

# The Return of Old Fashioned Racism to White Americans' Partisan Preferences in the Early Obama Era

Michael Tesler  
Brown University

## **Abstract:**

Old fashioned racism (OFR) was unrelated to white Americans' partisan preferences throughout the post-civil rights era. This study argues OFR could return to white partisanship following decades of dormancy because of Obama's presidency. After first demonstrating that such attitudes were significantly stronger predictors of opposition to Obama than ideologically similar white Democrats, I support that hypothesis with the following evidence: Opposition to interracial dating was significantly correlated with white partisanship in 2009 despite being unrelated to party identification in twelve earlier surveys; evaluations of Obama almost completely mediated that relationship between OFR and partisanship; Old fashioned racism predicted changes in white panelists' partisanship between 2006 and 2010; these attitudes were also a stronger determinant of midterm vote preferences in 2010 than they were in 2006, with that relationship once again mediated by President Obama; and experimentally connecting Obama to congressional candidates significantly increased the relationship between OFR and 2010 preferences.

Race occupied a prominent place in Americans' partisan preferences long before Barack Obama announced his intention to seek the Democratic presidential nomination. Carmines and Stimson (1989) convincingly argue that this organization of partisan politics around racial issues stemmed largely from elite-level differences in the two parties' support for 1960s civil rights initiatives. In particular, the enactment of civil rights legislation by the Democratic Kennedy and Johnson administrations, opposed by Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican candidate for the presidency, generated a new race-based divide between the parties. These authors go on to show that mass partisan polarization along the lines of racial policy attitudes emerged in the 1970s, as older citizens who came of age before the parties diverged so sharply on racial issues were gradually replaced by incoming partisans whose party attachments were formed after that new racial schism.

Racial conservatism continued to divide Democrats from Republicans at both the elite and mass levels throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. Mayer (2002), for example, found a consistent partisan division over race in presidential campaign appeals from 1964 to 2000 (also see Gertsle 2002; O'Reilly 1995; and Schaller 2006), and several others have documented the emergence of subtle appeals to anti-black stereotypes by Republican candidates in the post-civil rights era (Edsall and Edsall 1991; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001). These appeals are shown to help white Americans bring their racial predispositions to bear on support for Republican presidential candidates (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Valentino 1999; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002). It is not too surprising, then, that racially conservative attitudes commonly described as symbolic racism or racial resentment—attitudes that emphasize lack of black commitment to traditional American values—were central in shifting white Southerners from the Democratic to the Republican Party over the past few

decades (Valentino and Sears 2005). Differences between the two parties in both their racial policy positions and their rhetoric about race-relations also help explain racial resentment's significant independent impact on support for GOP presidential candidates from 1988 to 2004 (Tesler and Sears 2010; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2011).

Yet, overt racism all but vanished from both elite political discourse and mass party preferences during this same post-civil rights time period in which Republican campaigns employed coded appeals to anti-black stereotypes and racial resentment influenced white Americans' partisan attachments. In fact, the two political parties fully embraced the new norm of racial equality by the late 1960s (Mendelberg 2001). White voters, therefore, no longer encountered the straightforward appeals to segregation and racial supremacy that they frequently heard throughout the Jim Crow era (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001). With Democratic and Republican politicians now eschewing overtly racist appeals, survey questions assessing old fashioned racist sentiments like opposition to intimate interracial relations and beliefs in black intellectual inferiority were unrelated to party preferences in the post-civil rights decades before Obama became his party's nominee for president (Valentino and Sears 2005; Sears et al. 1997; see new results below too).<sup>1</sup>

But a black man essentially became the face of the Democratic Party after the 2008 election. Could that heightened cognitive association between Democrats and African-Americans open the door for a renewed role of overtly racist attitudes in white Americans' partisan attachments? Both the theoretical expectations and the empirical results presented below indicate that Barack Obama's association with the Democratic Party has indeed made old

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<sup>1</sup> Attitudes closely linked to old-fashioned racism, such as the desire to keep certain groups "in their place", were also uncorrelated with white partisanship in the 1990s (Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000)

fashioned racist attitudes a significant factor in white Americans' partisan preferences after decades of quiescence.

### **Empirical Expectations**

As just mentioned, old fashioned racist attitudes, such as desire for social distance between the races and beliefs in racial intellectual superiority were uncorrelated with white Americans' partisan attachments (even at the bivariate level) in the decades preceding Obama's presidency. However, OFR's influence could still be found in other facets of public opinion throughout the pre-Obama contemporary era. Overt measures of prejudice were significantly linked to a number of racial policy preferences during this time period—policies which included general government assistance to blacks (Huddy and Virtanen 1998; Sears et al. 1997; Bobo and Kluegel 1997), equal opportunity for African-Americans (Sears et al. 1997), affirmative action (Hughes 1997; Federico and Sidanius 2002), college scholarships for black students (Virtanen and Huddy 1998), and New York housing integration laws (Huddy, Feldman and Perkins 2009).

To be sure, less blatant forms of racial conservatism like symbolic racism and racial resentment were much stronger predictors of white opposition to almost all of those policies than old fashioned racism, and these newer forms of anti-black sentiments oftentimes completely mediated the significant bivariate effects of OFR (Bobo and Kluegel 1997; Sears et al. 1997; Hughes 1997).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the sizable ongoing impact of such overt forms of racism on racial

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<sup>2</sup> Old fashioned racism is assumed by Bobo and Kluegel (1997, 116) to be causally prior to these newer forms of racial animosity because of its stronger relationships with demographic factors (see also Virtanen and Huddy 1998 for similar results). Likewise, Hughes (1997, 69) writes, “old-fashioned racism may be one of several causal factors in symbolic racism, and symbolic racism may act as an intervening variable, explaining the impact of old-fashioned racism on opposition to affirmative action.”

policy preferences recently led political psychologists, Leonie Huddy and Stanley Feldman, to conclude that the political influence of old fashioned racism had been prematurely and unfairly dismissed by social science researchers (Feldman and Huddy 2010; Huddy and Feldman 2009; Huddy, Feldman and Perkins 2009).

That continued influence of old fashioned racism on issues specifically pertaining to African-Americans also has important implications for white Americans' partisan preferences in the in the age of Obama. Virtanen and Huddy's (1998) conclusion that old-fashioned racists oppose all efforts to improve the conditions of African-Americans—even popular programs targeted at “deserving blacks” like college scholarships and free-enterprise zones—because they view blacks as inferior to whites should be especially relevant. That is, we might expect old-fashioned racism to erode support for both Barack Obama's presidential candidacy and his presidency since adherents of that outdated belief system should naturally be prone to oppose the leadership of a president from a racial group whom they consider intellectually and socially inferior. My first formal hypothesis (H1), then, is that unlike ideologically similar white Democrats (e.g. Hillary Clinton) old fashioned racist attitudes should significantly decrease white Americans' support for Barack Obama.

