

Prospective Black Presidential Candidates: Can They Win?

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Abstract: This research essay examines public support for hypothetical black presidential candidates and their viability. The political landscape is primed for a black presidential candidate, yet the racial climate still has signs of apprehension and mistrust. When it comes to black presidential candidates the perceived political realities of blacks and whites are intimately connected to their perceived racial realities; thus, negative perceptions of race relations should correlate with lower optimism for black presidential candidates. The data suggest that for blacks, perceived viability is most strongly associated with mistrust of whites (suggesting whites are not ready), and for whites viability is most strongly associated with general perceptions of race relations (suggesting the country is not ready).

This paper was originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April, 2007. Comments and paper requests can be submitted to dcwilson@udel.edu.

Introduction

There are few empirical studies focusing on the public's perceptions of hypothetical black presidential candidates (Sigelman and Welch, 1984), and none examining their viability: whether or not a candidate can win.¹ In part, this is due to the limited number of presidential contests where there are black candidates to consider, couple with the belief that after the 1980s black presidential candidates have not received serious consideration in terms of primary support or campaign contributions. African American's overwhelming support for the Clinton administration may have played a role in the dearth of black presidential candidates in the early and mid 1990s, but the past two presidential elections have not offered a viable black candidate for the electorate to consider. However, the current political climate presents both a new political reality for African Americans, as well as a new pool of experienced black presidential prospects.

The current political situation in the United States could be considered ripe for a black presidential challenger. Illinois Senator Barack Obama is among the top contenders for the Democratic nomination, and there are a number of black political figures being mentioned as future leaders in their parties, both Republican and Democrat, and male and female. The public reports an overwhelming willingness to vote for a black candidate if nominated by their party (see Bardes and Oldendick, 2006, p. 186-187), and at least among Democrats, there appears to be some broad acceptance of black candidates. For instance, during the 2004 presidential campaign there was a point when the public supported activists Al Sharpton (who is black) more than it did Wesley Clark (a white, retired Army General) (Gallup Poll, June 12-18, 2003). Thus, based on current political signals, prospects for viable black presidential candidates appear positive.

However, the perceived racial realities of black Americans paints a different picture. There are discouraging reports about the deepening pessimism and alienation of African Americans (Bobo, 2002; Cose, 1993; Hochschild, 1995). For example, Dawson's 1993 Black Politics Survey (Dawson, 1994) found African Americans report high levels of cynicism and frustration with America. Eighty-one percent of blacks believed that "American society owes black people a better chance in life than we currently have." The study also reported that 50% of African Americans believe it was time to support a separate national political party. Gallup studies also support a pessimistic view. In 2004, African Americans reported less positive views of black-white relations than whites, they were more likely to believe that race relations will always be a problem, they were more pessimistic about the job and housing opportunities, and educational opportunities for their children relative to whites, and they were more likely than whites to believe discrimination and racial profiling exist (Gallup Poll Social Series, 2004).

Thus, the climate in America is both ripe for political success for black candidates, and at the same time, there is a sense that African Americans feel their opportunities for fairness and equality are still limited by race. These competing realities call for a renewed attention to the political climate for black presidential candidates. In this paper, I ask how are perceptions of viability influenced by voter race, political party affiliation, localized context, and/or perceptions about race relations?

These questions are important because they may help understand the prospects of current candidates like Barack Obama. As a black candidate his perceived racial background will bring about expectations and stereotypes related to other black political figures, including past candidates. During the primary season, the electorate tends to vote

mainly for candidates who have a strong chance of winning in November; thus candidates who are perceived as less viable, start off at a disadvantage. Even more problematic are politically irrelevant factors (e.g., race, sex, handicap status) that the candidate cannot control that influence perceptions of viability in presidential primaries. In these cases, the candidate and his or her public relations staff must find ways to direct attention back to relevant candidate issue positions and qualifications.

