

The Electoral Consequences of Skin Color: The “Hidden” Side of Race in Politics

Vesla M. Weaver

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Abstract Despite the significant role that skin color plays in material well-being and social perceptions, scholars know little if anything about whether skin color and afrocentric features influence political cognition and behavior and specifically, if intraracial variation in addition to categorical difference affects the choices of voters. Do more phenotypically black minorities suffer an electoral penalty as they do in most aspects of life? This study investigates the impact of color and phenotypically black facial features on candidate evaluation, using a nationally representative survey experiment of over 2000 whites. Subjects were randomly assigned to campaign literature of two opposing candidates, in which the race, skin color and features, and issue stance of candidates was varied. I find that afrocentric phenotype is an important, albeit hidden, form of bias in racial attitudes and that the importance of race on candidate evaluation depends largely on skin color and afrocentric features. However, like other racial cues, color and black phenotype don't influence voters' evaluations uniformly but vary in magnitude and direction across the gender and partisan makeup of the electorate in theoretically explicable ways. Ultimately, I argue, scholars of race politics, implicit racial bias, and minority candidates are missing an important aspect of racial bias.

Keywords Race · Electoral politics · Candidate evaluation · Skin color · Bias · Black candidates

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V. M. Weaver (✉)
Woodrow Wilson Department of Politics, University of Virginia,
P.O. Box 400787, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA
e-mail: vmweaver@virginia.edu

Amid the usual campaign rancor and negative attack advertisements that characterize competitive elections, voters were confronted by a new, more subtle appeal in 2008. In the hotly contested race for the 3rd congressional seat in Minnesota between Democrat Ashwin Madia and Republican Eric Paulson, the latter candidate aired a campaign commercial late in the campaign asking voters to “meet the real Ashwin Madia.” In the brief thirty-second advertisement, viewers see a candidate meant to appear more menacing through distorted still shots that exaggerated Madia’s skin color. Madia, the son of Indian immigrants who served as a Marine in the Iraq War, was made to look several shades darker in the attack ad than he actually appeared in the original images.¹ After the commercial aired, the once very popular Madia saw his support in the polls begin to slip, ultimately losing the bid for the open seat. Similarly, just a few months prior during the primary season, Hillary Clinton’s campaign allegedly altered the footage of her opponent in a campaign advertisement so that Barack Obama would appear significantly darker-skinned than he actually had appeared in the original footage of the event; the change was significant enough to gain the attention of several media observers, who likened the advertisements to the darkening of O.J. Simpson on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1994.² While quickly dismissed as speculative, new research (using image data analysis reduction techniques) documents that John McCain’s campaign altered or selected darker images of Obama in negative campaign advertisements and especially in stereotype-consistent ads related to crime and that these darkened ads increased in prevalence closer to the election (Messing et al. 2009).

The attempts by campaigns to manipulate the physical characteristics of their opponents, darkening their appearance to make them seem more ominous could be seen as an otherwise normal feature of negative campaigning, employed irrespective of the racial background of the opponent, were it not for the volume of evidence in psychological studies that reveal a powerful influence of a stereotypically black phenotype on cognitive evaluation, the long history of intraracial colorism in the United States, and the compounded disadvantage associated with being a darker-skinned, more afrocentric minority in a growing number of sociological studies. Study after study has documented a strong association between phenotype and negative perceptions and these results always go in one direction—darker-skinned, less Eurocentric-appearing blacks and Latinos are perceived as being less intelligent and attractive and more lazy, poor, and prone to violence. Research has also uncovered severe socioeconomic inequalities associated with skin color; darker skinned blacks receive less income, attain less education, are more likely to be in poverty, unemployed, and in prison and more likely to die of heart disease. Negative perceptions and outcomes cling most strongly not just to non-whites, but the darker, more phenotypically black members of their race.

Despite the significant role that skin color plays in material well-being and social perceptions, scholars know little if anything about whether skin color and

¹ “Did GOP Ad darken skin-color of Indian-American dem candidate?” *Huffington post*, October 30, 2008. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/10/30/did-gop-ad-darken-skin-co_n_139182.html.

² “Obama skin tone darker in Clinton Ad?” *Huffington post*, March 4, 2008. Available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/04/obama-skin-tone-darker-in_n_89829.html.

afrocentric features influence political cognition and behavior and specifically, if intraracial variation in addition to categorical difference affects the choices of voters. Do more phenotypically black minorities suffer an electoral penalty as they do in most aspects of life? This study investigates the impact of color and phenotypically black facial features on candidate evaluation, using a nationally representative survey experiment of over 2000 whites. Subjects were randomly assigned to campaign literature of two opposing candidates, in which the race, skin color and features, and issue stance of candidates was varied. I find that afrocentric phenotype is an important, albeit hidden, form of bias in racial attitudes and that the importance of race on candidate evaluation depends largely on skin color and afrocentric features. However, like other racial cues, color and black phenotype don't influence voters' evaluations uniformly but vary in magnitude and direction across the gender and partisan makeup of the electorate in theoretically explicable ways. Ultimately, I argue, scholars of race politics, implicit racial bias, and minority candidates are missing an important aspect of racial bias.

The paper proceeds in five sections. First, I discuss the research on skin color and feature-based disparities in outcomes, perception, and discriminatory treatment. Then, taking a brief detour into the history of the meaning and practice of race, I discuss why these glaring intraracial disparities have not generated a norm of color equality. This discussion motivates several testable hypotheses about the effect of color and afrocentric features and the expected magnitude of its influence for different groups of voters, which I discuss in Part II. Part III describes the design of the survey experiment and Part IV presents several sets of findings. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of what these findings imply for the study of black candidates, racial attitudes, and electoral politics.

Why Color and Phenotype?

Two overarching observations guide the attention to skin color and black appearance in this paper: skin color is an important form of racial inequality and bias *and* one that is not governed by widely held norms of racial equality. Thus, skin color is perhaps one of the only remaining areas in public opinion where racial bias is still expressed openly.

Skin color influences cognitive perceptions above and beyond race. Participants in the Implicit Association Test, taken by over two million people, demonstrated both explicit and implicit preference for light-skin compared to dark-skin; the tests showed that 68% of respondents were faster to pair dark-skin with negative words and light skin with good words than the reverse (Nosek et al. 2007, p. 17). Smaller experimental studies have replicated this pattern of light-skin preference. For instance, both black and white subjects were more likely to assign positive traits to blacks if they had lighter skin—describing them as motivated, educated, and attractive—and conversely, were more likely to apply negative racial stereotypes to darker members of that race, who were described as unattractive, criminal, unintelligent, and lazy (Maddox and Gray 2002). In another experimental study, a black perpetrator and his victim in a crime news story were more memorable and

produced the highest emotional concern among white subjects when the offender was dark-skinned (Dixon and Maddox 2005). Similarly, Hispanic subjects exhibited implicit bias towards the lighter complexioned Hispanics compared to darker members of that ethnic group (Uhlmann et al. 2002).

The negative associations with darker skin are not just limited to cognitive perception and stereotypical beliefs but have also been manifest in discriminatory behavior. For example, judges sentenced blacks with more stereotypically black facial features to an average of eight additional months of hard time compared to blacks with lighter skin and less Afrocentric features, even after taking into account different criminal histories (Eberhardt et al. 2004; for similar results, Blair et al. 2004). Importantly, while darker skin was strongly associated with sentencing length, race was not. The same basic finding obtained with jurists in capital cases, who were twice as likely to mete out the death penalty to blacks if they had more Afrocentric facial features (Eberhardt et al. 2006). In a survey experiment, subjects exposed to Hurricane Katrina victims were less generous in their support for disaster relief assistance if the target they encountered was dark-skinned (Iyengar and Hahn 2007). Darker-skinned blacks, in short, were more “deathworthy” and less deserving of emergency assistance. Though arriving at more complex findings, audit studies of housing and experimental studies of hiring have also documented differential treatment by skin tone (Yinger 1995; Wade et al. 2004); in the latter study, participants preferred light-skinned applicants to blacks with a darker appearance in an exercise in which they were asked to hire for an engineering firm. And perceptions of blacks themselves seem to reflect differential treatment by color, as darker-skinned blacks reported more discrimination than light-skinned blacks (Klonoff and Landrine 2000). Evaluations of phenotype matter, over and above reactions based on race alone, and can operate independently of racial categorization.

It is perhaps unsurprising then, that virtually every aspect of life and material well-being is influenced by skin color, in addition to race, even while color is rarely discussed. Darker-skinned blacks have less income and education (Allen et al. 2000; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Hill 2000; Hersch 2006), are more likely to be unemployed (Johnson et al. 1998), in poverty (Bowman et al. 2004), have lower occupational prestige and wealth (Seltzer and Smith 1991), worse health outcomes such as high blood pressure (Harburg et al. 1978; Krieger et al. 1998), and are punished more severely for the same crime (Gyimah-Brempong and Price 2006). Conversely, their lighter skinned counterparts are more likely to have college degrees, be homeowners, be of the professional class, and have higher status spouses. In a striking set of findings by economists, earnings gaps widened along a gradient of skin color. Specifically, while the wage differential between whites and blacks with light skin color was small and insignificant, black workers with medium and dark complexion earned 26.5 and 34.5% less than whites, respectively (Goldsmith, et al. 2007, p. 722). The wage penalties associated with darker skin remained large even after accounting for differences in human capital and family background, leading the authors to suggest that studies using the conventional method of examining only racial differences based on binary categories were missing a large part of the picture of wage

inequality. In short, material well-being and opportunities, like cognition, are structured not just by race, but further influenced by skin color.³

These findings are situated within a longstanding tradition of colorism—the tendency to “perceive or behave towards members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (Maddox and Gray 2002, p. 250) in addition to favoring an appearance “proximal to a White phenotype,” which can include other phenotypic markers and facial features (Burton, et al. 2010)—variously recognized in the United States, where darker-skinned, more afrocentric-appearing blacks were unofficially excluded from economic, social, and political opportunities historically.⁴ For the purposes of this study, I understand colorism as a form of racial discrimination that coexists with bias based on race but extends beyond racism because it is not merely triggered by undifferentiated membership in a racial category. While they are distinct, racism and colorism are closely related in that they both derive from and are features of a broader racial order/hierarchy. Angela Harris describes the relationship thus:

Racism involves discrimination against persons based on their racial identity, which in turn is traditionally designated through a complex mix of self-identification and other-identification through appearance (including color) and ancestry. Colorism involves discrimination against persons based on their physiognomy, regardless of their perceived racial identity. The hierarchy employed in colorism, however, is usually the same one that governs racism: light skin is prized over dark skin, and European facial features and body shapes are prized over African features and body shapes (2008, p. 54).