This contention that OFR shaped mass assessments of Barack Obama would not be too surprising, though, especially in light of ample evidence that newer forms of anti-black sentiments such as racial resentment and negative stereotypes were significantly stronger predictors of opposition to Barack Obama's presidential candidacy than prior Democratic nominees (Tesler and Sears 2010; Piston 2010; Jackman and Vavreck 2010; Kinder and Dale 2011; Kam and Kinder 2012). Nor would such a finding by itself suggest that old-fashioned

racism would come to influence the broader American political landscape after being unrelated to mass partisan attachments for decades prior to Obama's rise to prominence.

There is reason to suspect, however, that the hypothesized link between OFR and white Americans' evaluations of Barack Obama's would spill over into their party identifications and 2010 party-line voting behavior. Tesler and Sears (2010) describe this phenomenon in which the unusually large effects of racial attitudes on the public's assessments of Barack Obama are transferred to their related political evaluations as the "the spillover of racialization." Racial attitudes, they found, became an increasingly strong predictor of mass assessments of John McCain as his campaign against Obama intensified in the fall of 2008 (Tesler and Sears 2010). The impact of racial resentment on white Americans' opinions about health care and tax policy also grew considerably after Barack Obama's positions on these issues received heavy scrutiny in 2008 and 2009 (Tesler and Sears 2010); and racial predispositions were significantly more connected to opinions about President Obama's policy proposals than they were in survey experiments that framed the exact same initiatives as President Clinton's former proposals (Knowles, Lowry and Schamburg 2010).

The spillover of racialization into party identification may not be quite that pronounced, though. Americans' positions on fiscal policy issues like health care are often unstable from year to year and vary depending on the context in which they are assessed (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Kinder 1998). Party identification's well-documented individual-level stability and slow systematic changes (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse and Markus 1979; Green et al 2000), on the other hand, could limit the spillover of racialization into mass partisanship. That is, individuals might be more reluctant to change their relatively stable partisan attachments in response to

Obama's rise within the Democratic Party than their less crystallized opinions about policies strongly connected to his administration like health care.

Nevertheless, prior research suggests that Obama's Democratic presidency could still enhance the relationship between old-fashioned racism and white Americans party identifications. Green et al. (2002) argue that partisanship is not inherently stable; instead, "Party attachments tend to be stable because the social group imagery associated with the parties tends to change slowly over time. Once a person's party attachments take root, they are seldom disrupted by new conceptions of the partisan groups and the social coalitions that they comprise" (141). One way to alter this social group imagery, according to these authors, is to change the composition of party leadership. The Republican Party, for instance, effectively altered its public persona by putting Southerners into top party positions throughout the 1980s and 1990s, paving the way for Southern party realignment (Green et al. 2002, 13). Even more relevant for the present purposes, Sears, Citrin and Kosterman (1987) show that the increased association between the Democratic Party and African-Americans, which presumably resulted from Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, *immediately* accelerated the polarization of Southern partisanship by both racial attitudes and race.

Barack Obama's Democratic nomination and presidency should have an even greater impact on the Party's image than Jesse Jackson's failed presidential bid. Indeed, Obama's presidency situates black leadership at the forefront of the Democratic Party's persona much more powerfully than at any other time in history. If, as suspected, a black president from the Democratic Party solidified the cognitive association between Democrats and African-Americans, one logical upshot might be a renewed impact of old fashioned racism on partisan preferences. My second formal hypothesis, then, is that the negative influence of old fashioned

racist attitudes on Democratic Party identification should increase significantly from before to after Obama was elected president (H2). Moreover, the hypothesized impact of old fashioned racism on white Americans' assessments of Barack Obama should mediate the enhanced relationship between OFR and party identification (H3).

The spillover of old fashioned racism into white Americans' 2010 party-line voting for congress should be even more straightforward. Mass assessments of the incumbent president powerfully influence vote choice for the House of Representatives (Tufte 1975, 1978; Kernel 1977; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Jacobson 2004). We might therefore expect the hypothesized influence of OFR on mass assessments of President Obama to spill over into their partisan preferences for congressional candidates in 2010. That is, the link between old-fashioned racism and support for Republican congressional candidates should be stronger in 2010 than prior midterm elections (H4). Moreover, and like party identification, the hypothesized impact of OFR on white Americans' assessments of Barack Obama should mediate the enhanced relationship between overt prejudice and 2010 party-line voting (H5). Finally, efforts aimed at connecting Obama to Democratic congressional candidates should further increase OFR's impact on 2010 preferences (H6).

## **Method**

### ***Data***

This study utilizes cross-sectional data, panel re-interviews, and an original survey experiment to test those hypotheses. The first cross-sectional analyses draw upon a Pew Research Center Poll from March 2008.<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the historic closeness of the ongoing

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<sup>3</sup> Survey by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Methodology: Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, March 19–March 22, 2008, and based on

Democratic presidential nominating contest, that survey asked respondents who they would vote for if the general election was between John McCain and Barack Obama and if it was between John McCain and Hillary Clinton. These hypothetical presidential matchups have been effectively exploited in other datasets—namely, the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (Jackman and Vavreck 2009)—to argue that the influence of racial resentment, anti-black stereotypes and ethnocentrism would have been significantly weaker in 2008 had John McCain faced Hillary Clinton in the general election instead of Barack Obama (Tesler and Sears 2010; Kam and Kinder 2012; Jackman and Vavreck 2011). I utilize the March 2008 Pew Poll to test whether this same argument also holds for the influence of old fashioned racism on 2008 vote choice, as H1 suggests.

I turn to the Pew Values Study (PVS) Merger File for additional hypothesis tests. From 1987 to 2009, the PVS has conducted fourteen cross-sectional surveys, gauging respondents core political and social attitudes with a series of approximately 80 agree-disagree statements asked repeatedly over that time period.<sup>4</sup> One of those statements—“I think it is all right for blacks and whites to date each other”—was asked in thirteen of the fourteen repeated cross-sectional surveys and taps into the old fashioned racist belief system discussed in greater detail below. The PVS can be used, then, to determine how such desire for intimate social distance between the races correlated with white Americans’ party identifications in both the 20 years prior to Obama’s presidential bid and in the early months of his presidency. In other words, did the

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telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,503. This data set was accessed from the Roper Center’s data archives.

<sup>4</sup> The Pew Values Merger File was accessed from the Roper Center’s Data Archive.

relationship between old fashioned racism and Republican Party identification grow stronger because Obama was now the face of his party, which H2 and H3 suggested?