Focusing on issues of race relations is a common strategy for black candidates, especially in the context of larger black populations (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990). Yet, this strategy can backfire if negative perceptions about race in America correlate with beliefs about the inequality of the political process. Blacks, particularly pre-adult blacks, are shown to be less efficacious and trusting of the political system (Abramson, 1983), and may therefore be less inclined to believe that black candidates can win in presidential primaries or elections. As a result, a more negative outlook on racial matters translates into weaker perceptions of black candidate viability, which in turn, can translate into fewer financial contributions, less attention overall, and eventually fewer votes.

If perceptions of race relations are associated with perceptions of candidate viability, then candidates would do well to promote the positive rather than the negative aspects of race.² This would mean that civil rights era candidates who promote messages around the victimization of black American and highlight historical injustices would be at a disadvantage, while more mainstream post-civil right era or even moderate black candidates might have an upper hand, at least with the mass public. For now, however, the concern is for what, if any, empirical differences exist in perceived viability, the factors that influence these differences, and why.

Political Viability and Perceptions of Racial Realities

Perceived candidate viability is critical to a candidate's ability to win his or her party's nominations (Bartels, 1988). Voters use a number of factors including viability to decide which candidate they will vote for; however, because voters cannot digest all of the information about each candidate, their positions, and their chances of winning, they use shortcuts (see Ferejohn and Kuklinski, 1990), particularly in low-information elections (McDermott, 1997; McDermott, 1998). These shortcuts mostly consist of party identification and other individual character traits (e.g., Kilburn, 2005; Stone, Rapoport, and Atkeson, 1995), but can also include seemingly less relevant factors such as candidate race, candidate gender, incumbency status, and physical attractiveness, which can bias electoral outcomes (Krebs, 1998; Sigelman et al., 1995; Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler, 1987; Terkildsen, 1993).

Candidate race can be a particularly problematic factor because of the vulnerability of black candidates to stereotypes (McDermott, 1998). Black candidates are more likely than white candidates to be described as liberal, empathetic to the poor, more compassionate to disadvantaged groups, and more concerned with racial issues such as civil rights (McDermott, 1998; Sigelman et al., 1995; Williams, 1990). In terms of history, the fact that African Americans have needed federal protection simply to vote barely speaks to what the actual candidates have had to endure. The first black presidential candidate, Shirley Chisholm, had to endure both intra- and interracial derogation (McClain, Carter, and Brady, 2005), and to date, black candidates still face uphill racially charged battles in elections at the gubernatorial and senatorial levels. Thus,

race plays an important role in the perceived viability of candidates, especially in presidential elections.

Although viability seems to be the more relevant factor in electoral politics and voting behavior, research on black candidates has almost exclusively focused on vote intentions; namely, whether or not the public is willing or reluctant to vote for black candidates (Sigelman and Welch, 1984). There are two problems with this direction. First, respondents have become less overt in their responses to racial questions. Providing the socially desirable response to racially sensitive questions is now the norm (Schuman et al., 1997). Second, by failing to find voter bias against black candidates, studies often conclude that candidate race is less important to voting behavior. Indeed, the skewed reports on willingness to vote for historically underrepresented candidates may shed light on whether or not questions regarding willingness to “vote for” should still be an area of focus. Figure 1 shows the historical trend in response to public’s willingness to support a hypothetical black candidate.

[Figure 1 about here]

Survey variables measuring likely vote intent (i.e., willingness to vote for a black candidate) toward black candidates have reached such a skewed distribution that support could be considered unanimous (Bardes and Oldendick, 2006, p. 185-186).³ It’s likely that respondents face social pressure to say they would vote for black or female candidates due to social desirability factors; however, they should face less pressure to report whether or not they believe the candidates would win in presidential campaigns because neither optimism nor pessimism are necessarily undesirable responses. As a result, one might expect that there would be no differences between blacks and whites in

their reported willingness to vote for black candidates, but there are likely differences in their beliefs about a black candidate's chance of winning.

