditionalism are each statistically significant across all models. Recall that all variables have been rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Thus, we can compare the magnitude of the coefficients across variables. In the additive party identification model, ideological self-identifications prove to have the most

Table 1. Additive and Interactive Regressions Showing Effect of Racial Resentment on Political Predispositions Over Time for Whites.

	Party ID		Ideology		Racial resentment	
Racial resentment	0.102*	0.006*	0.097*	0.054*		
	(0.014)	(0.026)	(0.009)	(0.017)		
Racial Resentment × Time		0.023*		0.011*		
		(0.005)		(0.004)		
Party ID			0.301*	0.302*	0.059*	0.017
			(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.015)
Party ID × Time						0.010*
						(0.004)
Ideology	0.715*	0.718*			0.133*	0.069*
	(0.015)	(0.015)			(0.012)	(0.022)
Ideology × Time						0.016*
						(0.005)
Time		-0.009*		-0.006*		-0.010*
		(0.004)		(0.002)		(0.003)
Egalitarianism	0.177*	0.170*	0.109*	0.109*	0.362*	0.374*
	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Moral traditionalism	0.164*	0.160*	0.284*	0.283*	0.154*	0.154*
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Economic evaluations	-0.048*	-0.038*	-0.027*	-0.018*	-0.062*	-0.044*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education	0.088*	0.084*	-0.015	-0.017	-0.229*	-0.227*
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Income	0.053*	0.063*	0.006	0.008	0.001	-0.010
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Age	-0.141*	-0.144*	0.049*	0.049*	-0.031*	-0.027*
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Female	-0.009	-0.008	-0.017*	-0.016*	-0.009*	-0.008*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
South	0.002	-0.000	0.011*	0.010*	0.030*	0.031*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Year-fixed effects	✓		✓		✓	
R ²	.467	.466	.547	.547	.405	.403
n	8,859	8,859	8,859	8,859	8,859	8,859

Note. OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. OLS = ordinary least squares.

*Denotes significant at $p < .05$ level.

predictive power, with racial resentment, moral traditionalism, egalitarianism, and age having similar smaller effects. In the ideological self-identification

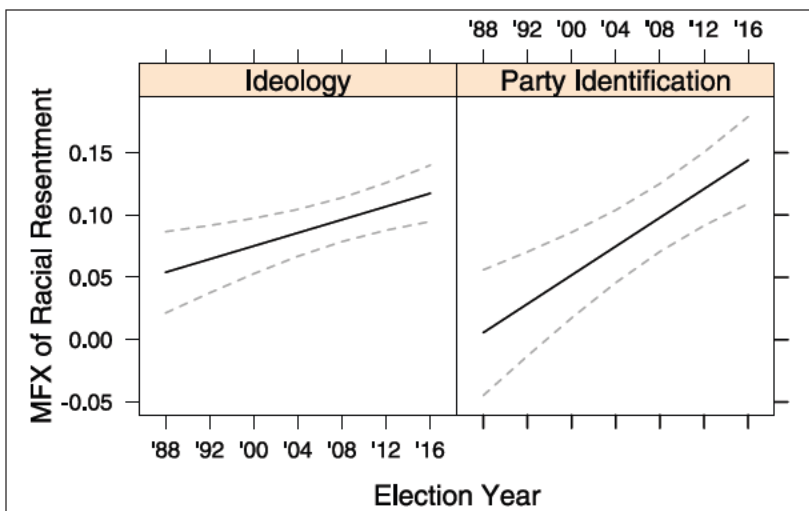


Figure 3. Marginal effect of racial resentment on partisan and ideological self-identifications for Whites, 1988-2016.

additive model, party identification has the most predictive power, moral traditionalism coming in second, and egalitarianism and racial resentment in close battle for third most influential. Thus, we have evidence that racial resentment is strongly related to each of these predispositions, even controlling for other factors.

