

Shades of Political Behavior: Examining Hidden Bias in Candidate Evaluation

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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.” As far as campaign spots go, this one was hardly unique, charging his opponent with taking “more of your hard earned tax dollars.” But in the brief thirty second advertisement, voters meet a slightly altered candidate. 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.ⁱ The distorted stillshots that accompanied the “real Ashwin Madia” exaggerated his color, introducing voters to a candidate that appeared more menacing. 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. 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 provoke several media observers, who likened the advertisements to the darkening of O.J. Simpson on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1994.ⁱⁱ

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 yet another tactic employed in campaign commercials, part of the normal negative attack ads that characterize modern campaigns, 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 color on cognitive evaluation, the long history of intraracial colorism in the United States, and the compounded disadvantage associated with being a darker-skinned minority in a vault of sociological studies. Study after study has documented a strong association between color and negative perceptions and these results always go in one direction – darker-skinned blacks and Latinos are perceived as being less intelligent and attractive, more prone to violence, poor and lazy. Research in an entirely different field has found 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 members of their race.

Despite playing a significant role in material well-being and cognitive perception, we know little if anything about whether skin color plays as significant a role in political life and specifically, if intraracial variation in addition to categorical difference affects the choices of voters. Do darker-skinned minorities suffer an electoral penalty as they do in most aspects of life? This study investigates the impact of color on candidate evaluation, using a nationally representative survey experiment on over 2000 whites. Subjects were randomly assigned to campaign literature of two opposing candidates, in which the race, skin tone, and issue stance of candidates was varied. I find that skin color is an important, albeit hidden, form of bias in racial attitudes and that the importance of race effect on candidate evaluation depend largely on skin color.

Ultimately, scholars of race politics, implicit racial attitudes, and minority candidates are missing an important aspect of racial bias.

Why Color?

Two overarching observations guide the attention to skin color 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, it is an important place, perhaps one of the only remaining areas, in public opinion where racial bias still freely operates and is expressed openly.

Numerous studies have found that skin color has a potent influence on cognition. Two psychologists found that both black and white subjects were more likely to assign positive traits to blacks if they had lighter skin and conversely, apply more negative racial stereotypes to darker members of that race (Maddox and Gray 2002). Dark-skinned blacks were more likely to be described as unattractive, criminal, aggressive, unintelligent, lazy, and poor while blacks with fairer complexions were described as motivated, educated, and attractive. In another experimental study, a black perpetrator and his victim were more memorable and produced the highest emotional concern when the offender was dark-skinned (Dixon and Maddox 2005). 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 account of different criminal histories (Eberhardt et al. 2004; for similar results, Blair, et al. 2004a). Most notably, 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).ⁱⁱⁱ In another 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, subjects preferred light-skinned applicants to blacks with a darker appearance in an exercise in which they were asked to hire for an engineering firm. 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. Darker-skinned blacks have less income and education (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Hill 2000), 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 found that darker skinned criminals received longer sentences in Mississippi; Burch 2005 found a similar result among Georgia felons). 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, they found that 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 percent less than whites, respectively (Goldsmith, et al. 2007, 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 are structured not just by race, but further influenced by skin color.^{iv} These studies have located the source of disparities in inheriting better outcomes as well as direct discrimination. Often, however, the disparities in socioeconomic wellbeing persist even after accounting for differences in family background, human capital, and other factors.^v

Color, therefore, emerges 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. 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, 250) – variously recognized in the United States, where darker-skinned blacks were unofficially excluded from economic, social, and political opportunities historically.

With skin color having such an important, if not publically recognized, role in the lives of and perceptions about minorities, it might also play a crucial role in political life. Because negative racial stereotypes cling most strongly to those of the outgroup with darker skin and more Afrocentric features, voters may be more likely to assign negative political stereotypes to

those representatives/candidates appearing more phenotypically black. Like other cues – race, gender, party – skin color may affect voters’ evaluations of the electoral desirability, abilities, and prospects of candidates. Darker-skinned office-seekers may be stereotyped as having fewer positive leadership qualities, less adept at handling certain issues, and be less favored representatives. By being more prototypical, darker skin color might aggravate the effect of racial bias (or favoritism) and amplify racially stereotypic judgments of black candidates and lessen individualized attributions.

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.

In the antebellum period, 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 races 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 we understand and practice race in the United States. Race became the primary category of difference, subsuming other differences between blacks and making immaterial potential claims for redress of intragroup disparate treatment. Intraracial differences in skin color took on less salience in our public discourse, identity formation, 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 may have emerged given the remarkable inequalities between blacks based on color – was blocked.

This racial history produced the unique paradoxical situation we find today, whereby large continuing 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. Stark differences in equality that inhere in intraracial skin color are opposed by powerful racial meanings produced over nearly a century of our history that asserted “social equality within racial groups” (Hochschild and Weaver 2007b,

174). In that situation, even if skin color is crucially important for economic and social stratification in times past and present (and in some arenas, actually rival or exceed the influence of racial difference), racial understandings based around “one-drop” conceptions blunt potential attention to intraracial inequality. The historically situated lack of a *norm of skin color equality* is the reason behind, to borrow Jennifer Hochschild’s apt phrase, “why people do not protest unfairness” in skin color (2006). The implication, therefore, is that 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 and identity.

The historical development of racial understandings and practice rendered skin color bias and stratification relatively invisible in a society so premised on racial difference and with a history of rectifying disparities through race-based policy. In sum, three unlikely 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.

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 five percent of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) cases of discrimination and only a very few cases have been fought and won before the EEOC on the basis of skin color discrimination.^{vi} In fact, while skin color discrimination is technically proscribed under Title VII of the Civil

Rights Act, the Court has so far avoided elaborating the difference between discrimination based on race versus color, often conflating the two. The courts have also sometimes dismissed the legitimacy of color claims: “there is no basis on this record for the recognition of skin color as a presumptive discriminatory criterion” (quoting Supreme Court in Nance 2005, 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, 465). The disbelief that blacks could discriminate along lines of color against other blacks highlights the absence of color as a salient feature of race politics in the United States.

Nor is harm based on skin color acknowledged in the political arena; no policy attends specifically to skin color disadvantage or tries to remedy large intraracial disparities and none of the groups fighting racial inequality lists skin color disparity among their grievances. In the public realm, pervasive skin color disparities have not been a major subject of concern among whites or minorities. Discussion of color has a marginally larger audience in black popular discourse, but even in this arena it is overshadowed by more primary racial battles for equality and the longstanding tradition of black solidarity. Intragroup disparities based on color simply do not enjoy the standing in discourse of racial equality. Moreover, large socioeconomic differences among blacks by color do not translate into different racial beliefs, strength of attachment to the racial group, or even perceptions of discrimination (Hochschild and Weaver 2007a). In other words, even though lighter skinned blacks have substantial material advantages, they express just as much solidarity with their racial group and do not tend to hold different policy preferences while dark-skinned blacks, who suffer disproportionately based on race and color, are no more racially liberal or racially conscious or perceive more discrimination. Generally speaking, in external identification blacks are described as such regardless of their

color or racial ancestry, so much so that after Barack Obama was elected president, headlines around the world proclaimed the first black – not biracial or mixed race – president. Indeed, in a poll that asked about Barack Obama’s racial background, only 16 percent of respondents said “mixed.”^{vii} Light-skinned blacks are generally not described by substrata of color. Even the phrase skin color has become a stand-in for race. In short, skin color has a hidden quality in this society’s practice and understanding of race even while the absence of skin color in political debate stands in bold contrast to large and enduring differences in opportunity.

With race so powerful an organizing conception, skin color is relegated to the subconscious. Lack of public discourse around skin color should not be assumed to stem from a lack of perceptual awareness. 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, 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, 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. 2004a, 674). “Category-based stereotyping” can be avoided, while color cannot.

That skin color operates subconsciously poses an important possibility for the study of racial attitudes. While many studies across the disciplines of political science, sociology, and psychology have found that racial attitudes matter, they have been increasingly difficult to study because they are very sensitive to social desirability bias – the incentive to not reveal attitudes that are not socially acceptable (Mendelberg 2001; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Real attitudes and perceptions based on race compete with a pervasive motivation to be consistent with equality norms. The reluctance to disclose racial attitudes – hiding them in “don’t know” responses or exaggerating levels of support for a minority candidate or racial policy – has grown over time as norms have been more widely embraced and institutionalized, which presents a major hurdle for scholars of race politics (Berinsky 1999; Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997). While the so-called Bradley/Wilder effect is widely debated, many a black candidate has experienced the dropoff in voting compared to exit poll interviewing, even while surveys of public opinion reveal an overwhelming public willingness to vote for black candidates (Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg 1991; Berinsky 1999; Hopkins 2007).^{viii} However, when people do not recognize that they are transgressing racial norms, they are more willing to express racial hostilities and biases openly (Mendelberg 2008a, 111; Iyengar and Kahn 2). Therefore, studies that measure racial attitudes implicitly show much more pronounced levels of racial animus, as subjects are much less likely to be aware of, and thus reject, the race-based nature of such instruments.