Even if that relationship grew stronger, we would still have no way of knowing from the PVS's repeated cross-sectional surveys whether Americans were changing their partisan preferences to comport with their underlying racial attitudes because of Obama's presidency. Some of these individuals, for instance, may have changed their support for intimate interracial relationships in accordance with their pre-existing partisan preferences precisely because the leader of the Democratic Party is now biracial (e.g. Lenz 2009). The PVS analyses are, therefore, augmented with data from the 2006-2008-2010 General Social Survey Panel Study. Panel re-interviews of the same respondents at two or more points in time help mitigate such concerns about reverse causality. More specifically, we can use a measure of old fashioned racism from the 2006 GSS to determine how such pre-Obama attitudes predicted changes in white Americans' partisanship from 2006 to 2010.

I return to repeated cross-sectional surveys to test H4 and H5. The first cross-sectional survey comes from the December 2006-January 2007 PVS, which included a 2006 congressional vote report item. To compare that pre-Obama relationship between old fashioned racism and congressional vote preference in 2006 to their association in 2010, I fielded two nationally representative surveys in October 2010, each of which contained 1000 respondents and both of which were conducted by the internet polling firm YouGov-Polimetrix. These two surveys are pooled together to enhance the efficiency of estimates. Taken together, the cross-sectional surveys from 2006 and 2010 provide insights into whether the negative relationship between OFR and Democratic vote choice for congress grew stronger between 2006 and 2010 because Obama was now the face of his party, as H4 and H5 suggested.

At the same time, though, that overtime comparison cannot tell us for certain whether any increased influence of old fashioned racism in the 2010 midterms was *caused* by Obama's presidency or another factor.<sup>5</sup> So with that in mind, I randomly assigned respondents from one of the abovementioned YouGov-Polimetrix surveys to two different survey forms. After first inquiring about how they intended to vote for the House of Representatives,<sup>6</sup> half of my participants were asked (1) whether they wanted the newly elected Congress to be more or less supportive of Obama's legislative agenda; (2) they were then told that Obama had been campaigning for Democratic candidates and asked if an endorsement from the president would make them more or less likely to support the Democratic candidate in their district. Shortly thereafter, these same individuals were asked how favorably they felt toward the two major parties' congressional candidates in their district. The remaining half of the sample, meanwhile, was just asked the candidate favorability items without being primed with questions designed to tie Democrats running for congress to Obama. This experimental design, therefore, offers a direct causal test of H6's contention that efforts to connect Obama with Democratic candidates for congress should further increase old fashioned racism's impact on 2010 preferences.

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<sup>5</sup> One potential confound, for instance, is the sampling and mode differences between the Random Digit Dialing phone interviews conducted by Pew, and the opt-in internet sample used by YouGov-Polimetrix.

<sup>6</sup> Ideally, the experimental manipulation would have taken place prior to assessing 2010 vote intention. That design would have enabled vote intention instead of candidate favorability ratings to be the dependent variable. My survey experiment, however, was fielded as part of a YouGov cooperative survey—one that mandated vote intention be assessed prior to individual investigators' content.

### ***Old Fashioned Racism***

At the midpoint of the twentieth century a substantial majority of white Americans still openly subscribed to the ideology of white supremacy. That ideology, which researchers have variously described as old fashioned racism, Jim Crow racism, and red-neck racism, embodied three main elements (Bobo and Kluegel, 1997; McConahay et al., 1981; McConahay and Hough 1976; McConahay, 1986): (1) desire for social distance between the races, (2) beliefs in the biological inferiority of blacks, and (3) support public policies insuring racial segregation and formalized discrimination. For simplicity purposes, I will only use the term old fashioned racism to describe such beliefs.

Adherence to all three components of the old fashioned racism belief system declined dramatically during the second half of the century. By the 1990s, in fact, white Americans' beliefs in black biological inferiority and support for de jure segregation had all but vanished from their survey reports (Schuman et al. 1997; though see Huddy and Feldman 2009 for more innovative measurements showing white subscription to old fashioned racist attitudes). White desires for intimate social distance between the races were more persistent, though (Schuman et al. 1997). Figure 1, for example, shows that only about half of the white respondents in the three 2007-2009 Pew Polls analyzed below completely agreed that it is okay for blacks and whites to date each other, with more than 15 percent still disagreeing.

For both substantive and practical purposes, then, this study utilizes just the social distance component of the old fashioned racist belief system as its focal explanatory variable. From a substantive standpoint, there are still enough white Americans who do not completely approve of miscegenation to affect politics; and practically speaking, the PVS's long time series

allows us to assess the influence of such attitudes on partisan preference both before and after the 2008 election.

In addition to the PVS's black-white dating item, I also employ an intimate social distance measure of old fashioned racism from the 2006-2008-2010 GSS panel study. That variable is a difference score, which subtracts how favorable or unfavorable white respondents would react to a close relative marrying an African-American from how favorable they would feel about their relatives marrying someone of the same race (see appendix for more information on variable coding). Figure 1 presents the distribution of this difference score measure. As can be seen, more than half of whites preferred having their close relatives marry someone of the same race in the 2006 GSS panel wave, with about one-quarter strongly preferring in-marriage.

### **Old Fashioned Racism and White Opposition to Barack Obama**

In order for Obama's presidency to once again make old fashioned racism a determinant of white Americans' broader partisan preferences, these attitudes must necessarily influence their assessments of Barack Obama above and beyond that of other Democratic politicians. Figure 2 indicates that old fashioned racism was, in fact, a stronger determinant of opposition to Barack Obama in 2008 than it was for his ideologically similar white opponent for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton.<sup>7</sup> The first panel in that figure graphs out the relationship between aversion to intimate interracial relationships and McCain vote intention against both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in the March 2008 Pew Poll referenced above. Figure 2 suggests that old fashioned racism was a more important determinant of 2008 vote choice than it would have been had John McCain's Democratic opponent in the general election been white, much the way

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<sup>7</sup> Obama and Clinton had ideologically indistinguishable voting records according to their NOMINATE score (Carroll et al 2008).

that previous research showed how racial resentment, anti-black stereotypes, and ethnocentrism were significantly stronger predictors of support for John McCain against Barack Obama than they were in hypothetical McCain vs Clinton matchups (Tesler and Sears 2010; Jackman and Vavreck 2011; Kam and Kinder 2012). With party identification and ideological self-placement held constant, the display shows that moving from completely agreeing that it's okay for blacks and whites to date each other to completely disagreeing decreased white support for Hillary Clinton against John McCain by less than 10 percentage points. All else being equal, that same change from least to most OFR decreased Obama's hypothetical vote share by more than 35 percentage points—a statistically significant difference in effects between candidates.

