

**Social Desirability and Racial Framing of Barack Obama  
and the Hypothetical Black President**

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## ABSTRACT

Recent elections involving deracialized black candidates reveal a propensity among whites to voice support for black candidates, but privately abstain or vote for someone else. Therefore, instead of accepting the validity of political attitudes toward deracialized candidates, this research explores the extent to which support for Barack Obama and a hypothetical black presidential candidate is tainted by socially desirable responses. Working under the axiom that deracialized candidates purposely avoid racially divisive issues, threatening and confrontational images, and positions challenging the whites' group and self interests, we argue that whites, more than African Americans, should experience greater internalized pressure to voice support for Obama. However, as perceptions of threat to the racial order of society increase, whites' support for deracialized candidates should decrease, at the same time they become sensitive to social norms. Our analysis of race of interviewer effects (surrogate for social desirability bias) and racial labeling (surrogate for threat) of Obama and a hypothetical black candidate supports our expectations. Specifically, while blacks do not show signs of social desirability bias concerning Obama, whites are more likely to voice support for Obama when interviewed by a black interviewer. Moreover, under high threat or when Obama is labeled as "African American" (as opposed to "Black"), whites' support for Obama decreases overall, but Obama's support significantly improves when interviewed by a black interviewer. We take this to mean that whites overcompensate for their support for Obama when he is made to appear more threatening.

## **Social Desirability and Racial Framing of Barack Obama and the Hypothetical Black President**

Widely perceived as a rising star within the Democratic Party and national politics, Senator Barack Obama appears to be the first African American with a serious chance of winning a major party's presidential nomination. Initially elected to the Illinois State House of Representatives in 1996 where he earned a reputation as a consensus builder, Barack Obama achieved national prominence as keynote speaker at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, where he was broadly perceived as an inspirational and transformative figure. Obama's electoral fortunes increased dramatically when he became only the third African American popularly elected to the U.S. Senate. Seeking to benefit from such broad appeal and exposure, Senator Obama declared his candidacy to run for the 2008 Democratic Party Presidential nomination on February 10, 2007.

Since announcing his candidacy, Senator Obama's chances for securing the Democratic nomination appear serious. He has received substantial support both financially and in terms of public opinion. According to the Federal Election Commission, Senator Obama received over 36 million dollars in contributions through June 2007, 25 million of which were raised in the first 3 months of 2007.<sup>1</sup> Equally noteworthy, of the roughly eight declared candidates running for the Democratic nomination, Senator Obama consistently ranks second behind Senator Hillary Clinton in candidate preference polling, despite having among the highest favorability ratings. Shortly after declaring his candidacy, a Gallup Poll indicated that 71

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<sup>1</sup> At least one third of Senator Obama's contributions came from individual contributors, a figure which outpaced all other candidates and signaled his populist appeal ([www.nytimes.com/2007/07/17/us/politics/17obama.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/17/us/politics/17obama.html)).

percent of American citizens thought Senator Obama had an “excellent” or “good” chance of being elected President.

Reflecting a departure from the traditional post-civil rights, activist, and confrontational political candidates, Senator Obama’s appeal is said to transcend race.<sup>2</sup> Whites, at least on the surface, seem captivated by his charm, charisma, and “articulateness.” With respect to style and image, Senator Obama is also young, handsome (by most accounts), polished, and a Harvard educated lawyer. But, further endearing the senator is his fervent opposition to the war in Iraq (favoring instead phased redeployment), his strong sense of pragmatism, self-billing as a consensus builder, and no known political baggage (e.g., scandals or moral indiscretions). However, underlying what might seem as a quick ascension into national politics and unbridled ambition, Senator Obama is assailed for his relative lack of political experience in domestic and foreign affairs and a penchant to talk in generalities. His evolving policy prescriptions contribute to perceptions of inexperience and that his candidacy rests more on style than substance. Still, many people do not know who he is or have not heard of him.<sup>3</sup> And, possibly troubling for Senator Obama,<sup>4</sup> many of the deracialized features

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, social psychologists tend to think of “racial transcendence” as a process of sub-typing exemplars that do not activate negative racial stereotypes (Kunda and Oleson 1997). For instance, African American political figures such as Colin Powell are said to transcend race (Kinder and McConaughy 2006); however, a social psychologist might say Powell is still viewed through a racial lens, but as an exception to a rule that generally applies to African Americans.

<sup>3</sup> In a 2007 Gallup Poll (June 4-24) 14 percent of the public, including 7% of non-Hispanic Whites, 16 percent of Blacks, and 45 percent of Hispanics claim to have “never heard” of Barack Obama.

<sup>4</sup> We do not assume that Obama, or any other deracialized candidate, requires black support to be elected. It is quite possible for candidates to believe that they can be elected without black support. Of course, to the extent this is true is an open question.

of his campaign that endear him to whites, seem to raise questions about his appeal among African Americans, who seem to favor Senator Clinton.<sup>5</sup>

The early support in the polls and enthusiasm for a deracialized African American presidential candidate, like Senator Obama, raise important questions about race and politics in American society. Given the significant racial progress and lessening of racial animosity over the past 50 years (Schuman et al. 1997), questions abound concerning whether it is possible for an African American to be elected president today or whether continued racial polarization masks underlying negative racial beliefs that work against the election an African American presidential candidate? More explicitly, how valid are responses to survey questions regarding the support for a real or hypothetical African American candidate?<sup>6</sup> To what extent does the concern for social desirability (i.e., self-monitoring and sensitivity to political correctness) outweigh the willingness to offer honest and candid assessments of African American candidates?

With a healthy skepticism of racial attitudes and carefulness in not taking for granted that people always mean what they say regarding race, this paper explores these questions in great detail. Inasmuch as there is nothing intrinsically gratifying about participating in a

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<sup>5</sup> An argument can be made that Obama's background may naturally diminish support among African Americans. While we would have to disagree in the sense that many African Americans with similar backgrounds have held elective office and received broad support from African Americans (e.g., Mayor Corey Booker received a B.A. from Oxford and a law degree from Yale, Deval Patrick, Governor of Massachusetts, received a B.A. and a law degree from Harvard, and U.S. Representative Artur Davis received a B.A. and law degree from Harvard), our use of the term deracialized is intended to convey a conscious decision and strategy on the part of black candidates to deemphasize racial issues and events with the hope of communicating their broad appeal.

<sup>6</sup> Underlying these questions is a concern for what has been characterized as the "Bradley Effect" (Citrin Green, and Sears 1990), "Wilder Effect" (Finkel, Gutterbock, and Borg 1991), or "Dinkins Effect" (Berinsky 1999). Both processes refer to the tendency for whites to express support for African American candidates but ultimately vote for the white candidate.

public opinion survey that would compel respondents to report more truthful attitudes than in other types of conversation, our primary task is to assess the validity of attitudes toward Senator Obama, and more generally, toward deracialized African American candidates. Working under the assumption that the appeal for deracialized candidates involves an assessment of threat to whites' group and self-interest (McCormick and Jones 1993; Perry 1996), we also ask, how does the racialization (of a deracialized political figure) influence support and self-monitoring behavior?

