

ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACKS IN THE OBAMA ERA CHANGING DISTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACTS ON JOB APPROVAL AND ELECTORAL CHOICE, 2008–2012

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Abstract Much published research indicates that voting behavior in the 2008 presidential election and evaluations of Barack Obama were importantly influenced by anti-Black sentiment. Various psychological theories made opposing predictions as to whether exposure to the first Black president during his first term would strengthen or weaken the alignment between general attitudes toward African Americans and evaluations of the president in particular. Using data from national surveys conducted in 2008, 2009–2010, and 2012, we compared the associations of prejudice toward Blacks with presidential approval in those years and with electoral choices in 2008 and 2012. As predicted by theories of individuation, attitudes toward Blacks became increasingly disconnected from evaluations of Mr. Obama and from people's electoral choices over time. However, levels of prejudice against Blacks rose between 2008 and 2012. Because of this increased prejudice and the diminishing individual-level influence of attitudes toward Blacks on electoral choices, prejudice toward Blacks

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doi:10.1093/poq/nfu012

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seems to have reduced Mr. Obama's vote share in the 2012 election by about the same extent as in 2008.

Although Barack Obama's election in 2008 constituted a major change in the status of Blacks in America, numerous studies belie the claim that the nation entered a "post-racial" era that year (e.g., [Tesler and Sears 2010](#)). Attitudes toward Blacks, measured in a variety of different ways, appear to have cost Mr. Obama votes in that election ([Lewis-Beck and Tien 2008](#); [Pasek et al. 2009](#); [Payne et al. 2010](#); [Piston 2010](#); [Redlawsk, Tolbert, and Franko 2010](#); [Tesler and Sears 2010](#); [Block 2011](#); [Highton 2011](#); [Jackman and Vavreck 2011](#); [Knuckey 2011](#); [Schaffner 2011](#); [Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012](#)). Furthermore, many Americans continued to express anti-Black sentiments after 2008 (e.g., [Valentino and Brader 2011](#)). These attitudes appear to have shaped opinions on many issues of government policy in recent years as well ([Hutchings 2010](#); [Tesler 2012](#)).

In this article, we explore the impact of attitudes toward Blacks on evaluations of President Obama's performance during his first term and on the outcome of the 2012 election. To do so, we examined two phenomena: (1) how attitudes toward Blacks changed, if at all, between 2008 and 2012; and (2) how the linkage between attitudes toward Blacks and evaluation of Mr. Obama changed during those years.

We begin by offering a theoretical overview of the phenomena to be studied. Next, we describe the data we analyzed, from national surveys of representative samples of Americans in 2008, 2009–2010 (hereafter referred to as 2009), and 2012. We then describe the results obtained and their implications for theories of prejudice and the conduct of contemporary politics.

Impact of Attitudes Toward Blacks on Presidential Approval and Electoral Choices

Many investigations using various methods have suggested that anti-Black attitudes cost Mr. Obama votes in the 2008 U.S. presidential election ([Pasek et al. 2009](#); [Lewis-Beck, Tien, and Nadeau 2010](#); [Tesler and Sears 2010](#); [Schaffner 2011](#)). This might have been the result of stereotype application, whereby people base their evaluation of a person on perceptions of a group to which he or she belongs ([Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1994](#); [Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000](#)). Race was a salient social category for Mr. Obama in 2008, so some individuals might have inferred his personal characteristics from their perceptions of Black Americans as a whole. Among individuals—both Black and White—with positive attitudes toward Blacks, this process might have benefited Mr. Obama ([Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2010](#); [Block 2011](#)); among people with negative attitudes toward Blacks, this process might have cost him esteem and votes ([Pasek et al. 2009](#)).

The impact of prejudice toward Blacks on evaluations of Mr. Obama may have played out in at least two ways during the years after his initial election. First, people who held negative attitudes toward Blacks may have been inclined to evaluate Mr. Obama's performance as president more negatively. Second, people with anti-Black attitudes may have been less inclined to vote for Mr. Obama in 2012. The magnitude of such effects would be a function of two changes that might have occurred after 2008: changes in the linkage between evaluations of Blacks and evaluations of Mr. Obama, and changes in the prevalence of pro- and anti-Black attitudes in the country.

Social psychology offers reasons why the strength of the linkage might have changed. Throughout Mr. Obama's first term, near-constant news focus provided Americans with a tremendous amount of information about the president that could help distinguish him from other Black Americans (cf. Hajnal 2007). Psychologists call this "individuating information" about a person. In the absence of such information, before perceivers get to know a person as an individual, perceivers are inclined to make inferences based on group stereotypes. But as individuating information is acquired over time, people usually rely less and less on stereotypes, because they can judge the person based on who he/she is and what he/she does (Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Fiske 1993; Blair 2002). Consequently, the acquisition of individuating information might be expected to decrease the impact of general attitudes toward Blacks on evaluations of Mr. Obama's performance (hypothesis 1a that we will test, abbreviated as H1a) and on 2012 voting decisions (H1b).

CHANGING LEVELS OF PREJUDICE

Attitude generalization: Anti-Black prejudice among White Americans was lower at the time of the 2008 presidential election than at the time of some previous presidential elections (Welch and Sigelman 2011) and lower than it had been during the months just before the election (Goldman 2012). This reduction of prejudice has been attributed to a so-called "Obama effect" on stereotypes of Blacks: People may have revised their stereotypes of Blacks in a positive direction because of positive perceptions of a prominent Black person (Plant et al. 2009; Bernstein, Young, and Claypool 2010; Columb and Plant 2011).

The hypothesis that exposure to the president might reduce prejudice toward Blacks is founded on the notion of attitude generalization: People are thought to update their group stereotypes according to positive and negative information they gain about salient individual members of that group (Bodenhausen et al. 1995; Henderson-King and Nisbett 1996; Macrae et al. 1998; Dasgupta and Greenwald 2001; Castelli et al. 2004; Richeson and Trawalter 2005; Dolderer, Mummendey, and Rothermund 2009; Mastro and Tukachinsky 2011; Stark, Flache, and Veenstra 2013). If some Americans came to believe during the 2008 campaign that Mr. Obama was hardworking, highly educated, and a

skilled politician, their perception of Blacks in general may have improved (cf. Ramasubramanian 2013). In line with this claim, experimental studies of college student participants found that exposure to the president reduced prejudice toward Blacks generally (Plant et al. 2009; Bernstein, Young, and Claypool 2010; Columb and Plant 2011). If this trend persisted during the first term of the Obama presidency, racial prejudice might have continued to decline.