The second panel of Figure 2 indicates that the negative effect of old fashioned racism on Barack Obama's favorability ratings was also significantly stronger than it was for white Americans' assessments of Hillary Clinton. As can be seen in that display, moving from the lowest level to the highest level of OFR decreased an individual's probability of rating these two candidates favorably by .44 and .13 respectively after controlling for partisanship and ideology.

It is not too surprising, then, that the third panel of Figure 2 shows how opposing interracial dating significantly decreased support for Obama against Clinton in the primary. This display indicates that moving from completely supporting to completely opposing blacks and whites' dating each other was associated with a 30 percentage point decline in primary support for Obama against Clinton among Democrats.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the fourth panel of Figure 2 compares the relationship between OFR and vote preference for Obama against McCain in the March 2008 Pew Poll to an early trial heat in the

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<sup>8</sup> The Democratic Primary preference item in the March 2008 Pew Poll was only asked of Democrats and Democratic leaning Independents.

2003 Pew Values Study,<sup>9</sup> which matched President Bush against a generic Democratic competitor. Just like the Clinton vs. McCain results presented earlier, the fourth panel of the figure shows that old fashioned racist attitudes were virtually unrelated to support for George W. Bush's reelection bid. In fact, the solid line in that display suggests that OFR and Republican vote choice may not have even been positively correlated in the 2004 election.

All told, then, these results confirm what our theoretical expectations would have already led us to believe: First, and in keeping with the null influence of OFR on partisan preferences found throughout the pre-Obama contemporary era (Valentino and Seas 2005; Sears et al. 1997), white Americans' desire for intimate social distance between the races would have almost certainly had little influence on their 2008 voting behavior had John McCain faced Hillary Clinton instead of Barack Obama. Second, and consistent with prior evidence showing how Obama's racial background activated newer forms of racial antagonisms (Tesler and Sears 2010; Piston 2010; Jackman and Vavreck 2011; Kam and Kinder 2012), old fashioned racist sentiments were also a significantly stronger determinant of white Americans' opposition to his candidacy than they were for Hillary Clinton.

### **Old Fashioned Racism and White Party Identification (1987-2010)**

The more impactful question for American politics in the Age of Obama, however, is whether that link between old fashioned racist sentiments and opposition to Obama will spill

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<sup>9</sup> Survey by Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Methodology: Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, July 14 - August 5, 2003 and based on 2,528 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult including an oversample of blacks. Results are weighted to be representative of a national adult population. The interracial dating item was only asked to half of the sample. Dataset accessed from the Roper Center's Data Archive.

over into the broader political landscape. There is reason to suspect it might. If, for reasons discussed above, President Obama solidified the cognitive association between African-American leadership and the Democratic Party then old fashioned racism could once again influence partisan preferences after decades of being unrelated to party identification.

***Bivariate Correlations between OFR and Party Identification (1987-2009)***

The results in Figure 3 suggest that Obama's presidency has, in fact, opened the door for old fashioned racism to influence white partisanship. The display graphs out the bivariate correlations between party identification and white Americans' opposition to interracial dating in the Pew Values Surveys conducted between 1987 and 2009.<sup>10</sup> Figure 3 shows that this measure of old fashioned racism was essentially uncorrelated with white partisanship in the surveys conducted between 1987 and 2007 (much like null relationships in the 1996 GSS presented by Valentino and Sears 2005). In fact, the correlation between opposition to interracial dating and Republican Party identification in both the twelve pooled pre-2009 surveys and in the most recent pre-Obama PVS from 2007 was only .01. In contrast with those earlier null results, however, Figure 3 discloses a highly significant correlation ( $p < .001$ ) between Republican partisanship and disagreeing that it is all right for blacks and whites to date each other in the April 2009 PVS.

To be sure, that significant correlation of .11 is still not especially strong. Nor is this correlational figure on par with the bivariate associations between party identification and racial policy preferences like affirmative action that have factored into the contemporary partisan alignment for at least the past few decades (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Laymen and Carsey

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<sup>10</sup> The dependent variable here is 3-category partisanship because 7-point party identification was not asked in every PVS.

2002).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, these results suggest that the election of a black president from the Democratic Party—even one who has been virtually silent about racial issues during the first term of his presidency (King and Smith 2011)—has once again made old fashioned racism a significant determinant of white partisanship after long being a dormant factor in American politics.

### ***Obama as a Mediator of Old Fashioned Racism***

If, as just suggested, the election of Barack Obama was responsible for the significant bivariate associations between old fashioned racism and Republican Party identification found in the 2009 PVS then we would expect mass assessments of the president to mediate that renewed relationship. Mediation occurs when an explanatory variable's influence (in this, case opposition to interracial dating) on a dependent variable (party identification) is transmitted through an intervening variable (hypothesized here to be evaluations of President Obama) (Baron and Kenny 1986). Thus, if the mediational pathway specified above is correct, then the significant relationships between party identification and old fashioned racism should become negligible after controlling for white respondents' assessments of the president.

Consistent with that expectation, the results presented in Table 1 show that the relationship between party identification and opposition to interracial dating was almost entirely mediated by evaluations of President Obama. The coefficient on opposition to interracial dating in the first column of the table indicates that changing from completely agreeing to completely disagreeing that it is okay for blacks and whites to date was associated with a 13 percent increase in the seven-point Republican identification scale's range. After controlling for white

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<sup>11</sup> The bivariate correlation between Republican Party identification and opposition to special preferences for African-Americans was .20 among white respondents in the 2009 PVS.

respondents' evaluations of President Obama, though, the second column of the table shows that this significant relationship between OFR and party identification was nearly reduced to zero.

These results suggest that the significant effects of old fashioned racism on party identification in the 2009 PVS were indirect, mediated by their more direct effect on mass assessments of President Obama—a finding entirely consistent with the spillover of racialization's contention that Barack Obama's presidency helped make OFR a significant determinant of white Americans' partisan attachments.

### ***Old Fashioned Racism and Partisan Change (2006-2010)***

The cross-sectional analyses from the PVS, however, cannot tell us whether the stronger relationship between old fashioned racism and party identification in 2009 was actually the result of white Americans' changing their partisan attachments in accordance with their underlying racial attitudes because of Obama's rise to prominence within the Democratic Party. It could be, for instance, that some individuals changed their racial attitudes in accordance with their prior partisan preferences because Barack Obama was now the face of his party.

Table 2 therefore turns to the 2006-2008-2010 GSS Panel Study to determine the extent to which white Americans were changing their partisan attachments to comport with their preferences for racial in-marriage and vice versa. The first two columns of the table disclose the relationship between variables measured in the 2006 wave of the panel on the exact same respondents' seven-point party identifications in 2010. Those regression models include lagged dependent variables, which allow us to assess the impact of the remaining predictors on the *change in party identification* from 2006 to 2010 of the panel. In other words, this is a model of attitude change. The coefficient on in-group marriage preference in the first column of the table, therefore, indicates that white respondents who strongly preferred racial endogamy became about

7 percent more Republican from 2006 to 2010 than those who did not prefer their relatives marry someone of the same race—a statistically significant difference ( $p < .01$ ).