While color is used in racial assignment and categorization, *colorism* refers to the tendency to make further preference judgments based on gradations of color and afrocentric features within race; thus, it captures the fact that darker-skinned, more afrocentric blacks undergo more extreme racial bias. Unlike racism, all people recognized as a belonging to a subordinated racial group do not face identical discrimination. Instead, the extent of discrimination will depend where one falls on a color continuum and the afrocentricity of one’s facial features. Scholars might think of colorism as denoting the “intersectional” discrimination a person faces as a member of a racial group and as a darker member of that group. In this way, colorism can operate independently from racism; two people in the same racial group can experience different treatment by complexion while both being subject to discrimination by race. However, colorism and racism are not completely distinct for the very fact that color is a *racial marker that can trigger race-based*

³ Lighter-skinned blacks often inherited better opportunities and status; often, however, disparities in socioeconomic wellbeing persist even after accounting for differences in family class background, suggesting a direct influence of color on outcomes. For a comprehensive exploration of color disparities and colorism than space allows here, see Nance 2005 and Hunter 2007.

⁴ While not enjoying a better legal status, lighter-skinned and mixed-race blacks often enjoyed substantial advantages since at least the first Reconstruction in both the black and white communities. Lighter-skinned black soldiers were more likely to be promoted in the Civil War; lighter-skinned blacks had superior educational arrangements; and fairer blacks were more likely to be a member of the black elite and leadership. For a comprehensive discussion, see Jones 2000.

evaluations. Darker-skinned members of the racial group may be more likely to exact reactions based on racial difference. Therefore, colorism is a system of discrimination that may operate independently of racism, while being rooted in the same principle that lightness is preferred. While racism has to do with categorical racial difference (i.e., blacks face racial discrimination based on their racial group), colorism has to do with treatment based on intraracial color (i.e., blacks may or may not face discrimination based on the darkness of their skin and other markers of a stereotypically black appearance). While colorism is not completely encompassed by discrimination based on racial categorization alone, because it is premised on the foundation that whiteness is valorized and associated with good qualities, it is maintained by the broader racial order.

When I refer to color bias in this paper, I mean that term to encompass other phenotypic features along with literal complexion. I follow scholars in other disciplines in that “skin tone is not the sole index of color identifications. Facial features, such as shape of one’s nose, eyes, and lips, also contribute to perceptions of a person’s color, as does the texture and style of one’s hair” (Harris 2008, p. 60). Therefore, the experimental design here does not attempt to isolate skin tone from other facial features that may connote an Afrocentric phenotype. When I refer to color in this paper, I mean it as a broader proxy for phenotypic variation.

With skin color having such an important, if not publicly recognized, role in the lives of and perceptions about minorities, it might also play a crucial role in political life. Because negative racial stereotypes are more strongly associated with out-group members with darker skin and more Afrocentric features, voters may be more likely to assign negative political stereotypes to those candidates appearing more phenotypically black. Like other cues—race, gender, party—skin color and afrocentric features may affect voters’ evaluations of the electoral desirability, abilities, and prospects of candidates.

But there is another important reason why skin color is likely to be significant in electoral politics. While skin color has emerged as a powerful predictor of almost every measure of material well-being, skin color disparities are not a vehicle of political mobilization, and discrimination based on color has failed to generate a widespread norm of equal treatment. The reason is rooted in history.

After the First Reconstruction, racially discriminatory laws and practices in the United States quickly developed around rules of classification that accorded blacks inferior status regardless of their degree of mixture and white ancestry, known as hypodescent or more commonly referred to as the ‘one drop of blood rule’ (Hollinger 2003). In legal practices and Jim Crow norms, even blacks with the fairest skin and most Eurocentric features would be treated, segregated, and discriminated against as black. *Blacks were equal in their uniformly unequal status*. In response, black political movements for equality later emerged in opposition to categorical racial inequality and blacks of all shades banded together in a common quest for racial inclusion. With landmark civil rights legislation and the outlawing of discrimination, norms of racial exclusion and inferiority were eventually replaced by strong norms of racial equality. But the entrenched tradition of one-drop racial conceptions did not die with the dismantling of Jim Crow; while racial exclusion transformed, racial understandings based on a bright-line distinction between the

racism continued and were the primary way racial remedies would be organized. Thus, through a series of early policy decisions, state statutes, Census classifications, court cases, and popular discourse the one-drop rule was instituted and institutionalized, first for purposes of exclusion and racial domination, and later in race-conscious policies to correct racial exclusion after its legal demise.

This history had an enduring effect on how people understand and practice race in the United States. Race became the primary category of difference in politics, subsuming other differences between blacks and making immaterial potential claims for redress of intragroup disparate treatment. Intra-racial differences in skin color took on less salience in our public discourse, identity formation, explicit public attitudes, and legal norms. Meanwhile, the powerful “logic of racial solidarity” that emerged in confrontation of the deep history of racial inequality in this country meant that categorical racial differences became and continue to operate as the basis of egalitarian claims. With race guiding both our prejudices and our attempts to get beyond them, widespread norms of skin color equality did not develop and neither did attention to color disadvantage. Likewise, a politics around skin color—that might have emerged given the remarkable inequalities between blacks based on color—was blocked.

This racial history produced the paradoxical situation in contemporary times, whereby large and enduring gaps in material equality and differential perceptions that surface in nearly every study based on color is *not* a subject around which blacks organize politically, nor do they play a significant role in our racial understandings. Unlike virtually all other background characteristics that have similarly profound effects on groups’ lives and experiences—including being a woman, minority, veteran, blue-collar worker, or person with disabilities—skin color is perhaps alone in its apolitical quality, namely the lack of political claims, identity, and recognition by courts as a protected status. The presence of salient identities in politics is more easily measured than their absence, but a few indicators are telling. Unlike race, color claims represent fewer than 5% of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) cases of discrimination and the courts have also mostly dismissed the legitimacy of color-based claims, mostly refusing to recognize that blacks can be “differentially racialized” based on gradations of color and other afrocentric phenotypic features.⁵ No policy attends to harms based on skin color disparities, nor has intra-racial inequality been a major agenda item for equality advocates, overshadowed by more primary racial battles for equality and the longstanding tradition of black solidarity. In the politics of identity, large socioeconomic differences among blacks by color do not translate into different racial beliefs or strength of attachment to the racial group (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). While large socioeconomic disparities stratify by color, there is a lack of public discourse, identity politics, and policy around them.

⁵ While skin color discrimination is technically proscribed under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Court has said: “there is no basis on this record for the recognition of skin color as a presumptive discriminatory criterion” (quoting Supreme Court in Nance 2005, p. 460). One defendant in a color lawsuit, the IRS, argued that there couldn’t be discrimination because “skin color and race are essentially the same characteristic” (Nance 2005, p. 465).

In sum, three conditions characterize the politics and practice of race in the United States: (1) skin color continues to have profound effects on the lives of individuals but (2) goes largely unrecognized due to the absence of norms and a society that was organized around racial difference and yet (3) color still influences psychological perception unconsciously, leading to biases found in attitudes about blacks and behavior towards them.

With race so powerful an organizing conception, skin color is relegated to the subconscious. It is not that people do not organize and perceive skin color information; they do. Darker color has been found to be associated with heightened amygdala activity such that “Afrocentric features may be enough to produce an automatic, negative affective response toward individuals possessing this phenotype” (Ronquillo et al. 2007, p. 43). Through experimentation, psychologists have shown that “perceivers can use skin tone as organizing principles in social perception” and that the tendency for people to perceive racial outgroups as coherent and homogenous “did not mask social perceptual discrimination based on skin tone” (Maddox and Gray 2002, p. 254). While people are aware of differences between light and dark blacks and even gravitated towards the most stereotypical black faces in a cueing experiment, however, they aren’t aware of a skin color equality norm; they don’t know they are being “colorist” and therefore cannot repress those judgments. Unconscious bias around skin color is not governed by conscious norms of equality, and therefore, not subject to control. Several recent psychological studies powerfully demonstrated this lack of awareness of skin color. While subjects knew and could suppress racial stereotypes, they proved unable to do so with skin color and Afrocentric features “even when they were given explicit information about the problem” (Blair et al. 2004, p. 674). “Category-based stereotyping” can be avoided, while color cannot.

These two crosscutting factors—the importance of skin color in perceptions and actual outcomes and the absence of a strong societal norm to avoid its expression—provide the source of the motivation for this study. The first guides the study to examine whether similar color-based evaluations are expressed in politics, while the second suggests that an important form of racial bias—that involving skin color and phenotype—may be an understudied aspect of white racial attitudes, one that might be unique in its immunity from social desirability effects.