The stronger the norm, the greater the incentive to conceal attitudes deemed to be in opposition to the norm. But what if no such norm exists? I argue that 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 decisionmaking.

Skin color is therefore one of the few remaining locations where racial favoritism can be expressed openly, where stereotypes based on color don't seem to interrupt or disturb the norm of racial equality or voter awareness of it. Thus, exploring a racial area distant from racial egalitarian norms like skin color affords us a unique look at a racial space where there is little incentive to monitor and may lead us to uncover important insights about the nature of racial prejudice in contemporary life.

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 – may be an understudied aspect of white racial attitudes, one that might be unique in its immunity from social desirability effects.

The survey experiment described below was designed to test whether socioeconomic disparities and bias driven by color have an analogous political component. Despite its

prominence in sociological and psychological studies, skin color has rarely been the subject of political science inquiry. While largely absent in scholarship, anecdotal evidence suggests that it may in fact play an important role in electoral politics. 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 2007a, 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 2008, 1). In non-indigenous electorates, vote share declined significantly with darker skin for both challengers and incumbents.

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 in order to charge the opponent with racial inauthenticity. Color appeals were featured prominently in several recent races, including the mayoral contest in Newark between Sharpe James and Corey Booker, in which the former made not-so-veiled color references to his light-skinned, green-eyed opponent as well as in the election between Earl Hilliard and Arthur Davis,

where the former used the fairer coloring of Davis to call into question the racial credibility of his opponent, and the contest for mayor of Washington, DC in which color became a class symbol which served to discredit the light-skinned Sharon Pratt Kelley's ability to relate to the people (by appearing too bourgeoisie) and strengthen her opponent, Marion Barry.

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, and while color has been subtly displayed in at least a few contemporary campaign appeals, it has only been the subject of one other study in political science (Terkildsen 1993).^{ix} I extend that early study in many ways, most notably by including more variation to explore – how skin color interacts with name and ideology – 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.

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. Largely because they employed different methodologies, laboratory experiment findings (McDermott 1998; Terkildsen 1993; Sigelman et al. 1995; Reeves 1997; Moskowitz and Stroh 1994) did not accord with studies of actual black candidates using exit poll data (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Strickland and Whicker 1992) which themselves produced differing findings based on the level of office sought by black candidates (Highton 2004 explores House elections in 1996 and 1998; Jones and Clemons 1993

explore the Virginia gubernatorial election) which contrasted with popular support for voting for a black candidate in public opinion surveys.

In addition to coming to discordant conclusions, our studies are also increasingly limited for several important reasons. First, the methodological approach of existing research is out of sync with important changes that have occurred in racial politics. Many of the minority candidates studies were case studies, appropriate at the time given that most black/white contests were happening at the mayoral level in very diverse contexts. Few give us workable models for understanding the situation presented by elections on this side of the 21st century, namely, a black candidate for the highest office in the country and several black candidates running for office in majority white districts and for other high profile offices at the statewide level. In addition, egalitarian racial norms are even more widespread and important today, making direct references to a candidates' race a red flag (Berinsky 1999). Therefore, designs based on visual rather than textual cues may be critical for uncovering sensitive attitudes. Second, race in these first generation studies was treated as invariant. We don't know how evaluations of minority candidates are mediated by their ideology, name, platform, or skin color and whether a candidate's race is resistant to intermediating information or, conversely, magnified by congruent information. Moreover, case studies and small laboratory studies did not allow for deeper exploration of whether certain demographic groups of voters react differently to black office-seekers.

Finally, including skin color in race-of-candidate studies may uncover 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 fifty percent 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 are less generous with darker black disaster victims. Do voters make similar color-based judgments?

In sum, skin color adds a factor that may be important in racialized voting given that it has been found to be an important dimension in other areas of life; it also gives us a new way of testing racial bias implicitly without raising the red flag of race.

The Study

In order to examine the role of skin color in electoral politics, an Internet-based survey experiment was administered on a nationally representative sample^x of 2,138 non-Hispanic white adults in September 2004^{xi}; respondents were exposed to campaign advertisements that altered the race, skin color, and platform of candidates and asked about their reactions to the contenders. First, subjects were shown the campaign literature of two opposing male candidates of approximately the same age and informed that the candidates are 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 digitally averages several faces together to produce distinct candidates.^{xii}

The campaign ads give the candidates opposing stances on five issues – economic growth, health care, education, public safety, and the environment^{xiii} – such that one candidate supports a more conservative platform while the other candidate supports a more liberal platform across the five issues.^{xiv} The candidates also had a randomized name assignment, one having a more Anglo-sounding name (“Tom Sheldon”), while his opponent had a name more closely

associated with blacks (“Martin Turner”), building on previous work where black-sounding names can condition reactions to a target (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003). Studies of racial stereotyping have consistently found that stereotypic beliefs can be interrupted by countervailing information and conversely, amplified by stereotype-consistent information. When stereotypical information is congruent (black Martin Turner, black liberal), I expect that the black candidate will suffer, but when distinct (black Tom Sheldon, black conservative), the black candidate will be rewarded.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of these four campaigns, creating a total of 16 possible versions of the experimental stimuli (4 X 2 X 2): White1 vs. White2; White1 vs. Light skinned Black; White1 vs. Dark skinned Black; Light skinned Black vs. Dark skinned Black.

[Table 1 about here.]

Immediately after subjects read the campaign literature, they were asked a battery of pretested questions about their reactions, including a feeling thermometer rating, 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), the respondents’ interest in the campaign and concern about the outcome of the election, the importance of certain candidate characteristics in determining their vote, and perceived ideology of the candidates.^{xv} 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.^{xvi} Respondent demographic and socioeconomic information as well as partisanship and ideology were collected by Knowledge Networks.

The study included a total of 2,138 non-Hispanic white respondents, out of 3000 total contacted (71% acceptance rate). As shown in the table in Appendix IV, the sample is comparable to the American National Election Study for that year and the distribution of subject characteristics are relatively constant across groups, with the exception that there are slightly fewer Republican identifiers in Treatment 1B (White1 X Dark-skinned Black) and slightly fewer respondents identifying as Democrat or liberal in Treatment 2 (Light-skinned Black X Dark-skinned Black).

Through its innovations, 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, which was done of a non-probability sample (students in Louisville, Kentucky) in a laboratory setting (Terkildsen 1993). 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.

First, unlike past experiments of candidate evaluation, it contains a nationally representative sample with enough respondents to analyze how the demographic profile of the "voter" affects their evaluation of black and white contenders. Student samples, relied on by prior studies, were found to be very problematic for the study of racial attitudes (Sears 1986). Because racial prejudice in the South is stronger, experiments based on small, region-specific samples limit how far we can make generalized conclusions. Perhaps even more important is the array of finer substantive considerations a nationally based sample will open up. Recent research in the racial attitudes literature has suggested that women are more receptive to racial cues and more likely to avoid race-based decisions than men (Hutchings, Walton, Jr., and Benjamin 2005) and that gender was the most important predictor of racially prejudiced attitudes (Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997). One fascinating study found that the gender gap in vote choice was due

entirely to evaluations of “how compassionate candidates are toward vulnerable social groups” (Hutchings, et al. 2004, 512). In that study, women were least supportive of George W. Bush when he appeared alongside the racially conservative Republican issue message but the gender gap disappeared when both candidates were racially sympathetic. Consistent with studies finding that women are more likely to be racial egalitarians, exhibit compassion for disadvantaged groups, and more likely to reject racial appeals, candidate race could operate as an important signal to female voters. While not the primary focus here, this study can lend insights about whether voters respond differently to candidate race based on certain relevant aspects of their demographic background (age, region, partisanship, and education) through a large, national sample.

Second, the design is also unique in its verisimilitude to a real campaign by including candidate positions on campaign literature, candidate names, as well as a comparison of *two* candidates. This serves two very important functions. The first is to enable an exploration of interactions (e.g. how skin color affects the perception of minority candidates with counter-stereotypical stances and names). The second is to increase the reliability of the results by modeling an actual campaign, where voters usually have some basic information on the positions of opposing candidates, which also is connected to ameliorating concerns over social desirability.