Those modest, but significant effects of OFR on changes in white Americans' party identifications from before to after Obama became president were primarily independent of other factors too. The coefficients in the second columns of Table 2, for instance, show that the impact of in-group marriage preference on partisan change was virtually unaltered when controlling for prior economic, military, and religious attitudes that might have also predicted partisan change from 2006 to 2010.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, however, the coefficients in the right hand columns suggest that party identification, as measured in the first wave of the 2006-2008-2010 GSS panel study, did not significantly predict white respondents' changes in racial endogamy preferences between 2006 and 2010. We can be more confident, then, that the enhanced bivariate correlations between OFR and Republican Party Identification from 2007 to 2009 shown back in Figure 2 were mostly the result of white Americans changing their partisan attachments to comport with their prior racial attitudes rather than them becoming more or less supportive of interracial relationships in accordance with their pre-existing partisan preferences.

In sum, the results in Figure 2, Table 1, and Table 2 all suggest that old fashioned racism returned to white Americans' party identification in the early Obama era because the country elected an African-American president from the Democratic Party. It is important to note, however, that none of these results shows the spillover of OFR from Obama to white partisanship was especially large. In fact, the findings pale in comparison to prior research by

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<sup>12</sup> Because the GSS employs three different survey forms, these control variables were limited to measures that appeared on the same two forms as the marriage preference items.

Tesler and Sears (2010), which documents how racial resentment came to influence public opinion about John McCain and health care after these evaluations were easily connected to Obama. Nevertheless, these OFR results are perhaps equally impressive when taking into account both the well-established stability of party identification and the fact that old fashioned racist attitudes had been unrelated to white partisanship for decades prior to Obama's rise to prominence within the Democratic Party.

### **Old Fashioned Racism and White Americans' Midterm Vote Preferences (2006-2010)**

Midterm vote preferences, as noted earlier, are more sensitive to short-term political dynamics like assessments of the incumbent president than mass partisanship. We might therefore expect that the spillover of OFR from Obama into white Americans' 2010 voting behavior would also have been stronger than it was for party identification.

Consistent with that expectation, Figure 4A shows that old fashioned racism had a noticeably larger impact on white Americans' vote choices in the 2010 midterm elections than it had back in 2006. The solid line in that display graphs out the relationship between opposition to interracial dating and Democratic vote choice for the House of Representatives, as reported in the December 2006-January 2007 PVS. The display shows that desire for intimate social distance between the races had little impact on white Americans' voting behavior in the 2006 midterm elections—a result which should now be fully expected given the repeated null effects of OFR on partisan preferences throughout the pre-Obama contemporary era.

The dashed line in Figure 4A, which illustrates the relationship between opposition to interracial dating and 2010 vote intention, tells a much different story. Indeed, the that graphic shows that moving from least to most OFR decreased support for Democrats by about 35 percentage points in the 2010 House elections. Much like the activation of old fashioned racist

sentiments in 2009 party identification, then, these results also seem to suggest that Obama's presidency made opposition to interracial dating an important predictor of partisan preferences.

If the election of Barack Obama did in fact activate such old fashioned racist attitudes in the 2010 midterms, then we would once again expect mass assessments of the president to mediate the effects of OFR. As was the case with the mediational results presented for party identification back in Table 1, Figure 4b also shows that most of the impact of opposition to interracial dating on 2010 partisan preferences was indirect, mediated by OFR's more direct effects on white Americans' assessments of Barack Obama. In fact, the strong bivariate relationship between opposition to interracial dating and 2010 midterm vote preferences was reduced back down to its 2006 levels after accounting for the significant correlation between OFR and opposition to Obama.

Taken together, then, the mediational results in both Table 1 and Figure 4b are highly consistent with the spillover of racialization's central causal claim that old fashioned racism returned to white Americans' partisan preferences because of Obama's election.

### ***An Experimental Test of Obama's Activating Influence***

Mediational analyses, however, run the risk of overstating the causal effects if the designated mediating variable is not independent of omitted factors that also affect the dependent variable (Green, Ha and Bulluck 2010). It is important to augment those results, then, with an experimental test of the spillover of racialization in order to further interrogate the causal role of public reactions to Obama's racial background in activating old fashioned racist attitudes. As discussed above, this experiment connected candidates for congress to President Obama by telling one half of the survey respondents that Obama had been campaigning for many Democrats and asking if an endorsement of Obama would make them more or less likely to

support their district's Democratic candidate for the House of Representatives. If, as H6 suggested, efforts aimed at connecting Obama to political evaluations can further activate old fashioned racist sentiments in mass opinion, then we might expect opposition to interracial dating to be a significantly stronger predictor of candidate preferences for respondents who were randomly assigned to receive this experimental manipulation.

That hypothesis test is complicated, however, by the fact that many respondents probably did not need the Obama experiment to connect the president—and their feelings about interracial dating as a consequence—to their candidate evaluations. We now know, for instance, that OFR was a significant predictor of partisan preferences in multiple post-2008 surveys in which respondents did not receive any experimental manipulations designed to further connect Obama to the Democratic Party. That baseline influence could have created a ceiling effect that limited the Obama condition's potential to activate OFR. As a result, any significant differences in the effects of opposition to interracial dating on candidate evaluations yielded between the two conditions are likely conservative estimates of Obama's ability to activate old fashioned racist sentiments in public opinion and voting behavior.<sup>13</sup>

That being said, old fashioned racism still had a significantly stronger relationship with candidate evaluations in the Obama condition than it had in the baseline group. The OLS coefficients on opposition to interracial dating presented in Table 3 indicate that moving from least to most OFR decreased Democratic minus Republican candidate evaluations by only about

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<sup>13</sup> The fact that congressional vote intention was assessed before both the experimental manipulation and the candidate evaluation items may also introduce a conservative bias into the results since survey respondents are shown to rationalize their voting behavior with their candidate evaluations (Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning 1994).

five percent of the relative evaluation scale's range in the baseline condition after controlling for party identification and ideological self-placement. In contrast with that modest effect, the interaction term, Interracial Dating\*Obama Prime, discloses that the same movement in OFR was associated with a fifteen percent increase in Democratic - Republican candidate evaluations—a difference in effects between experimental conditions that hovers right around conventional levels of statistical significance ( $p = .058$ ). So while not definitive, the experimental results presented in Table 3 are quite consistent with H6's contention that connecting political evaluations to President Obama can further enhance the influence of old fashioned racist attitudes in mass opinion.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Old fashioned racist attitudes, as shown above, were a significant predictor of white Americans' partisan preferences—2008 presidential vote intention, 2009 party identification, and 2010 congressional vote choice—in the early Obama era after neither affecting their party identifications nor their partisan voting behavior for at least a generation prior to the 2008 election. While the spillover of old fashioned racist attitudes from Barack Obama to white Americans' party identifications was not as pronounced as the spillover of newer forms of racial conservatism into the president's policy proposals (Tesler and Sears 2010), the results presented in this study may be even more important, nonetheless.