Through analyses of original survey data, we examine the interaction between social desirability bias (i.e., race of interviewer effects) and racialization (i.e., racial labeling) on the support for both Senator Obama and a fictional black candidate. In anticipation of things to follow, our argument suggests that since deracialized political candidates do not take positions seeking to challenge the racial status quo, whites, more than African Americans, experience greater internalized pressure to voice support for them. But, as perceptions of racialization increase (or threat to whites' self or group interest), whites' support for Obama decreases. However, this decline in support reverses as whites exposed to social desirability norms (or the black interviewer) attempt to censor their beliefs. We take this to mean that whites overcompensate for their support for Obama when he is made to appear more threatening.

This analysis proceeds with a review of the interaction between deracialization, social desirability, and racial attitudes, and then we develop and test a set of expectations concerning the consequences of social desirability and racial labels.

### **Perceived Viability of African American Presidential Candidates**

A selection artifact accounts for a substantial component of the enthusiasm for Senator Obama and other recent African American candidates. That is, without the right “type” of racially transcendent black candidate, whites may not think seriously about voting for such a candidate or feel any pressure to voice support for them (e.g., Finkel, Gutterbock, and Borg 1991). While past presidential bids by African Americans received little, if any, support from whites (e.g., Shirley Chisholm in 1972, Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988, Carol Moseley Braun in 2003, and Al Sharpton in 2003), it is now possible to think realistically about the prospects of electing a black presidential candidate, as deracialized campaign strategies seem to be guided by explicit concerns about being more palatable and acceptable to whites, while shying away from divisive racial appeals and confrontational behavior (Hamilton 1977; McCormick and Jones 1993; Perry 1996). Deracialized candidates seek to avoid using explicit references to racial issues, public appeals to the black community, and associating with controversial racialized individuals (McCormick and Jones 1993). Instead, deracialized tactics emphasize race-neutral issues and attempt to project a non-threatening or non-stereotypical image to whites.<sup>7</sup> Deracialized candidates must also appear intelligent and articulate, hard-working, patriotic, and “clean” to be considered viable. Not only do these traits counter the negative stereotypes often associated with African Americans (Bobo and Kluegel 1997), but they also stand in stark contrast to the traditional confrontational style and images of previous black politicians. All of this is done to assuage whites’ sense of threat stemming from a long held

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<sup>7</sup> While this approach may increase support among whites, a deracialized strategy tends to alienate African Americans (Orey 2006). Also, since voters tend to stereotype African American candidates as more concerned with minority right than whites (McDermott 1998; Sigelman et al. 1995), whites may feel their group interests are threatened and choose not to support black candidates on perception alone.

belief that African American candidates would favor the interests of the black community over white's interests (Hajnal 2007).

Senator Obama's deracialized character resembles other African American political figures, such as former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Though he declined to run for the Republican Party nomination for president in 1996, Colin Powell appeared to have broad support. Having served in the military and credited with leading a successful military campaign in the first Gulf War, perceptions of Powell centered more on his stature as a "war hero" than his race (Kinder and McConnaughy 2006). Powell was also cast as an exemplary case of racial progress (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997): from humble beginnings to rising to the top through hard work, perseverance, and serving his country. Powell's feeling thermometer rating among whites in the 1996 NES (mean=70.4) are among the highest ever recorded, outpacing other popular figures such as Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 (mean=67.4), Richard Nixon in 1972 (mean=67.8), and Ronald Reagan in 1988 (mean=64.7) (Kinder and McConnaughy 2006). While his support has waned somewhat due to his role in the justification for going to war in Iraq, Powell remains a popular figure in America.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps foreshadowing problems with a deracialized image, Powell's 1996 National Election Study (NES) feeling thermometer rating among African Americans (mean=69) was lower than the ratings for Bill Clinton (mean=83.3), Hilary Clinton (75.1), and Jesse Jackson (mean=71.2). It is especially noteworthy that Kinder

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<sup>8</sup> The Harris Poll tracked Powell's job approval as Secretary of State from 2001 to 2004, and during that time his "excellent/good" ratings drop from 88 to 66 percent. This trend can be seen online at [www.pollingreport.com/p.htm](http://www.pollingreport.com/p.htm) (look for Colin Powell).



and McConnaughey did not find social desirability bias (race of interviewer effects) in whites' or blacks' responses to Colin Powell.

Several recent campaigns run by African American candidates also reflect this form of deracialized strategy (but the origins of deracialization lies with Hamilton (1977) and 1989 mayoral elections). Though unsuccessful, Lynn Swann ran as a Republican for Governor of Pennsylvania in 2006 and he received 40 percent of the vote. Similarly, Ken Blackwell as a Republican was defeated by 20 percent in Ohio's gubernatorial election. Michael Steele as a Republican loss with 44 percent of the vote for the U.S. Senate in Maryland. Running as Democrat, Harold Ford Jr. was defeated by less than 3 percentage points for the U.S. Senate in Tennessee. However, successful in a statewide election, Deval Patrick, another Democrat, was elected with 56 percent of the statewide vote in a four-way gubernatorial race in Massachusetts. In 2004, Barack Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate in Illinois with 70 percent of the vote. A common vein running through these electoral efforts suggests that deracialized African American candidates can now achieve a certain measure of success within largely white districts.

Citrin, Green, and Sears' (1990) analysis of the support for Tom Bradley's 1982 campaign for governor of California, another ostensibly deracialized political figure, suggests that deracialization is likely to mitigate the influence of racial considerations among whites. Deracialization deactivates racial cues whereby other issues can take on greater importance. Citrin, Green, and Sears (1990) also observed that the downside to the "need to assuage the anxieties of white voters" is the failure to mobilize black voters.

## Declining Racial Resentment

The racial attitudes literature suggests that on a variety of different dimensions there seems to be a growing sense of racial tolerance that would ostensibly translate into greater support for African American candidates. As another component contributing to the optimism for black presidential candidates, it is possible to point to the decline in old-fashioned “redneck” racism and beliefs about the inferiority of blacks as indicators of racial progress (Schuman et al. 1997). A consequence of the lessening of racial resentment and threat among whites suggests that the racial beliefs that once prevented blacks from voting and running for public office are now reversed and become prima-facie evidence of the growing acceptance of African American candidates beyond local political contexts (e.g., mayorships). For instance, the percentage of whites subscribing to racial stereotypes has significantly declined overtime and the openness to school desegregation rose by over 60 percentage points from 1942 (around 32 percent) to 1982 (around 93 percent) (Page and Shapiro 1992; Schuman et al. 1997). While the majority of White Americans still oppose “busing”, their level of opposition has decreased by about 20 percentage points from 84 percent in the early 1970s to 62 percent in the mid-1990s (Schuman et al. 1997). White Americans have also shown declining prejudice in terms of interracial relationships. Since the 1970s, the percentage of whites favoring “laws” against interracial marriage has declined from almost 40 percent to about 10 percent (Bardes and Oldendick 2007). Other evidence suggest that whites, presumably, are no longer singularly fixated on race and are now ready to consider voting for minority candidates who appeal to broader political concerns (Hajnal 2007; Sigelman et al. 1995).

However, whether these figures reflect a real reduction in racist attitudes or changing social norms regarding race is an open question. If a change has occurred in what is considered to be socially acceptable speech about race, it is difficult to discern whether racist attitudes have eroded, or whether there has merely been a change in public expression on racial matters (Jones and Sigall 1971; Schuman et al. 1997). Distinguishing individuals who have learned the appropriate responses to questions about race from individuals who possess sincerely tolerant racial beliefs remains very difficult in the survey context (Schuman et al. 1997). As a result, the expressed enthusiasm for deracialized black candidates could be prematurely interpreted to mean they enjoy broad support. Thus, measures tapping into the support and vote intentions may be unable to reveal intentionally concealed racial beliefs of respondents who are sensitive to the socially acceptable answers.