Political and Racial Reality

The political reality framework posits that there is a disproportionate political reality as it relates to equal treatment and equal representation. The disproportionate setting can be real or perceived, is assumed to be based on group membership, and as is systemic rather than episodic. Thus, individual political attitudes and behaviors are influenced by a system of perceived unfairness which seemingly results in the unequal distribution of political resources (Abramson, 1983; Bobo and Gilliam, 1990; Emig, Hesse, and Fisher, 1996; Howell and Fagan, 1988).

Past studies examining the political reality model have mainly focused on differences between blacks and whites (see Michelson, 2003, for a focus on Hispanic Americans). There is evidence that the political reality model may explain differences in black Americans' political attitudes, particularly trust and efficacy (Abney and Hutcheson, 1981; Abramson, 1983; Howell and Fagan, 1988), and political behaviors (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990). However, these studies either assume that there are racial differences in perceived political realities, or they mainly focus on "political empowerment" (i.e., actual political representation) as a proxy for political reality.

For most black Americans their racial reality is their political reality. Those who perceive the environment to be more racially negative should be less likely to believe that black presidential candidates would win in either primary or presidential elections. A negative racial reality would be characterized by pessimism about black-white relations, mistrust, perceptions of racial discrimination, and beliefs about prejudice. Given the

pessimism, and deeply rooted cynicism, distrust, and perceived unfairness related to the national political system (Bobo, 2001; Cose, 1993; Dawson, 1993; Hochschild, 1995), I expect African Americans to be less optimistic than whites about black candidate viability. And, although black representation may be stronger in more localized contexts (e.g., cities, counties, or states), at the national level, history shows that black presidential candidates are less likely to be seen as viable presidential candidates, much less win the party's nomination (McClain, Carter, and Brady, 2005).

Black presidential candidates have been more prominent in the Democratic party. Rational citizens might believe the party would only have a greater proportion of black candidates if they are viable; however, given the unsuccessful experiences of past black Democratic challengers, many Democrats may believe that black (and likely women) candidates are more symbolic than viable. Thus, the political reality for Democrats should be a heightened awareness of racial problems in the United States — particularly among black Democrats — and a more pessimistic outlook on race relations. As a result, Democrats should be less likely to perceive that black candidates would win, even though they are front and center in the party.

There is not much empirical evidence regarding black candidate support within the Republican Party, however, high-profile black Republicans who are sometimes mentioned as prospective candidates (e.g., Alan Keyes, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell) tend to have strong ties to government and military and thus have institutional and political credibility. Therefore, if the Republican Party nominated a black candidate for president, the nominee would likely be someone who shared the moderate to conservative views of the party. The relatively small number of black Republicans would

then likely support the candidate that the majority of Republicans, who are largely white, would support. Thus, I expect Republicans to be more likely than Democrats to believe a black candidate could win.

Contextual characteristics related to race, such as neighborhood racial composition, have also received considerable attention in the racial attitudes literature (e.g., Gay, 2004; Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000; Taylor, 1998). Assuming that en masse blacks tend to be more pessimistic about racial realities in America, the aggregate effect should trickle down to individuals who live among greater numbers of blacks. According to the political reality model, living among more blacks should lower perceptions of the perceived viability of a black presidential candidate. However, this relationship should be mediated by perceptions of race relations because it is the aggregate pessimism regarding race rather than simply living among more blacks that is the determining factor.

I define “racial reality” as the perception of race relations in the United States. Assuming the American public sees *race* when they see a black political candidate, it is likely public views on race relations are in-fact related to views about the [black] candidate. Therefore, when it comes to black candidates, broad perceptions of race relations encompass the sub-realities (social, economic, educational, employment, etc.) of race through notions of equality and fairness. Given blacks’ skepticism about the decline of racial negativity (Bobo, 2001; Gallup, 2004; Schuman et al., 1997), I expect blacks to have more pessimism about race relations, and thus be less likely than whites to believe that black presidential candidates would win in an election.