But while a long list of studies have linked cognitive perception, discriminatory behavior, and actual disadvantage to skin color, while black elected officials have been disproportionately light-skinned,⁶ and while color has been subtly displayed in

⁶ A disproportionate number of high-ranking appointments to blacks have favored the lighter of the race. In a study of black politicians since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, color had only a weak association with running for office but black candidates with lighter skin were more likely to ultimately be elected (Hochschild and Weaver 2007, p. 651). So while the VRA produced more descriptive representation for blacks, it was accompanied by the underrepresentation of darker-skinned blacks. Color-based electoral disadvantage has been more directly explored outside the United States; two economists analyzed elections in Australia (where photographs of candidates were required to appear on the ballot) and found that “the aspect of the candidate’s appearance that matters most is not beauty, but skin color” (Leigh and Susilo 2009, p. 62). In non-indigenous electorates, vote share declined significantly with darker skin for both challengers and incumbents.

at least a few contemporary campaign appeals,⁷ it has only been the subject of a single investigation in political science (Terkildsen 1993). Based on a survey experiment of 348 white voters drawn from jury pools in Louisville, Kentucky in which voters were exposed to a single candidate that varied in race and color, Terkildsen found that subjects were significantly less likely to vote for the black candidates. More specifically, after accounting for self-monitoring, subjects were significantly less likely to vote for the dark-skinned black candidate compared to the light-skinned black candidate and subjects high in race prejudice were particularly likely to give him negative ratings.

Terkildsen thus found, contrary to past case studies of black candidates, that “political aspirants who happen to be African American and possess a darker skin pigment are the victims of a triple bias—race, prejudice, and skin color” (1993, 1048). However, her study focused only on a singular candidate, exhibited extensive self-monitoring due to the presence of an interviewer, didn’t explore potentially important divisions among groups of voters, and, though it included a platform manipulation, didn’t present these results. Additionally, it remains an open question whether the findings stand up against the passage of time or in a non-southern context. I extend that early study in many ways, most notably by including more variation to explore—how skin color interacts with candidate name and ideology, how color operates when race is constant (two black candidates of varying shades in the same contest), and how it affects evaluations beyond the vote—and with improvements in experimental design—using two candidates rather than one, an anonymous computer response rather than an interviewer, and a nationally representative sample of subjects. Building on the insights of Terkildsen’s early investigation, I am able to further explore the influence of color in addition to race on voter perceptions.

While this study is primarily geared towards exploring skin color in political evaluation it also gives a timely update of the study of race in the electoral arena. The first generation of studies concerned with whether the race of candidates affects voters provided mixed evidence, often disagreeing about the extent of bias towards black candidates; some studies found that whites were much less likely to vote for a candidate if he was black, while others found that this was operating largely through a liberal stereotype, while still others found that it depended on context (Colleau et al. 1990; McDermott 1998; Terkildsen 1993; Sigelman et al. 1995; Reeves 1997; Moskowitz and Stroh 1994; Citrin et al. 1990; Strickland and Whicker 1992; Highton 2004; Jones and Clemons 1993).

⁷ While its invisibility in political discourse likely masks its role in politics, at least a few campaigns have recognized its potential to affect the subconscious evaluations of voters, including several examples of deliberate attempts at exaggerating the dark color of opponents in visual campaign material in competitive races. Skin color has also been displayed in the opposite direction—not to make one’s black opponent more menacing, but in same-race electoral contests as a symbol of upper-class roots and racial inauthenticity. Color appeals were featured prominently in several recent races, including the Newark mayoral contest between Sharpe James and Corey Booker, the election between Earl Hilliard and Artur Davis for the 7th Congressional district in Alabama, and the mayoral election in Washington, DC between Sharon Pratt Kelley and Marion Barry; in each of these contests, the first candidate made references to their opponents’ fairer skin shade in order to call into question their racial authenticity and suggest an out-of-touch bourgeoisie background, thereby discrediting their ability to relate to the “people.”

In addition to coming to discordant conclusions, our studies are also increasingly limited because race in these first generation studies was treated as invariant. Most of these studies did not examine if and in what ways evaluations of minority candidates may be mediated by their ideology, platform, or skin color and whether certain demographic groups of voters react differently to black office-seekers, which I turn to next (see Terkildsen for an exception on skin color; see Reeves for an exception on issues).

Hypotheses: The Role of Race and Skin Color and Potential Mediators

Based on the results of past studies of the negative influence of dark skin color, I expect that color will be a powerful component of candidate evaluation and electoral success, above and beyond the race of the candidate. Because race functions more negatively for darker members of the out-group in a variety of contexts, I expect light-skinned black candidates will receive more support than their dark-skinned, more afrocentric-appearing counterparts. Therefore, to the extent that white voters react differently to black candidates, these judgments will be even more pronounced for the darker-black candidate. Thus, I expect that relative to both white and light-skinned black candidates, dark-skinned black candidates will receive fewer votes; subjects will assign fewer positive leadership qualities and will perceive them as less competent at handling certain issues.

However, this race-skin color effect will itself depend on the racial context of the campaign. I expect the influence of skin color will be most pronounced in same-race electoral contests. Research has found that while people are aware of and can control racial stereotypes, they are not able to suppress stereotypic judgments made based on skin color (Dasgupta et al. 1999). When people do not recognize that they are transgressing racial norms, they are more willing to express racial hostilities and biases openly (Mendelberg 2008a, p. 111; Iyengar and Kahn 2007). Skin color is a racial cue that indirectly highlights the salience of race without appearing to; it provides racial information without triggering awareness of race consciously. Because no public norm of skin color equality exists and society is organized around racial difference, automatic bias based on skin color difference will not prompt the awareness of norm violations that may trigger its repression. Simply put, color bias is not widely acknowledged, so people will not seek to disguise it. Active stereotypes around dark complexion combined with the lack of a widely held norm against its expression mean that differences are perceived cognitively but not recognized as racial or as raising questions of equality and therefore, not processed in a way that would reduce racially based decision-making. Therefore, the risk of violating the racial equality norm is low in a black versus black election where the candidates are of the same race; the norm of racial equality does not become salient when both candidates are black because it is less apparent to voters that a racial decision is upon them. Extending this logic then, when subjects are asked to evaluate two candidates of different races, they are aware that they should not racially discriminate, while when they see two same-race candidates, they do not know they should be color-blind, even if the two candidates have different

complexions. In other words, the norm of racial equality suppresses racial voting in interracial contests but because it remains latent in intraracial conditions, the colorism mechanism in candidate evaluation is unimpeded.

Platform and Name as a Mediator of Evaluations based on Race and Color

While studies of race and candidate evaluation have found that subjects consistently stereotype black candidates as liberal (McDermott 1998; Sigelman et al. 1995), research on racial stereotyping has also found that stereotypic beliefs can be interrupted by countervailing information and conversely, amplified by stereotype-consistent information (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997). When stereotypical information is congruent (black liberal), I expect that the black candidate will suffer, but when distinct (black conservative), the black candidate will be rewarded. On the other hand, however, it is possible that subjects “ignore disconfirming evidence” of a liberal platform under the condition of information about a candidate’s race and skin color. Scholars of political psychology suggest that “belief stereotypes may then inhibit voters from processing atypical ideological or partisan information when candidates of color hold moderate or conservative political convictions” (Callaghan and Terkildsen 2002, p. 70).

In addition to candidate platform, the name of the candidate may magnify or reduce the racial cue. Studies now show that blacks and whites tend to have very distinct naming conventions (blacks have a much higher frequency of receiving certain names than whites and vice versa) and that people readily attribute certain names as belonging to blacks and whites (Fryer and Levitt 2004; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003). Relying on birth records in California, Fryer and Levitt show how substantially naming patterns differ by race: “More than half of all Blacks have names that are at least four times as likely to be given to Blacks...there are relatively few individuals carrying names that are similarly likely for Blacks and Whites” (2004, p. 776). Studies also show that distinctively black-sounding names are linked to a wide variety of negative outcomes; audit studies and field experiments have found that people with black-sounding names are much less likely to be called for a job interview (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003; King et al. 2006), much less likely to receive a response in a housing audit (Friedman et al. 2010), and much less likely to be responded to by state legislative offices in requests for help registering to vote (Butler and Broockman 2009). Black names have also been linked to lower test scores through teachers having diminished expectations of students with these names (Figlio 2005).

While candidate evaluation is a different domain than those studies, the underlying mechanism should operate similarly on judgments of political candidates. Much like physical appearance, names can also provide racial information that voters use to make assumptions about the qualities of a candidate for office. Therefore, I expect that candidates with stereotypically “white” names would receive more support and more positive trait evaluations than those with prototypical “black” names. And while no studies to my knowledge have evaluated the interaction of name and color/race, I also expect the effect of name and color/race to interact such that one would increase the salience of the other as a racial cue.

It's not that candidate color and race *depend* on the blackness of one's name; rather, I hypothesize that because names also operate as a racial cue, further triggering racialized evaluations, having a black-sounding name may amplify the effect of being black and having dark skin color on candidate judgments.

Gender and Partisan Gaps in Support for Black Candidates

In addition to hypotheses around race and skin color, I expect that the influence of race and color will vary in important ways across social groups; specifically, the race and color manipulations will elicit different reactions based on subject gender, partisanship and ideology, and racial predispositions. In studies of electoral outcomes, black candidates running for office were most likely to be supported by women, liberals, racial egalitarians, and Democrats. Extensive research has also documented partisan and gender gaps in commitment to racial equality, finding that women and liberals were more committed to racial equality norms, more concerned with the plight of disadvantaged groups, more racially egalitarian, less likely to express negative racial bias and favoritism for in-groups, more likely to understand inequality as flowing from structural factors, and more likely to instigate social change to reduce inequality (Schuman et al. 1997; Pratto et al. 1997; Jost et al. 2003; Nosek et al. 2009).