In the additive racial resentment model, we observe statistically significant coefficients associated with both partisan and ideological self-identifications. Thus, regardless of causal direction, we have robust evidence that there is a real connection between racial resentment and these predispositions. But, we are not as interested in the effect of racial resentment relative to other predictors as we are in the effect of racial resentment relative to itself at different time points. It is most important to our theory, then, that the coefficients associated with the multiplicative terms in each of the interactive models is statistically significant. This is the case in each of the interactive models. As these coefficients are difficult to interpret on their own, we visually present the marginal effect of racial resentment on partisan and ideological self-identifications over time, as well as the marginal effects of partisan and ideological self-identifications over time, in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

In Figure 3, the marginal effect of racial resentment on both ideology and partisan identifications increases over time (positively, as both variables are coded such that larger values represent more conservative/Republican

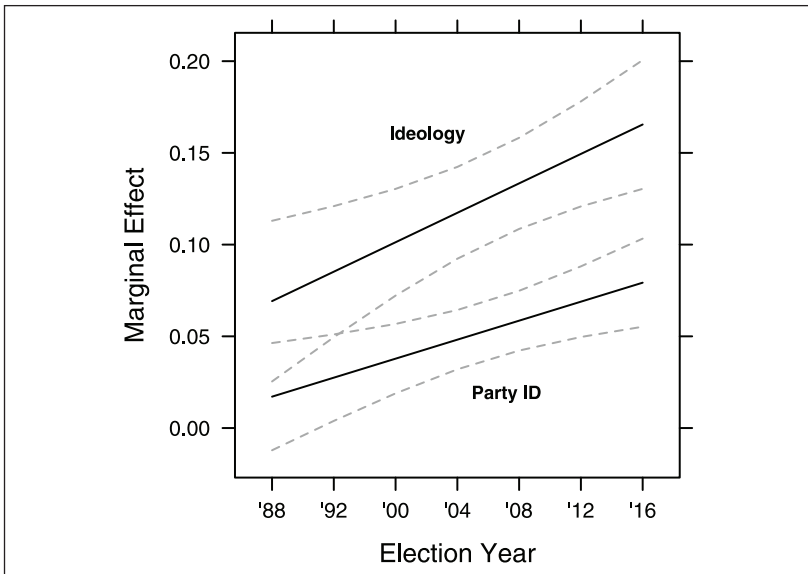


Figure 4. Marginal effect of partisan and ideological self-identifications on racial resentment for Whites, 1988-2016.

responses). As we would have expected, given the relationships revealed by the correlations presented above, the marginal effect of racial resentment on party identification is larger than the marginal effect on ideological self-identification in all years. More specifically, the marginal effect of racial resentment on partisan self-identifications increased from 0.01 in 1988 to 0.14 in 2016, and the same effect on ideological self-identifications increased from 0.05 to 0.12 over the same time period. In both cases, the effect of racial resentment on the symbolic political predispositions is statistically significant and increases with each subsequent year.

In Figure 4, we consider the relationship between political predispositions and racial resentment over time if political predispositions, rather than racial resentment, are the causal “first movers.” The marginal effect of racial resentment on partisan self-identifications increased from 0.02 in 1988 to 0.08 in 2016, a statistically significant increase over time. The marginal effect of racial resentment on ideological self-identifications increased from 0.07 in 1988 to 0.17 in 2016, which is also a statistically significant increase. That the increasing relationship between racial resentment and partisan and ideological self-identifications are still observed assuming the reverse causal ordering is comforting. There is no evidence that the causal ordering we posit is incorrect,

Table 2. Additive and Interactive Regressions Showing Effect of Racial Resentment on Political Attitudes and Behaviors Over Time for Whites.

	Candidate evaluations		Vote choice		Health insurance		Government services	
Racial resentment	0.118*	-0.004	1.378*	0.778*	0.081*	-0.081*	0.062*	-0.060*
	(0.009)	(0.017)	(0.194)	(0.351)	(0.015)	(0.028)	(0.012)	(0.022)
Time		-0.016*		0.098*		-0.010*		-0.008*
		(0.002)		(0.050)		(0.004)		(0.003)
Racial Resentment × Time		0.030*		0.086		0.042*		0.031*
		(0.004)		(0.077)		(0.006)		(0.005)
Party ID	0.405*	0.406*	4.849*	4.726*	0.197*	0.192*	0.138*	0.134*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.149)	(0.144)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Ideology	0.179*	0.181*	2.229*	2.183*	0.261*	0.260*	0.229*	0.222*
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.228)	(0.222)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Egalitarianism	0.078*	0.079*	1.424*	1.111*	0.209*	0.223*	0.216*	0.223*
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.224)	(0.217)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Moral traditionalism	0.134*	0.130*	2.264*	2.120*	0.108*	0.105*	0.071*	0.072*
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.210)	(0.204)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Economic evaluations	-0.091*	-0.066*	-0.738*	-0.657*	-0.055*	-0.024*	-0.034*	-0.022*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.115)	(0.102)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Education	-0.008	-0.013	-0.600*	-0.711*	0.050*	0.043*	0.074*	0.066*
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.190)	(0.185)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Income	0.018*	0.024*	-0.194	0.126	0.111*	0.110*	0.078*	0.080*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.156)	(0.150)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Age	-0.023*	-0.023*	-1.416*	-1.573*	-0.027	-0.024	0.038*	0.039*
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.204)	(0.199)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Female	-0.010*	-0.009*	-0.043	-0.034	-0.001	0.001	-0.037*	-0.039*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.078)	(0.076)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
South	0.018*	0.016*	0.242*	0.135*	0.002	0.002	-0.009	-0.010
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.087)	(0.085)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Year-fixed effects	✓		✓		✓		✓	
(Pseudo) R ²	.666	.664	.565	.544	.348	.347	.380	.373
n	8,800	8,800	7,529	7,529	7,784	7,784	7,681	7,681