Data and Variables

In July of 2005, along with the Gallup Organization, I collected data to address questions regarding hypothetical black candidate viability. Respondents for the study come from the Gallup Poll Panel (GPP) representing broad and diverse segments of the U.S. population. GPP members are recruited by Random Digit Dialing (RDD), and are asked to complete two to three surveys per month, although the upper limit rarely happens. The GPP has been shown to provide similar results to Gallup's national RDD studies.⁴ The survey methodology consisted of a disproportionate stratified RDD telephone survey of GPP members. In an attempt to get approximately equal numbers of blacks and whites, the black population in the GPP was oversampled. The final sample contains 603 (59%) whites and 423 (41%) blacks. In terms of gender, 614 (60%) respondents are female and 412 (40%) are male. The gender-race composition breaks down as follows, 354 (34.5%) white females, 260 (25.3%) black females, 249 (24.3%) white males, and 163 (15.9%) black males. The overall sampling error for the study is $\pm 3\%$.

The main dependent variable in this research is the concept of viability. The measure of viability in this research results from questions about whether or not respondents thought black and female candidates could win in a presidential election.⁵ I include preliminary analyses of the items about female candidates to provide a comparative group to black candidates. First, respondents were asked whether or not they were willing to vote for black/female candidates, and then they were asked whether they thought the black/female candidates would win. The questions were asked as two adjacent items ("vote for" and "will win") per set ("black candidate" and "woman candidate"). The items are listed below.

Black Candidate set

If your political party NOMINATED a Black person for president in 2008, would you VOTE for him or her if they were qualified for the job, or not? (1=Yes, would vote for him/her, 0=No, would not vote for him/her)

If a Black candidate were RUNNING for president in 2008, do you think he or she would WIN, or not? (1=Yes, would win, 0=no, would not win)

Female Candidate set

If your political party NOMINATED a woman for president in 2008, would you VOTE for her if she were qualified for the job, or not? (1= Yes, would vote for her, 0=No, would not vote for her)

If a woman candidate were RUNNING for president in 2008, do you think she would WIN, or not? (1=Yes, would win, 0=no, would not win)

In an attempt to cancel out the effects of question order, the gender and race item sets were randomly ordered. Thus, a random half of respondents answered the female candidate set first, and others were asked the black candidate set first.

Perceptions of perceived racial realities were measured by five questions gauging respondents' beliefs and opinions about black-white group relations. The exact question wording for the items are listed in the Appendix.

Respondent demographics were collected by self-reports. Respondent gender, race, education, and age were self-reported.⁶ Respondent political party identification was also based on self-report, with three categories: Democrat, independent, and Republican. Local black context is operationalized as the percentage of blacks in the areas where respondents live. Percentages were based on statistics from the Census Bureau, and were appended to the data by the respondent's self-reported five-digit zip code.⁷

Results

Tables 1 through 3 summarize the relationships between target candidate (black candidate and female candidate), vote support (would vote for), and perceived viability (would win). Each table shows the “difference” across vote support and viability per target candidate, as well as the “gap” between the two items referencing candidate characteristics. The tables present the relative differences in political support levels between black and female candidates, and the proportional differences within candidates. The cell statistics are the total sample percentages and the total sample sizes for each bivariate cell.

[Table 1 about here]

Public support for female and black presidential candidates is both high and roughly equal — although statistically different; however, perceptions of viability exhibit much larger differences. These results are shown in the first table. Female candidates are perceived as having a greater chance of success than black candidates by 14 percentage points. This can be gleaned from the column labeled “Gap.” Also, black candidates have more to overcome in terms of perceived chances of victory. While 98% of respondents say they would vote for a black presidential candidate, only 26% believe a black candidate would win; a difference of 72%. Contrast that difference with those for a female candidate, where 94% of respondents say they would vote for a female presidential candidate, and 40% believe she would win.

The results show equal support, but different perceptions of viability. A black candidate is perceived as having a lower chance of victory than a female candidate if nominated for the presidency in 2008. The next sections examine the extent to which

individual background factors might help account for differences in public opinion toward prospective female and black presidential candidates.

The tables in the next two sections are transposed for comparison purposes. For these tables, the target candidates are listed on the rows and the respondent characteristics are listed across the columns. This method allows for direct comparisons across demographic categories.