Yet there is reason to doubt that continued exposure to the president would further improve attitudes toward Blacks. Once Mr. Obama was in office, Americans' attitudes toward the president may have been shaped by the policies he enacted and the actions he took. Americans were far from unanimous in endorsing those policies and actions. For example, the nation has been about equally divided, positive and negative, toward the Affordable Care Act, Mr. Obama's signature legislation (Henderson, Hillygus, and Tompson 2010; Tesler 2012). Therefore, perhaps people who disliked Mr. Obama's actions in office might have generalized these negative evaluations to Blacks as a whole, so anti-Black prejudice might have increased between 2008 and 2012 (cf. Lybarger and Monteith 2011). Hence, we might observe more racial prejudice at the end of the first term of the Obama presidency than at the beginning.

Subtyping: In contrast to the notion of attitude generalization, the subtyping model of stereotype change (Weber and Crocker 1983; Johnston and Hewstone 1992) anticipates little or no change in prejudice toward Blacks resulting from exposure to the first Black president in action. People sometimes protect their group stereotypes by "subtyping" out individuals who seem to contradict and therefore threaten the validity of those stereotypes. Such individuals are viewed as not representative of the group and not informative about other members of it (Fiske et al. 1987; Devine and Baker 1991; Hewstone 1994). Therefore, some perceivers might have said, "Yes, Barack Obama is Black. And yes, he's apparently smart and hardworking. But he's not really a typical Black person and therefore provides no reason for me to change my impression of most members of that group." If most anti-Black Americans subtyped Mr. Obama, then evaluations of his actions in office would have little or no impact on subsequent levels of anti-Black prejudice.

These various psychological theories lead to contradictory expectations about the influence of the Obama presidency on attitudes toward Blacks. Hence, we consider this an open research question (RQ1).

AGGREGATE IMPACT OF PREJUDICE TOWARD BLACKS ON APPROVAL AND VOTING

The impact of attitudes toward Blacks on Mr. Obama's reelection prospects in 2012 depended on the level of racial prejudice in 2012 and the linkage of prejudice with presidential approval and electoral choices. Stated generally, the

net influence of anti-Black prejudice on Mr. Obama's 2012 vote share would increase if attitudes toward the president and negative attitudes toward Blacks became more closely conflated and/or if attitudes toward Blacks became more negative during that time. But if the linkage between negative evaluations of Blacks and of Mr. Obama weakened over time, or if attitudes toward Blacks became more positive over time, the net effect of anti-Black prejudice on evaluations of his performance and on his vote share might have decreased. Thus, the net influence of these two changes also remains an open question for research, with regard to aggregate changes over time in both presidential approval (RQ2a) and voting (RQ2b).

MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACKS

Measurement of attitudes toward Blacks has been a contentious issue. Some scholars have expressed concern that respondents may intentionally suppress expressions of anti-Black racism when responding to questions gauging disliking of Blacks or endorsement of stereotypes (see [Sears and Henry \[2005\]](#)). Questions intended to be more subtle, such as those tapping symbolic racism and racial resentment, are phrased in ways thought to overcome this problem. However, these measures have been criticized for conflating attitudes toward Blacks with conservative ideology (cf., [Sniderman and Tetlock 1986](#); [Sniderman and Carmines 1997](#)).

A third approach has been to measure such attitudes implicitly, in ways thought to tap directly into people's minds without relying on the honesty or accuracy of self-reports. Implicit measures use response latency ([Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998](#)) or evaluative judgments of neutral objects ([Payne et al. 2005](#)) to tap unconscious biases. It is unclear whether and how such biases influence electoral decisions and other choices that are highly premeditated, especially when controlling for explicit measures of related attitudes (cf. [Hofmann et al. 2008](#); [Greenwald et al. 2009](#); [Pasek et al. 2009](#); [Payne et al. 2010](#); [Kalmoe and Piston 2013](#)). Earlier studies suggest that explicit attitudes toward Blacks influenced electoral decisions while implicit measures had little unique effect, so we expected to see that here as well when predicting presidential approval and electoral choice (H2). In the analyses reported here, we used all three types of measures to gauge the dynamics and impact of attitudes toward Blacks.

THE CURRENT STUDY

To test the hypotheses and explore the research questions outlined above, we measured attitudes toward Blacks (assessed both explicitly and implicitly), approval of Mr. Obama's job performance (in 2009 and 2012), and candidate preferences prior to the 2012 election. With these measures, we gauged the linkage of individuals' attitudes toward Blacks with presidential approval

and preelection candidate preferences at various times (to test H1a and H1b). Second, we assessed changes in the distributions of attitudes toward Blacks over time (RQ1). Finally, we estimated the net effect of anti-Black prejudice on presidential approval (RQ2a) and preelection candidate choices (RQ2b). To do the latter, we employed the strategy developed by [Pasek et al. \(2009\)](#), who conducted a statistical simulation to gauge changes in behavior that would be expected to occur if attitudes toward Blacks were made neutral.

Methods

DATA

The data come from three surveys conducted by GfK Custom Research (formerly Knowledge Networks) using their KnowledgePanel, which constituted a probability sample of American adults who agreed to complete questionnaires regularly via the Internet. Surveys for the current study were conducted only in English. Initial recruitment was done via Random Digit Dial (RDD) telephone calls and letters mailed to households selected by Address-Based Sampling (ABS) from the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File. Respondents who did not have Internet access at home prior to joining the panel were provided with a laptop and/or broadband Internet connection.

In each year (2008, 2009, and 2012), a group of respondents completed two surveys, one measuring implicit attitudes toward Blacks using the Affect Misattribution Procedure (AMP), and the other asking a series of explicit questions. In 2008, all members of a selected sample received two invitations simultaneously, one to complete the AMP, and the other to complete the explicit questionnaire. In 2009 and 2012, a sample was first invited to complete the AMP, and the people who did so later received invitations to complete the explicit questionnaire.

In 2008, the AMP was completed between August 27 and September 6, 2008, by 1,688 people, and the explicit questionnaire was completed during the same time period by 2,012 people. A total of 1,567 people completed both surveys and were the focus of our analyses (CUMRR1 = 8.1 percent across both surveys; see [Callegaro and DiSogra \[2008\]](#)).¹ In 2009, the AMP was completed by 2,402 individuals between October 23 and November 11, 2009, and 1,037 of them completed the explicit questionnaire between December 23, 2009, and January 10, 2010 (CUMRR1 = 3.2 percent). In 2012, the AMP was completed by 1,391 people between August 3 and 20, 2012, and 1,071 of them completed the explicit questionnaire between August 30 and September 11, 2012 (CUMRR1 = 4.3 percent).