First, and unlike mass policy preferences that oftentimes vary depending on the context in which they are assessed (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Kinder 1998), partisanship typically persists rather stably throughout the life cycle (see Sears and Levy 2003 for a review). Party identification should therefore not only be more resistant to the president's influence than public support for his administration's policies, but the enhanced polarization of white partisanship by

old fashioned racism in response to Obama is also more likely leave a lasting mark on American politics that persists after he leaves office.

Second, it is easier claim that the effects of a particular variable on vote choice will have a broader impact on the political system than similar sized effects of that variable on policy preferences. We know, for instance, that old fashioned racist attitudes influenced white Americans' vote preferences for president in 2008 and congress in 2010 because of Obama's rise to prominence within the Democratic Party. It is much harder, however, to tell whether the enhanced effects of racial resentment on opposition to health care reform in 2009 and 2010 had any effects on the ultimate policy outcome.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the election of the country's first black president seems from the results presented in this study to have had the ironic upshot of opening the door for old fashioned racism to once again influence American politics after decades of quiescence. Moreover, these prejudiced attitudes were activated despite the fact that Obama pursued a race neutral agenda throughout his first term in office, and in spite of the fact that both political parties have long embraced the norm of racial equality (Mendelberg 2001). To be sure, more work is needed to understand how this activation of old fashioned racism will manifest itself in both elite and mass political behavior during Obama's presidency and beyond. For the time being, though, it appears that opposition to an African-American president from the Democratic Party will continue to provide an avenue for the expression of old fashioned racism in white Americans' partisan preferences during Barack Obama's tenure in office.

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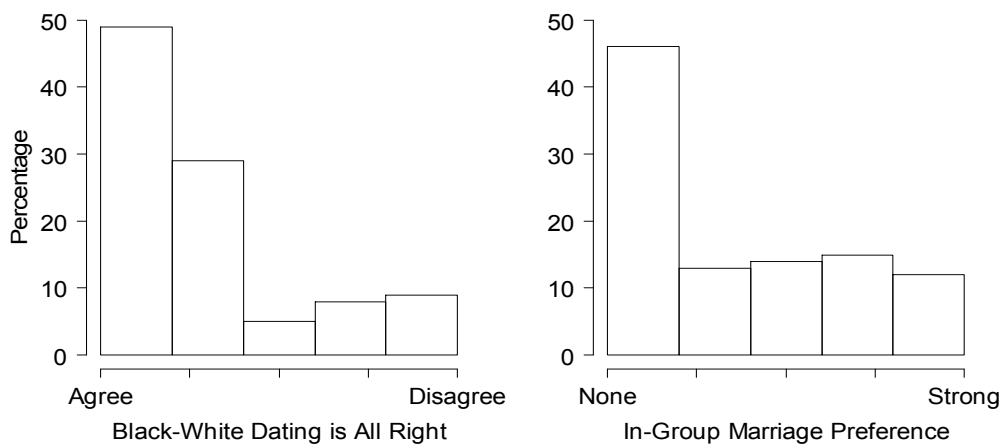
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*Figure 1: Distribution of White Americans' Desire for Intimate Distance between the Races. Note: Distribution in the first panel averages across frequencies in the 2007 Pew Values Study, the 2009 Pew Values Study, and a March 2008 Pew Poll. Distribution in the second panel comes from the 2006 wave of the 2006-2008-2010 GSS Panel Study.*

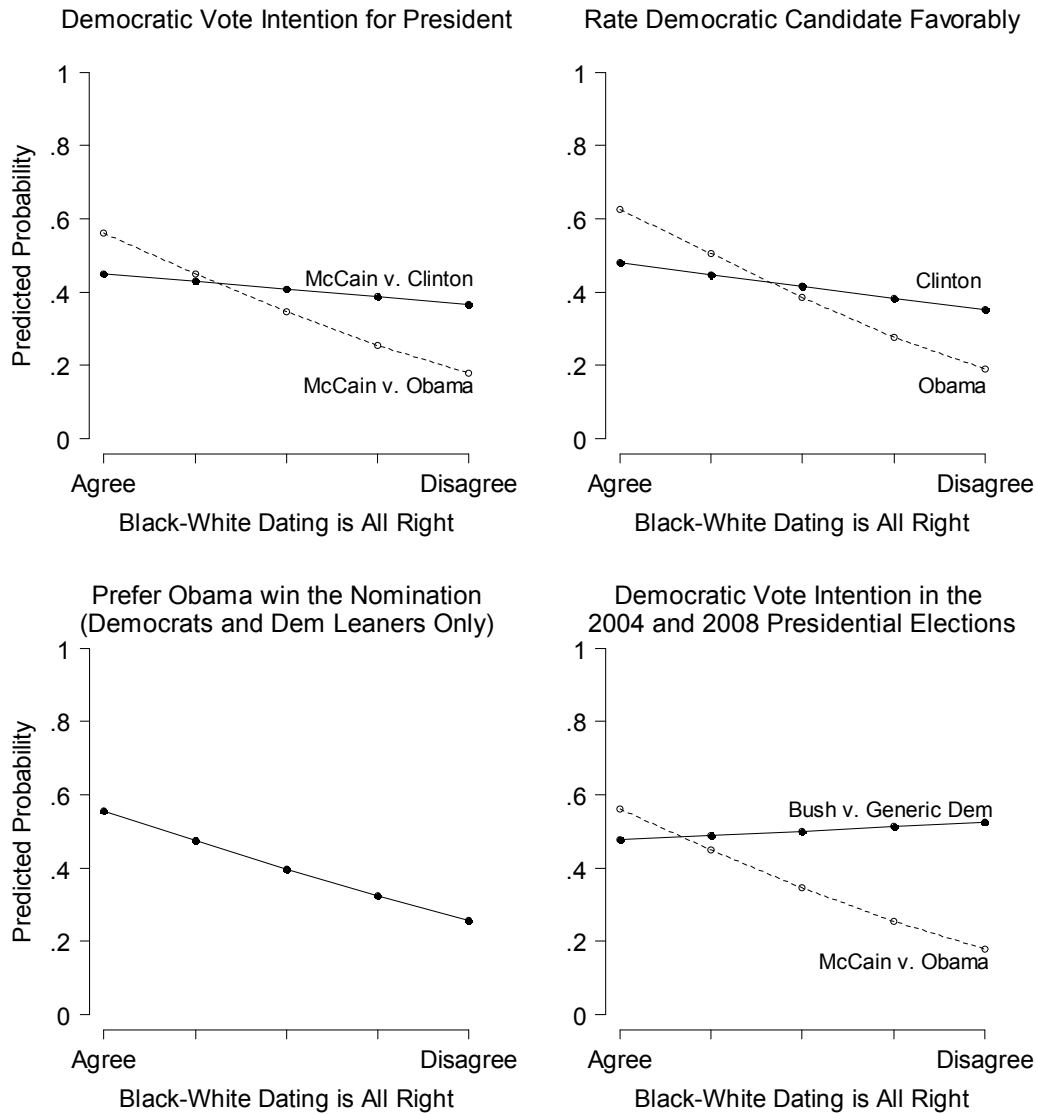
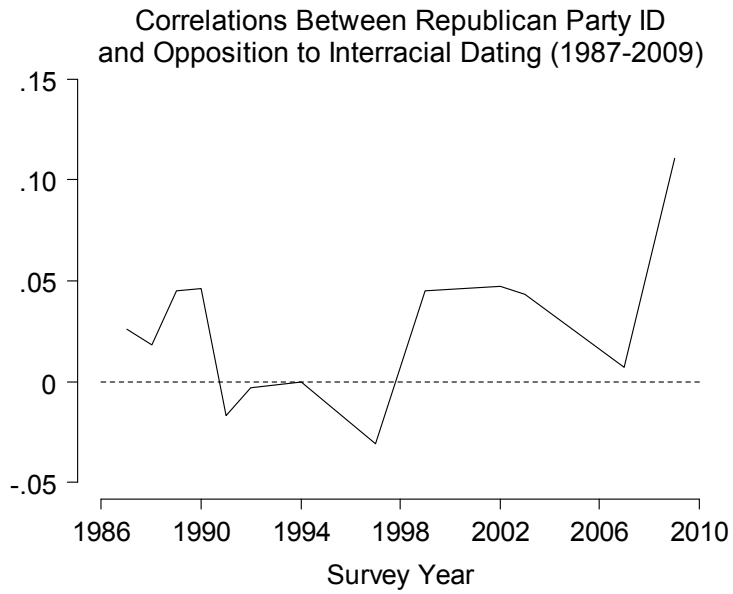


