

A New Face to the Race Card? Campaigns, Racial Cues, and Candidate Credibility

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Objective. This research examines the effects of using positive racial imagery in the context of an electoral campaign. *Method.* This study utilizes an experiment that was embedded in a survey conducted as part of the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. *Results.* Unlike negative stereotypical images that activate racial prejudice, positive racial images can be used to improve perceptions of a candidate's perceived level of inclusivity and overall candidate evaluations. The ability to do so, however, is contingent on the racial attitudes of the subjects. *Conclusion.* This study provides new insight into how racial appeals can be made in campaigns as well as the relative rigidity and fluidity of political stereotypes.

The principle of equality is deeply engrained in the political thinking of Americans. Indeed, the very foundation of the United States' valuation of equality is written in our governing documents. And yet, America struggles with its racial history. As Myrdal writes in his seminal book:

The "American Dilemma," . . . is the ever-raging conflict between, on the one hand, the valuations preserved on the general plane which we shall call the "American Creed," where the American thinks, talks, and acts under the influence of high national and Christian precepts, and, on the other hand, the valuations on specific planes of individual and group living, where personal and local interests; economic, social, and sexual jealousies; considerations of community prestige and conformity; group prejudice against particular persons or types of people; and all sorts of miscellaneous wants, impulses, and habits dominate his outlook. (1944:xxix)

This racial tension would outlive both U.S. chattel slavery and Jim Crow. To be sure, American politics has been marred by a continual struggle to balance the adherence to the norm of equality with the suppression of minority groups. No time is this more apparent than during campaign season.

Prior to the 1960s, commitment to equality stood second to the maintenance of the racial status quo. Preceding and throughout the civil rights movement, political parties and candidates made explicitly racial campaign appeals, not just in terms of the political images used, but also the rhetoric surrounding these images (Mendelberg, 2001). In the post-civil rights era, however, attitudes toward race have become more liberal (Schuman et al., 1997). As Mendelberg (2001:7) explains: "White Americans recognize that it is no longer acceptable to seem like a racist, not for elites or for citizens . . . Most people want to avoid not only the public perception that they are racist, but also thinking of themselves as racist."

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As a result, parties and candidates have had to modify their strategies of playing “the race card”—using images and racially coded terms to invoke racial considerations—to adhere to the now preferred norm of equality (Sears, Henry, and Kosterman, 2000). One adjustment has been to capitalize on more subtle forms of race baiting, as was seen with the use of the 1988 Willie Horton ad and the 1990 Jesse Helms “hands” ad. Alternatively, political elites—realizing the potential negative consequences of repeatedly playing “the race card”—have shifted from the use of racial images to convey racially conservative messages to the more positive use of racial images to signal harmony and equality among the races (Philpot, 2007).

Yet, we know very little about the extent to which positive racial appeals have affected public perceptions of political elites (but see Philpot, 2007; Nelson, Sanbonmatsu, and McClerking, 2007; Stephens-Dougan, 2016). The vast majority of the extant research on the use of racial images in campaigns is related to how negative stereotypical images of blacks are paired with coded language to produce implicitly (and even sometimes explicitly) racialized messages. The most consistent finding is that such messaging evokes negative racial predispositions (see Mendelberg, 2008 for a review). Mendelberg’s (2001) examination of the effects of the Willie Horton ad, for instance, demonstrated that exposure to the ad primed the use of the modern racism scale in subsequent evaluations of racial policies. Valentino, Hutchings, and White (2002) found that political ads about wasteful government spending primed three different measures of racial attitudes—racial resentment, *laissez-faire* racism, and blacks having too much influence—as a predictor of candidate preference, even in the absence of racial images. The strongest effects, however, were found in the experimental condition that linked narration about government waste with images of blacks, particularly at the expense of hardworking whites. There is no reason to believe, however, that the use of positive racial imagery would elicit the same response (Nelson and Kinder, 1996).

How do citizens respond to positive racial imagery used by candidates within campaign communication? Answering this question is the goal of the current study. We argue that candidates can successfully use positive racial imagery to signal to voters that they are racially inclusive. Candidates’ credibility in this area, however, is contingent on their gender and party affiliation. That is, female and Democratic candidates are more effective at using racial images to convey their racial inclusivity. Moreover, we demonstrate that candidates can potentially gain electoral advantage once they demonstrate to voters that they are racially inclusive.

Campaign Cues and Candidate Credibility

Generally speaking, citizens not only possess low levels of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996) but lack the incentive to incur the costs required to fill in their informational gaps (Downs, 1957). Yet, voters are able to make decisions by selecting cues from the political environment that enable them to act the same way they would had they engaged in more effortful analysis (Lupia, 1994). This occurs particularly in low-information elections, where neither the ideological or issue positions of the candidates are known. Voters make choices based on small amounts of information, which they use to construct an overall assessment of the candidate (Popkin, 1994).