1. All response rates are cumulative of both recruitment to KnowledgePanel and participation in both surveys for each survey. In 2008, some people completed the explicit measures but not the AMP. CUMRR1s for the two surveys were 10.1 and 9.2 percent, respectively.

All data were weighted using weights generated via raking by GfK to match the most recent Current Population Survey statistics available at the time of each data collection for gender, race, education, and Census region among all American adults.² Individuals in all racial groups were used in all analyses.³

MEASURES OF ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACKS

The same five measures of attitudes toward Blacks were administered in each year. The *Affect Misattribution Procedure* (AMP) taps implicit attitudes toward Blacks by assessing how people classify Chinese ideographs that appear on a computer screen immediately following the appearances of Black and White faces (Payne et al. 2005). People who classify ideographs following 24 White faces as “pleasant” more frequently than ideographs following 24 Black faces are regarded as having an implicit anti-Black bias.⁴ *Symbolic Racism* (Henry and Sears 2002) and *Racial Resentment* (Kinder and Sanders 1996) are two batteries of almost identical items intended to measure anti-Black affect, values, and beliefs about whether Blacks violate traditional American values. Symbolic Racism was measured with eight items, and Racial Resentment with six.⁵ *Differential Disliking of Whites and Blacks* (two items) and *Stereotypes of Blacks* (14 items; see Devine [1989]) are thought to be more overt measures of prejudice. These measures were chosen because they have received considerable attention in the literature and we wanted to assess how consistent results were across racial attitudes measurement strategies. All measures were coded to range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating more anti-Black attitudes (see online appendix A for question wordings, distributions of responses, and reliabilities).⁶

2. We did not weight the data to match the population of voters for three reasons. First, we know of no definitive data documenting the demographic characteristics of people who voted in the 2008 and 2012 elections. Exit polls are known to have been inaccurate (see Merkle and Edelman [2002]; McDonald and Thornburg [2012]). The Current Population Survey voting supplement relies on many proxy reports of turnout and may therefore also mischaracterize demographics (see Highton [2005]; Hur and Achen [2013]). Furthermore, our 2009 data were not collected during an election period, so that data set could not have been weighted to match voters. Most importantly, our analyses predicted both candidate choice and turnout, so we used data from voters and nonvoters (cf. Pasek et al. 2009).

3. Estimated vote totals under counterfactual racial attitudes reflect the entire electorate and therefore can be interpreted as the proportion of all votes that would be expected to change. Respondent race was used as a control variable in all regressions. Intercept differences between racial groups are shown in the tables in online appendix F.

4. The AMP has been found to relate to various explicit measures of racial prejudice and to vote choices in ways similar to what is observed with the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al. 2009). See online appendix H for a comparison of the AMP and the IAT in the 2008–2009 American National Election Panel Studies. The IAT was not measured in the surveys we analyzed.

5. Although these batteries are very similar and overlap in part, their proponents suggest that they should tap this construct in slightly different ways. We therefore opted to test both measures.

6. All measures were highly reliable ($\alpha > .80$) in all years (see online appendix A).

To simulate an electorate without prejudice using [Pasek et al.'s \(2009\)](#) method, we had to identify a neutral point on each of the attitude measures. For two of the measures, this was straightforward, because the measures had explicit neutral points. For the AMP, the equivalent reaction to White and Black faces yields a neutral value of .5. Respondents who said that they liked or disliked Blacks and Whites equally received a score of .5 on the differential disliking scale. Our goal was to identify all instances in which respondents held negative (or positive) attitudes toward Blacks and to neutralize those attitudes. Neutralizing these attitudes among all Americans (not just Whites) would allow us to estimate their impact on the election outcome and on evaluations of Mr. Obama.

The other measures did not have explicit neutral points, so we inferred them using the AMP and Differential Disliking measures, as well as an additional measure of Differential Stereotypes that was available in only two of the years (see online appendix B). Following the procedure developed by [Pasek et al. \(2009\)](#), the neutral point for each of these measures was the average value of that measure for people who were at the neutral points of the two measures with explicit neutral points.⁷ For Symbolic Racism, neutral scores ranged from .47 to .53 and averaged .50. For Racial Resentment, neutral scores ranged from .52 to .60 and averaged .55. For Stereotypes, neutral scores ranged from .41 to .44 and averaged .42.⁸ Additional information on this procedure, including a sensitivity analysis, is provided in online appendix B.

APPROVAL OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB PERFORMANCE

Respondents in 2009 and 2012 were asked:

“Overall, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?” “Strongly approve,” “Somewhat approve,” “Have mixed feelings,” “Somewhat disapprove,” and “Strongly disapprove.”

Job approval was treated as an ordinal measure, ranging from “strongly disapprove” to “strongly approve.” Individuals who did not answer the approval question were excluded from analyses predicting this measure ($N = 6$ in 2009; $N = 10$ in 2012).

7. Three measures of neutrality over the three years yielded a total of eight neutral estimates for each racism measure that did not have a natural neutral point (see online appendix B). The ranges of these estimates are presented to provide a sense of the precision of our estimates of the neutral points.

8. One could make a case that the neutral point on the stereotypes scale is the place where respondents endorse equal numbers of positive and negative stereotypes about Blacks. It is unclear, however, whether the positive and negative stereotypes we examined are equally strong, so it seems wiser to estimate this point via the empirical method we used. The neutral point under this alternative specification would have been .36, which would portray an electorate with slightly more anti-Black sentiment than the estimate used.

TURNOUT

In assessing the potential influence of attitudes toward Blacks on electoral choices, two processes must be taken into account. Attitudes toward Blacks might alter preferences between candidates and/or might lead some individuals to turn out or to not turn out (Pasek et al. 2009). Both processes could change the aggregate influence of prejudice on the election outcome. In modeling an electorate without anti-Black or pro-Black attitudes, we needed to simulate changes in people's candidate choices and turnout decisions. A dichotomous measure of turnout was produced using the likely voter model provided by the Associated Press. With that model and using responses to five questions, respondents were classified as either "likely voters" or not during 2008 and 2012. Individuals were classified as "likely voters" if (1) they were registered, knew where to vote, and reported high or moderate turnout likelihood, voted in the last presidential election, and reported voting frequently; or (2) reported moderate turnout likelihood and were too young to have voted in any past presidential elections (see online appendix C for question wordings). This dichotomous measure was used to build the dependent variable in multinomial logit regressions.⁹

CANDIDATE CHOICE

Respondents in 2008 and 2012 were asked, "If the [2008/2012] general election for president were being held today and these were the candidates, would you vote for..." Response options were: "Barack Obama, the Democrat," "[John McCain/Mitt Romney], the Republican," "[Bob Barr/Gary Johnson], the Libertarian," ["Ralph Nader, the independent"/"Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate"], "Someone else," or "Don't know."¹⁰

Respondents who said "Don't know" to this first question were asked, "If you had to choose, is there one of these candidates that you lean more toward?" Response options were: "Barack Obama, the Democrat," "[John McCain/Mitt Romney], the Republican," "[Bob Barr/Gary Johnson], the Libertarian," ["Ralph Nader, the independent"/"Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate"], "No, don't lean toward any of these candidates," or "Don't know."