Note. Columns 1, 2, and 5 to 8 are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Columns 3 and 4 logit coefficients. OLS = ordinary least squares.

*Denotes significant at $p < .05$ level.

and, if it were, results from incorrectly specified models would likely not be substantively different. However, there is good reason to believe that racial resentment affects partisan and ideological self-identifications, rather than the other way around. Racial resentment is a deeply-held, implicit orientation toward Blacks, whereas partisan and ideological self-identifications are explicit choices about labels to identify with. This claim is also in line with previous research that has demonstrated the potential for both racial resentment and old-fashioned racism to affect changes in individual partisanship (Tesler, 2013).

Next, we consider the relationship between racial resentment and affective evaluations of the major party candidates, vote choice, and attitudes about health insurance and governmental services. The estimates from these models are presented in Table 2. With the exception of the vote choice models, which are derived from logistic regression analyses, the cell entries are OLS coefficients. As with above, the coefficients in all columns except 3 and 4 can be compared as they have the same scale. We begin our interpretation of these results with a consideration of the additive models.

Once again, the effect of racial resentment on each of these attitudes and behaviors is quite strong. Because we are not particularly interested in the effects of control variables beyond simply ensuring that potential confounders in the relationship between racial resentment and each of the dependent variables have been eliminated, and because the interpretation of such “nuisance” parameters can be problematic anyway (Keele & Stevenson, 2016), we leave examination of these estimates to the reader. We will note, however, that no estimates associated with any of the control variables are incongruent with previous work or theories with respect to sign or significance.

Instead, we turn to the interactive models presented in Table 2. Once again, we find evidence for our theory. In all but one case, the coefficient associated with the racial resentment–time multiplicative term is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. The racial resentment–time multiplicative term is not statistically significant in the vote choice model, though it is properly signed. This is somewhat congruent with previous work that has shown the lack of an effect of ethnocentrism (Kam & Kinder, 2012) and various measures of racial prejudice (Weisberg & Devine, 2010) in elections prior to 2008. Indeed, interacting racial resentment with a dummy variable representing all but one of the years reveals that the effect of racial resentment on vote choice was greater than that in 1988 in only 2008 and 2012. Although our theory does not seem to bear out in the case of vote choice when controlling for other factors, that it does find support with respect to the other five dependent variables is still remarkable.

To facilitate interpretation of the coefficients associated with the racial resentment–time multiplicative terms, we, once again, graphically present marginal effects in Figure 5. With each dependent variable, the marginal effect of racial resentment increases over time. The absolute value of the marginal effect of racial resentment on the differential evaluation of the major party candidates is 0 in 1988 and increases to approximately 0.18 by 2016. When it comes to voting for the Democratic candidate rather than the Republican candidate, the absolute value of the marginal effect of racial resentment increases from 0.08 in 1988 to 0.12 in 2016. As noted above, the marginal effect of racial resentment on vote choice does appear, visually, to