Over the course of a campaign, voters may encounter an endless supply of information cues and must discern among them in order to make decisions. They do so by determining

which cues they find the most credible. Research on source credibility finds that credible sources are those that citizens believe to be “experts” on a particular subject matter and therefore the most trustworthy. As a result, credible sources are also found to be the most persuasive (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). People are also more receptive, and therefore more persuaded, by information that confirms existing stereotypes (Macrae, Shepherd, and Milne, 1992).

In the U.S. two-party system, candidates are able to generate credibility by associating themselves with either of the two major parties, which have developed reputations for representing particular issues and constituencies. As the parties have become more polarized, these distinctions have become even more pronounced (Aldrich, 1995; Rohde, 1991; Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). Each of the two parties have come to “own” certain issues and, as a result, voters have developed partisan stereotypes or party images that reflect this. The parties’ reputations for handling various issues coalesce into party images, which guide individuals’ evaluations of the parties and their candidates (Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Rahn, 1993). Partisan stereotypes are arguably the most commonly used in political decision making (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964).

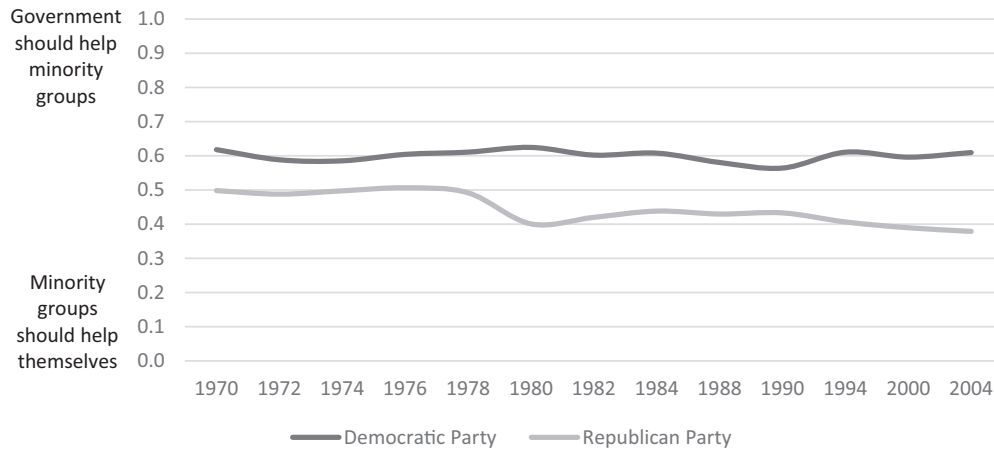
In order to gain electoral advantage, Petrocik’s (1996) theory of issue ownership posits that candidates play to their respective parties’ strengths in order to appear both competent and sincere to voters. The issue handling reputations of the parties are held constant but the salience of issues varies by whether these issues are highlighted over the course of the campaign. From this standpoint, positive electoral outcomes are achieved when candidates succeed in defining the campaign in terms of issues on which they are perceived to have the relative advantage. Further, perceptions of a party’s competency on an issue are more important than an individual candidate’s record on the issue (Kaufmann, 2004).

Candidates typically do not fare well when they trespass on the issues owned by the opposing party (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994). For instance, despite George H. W. Bush promising to be the “educational president” and to “create 30 million more jobs,” survey respondents attributed these campaign promises to his Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakis. Moreover, independents and Republicans who incorrectly attributed Dukakis with those campaign promises were 10 percentage points more likely to vote for Dukakis over Bush (Norpoth and Buchanan, 1992). In an examination of the 1998 midterm elections, Abbe et al. (2003) found that voters were more likely to vote for a candidate who shared common issue priorities that were owned by the candidate’s party. Further, they attribute the GOP’s loss in House seats during the 1998 election to GOP candidates’ failure to emphasize Republican-owned issues (Abbe et al., 2003). Thus, a candidate’s credibility on an issue depends on how much it conforms to her party’s preexisting reputation.

While the concept of issue ownership assumes long-term stability in the issue positions of the parties, there are times when it is necessary for parties and their candidates to deviate from their typical positions (Downs, 1957). In determining whether to trespass on the opposing party’s issues, a candidate will consider the state of the economy, issue salience, voter expectations, and the campaign process (Damore, 2004). Although the success rate is low, there are candidates who have effectively utilized this strategy. For example, Holian (2004) found that Clinton successfully coopted the Republican-owned issue of crime by declaring a pro-death penalty stance during the 1992 presidential election, but then subsequently refocusing the debate to crime prevention (rather than crime and punishment) thereafter. Nevertheless, the successful cooption of the opposing party’s issues is more the exception than the rule.

FIGURE 1

Perceived Differences in the Two Parties on Government Aid to Blacks Over Time



NOTE: Estimates are weighted means. Only white respondents are included in the analyses.
SOURCE: American National Election Study Cumulative File, 1948–2012.

Race and Credibility

In taking their respective issue positions, parties become aligned with different social groups in the electorate. While not all social groups are politicized, one of the most enduring political cleavages that falls along partisan lines is race (Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Frymer, 1999; Philpot, 2007; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld, 1989). Due to the repeated use of race in campaigns, race has become so prominent that scholars have posited it to be the underlying determinant of partisan division (Campbell, 1977; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Frymer, 1999; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld, 1989). Further, the ease with which people make evaluations of parties and candidates is attributable to the race cleavage that has been perpetuated throughout the years using racial appeals in party competition.