Responses to both of these questions and the turnout measure were used to assign each respondent to one of four categories: (1) a likely voter for Mr. Obama; (2) a likely voter for the Republican candidate; (3) a likely voter who

9. We also generated a second model of turnout that assigned each individual a probability of voting based on the same predictors (cf. Traugott and Tucker 1984). Results of electoral choice predictions when likely voting was modeled using this method are presented in online appendix D. Results were substantively identical to those obtained using the dichotomous measure of turnout likelihood.

10. The ordering of the major party candidates was randomized; all other candidates were presented in a consistent order.

did not indicate an intention to vote for a major party candidate (i.e., expressed the intention to vote for Bob Barr, Ralph Nader, Gary Johnson, Jill Stein, or someone else, or said, “No, don’t lean toward any of these candidates”); or (4) a respondent not categorized as a likely voter.

Individuals who did not report a candidate choice or did not provide information necessary to compute turnout likelihood were excluded from analyses. As a result, 1,802 individuals were assigned an electoral choice (either voting for a candidate or not voting) in 2008 (out of 2,012 who completed at least some questions in the explicit questionnaire), and 957 were assigned an electoral choice in 2012 (out of 1,071 who completed that year’s explicit questionnaire).

Additional measures used as controls in the analyses are shown in online appendix E. Correlations among all measures of attitudes toward Blacks, partisanship, ideology, approval of Mr. Obama’s performance, and electoral choices are presented in online appendix G.

MISSING DATA AND MULTIPLE IMPUTATION

Missing values on predictors were replaced with imputed values created using multiple imputation with deletion via chained equations (using the MICE software in R). We created five data sets, one for each year and one for each pair of succeeding years (2008–2012 and 2009–2012), and imputation was done separately for each one. Because multiple imputation relies on Monte Carlo simulations, imputed values for a variable varied slightly across data sets, leading to slight differences between the coefficients for each variable in multiyear equations and those in single-year equations. Values were not imputed for electoral choices or presidential approval.¹¹ Coefficients shown for all analyses were pooled across five separate imputations for each data set (see [van Buren and Groothuis-Oudshoorn \[2011\]](#)).

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

To understand how attitudes toward Blacks and the influence of those attitudes changed between 2008 and 2012, seven analyses were conducted. The first two analyses examined the linkage between attitudes toward Blacks and presidential approval. For each measure of attitudes toward Blacks, we estimated ordinal logit regressions predicting presidential approval in 2012 (analysis

11. For only one variable were values missing for more than 10 percent of cases in any of the three years: 490 individuals did not complete the Affect Misattribution Procedure in 2008. This large amount of missingness might decrease the statistical precision of relations between the AMP and other variables, but the large number of people (1,312) who completed the AMP and had valid values on electoral choice means that any imprecision was unlikely to influence the results reported here. Furthermore, the multiple imputation procedure takes this variance into account when producing standard errors.

1) and examined differences in the strength of predictors of approval between 2009 and 2012 (analysis 2; H1a). Comparing coefficients between these two years revealed how the linkage between attitudes toward Blacks and presidential approval changed. The third and fourth analyses gauged the associations between attitudes toward Blacks and electoral choices using multinomial logit regressions. We replicated the analyses predicting presidential approval to compare the strength of the linkage between electoral choices and attitudes toward Blacks in 2012 (analysis 3) as well as changes in the strength of predictors of electoral choice between 2008 and 2012 (analysis 4; H1b). The fifth analysis explored changes in attitudes toward Blacks over time using each of the racial attitude measures (RQ1). Using the results from the first four analyses, as well as placement of neutral attitudes toward Blacks, we estimated the influence of anti-Black prejudice on approval of the president and on the election outcomes. Analysis six compared projected presidential approval under actual and counterfactual attitudes toward Blacks in order to reveal the net influence of those attitudes in 2009 and 2012 (RQ2a). The seventh analysis compared preelection electoral choices under actual and counterfactual conditions in 2008 and 2012 (RQ2b).

Comparisons of model-predicted values of presidential approval and electoral choices under various counterfactuals cannot be directly compared with actual values of presidential approval and electoral choices. Predicted values of these variables were estimated from each imputation for every respondent using the regression models. Based on actual levels of racism, distributions of demographic characteristics, partisanship, and ideology, each respondent was assigned a probability for each of the five levels of approval or each of the four electoral choices. A weighted average of these probabilities produced an estimate of the distribution of approval or electoral choice across all outcomes for each of the imputations. These within-imputation averages were then averaged to produce an estimate for each outcome. For presidential approval, the “strongly approve” and “somewhat approve” categories were combined to produce an estimate of approval; the “strongly disapprove” and “somewhat disapprove” categories were combined to produce an estimate of disapproval.

To produce the counterfactual of no anti-Black sentiment, predicted values were generated in a second set of five data sets. These data sets were identical to the ones used for actual levels of racism except for the fact that individuals who expressed attitudes that were more anti-Black than the neutral point were transformed to the neutral point on each measure. Finally, to produce the counterfactual of no anti-Black sentiment or pro-Black sentiment, predicted values were generated on a third set of the five data sets. These data sets were identical to the ones used for actual measured levels of racism except for the fact that all attitudes toward Blacks were transformed to the neutral point on each measure. Having simulated these estimates among all Americans, we could generate predictions of changes in presidential approval and election outcomes.