Respondent Race

Table 2 shows differences across blacks and whites in terms of vote support and chances of victory for both female and black candidates. The results show no differences across race in terms of support, but show significant differences in viability.

[Table 2 about here]

Blacks are more likely than whites to perceive that a female candidate would win: a “Gap” value of 8%. However, black respondents are less likely than whites to perceive that a black candidate would win — a Gap value of 13%. Similarly, for a female candidate, blacks and whites do not vary in their difference scores (overall difference = 4%) (i.e., the difference between vote support and viability). Yet, for a black candidate, the change in difference scores is large (13%). These results highlight the perceived racial differences in political realities: blacks are more optimistic about the prospects of a female candidate than they are about a black candidate. Blacks appear to still believe candidate race has negative consequences in politics.

Party Identification

In terms of party identification (party ID), Table 3 reports the differences in political support, across target candidate, and across party membership. Democrats are

more likely than Republicans to vote for, and perceive as viable, a female candidate; yet, with a black candidate, Democrats and Republic report equal levels of vote support, but differ dramatically in their perceptions of viability mainly because Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that a black candidate would win in a presidential election.

[Table 3 about here]

Further analyses examining the race by partisanship interaction show white Democrats are more likely than black Democrats to believe a black presidential candidate would win. Twenty-five percent of white Democrats said that a black candidate would win, compared to 17% of black Democrats (pct diff. = 8%, $p < .05$). Among Republicans, there were no significant differences in perceived viability for a black candidate. Thirty-nine percent of whites and 33% of blacks (pct diff. = 6%, n.s.) believed that a black candidate would win.

Perceived Race Relations and Black Presidential Candidate Viability

There are five measures of perceived race relations (i.e., racial realities). The five measures focus on general perceived relations (BLKWHT), whether blacks have “too little” influence (BLKLTL), racial mistrust (BWTRST), whether an individual perceives race as a factor in discrimination (RACEMTRS), and perceptions of whites’ prejudice toward blacks (WHTPREJ). These BLKWHT measure is coded so that higher values indicate more positive race relations, and all of the other variables are dummy coded so that positive values indicate more negative racial perspectives. The results are compared across race and party ID, and are shown in Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

On all five of the measures, blacks report more pessimism — negative racial reality — than whites. The largest differences between blacks’ and whites’ perceptions are in the issues of perceived black influence (BLKLTTL: pct diff. = 36%, $p < .01$) and perceptions about race as a likely discrimination factor (RACEMTRS: pct diff. = 52%, $p < .01$). The results support the expectation of racial differences in racial realities.

Table 5 also shows differences in racial realities across party ID. Since most of the Democrats in the sample were black (not shown) — 56% of Democrats are black and 43% are white — it is not surprising that Democrats are more pessimistic about race relations than Republicans. This might partially explain why Democrats are less likely to perceive black candidates as likely to win (see Table 3) in a presidential race.

Multivariate Analysis of Perceived Viability of Black Presidential Candidates

Moderated multiple logistics regression (MMLR) analyses (see Stone-Romero and Anderson, 1994) were used to analyze the hypothesized relationships with perceived candidate viability.⁸ The results, shown in Table 5, are presented separately for blacks and whites. The coefficients represent the effects of each variable on perceived viability, with signs indicating the direction and asterisks indicating significance levels.

[Table 5 about here]

Perceived race relations accounts for the majority of the differences in perceived viability for black presidential candidates; especially among blacks (Δ in $R^2 = .102$). Blacks who live in areas with greater black populations are less likely to believe that a black candidate would win a presidential race; however, once racial realities are considered, the black population effects disappear. This pattern is an example of a mediation effect (Baron and Kenney, 1986), and supports the expectation that the effects

of population on viability are due to the perceptions that exist within the community rather than the actual proportion of black people who live in the community. After controlling for sex, age, education, and black population size, party identification has no significant effect on perceived viability for either racial groups.