Only recently have public opinion researchers begun to acknowledge this problem.<sup>9</sup> Kuklinski et al. (1997) suggest that censoring of racist beliefs may pose a measurement problem that rivals substantive explanations. Individuals may conceal their negative feelings and target their animosity through more subtle expressions. Peffley and Hurwitz (1998) also indicate that it is important to determine the extent to which racial attitudes and stereotypes are due to social desirability pressures of impression management. Feldman and Huddy (2005) in their study of racial resentment recognize that better and more valid measures of prejudice

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<sup>9</sup> Social desirability around racial responses has been long recognized and dealt with explicitly within social psychology. In response to findings that suggested whites' attitudes toward blacks were improving (Karlins et al. 1969), Jones and Sigall (1971) argued that whites' attitudes had not changed, but instead whites were less willing to express overt negative racial attitudes. Sigall and Page (1971) developed the well-known bogus-pipeline approach (a device similar to a lie detector that was intended to trick participants in reporting their true racial attitudes). In subsequent studies, the bogus pipeline approach has been successful in producing less socially desirable responses (Roese and Jamieson 1993). Because it is obviously difficult to validate social attitudes in a survey, survey researchers have had to exercise some caution in interpreting racial responses.

are needed that avoid social desirability concerns. In the end, while there is evidence to suggest that racial prejudice has declined overtime, which translates into a greater willingness to accept certain types of black candidates, this is only true to the extent that we can trust what people tell us about their racial beliefs.

### **Support for a Hypothetical Black Candidate**

Following the trend in diminished racial intolerance, survey questions assessing the support for a hypothetical Black or African American presidential candidate provide more direct evidence for optimism for African American hopefuls such as Barack Obama. Questions measuring this sentiment are variants on the following Gallup question: *“Between now and the [2004] political conventions, there will be discussion about the qualifications of presidential candidates—their education, age, religion, race, and so on. If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be Black, would you vote for that person?”* Overtime responses to this question reported in Figure 1 show a significant and dramatic increase in the percentage willing to vote for a black candidate. When Gallup began asking the “hypothetical” or fictional black candidate question in 1958, 40 percent of white respondents indicated they would vote for a black candidate. This was at a time when people possessed more racist views about blacks and were less inhibited to express them. By 1972, when a similar question was asked by NORC, 80 percent of respondents were willing to vote for a black candidate. This percentage increased slightly in the 1980s and leveled-off in 1990s, but as it now stands, close to 90 percent are willing to vote for a black candidate, everything being equal.

*[Figure 1 About Here]*

Such a dramatic increase over time with near unanimous agreement is virtually unseen in public opinion data and should raise serious questions about its validity. We are highly dubious of the truthfulness of responses to this question. While it is possible for survey respondents to view this question as an indicator of racial progress, which is likely to invoke a socially desirable response, it is equally plausible to perceive it as an abstract equality question (Schuman et al. 1997). Such questions tapping democratic abstractions are known to elicit social desirability bias in which individuals feel pressure to support various aspects of democracy (McClosky 1964; Prothro and Grigg 1960). And, it is on such questions where there is also near unanimity. Thus, respondents may perceive different meanings—racial progress, inequality, or both racial progress and inequality—in the “hypothetical black” president question, with each likely to pressure respondents to voice support for an African American candidate even if they do not in fact believe it is true. Aside from a few empirical studies (e.g., see Sigelman and Sigelman, 1984), the black candidate question has gone virtually unchecked in its ability to reveal true public attitudes or social desirability, or both. We put this question, and the topic regarding support for hypothetical and real black presidential candidates, on trial.

Just to summarize our argument, the evidence underlying the optimism for Barack Obama and the fictional African American president may be interpreted differently to mean their support is partly artificial. Therefore, instead of accepting perceptions of Barack Obama and the support for a hypothetical black candidate as valid on their face, we explore the extent to which individuals self-censor their responses and the conditions under which such behavior

is most likely to occur. The next piece of the puzzle is to make the case for how social desirability effects can be measured in a public opinion survey.

### **Self-Censoring (Race of Interviewer Effects)**

It has long been understood that survey questions pertaining to race are likely to elicit certain types of self-censoring (or self-monitoring) behavior (Hyman et al. 1954; Krysan 1998; Summers and Hammond 1966; Williams 1964). While techniques, such as the bogus pipeline (Sigall and Page 1971) and Implicit Attitudes Tests (IATs) (Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner 2002; Greenwald et al. 1998), have been used to reveal subtle attitudes and opinions about race, interviewer effects have been used unobtrusively to capture a specific form of social desirability bias involving sensitivity to race in public opinion surveys.

Interviewer effects reflect a willingness on the part of survey respondents to tailor their responses to social expectations based on what they infer from characteristics of the interviewer. Survey respondents who are more sensitive to social evaluations attempt to project a favorable image for the interviewer. This form of behavior may reflect a type of self-monitoring whereby respondents who are attentive to cues in social situations project an appropriate self-presentation (Snyder 1974) or it may also reflect a form of fronting or impression management behavior in which individuals attempt to present themselves a positive light (Goffman 1959; Crowne and Marlowe 1960). Regardless, interviewer effects occur in surveys because respondents are asked many sensitive, controversial, and presumably private questions that may make them look unfavorable to the interviewer. Thus, depending on the interviewer's race and the nature of the question, survey respondents infer what might

appease the interviewer or present themselves in more favorable light, and then tailor their responses accordingly. In this instance, the need to manage one's impression outweighs the concern for truthfulness. This effect has been shown to be extremely important in the willingness to express both racial and non-racial attitudes (Anderson, Silver and Abramson 1988a, 1988b; Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg 1991; Krysan and Couper 2003; Schaeffer 1980; Schuman and Presser 1981; Tucker 1983) and to have methodological consequences (Davis 1997b; Krysan and Couper 2003).

It is important to note that race of interviewer effects or self-monitoring are most likely to arise when both whites and blacks perceived a risk of violating social norms and expectations. When there is a higher risk or "threat" of violating social norms related to race, individuals overcompensate by becoming more tolerant, egalitarian, and committed to racial equality than they would be in less threatening situations. This is a projected self-image or front intended to conceal one's true beliefs and fend off potentially negative evaluations. Nowadays, people do not relish the thought of being perceived as racist, even among strangers.

The consequence of race of interviewer effects is that polling results can be quite misleading. In 1982, Tom Bradley ran against George Deukmejian for governor of California. Although there is some debate about when voters make-up their minds about candidates and issues, polls before the 1982 election showed Bradley with a lead, but in the actual election he narrowly lost. It turned out that a smaller percentage of white voters actually voted for Bradley than had said, they planned to vote for him. The gubernatorial race between Douglas Wilder and Marshall Coleman in 1989 showed similar effects. Even though Wilder led in pre-

election polls by 9 percent, Wilder won the election by less than half of one percent. According to Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg (1991), white respondents were more reluctant to report intentions to vote for the white candidate, and more willing to report intentions to vote for the black candidate. It is our contention that the survey evidence, upon which the optimism for the presidential candidacy of Senator Barack Obama is based, is untenable. Specifically, we argue that the race of interviewer is likely to influence how survey respondents report their attitudes and opinions toward Barack Obama.