Results

PREDICTING PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

In ordinal logit regressions predicting presidential approval in 2012 using demographics, party identification, liberal-conservative ideology, and each measure of attitudes toward Blacks (in independent regressions), more anti-Black explicit attitudes were associated with lower likelihoods of approval.¹² Respondents who were higher on symbolic racism ($b = -2.79, p < .001$; table 1, row 1), racial resentment ($b = -2.10, p < .001$; row 2), and anti-Black stereotypes ($b = -1.27, p < .001$; row 3) in 2012 were less likely to approve of the president. The coefficient for differential disliking of Blacks and Whites ($b = -.71, p = .28$; row 5) trended in the same direction but was not statistically significant. Implicit attitudes toward Blacks had a nonsignificant coefficient ($b = .22, p = .62$; H2) in the opposite direction from expectations. This coefficient was only significant and also ran in the predicted direction when no controls were included in the equation (see table J1 in online appendix J).

Consistent with H1a, the relation between attitudes toward Blacks and presidential approval was weaker in 2012 than in 2009 (table 1, column 2). All five measures of attitudes toward Blacks were significantly related to approval in the earlier year ($ps < .001$). For stereotypes and differential disliking, the drop in predictive power was statistically significant ($bs = 1.45$ for stereotypes and 2.67 for differential disliking, $ps < .02$, table 2, column 3), though this was not true for the other measures. Nonetheless, this pattern across the measures is consistent with a general conclusion that the impact of racism on presidential approval either stayed the same or declined slightly.

PREDICTING ELECTORAL CHOICES

Individuals holding more anti-Black attitudes in 2012 were less likely to say that they intended to vote for Mr. Obama. According to estimates of the coefficients in multinomial logit regression equations, higher scores on symbolic racism and racial resentment were associated with a higher likelihood of voting for Mr. Romney than voting for Mr. Obama ($bs = 3.88$ and $3.10, ps < .001$; see column 1 of table 2). Respondents who were more anti-Black on the symbolic racism and stereotype measures were also more likely to not vote at all than to vote for Mr. Obama ($bs = 1.47$ and $1.36, ps = .02$). In addition,

12. As explained by Pasek et al. (2009), this approach provides a middle-of-the-road estimate of the influence of racial attitudes on presidential approval. We estimated the parameters of two additional equations to understand the potential range of the influence that racial attitudes might have had: (1) a parsimonious equation predicting presidential approval using only attitudes toward Blacks and demographics; and (2) an enhanced equation including all of the predictors in the primary equation and also including perceptions of the economy and of a variety of President Obama's personality traits. Results were extremely similar to those reported in the text.

Table 1. Estimates of the Influence of Attitudes Toward Blacks in Separate Ordinal Logit Regressions Predicting Presidential Approval in 2012, 2009, and Differences in Coefficients Between the Two Time Periods

Measure of attitudes	2012 Model		Model Comparing 2009 and 2012			
	Main effect of attitudes toward Blacks		Main effect of attitudes toward Blacks		Interaction between year (2012) and attitudes toward Blacks	
Symbolic racism	-2.79***	(.38)	-3.58***	(.41)	.88	(.54)
Racial resentment	-2.10***	(.35)	-2.63***	(.38)	.61	(.50)
Stereotypes	-1.27***	(.33)	-2.70***	(.39)	1.45**	(.52)
Differential disliking	-.71	(.65)	-3.36***	(.84)	2.67*	(1.06)
AMP	.22	(.45)	-.96*	(.49)	1.17	(.66)

NOTE.—Standard errors are in parentheses. Coefficients come from separate ordinal logit regressions using each measure of attitudes toward Blacks. Interactions of year (2012) with each measure of attitudes toward Blacks in column 3 come from the same regression as the 2009 estimate for the measure of attitudes toward Blacks in column 2. Demographics, ideology, and partisanship were controlled. Estimates of all parameters and predicted outcomes for each counterfactual are shown in online appendix F.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 2. Estimates of the Influence of Attitudes Toward Blacks on Electoral Choices in 2012 in Separate Multinomial Logit Regressions

Measure of attitudes	Romney vs. Obama		Non-major party vs. Obama		Not vote vs. Obama	
Symbolic racism	3.88***	(.85)	.56	(1.04)	1.47*	(.64)
Racial resentment	3.10***	(.82)	.03	(1.02)	1.05	(.59)
Stereotypes	.81	(.73)	.38	(1.01)	1.36*	(.57)
Differential disliking	-.60	(1.41)	-5.11*	(2.41)	-.90	(1.12)
AMP	.81	(.99)	.85	(1.27)	.29	(.79)

NOTE.—Standard errors are in parentheses. Coefficients come from separate multinomial logit regressions using each measure of attitudes toward Blacks. Demographics, ideology, and partisanship were controlled. Estimates of all parameters and predicted outcomes for each counterfactual are shown in online appendix F.

*** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

individuals who manifested more disliking of Blacks than Whites were less likely to be classified as a non-major-party voter than as someone who would vote for the president ($b = -5.11, p = .03$).

Consistent with H1b, the linkage between explicit attitudes toward Blacks and electoral choices was weaker in 2012 than in 2008 (see [table 3](#)). With every measure, people who had more anti-Black attitudes in 2008 were more likely to behave in ways other than voting for Mr. Obama. For nearly all of the measures of attitudes toward Blacks, the coefficients linking these attitudes with electoral choices were about half as strong in 2012 (see [table 3](#), columns 4–6).¹³ The only exception to this general pattern involved implicit attitudes toward Blacks, which did not predict electoral choices in 2008 or 2012 when controls were in the model (H2; see online appendix J for a model with no covariates).¹⁴

This general pattern can be illustrated with the coefficient estimates from regressions using symbolic racism as a predictor. Symbolic racism was the strongest predictor of choosing to vote for the Republican candidate rather than for Mr. Obama in 2008 (John McCain; $b = 7.11, p < .001$; [table 3](#), row 1, column 1) and was a far weaker predictor in 2012 (difference; $b = -3.23, p < .001$; [table 3](#), row 1, column 4). Similar drops were observed comparing voting for Mr. Obama with voting for non-major-party candidates and not voting ($bs = -4.97$ and -3.86 , respectively; $ps < .001$; [table 3](#), row 1, columns 5 and 6).

TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACKS

The distribution of Americans' attitudes toward Blacks did not become any more positive between 2008 and 2012 (see [table 4](#); RQ1). In fact, nine of the 15 comparisons in [table 4](#) manifested no significant change over time; only one measure (Differential Disliking) showed a significant decrease in negativity between 2008 and 2009; and the other four comparisons manifested significant increases in anti-Black attitudes. If anything, attitudes toward Blacks appear to have worsened slightly over time by some metrics.¹⁵

13. We produced an additional confirmation of the reduced relation between racial attitudes and evaluations of the president by comparing the average correlations between racial attitudes and candidate traits over time. With the sole exception of the AMP, these universally decreased from 2008 to 2012. Results are presented in online appendix I.