Figure 2: White Americans' Support for Democratic Candidates for President, as a Function of Old Fashioned Racism. Note: Probabilities are based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A1 of the appendix. Probabilities were calculated by setting indicator variables for Democratic, Republican, Liberal, and Conservative self-identification to their sample means. Source: Pew Poll, March 2008; Pew Values Study, July-August, 2003.



*Figure 3: Correlations between Republican Party Identification and Old Fashioned Racism among White Americans. Note: Dependent variable is 3-category partisanship. Source: Pew Values Study Merger File*

Table 1 (Logistic Regression): Predictors of White Americans' Party Identifications

	Model 1	Model 2
Opposition to Interracial Dating	.125 (.039)	.025 (.034)
Obama Support		-.599 (.020)
Constant	.465 (.015)	.815 (.015)
Observations	1117	1117

*Note:* The dependent variable is 7-point partisanship, recoded from 0 (strong Democrat) to 1 (strong Republican). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest value. Regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. Source: Pew Values Study, April 2009.

Table 2 (OLS): Predictors of White Panelists' Party Identifications and In-Marriage Preferences in 2010

	<u>DV: 2010 Party Identification</u>		<u>2010 In-Marriage Preference</u>	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
2006 Party ID	.751 (.029)	.721 (.032)	.039 (.038)	.038 (.042)
2006 In-Marriage Preference	.067 (.025)	.063 (.026)	.539 (.038)	.540 (.039)
2006 Social Spending Opposition Scale		.111 (.041)		.041 (.060)
2006 Defense Spending Support		.032 (.027)		.008 (.035)
2006 Bible Literalism		.006 (.030)		-.031 (.040)
Constant	.107 (.017)	.083 (.020)		.059 (.027)
Observations	635	618	634	617

*Note:* The dependent variable in the right columns is 7-point partisanship, recoded from 0 (strong Democrat) to 1 (strong Republican). Dependent variable on the left is a difference score, which subtracts how favorable or unfavorable white respondents would react to a close relative marrying an African-American from how favorable they would feel about their relatives marrying someone of the same race, recoded from 0 (no in-marriage preference) to 1 (strongly favor relative marry a white partner and strongly oppose a black spouse). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest value. Regression analyses utilize cumulative panel weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. Source: 2006-2008-2010 GSS Panel Study.

Figure 4A:

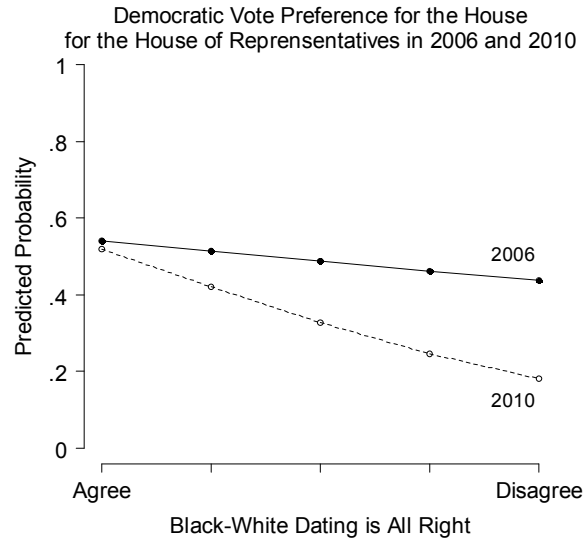


Figure 4B:

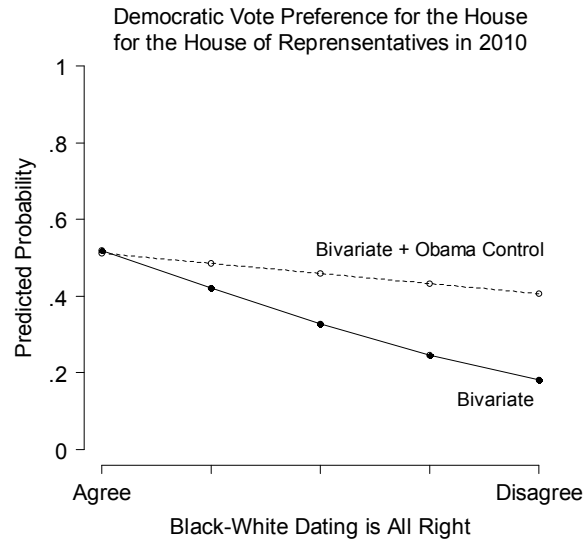


Figure 4: Democratic Vote Preference for the House of Representatives in 2006 and 2010 as a Function of Old Fashioned Racism. Note: Predicted probabilities are based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A2 of the appendix. Probabilities in the bivariate + Obama control model were calculated by setting evaluations of President Obama to their sample means. Source: Pew Values Study, December 2006-January 2007; Pooled YouGov-Polimetrix Surveys, October 2010.