Third, the study uses a novel way of measuring racial attitudes. As Kuklinski and colleagues note, “Validly measuring racial attitudes is one of the most difficult tasks that social scientists face” (1997, 324). Studies have employed new methods to circumvent the concealment of racially controversial and sensitive attitudes, designing their studies in ways that allow participants to express racial animus openly without the interviewer’s awareness; one method is the ‘list’ experiment, an unobtrusive measure that asks respondents to merely say the

number of things on a list of a few things that make them angry, without asking them to reveal which items specifically (Streb, et al. 2008; Kuklinski, et al. 1997; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). In similar fashion, other studies have indirectly cued race through implicit appeals to race (Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2004; Federico 2004; Valentino) or subliminal priming (Kam 2007); through cues that indirectly highlight race, “the audience attends to the racial content just enough to process it, but does not attend to the fact that the content is racial” (Mendelberg 2008a, 110).

To more closely measure racial perceptions in the current study, several different techniques are used. Departing from the ‘paper and pencil tests’ that characterized early studies set in the laboratory, this study more closely approximates the confidentiality of the voting booth through an internet-based design previously unavailable to researchers. Most importantly, it dampens the social desirability effects associated with social survey items that directly ask respondents to reveal their racial beliefs by using an anonymous computer response. 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 any effect of the race of the interviewer. In addition to the internet design, the study presents racial information in a visual rather than a textual label, which is less explicit. In contrast to previous studies of racialized voting, subjects are given more than just cosmetic information about both candidates in the posited contest, which also serves to reduce self-monitoring by lowering the possibility that subjects are aware that they are being asked about race. Finally, by including a treatment that is racially neutral (the contest between the light-skinned and dark-skinned black), the study can measure the presence of racially-based perceptions that are not subject to conscious

control. This is a novel way of measuring racial attitudes but also may be a window into an important, as yet unrecognized, expression of racial bias.

Results

How race matters for candidate evaluation depends largely on skin color. Darker skin magnified the effect of race, exacerbated stereotypical beliefs about candidates, made certain categories of voters more or less likely to support the candidate, and heightened the sensitivity of voters to the name and race of the candidate. Dark skin was resistant to counter-stereotypical information while amplifying the effect of race under stereotype-congruent information. In addition to color, the results also demonstrate new insights in the evaluation of black candidates, extending past studies based on student samples alone. For example, for the first time, the study shows systematically that race and color diminish the power of partisan cues. Subjects were less likely to heed information about the ideology of the candidate and more likely to attend to name and color in conditions with a black opponent, suggesting that the traditional basis of voting (evaluating candidates' stances on issues and political ideology) was diminished as subjects relied on other, less substantive information (name, color) to make political judgments and ultimately, to determine vote choice. The analysis proceeds by examining differences between the control and first two treatments (excluding the last treatment) in whether and how candidates' perceived political traits, favorability, and vote choice were affected by race and skin color, how name and platform interacted with color and race, and whether demographic characteristics of the "voter" mattered. The second part of the analysis examines the impact of skin color separately from racial difference by comparing the control with the last treatment in which a contest is posed between two black candidates of different shades of color.

First, I examine whether race and color influenced stereotypic perceptions of the candidates' political qualities. (For the purposes of this analysis, the "opponent" is always the white opponent in the control, the light-skinned black candidate in the first treatment, and the dark-skinned black candidate in the second treatment group.) Figure 1 displays the differences across treatment groups in the proportion of respondents who rated the opposing candidate more favorably across four characteristics. In the control condition, relatively equal percentages of respondents labeled the opposing candidate as more experienced, intelligent, hard working, and trustworthy (as indicated by the relatively flat line across the bars, which remain steady at around 44 percent for all traits). In contrast to the control condition, when subjects were exposed to an opponent that was black, they were significantly more likely to say he was less experienced (and for one candidate, less intelligent) but more hard working and trustworthy. For example, for black opponents in both treatment groups there was over a twenty point difference in the percentage of respondents that described him as experienced versus hardworking. Compared to the control, the percentage of respondents rating the light-skinned black opponent as more experienced and intelligent declined twelve and five points, respectively. 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, as indicated by the staircase appearance of the bars in the graph. Stated differently, a black opponent entering the contest moved white subjects to believe his white counterpart was more experienced, and for one candidate, more intelligent. Skin color also played a role; subjects were especially likely to describe the black candidate as harder working and more trustworthy when he had dark skin.

[Figure 1 about here]

There are two potential interpretations for these results. First, perhaps when evaluating black candidates, 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 to 4 percentage points). Moreover, only the positive stereotypes were magnified for the darker black candidate, which suggests that because respondents have a higher awareness of race in this condition, subjects faced incentives not to negatively evaluate this candidate.

The second explanation for the asymmetrical trait attributions in the black candidate conditions compared to the control is that the results may be reflecting racialized beliefs about the candidate's background. According to this logic, respondents understand that blacks face socioeconomic inequality and other disadvantages; with this information brought to mind by the racial cue, 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; the design of the study doesn't permit further adjudication. Regardless of which explanation is predominant, we see a sharp

divergence in evaluations of the opposing candidate in experimental conditions in which the only difference was race and skin color.

The survey experiment contained a manipulation that varied the name of the candidate from a more Anglo name, Tom Sheldon, to a less Anglo-sounding name, Martin Turner. The findings are consistent with the expectation that a counterstereotypical name will yield more support for the minority candidate, yet still surprising. In general, “Martin Turner” was evaluated less positively across all conditions including the control on perceptions of experience, intelligence, work ethic, and trustworthiness. However, the magnitude of the effect of the name was itself contingent on race and skin color; *the negative effect of the name was greater for black candidates, and significantly greater for the darker-skinned candidate*. Figure 2 displays the difference in positive traits when the opponent was named Martin Turner versus Tom Sheldon for the control and treatment groups. The darker-skinned black candidate was by far the most sensitive to the name difference. More specifically, the white opponent was labeled 2-5 percentage points less in the positive trait if he appeared as Martin Turner; by comparison, the dark-skinned black opponent suffered a drop of 6-8 percentage points if he appeared as Martin Turner. In the control condition, the percent describing the opponent as more intelligent declined slightly from 39 to 35 between Tom Sheldon and Martin Turner; conversely, 42 percent of subjects described the dark-skinned black opponent as more experienced when he appeared as Tom Sheldon, compared to only 34 percent when named Martin Turner. Otherwise stated, the effect of a black-sounding name was to depress the assignment of positive qualities to the black opponent, especially when paired with a more black appearance (dark-skinned). When they saw a black candidate, subjects interpreted the additional information of a name – however innocuous – along racial lines.

[Figure 2 about here]

A distinct pattern is witnessed in the next set of results. Recall that subjects were shown two candidates, one with a liberal platform, the other with a conservative stance across five issues. As in the name manipulation, I expected that having a stereotype-inconsistent ideology would help the black opponent compared to the control. Figure 3 plots the difference between the platforms (liberal/conservative) for the likelihood of assigning the positive attribute to the opponent. In all conditions, the conservative opponent is described more positively on the relevant traits than an opponent running on a liberal platform. However, the results show the opposite of the effect of name with regard to race/color; the magnitude of the effect of platform difference was larger for the white opponent in the control condition. In the control condition, differences in platform information led subjects to discern significant differences in the experience, intelligence, work ethic, and trustworthiness of the white candidates; for black candidates, however, distinct platforms did not play as great a role for arriving at judgments about their political traits. The figure demonstrates that subjects perceived less difference between black opponents with ideologically opposed platforms in two qualities they possessed (hardworking and trustworthy). Paired with the results above, this suggests that information about their issue stances is less differentiating than name and color for black candidates. Further, when confronted with a candidate who was black, subjects relied less on substantive information (issues and ideology) and more on symbolic/descriptive information (name). This finding is disturbing in that it suggests that characteristics that produce stereotypical information shortcuts (name, color) are more important for black candidates than actual information about their issue positions and that the positive benefit of stereotype-modifying information mattered more in the area of symbolic information. Therefore, the traditional basis of voting (evaluating candidates'

stances on issues and ideology) were diminished as a new source of info was imparted – race/color/name. For the first time, this study suggests that subjects paid less attention to party cues in the condition with a black candidate and more to name and color.

[Figure 3 about here]

The survey also queried subjects on which candidate they believed would better handle certain issues in office. While the results were smaller than those found in evaluations of candidates' political qualities, significant differences emerged for perceptions of which candidate would be better in office in dealing with the economy and aiding the disadvantaged (but not the issues health or crime). For example, when the opponent was white with a liberal platform, 27 percent of subjects said he would be somewhat or much better in office on aiding the disadvantaged; this proportion grew to 37 when the opponent was a light-skinned black liberal and 43 when he was a dark-skinned black liberal ($p=.057$). In contrast, when the opponent was conservative, subjects were only more likely to believe the black opponent would be better at helping the disadvantaged relative to the control if he was dark-skinned ($p=.001$). When subjects were asked which candidate would be better in office on the economy, they perceived a greater difference between the candidates in the interracial conditions and favored the white candidate when the opponent was black (regardless of color) and liberal ($p=.034$). The differences in evaluations of candidates' issue competence and political qualities help explain differences in vote choice, which I turn to next.