14. This differs from the estimated influence of implicit attitudes on Election Day choices in the same 2008 data set ([Pasek et al. 2009](#)). The distinction appears to be due to differences between those individuals who report intending to vote for a non-major-party candidate and those who actually do so.

15. Means of the attitude measures were very similar to those of the same measures in the 2008 and 2012 American National Election Studies, which can be seen in table H1 of online appendix H. These similarities suggest that the changes observed are unlikely to be an effect of the particular data-collection methods used for the present study.

Table 3. Estimates of the Influence of Attitudes Toward Blacks on Electoral Choices in 2008 and 2012 from Separate Multinomial Logit Regressions

Measure of attitudes	2008 (main effect)				Difference between 2008 and 2012 (interaction with 2012)				
	Republican vs. Obama	Non-major party vs. Obama	Not vote vs. Obama	Republican vs. Obama	Non-major party vs. Obama	Not vote vs. Obama	Republican vs. Obama	Non-major party vs. Obama	Not vote vs. Obama
Symbolic racism	7.11*** (.67)	5.53*** (.76)	5.34*** (.56)	-3.23** (1.06)	-4.97*** (1.28)	-3.86*** (.84)			
Racial resentment	5.61*** (.59)	4.40*** (.69)	3.89*** (.50)	-2.51* (.99)	-4.37*** (1.22)	-2.84*** (.77)			
Stereotypes	2.77*** (.53)	2.78*** (.65)	2.49*** (.45)	-1.96* (.90)	-2.40* (1.21)	-1.13 (.73)			
Differential disliking	3.97*** (1.11)	3.27* (1.37)	4.80*** (.99)	-4.57* (1.78)	-8.37*** (2.77)	-5.70*** (1.49)			
AMP	1.47 (1.24)	1.79 (1.19)	.78 (1.17)	-.67 (1.59)	-.94 (1.74)	-.49 (1.41)			

NOTE.—Standard errors are in parentheses. Coefficients come from separate multinomial logit regressions using each measure of attitudes toward Blacks. Interactions of year (2012) with each racism measure in columns 4–6 come from the same regression as the 2008 estimate for the impact of attitudes toward Blacks in columns 1–3. Demographics, ideology, and partisanship were controlled. Estimates of all parameters and predicted outcomes for each counterfactual are shown in online appendix F.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 4. Means and Changes in Means over Time in Attitudes Toward Blacks

Measure of attitudes	2008		2009		2012		Change		
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	2008 → 2009	2009 → 2012	
Symbolic racism	.51	2,221	.53	1,030	.53	1,032	.02*	.00	.02*
Racial resentment	.57	2,174	.57	1,014	.58	1,008	.00	.02	.01
Stereotypes	.45	2,135	.45	1,004	.46	988	.00	.01	.00
Differential disliking	.53	2,211	.52	1,028	.53	1,032	-.01***	.01*	.00
AMP	.53	1,225	.53	1,037	.55	1,071	.01*	.01**	.02***

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

NET EFFECT OF PREJUDICE ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

When explicit anti-Black attitudes were transformed to be neutral, the models predicted that the proportion of people approving of Mr. Obama's performance in 2012 would increase by as much as 2.7 percentage points, and the proportion disapproving would drop by as much as 4.1 percentage points.¹⁶ Such hypothetical changes in approval and disapproval are shown for each prejudice measure in the first three columns of [table 5](#). If anti-Black sentiments were neutralized in 2009, the models in [table 1](#) predict that the proportion approving would have increased by as many as 3.7 percentage points, somewhat larger than the estimated increase in 2012 ([table 5](#), columns 7–9).

When we neutralized both pro-Black and anti-Black explicit attitudes in 2012, the models predicted a net decrease in disapproval of as much as 2.6 percentage points ([table 5](#), columns 4–6). Because the implicit measure was not related to approval in 2012, neutralizing implicit attitudes did not yield changes in approval.¹⁷ Neutralizing both anti-Black and pro-Black sentiments, the models predicted as many as 3.9 percentage points less disapproval than with observed racial attitudes ([table 5](#), last three columns).

THE NET EFFECT OF PREJUDICE ON ELECTORAL CHOICES

Given actual racial attitudes in 2012, the models in [table 2](#) predicted that the president would receive between 46.7 and 46.9 percent of the vote and that Mr. Romney would receive between 43.0 and 43.3 percent of the vote. For 2008, translating the coefficients into expected vote shares yields predictions that Mr. Obama would have gotten between 45.7 and 45.9 percent of the vote with actual racial attitudes, and Mr. McCain would have gotten between 43.3 and 43.4 percent of the vote had the election been held at the time of the survey.

Transforming all anti-Black attitudes into neutral attitudes, President Obama was predicted to receive as much as 3.7 percentage points more in 2012 ([table 6](#), column 1). Mr. Romney was predicted to receive as much as 4.7 percentage points fewer than actually occurred. When anti-Black prejudice was eliminated in 2008, Mr. Obama would have received as much as 5.6 percentage points more votes, and Mr. McCain would have received 5.1 percentage points fewer votes ([table 6](#), columns 5–6). Thus, it seems that Mr. Obama lost a greater proportion of votes in 2008 than in 2012 due to anti-Black attitudes.

16. With existing attitudes toward Blacks in 2012, the various models in [table 1](#) predict that 34.0 to 34.2 percent of Americans would approve of the president's performance, 36.9 to 37.1 percent would disapprove, and 28.9 to 29.0 percent would neither approve nor disapprove. These numbers are not far from the survey's observed simple result that 35.0 percent of Americans said they approved of the president's performance, 37.8 percent disapproved, and 27.2 percent neither approved nor disapproved (see [table F10](#), column 2, in online appendix F). This is a reassuring indication that the models in [table 1](#) are functioning as they should.