Table 3 (OLS): Predictors of White Americans' Democratic-Republican Congressional Candidate Favorability Ratings

Opposition to Interracial Dating	-.049 (.036)
Opposition Interracial Dating* Obama Prime	-.103 (.054)
Democrat	.172 (.029)
Democrat*Obama Prime	-.049 (.043)
Republican	-.101 (.027)
Republican*Obama Prime	-.014 (.044)
Liberal	.062 (.031)
Liberal* Obama Prime	.054 (.049)
Conservative	-.206 (.028)
Conservative*Obama Prime	.072 (.042)
Obama Prime	-.005 (.029)
Constant	.522 (.020)
Observations	659

Note: Dependent variable is difference between Democratic-Republican congressional candidate favorability ratings, recoded from 0 (rate Republican candidate very favorable and Democrat very unfavorable) to 1 (rate Democratic candidate very favorable and Republican very unfavorable). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest value. Regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. *Source:* YouGov-Polimetrix Survey, October 2010.

## Appendix

### *Explanatory Variables*

*Bible Literalism*: A three-category variable recoded from 0 (Bible is book of fables) to 1 (Bible is word of God).

*Conservative*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (identify as conservative or somewhat conservative) or 0 (all other responses).

*Defense Spending Support*: A three category variable recoded from 0 (spend too much on national defense) to 1 (spend too little).

*Democrat*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (identify as a Democrat) or 0 (all other responses).

*Liberal*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (identify as liberal or somewhat liberal) or 0 (all other responses).

*In-Group Marriage Preference*: A five-category difference score, which subtracts how favorable or unfavorable white respondents would react to a close relative marrying an African-American from how favorable they would feel about their relatives marrying someone of the same race, recoded from 0 (no in-marriage preference) to 1 (strongly favor relative marry a white partner and strongly oppose a black spouse).

*Obama Support (Pew)*: An additive index recoded from 0 (low) to high (1). The scale was constructed from the following two items: 1) Three-category presidential approval, with don't knows coded as 0.5. 2) Three-category 2008 vote report, with nonvoters coded as 0.5.

*Obama Support (YouGov-PMX)*: An additive index recoded from 0 (low) to high (1). The scale was constructed from the following two items: 1) 5-category presidential approval, with don't knows coded as 0.5. 2) Three-category 2008 vote report, with nonvoters coded as 0.5.

*Opposition to Interracial Marriage*: A five-category variable recoded from 0 (completely agree that it is all right for blacks and whites to date each other to) to 1 (completely disagree).

*Social Spending Support Scale*: An additive index recoded from 0 (low) to high (1). The scale was constructed from the following three-category items: 1) Spend too much, too little or right amount on Social Security; 2) Spend too much, too little or right amount on health; 3) Spend too much, too little or right amount on education; don't knows coded as 0.5 for each item.

*Republican*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (identify as a Republican) or 0 (all other responses).

## ***Dependent Variables***

*Democratic – Republican Candidate Favorability*: A ten category scale measuring the difference between evaluations of Democratic and Republican candidates for the House (1-5 rating scales for each item). The scale is recoded from 0 (rate Republican candidate very favorable and Democrat very unfavorable) to 1 (rate Democratic candidate very favorable and Republican very unfavorable). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*Democratic Vote Preference*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 0 (prefer Republican candidate) or 1 (prefer Democratic candidate).

*In-Group Marriage Preference*: A five-category difference score, which subtracts how favorable or unfavorable white respondents would react to a close relative marrying an African-American from how favorable they would feel about their relatives marrying someone of the same race, recoded from 0 (no in-marriage preference) to 1 (strongly favor relative marry a white partner and strongly oppose a black spouse). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*Party Identification* (GSS; Pew 2009): A seven category variable recoded from 0 (strong Democrat) to 1 (strong Republican). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*Party Identification* (Pew Values Survey Merger File): A three category variable recoded from 0 (Democrat) to 1 (Republican). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*Rate Clinton Favorably*: Variable is coded as a dummy taking on a value of 1 (rate "very" or "somewhat" favorable) or (all other responses).

*Rate Obama Favorably*: Variable is coded as a dummy taking on a value of 1 (rate "very" or "somewhat" favorable) or (all other responses).

Table A1 (Logistic Regression): Predictors of White Americans' Support for Democratic Presidential Candidates

	Obama vs. McCain	Clinton vs. Mccain	Obama vs. Clinton	Generic Dem vs. Bush	Rate Obama Favorably	Rate Clinton Favorably
Opposition to Interracial Dating	-1.76 (.376)	-.348 (.350)	-1.28 (.453)	.189 (.380)	-1.96 (.254)	-.531 (.245)
Democrat	2.02 (.259)	1.80 (.243)	-.116 (.284)	2.28 (.317)	1.10 (.194)	1.11 (.194)
Republican	-1.16 (.291)	-1.69 (.323)		-2.58 (.427)	-.485 (.196)	-1.04 (.224)
Liberal	.275 (.290)	.892 (.333)	.229 (.267)	1.46 (.392)	.182 (.225)	.549 (.229)
Conservative	-.935 (.250)	-.749 (.238)	-.047 (.348)	-.554 (.292)	-.431 (.179)	-.380 (.189)
Constant	.109 (.181)	-.311 (.182)	.236 (.262)	-.383 (.223)	.372 (.152)	-.179 (.148)
Observations	933	949	418	644	1194	1194

*Note:* The dependent variables are coded as dummies, taking on values of 1 and 0. All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest value. Regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. *Source:* Pew Poll March 2008; Pew Values Study, July-August, 2003.

Table A2 (Logistic Regression): Predictors of White Americans Democratic Vote Preferences for the House of Representatives in the 2006 and 2010 Midterm Elections

	2006	2010 [1]	2010 [2]
Opposition to Interracial Dating	-.417 (.330)	-1.59 (.404)	-.426 (.648)
Obama Support			5.30 (.648)
Constant	.163 (.120)	1.72 (.713)	-2.21 (.277)
Observations	500	1052	1030

*Note:* The dependent variables are coded as dummies, taking on values of 1 (Democratic vote preference) and 0 (Republican vote preference). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest value. Regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. *Source:* Pew Values Study, December 2006-January 2007; Pooled YouGov-Polimetrix Surveys, October 2010.