Gender was the most important predictor of explicit racially prejudiced attitudes (Kuklinski et al. 1997) and implicit preference for whites versus blacks and implicit racial stereotyping (Nosek et al. 2007). Vince Hutchings and his colleagues found that women and men respond differently to political candidates based on how racially inclusive their message is; compassion towards racial groups was most likely to be induced in women than men. The gender gap in vote choice was due entirely to evaluations of "how compassionate candidates are toward vulnerable social groups" (2004, p. 512). In that study, women were least supportive of George W. Bush when he appeared alongside a racially conservative Republican issue message but the gender gap disappeared when both candidates were racially sympathetic. Similarly, recent research has suggested that women are more likely to avoid race-based decisions and reject racial appeals than men (Hutchings et al. 2005).

Similarly, ideological differences in racial bias are pronounced. Compared to liberals, self-identified conservatives show stronger explicit and implicit favoritism for whites, white children, and light-skinned people over blacks, black children, and dark-skinned people (Nosek et al. 2009); these results were based on over two million respondents completing the IAT. Examination of the ANES also reveals that conservatism is strongly associated with self-reported negative ratings of racial groups (ibid). Like women, liberals are more likely to control racially-based preferences to accord with egalitarian principles.

Given that important differences exist by gender and partisanship/ideology in racial attitudes and bias, I expect similar differences in evaluations of candidates by race and color. Specifically, in relation to the above hypotheses around race and color, I expect that women, Democrats/liberals, and racial egalitarians will be least likely to exhibit preference for white and light-skinned candidates, while men,

Republicans/conservatives, and racially biased subjects will be most likely to punish black candidates and especially those of dark skin color.

The Study

In order to examine the role of skin color in electoral politics, I designed and conducted an Internet-based survey experiment of a nationally representative sample⁸ of 2,138 non-Hispanic white adults in September 2004⁹; the study exposed respondents to campaign advertisements that altered the race, Afrocentric appearance (including color and other features), and platform of candidates and asked subjects about their reactions to the contenders. First, subjects viewed the campaign literature of two opposing male candidates of approximately the same age “running for an important office in a neighboring state.” To control for visual candidate differences, the study used a morphing technique using photo editing software, which allows researchers to have a comparison of two candidates while carefully controlling visual stimuli (see Supplemental Material for a detailed description of how images were produced).

The campaign ads give the candidates opposing stances on five issues—economic growth, health care, education, public safety, and the environment¹⁰—such that one candidate supports a more conservative platform while the other candidate supports a more liberal platform across the five issues.¹¹ The candidates also had a randomized name assignment, one having a more Anglo-sounding name

⁸ The Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) administers a random internet sample, which is currently gathered through Knowledge Networks, a company that specializes in providing representative samples that are interviewed via WebTV. From the TESS website www.experimentcentral.org: “To achieve a representative sample, Knowledge Networks ... uses a random RDD sample. When a person agrees to participate, they are provided with free Internet access (via WebTV) and are given the necessary hardware for as long as they remain in the sample. Most research to date comparing this kind of sample with telephone RDD samples suggest they are equally representative, and some suggest that the data obtained via WebTV/internet are somewhat more reliable than what is obtained by phone.”

⁹ I am very interested in whether and how respondents of different races and ethnicities respond to candidate skin color, and whether they follow the same pattern as whites. By restricting the study to non-Hispanic white respondents, the author does not mean to imply that the race and skin color of political candidates does not influence evaluations for black and Latino voters. To make an analysis of minority reactions feasible across a 16 cell design, however, required a very large oversample of Blacks and Latinos, which I was not able to obtain.

¹⁰ Candidate issue stances were modified versions of real candidate positions taken from campaign websites. Candidate platforms available upon request (Supplementary Material).

¹¹ The candidates are purposefully not given an explicit party label, Democrat or Republican, for two major reasons. First, this label will mean different things in different regions, such that using a conservative/liberal platform dichotomy is more informative and easier to analyze. Second, prior studies have also avoided party labels because of their potential to “swamp” the results and given the fact that most real-world candidates do not explicitly mention their party on campaign ads (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005). The conservative/liberal platform manipulation was effective. On average respondents did perceive a difference in the candidate platforms; on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being “extremely liberal” and 7 being “extremely conservative” the liberal candidate received an average rating that falls on the liberal side of the scale (3.5) and the conservative candidate received an average score more towards the conservative side of the scale (4.4).

(“Tom Sheldon”), while his opponent had a name more closely associated with blacks (“Martin Turner”). Manipulation checks, presented in the Supplemental Material, strongly suggest that subjects correctly perceived the candidates’ race, color, platform, and name with one important exception; subjects saw a small but statistically significant difference in color between the white candidates, when there should have been none. This design defect is discussed later.

In Study 1, respondents viewed one of these three campaigns, through random assignment: White1 vs. White2; White1 vs. Light skinned Black¹²; White1 vs. Dark skinned Black. In Study 2, subjects are exposed to two candidates that vary on platform and name as in Study 1. However, subjects in this condition were exposed to a contest between a Light skinned Black with a less afrocentric appearance and a Dark skinned Black with more afrocentric features. Along with a randomized platform and name, there were a total of 16 possible versions of the experimental stimuli ($4 \times 2 \times 2$) (Table 1). For simplicity, I refer to this manipulation as “color” and to the black candidates as light- or dark-skinned in the remainder of the text, even while the manipulation also includes variation in phenotypically black facial features.

After reading the campaign literature, participants answered a battery of pretested questions, including a thermometer rating of favorability, queries on how strong each candidate is on various issues (crime, health care, economy, disadvantaged), items tapping into political stereotypes (which candidate is more experienced, hardworking, intelligent, trustworthy), and perceived ideology of the candidates.¹³ Ultimately, subjects voted for their favored candidate on a simulated ballot. The survey also included a standard racial predispositions question later in the module to test whether racial affect influences reactions to minority candidates.¹⁴ The racial affect measure shows great variation; 40% of the sample rated whites more favorably than blacks (pro-white), 47% of subjects showed no difference, and 13% had a pro-black orientation. Compared to the ANES of the same year, a much larger proportion of subjects had a pro-white affect; in that study where an interviewer is present, only 28% of respondents rated whites more favorably than blacks. Knowledge Networks provided information on respondent partisanship, ideology, and socioeconomic and demographic background. In this paper, the focus of the discussion will be on how race and color affected the vote, perceptions of the candidate’s ideology and political traits, and differences across different categories of voters in perceptions.

This study makes several improvements to studies of racially inflected voting and the lone study that began to unearth the role of skin color in political life (Terkildsen 1993). In contrast to past studies that relied on convenience samples, it contains a

¹² It is possible that subjects see the light-skinned black candidate as biracial, racially ambiguous, or “less black” than the dark-skinned black. However, the manipulation check demonstrates that there is widespread agreement that the light-skinned candidate is black.

¹³ The questions were carefully designed and pretested in two pilot studies. Where possible, these questions are directly taken from, or closely resemble, survey items in the American National Election Studies (ANES). Survey questionnaire available upon request (Supplementary Material).

¹⁴ The racial predisposition question is asked separately and later in the survey module so as not to prime subjects or clue them into the nature of the study (Mendelberg 2008b).

nationally representative sample, allowing us to make generalizations and analyze the demographic profile of the “voter.” The design includes candidate positions on campaign literature, candidate names, as well as a comparison of *two* candidates, which enables an exploration of interactions (e.g., how skin color affects the perception of minority candidates with counter-stereotypical stances). Finally, by using an anonymous computer response, it dampens the social desirability effects associated with social survey items that directly ask respondents to reveal their racial beliefs. The privacy and anonymity of the research context don’t require that respondents report racial feelings to an interviewer, which should diminish misreporting, non-response, and neutralize race of interviewer effects. In contrast to previous studies of racialized voting, the study presents racial information in a visual field rather than a textual label (Reeves 1997; McDermott 1998).

Results

The first study explores the role of race and color in an interracial context. Specifically, the findings reveal whether and how the race and skin color manipulation influenced subjects’ perceptions of political traits, issue strengths, and vote choice, how candidate name and platform interacted with color and race, and whether the effects varied by white subpopulations. The second study examines the impact of skin color separately from racial difference by seeing how subjects’ reacted to candidate skin color in a contest between two black candidates of different shades.

Study 1

Main Effects

The first study involved three experimental groups. In every experimental group, subjects saw candidate White1. However, the candidate that opposed White1 varied as such: (1) a white opponent (called White2); (2) a light-skinned black opponent; or (3) a dark-skinned black opponent. For the purposes of the discussion of the results and graphics, the “opponent” is always the white opponent in the control, the light-skinned black opponent in the second subject group, and the dark-skinned black opponent in the last treatment group.