We see this borne out in survey data. Since 1970, the American National Election Studies have asked respondents where they would place the Democratic and Republican Parties on a seven-point scale that assesses the extent to which government assistance to blacks is appropriate.¹ As illustrated in Figure 1, the public has a distinct view of the two parties when it comes to race, with the Democratic Party being perceived as more liberal and the Republican Party being perceived as more conservative. This difference ranges from 0.09 in 1974 to 0.23 in 2004. Therefore, we would expect Democratic candidates to have more credibility when it comes to appearing more racially inclusive.

Gender, like party affiliation, can be used as another heuristic to make inferences about a candidate's position on different issues. Experimental research has demonstrated that, when presented with a set of fictitious candidates, citizens infer that the female candidates

¹Specifically, respondents were asked the following question: "Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. Where would you place the Democratic/Republican Party?" For these analyses, sample weights were applied and responses were scaled from 0 (most conservative) to 1 (most liberal). Also, only white respondents were included in these analyses.

are more liberal, more Democratic, and more feminist than the male candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Alexander and Andersen, 1993). Moreover, female candidates are also seen as more competent at handling compassion issues—such as social spending, health, education, and child-care issues—and less competent at handling military issues, crime issues, and foreign affairs (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1992; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). The same is true of *actual* candidates. In a comparison of Senate candidates' ideology (derived from roll-call votes) to survey respondents' placement of the candidates on the liberal–conservative continuum, Koch (2000) found that people perceive female candidates to be more liberal than they actually are. He also found that, regardless of their party affiliation, respondents perceived female candidates to be more liberal than their male counterparts. Likewise, Dolan's (2004) analysis of House candidates yielded similar results—female candidates were perceived to be more liberal than their male counterparts, though this was only true for Democratic candidates. In the case of female Republican candidates, “the sex and partisan cues are conflicting, which may make it difficult for people to form a clear evaluation” (Dolan, 2004:214).

While there has not been a direct examination of perceptions of the racial attitudes of female candidates, women in general are thought to be less racially conservative. Johnson and Marini (1998) argue that there are gender differences in the way people are socialized to interact with one another, with women being more open to interpersonal exchanges. This has implications for racial attitudes and men's versus women's willingness to have contact with people of other races. In a study of white high school students, they found that women are generally more accepting of interaction with other racial groups than men. Similarly, Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin (2010) found that white women in Georgia were significantly less supportive of the Confederate Battle Flag when the flag was linked to the Ku Klux Klan. Using a list experiment, Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens (1997) find that southern white men harbor much greater racial animosity than southern white women.

Given these reputations, we believe that there is a hierarchy of credibility when it comes to which candidates can effectively use positive racial images to signal to voters that they are racially inclusive. A female Democratic candidate, with gender and a partisan stereotype that signal an authenticity with respect to racial inclusivity, will be seen as the most credible when attempting to utilize positive racial images in her campaign. A male Democratic candidate, whose party owns the race issue, will also be seen as credible, although not to the extent of the female Democrat. Although the female Republican candidate will be issue trespassing, her gender will allow her to be seen as credible when using positive racial imagery to appear more racially inclusive. Finally, the male Republican candidate will not only be issue trespassing, but his gender will not lend a sense of authenticity to the use of this strategy. Therefore, he will be seen as the least credible when trying to use positive racial images to appear racially inclusive.

Based on extant research (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Abbe et al., 2003; Norpoth and Buchanan, 1992), we also hypothesize that a candidate's perceived level of credibility will have potential electoral consequences. Campaign messages of racial inclusivity that are consistent with partisan and gender stereotypes for a candidate should provide a boost in the candidate's overall evaluations. On the other hand, messages that “trespass” or run counter to voters' partisan and gender stereotypes may fail to live up to voters' expectations and incur an electoral penalty.

Finally, we add one last caveat. Up until this point, we have assumed that voters will accept candidates who appear more racially inclusive as a good thing. This should not be taken as a given. For some voters, racial inclusivity is a worthy enterprise; for others, this is a detriment to candidate support. Thus, we also hypothesize that candidate support

will be contingent on the racial attitudes of voters, with racially liberal voters favoring candidates appearing more racially inclusive and racially conservative voters penalizing racially inclusive candidates.

Research Design and Methods

This study requires answering two questions. First, who is able to credibly use positive racial imagery? Second, does the perception of positive racial imagery influence candidate evaluations? To answer the aforementioned questions, we designed an experiment, which was embedded in a survey conducted as part of the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). The CCES featured a stratified sample of 1,000 adult respondents and was administered by YouGov in two waves—a preelection wave (October 2014) and a postelection wave (two weeks following the Election Day).² Blacks and other nonwhites only constituted about 25 percent of our sample, preventing us from running any meaningful analyses on their responses to the experimental treatments. Therefore, our analyses are restricted to the white respondents in the sample ($n = 752$).