Four prominent findings emerge: 1) Skin color acts as a cue in addition to race alone 2) the size and direction of the effect of race and skin color depends on platform and voter partisanship; 3) counterstereotypical information moderates but does not completely neutralize the effect of race and skin color on candidate evaluation and vote choice; and 4) favoritism for

the black candidate among Democrats and women and hostility to the black candidate by Republicans and men remains even after controlling for ideological perceptions. Unlike the design of past studies which did not allow for investigation in how partisans differ from nonpartisans, southerners from nonsoutherners, women from men, I find that candidate evaluation was not uniformly negative or positive but depends on the demographic characteristics of the “voter.” Table 2 presents the differences in vote choice by subject group by certain relevant characteristics of voters: racial affect,^{xvii} gender, and partisanship.^{xviii} Subjects with a pro-white orientation are less likely to vote for the black candidate, particularly with dark skin, while those favorable to blacks or having a neutral orientation were considerably more likely to cast their vote for the black candidate compared to the control, a finding that largely confirms the persistent role of racial affect in predicting support for black candidates (Terkildsen 1993; Citrin, Sears, and Green 1990; Cam 2007).

[Table 2 about here.]

Of greater interest, the table demonstrates stark and statistically significant differences by gender and party. Women were more likely to vote for the black opponent, and especially likely when he was dark-skinned, compared to the control. Even though women were just as likely as men to report that the black candidate had less experience, they were still more likely to cast their vote for him. Though not reaching statistical significance, men were less likely to cast their vote for the black candidate compared to the control. Subjects who identified as Democrats were more likely to favor the black opponent, but only if he was dark-skinned, while Republican partisans were less likely to vote for the black candidate, especially if he was dark-skinned. Perhaps these differences are explained by subjects inferring information about the partisanship

of candidates given information about race and skin color. Given the next set of results, however, that explanation comes up short.

If a liberal stereotype of black candidates is driving the differences in vote support and favorability, I expect that when given countervailing information about the candidate's liberalism, racialized voting along party lines should diminish. Past studies have also found that the presence of partisan cues diminishes the impact of race on candidate evaluation (Cam 2007). 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, 70).

Assigning the opponent to the more conservative platform enables a test of this.^{xix} The results in Figure 4 suggest that counter-stereotypical information attenuates the race of candidate effects but not entirely. The tendency for support to diminish among Republicans and men and to increase among Democrats and women when the opponent was black does not appear to be due to subjects using race as a stand-in for party affiliation of the candidate. Among men, the black opponent loses support compared to the control whether running as a conservative or liberal (though the result is small and insignificant). While Republicans are more likely to vote for the opponent when he has a conservative platform, their support for him declines as the conservative opponent gets darker with the dark-skinned black opponent suffering a 10-point decline. When the candidate was liberal, the vote declines as well, so much so that the liberal dark-skinned black candidate receives a meager 17 percent of the Republican vote. Though no longer statistically significant, the trend is still the same: among Republicans, black candidates

lose support, even when they have conservative platforms, and the effects of the vote decline are most pronounced when the black opponent is of darker hue. Skin color and race influenced the vote of Republican-identifiers beyond the platform cue.

[Figure 4 about here.]

For women, the results are straightforward and consistent; relative to the control, the opponent receives more support when black (and even moreso when dark-skinned) regardless of platform ($p=.168$ for conservative opponent; $p=.038$ for liberal opponent). Among Democratic-identifying subjects, the effect of platform for black candidates depends on color. The results for the black liberal follow the same racialized pattern as we have just seen – vote share increases, and it increases with darker skin color. However, the counterstereotypic information – namely, a conservative platform – moderates this effect, *but only for one candidate*. On the one hand, the dark-skinned black conservative opponent was more palatable to Democrats than the white conservative in the equivalent condition; conversely, vote share for the conservative light-skinned black opponent dropped to 22 percent. This suggests that *skin color itself mediates the partisan cue of race*. Color interacts with issue stance in a complex way, such that among Democrats, the favorable race-based perception of a black candidate is weakened, if not reversed, when the candidate has fair skin in combination with conservative political positions. This result suggests that being a lighter member of the racial group with a conservative message diminishes the affection bestowed on black candidates by Democratic partisans, which I discuss further soon. Because past studies have not been able to explore finer analyses of the influence of voter demographics or skin color, this finding was unanticipated.

To further test whether the effect of race and color on vote choice can be explained by perceptions of the candidates' liberalism, I estimate a logit regression model in order to explore

the determinants of vote choice for men and women, and Democrats and Republicans, separately. The dependent variable is *Vote for White Candidate* (W1 in Control). I include dummies for each of the treatment conditions (control omitted). I include an interaction term to capture whether the white candidate's platform (and perceived ideology) matches the respondent's partisanship and ideology. In addition to standard demographic controls, the model includes an interaction between racial affect (coded as 1=Pro-White; 0=Neutral or Pro-Black) and being exposed to a biracial election. The dummy subject groups in Table 3 indicate that subjects were equally likely to vote for the white candidate, except in two experimental conditions. In the contest between the white and a dark-skinned black candidate, Republicans are less likely to vote for the black candidate, while women and Democrats are significantly more likely to vote for the black candidate. If black candidates are perceived as more liberal and voters simply voted for the candidate they perceived as most aligned with their own ideological disposition, then the ideology interaction should pick this up. In short, the level of support for the dark-skinned black opponent was not due to a liberal stereotype.

Not only was there no negative effect of race on vote choice among female subjects and those subjects who identify with the Democratic Party, there was a large and significant favoritism for the black opponent above and beyond a liberal stereotype. Given that perceived ideology is not the reason, what can explain this? One possible mechanism is suggested by previous research: compassion. Identifying with or experiencing feelings of closeness to outgroups can motivate greater support for policies that would help blacks (Craemer 2008). Psychological studies have demonstrated that when individuals are confronted by outgroups' vulnerability they may feel "dispositional empathic concern," which is the notion that "feeling compassion for a member of a stigmatized group can improve attitudes toward the group as a

whole” (Karacanta and Fitness 2006, 2731). Viewing an interracial contest then may have led subjects to experience an emotive response of compassion for the black opponent, provoking “impulses to compensate out-group members” particularly when he was of dark complexion (2732). Prior research also suggests that compassion is more likely to be induced in women than men. One study found that women and men respond differently to political candidates based on how racially inclusive their message is (Hutchings, et al. 2004). Importantly, the authors note, it was not just that racially liberal stances resonate more with women because they share agreement on issues also important to blacks; instead, women actually used candidates’ expression of racial sensitivity as a signal about how compassionate a candidate is, a quality that they found was more important to women than men.

In addition to stances on racial issues, it is also likely that female subjects also used the candidate’s race itself to infer compassion of the candidates or felt racial empathy that they expressed by rewarding the black opponent with their vote. An interracial election could have served to remind subjects that the black candidate was more vulnerable and provide a signal about his own compassionate qualities, thus producing a desire to reward and support black candidates among women and Democrats. This suggested mechanism is consistent with the finding that there was no gender gap in the control condition (two white candidates) but as the candidates race diverged, a large gender chasm opened up with women expressing great affinity for the black candidate. Also suggestive of the compassion mechanism is the finding that women were more likely than men to label the opponent as hardworking when he was black; only 38 percent of women believed the opponent was more hardworking in the control (when he was white), compared to 53 and 59 percent when the opponent was a light-skinned black and dark-skinned black, respectively ($p=.000$; results were insignificant for men). Subjects’

evaluations of the candidates issue strengths further suggest this compassion effect at work; subjects believed the opponent would be better in office on helping the disadvantaged if he was black and especially so if he was dark-skinned. However, when the black is no longer viewed as coming from a disadvantaged and vulnerable outgroup – he is light-skinned and conservative – not only do Democrats and women no longer favor him, they actually find him more objectionable than a white conservative opponent. He is seen not just as not committed to their ideological orientation, but as black and conservative, namely not committed to his racial group, and view him as less compassionate. Again, this explanation is consistent with the finding presented earlier that black opponents were viewed as better in office for the disadvantaged and harder working, except in the condition of a light-skinned black with conservative platform. Rather than being biased against the light-skinned black conservative, he elicits less compassion because he is no longer viewed as deserving of racial sympathy or as being sympathetic to his racial group. The design of the present study does not permit us to test the sources of this asymmetrical interaction effect of color and platform but raises interesting dynamics for future study.