Contrary to my expectations, there was no main effect of candidate race or skin color on vote choice. The first column of Table 2 displays the results of a logistic regression where the dependent variable is vote choice (1 = vote for White1 candidate; 0 = vote for opponent), controlling for differences in respondent gender, partisanship, political ideology, region, urbanicity, age, income, and education.¹⁵ The model also controls for the name of the opponent (0 = Tom Sheldon; 1 = Martin Turner), his platform (0 = Conservative; 1 = Liberal), and the perceived

¹⁵ Models have been tested with and without controls included; results do not depend on the inclusion of controls. Results without control variables are available from the author.

ideology difference¹⁶ between the two candidates. The model pools the subjects and includes dummy variables for each treatment (where the omitted subject group is the control group that viewed a contest between two white candidates). The results in Table 2 reveal that being exposed to a contest with a light-skinned or dark-skinned black opponent did not significantly affect the likelihood of voting for the opponent *in the aggregate*. Somewhat surprisingly, as the non-significant results in the second column of the table indicate, varying the race and color of the opponent did not influence subject's perception of his conservatism/liberalism relative to the control, nor did they influence perceptions of which candidate would be better in office handling crime and health. Finally, in models not presented here, I found no interaction effect between race/color and the name or platform of the candidate on vote choice or trait assignment, contrary to the hypothesis that a counterstereotypical (conservative) platform and Anglo-sounding name (Tom Sheldon) would increase the favorability of the black or dark-skinned opponent. Otherwise stated, being exposed to an opponent named Martin Turner running on a liberal set of issues did not heighten the sensitivity of subjects to the race or color of the candidate as initially expected.

While seemingly irrelevant to vote choice and perceived ideology, race and skin color had a large effect on white subjects' perceptions of the political qualities of the opponent. I anticipated that if race and color bias plays a role, subjects exposed to a black opponent would be less likely to assign the four positive traits to him and that this difference would be especially pronounced for a black opponent with dark skin, liberal platform, and black-sounding name. While skin color and race clearly influenced white subjects' trait evaluations, the effect was more complex than initially hypothesized (I anticipated a decline across all four traits in conditions with a black opponent and a particularly large difference for darker skin).

The last four columns of Table 2 display the results of logistic regressions where the dependent variable is a political trait, or more specifically, subjects' evaluations of which candidate was more experienced, intelligent, hardworking, and trustworthy (1 = White1 is more; 0 = Opponent is more), including the same set of controls. Being exposed to a black opponent significantly reduced the likelihood of saying that the opponent was the more experienced candidate; similarly, but only for the light-skinned black, subjects were less likely to rate the black opponent as more intelligent (though this result didn't reach significance). However, in a clear reversal of these results, subjects were significantly more likely to report that the black opponent was more hardworking and trustworthy, relative to the control condition. So while the evaluation of the white opponent was relatively consistent across traits, evaluations of the same opponent when black exhibit a praise/punish dualism, such

¹⁶ This measure is constructed as the difference between the ideological score subjects gave the candidate and the opponent on a standard 7-point ideology item. The measure goes from -6 to 6, such that a negative number indicates the subject rated the White1 candidate as more conservative and a positive number indicates they rated the opponent as more conservative; 0 = no difference.

Table 1 Experimental design

Candidate	Opponent	Platform Manipulation	Name
White1	White2	Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
White1	Light-skinned Black	Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
White1	Dark-skinned Black	Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
Light-skinned Black	Dark-skinned Black	Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Conservative, Opponent is Liberal	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Tom Sheldon, Opponent is Martin Turner
		Candidate is Liberal, Opponent is Conservative	Candidate is Martin Turner, Opponent is Tom Sheldon

that *black opponents were rated significantly less positively on experience but significantly more positively on work ethic and trustworthiness.*¹⁷

The differences in trait evaluation are not only statistically significant but large in size. Using CLARIFY to convert the logistic coefficients into meaningful statistics, Fig. 1 displays the predicted probability of evaluating the opponent as more favorable across the four characteristics for each subject group (King et al. 2000; Tomz et al. 2001). In the control condition, the predicted probability of evaluating the opponent as more experienced, intelligent, hardworking, and trustworthy is

¹⁷ Subjects were not significantly more likely to rate the dark-skinned black candidate as more hardworking or trustworthy when the light-skinned black condition was the baseline. Subjects were significantly less likely to rate the light-skinned black as intelligent and experienced compared to both the control and when the dark-skinned black was the baseline comparison group.

Table 2 Does opponent race and color affect white subjects' perceptions of his positive traits, issue strengths, ideology, and vote choice?

	Candidate is more...				Candidate will be better in office on...					
	Vote	Ideology	Experienced	Intelligent	Hardworking	Trustworthy	Economy	Health	Crime	Aiding disadvantaged
Light-skinned Black	0.130 (0.138)	0.001 (0.139)	0.614 (0.150)**	0.299 (0.148)	-0.337 (0.144)*	-0.131 (0.143)	-0.259 (0.118)*	0.196 (0.118)	0.173 (0.119)	-0.0703 (0.119)
Dark-skinned Black	-0.189 (0.135)	0.104 (0.138)	0.432 (0.148)**	-0.164 (0.147)	-0.517 (0.144)**	-0.323 (0.144)*	0.211 (0.118)	0.0551 (0.118)	0.130 (0.119)	0.407 (0.120)***
Opponent = Liberal	0.130 (0.061)*	0.922 (0.057)***	0.290 (0.062)**	0.230 (0.060)**	0.119 (0.059)*	0.112 (0.059)	-0.179 (0.048)***	0.0282 (.048)	-0.398 (0.050)***	0.301 (0.049)***
Opponent Name = Martin Turner	0.101 (0.056)	0.006 (0.057)	0.151 (0.062)*	0.167 (0.061)**	0.074 (0.059)	0.125 (0.059)*	0.0246 (0.048)	-0.0263 (.048)	0.0370 (0.0483)	0.0220 (0.049)
Observations	1339	1377	1204	1192	1200	1205	1456	1454	1456	1455
R-squared										

Issue strength is based on ordered logit (1 = White1 will be much better in office to 5 = Opponent will be much better in office on the issue)

Results for dichotomous variables vote and traits are based on logistic regression; OLS regression is used for perceived ideology and issue strengths. Models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates. Traits and vote choice are dichotomous variables: 0 (Opponent is more of the relevant trait or vote for opponent) to 1 (White1 is more of the relevant trait or vote for White1). Significance levels are compared to the control condition (White1 × White2). Standard errors in *parentheses* and *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, *bolded* $p \leq 0.10$

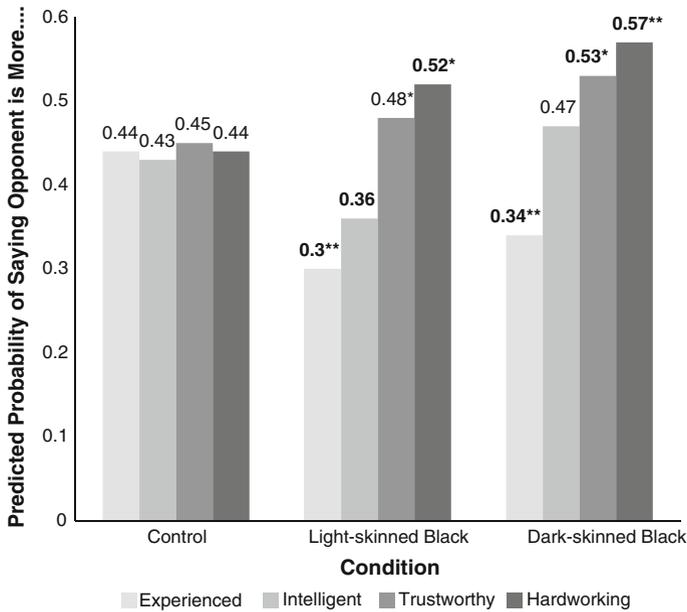


Fig. 1 What is the probability of assigning positive traits to the opponent given his race and color? Predicted probabilities derived from logistic regressions. Full models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates. Results that are statistically significant are noted with asterisks. Significance levels are compared to control. *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ $p < 0.1$ in *bold*

roughly equivalent across the four traits. In contrast to the control condition, a wide gap opens up in evaluations of the opponent when he was a light-skinned or dark-skinned black; there is over a twenty point difference in the likelihood of describing the black opponent as experienced versus hardworking in both treatment groups (compared to no difference in the control). Specifically, the likelihood of rating the opponent as more experienced decreased by 14 and 9 percentage points when the opponent was a light-skinned or dark-skinned black, respectively, holding all other factors in the model at their means. While falling short of being statistically significant ($p = 0.07$), the likelihood of rating the opponent as more intelligent fell by 7 percentage points when he was a light-skinned black. In contrast, the likelihood of rating the opponent as more trustworthy and hardworking *increased* when the opponent was a light-skinned black (by 4 and 8 points) and especially when the black candidate had dark skin (by 8 and 13 points).¹⁸ Stated differently, a black opponent entering the contest led white subjects to believe his white counterpart was more experienced, but not as hardworking or trustworthy.

¹⁸ While these differences are statistically significant compared to the control, results for the dark-skinned black are not statistically significant when the light-skinned black condition is the baseline (except for intelligent).

There are two potential interpretations for these surprising results. First, perhaps when evaluating black opponents, respondents were careful to allow positive evaluations to accompany negative beliefs about the candidate. In other words, the presence of multiple trait questions allows respondents to circumvent appearing racially inegalitarian by permitting them to also praise the black candidate who they just said was less experienced, thereby giving rise to the praise/punish dynamic in the conditions with a black candidate. This impression management interpretation is indeed consistent with another source of evidence of self-monitoring; the proportion of respondents who refused to respond to these questions was significantly higher in the experimental conditions with a black candidate, and especially so when the candidate was dark-skinned (by 3–4 percentage points).