17. Results obtained with more parsimonious and exhaustive sets of controls are presented in online appendix J.

Table 5. Difference Between Actual and Predicted Presidential Approval for Counterfactual Levels of Attitudes Toward Blacks in 2012 and 2009

Measure of attitudes	2012						2009					
	No anti-Black sentiment			All attitudes toward Blacks neutralized			No anti-Black sentiment			All attitudes toward Blacks neutralized		
	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove
Symbolic racism	2.7%**	1.4%*	-4.1%***	-0.4%	3.0%***	-2.6%	3.7%***	2.0%**	-5.7%***	0.2%	3.7%***	-3.9%
Racial resentment	2.2%	1.0%	-3.1%***	-0.3%	2.1%**	-1.8%	2.6%	1.3%*	-3.9%***	-0.1%	2.5%***	-2.4%
Stereotypes	1.7%	0.1%	-1.8%	0.5%	0.4%	-0.9%	3.3%*	0.3%	-3.7%***	1.2%	1.0%	-2.2%
Differential disliking	0.3%	0.1%	-0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	-0.3%	1.1%	0.3%	-1.3%	0.8%	0.5%	-1.2%
AMP	-0.2%	0.0%	0.2%	-0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.9%	0.1%	-0.9%	0.5%	0.1%	-0.6%

NOTE.—Percentages refer to the difference between predicted approval under each counterfactual and predicted approval given actual attitudes toward Blacks; see table F10. Predicted attitudes come from independent regressions for each racial attitude measure. Predicted “approve” and “strongly approve” responses were collapsed into the “approve” category. Predicted “disapprove” and “strongly disapprove” responses were collapsed into the “disapprove” category. Demographics, ideology, and partisanship were controlled. Full regression results and predicted approval for each counterfactual are shown in online appendix F. Statistical significance was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure. No estimated differences differed significantly between years.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 6. Difference Between Actual and Predicted Vote Share for Barack Obama and His Republican Opponent in 2012 and 2008

Measure of attitudes	2012				2008			
	No anti-Black sentiment		All attitudes toward Blacks neutralized		No anti-Black sentiment		All attitudes toward Blacks neutralized	
	Obama vote share	Republican vote share	Obama vote share	Republican vote share	Obama vote share	Republican vote share	Obama vote share	Republican vote share
Symbolic racism	3.7%*	-4.7%*	1.9%	-3.0%	5.6%***	-5.1%***	-1.8%	0.3%
Racial resentment	3.0%	-4.1%*	1.7%	-2.5%	5.1%***	-4.6%***	-0.6%	-0.5%
Stereotypes	0.8%	-0.9%	0.1%	-0.2%	3.2%*	-2.2%	0.6%	-0.4%
Differential disliking	-0.6%	-0.2%	-0.3%	-0.2%	1.2%	-1.0%	0.8%	-0.7%
AMP	0.8%	-0.5%	0.5%	-0.3%	1.2%	-0.7%	0.7%	-0.4%

NOTE.—Predicted attitudes come from separate multinomial logit regressions for each racial attitude measure. Nonvoters were modeled in the analyses but were not included in the denominator for this table. Demographics, ideology, and partisanship were controlled. Full regression results and predicted behaviors for each counterfactual are shown in online appendix F. No estimated differences differed significantly between years.
 *** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

Neutralizing all attitudes toward Blacks in 2008 resulted almost no change in Mr. Obama's and Mr. McCain's vote shares (table 6, last two columns). It appears that the votes Mr. Obama lost and those Mr. McCain gained due to anti-Black attitudes were counteracted by a similar percentage of votes that were gained and lost due to pro-Black attitudes. This was different in 2012, when neutralizing attitudes toward Blacks led to gains of up to 1.9 percentage points for Mr. Obama and losses of up to 3 percentage points for Mr. Romney. Therefore, although the influence of attitudes toward Blacks on voting decisions diminished between 2008 and 2012, their impact on the distribution of electoral choices increased slightly. This increased impact might have resulted from changes in the distributions of attitudes toward Blacks between 2008 and 2012.¹⁸

Discussion

Evaluations of Blacks generally appear to have become more divorced from evaluations of Mr. Obama and from electoral choices during the president's first term. These results were consistent with hypotheses 1a and 1b, which were derived from the notion that gaining individuating information about the president may have led to reduced reliance on stereotypes of groups (cf. Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Bless et al. 2001).

During the first four years of the Obama presidency, anti-Black prejudice appears to have increased slightly. This is consistent with the notion that people generalized from negative attitudes they harbored toward President Obama and his policies to their attitudes toward Blacks in general (RQ1).¹⁹ However, increased prejudice could also have occurred partly if the reduction of prejudice observed during 2008 (Welch and Sigelman 2011; Goldman 2012) was due to short-lived effects of the campaign and was therefore temporary. This might have occurred if people subtyped Mr. Obama instead of generalizing to all Blacks from their attitudes toward him. We look forward to future work that may be able to disentangle these two explanations.

Despite the fact that attitudes toward Blacks were less strongly related to approval and electoral choices in 2012 than in 2008 or 2009, the total impact

18. Results obtained with more parsimonious and more exhaustive models are presented in online appendix J.

19. Further evidence for this can be found in responses to the survey question "For each of the following individuals, please select if you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of that person. If you don't know enough about the person to have an opinion, you can say that too. . . Barack Obama." In 2012, 31 percent of Americans reported that they had a "very unfavorable" view of the president, and an additional 13 percent reported that they had a "somewhat unfavorable" view. These numbers represented a significant increase from 26 percent "very unfavorable" and 15 percent "somewhat unfavorable" in 2009 and from 23 percent "very unfavorable" and 18 percent "somewhat unfavorable" in 2008.

of attitudes toward Blacks on approval and election outcomes was similar in 2012 to 2008 and 2009 (RQ2a and b). Higher levels of anti-Black prejudice appear to have canceled out the weakening effect of attitudes toward Blacks in 2012, such that the net impact of neutralizing these attitudes on presidential approval and preelection electoral choices was similar to earlier years.

RACIAL PREJUDICE AND THE SECOND TERM

The evidence presented here is not in line with claims of an “Obama effect” (cf. [Plant et al. 2009](#); [Bernstein, Young, and Claypool 2010](#); [Columb and Plant 2011](#); [Welch and Sigelman 2011](#); [Goldman 2012](#)), whereby attitudes toward Blacks became less negative during the first term of Mr. Obama’s presidency. Attitudes toward Blacks appear to have become more negative at the same time that these attitudes became more divorced from attitudes toward the president. There are a few possible explanations for this pattern. The Obama effect that seemed to appear in earlier studies may have been fleeting, disappearing once enough individuating information was available about the president. The Obama effect might also have been confined to the time of the election campaign; no studies examined these effects long after Election Day. Alternatively, attitudes toward Mr. Obama may have affected attitudes toward Blacks both before and after the 2008 election, reducing negativity toward Blacks before the election and increasing negativity afterward. Some evidence suggests that attitudes toward Blacks and attitudes toward the president’s policies have become increasingly conflated, specifically in the realm of health care ([Knowles, Lowery, and Schaumberg 2010](#); [Tesler 2012](#)). People who disagreed with the president’s policies may have generalized their anger toward him to Blacks in general. Studies using panel data may be able to test these two possibilities in the future.