This analysis has so far shown an important influence of race and color on candidate perceptions, one that interacts with voter demographics and is conditioned by name and platform. However, across treatments, the darker black candidate tended to elicit more positive evaluations (at least on a few of the trait measures). 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 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. 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.

Turning to the findings, Figure 5 displays the percent of respondents in the control condition and last treatment group who described the opponent as having more of the relevant four traits. Two features in this graph stand out. First, relative to the control (two white candidates), the proportion of respondents saying the opponent was more experienced, intelligent, or hardworking was significantly lower for the dark-skinned black opponent in a contest against a light-skinned black. In other words, *subjects showed a strong tendency to assign positive attributes to the light-skinned black over his darker-skinned counterpart*. For example, the percentage of respondents that described the conservative white opponent in the control condition as intelligent was about 41 percent; in contrast, the proportion of subjects describing the conservative opponent as intelligent when he was dark-skinned dropped 10 percentage points in a race against a fellow black of lighter hue. There were only two exceptions to this general pattern: a greater percent of subjects described the dark-skinned black candidate as hardworking and slightly more as experienced when he had a liberal platform. The second

notable finding depicted in the graph is that there was a larger effect of platform in the contest between two white candidates, consistent with the findings discussed earlier in this article. A change in platform more strongly shaped the attributions in the condition with two white candidates.

[Figure 5 about here.]

Like political trait evaluations, skin color also had a considerable impact on vote choice. Figure 6 plots the results. As before, Martin Turner is less favored than Tom Sheldon; the conservative platform is favored among Republican identifiers and the liberal platform among Democrat partisans. However, relative to the control group, subjects “voted” less for the dark-skinned black candidate compared to his lighter opponent. This occurred regardless of platform and name. The difference between the control and last treatment was particularly pronounced when the opponent was conservative; for both Democrats and Republicans, the conservative opponent suffered a 10 point drop in vote support if he had dark skin, reversing earlier results that suggested Democrats favored darker-skinned blacks. There is only one exception to this general trend of favoritism for the light-skinned black: Democratic-identifiers supported the liberal dark-skinned Black opponent in equal proportion as the control. Unlike the earlier results that showed favoritism for the black opponent among Democrats, *there is a clear favoritism for the light-skinned black candidate when race is controlled*. 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 ($p=.023$). When racial motivation was not aware to subjects, they responded with favoritism for the lighter of the black candidates. Color damaged the electoral prospects of the darker black in the intraracial contest compared to the control. The findings here suggest that some of the

favoritism for the black candidate found in the interracial contest among women and Democrats – the compassion effect – does not hold up once categorical racial difference is removed.

Democrats and women were just as likely to prefer a fairer black candidate over a dark-skinned opponent. 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.

[Figure 6 about here.]

Discussion

This analysis has suggested the continuing importance of race-based evaluations, but suggests an important addition, namely that these evaluations are not only associated with our traditional racial divide. 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. This effect was always in the same direction: if there was an effect of race, it was larger for the dark-skinned candidate. Light-skinned black candidates were more immune from race effects in both directions (bias for and against). Among respondents for whom the black candidate was disfavored, the candidate was even more objectionable when dark and conversely, when the black candidate was favored (among women and Democrats), darker color provided a bonus. 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. Darker color also increased the penalty of a black-sounding name.

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.

This analysis also amends studies of race in electoral evaluation. To the mixed evidence of previous studies using disparate methodologies, it suggests that the effect of race was more complex than traditionally appreciated. Instead of being uniform, the effect of race depended on voter characteristics. For some groups of voters, not only was the assumed reluctance to support a black candidate not found, but a favoritism for the outgroup candidate was expressed. Further analysis is needed to understand the mechanisms behind the greater support of women and Democrats. In addition, platform neutralized, but didn't totally eliminate, the effect of race/color on vote choice and trait attribution. A surprising set of findings showed that information about the candidate became more or less important depending on candidate race; specifically, a black candidate diminished the effect of partisan cues and magnified the effect of a black-sounding name. Information that is normally quite important played a muted role.

While scholars in various fields have demonstrated pronounced disadvantage associated with darker color, 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.

Tables & Figures

Table 1: Experimental Design

<i>Experimental Group</i>	<i>Name Manipulation</i>	<i>Platform Manipulation</i>
White1 vs. White2	Tom Sheldon	Conservative
White1 vs. Light-skinned Black	Martin Turner	Liberal
White vs. Dark-skinned Black		
Light-skinned Black vs. Dark-Skinned Black		

Table 2: Vote Choice by Subject Group and Respondent Characteristics

Vote Share for Opponent							
SUBJECT GROUP	TOTAL	Gender		Party		Racial Affect	
		<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>GOP</i>	<i>Democrat</i>	<i>Pro-White</i>	<i>Neutral or Pro-Black</i>
<i>White vs. White</i>	44.3%	48.7%	39.7%	49.8%	39.7%	45.9%	43.6%
<i>White vs. Light Black</i>	42.6	42.7	42.5	44.7	36.8	37.6	47.5
<i>White vs. Dark Black</i>	49.4	46.1	52.1	37.7	53.3	41.2	55.6
<i>Sig.</i>	.05	.46	.01	.06	.00	.24	.01
N	2003	955	1048	786	717	786	1184

Vote for Light Candidate	Men	Women	Republican	Democrat
Platform (light is Conservative)	0.180* (0.088)	-0.006 (0.079)	0.379** (0.112)	-0.296** (0.093)
Name (light is Tom Sheldon)	0.159* (0.080)	0.070 (0.075)	0.011 (0.094)	0.179* (0.088)
White vs. Light Black Election	0.323 (0.226)	-0.093 (0.217)	0.321 (0.260)	0.088 (0.244)
White vs. Dark Black Election	0.105 (0.224)	-0.510* (0.210)	0.675* (0.272)	-0.538* (0.236)
Light Black vs. Dark Black Election	0.551* (0.222)	0.002 (0.217)	0.583* (0.260)	0.310 (0.260)
Household Income	-0.010 (0.023)	0.004 (0.021)	-0.000 (0.028)	-0.001 (0.025)
Education	0.077 (0.086)	-0.136 (0.082)	-0.016 (0.106)	-0.052 (0.097)
MSA Status	-0.209 (0.201)	0.338 (0.191)	-0.132 (0.234)	0.064 (0.229)
Midwest	0.041 (0.232)	0.432 (0.227)	0.196 (0.274)	0.034 (0.262)
South	0.278 (0.241)	0.238 (0.228)	0.305 (0.293)	-0.032 (0.267)
West	-0.027 (0.257)	0.234 (0.243)	0.222 (0.310)	-0.069 (0.274)
Respondent Ideology (6-pt.)	-0.053 (0.071)	-0.092 (0.071)	-0.035 (0.077)	-0.133 (0.079)
Respondent Party (7-pt)	0.025 (0.046)	-0.027 (0.042)		
Ideology Rating Difference (light-dark)	0.006 (0.040)	0.015 (0.040)	0.281** (0.054)	-0.169** (0.048)
Platform * Respondent Ideology	0.062 (0.124)	0.208 (0.118)	0.237 (0.138)	0.068 (0.126)
Platform * Respondent Party	0.543** (0.100)	0.375** (0.094)		
Perceived Ideology Difference * Respondent Ideology	0.710** (0.083)	0.651** (0.080)	0.443** (0.095)	0.566** (0.100)
Racial Affect (2-pt)	0.456** (0.167)	0.210 (0.155)	0.368* (0.189)	0.239 (0.182)
Gender			0.041 (0.189)	0.147 (0.176)
Constant	-0.238 (0.450)	0.297 (0.435)	-0.202 (0.497)	0.359 (0.448)
N	839	913	743	686

Table 8: Logit Regression Results. Dependent variable is Vote for Light Candidate. Subjects who did not give a choice were excluded from the analysis (about 6 percent). Standard errors in parentheses. *significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