The second explanation for the asymmetrical trait attributions in the black candidate conditions compared to the control is that the results may be reflecting racially influenced assumptions about the candidate's background. According to this logic, respondents understand that blacks face socioeconomic inequality and other disadvantages; a black candidate for a high political office in a relatively low information context might be assumed to have overcome formidable barriers and therefore possess less actual experience in office given their unequal opportunity, leading subjects to simultaneously assume the black candidate is not as experienced as their white opponent but has a better work ethic (i.e., "he must have worked hard to get where he's at"). Both interpretations are consistent with the evidence and indeed, both may be operating simultaneously; future studies might explore the mechanisms driving the asymmetric trait attribution. Regardless of which explanation is predominant, there is a sharp divergence in evaluations of the opposing candidate in experimental conditions in which the only difference was race and skin color and in an electoral contest that provided no direct information on these candidate qualities. Race exerted a powerful and independent influence in political evaluation.

However, the evidence for the additional influence of skin color is somewhat mixed in these results. While the trait differentials were larger for the dark-skinned black condition on two of the four trait items, they were not statistically different from the light-skinned black condition. In addition, the light-skinned black opponent reduced the likelihood that subjects would rate him as more intelligent, an effect that was statistically different from the dark-skinned black condition.

In addition, skin color and race only influenced perceptions of who would be better in office for two of four issue areas; subjects were less likely to believe the light-skinned black candidate would be better on economy and more likely to believe the dark-skinned black opponent would be better in office at aiding the disadvantaged.

Are the Effects of Race and Color More Pronounced Among some Voters?

While there was no main effect of race or color on vote choice, there is a wide gender, ideological, and racial gap in the effects of the treatment. Across subgroups of voters, race and color exert a strong and independent influence. The direction of that influence varied based on the demographic and ideological identity of the voter

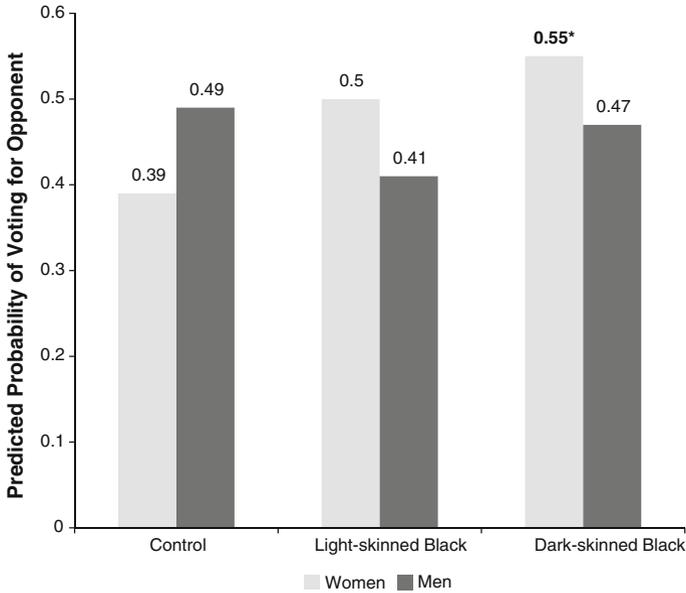


Fig. 2 What is the probability of voting for the opponent given his race and color by gender? Predicted probabilities of voting for the opponent derived from logistic regression. Models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates. Significance levels are compared to control. *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ $p < 0.1$ in *bold*

in theoretically anticipated ways. On several dimensions of candidate evaluation, *women diverged from men and liberals diverged from conservatives in their reaction to the race and color of the opponent*. Thus, the absence of a main effect of the manipulations on voting is in large part an artifact of strong effects on voters in opposite directions that are averaged out in the aggregate vote choice, masking large, but asymmetric, effects of race and color on candidate evaluation.

Figures 2 and 3 present the result of logistic regression models where the dependent variable is vote choice. This time, the models are run separately by ideology¹⁹ and gender controlling for the background factors as before to ensure that differences in the distribution of voters across experimental groups aren't driving differences in the outcomes of interest.²⁰

Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of voting for the opponent in each condition for men and women separately. For women, the probability of voting for the white opponent in the control condition is 0.39 holding other factors in the

¹⁹ The ideology measure was the traditional 7-point item from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. This was further collapsed so that respondents on the conservative side of the scale were coded as 1, moderates as 0, and liberals as -1. I have run the analysis using both versions of this measure and the results do not depend on whether the collapsed or original measure is used.

²⁰ Interactions by age, region, urbanicity, education, and income did not have a clear or significant impact. Following Kuklinski and his colleagues, I examined an interaction for southern men and for respondents born before 1960 but there was no effect (1997).

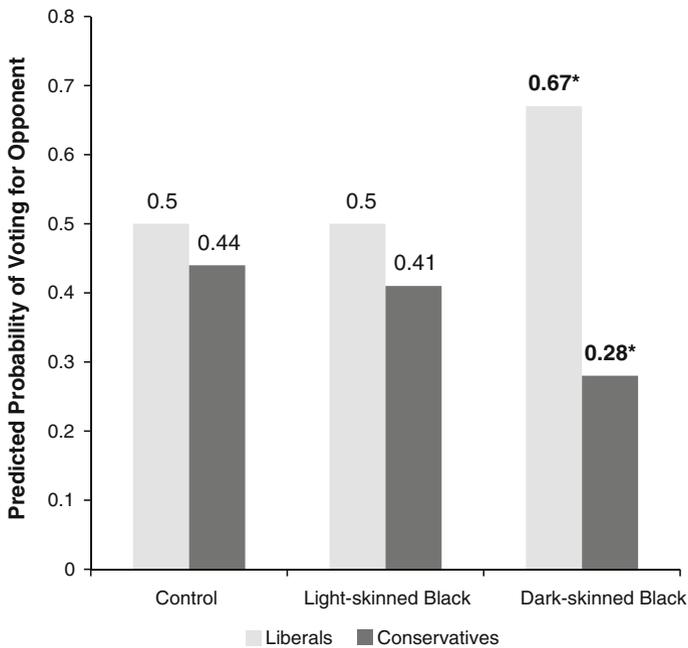


Fig. 3 What is the probability of voting for the opponent given his race and color by ideology? Predicted probabilities of voting for the opponent derived from logistic regression. Models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates. Significance levels are compared to control. *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ $p < 0.1$ in *bold*

regression model at their means²¹; when the opponent is a dark-skinned black, however, the probability of voting for him rises to 0.55 for women (the result is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level both when the comparison group is the control and the light-skinned black condition). This strong, positive bias among women is only evident for the black candidate when he has dark skin; while women were slightly more likely to vote for the light-skinned black opponent, this difference did not reach statistical significance. Figure 3 portrays the predicted probability of voting for the opponent in each condition for self-identified liberals and conservatives separately holding other factors constant at their means.²² Among liberals, while the probability of voting for the opponent in the control and light-skinned treatment was about 0.5, this probability increases dramatically to 0.67 when the opponent is a dark-skinned black (compared to the control, $p = 0.05$; compared to the light-skinned black condition, $p = 0.003$). In contrast, among conservatives, the predicted probability of voting for the opponent declined substantially from 0.44

²¹ For reasons unknown, women are more likely to support White2 in the control condition than men.

²² The same basic results obtain if I use party identification instead of political ideology. Republicans, like conservatives, are significantly less likely to vote for the dark-skinned black opponent. Though partisanship and ideology are not the same, I report results for ideology with the caveat that the same pattern of results obtains for partisanship.

in the control condition to a meager 0.28 when the opponent was a dark-skinned black.

There is an important pattern in these results. The effects of the light-skinned black treatment were not significant for conservatives and just missed significance for women. Thus, race only magnified or lessened support for these groups of voters when the black opponent was dark-skinned. Conservative voters were less inclined to cast their vote for the black opponent but only when he was dark-skinned; likewise, the black opponent was advantaged among women and liberals, but only when he had dark-skin. Thus, whether race had an influence on candidate perceptions depended on skin color.

As with voting, skin color also shaped evaluations of the opponent's political traits, for different groups of voters in similarly asymmetric ways. In models with the four traits as dependent variables, I examined the likelihood of assigning the trait to the opponent among women and men and liberals and conservatives separately (after controlling for several factors).²³ Subjects rated both black opponents as significantly less experienced, regardless of gender or ideology (all results significant at the $p > 0.05$ level). As Fig. 4 shows, women and self-identified liberals were much more likely to rate both the light- and dark-skinned black opponents as more hard-working and more trustworthy compared to the control (these results are all significant when compared to the control but differences for the dark-skinned black condition are insignificant when the comparison group is the light-skinned black opponent). Women and liberals were also significantly more likely to believe the dark-skinned black opponent would do better in office aiding the disadvantaged (significant compared to both control and light-skinned black condition).

There are two important findings. First, I find a strong and significant positive bias towards blacks and dark skin among women and self-identified liberals and a strong and negative race and color bias among conservatives. The direction of color and race bias thus is a function of *who* is evaluating. Second, the importance of race turned on skin color. The negative or positive effect of race was largely confined to the dark-skinned black opponent; positive bias among women and liberals or negative bias among conservatives was not as strong for the black opponent when his skin color was light. As I hypothesized, black candidates, when they have light skin color, are relatively immune from the negative (or positive) effects of race.

Is Differential Support for the Dark-Skinned Black Candidate Driven by Racial Prejudice or Ideology?

What explains the reduced support among conservatives and racially biased and amplified support among liberals and women? The liberalism of the opponent's platform does not. Nor does the *perceived* liberalism of the opponent. Nor do other background differences across conditions explain the result. If subjects use race as a proxy for liberalism and vote accordingly, the perceived difference should show up

²³ For space considerations, these separate models are not reported. Full tables are available by request.