Of the racial reality measures, only positive perceptions of black-white relations (BLKWHT) are associated with positive perceived viability among whites, and negative self-reports about interracial mistrust (RACETRST) are associated with negative viability among blacks. Those whites who perceive a black candidate could win have more positive perceptions of race relations. This suggests that whites may use a general assessment of general group relations in their assessment of black candidate viability. Blacks on the other hand may make a single group assessment; those with lower trust toward whites are less likely to believe a black candidate could win.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results paint a picture of the obvious — that perceptions of the viability of black presidential candidates are related to race. What’s most telling about the findings presented here are the differences in how blacks and whites interpret the viability of black candidates. Blacks tend to view viability of black presidential candidates in terms of “trust,” with lower trust equating to lower optimism, whereas whites tend to view viability in terms of racial optimism, with more positive perceptions of race relations translating into greater optimism for black candidates. The final picture is one of a glass half-empty versus a glass half-full.

Black presidential candidates are constantly faced with a double-edged sword regarding how to best market themselves. They can either be a black politician, or a

politician who happens to be black. Either way, they are likely to be stereotyped from the start (McDermott, 1998), and framed by the media as politicians who either do or do not know their political identities. What black candidates can count on is that people will, in part, view their viability in relation to some aspect of race relations; especially by blacks who live in areas more heavily populated by blacks. This is something that white candidates have to worry about less.

The key for a prospective black presidential candidate for 2008, such as Obama, would be to continually promote an American identity and tout the merits of the electoral system to the public. This essentially means persuading blacks that they can trust whites and trust the political system to work for them, and persuading whites that race relations are good, but not perfect, and that they will continue to get better. Unfortunately, the results of the last two elections, as well as the events around Hurricane Katrina and the city of New Orleans, do not bode well for this prescription. There is still a sting from the 2000 election, (Herron and Sekhon, 2004), high black Democratic turnout in 2004 did not translate into a Democratic victory, and blacks and whites have different opinions who's to blame for the negative events surrounding Hurricane Katrina (Dawson, Harris-Lacewell, and Cohen, 2005).

Yet, future primaries and presidential elections may turn out differently due to a new non-hypothetical black presidential candidate (i.e., Obama) and other black political figures running for high profile offices. Aside from the vice presidency, presidential candidates typically spawn from senatorial and gubernatorial positions. Although unsuccessful in 2006, Lynn Swann (Pennsylvania Governor), Michael Steele (Maryland Senate), Ken Blackwell (Ohio Governor), and Harold Ford (Tennessee Senate) or others

like them may potentially bring new political prominence to both parties, while simultaneously increasing the pool of prospective black presidential candidates. Couple these recent campaigns with current high profile black political figures such as Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Deval Patrick, and there exists a new image of black presidential prospects; one characterized by political figures who are less activist or demonstrative and more experienced in institutional politics and electoral governance.

The data presented in this paper highlight the need to delve into the factors related to the perceived viability of historically non-represented groups vying for the presidency. This study attempts to look at how candidate characteristics such as race influence black presidential candidates' perceived chances of success. The results point to the need for new black presidential candidates who can both appear viable and electable, and also have a track record of winning.

Appendix: Perceived Race Relations Items

(*BLKWHT*) Would you say relations between (read and rotate A-D) are very good (5), somewhat good, Neither Good nor Bad, somewhat bad, or very bad (1)?

(*BLKTL*) Some people think that certain groups have too much influence in American life and politics, while other people feel that certain groups don't have as much influence as they deserve. I am going to read you a list of groups, for each one please tell me whether that group has too much influence, just about the right amount of influence, or too little influence. The first group is (Blacks). Would you say they have too much influence, just about the right amount of influence, or too little influence?

(*BWTRST*) Do you feel you can trust most (White/Black) people, or not?

* Blacks trust of whites, and whites trust of blacks.

(*RACEMTRS*) If you were treated unfairly in a particular situation, for example by a store clerk or a stranger on the street, would you generally think that your RACE had something to do with it, or not?

(*WHTPREJ*) How prejudiced would you say Whites are towards Blacks? Would you say they are not at all prejudiced, slightly prejudiced, or extremely prejudiced?