Each respondent was told that he or she would be viewing a series of advertisements. Respondents in the treatment groups viewed one fictitious candidate campaign ad flanked by two common product (nonpolitical) ads.³ Following exposure to the ads, respondents provided their views of the candidate, their policy preferences, and other political opinions.

The experimental treatments presented respondents with a 30-second political advertisement focusing on either Michael or Michelle Anderson, a white candidate who was running for Michigan's 10th Congressional District. The ad highlighted a number of the candidate's nonspecific issue positions (e.g., "pro-economic growth," "pro-middle-class," etc.) and, depending on the treatment condition, varied whether the candidate was a Democrat or a Republican. We also varied the visual images that accompanied the candidate's positions with either nonracially inclusive or racially inclusive imagery (see Table 1 for a complete transcript of the ad and description of accompanying visual cues and Table 2 for the visual images from the racially inclusive noninclusive conditions).

Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental conditions. To ensure that there were no imbalances in the distribution of background characteristics of the respondents across conditions, we analyzed the sample demographics by experimental treatment. As Table 3 illustrates, the sample was fairly evenly distributed. Further, an analysis of variance test for each demographic characteristic confirms that any observed differences across experimental treatments were not statistically significant.

We are concerned with the experimental treatments' effect on two dependent variables. The first dependent variable measures respondents' perceptions of each candidate's racial inclusivity. To this end, we use responses to the following item: "Please indicate whether this describes Michelle/Michael Anderson extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all. Michelle/Michael Anderson really cares about blacks." Responses were coded on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 (not well at all) to 1 (extremely well). The second dependent variable measures overall evaluations of the candidates as measured by a feeling thermometer. Specifically, respondents were asked: "One of the ads you viewed was for Michelle/Michael Anderson, a candidate running for Congress. We'd like to get your feelings toward Michelle/Michael Anderson. I'd like you to rate her/him using something

²The within-panel response rate for the 2014, CCES was 53.9 percent (RR3).

³The product ads were for Outback Steakhouse (30 seconds) and MegaRed Krill Oil (20 seconds).

TABLE 1
Experimental Manipulation

| Visual | Verbal |
|--|--|
| White screen with “values” written in black lettering fading in and then fading out. | “The values to know what counts.” |
| White screen with “experience” written in black lettering fading in and then fading out. | “The experience to get things done.” |
| Picture of a white family where either the husband or wife could be the candidate depending on the treatment selected. | “ [Michael Anderson/Michelle Anderson] is a [Republican/Democrat] running to represent Michigan’s 10th Congressional District.” |
| Image of [white/black] adult students. | “ [Michael/Michelle] ’s number one goal is to grow the economy . . .” |
| Image of [white/black] auto workers. | “. . . lower the unemployment rate, and provide opportunity for American workers.” |
| Image of [white/black] family at dinner table. | “ [Michael/Michelle] knows that middle-class families are the backbone of this country, and will do all [he/she] can to make the middle class strong again.” |
| Image of [white/black] truck driver. | “ [Michael Anderson/Michelle Anderson] , the right choice for workers,” |
| Image of [white/black] family at picnic. | “. . . families,” |
| Image of [white/black] Boy Scouts walking in a parade. | “. . . the 10th Congressional District,” |
| Image of [white/black] people in audience of convention. | “. . . and America.” |
| Either male or female candidate image depending on the treatment selected. | “On November, 6, a vote for [Michael Anderson/Michelle Anderson] is a vote for a stronger America.” |

we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Michelle/Michael Anderson. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorable toward Michelle/Michael Anderson and that you don’t care too much for her/him. A rating of 50 means that you don’t feel particularly warm or cold toward her/him. Keeping this in mind, how would you rate Michelle/Michael Anderson?” Responses were rescaled from 0 (coolest) to 1 (warmest).

Finally, we hypothesize that the effect of improving candidate inclusivity on overall candidate evaluations will be contingent on respondents’ racial attitudes. Therefore, we utilize respondents’ placement on the racial resentment scale. As part of the racial resentment battery, respondents were asked their level of agreement with the following four statements:

- It is really a matter of people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.
- Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
- The Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
- Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

TABLE 2
Ad Images

| <u>Race-neutral</u> | <u>Racially inclusive</u> |
|---|--|
| <p>Image of workers 1</p>  | <p>Image of workers 1</p>  |
| <p>Image of workers 2</p>  | <p>Image of workers 2</p>  |
| <p>Image of family 1</p>  | <p>Image of family 1</p>  |
| <p>Image of workers 3</p>  | <p>Image of workers 3</p>  |
| <p>Image of family 2</p>  | <p>Image of family 2</p>  |
| <p>Image of people gathered</p>  | <p>Image of people gathered</p>  |
| <p>Image of people gathered 2</p>  | <p>Image of people gathered 2</p>  |