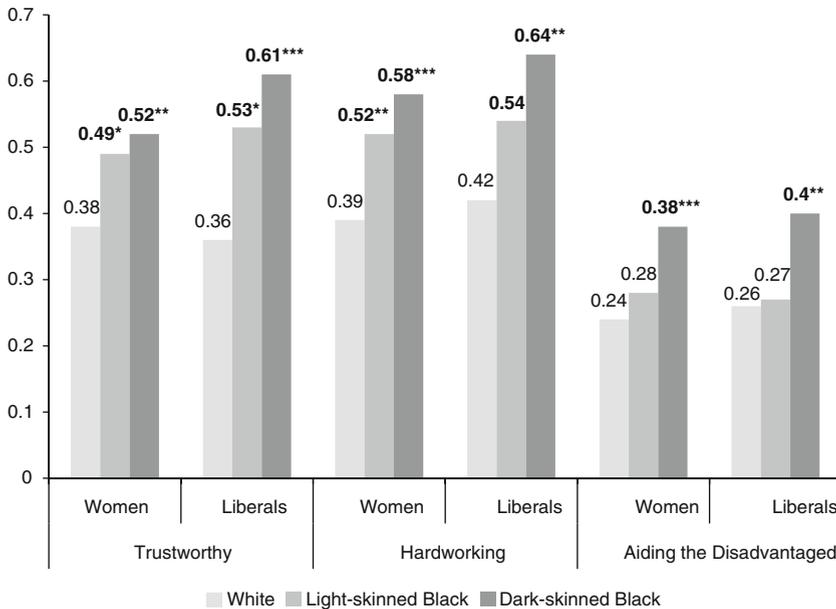


Fig. 4 What is the probability of assigning positive traits and issue strengths to the opponent given his race and color, among women and liberals? Predicted probabilities of assigned Traits derived from logistic regression. Models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates. Significance levels are compared to control. *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ $p < 0.1$ in *bold*

in the ideological rating; subjects exposed to a black opponent should rate him as more liberal, relative to the white opponent in the control. The OLS regression model in Table 2 shows that the race and color of opponents did not influence subjects’ evaluations of his ideological placement differently from the control. In models not shown for space consideration, the interaction between the opponent’s platform and the treatment group did not have a significant effect on perceptions of liberalism; in other words, subjects were no more likely to rate a black liberal opponent as more liberal than the control or a black conservative opponent as less conservative than the equivalent white opponent. Additionally, all of the regression models control for the perceived ideological difference between candidates; in other words, differences in voting across the conditions persisted even after accounting for how liberal subjects believe the candidates to be.

Assigning the opponent to the more conservative platform enables a further test. If a liberal stereotype of black candidates (and darker blacks in particular) is driving the differences in vote support for women and conservatives, then it follows that when given countervailing information about the candidate’s ideology—namely, a conservative platform—racialized voting along gender and ideological lines should diminish. The results in Fig. 5 suggest that counter-stereotypical information—a black opponent running on a conservative platform—does little to attenuate the effect of race and color. The tendency for support to diminish among conservatives

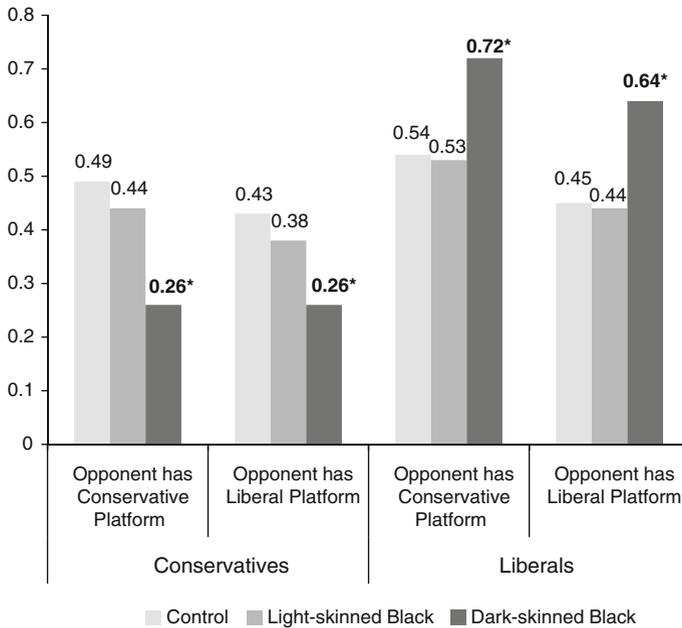


Fig. 5 Do race and color affect vote choice of liberals and conservatives differently? Predicted probabilities of voting for the opponent derived from logistic regression. Models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates. Significance levels are compared to control. *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ $p < 0.1$ in bold

and to increase among liberals and women when the opponent was black—and even more so when the opponent was black and dark-skinned—does not appear to be due to subjects using race/color as a stand-in for political ideology of the candidate.

Specifically, Fig. 5 charts the predicted probability of voting for the opponent among conservative and liberal voters in the three conditions, assigning the opponent to a liberal or conservative platform. Among self-identified conservative subjects, the conservative light-skinned black opponent does slightly worse than the conservative white opponent (though this does not reach significance), and the dark-skinned black conservative opponent receives significantly fewer votes relative to both the control and the light-skinned black conditions. Even when the dark-skinned black was conservative, conservative whites were still 24 percentage points less likely to vote for him. The same pattern obtains when the opponent has a liberal platform: black liberals do significantly worse and the effect of race is exacerbated further by dark skin color. Conservative subjects are less likely to vote for a black candidate; but importantly, skin color had the power to exacerbate this tendency—being black and having a dark complexion diminished the probability of voting for the opponent by 22 percentage points compared to the control (regardless of platform). Among conservatives, black opponents lose support, even when they have conservative platforms, and having darker hue magnifies the race penalty.

Conversely, liberal-identifiers were significantly more likely to vote for the dark-skinned black opponent (but not the light-skinned black), and this increase occurred regardless of which platform—liberal or conservative—the opponent had. The probability of voting for the dark-skinned black opponent increased almost 20 percentage points among liberals (and was significantly different from both the control and when the light-skinned black condition was the baseline).

If women, liberals, and conservatives are not using race as a shortcut for ideology, then what explains why the former would be more likely to favor the black opponent and the latter less likely? As anticipated from the findings of less racial bias and greater sensitivity to avoiding negative racial appeals among women in past studies, women were not as likely to oppose the black candidate. But in a surprising set of results, this study shows that *not only were women less negatively biased towards black candidates, but they actually showed positive bias towards the dark-skinned black*, disproportionately casting their vote for him and saying he was the more hardworking and trustworthy candidate. In fact, without female subjects, the dark-skinned black opponent would almost never win the contest.

Three explanations are plausible. First, women are more likely to vote for the black opponent because they are better at camouflaging perceptions based on race. Liberals and women may have been more likely to consciously resist bias against the black candidate in line with the past research cited earlier which shows that women hold more discrepant explicit and implicit attitudes, are more likely to give egalitarian explicit responses, and have a stronger motivation to avoid bias. While this may be a good reason, other evidence is inconsistent. There is no interviewer present in the study; therefore, there is no incentive to perform consistent with socially desirable behavior. But let's say women still wanted their behavior to match norms of racial equality. Women were almost just as likely as men to express anti-black affect on the racial feeling thermometer; 38% of women, compared to 41% of men, were pro-white on this measure. It seems unlikely then that women would be simultaneously willing to express negative racial sentiments on one measure but not the other.

Second, perhaps the greater likelihood of voting for the black opponent is due to women's more positive view of blacks generally. This explanation, while intuitive, still comes up short. Even after taking into account the very slight differences in racial affect between the sexes, women were still significantly more likely than men to vote for the dark-skinned black candidate (models available from author). What is possible and does appear to be true is that negative racial affect was less determinative of the vote for women than men; in results not shown here, racial affect did not have a significant effect on voting among women, but did among men. Therefore, it seems possible that women, while almost as likely to express negative racial affect towards blacks, are less likely to have that predisposition affect their vote. This explanation deserves further testing.

A further possibility is that race and color are shortcuts that subjects used to form perceptions of other candidate qualities. Women were more likely to rate the black opponent as hardworking and expected him to be better in office at helping the disadvantaged (results available from author). Perhaps women weight these qualities as more desirable and vote accordingly. Indeed, when the perception of

which candidate would be better in office on aiding the disadvantaged is included in the model, the gender interaction no longer has a significant influence on vote choice. Thus, perhaps race and color are operating as a signal for female and liberal voters about another dimension of candidate political orientation—not a liberal/conservative ideological dimension but a compassionate/non-compassionate dimension. This possibility is speculative in absence of further tests but warrants future investigation.

Similarly, conservatives remain more likely to oppose black candidates even after accounting for perceived ideology and racial affect. Controlling for racial affect lessens, but does not eliminate, the effect of race and color on vote choice of self-identified conservatives. This result is surprising because it means that something other than racial affect is the mechanism. In other words, if conservatives are more opposed to the black opponents because they are prejudiced, then controlling for racial affect should make the effects diminish or disappear altogether. There are two reasons for this result. First, racial affect is an imperfect measure of underlying racial attitudes. Specifically, the racial affect item does not measure *implicit racial bias*. Therefore, the feeling thermometer measure may not have totally captured racial bias. Second, perhaps even apart from negative racial affect and ideology, race and color provide additional information to voters about candidate qualities. It could be the case that conservatives stereotype black candidates as less likely to pursue issues they deem important, less aligned with their values, or they are simply more likely to see white candidates as familiar representatives; these aspects of candidate evaluation may not be captured by the affect a person feels towards ordinary blacks. These may indeed be correlated with racial affect, but not totally encompassed by it.