As this relates to the social desirability bias in reaction to Barack Obama and deracialized political figures, we argue that neither blacks nor whites perceive these individuals as overly threatening. For instance, Barack Obama does not appear threatening to whites because his positions (or lack of position) on traditional racial issues, charm, and “articulateness” have not sought to challenge the racial hierarchy in society, nor have they induced negative racial stereotypes that anger or threaten whites. This does not suggest that Senator Obama has not taken stances on issues blacks care about, such the Iraq War, education, civil rights, and social justice issues or that blacks only care about racial issues. But, it has been remarked that Obama does not approach such issues in ostensibly racial language that would appeal to blacks or with the type of passionate blacks might have come to expect.

Thus, while whites may feel pressured to support him because it is the socially desirable thing to do, under greater threat this support might be expected to decrease. The “not black enough” charge against Barack Obama may also be a cue to whites that he is not



threatening, and as a result more acceptable.<sup>10</sup> If anything, whites may feel pressure to support Obama because he is non-threatening. To African Americans, Barack Obama has less (or ambiguous at best) appeal for the same reasons that endear him to whites. Unlike traditional post-civil rights politicians, Barack Obama does not appear to utilize the traditional black network of organizations (i.e., the NAACP and black churches), or events that would increase his appeal to the black community and to other black leaders. To the extent the racial label is seen as progressive among African Americans, it should endear Obama to African Americans. The only difficulty now is how to create a racialized or a more threatening image of a political figure like Senator Obama to whites while at the same time framing him as more progressive among African Americans in the context of a public opinion survey. We accomplish this by analyzing racial labels.

### **Data**

The Institute for Public Policy & Social Research at Michigan State University conducted the survey over a two-month period in the summer of 2007. The survey was conducted by telephone and used a stratified random sample of English-speaking adults age eighteen and older. The sample was stratified by region of the state. In addition, there was an over-sample of telephone exchanges in which at least 20 percent of the population was black. Post-sampling weights adjust both for the regional stratification, the over-sample of certain telephone exchanges, and unequal probabilities of selection in the household. All of the results reported here are based on weighted data. Interviews were completed with 746

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<sup>10</sup> See *Los Angeles Times* Opinion Section Article by Louis Chude-Sokei, dated February 18, 2007, titled “Redefining ‘Black’”.

persons, of whom 147 were self-identified as black or African American, 746 as white, and 65 as “other.” The completion rate among eligible households was 60.2%. This analysis is based primarily on respondents who were self-identified as white. The approximately 20-minute survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). This survey was designed specifically to study racial attitudes. Because the experimental techniques employed in this survey are simple functions of computer programming, respondents are unaware of any manipulation in the interview schedule and questions.

## Procedures

We included a variety of different measures to assess the support for both a hypothetical candidate and Senator Obama. Each measure taps into a different aspect of support, but a common vein running through these measures is the viability of a black presidential candidate. First, in replicating the traditional Gallup “hypothetical candidate” question, we randomized the framing of the candidate under three conditions: “Black,” “African American,” and more explicitly as “Senator Barack Obama.” We suspect that the framing or labeling of African American candidates might convey important racial information and kindle different emotions (Fairchild 1985; Terkildsen 1993; Zilber and Niven 1995). For instance, in an experiment on racial labels associated with the different black political candidates, Zilber and Niven (1995) show that whites construct different political perceptions of candidates when exposed to different racial labels.<sup>11</sup> Whites invariably

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<sup>11</sup> This should cast greater doubt on the validity of the Hypothetical Black president series. As whites’ perceived greater threat from the racial labels used to describe the black president, the series has

responded more favorably toward candidates labeled as “black” than “African American.” It was argued that whites perceive the term “African American” as threatening because they see blacks as trying to attain higher social status, demanding greater respect, and that it emphasizes the African over American, which is intended to separate themselves from the rest of the nation (Zilber and Niven 1995, 656).<sup>12</sup> Among blacks, research indicates that a preference for the “African American” label over a “Black” label is associated with progressive traits such as lower age levels, higher educational levels, and residing in urban areas (Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin 2005). Evidence is also mounting that racialized labels diminishes support for policies intended to redress racial disparities (Peffley and Hurwitz 1998; Sniderman et al. 1996). Thus, considering African American is a relatively recent label arising out of desire to be more culturally identified rather than skin color identified, blacks may see this label as more endearing and provide greater support for candidates associated with this label. At the same time, however, whites may see the “African American” label as more threatening than the “Black” label because of what it conveys about blacks. To whites, what may appear progressive among blacks may be perceived as a challenge to their self-interest or group interest. Not only do the electoral prospects of presidential candidates invoke a certain amount of anxiety (Marcus and MacKuen 1993), such threatening cues enhance the processing of information. Thus, it is not unusual for a certain amount of threat and anxiety to be associated with the perceptions of presidential candidates.

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steadily increased. According to this literature, whites should have had greater difficulty in supporting black candidates just based on the labels in the question.

<sup>12</sup> Based on recent evidence on the stigmatizing effects of racialized names, Barack Obama’s ethnic name, by itself, has the potential to bias white’s reactions (Carpusor and Looges 2006). Unfortunately, our research design does not permit an analysis of the names of potential African American president. Nevertheless, we can only speculate that name could be a potentially important racial cue.

We replicate this approach using the following question:

Between now and the 2008 political conventions, there will be a lot of talk about the presidential candidate's qualifications, for example their education, age, religion, and race. If your party nominated a well-qualified person for president who happened to be [*version 1-“Black,” version 2-“Senator Obama,” version 3-“African American”*] how likely is that you would vote for that person?

A second set of questions was asked to assess the belief that a black candidate could actually win the election, not just their party's nomination.

Next, I have some questions about the 2008 presidential election. If a [*version 1-“Black candidate,” version 2-“Barack Obama,” version 3-“African American”*] do you think that person could win?

It is one thing to be willing to vote for a black candidate, but it is another thing to believe in their likelihood of winning the election. The latter is more of gauge of how others might react, while the former is a report of one's own behavior. Our design allows us to explore if the likelihood of winning influences the support for a black presidential candidate.

The last question asked respondents to predict who would be elected president first, a female or a black person.<sup>13</sup> While it is certainly plausible for respondents to think about political figures such as Senator Hilary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama who are both currently involved in presidential campaigns the question is intended to measure perceptions of racial and sexual bias. Here too, we randomly assign respondents to two different versions varying only the racial label, African American and Black:

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<sup>13</sup> This question could be interpreted a number of ways; however, we presume respondents will interpret the question to mean a female candidate who is a non-black female and a black candidate who is either male or female. This is supported by Grice's (1975) conversational rules, one of which states individuals know to avoid redundancy, and thus will interpret the second category (the racial labels, “African American” or “Black”) to mean something different from the first (the gender label, “female”) (Weisberg, 2005).

Who do you think the American people will elect first for president, a female or an [*African American*] or a [*Black person*]?