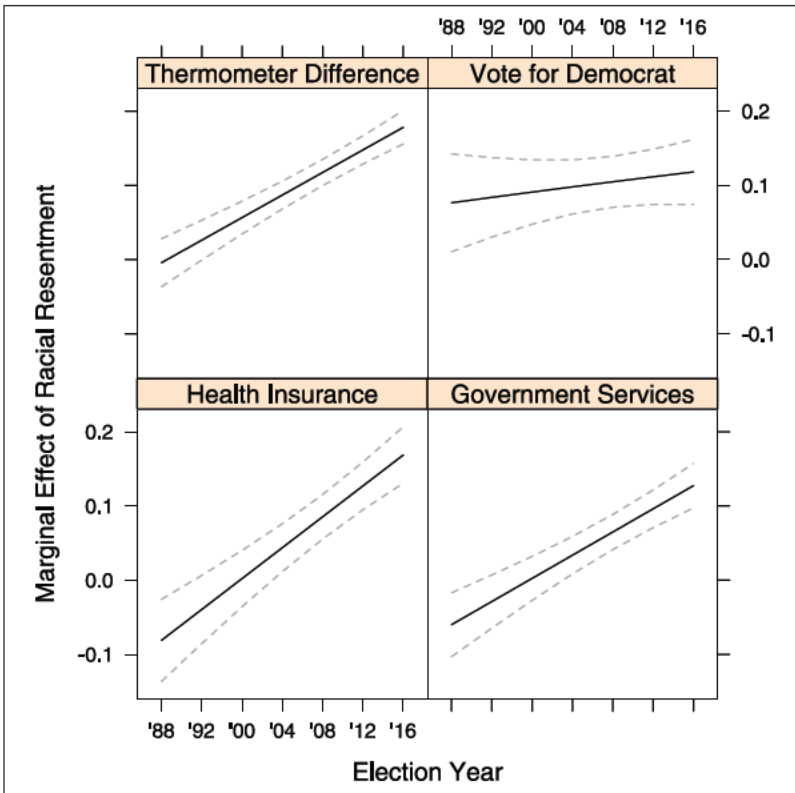


Figure 5. Marginal effect of racial resentment on attitudes and behaviors for Whites, 1988-2016.

have increased slightly over time, but we cannot be very confident, statistically, that this perceived increase is real.

The increase in the marginal effects of racial resentment are even more striking with respect to issue attitudes. The marginal effect of racial resentment of attitudes about health insurance increases from -0.08 in 1988 to 0.17 in 2016, a marked increase from no effect to one rivaling that on affective evaluations or vote choice. The same marginal effect when it comes to attitudes about governmental spending and services increases from -0.06 in 1988 to 0.13 in 2016. These estimates supply a first piece of evidence of the overtime racialization of public policy issues that had been previously confirmed only cross-sectionally (Gilens, 1999), for example, or during short time spans (Tesler, 2012).

Even controlling for the domineering effect of partisan and ideological self-evaluations, retrospective evaluations of the economy, and demographics, the strength of the relationships between racial resentment and a host of political attitudes and behaviors have steadily increased since 1988. As such, we have robust evidence, across all of our analyses on all types of political attitudes, predispositions, and behaviors, for our central hypothesis that American electoral politics, as a whole, has become increasingly racialized over time.

This pattern is robust across strategies for measuring both new racism (of which racial resentment is a particular dimension) and the dependent variables we employ here. Using data from the General Social Survey (GSS) over the same time span, 1988-2016, we observe in each of the four cases we are able to investigate with available GSS data—partisan and ideological self-identifications, (Democratic) vote choice, and attitudes about the role of government—a monotonic increase in the correlation with the new racism scale across time. New racism also exerts a statistically significantly increasing effect on party identifications, ideological self-identifications, and attitudes about the role of government, controlling for other factors. As with our model of ANES data, the interaction between new racism and time is not statistically significant at conventional levels in the model predicting vote choice (though, the marginal effect is in the correct direction and marginally significant at the $p < .10$ level). Thus, we have remarkably consistent evidence for our theory about the increasing effect of racial prejudice on a wide array of political attitudes, orientations, and behaviors over time across measurement strategies employed in two of the most widely recognized surveys in the social science community. The full results of these additional analyses can be found in the Supplemental Appendix.

The Conditional Effect of Authoritarianism

Although we stress that our data are not capable of addressing causality, we consider the relationship between racial resentment, our dependent variables, and authoritarianism discussed above. As authoritarians have increasingly sorted into the Republican Party (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009), the increase in correlation between racial resentment and party identification could be conditional on level of authoritarianism. That is to say, implicit racial cues employed by Republicans may have activated both racial and authoritarian predispositions, causing partisan sorting by racial and authoritarian attitudes. If this is the case, the temporal relationship between partisanship and racial resentment that we observe may actually be due, to some extent, to authoritarian sorting.