So far, there is a good deal of evidence that evaluations are more pronounced for darker-skinned blacks. The results also suggest that in many cases, voters are not more or less likely to support light-skinned black candidates compared to whites. Perhaps the reason for these weak results is that light-skinned blacks are not readily identified as black. This possibility is not supported by the data, however; in a manipulation check, over 90% of respondents clearly identified him as black. However, an important caveat deserves mention that limits the interpretation of the absence of an effect of color on voting in the light-skinned black condition and the interpretation of the size of the effect of being black and dark. As previously stated, in a manipulation check, subjects not only perceived a difference in color between the light- and dark-skinned black candidates but between the two white candidates in the control. Subjects rated the opponent in this condition (White2) as slightly darker in skin tone than White1. Interestingly, White2 receives fewer votes and fewer positive trait evaluations than White1. In other words, evaluations were uneven in the control condition and the manipulation check suggests that this may have been due to perceived skin color differences between the candidates in the control condition; thus, comparing the light- and dark-skinned treatments to this condition may understate differences given that the slightly darker white2 candidate elicited less support. This unforeseen design flaw could limit the ability to detect an effect of being treated to a light-skinned black candidate. Thus, one cannot dismiss the possibility that the light-skinned black candidate would have received less

support relative to the control candidate if that control candidate had been equally matched in color to his opponent.

Study 2

This analysis has so far shown an important influence of race and color on candidate perceptions, one that interacts with voter demographics. However, on a few measures the darker black candidate elicited more positive evaluations. In the end, the results suggest two contradictory interpretations: (1) that voters actually favored the darker of the black candidates; (2) that this favoritism was due to the fact that subjects were more aware of race in this condition and thus faced greater incentives to manage their impressions. Therefore, this analysis turns to a fourth condition, a contest between a light-skinned black candidate and dark-skinned black opponent. In this condition, race is not made salient because it is an *intraracial* contest, allowing racial messages (skin color) to operate without being inhibited. While this condition is not very realistic—indeed, there are few black vs. black races in a primarily white electorate—it allows an unobtrusive racial cue that is less likely to be identified by subjects. Because this condition is non-racial in that it omits the conscious racial cue (black vs. white contest), it reduces the costs of revealing true perceptions; subjects should be equally sensitive to a skin color cue but less aware of it compared to a racial cue, per the earlier discussion. In this condition, subjects can express support for either candidate and would be supporting a black in either case, while remaining unaware that they are making a preference by color. By removing an important motivation to self-monitor, this treatment will give critical clues to political evaluations absent self-regulation desires.

To examine the effect of color in this condition, I estimated logit and ordinary least squares regression models for the subject group exposed to the race between a light-skinned black and dark-skinned black. The key explanatory variable is *Skin Color* (coded as 1 for the lighter-skinned black and 0 for the darker-skinned black). The models also include a variable to account for the platform of the opponent (1 = Conservative; 0 = Liberal) as well as the standard demographic and partisanship controls as in previous models. The results of the regressions in Table 3 suggest that lighter skin had a strong positive effect on likelihood of voting for the candidate. In addition, light skin increased the likelihood of saying he was more intelligent, experienced, and trustworthy in a contest against a dark-skinned black. In other words, *subjects showed a strong tendency to assign positive attributes to the light-skinned black over his darker-skinned counterpart*. There was only one exception to this general pattern: light skin did not increase the perception that the candidate was more hardworking than his opponent.

Unlike the earlier results that showed favoritism for the black opponent among liberals and women, *there is a clear favoritism for the light-skinned black candidate when race is controlled, regardless of platform, gender, and partisanship*. In addition, this favoritism was just as pronounced for those who expressed positive affect towards blacks; among those with a pro-black affect, voting for the opponent declined from 59.6 to 38.9 when he was dark-skinned ($p = 0.023$). Thus, when subjects were not made aware of categorical racial difference and had no motivation

Table 3 Regression results for light-skinned black vs. dark-skinned black condition

	Relative Favorability of Opponent	Vote for Opponent	Opponent is More Experienced	Opponent is More Intelligent	Opponent is More Hardworking	Opponent is More Trustworthy
Skin color (opponent is light-skinned)	0.161 (0.0843)*	0.225 (0.0990)**	0.356 (0.105)***	0.364 (0.108)***	0.000526 (0.104)	0.206 (0.107)*
Platform (opponent is conservative)	0.252 (0.0838)***	0.107 (0.0986)	0.273 (0.104)***	0.257 (0.107)**	0.00860 (0.103)	0.177 (0.107)*
N	475	456	401	400	397	387
R-squared	0.034					

The model with dependent variable Relative Favorability Rating is based on OLS Regression. Remaining models are based on ordered logit regression. All models control for name and platform of candidate, and age, income, education, region, urbanicity, gender, party identification, ideology of the respondent and perceived ideology difference between the candidates Standard errors in *parentheses*. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, *bolded* $p \leq 0.10$

to be racially neutral, they responded with favoritism for the lighter of the black candidates. The findings here suggest that some of the favoritism for the black candidate found in the interracial contest among women and liberals does not hold up once categorical racial difference is removed. Liberals and women were just as likely to prefer a fairer black candidate over a dark-skinned opponent in contests between two black candidates. Like studies in sociology, economics, and psychology, this survey experiment suggests that the advantages that accrue to blacks of lighter skin are also evident in the electoral arena.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest two primary conclusions and implications for the study of race and electoral politics. First, race matters, but in different directions. In the 2008 election, scores of news accounts focused on the question of whether Obama’s race would be a barrier, a boost, or simply wouldn’t matter one way or another. This study suggests that both interpretations may be appropriate. In the aggregate, it may not have an impact; for women and liberals, being a black candidate may be a significant advantage, while for conservatives, it may significantly diminish vote support. This analysis also amends studies of race in electoral evaluation. Unlike the design of past studies which did not allow for investigation in how partisans differ from nonpartisans, southerners from non-southerners, women from men, I find that the size and direction of the effect of race and skin color depends on the gender and ideological orientation of the “voter.” Importantly, these subgroup differences pulled in such different directions that there was no effect of race and color *on average*. For some groups of voters, not only was the assumed reluctance to support a black candidate not found, but favoritism for the

out-group candidate was expressed. Further analysis is needed to understand the precise mechanisms behind the greater support of women and liberals and conversely, the lessened support among conservatives (even when the black opponent was running on a conservative platform). In addition, platform lessened, but didn't totally eliminate, the effect of race/color on vote choice and trait attribution. This finding calls into question the notion that conservatives and Republicans oppose black candidates and race-related policies on "principled," not racial grounds (Sniderman and Carmines 1997).

Second, this analysis has suggested the continuing importance of race-based evaluations, but also suggests an important addition, namely that these evaluations are not only associated with our traditional racial divide. Categorical stereotyping, the subject of most research on racial attitudes and race of candidate effects, misses much of the bias in electoral politics. Our psychological perceptions may be even more racialized than previously understood. Racial bias—positive or negative—may depend as much on color and phenotype as it does on categorical racial difference.

Color in this study had a large, unambiguous effect that was independent of race. The magnitude of the effect of race on candidate evaluation depended primarily on color. With few exceptions, darker skin magnified the effect of race, exacerbated stereotypical beliefs about candidates, and made certain categories of voters more or less likely to support the candidate. Light-skinned black candidates were more immune from race effects in both directions (bias for and against). Like race and gender cues in electoral politics, skin color also operated as a shortcut in candidate evaluation. Sensitivity to skin color was especially likely when subjects were not aware of differences based on racial categories. In the situation of a same-race election between black candidates, the effect of darker color was consistently associated with negative reactions. Candidates who shared the same race were nevertheless treated and evaluated quite differently. Future studies might build on this research by evaluating the impact of color for minority voters.

Historical norms and legal precedents that evolved to treat blacks as all of a group and ignore internal variation by mixed ancestry and color prescribed the understanding and practice of race in ways that meant that color did not become a salient identity, even while large intraracial disparities and color bias persisted. This study, like others in sociology and psychology and economics, has shown that intraracial variation by color has an unmistakably large impact on voters' perceptions of candidate quality. However, studies of racial cues, audit studies of discrimination, and racial stereotyping continue to design their studies that treat race as a binary category and racial groups as internally consistent, potentially missing a source of racial bias that operates without awareness of egalitarian norms. Continuing to ignore an important form of racialized perception risks damaging our studies. For example, experimental studies that alter the race of the target and measure policy preferences may find that their results are improved by being attentive to the phenotypical variation among blacks.

Color has recently emerged in several studies as an important influence on cognitive perception and behavior, such that the extent to which a person appears "stereotypically Black" influences judgments of character, criminality, and whether

a victim of a natural disaster exacts sympathy, as well as shaping actual life chances and experience, such that the outcomes of minorities are further stratified by color. However, the possibility that color may play a role in racial bias has been a central deficit in studies in race politics. The point of this exploration confirms that skin color bias is an understudied, albeit significant, aspect of white racial attitudes.

Finally, including skin color in race-of-candidate studies has unearthed a more subtle form of bias that is nonetheless important for understanding racial dynamics in American politics. Employers discriminate based on the blackness of one's name – job applicants with black-sounding names were 50% less likely to be called back for an interview (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003), jurists discriminate based on phenotype, applicants for rental housing with black-sounding accents were more likely to be turned away, assessed applicant fees, or told about credit problems (Massey and Lundy 2001), and people were less generous with darker black disaster victims. And the current study shows that voters likewise make similar color-based judgments.

I show in this article that what color political candidates are, as much as or even more than what race they are, affects their electoral prospects, voters' perceptions of their political qualifications, and evaluations of how they'll perform in office on various issues. Scholarly work on race and politics often revisits W.E.B. Du Bois' prediction that "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line." Normally, this passage is cited to remind us of the enduring power of racial distinctions in understanding American politics. But American racial thinking is quite literally—Du Bois might also remind us—about color.

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