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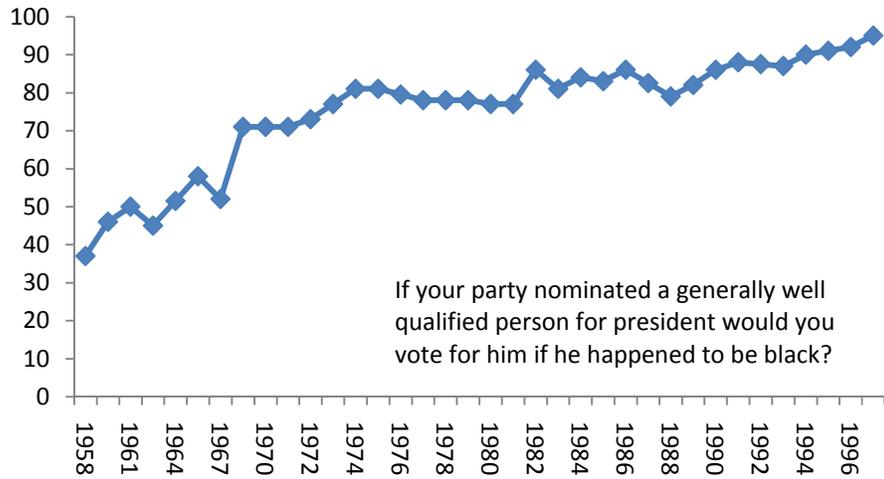


Figure 1. Trend in Public Opinion Support for a Hypothetical Black Presidential Candidate

Sources. Gallup and National Opinion Research Center

Notes. The wording of the question has varied over time replacing using labels like “a Black Man,” “Negro,” and more recently “African American.”

Table 1. Political Support and Viability by Target Candidate – Overall Sample

	Presidential Candidate		Gap
	Female	Black	
Would vote for	94% (1,016)	98% (1,010)	4% *
Would win	40% (963)	26% (962)	-14% *
Difference	-54% *	-72% *	

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the total N size for the contingency values; significance based on independent and paired samples z-tests; *p < .05, **p < .01.

Table 2. Political Support and Viability by Target Candidate – Across RACE

		Respondent Race		
		White	Black	Gap
Female Candidate	Would vote for	92% (598)	96% (418)	4% *
	Would win	37% (560)	45% (403)	8% **
	Difference	-55% **	-51% **	
Black Candidate	Would vote for	97% (594)	97% (416)	0%
	Would win	32% (558)	19% (404)	-13% **
	Difference	-65% **	-78% **	

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the total N size for the contingency values; significance based on independent and paired samples z-tests; *p < .05, **p < .01.

Table 3. Political Support and Viability by Target Candidate – PARTY IDENTIFICATION

		Respondent Party ID		
		Republican	Democrat	Gap
Female Candidate	Would vote for	86% (267)	97% (543)	11% **
	Would win	34% (251)	45% (523)	11% **
	Difference	-52% **	-52% *	
Black Candidate	Would vote for	97% (265)	97% (540)	0
	Would win	39% (251)	20% (521)	-19% **
	Difference	-58% **	-77% **	

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the total N size for the contingency values; significance based on independent and paired samples z-tests; *p < .05, **p < .01.

Table 4. Perceived Race Realities for All Respondents, and Across Race and Political Party Identification

	Perceived Racial Realities				
	Mean Perceptions of Black-White Relations	% Saying Black Have “Too Little” Influence	% Saying They Don't “Trust” the Opposite Race	% Saying Race Is Discrimination Factor	% Saying “Whites Are Extremely Prejudiced Toward Blacks”
	BLKWHT	BLKLTL	BWTRST	RACEMTRS	WHTPREJ
Overall	3.45 (1,018)	60% (1,018)	26% (989)	27% (1,006)	19% (1,002)
<i>Race</i>					
Black	3.34 (420)	81% (419)	39% (405)	59% (409)	28% (409)
White	3.53 (598)	45% (599)	17% (584)	6% (597)	12% (593)
Difference	.193**	36%**	21%**	52%**	16%**
<i>Party ID</i>					
Republican	3.67 (265)	34% (267)	20% (263)	11% (265)	7% (268)
Democrat	3.33 (545)	73% (545)	30% (524)	38% (536)	25% (533)
Difference	.334**	39%**	10%**	27%**	18%**