These experiments embedded within a public opinion survey have several benefits. First, as with the classic laboratory experiment, control and randomization increase internal validity. This gives greater confidence in attributing any differences across groups (or treatment categories) are due only to question wording differences. Still, initial comparisons revealed that all treatment groups were essentially indistinguishable across a variety of demographic and political comparisons, including education, race, age, gender, income, partisanship, and ideology. Second, external validity is another strength in this design because subjects are drawn from a representative sample, making it possible to make generalizable statements about the larger population.<sup>14</sup>

### **Race of Interviewer Measure (Social Desirability)**

Race of interviewer is measured as the respondents' perception of the interviewer's race, which was asked at the end of the survey. Although some respondents guess wrong, it is most important to measure the race of the person to whom respondents think they are speaking. This supports research by Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Smitherman (2000), which argues that differences in speech patterns, gestures, and phrases continue to have an

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<sup>14</sup> According to US census data, the demographic profile of Michigan is comparable to the country. Whereas Michigan has 81.3 percent population that is white, the country has 80.2 percent white population. The median income in Michigan is \$44,409 and \$44,304 for the country. In terms of poverty, 12.5 percent is below poverty in Michigan and 12.7 in the country. The only notable difference is that in the 2004 presidential election, Michigan supported Kerry with 52 percent of vote and the country supported Bush as 52 percent.

explicit racial component. Such speech patterns are easily identifiable in telephone survey, as most respondents actually guess or “perceive” the race of the interviewer correctly. We asked respondents to guess their interviewer’s race, and of those respondents who ventured an answer, 74 percent of whites and 77 percent of African Americans were able to correctly identify the interviewer’s race.

Instead of discarding respondents who either refused to answer the question or said “Don’t Know,” we include those cases in our measure of interviewer effects. To the extent that these respondents were reluctant to make a guess because they really did not know the interviewer’s race or the interviewer’s race was ambiguous, this lack of knowledge could also influence their responses because of heightened suspicions and self-monitoring. As a result, we consider respondents who either cannot or refuse to identify the race of their interviewer, as having a racially ambiguous interviewer.

### Hypotheses

To make our expectations clear, we develop a set of hypotheses based on the previous discussion. Our first hypothesis pertains to the overall effects of race of interviewer bias among white and African American respondents. That is, *whites are expected to be more susceptible to social desirability effects concerning the candidacy of Barack Obama and a hypothetical black presidential candidate than African Americans*. This expectation involves Senator Obama’s deracialized campaign strategy, the extent to which his candidacy possesses a threat to whites’ self and group interests, and perceived social pressures to not appear racist or unsupportive of a black candidate. Simply put, Barack Obama’s candidacy should represent

more of a threat to whites than to African Americans. Unlike other post-Civil Rights political candidates, Senator Obama has not overtly challenged social and racial justice issues that would resonate within the black community. Thus, whites might feel compelled to voice support for Senator Obama to African American interviewers because they perceive them to support Obama based on race, even if the reality is that deracialized candidates do not automatically appeal to African Americans.

Our second hypothesis relates to the racial labeling of a hypothetical black presidents and Senator Obama. *Hypothetical candidates and Barack Obama labeled as “African American” should receive less support than when they are labeled as “black.”* Previously cited research by Zilber and Niven (1995) suggests that whites might perceive a certain amount of threat from the change in self-identification from “Black” to “African American.” Whites are likely to see African American label as a desire for greater status and recognition, and as a result, they are likely to perceive greater threat to their self and group interest.

Our last hypothesis combines the first two hypotheses. *Race of interviewer effects should be higher under the more threatening label of “African American” and lower among a less threatening label of “black.”* When there is a higher risk of violating racial and social norms, respondents should feel greater pressure to behave in a politically correct fashion (or self-monitoring) than when the racial label is less threatening. This expectation benefits from the research by Terkildsen (1993), which shows that people who are guided by situational cues are less willing to express support for threatening black candidates (e.g., “dark-complected”) than less threatening black candidates (e.g., “light-complected”).

## Analysis

### Electability of Senator Obama and a Hypothetical Candidate

An important theme of this analysis suggests that support for Senator Obama, and deracialized candidates more generally, is necessarily complex. What may appear as broad support on the surface may mask many different underlying processes capable of altering interpretations. Perhaps more than traditional post-Civil Rights politicians, the viability of deracialized candidates, like Senator Obama, requires a greater understanding of social-psychological processes underlying public opinion. Despite the biases in public opinion attitudes we uncover, Senator Obama's support cannot be dismissed as a measurement artifact.

*[Table 1 About Here]*

The influence of the race of interviewer (our surrogate measure of social desirability) and racial labels (our surrogate measure of threat) on perceptions of whether Senator Obama and a hypothetical black candidate can win the 2008 Presidential election is reported in Table 1. Our hypotheses are supported nicely with this question. In Panel A, a fictional or hypothetical black candidate is perceived to have a greater chance of winning than Senator Obama. Thus, while he enjoys substantial support, he clearly does not reflect all of the features people have in mind when they think of the ideal black candidate; to the extent that a single person is capable. In both instances, the "African American" label attached to a fictional candidate and Senator Obama leads to a significant reduction in support than the "Black" label. For instance, while 62.7 percent of respondents think the "Black" candidate can win, 54.0 percent think an "African American" can win. This same pattern shows up when the racial labels are applied to Senator Obama. When he is labeled as "Black" 58.9 percent say



that he could win, but the percentage is reduced to 52.1 percent when labeled as “African American.” Recall that the “African American” label was hypothesized to make Senator Obama appear more threatening, and as a consequence, reduce his support.

In Panel B, the overall findings are replicated for white respondents; the “African American” label is associated with lower support than the “Black” label. Interestingly, African Americans are much less likely than whites on each form to say that a hypothetical black candidate with equal qualifications or Senator Obama can win. For the hypothetical black and African American president, there is a respective difference of 37.2 percent and 33.6 percent between black and white responses, and when Senator Obama is labeled as “Black” or “African American” there is 13.2 percent and 21.4 percent respective difference. Also noticeable in Panel B is the finding that, similar to the reactions among whites, Barack Obama receives less support (almost 13 percent) among African Americans when framed as “African American” than “Black.” While their responses to the label might be similar, African Americans and whites are likely to attach different meanings to racial labels. African Americans are not likely to view the “African American” label as threatening as whites. The African American label was initially proposed by Jesse Jackson in the late 1980s to signify a shift from color to cultural significance. Since about half of African Americans find the “African American” label unacceptable and those who prefer it to the “black” label tend to be younger, urban, and more highly educated (Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin 2005), assigning such a label to Senator Obama would seem to further endear him to African Americans. It is only our conjecture, but the “African American” label may racialize Senator Obama to blacks, while the term makes him more racialized and consequently threatening to whites. Some

attention has been devoted to Obama's race and self-labeling, his father was a black Kenyan and his mother was a white American from Kansas, whom later remarried an Indonesian.

Panel C introduces social desirability (race of interviewer) into the analysis. As predicted from our hypothesis, not only does the race of interviewer influence reactions to the hypothetical black candidate and Senator Obama, it also seems to be more influential when the "African American" labeled is used. For instance, when the interviewer is white, 64.4 percent of white respondents say an "African American" can win, compared to 76.5 percent when the interviewer is black and 67.2 percent when the race of the interviewer is ambiguous. Though not as clean as the previous result, 52.7 percent of white respondents say that Obama labeled as an African American can win, compared to 56.9 percent when the interviewer is black and 66.5 when the interviewer is ambiguous. Race of interviewer effects are not present among whites assigned to the "Black" label or as our argument suggests, when whites perceive less threat from Obama when characterized as "Black."