MEASURES OF ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACKS

All of the explicit measures of attitudes toward Blacks were related to presidential approval and electoral choices in expected directions. However, the strength of this relation varied considerably across the various measures of attitudes toward Blacks. In line with earlier studies (e.g., [Tesler and Sears 2010](#)), the measures of new racism were the strongest predictors of both presidential approval and electoral choices. This finding is consistent with claims made by the proponents of these measures that they assess attitudes toward Blacks more effectively than do other tools.

The finding that implicit attitudes did not predict presidential approval in 2012 and did not predict electoral choices in 2008 or 2012 challenges the notion that racial attitudes are best measured implicitly (cf. [Ditonto, Lau, and Sears 2013](#)). Perhaps implicit measures predict automatically expressed attitudes better than they predict judgments and behaviors that are formed and expressed

under full cognitive consideration (H2; see [Hofmann et al. \[2008\]](#)). In this vein, other research noting that the AMP predicted Election Day choices in 2008 identified the strongest impacts when explicit measures of prejudice were not controlled ([Greenwald et al. 2009](#); [Kalmoe and Piston 2013](#)), and among voters who were not confident in their choices ([Lundberg and Payne 2014](#)).

LIMITATIONS

A weakening of the relation of attitudes toward Blacks with presidential approval and electoral choices may be a result of individuation. However, a variety of other explanations could account for this pattern as well. With our data, we cannot rule out the possibility that changes in attitudes toward Blacks and changes in the impact of those attitudes could be due to some combination of effects of events that occurred during the prior four years, shifts in the demographic composition of the nation, and/or variations in norms of expressing racial sentiments.

The observed relations of anti-Black attitudes with presidential approval and electoral choices are based on a series of assumptions, so the results reported here should be interpreted in that light. For example, predictions regarding electoral choices were generated using data collected in August 2008 and September 2012. Many events (e.g., the economic crash of 2008) happened between the survey interviews and the Election Days, and those events may have altered the distributions of attitudes toward Blacks and the impact of those attitudes. In particular, the 2008 economic crash occurred between the time data were collected for the 2008 study and the time of the election, which considerably boosted the Democratic nominee's prospects and may have altered the net influence of attitudes toward blacks in that election.²⁰ In a similar vein, negative economic perceptions—which have been associated with racial animus ([Jackson 1993](#); [Becker, Wagner, and Christ 2011](#); [Butz and Yogeewaran 2011](#))—were particularly prevalent during the 2008–2012 period. Either panel data or a much larger number of data points would be required to disentangle the influence of evaluations of President Obama from other concurrent shocks that may have influenced attitudes toward Blacks.

20. In general, we would expect anti-Black attitudes to have harmed Mr. Obama more on Election Day than was observed at the time of this study. This expectation stems from a combination of two pieces of information. First, attitudes toward Blacks are more likely to influence the choices of swing voters than of committed partisans, because committed partisans are less likely to change their minds. Second, as the median voter shifted in a conservative direction, these swing voters might be expected to have more anti-Black attitudes on average, in line with the consistent finding that conservatives are more likely to express such attitudes. Hence, a shift favoring the Democratic nominee would likely increase the number of individuals for whom anti-Black attitudes were consequential. These expectations are in line with results obtained using the data set examined in this paper to predict Election Day behavior instead of August behavior ([Pasek et al. 2009](#); [Kalmoe and Piston 2013](#)).

A second assumption underlying this analysis is that the implicit and explicit measures assessed only attitudes toward Blacks. Some scholars have speculated that the survey questions used here that were designed to tap symbolic racism and racial resentment may tap other constructs in addition, in particular ideological conservatism (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sears and Henry 2005; Tesler and Sears 2010). If such confounding is present, the apparent impact of attitudes toward Blacks gauged using these measures may be due partly to other constructs.

To minimize this likelihood, we reported results controlling for ideology and related constructs. Of course, controlling for these measures may not fully eliminate confounding. It is possible that our covariates could fail to account fully for a conflation between ideology and racial attitude measures, leading us to overestimate the effects. In contrast, negative attitudes toward Blacks have been more common among conservatives and Republicans than among other groups, so controlling for ideology and partisanship may instead have led to an underestimation of the effect of attitudes toward Blacks. For this reason, we conducted analyses using more parsimonious models and using more exhaustive models (described in online appendix J) to provide a sense of the upper and lower bounds of our estimates. And the same basic findings were confirmed using these other measures of attitudes toward Blacks, further enhancing confidence that our principal conclusion is not an artifact of the confounding of those attitudes with ideology. Hence, the main results reported here appear robust, although the influence of attitudes toward Blacks did vary depending on the measures used.

One might wonder whether in the surveys we used, the large number of questions tapping attitudes toward Blacks sensitized respondents to the survey's intended purpose on racial issues and thereby distorted the obtained results.²¹ For example, efforts to provide socially desirable answers might have caused respondents to suppress the expression of anti-Black sentiments. But two considerations are reassuring in this regard. First, anti-Black attitudes were reported very frequently in these surveys, suggesting that people did not think they were embarrassing. Second, online surveys tend to be insensitive to social-desirability pressures (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008; Chang and Krosnick 2009, 2010; Holbrook and Krosnick 2010; Lind et al. 2013).

21. Survey topline results with all question wordings and orderings are available online at http://surveys.ap.org/data/KnowledgeNetworks/AP_Election_Wave6_Topline_W6%20ALL%20weight5_091808.pdf and http://surveys.ap.org/data/GfK/AP_Racial_Attitudes_Topline_09182012.pdf. Both outcome measures were completed at the beginning of the explicit surveys, so there was little chance that racial attitude measures would directly change these results. It is, however, possible that the succession of increasingly explicit measures of racial attitudes may have cued respondents in to the purpose of the study and led some individuals to underreport anti-Black attitudes in all three studies with these measures.

CONCLUSION

In sum, these results suggest that negative attitudes toward Blacks had a decreasing net impact on evaluations of the president over the course of his first term. Perhaps this means that evaluations of Mr. Obama in 2012 were based more on who he is and what he has done than on his racial group membership. Nevertheless, in the 2012 election, anti-Black sentiments seem to have cost the president a share of votes similar to the share he lost in the 2008 election, most likely because these negative sentiments became more prevalent during his first term.

Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are freely available online at <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/>.

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