TABLE 3
Sample Characteristics by Experimental Condition

| | Female Democrat | | Female Republican | | Male Democrat | | Male Republican | | Significance |
|--|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Racial | Race-Neutral | Racial | Race-Neutral | Racial | Race-Neutral | Racial | Race-Neutral | |
| Age | 51.4 | 51.8 | 50.1 | 54.1 | 53.0 | 50.3 | 49.3 | 50.3 | 0.34 |
| Income (15-point scale; 0 = less than \$10k, 1 = \$250k+) | 0.35 | 0.36 | 0.38 | 0.36 | 0.35 | 0.36 | 0.35 | 0.36 | 0.91 |
| Education (6-point scale; 0 = no HS, 1 = postgrad) | 0.50 | 0.49 | 0.54 | 0.52 | 0.54 | 0.50 | 0.58 | 0.50 | 0.58 |
| Percentage of females | 55% | 56% | 57% | 46% | 43% | 51% | 51% | 51% | 0.53 |
| Ideology (7-point scale; 0 = liberal, 1 = conservative) | 0.54 | 0.51 | 0.59 | 0.58 | 0.52 | 0.53 | 0.56 | 0.53 | 0.76 |
| Party ID (7-point scale; 0 = strong Democrat, 1 = strong Republican) | 0.51 | 0.50 | 0.51 | 0.48 | 0.49 | 0.43 | 0.48 | 0.43 | 0.93 |
| N | 89 | 87 | 82 | 92 | 86 | 84 | 77 | 84 | 77 |

NOTE: Values are unweighted means. Significance level for each demographic characteristic was determined by conducting an analysis of variance test across experimental conditions.

SOURCE: 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

TABLE 4

The Effect of Experimental Condition on Perceptions of Candidate Inclusivity

| | Noninclusive | Racially Inclusive | Difference |
|-------------------|--|--|------------|
| All candidates | 0.46 (<i>SD</i> = 0.30; <i>N</i> = 329) | 0.56 (<i>SD</i> = 0.29; <i>N</i> = 303) | 0.10* |
| Female Democrat | 0.49 (<i>SD</i> = 0.28; <i>N</i> = 81) | 0.64 (<i>SD</i> = 0.24; <i>N</i> = 71) | 0.15* |
| Female Republican | 0.48 (<i>SD</i> = 0.32; <i>N</i> = 82) | 0.58 (<i>SD</i> = 0.30; <i>N</i> = 76) | 0.10* |
| Male Democrat | 0.44 (<i>SD</i> = 0.27; <i>N</i> = 85) | 0.52 (<i>SD</i> = 0.29; <i>N</i> = 80) | 0.08* |
| Male Republican | 0.42 (<i>SD</i> = 0.30; <i>N</i> = 81) | 0.51 (<i>SD</i> = 0.30; <i>N</i> = 76) | 0.09* |

NOTE: Values are unweighted means. Perceptions of candidate inclusivity is a four-point variable coded 0 (not well at all) and 1 (extremely well); * = Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ in a one-tailed test of independent samples.

SOURCE: 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Respondents used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to respond to each statement. The four statements were combined into an additive index ranging from 0 (most racially liberal) to 1 (most racially conservative). The index mean was 0.61, the interitem correlations ranged from 0.47 to 0.71, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

Results

Our first hypothesis predicts that the use of positive racial imagery in campaign communication will positively affect perceptions of candidates' racial inclusivity. Specifically, we expect respondents to deem female candidates more credible, and thus, believe them to be more racially inclusive after viewing a female candidate in a racially inclusive campaign ad. We also expect Democratic candidates to appear more credible and signal to respondents a greater level of racial inclusivity after appearing in a racially inclusive campaign ad.

Table 4 presents the mean placement of the candidates on the racial inclusivity measure by treatment condition.⁴ The first thing of note is that, absent any racial cues, respondents place female candidates higher than male candidates on the racial inclusivity scale. An analysis of variance test, however, determined that these observed differences were not statistically significant. In general, respondents also place candidates appearing in a noninclusive ad at 0.44 on the racial inclusivity measure and 10 percentage points higher at 0.54 when they appear in a racially inclusive ad. When a Democratic female candidate appeared in a noninclusive ad, respondents placed her at 0.49 on the racial inclusivity measure. This increased to 0.64 when she appeared in a racially inclusive ad. Further, this difference of 15 percentage points is statistically significant.⁵ Respondents similarly placed the Republican female candidate at 0.48 on the racial inclusivity scale when she appeared in a noninclusive ad. When she appeared in a racially inclusive ad, her placement increased to 0.58, a statistically significant increase of 10 percentage points. The average placement of the Democratic male candidate in the noninclusive ad on the racial inclusivity item was 0.44 and increased to 0.52 when he appeared in a racially inclusive ad. Likewise, his Republican counterpart's placement on this measure was 0.42 when he appeared in a

⁴Since we are only interested in differences across treatment conditions and not population estimates, sample weights were not applied.

⁵A *t*-test of independent samples was used to assess if there was a statistically significant difference between the noninclusive and racially inclusive treatment conditions for each of the hypothetical candidates.

TABLE 5
The Effect of Experimental Condition on Candidate Evaluation

| | Noninclusive | Racially Inclusive | Difference |
|-------------------|--|--|------------|
| All candidates | 0.58 (<i>SD</i> = 0.27; <i>N</i> = 277) | 0.59 (<i>SD</i> = 0.24; <i>N</i> = 247) | 0.01 |
| Female Democrat | 0.54 (<i>SD</i> = 0.27; <i>N</i> = 69) | 0.57 (<i>SD</i> = 0.22; <i>N</i> = 63) | 0.03 |
| Female Republican | 0.60 (<i>SD</i> = 0.28; <i>N</i> = 67) | 0.63 (<i>SD</i> = 0.23; <i>N</i> = 56) | 0.03 |
| Male Democrat | 0.56 (<i>SD</i> = 0.24; <i>N</i> = 74) | 0.59 (<i>SD</i> = 0.24; <i>N</i> = 64) | 0.03 |
| Male Republican | 0.60 (<i>SD</i> = 0.28; <i>N</i> = 67) | 0.59 (<i>SD</i> = 0.25; <i>N</i> = 64) | -0.01 |

NOTE: Values are unweighted means. Candidate evaluation is a 100-point feeling thermometer coded from 0 (does not prefer the candidate) to 1 (prefers the candidate); * = Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ in a one-tailed test of independent samples.

SOURCE: 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

noninclusive ad. When the male Republican candidate appeared in a racially inclusive ad, his placement on the racial inclusivity measure increased to 0.51. In the case of both male candidates, this increase was statistically significant.

To sum up, the results presented in Table 4 confirm our first expectation. Female Democratic candidates are perceived to be the most racially inclusive after appearing in a racially inclusive ad, suggesting that they hold the most credibility in this area. They are followed by female Republican candidates, with male candidates—regardless of party affiliation—having the same amount of credibility. Note, however, that a difference-in-difference test determined that the treatment effects across candidates were not statistically significant.⁶

In Table 5, we replicated the analyses in Table 4, substituting racial inclusivity for overall candidate evaluations. The goal of these analyses was to discern whether the candidates' appearance in a racially inclusive ad improved their overall assessments by respondents. Although candidates, with the exception of the male Republican candidate, did improve their evaluations by appearing in a racially inclusive ad, these effects were miniscule and failed to reach statistical significance.⁷

For the next set of tests, we are interested in knowing to what extent candidates can improve their overall evaluations by convincing voters that they are more racially inclusive. In particular, we look at whether improving a candidate's inclusivity as a result of using positive racial images in campaign communication had an effect on subjects' placement of the candidates on a feeling thermometer.⁸ To this end, we estimate the joint effect of candidate inclusivity and the experimental treatment on overall candidate evaluations. Our expectation is that, the more credible the candidate appears when engaging in a racially inclusive strategy, the greater the net improvement in that candidate's overall evaluation. Based on the results in the previous section, we would expect the female candidates in the

⁶To conduct a difference-in-difference test, we estimated an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model using racial inclusivity as the dependent variable. Three dummy variables were included as independent variables: one representing whether respondents watched a noninclusive versus inclusive ad (*racetreat*); one representing whether the ad featured a female versus a male candidate (*femaletreat*); and one representing whether the ad featured a Democrat versus a Republican candidate (*Demtreat*). Additionally, we included the interactions between *racetreat* and *femaletreat* and *racetreat* and *Demtreat*. While the coefficient on the *racetreat* variable was statistically significant, neither of the interaction terms were, indicating that the size of the effects were statistically speaking no different for either the female or the Democratic candidates.

⁷Similar to the previous analyses, a difference-in-difference test was conducted, which determined that there were no statistically significant differences in effects across treatment groups.

⁸The candidate inclusivity measure was asked *after* the candidate feeling thermometers to ensure there would be no racial priming effects beyond those caused by the experimental treatments.

racial conditions to receive the greatest net improvement in feeling thermometer scores, relative to their male counterparts. As the results presented in the first and fourth columns of Table 5 indicate, this is not the case. Looking first at female candidates, we see that whether a candidate cares about blacks affects subjects' overall evaluations of the candidate. However, this construct is given no more weight as a result of subjects being exposed to positive racial imagery. Likewise, male candidates engaging in a strategy involving positive racial imagery are no more likely to have this construct weighted more heavily in subjects' overall evaluations of them.

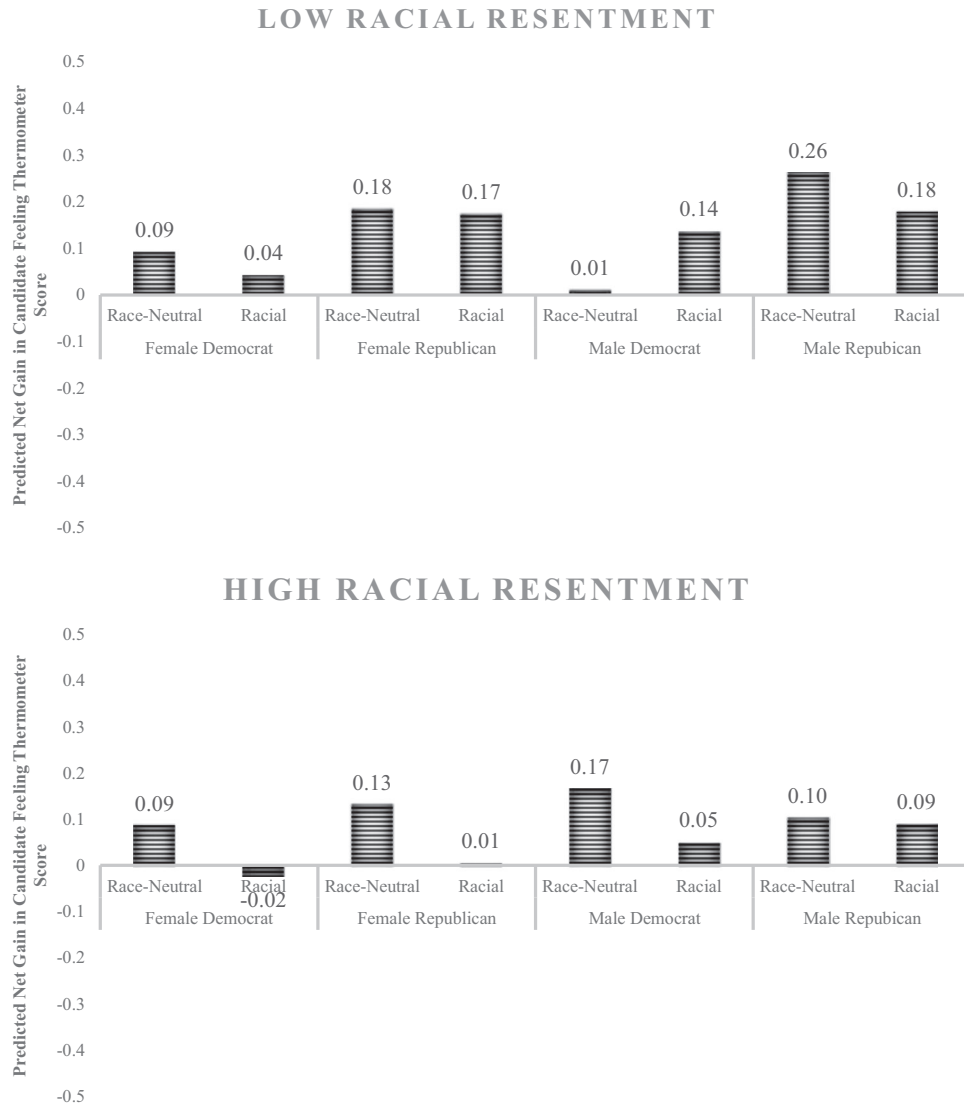
We also speculate that, when it comes to winning favor among voters, there may be a push-pull effect occurring. To be sure, there are some people who view a candidate's racial inclusivity as a positive attribute; for others, employing a racially inclusive strategy may be a deterrent to lending support to a candidate. Analyzing these two groups of respondents together may cancel out any discernable effects. Therefore, we analyze the data, separating out subjects by those who are low on the racial resentment scale and those who are high on the racial scale. As indicated in Table 6, when these two groups are separated, we see clear differences in the weight of racial inclusivity on overall candidate evaluations. For instance, low racial resentment subjects place a greater weight on the Democratic male candidate's racial inclusivity after seeing him in a racially inclusive ad than they do when he is in a noninclusive ad. In contrast, when high racial resentment subjects view the Democratic male candidate in the racially inclusive ad, the weight of his inclusivity *decreases* compared to when he appears in the noninclusive ad.

To gain a better understanding of what these findings mean substantively, we calculate candidates' feeling thermometer scores when candidates are placed at their respective means on racial inclusivity, compared to 1 standard deviation above their means (see Table 4). The top half of Figure 2⁹ presents the results for low racial resentment subjects. Compared to other candidates, the female Democratic candidate in both racially inclusive and noninclusive conditions gained very little by improving her racial inclusivity. The female Democratic candidate in the noninclusive treatment condition improved her feeling score by about 9 percentage points, from 0.63 to 0.73, when she was deemed more racially inclusive by subjects.¹⁰ In the racially inclusive condition, her placement on a feeling thermometer was 0.65 when placed at her mean level of candidate inclusivity. It increased to 0.70 when respondents placed here at 1 standard deviation above the mean. Neither of these differences were statistically significant. In contrast, the female Republican candidate, who had a much lower baseline on the feeling thermometer when perceived as not being racially inclusive (0.56 in the noninclusive condition; 0.59 in the inclusive condition), was able to improve her feeling thermometer score by over 17 percentage points in both conditions. Moreover, this difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The male Democratic candidate in the noninclusive condition had relatively high feeling thermometer scores, regardless of perceptions of candidate inclusivity. As a result, subjects rating him higher on the racial inclusivity measure had very little bearing on his overall evaluations. The male Democratic candidate in the racially inclusive condition, however, improved his feeling score from 0.64 to 0.77, a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$). The largest improvement, however, occurred for the male Republican candidate. In the noninclusive condition, the marginal effect of improving his candidate inclusivity was 26 percentage points. In the racial condition, his feeling thermometer score increased by 18 percentage points (from 0.55 to 0.73) as respondents believed him to be more racially

⁹Figure 1 is based on the OLS regression analyses shown in Table 5. The predicted values were estimated by manipulating the experimental treatment and levels of perceived candidate inclusivity.