Why African Americans are less supportive of a "black" Barack Obama's chances, which we address in the Appendix of this manuscript, is an intriguing question.<sup>15</sup> We are able to show education has a major influence on the support for Obama among African Americans. Specifically, while more highly educated African Americans may better understand the racial strategy and appreciate attention to non-racial issues that might affect them, lesser-educated African Americans may require much stronger racial appeals. Thus, it is

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<sup>15</sup> It is not our argument that blacks should vote for Senator Obama just because he is African American. Survey evidence suggests that African Americans do not require a racial match. For instance, the 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study found that 26 percent of blacks thought blacks should always vote for the black candidate. In the 1984 and 1988 National Black Election Studies, 18 percent and 24 percent, respectively, thought similarly.

probably among the less educated that the charge of Obama as “not black enough” may be most relevant.

### **Personal Preference for Senator Obama and a Hypothetical Candidate**

Stating one’s willingness to vote for a hypothetical candidate or Senator Obama involves a different decision calculus than the previous question. Whereas the previous question required respondents to assess the behavior of others, the vote question asks about one’s own behavior. Individuals seem to give more candid responses on the behavior of others than their own behavior (cite). Because individuals will be more guarded on this question, we expect higher social desirability responses. At the same time, however, separating out self-monitoring effects that are due to race should be more difficult. This is precisely what we find in our analysis in Table 2.; our hypotheses are not as clean as in the win question.

*[Table 2 About Here]*

Panel A (Table 2) shows that respondents are significantly more likely to vote for a hypothetical black or African American candidate than Barack Obama. Perhaps due to the overall social desirability effect of this question, respondents do not seem to make a difference between the racial labels of the hypothetical presidential candidate. While the willingness to vote for Senator Obama is reduced significantly, the sting of the “African American” label continues to influence responses. Whereas 70.9 percent of white respondents say they are willing to vote for Senator Obama under the “black” label in Panel B, their support declines by 14 percent when he is labeled as “African American.” This is consistent with the results from the previous win question.

Even though African American respondents may not think Senator Obama can win if nominated, a larger proportion seems willing to vote for him, nevertheless. Again, the “win” question is very different from the “vote” question. African Americans may honestly believe that the country is not ready for a black president, but nevertheless, vote for him. However, the racial label attached to Senator Obama matters a great deal but in the wrong direction. Among African Americans, their support is reduced by 25 percent when Senator Obama is labeled as “Black.” This is an anomalous result for which we do not have a ready explanation. We suspect that the small cell frequencies for African Americans may produce numbers that are sensitive to a few extreme responses.

As a further confirmation of our hypothesis, Panel C shows that in every instance, regardless of interviewer race, Senator Obama framed as an “African American” suffers more in a loss of support than framed as “Black.” When interviewed by a white interviewer, 74.2 percent of whites say they are willing to vote for Senator Obama labeled as “Black,” but this percentage declines by almost 16 percent when he is labeled as “African American.” Similarly, the difference in percentage is almost 16 percent when the interviewer is Black and almost 11 percent when the race of the interviewer is ambiguous.

Also, the presence of race of interviewer effects supports our contention that the more threatening label attached to Senator Obama invites a greater attempt among whites to conceal this form of bias. Though the difference is not large, when the Senator Obama is labeled as an “African American,” 58.3 percent of whites say they are willing to vote for him, compared to 55.2 percent when the interviewer is black and 54.6 when the race of the interviewer is ambiguous.

Taking the experimental results together, it is clear that social desirability and racial labeling figure prominently into the perceptions of deracialized candidates and Senator Obama. These results are instructive but they cannot explain away Senator Obama's tremendous appeal. Theoretically, we have come close to explaining the origin of race of interviewer effects or social desirability bias in public opinion surveys. Under higher threatening situations, as revealed in the use of racial labels, whites are more willing to voice support for African American candidates than whites in a less threatening situation.

### **Multivariate Analysis**

The previous results are based on a random assignment of respondents to four different versions of question wording. As a result of a small number of cases preventing multivariate analyses and the testing of rival hypotheses, we turn to another question. With the aid of a split half design on a question pertaining to who respondents think will be elected first (an "*African American or a woman*" and "*a Black person or a woman*") we put our bivariate results to a more rigorous test. Due to the small sample of African Americans, this part of the analysis is limited to whites. Through an examination of a multivariate model, we ask to what extent can the interaction between social desirability (race of interviewer effects) and perceptions of racial threat (racial labels) be explained by other factors, such as ideology, education, age, gender, and exposure to the framing in the experimental conditions?

[Table 3 About Here]

Ideology is expected to play an important role. While it is difficult to predict if liberals or conservatives would be more supportive of a black person or a woman for president, the racial label might be the most relevant stimulus. Racial labels have been found to be more relevant for liberals than conservatives (Zilber and Niven 1995). Therefore, liberals should probably be more willing than conservatives to support the “Black” over a woman, but respond no differently from conservatives when the label is more threatening. As a consequence of identity, women are more likely to think that a woman has a greater chance of being elected first, especially when the choice is between a threatening “African American” label and a woman. Education may not predispose people to thinking that a black person has a greater chance of being elected than a woman and vice-versa, but education may reduce the threat of racial labels. Older people are probably no different from younger people in perceiving a sense of threat from the African American label, but in a less threatening condition older people might be more likely to think a woman has a greater chance of being elected first. Even though issues pertaining to race may be more susceptible to race of interviewer effects, we do not rule out the possibility of social desirability effects in response to gender influences the reactions to the electoral prospects of a female presidential candidate (Streb et al. 2007). That is, men trying to say the right thing might be more willing to voice support for the female candidate than the African American candidate when the interviewer is female.<sup>16</sup> To account for this possibility, we include a gender of interviewer

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<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of gender of interviewer raises important questions about the interaction between the race and gender of interviewer. Of the total respondents interviewed by a female interviewer (69 percent), 14 percent perceive the interviewer as African American, 47 percent perceive the interviewer as white, and 39 percent perceive the interviewer as racially ambiguous. We tested several different equations included the interaction between race and gender of interviewer for African American and

measure. Lastly, we include exposure to the previous experiment in the model to capture the extent to exposure to previous racial labels sensitize respondents to different responses.

The results of the multivariate model are presented in Table 3. While most of our expectations hold true, with the exception of education, the significant coefficients for race of interviewer for “African American elected first” (Models 1 and 2) directly confirm our hypothesis. Independently and controlling for other factors, race of interviewer has a significant effect on respondents assigned to the “African American” label. It appears that the “African American” label invokes a certain level of threat among whites, which they in turn attempt to conceal by overcompensating their support for the more threatening label. The negative coefficient indicates that whites tend to voice greater support for the “African American” candidate under higher threat. An alternative interpretation of this result might suggest that whites are willing to support African American candidates who directly challenge their group-interest, but we do not believe this is to be correct. Instead, whites who perceive greater risk of violating social norms tend to overcompensate by appearing to support African American candidates who would present a greater risk to challenging the racial ordering of society.