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the valid N sizes for the groups on the left; significance based on independent samples t-tests for means and z-tests for proportions; *p < .05, **p < .01. Exact question wordings can be found in the Appendix section.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Estimates of the Effect of Perceived Racial Realities on Black Presidential Candidate Viability Controlling for Race

	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>		<u>Model 3</u>	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
<i>Demographics</i>						
Sex (male=1)	.06 (.29)	.08 (.20)	.04 (.29)	.04 (.04)	.07 (.31)	.05 (.21)
Age (in years)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
College Educated	-.41 (.29)	-.23 (.20)	-.48 (.29)	-.26 (.20)	-.38 (.31)	-.31 (.21)
<i>Racial Context</i>						
% Black Population	-1.1 (.47)*	-.66 (1.0)	-1.0 (.47)*	-.36 (1.0)	-.94 (.49)	.24 (1.1)
<i>Party ID</i>						
Democrat			-.20 (.21)	-.25 (.30)	-.04 (.45)	-.18 (.31)
Republican			.69 (.56)	.40 (.29)	.68 (.59)	.38 (.30)
<i>Racial Realities</i>						
BLKWHT					.10 (.16)	.25 (.12)*
BLKLTL					-.69 (.36)	.10 (.22)
RACETRST					-1.1 (.37)**	-.53 (.29)
RACEMTRS					-.52 (.30)	.11 (.43)
WHTPREJ					.06 (.40)	-.78 (.40)
Constant	.10 (.56)	-.35 (.40)	-.95 (.66)	-.36 (.46)	-.36 (.97)	-1.2 (.66)
N	345	479				
Δ in Model R ²	-	-	.018	.026**	.102**	.046**
R ²	.037	.007	.055	.033	.157	.079

Notes: The N size for blacks and whites the analyses are respectively 345 and 479. *p < .05, **p < .01. Exact wording of the “Racial Realities” items can be found in the Appendix.

Endnotes

¹ Researchers (e.g., Bartels, 1988 and Abramson et al., 1992) have made a distinction between the two concepts of “viability” and “electability” based on the context of the presidential campaign: nomination process — viability, and general election — electability. For the purposes of this research, I will use “viability” because of the fact that no black candidate made it past the nomination process, and also because the measures in this study explicitly incorporate the idea of a “nominee.”

² This approach may also backfire if the racial negativity is too overt and events of the recent past are ingrained in the minds of the public.

³ Schuman et al., (1997) characterize voting “for a black candidate” questions as a way to measure attitudes toward nondiscriminatory political choices, and should be considered targeted principles of equal treatment.

⁴ Out of 44 comparisons of GPP surveys to Gallup Poll national RDD samples between 2004 and 2005, none showed significant differences to Gallup presidential approval questions.

⁵ The actual wording of the items uses the term “Woman” rather than female, however, I use “female” here as the adjective form of “woman.”

⁶ Respondent education was recoded from a six-point ordinal (LT High School, High School, Some College, Trade/Tech/Vocational Training, College Graduate, and Post Graduate) to a dichotomous (1=College/Post Graduate, 0=all others) variable. While a purposefully reduced level of measure may be inappropriate, the rationale for this change was mainly for parsimony of interpretation (i.e., uncertainty over midpoints), and analysis revealed no differences between the two measurement levels.

⁷ The zip related percentages are based on the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS).

⁸ The use of zip code aggregate level data in any individual level analysis is risky due to violation of the “independent errors” assumption. Thus, the estimated regression effects are based on the maximum likelihood estimation technique in the non-linear model logistic link function within HLM. This technique is appropriate for multi-level data with dependent variables having binary outcomes (Raudenbush et al, 2004).