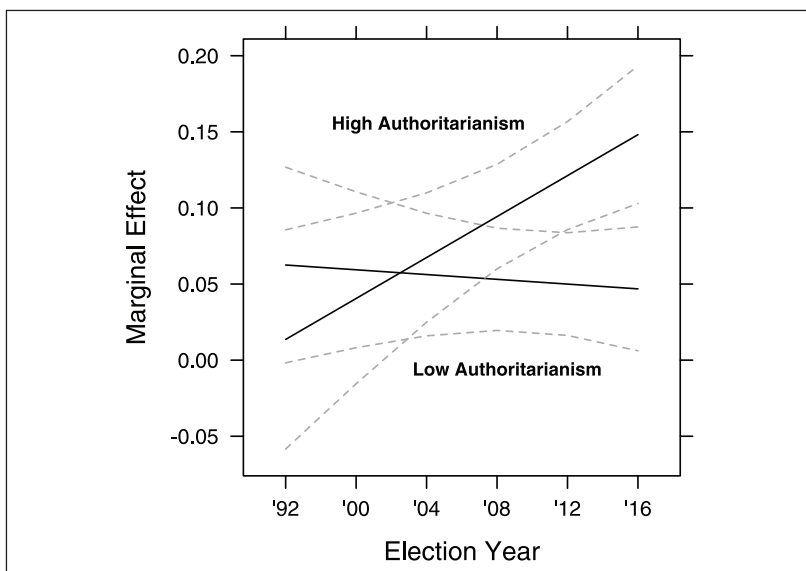


Figure 6. Marginal effect of racial resentment on partisan self-identification conditional on authoritarianism for Whites, 1992-2016.

To consider this conditional effect, we reestimated all of the above models with authoritarianism included in a three-way interaction with racial resentment and time. Authoritarianism is measured by the four-item child-rearing scale included on the ANES since 1992. Note that the absence of the authoritarianism measures from the 1988 ANES requires that we drop this year from our analysis, leaving us with six presidential elections from 1992 to 2016. As attitudes toward “big government”—a control found in work by Hutchings (2009) and Tesler (2012)—are similarly unavailable in 1988, we include them in these models as well. Both measures are, such as all other variables, rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Question wording, as well as the full results of these models, appear in the Supplemental Appendix.

In only one case do we observe a statistically significant three-way interaction between authoritarianism, racial resentment, and time: with respect to party identification. In the model where party identification is treated as an independent variable and racial resentment the dependent variable, we observe a conditional effect of authoritarianism. To provide the most intuitive description of this relationship, we plotted the marginal effect of racial resentment in party identification across time for individuals high and low on the authoritarianism scale¹⁰ in Figure 6. The only point at which there is

a statistically significant difference between high and low authoritarians is in 2012, and then somewhat more so in 2016. Thus, although authoritarianism does exert a statistically significant effect, it does so only in the two most recent elections. We also note that controlling for authoritarianism (an additive, rather than multiplicative effect) in the partisanship model depicted in Table 1 above does not alter the statistical or substantive significance of the interaction between racial resentment and time.

We believe that implicit racial cues in elite political rhetoric and campaign messages serve as the “dog whistle” to authoritarians that the Republican Party is the party of traditional—and, in particular, anti-egalitarian—values. Implicit racial cues, then, are still the causal mechanism by which authoritarians are cued to sort into the Republican Party, promoting the observed increase in the correlation between racial resentment and other political attitudes, predispositions, and behaviors. This causal arrow is congruent with both Hetherington and Weiler’s (2009) use of the racial issue evolution that began in the 1960s as an explanation for how racial issues cued authoritarians to sort into the Republican party and Feldman’s (2003) contention that the connection between authoritarianism and prejudice is conditional on perceived threat, which would only occur if implicit racial cues were signaling such a threat. Although we find this causal story more compelling than one where authoritarianism-led sorting causes racialization, we reiterate that our data are incapable of testing causal claims, and we do not assert causality here or anywhere in the manuscript. Although causal theories are the currency of science, causal assertions based on empirical observations are simply beyond the abilities of our data, and outside of the focus of our contribution. Rather, our contribution lies in a more complete picture of the relationship between racial considerations and a wide range of political attitudes and predispositions over time.

Conclusion

The election of the first Black president is undoubtedly a monumentally historic event in American history. It is no surprise, then, that this time period has been the subject of intense scrutiny. In particular, several scholars have found that the influence of important race-based social orientations such as racial prejudice (Tesler, 2012; Tesler & Sears, 2010) and ethnocentrism (Kam & Kinder, 2012; Kinder & Dale-Riddle, 2011) has increased during the campaigns and subsequent presidency of Barack Obama. Although the conclusions drawn from this work seem entirely reasonable, and are technically correct in some respects according to our own analyses, what they gain in attention to the Obama presidency they lose in the broader timeline of modern

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presidential campaigns and American political history. Rather than a *shock* to the relationship between racial resentment and other political attitudes, orientations, and behaviors, we find that the presidency of Barack Obama is a *component* of a longer story about the role of race in American politics.

More specifically, we find that the relationships between racial resentment and partisan and ideological self-identifications, evaluations of the major party candidates, and attitudes about health insurance and government services have strengthened markedly since at least 1988, rather than since 2008, as several recent analyses have demonstrated. And these relationships have continued to grow as Obama has transitioned out of the public eye and other White presidential candidates have reassumed the political scene, validating previous research that asserts an effect of racial attitudes even in all White political races. The connections between racial resentment and other political variables persist in the face of the relative stability of racial resentment among American Whites, and despite statistical controls for other powerful political constructs and socioeconomic characteristics.

Although a full, empirical explication of the causal mechanisms would likely require a book-length treatment and much more data, we attribute this phenomenon to the racial issue evolution that underwrote the partisan realignment of the Civil Rights era, the documented increase in the use of racial code words in modern campaigns (Mendelberg, 2001), and the partisan polarization and sorting that the former phenomena and elite cues promoted. With the shift from “old racism” to “new racism” came a concurrent shift in the rhetoric necessary to effectively cue and direct racial animus. It is precisely the increase in symbolic, abstract rhetoric about race and public policy that subconsciously encourages ordinary individuals to make connections between their own racial orientations and political parties, candidates, and policies. We encourage others to gather the data necessary to test potential causal explanations for the observed increasing association between racial resentment and politics. Such data might include estimates of the number or qualities of (symbolically) racial campaign advertisements across elections, or the nature of the rhetoric about political opponents and certain public policy issues employed by political candidates.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available for this article online.

Notes

1. The following excerpt from a 1981 Atwater interview illustrates his strategy: “You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘nigger’—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstract now [that] you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I’m not saying that. But I’m saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, ‘We want to cut this,’ is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than ‘Nigger, nigger.’”
2. The racial resentment items did not appear on the 1996 ANES survey.
3. The items are recoded such that larger positive values indicate more racially resentful attitudes.
4. For more information about the competition, see the following: <https://www.ercp2016.com/>.
5. While we note a pattern that is distinct from that posited by previous work, we acknowledge the fact that this work uses different, but related, measures of racial prejudice than the racial resentment battery that we focus on here.
6. We also estimated all models with a dummy variable indicating whether respondents were part of the traditional face-to-face sample or Internet sample (which only applies to 2012 and 2016) to control for potential survey mode effects. Although this variable is statistically significant in some models, no substantive results were altered whatsoever.
7. This is the equivalent of estimating a model with dummy variables for all election years but one (the reference year). We simply elected to summarize this procedure by including a check mark for election year fixed effects in the tables as the coefficients associated with the year dummy variables are of no substantive interest.
8. To be sure that our assumption of a linear increase in the marginal effect of racial resentment over time is not a problematic one, we test for significant nonlinearity in the interaction between racial resentment and time in two different ways. First, we estimated a series of models where racial resentment was interacted with dummy variables corresponding to six of the seven presidential election years included in the analysis (six because including a dummy variable for all

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seven election years would introduce perfect multicollinearity between the year variables). At first glance, this strategy seems to reveal some nonlinearity; but, in every case, a line can be comfortably drawn through the confidence bands associated with marginal effects of racial resentment for each year. Second, we employed the strategies for investigating nonlinearities in interaction models outlined by Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2016). These more formal strategies also revealed no problematic deviations from linearity. Thus, we are very comfortable in assuming a linear relationship between racial resentment and each of the dependent variables across time.

9. Note that even though sample sizes may appear smaller than expected, each of the models contains up to 13 substantive independent variables comprised of 22 individual items. Such extensive controls will inevitably result in smaller sample sizes because complete data are necessary to estimate regression models. That our regression results are mirrored in the bivariate analyses above, however, suggests that our relationships of interest are not being driven by systematic missingness.
10. As the authoritarianism scale ranges from 0 to 1, we classified those with a scale score of 0.25 and below as “low,” and those with a scale score of 0.75 and above as “high.”

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