The significant coefficients for gender (Model 2) and ideology (Model 4) reveal important motivations. Threatening African American candidates seem more likely to heighten gender differences in which white males begin to think that a woman stands a better chance of being elected first. However, when threat is low gender differences seem to be essentially irrelevant. The role of ideology in predicting whether an African American or

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white respondents. None of the interaction effects were significant. These results give us greater confidence in the main effects of social desirability due to race.

black will be elected before a woman suggests that under low threat situations ideology matters. Liberals in this situation are more likely than conservatives to believe that a woman has a better chance of being elected president first. Social desirability connected to gender does not account for any of the variability in whether an African American (and Black) or a woman would be elected first. We suspected initially that since the both questions make an assessment against the election of a woman would elicit social desirability concerns connected to gender. This is not the case.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to explore the extent to which support for Senator Barack Obama and a hypothetical black candidate are tainted by socially desirable responses to race and to examine the extent to which expressed support may be biased by threat perceptions (racial labels). Instead of accepting the validity of political attitudes toward deracialized candidates like Senator Obama, we began with a healthy skepticism of whether people really mean what they say when it comes to race. Recent elections involving deracialized black candidates reveal a propensity, particularly among whites, to voice public support for black candidates but privately either vote for someone else or not vote at all.

We argue in this analysis that deracialized candidates should be more inviting of self-monitoring type behavior among whites than African Americans. Unlike traditional post civil rights politicians who can be publicly dismissed by whites on racial group interest principles, deracialized candidates seem to challenge many ideas about race in American society and what people are willing to say about race. Whereas African Americans may not feel social pressure



to support deracialized candidates because (by definition) they avoid the issues, positions, and linkages to organizations and events that would appeal to the black community, and threaten whites, whites should feel greater pressure to voice support to avoid appearing racially biased. An important twist to this argument suggests that this relationship is conditioned on the extent to which perceptions of threat become more explicit, through the use of framing and racial labels, condition this relationship. If a deracialized candidate or hypothetical black candidate is made to appear more threatening, do they receive the same level of support and more importantly, does this alter the self-monitoring of survey respondents?

We designed a series of experiments embedded in a public opinion survey to test this theory. In addition to the social desirability effects as indicated by race of interviewer effects, respondents were randomly assigned to different racial labels describing black candidates. This approach revealed many interesting and informative results about the viability of Senator Obama. First, despite the self-monitoring behavior of whites and the influence of racial labels, Obama's support, both good and bad, cannot be dismissed as an artifact of measurement. In all of our measures, Barack Obama enjoys broad support from whites but he less appealing among African Americans. Charges that he is not "black enough" might resonate among African Americans, especially the less educated and lower status, but the extent to which he needs such support or how he might overcome this hurdle without diminishing his white base of support will be an interesting challenge as his long-term national political career evolves.

Second, confirming of our expectations, race of interviewer effects or self-monitoring occurs primarily among white respondents. To the extent that Barack Obama is perceived as deracialized candidate and not a threat to the racial status of whites, African Americans who

are supportive of Obama may have no real pressure to conceal their support for him. By contrast, racialized presidential candidates like Jesse Jackson whom whites disliked and perceive as threatening to the racial status quo, are more likely to be stereotyped as overly representing black interests (McDermott, 1997), and viewed through a racially prejudiced lens (Kinder and McConaughy, 2006). Moreover, while African Americans are reluctant to voice support for white political figures (e.g., Ronald Reagan) when they talk to an interviewer of the opposite race (Davis 1997b), they express greater support for Barack Obama when interviewed by a black interviewer. Depending on the question, the impact of the social desirability pressure might be anywhere from 4 to 8 percent.

Third, the framing and racial labeling of a deracialized candidates like Barack Obama has a powerful influence on how he is perceived by white respondents. Specifically, framing Barack Obama as “African American,” as opposed to “Black,” diminishes his support. Our explanation of this result is that whites perceive a certain amount of threat in racial labels. The “African American” label seems to convey that African Americans are attempting to alter the racial hierarchy and their positions in society; thereby, threatening whites’ sense of group position and impinging on their prerogatives (Bobo, 1999). Because this label reduces the support for Barack Obama our results suggests that pursuing a deracialized campaign strategy might be appropriate to appeal to white voters. Of course, the dilemma remains just how to simultaneously appeal to black voters. African American respondents in the data were actually more supportive of Obama when he was labeled as African American; hence, the “double edged” sword for racial minority candidates.

Lastly, we find that attaching threatening racial labels to Senator Obama not only reduces support, but it also invites respondents to respond in a socially desirable fashion. That is, in response to threatening labels whites become more sensitive to social norms and voice greater support for Barack Obama. This is an intriguing result, as it informs the motivation underlying race of interviewer effects. Fear of violating social norms on race may compel many whites to censor their own behavior.

It is important to ask how might the results from this analysis be applied to the current presidential campaign of Senator Obama? More research is required on the framing of deracialized candidates, but we are able to speculate based on a cursory analysis of newspapers stories on Obama and his speeches.<sup>17</sup> In the major U.S. newspapers, Obama is more than twice as likely to be framed as “black” than “African American.” This result would normally reduce the relevance of our results and racial labeling, especially if voters are being presented with a single racial frame and the negative frame is only at the margins. But, an analysis of how Obama presents himself should not be too quick to dismiss our findings. Because of his ethnic background, born to a Kenyan father and a white American mother, Senator Obama consistently labels himself as African American. This label is intended to identify his multi-ethnic heritage, but at the same time, it may cause some whites to think differently about his viability.

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<sup>17</sup> This analysis is based on the count of articles from a Lexis-Nexus search on Barack Obama and “black” or “African American” in the same sentence for all the major newspaper sources from January 1, 2007 to November 1, 2007. Content analysis were performed on Senator Obama’s speeches listed on his campaign website: <http://www.barackobama.com/index.php>

## Appendix

As a validation of our results, we used data from Gallup's Annual Minority Rights and Relations Study to assess race of interviewer effects, and more importantly, how African Americans perceive Barack Obama. This is a national RDD telephone survey of 2,388 adults conducted June 4-24, 2007, including an over-sample of blacks (N=596). We use the following question, asked only of Democratic identifiers:

*"I'm going to read a list of people who may be running in the Democratic primaries for president in the next election. After I read all the names, please tell me which of those candidates you would be most likely to support for the Democratic nomination for President in the year 2008..."*

An examination of expressed support for Obama across race and race of interviewer is informative. In our data blacks are less support of Obama than whites, but in the Gallup blacks (71 percent) are more supportive than whites (44 percent). When the race of the interviewer is considered, the percentage of white support Obama increases to 55 percent when the interviewer is black and to 48 percent when the interviewer's race is ambiguous, but Obama support declines to 39 percent when the interviewer is white. Among blacks, 71 percent support Obama when the interviewer is white, 76 percent when the interviewer is blacks, and 66 when the interviewer's race is ambiguous. Controlling for age, gender, education, and region, interviewer effects remain significant for whites, similar to our Michigan results.

Education is the only other coefficient to achieve significance. This shows that Obama's appeal is perceived differently among African Americans. While it is not clear if there is a real divide along educational lines among African Americans, more highly educated blacks appear more supportive of Obama. We infer from this result that while education may help blacks understand the context of Obama's political image and his campaign strategy. It is also possible that charges that Obama is "not black enough" may resonate with lesser-educated blacks who might require more overt and simple racial messages. Lastly, less educated blacks may perceive that Obama would not be a successful president because of racism, and thus would rather give there support to a white candidate who may not be black, but would likely represent black interests (i.e., Hillary Clinton).