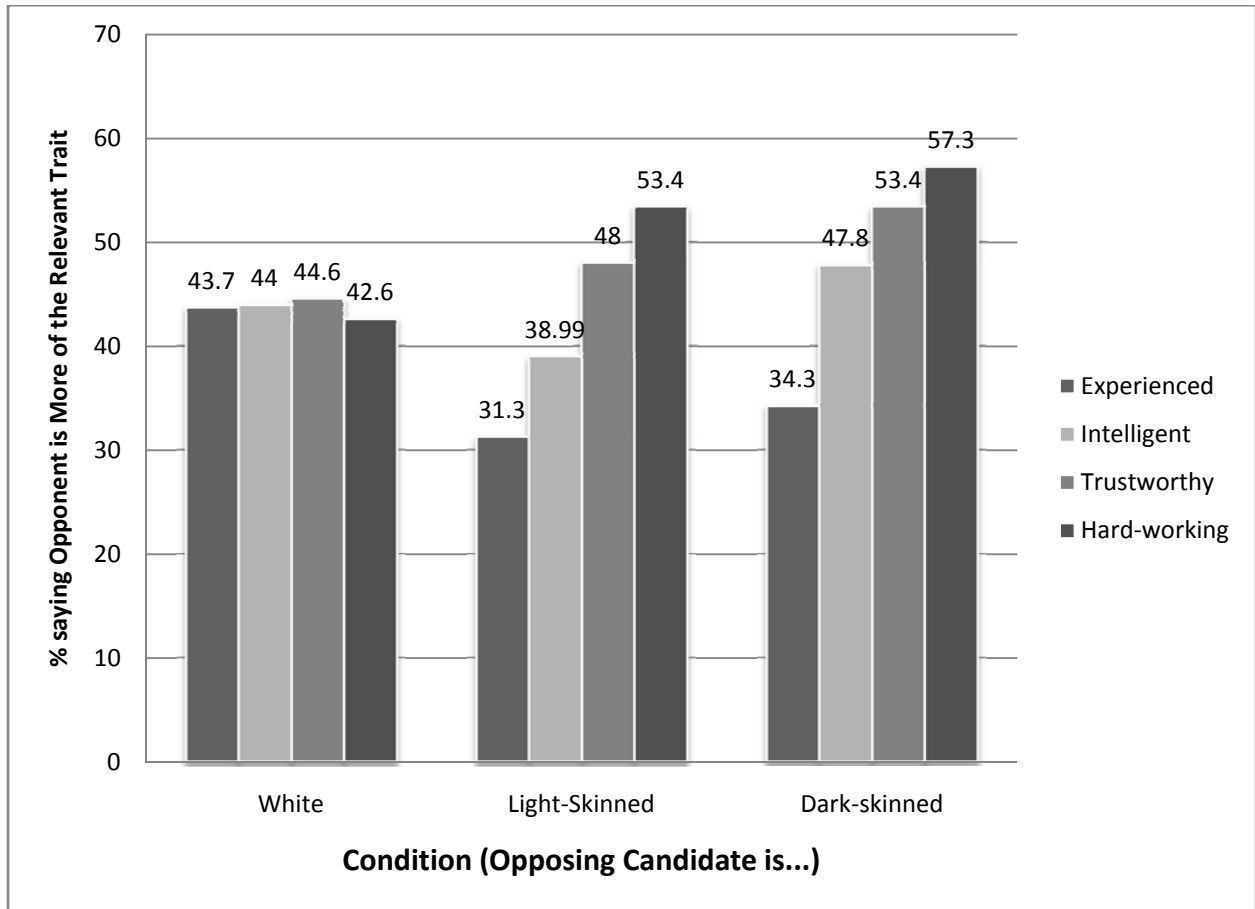


Figure 1: Perceived Candidate Traits by Subject Group

Experienced: $\chi^2 = 23.284$ $p = .001$

Intelligent: $\chi^2 = 12.872$ $p = .045$

Hardworking: $\chi^2 = 24.265$ $p = .000$

Trustworthy: $\chi^2 = 11.553$ $p = .073$

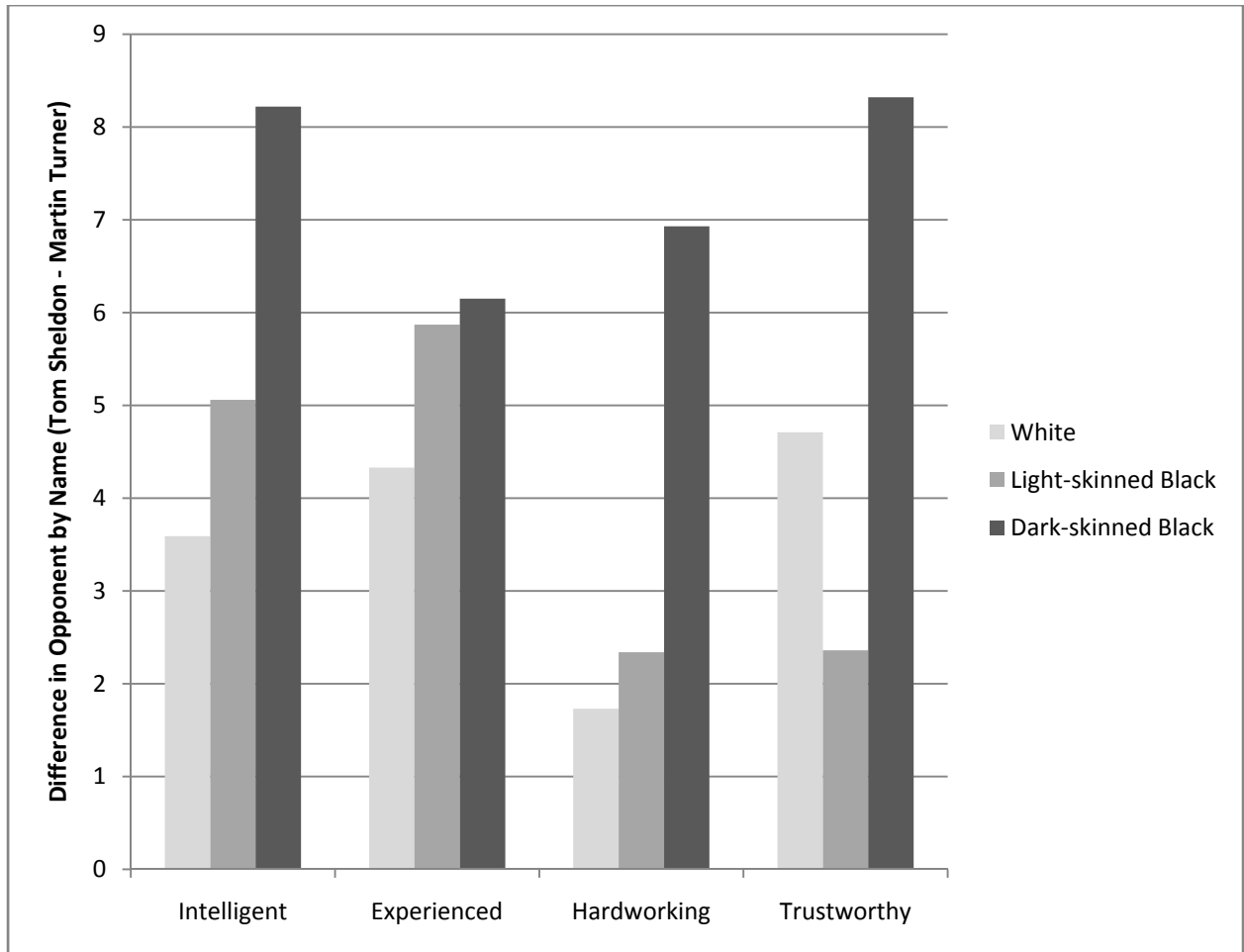


Figure 2: Difference between Trait Attributions by Name (Tom Sheldon/Martin Turner) and Subject Group.

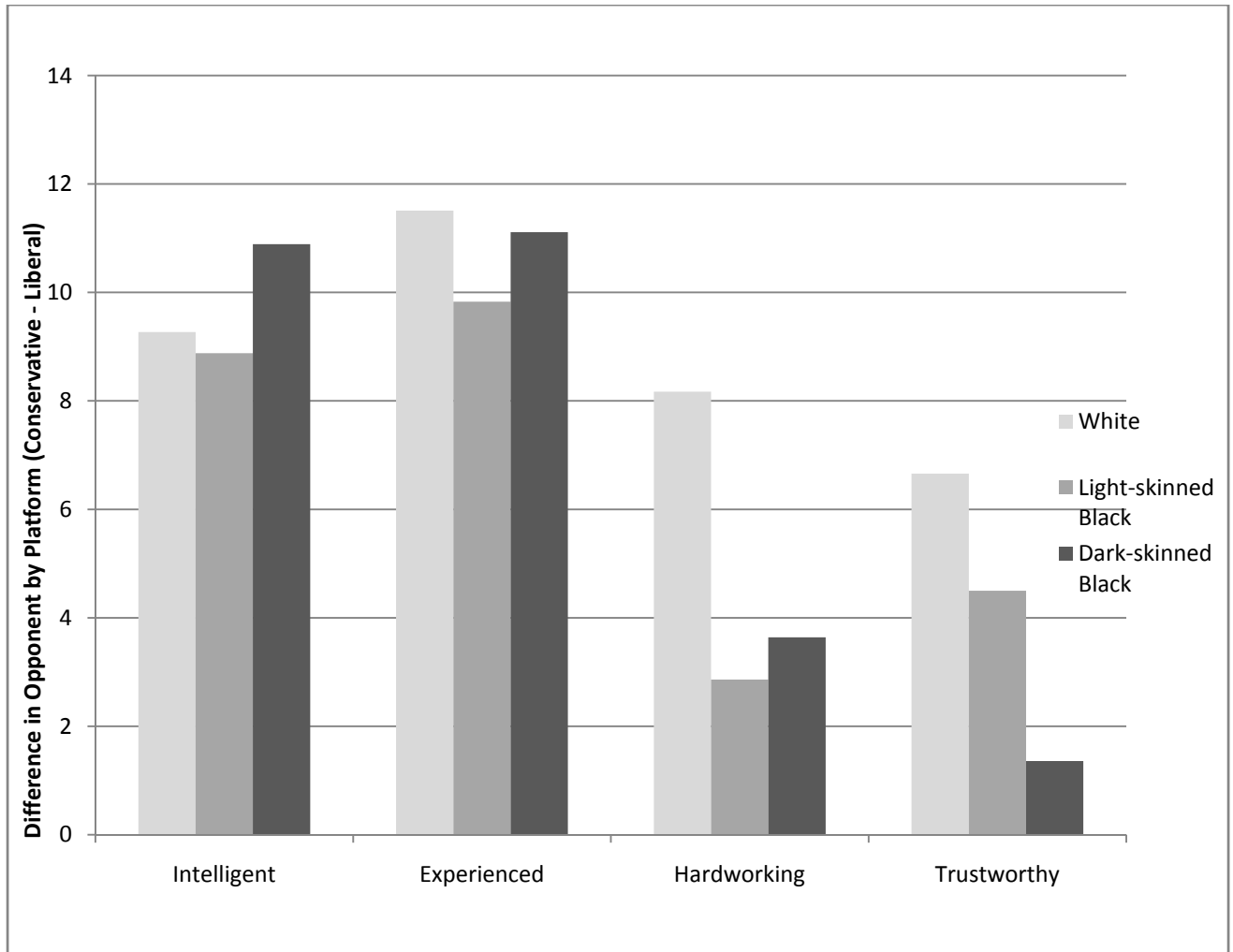


Figure 3: Difference between Trait Attributions by Platform (Conservative/Liberal) and Subject Group.

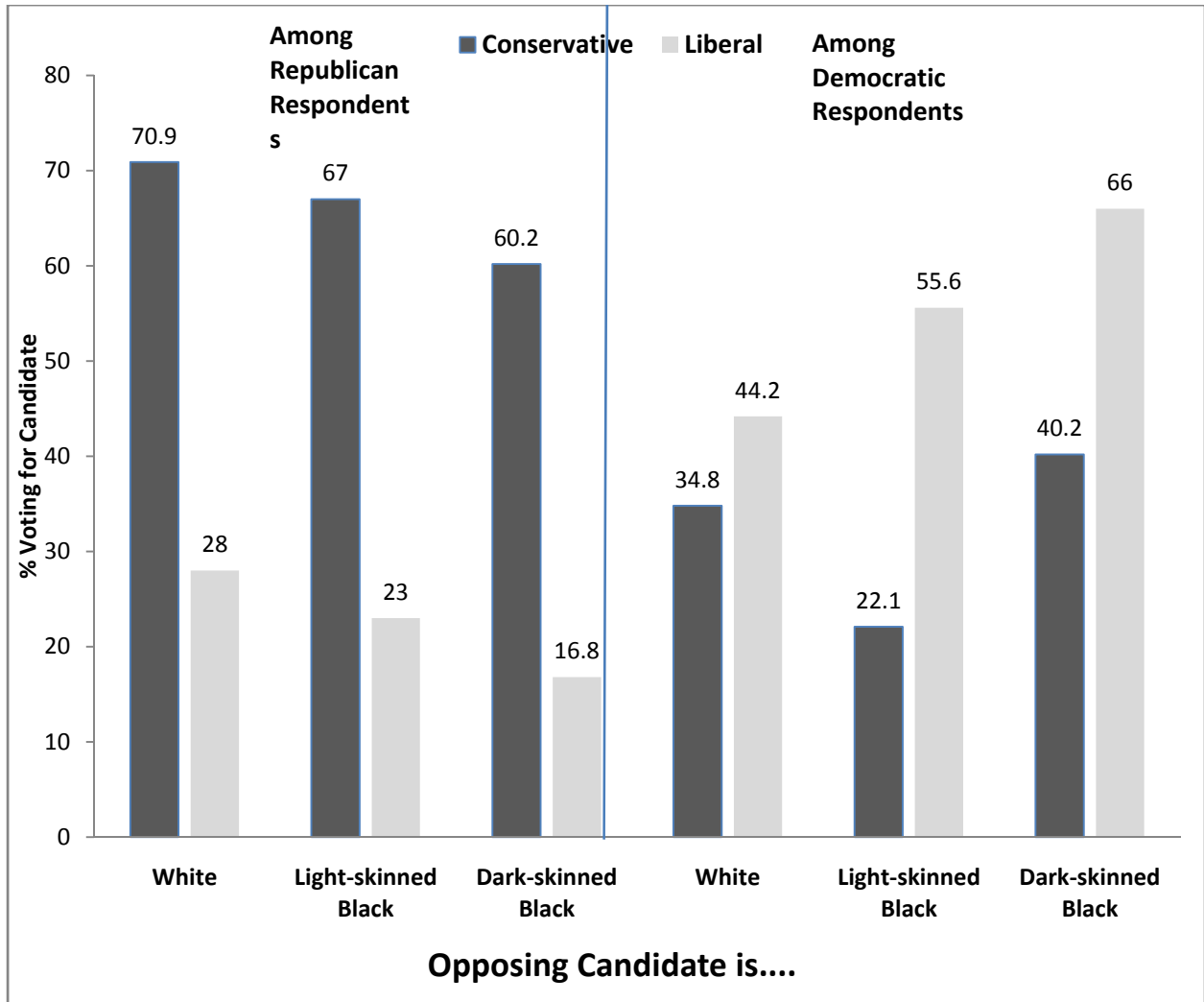


Figure 6: Vote by Platform and Subject Group, by Partisan Identification. Differences are significant for Democrats ($p < .05$) but not Republicans.

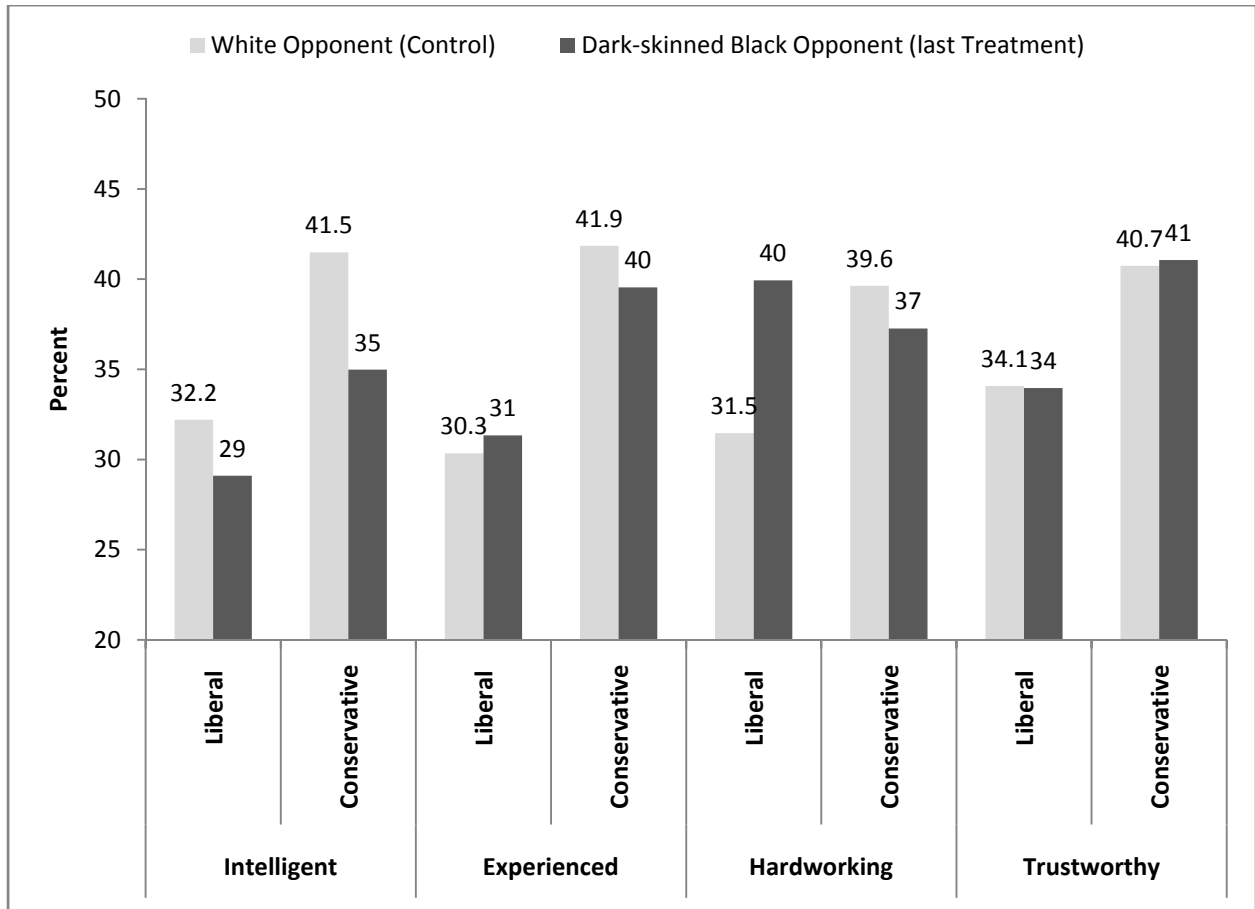


Figure 7: Perceived Traits in the Last Treatment Group (Light-skinned Black X Dark-skinned Black) Compared to the Control by Platform.

These results are not statistically significant except the Liberal Opponent Hardworking. Should I remove this chart?

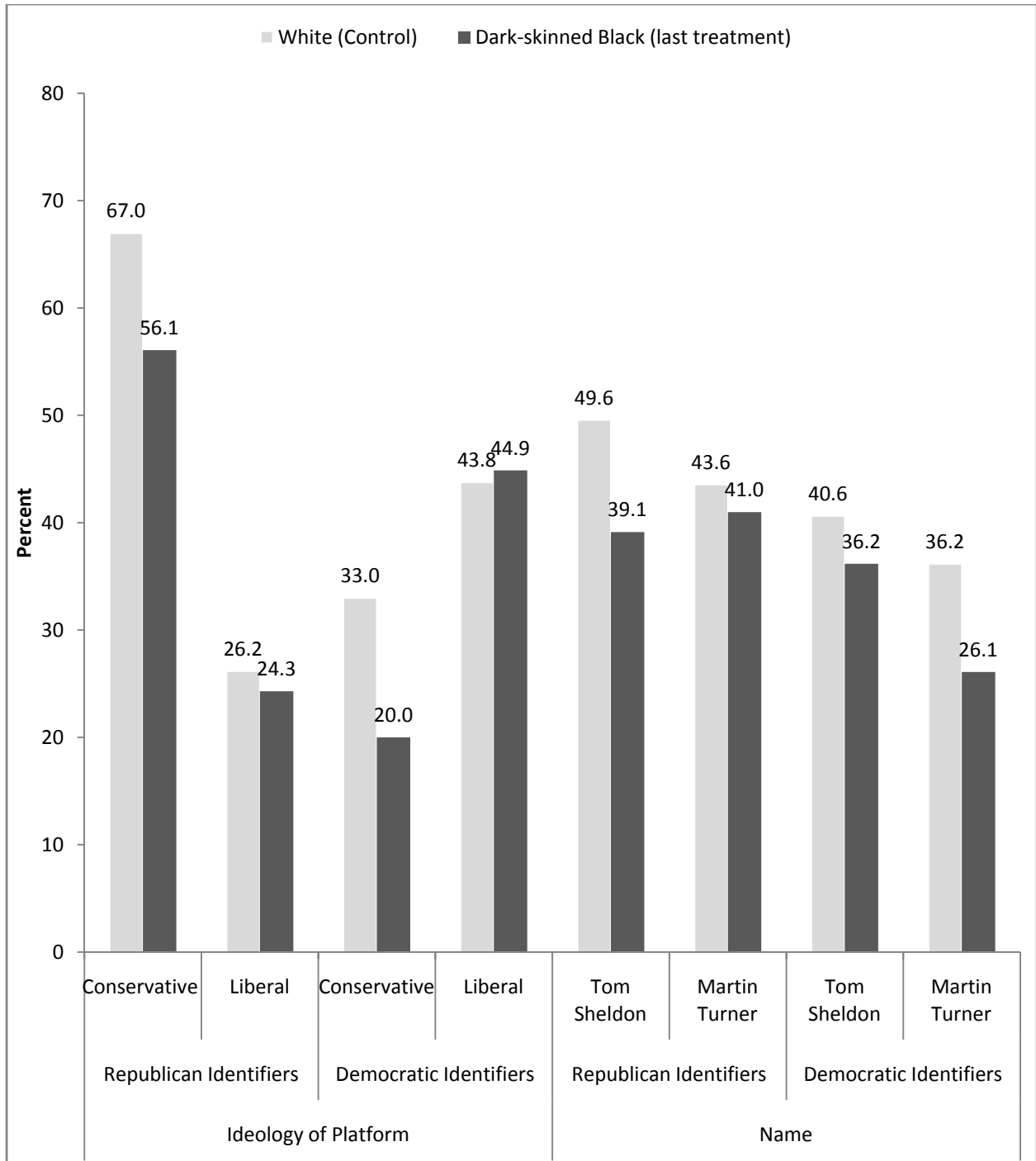


Figure 8: Vote Choice by Name and Platform Separately by Partisan Identification.

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ⁱⁱ **PUT CITE HERE**

ⁱⁱⁱ Interestingly, this effect was only present in cases where the murder victim was white.

^{iv} Although see Gullickson 2005 for a study that disagrees with these findings.

^v For a comprehensive exploration of color disparities and colorism than space allows here, see Nance 2005.

^{vi} One successful case was a claim brought by a dark-skinned black against Applebee’s restaurant in which the dark-skinned black employee complained about discrimination by his light-skinned boss.

^{vii} Quinnipiac University Poll [April, 2007].

^{viii} The presence of a “Bradley/Wilder effect” has been contested. Hopkins 2007 shows persuasively that the effect may have operated during the early 1990s but has since disappeared.

^{ix} Some case studies have attributed at least a portion of Doug Wilder and Edward Brooke’s electoral success to physical characteristics. At the end of the long list of factors, one study curiously stated that “looking more white” was a deracialization strategy (Strickland and Whicker 1992, 209). However, skin color in these studies was more of a curious afterthought rather than an important influence on reactions to black candidates. A dissertation on same-race elections with black candidates in New Orleans found that in these elections skin color plays a significant role in electability, such that lighter complexions are favored (Kirkland 2000).

^x 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.”

^{xi} We are 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 Caucasian 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. Indeed, a previous study of black candidates in New Orleans suggests that skin color was just as important to black voters (Kirkland 2000). Moreover, we know that blacks are just as likely to hold more negative stereotypes of darker-skinned blacks (Maddox & Gray 2002). To make an analysis of minority reactions feasible across a 16 cell design, however, required a very large oversample of Blacks and Latinos, which we were not able to obtain. Similar studies have in the end excluded their black, Latino, and Asian respondents from the resulting analysis (Hutchings, Walton, Jr., and Benjamin 2005)

^{xii} See Appendix I for a description of how images were produced. The morphing technique was adapted from the Implicit Association Tests (IAT). It allows researchers to have a comparison of two candidates while carefully controlled visual stimuli can elicit subject responses to the condition in question – race and skin color. Only one other study in political science has used this procedure; see Bailenson, et al. (forthcoming).

^{xiii} Candidate issue stances were modified versions of real candidate positions taken from campaign websites. See Appendix II for the candidate platforms.

^{xiv} 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). While voters don’t act in a vacuum, most elections are “rather information-poor environments in which voters typically know very little about candidates” (Berinski and Mendelberg 2005, 857). 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).

^{xv} 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). Refer to Appendix III for the exact survey questionnaire.

^{xvi} The racial predisposition question is asked after treatment so as not to prime subjects or clue them into the nature of the study (Mendelberg 2008b).

^{xvii} The measure of racial affect was computed by taking the difference between the respondent’s rating of whites and the their rating of blacks, so a positive number translates into favorable to whites where a negative number is more favorable to blacks and a 0 was neutral or no difference.

It was further collapsed so that feeling more positive towards whites was coded as 1, neutral disposition was coded as 0, and relative positive affect for blacks was coded as -1. There were 43 respondents (about 2%) who didn't respond.

^{xviii} Breakdowns by age, region, education, and income did not have a clear or significant impact and are excluded from the table.