¹⁰Due to rounding, differences will not appear to be exact.

FIGURE 2
The Effect of Candidate Inclusivity on Candidate Evaluations



NOTE: Predicted values are based on the OLS estimates presented in Table 4. Predicted net gain is calculated by subtracting the candidates' feeling thermometer scores when they are not perceived as racially inclusive from their feeling thermometer scores when they are perceived as being racially inclusive. Low racial resentment respondents score below the mean on the scale; high racial resentment respondents score at or above the mean on the scale.
SOURCE: 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

inclusive. These results suggest that, relative to the female Democratic candidate, the other candidates are at an initial disadvantage among low racial resentment subjects. As the candidates are perceived to be more racially inclusive, however, they are able to overcome this disadvantage. Conversely, the female Democratic candidate, already starting with the

highest feeling thermometer scores among low resentment respondents, sees little marginal effect from improving inclusivity.

The results presented in the bottom half of Figure 2 demonstrate that high racial resentment respondents were less impressed by candidates who attempted to appear more racially inclusive. Female candidates in the racial conditions—regardless of party affiliation—saw essentially no change in their overall evaluations (-0.02 for the female Democrat; 0.01 for the female Republican) when their candidate inclusivity improved. Although the female Democratic and Republican candidates in the noninclusive treatment condition experienced a net gain of 9 and 13 percentage points, respectively, this effect was smaller than that among low racial resentment subjects and is mostly attributable to a lower initial baseline placement. The male Democratic candidate in the noninclusive condition experienced the largest boost in feeling thermometer ratings. His mean predicted score went from 0.53 to 0.69 as high racial resentment subjects viewed him as more racially inclusive. The male Democratic candidate in the racially inclusive condition was able to improve his overall evaluations by 5 percentage points (from 0.53 to 0.58) as subjects rated him higher on the racial inclusivity measure, but this difference was not statistically significant. Finally, the male Republican candidate in both noninclusive and racially inclusive conditions saw an improvement in his overall evaluations as his racial inclusivity improved. In both treatment groups, high racial resentment subjects placed him about two-thirds up the feeling thermometer when they believed him to be less racially inclusive. This increased by about 10 percentage points in both conditions when subjects indicated that he was more racially inclusive.

Conclusion

This study offers a new perspective on how racial appeals can be made in campaigns by assessing the effects of positive, inclusive racial imagery in advertising. Our expectation was that inclusive imagery would signal to voters that the candidate was more racially inclusive, but that the impact of using these images would be contingent on the candidate's credibility in appearing inclusive. Consistent with these expectations, female Democratic candidates garner the most impact on their perceived inclusivity when using racially inclusive images in advertising and male Republican candidates garner the least impact. We also found, however, that candidates who appeared more credible when making racially inclusive appeals failed to influence their overall candidate evaluations. For female Democratic candidates, there was a ceiling effect—based on gender and partisan stereotypes, where she had already met voters' expectations for being racially inclusive. Therefore, engaging in a racially inclusive strategy afforded her no additional support. In contrast, we found that when male and Republican candidates used racially inclusive images in campaign advertising they could overcome voters' stereotypical perceptions and close the gap in perceived inclusiveness compared to female Democratic candidates. This, in turn, translated into increased support among voters.

We further found that respondents' racial attitudes were an important moderator of these effects in that they determined one's openness to a candidate appearing more racially inclusive. As expected, the candidates' use of racially inclusive images did not improve their overall candidate evaluation among voters who scored high on the racial resentment scale. For respondents who scored low on the racial resentment scale, however, improving the candidate's racial inclusivity significantly boosted overall candidate evaluations, particularly among candidates who had not previously been thought of as racially inclusive as a result of their partisanship or gender.

These findings speak to the relative rigidity and fluidity of political stereotypes. There are some stereotypes—particularly the ones that sit at the intersection of party and gender—that are so ingrained in the minds of voters that campaign messaging will have minimal impact. Take for instance the female Democratic candidate. While she had the most credibility when using a campaign strategy that incorporated positive racial imagery, she played to type. She did exactly what she was expected to do and, therefore, garnered the same level of support she would have had if voters had just been left to assume her position on race. Similar to Damore (2004), our findings suggest that playing against type or issue trespassing can pay off, particularly when a candidate has nothing to lose. Although the male Republican candidate was not as credible as the female candidates of either party, his attempt to appear more racially inclusive was enough to allow him to come from behind among racially liberal voters who would have otherwise written him off completely as a candidate. Still, more research in this area is needed to see if this effect is situational or if this alternative use of playing the race card can redefine gender and partisan stereotypes on race.

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