**Logistic Regression Coefficients Explaining  
Support for Barack Obama  
(Democrats Only)**

	White Respondents	African American Respondents
Age	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Gender (1 = male)	-.14 (.17)	.24 (.20)
Education	.32** (.09)	.53** (.09)
Region (1 = South)	-.33 (.18)	.01 (.09)
Black Interviewer	.50** (.19)	.41 (.21)
Constant	-.74 (.38)	-1.32** (.43)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.09
X <sup>2</sup>	31.5	40.1
N	594	587

Note. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, standard errors in parentheses.

Source. 2007 Gallup Minority Race Relations Study

Age is measured in years, gender is a dummy coded variable (1 = males), Education is a four point ordinal measure (1 = Less than high school education, 2 = High school graduate, 3 = Some college, and 4 = College graduate), and Region is dummy coded to indicate Southern state residence or not (1 = South).

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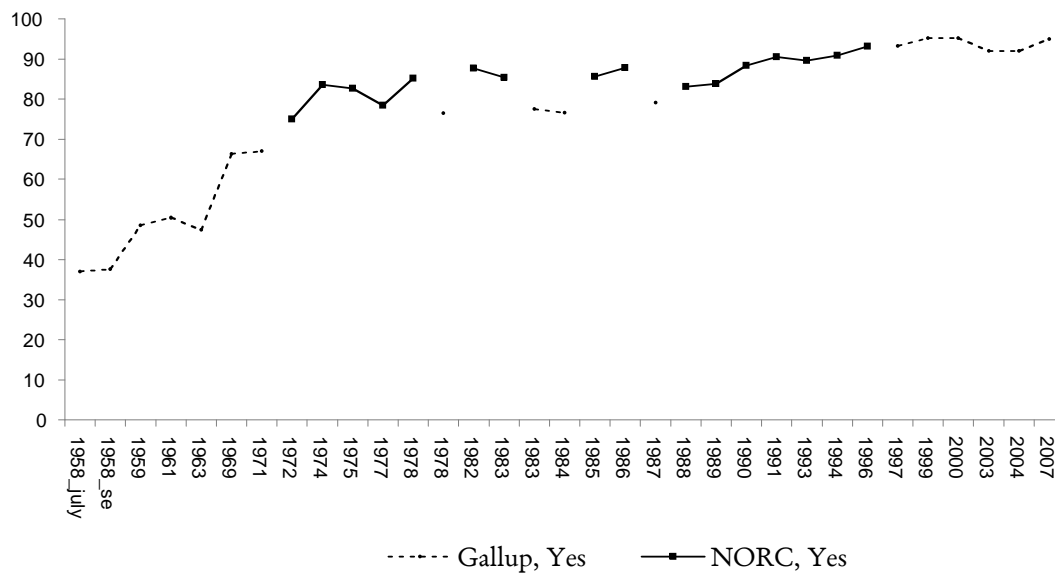
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Figure 1. Percent Saying Would Vote For African American Candidate  
(Gallup and GSS Data)



**Table 1. Responses to Hypothetical Black Candidate and Barack Obama Winning the 2008 Presidential Election**

**Panel A. Responses to Hypothetical and Barack Obama**

	Racial Labels (Randomly Assigned)			
All Respondents	“Black”	“African American”	Obama as “Black”	Obama as “African American”
Yes	62.7%	54.0%	58.9%	52.1%
No	37.3	46.0	41.1	47.9
(F[4, 857] = 296.2; p < .001)				

**Panel B. Responses to Hypothetical and Barack Obama by Race**

<b>White Respondents</b>				
Yes	71.7%	66.3%	62.2%	57.8%
No	28.3	47.8	37.8	42.2
(F[4, 668] = 321.5; p < .001)				

<b>African American Respondents</b>				
Yes	34.5%	32.7%	49.0%	36.4%
No	26.2	67.3	51.0	63.6
(F[4, 133] = 21.8; p < .001)				

**Panel C. Race of Interviewer Effects – White Respondents Only (Percent Saying Yes)**

<b>Race of Interviewer</b>					
White Int.	71.2%	64.4%	61.5%	52.7%	F(4,357) = 152.6; p < .001
Black Int.	72.9	76.5	61.5	56.9	F(4,79) = 42.6; p < .001
Ambig Int.	71.2	67.2	63.5	66.5	F(4,232) = 112.4; p < .001

Note: African American respondents were not analyzed in Panel C because of small cell frequencies.

**Table 2. Willingness to Vote for Hypothetical Candidate and Barack Obama in the 2008 Presidential Election**

**Panel A. Vote for Hypothetical Candidate and Barack Obama**

**Racial Labels (Randomly Assigned)**

<b>All Respondents</b>	<b>“Black”</b>	<b>“African American”</b>	<b>Obama as “Black”</b>	<b>Obama as “African American”</b>
Yes	94.2%	94.6%	71.1%	67.5%
No	5.8	5.4	28.9	32.5

[F(4,859)=1198.4; p < .001]

**Panel B. Responses to Hypothetical and Barack Obama by Race**

**White Respondents**

Yes	95.0%	96.7%	70.9%	56.7%
No	5.0	3.3	29.6	43.3

[F(4, 668)=919.7; p < .001]

**African American Respondents**

Yes	95.2%	93.2%	63.3%	88.9%
No	4.8	6.8	6.7	11.1

[F(4,141)=208.8; p < .001]

**Panel C. Race of Interviewer Effects – White Respondents Only (percent saying yes)**

**Race of Interviewer**

White Int.	91.9%	95.4%	74.2%	58.3%	F(4,357)=435.7; p < .001
Black Int.	100	100	71.0	55.2	F(4, 72)=198.6; p < .001
Ambig Int.	95.1	98.6	65.5	54.6	F(4,231)=295.7; p < .001

Note: African American respondents were not analyzed in Panel C because of small cell frequencies.

**Table 3. Logit Regression Estimates Explaining Whether An  
African American or a Woman Will Be Elected President First**  
(White respondents)

Independent Variables	“African American Elected First”		“Black Elected First”	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Black Interviewer	1.44* (.65)	2.01* (.90)	.35 (.48)	-.05 (.54)
Ambiguous Interviewer	.08 (.34)	.27 (.36)	.02 (.35)	.15 (.33)
Interviewer Gender (1 = Female)		-.23 (.33)		-.16 (.39)
Ideology (Self-report)		.02 (.09)		-.24** (.09)
Education		.03 (.07)		.09 (.07)
Gender (1 = male)		-1.19** (.32)		-.47 (.33)
Age		-.01 (.01)		-.02* (.01)
Form-1 – “Black”		-.88* (.42)		.01 (.52)
Form-2 – “African American”		-.66 (.45)		.21 (.54)
Form-3 – “Obama – Black”		-.27 (.45)		.72 (.52)
Constant	.26 (.20)	1.39 (1.21)	.10 (.21)	.75 (1.36)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.13	.00	.06
Prob > chi <sup>2</sup>	.08	.004	.002	.06
N	269	249	286	266

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Note: This analysis is based on weighted data. The dependent variable is a dichotomy reflecting 1 if an African American [or Black] will be elected President first and 0 if a woman will be elected President first. The white interviewer is the excluded category for the interviewer variables. Form-4 “Obama-African American” is the fourth form and the excluded category for the series capturing the exposure to a previous question wording experiment. \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ .