

Racism, Sexism, and Candidate Evaluations in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election

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In an attempt to understand the extent to which racism and sexism influenced affect toward Barack Obama and Sarah Palin, we analyze data from a national survey conducted in October 2008. Situating our investigation in previous examinations of modern racism and modern sexism, we test competing hypotheses about the role of these attitudes in the 2008 presidential election. Our results suggest that racism had a significant impact on candidate evaluations while sexism did not. We find that respondents who hold racist attitudes expressed negative attitudes toward Obama and positive attitudes toward Palin. When interacted with party identification, racism continued to exert a strong effect, indicating findings that are robust across partisan affiliations. Sexism, on the other hand, did not significantly influence evaluations of either Palin or Obama.

The 2008 presidential election might have been notable simply because it did not involve a sitting president or vice president for the first time in over half a century. However, it was particularly significant because in the Democratic primary battle, Hillary Clinton became the first woman to launch a serious challenge for a

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major party nomination, ultimately losing to the first African-American nominee, Barack Obama. Also, John McCain announced Sarah Palin as his running mate; she was thus the first woman to be nominated for that role from the Republican Party. These firsts contributed to an election that aroused media and public speculation about the roles race and gender play in campaigns and elections. Writing at the end of the campaign, Frank Bruni (2008) said:

Much of its impact boils down, yes, to race and gender, Mr. Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sarah Palin, who could become the nation's first female vice president. Was sexism more potent than racism? This was the sort of impossible question raised on television shows and in newspapers, at restaurant counters and kitchen tables, revolving around Senator Clinton in winter and spring, Governor Palin in summer and fall.

While we agree that there is no *simple* answer to this question, it is possible to look for clues. To that end, we move beyond basic political science explanations that attribute much of the variation in citizens' affect toward political candidates to party identification and ideology to examine how racism and sexism influenced affect toward Obama and Palin. Using data from an original national opinion survey, we demonstrate that racism was more important than sexism in the 2008 presidential election.

Even so, an explanation of this finding is far from self-evident, since work in political psychology suggests competing hypotheses about the effects of both of these prejudices. Our analysis of race and gender prejudice in the 2008 presidential election also speaks to broader questions about the persistence of stereotypes and the proclivities of individuals to use them in making electoral choices.

The Effects of Racist Attitudes

Although some may argue that racism is no longer an issue in the United States, empirical evidence has shown that racial prejudice, while perhaps less overtly expressed, remains central to understanding American politics (Gilens, 1995; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). Today, rather than articulated as a belief in the biological inferiority of African Americans or support for segregation and formal discrimination, racism in America is more likely to be "symbolic," or a presentation of attitudes that may be racially biased but are expressed as support for traditional American values or opposition to specific policies aimed at correcting preexisting racial injustices (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997). McConahay and Hough (1976) defined the behavioral component of subtle, or modern, racism as actions or attitudes toward policies that while not explicitly justified on a racial basis, result quite directly in preserving the racial status quo. Essentially, the racism that exists in modern society is no longer about segregation, discrimination, and biological superiority, but instead encompasses beliefs about Blacks' lack of effort and the

extent to which they are undeserving (Kinder & Mendelberg, 2000).¹ Based on the symbolic racism thesis, Americans who still hold racist beliefs, regardless of how subtle, may have been offended by Obama's effort to seek the presidency, as this could have been seen as an attempt to change the racial situation and race-related policies in the United States. They may also have interpreted Obama's status as a presidential nominee as a result of undeserved race-based preferences that benefited him earlier in his education or political career.

The persistence of racist attitudes and the wide range of situations to which racial stereotypes are applied suggest a second potential connection between subtle racism and affect toward Obama. Kinder and Sanders (1996) argued that unlike Americans' views on many other political issues, Americans hold genuine attitudes on racial issues, and other evidence has suggested that these racial sentiments affect attitudes both in the business world and in the political world. For instance, Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips (2008) found that subtle racism has an impact on the business world, as the prototypical leader continues to be conceived of as White. They concluded that racism has an influence on people's evaluations of leadership characteristics and may result in negative evaluations of minority leaders. Studies have also shown that racist attitudes influence opinions about a variety of policies that appear to have little to do with explicit racial issues, such as welfare and crime (Gilens, 1995; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman 1997). All of this research has demonstrated that many Americans still embrace negative stereotypes about African Americans and that these views do indeed influence their opinions on political issues and various public policies. Thus, we would expect that Americans who embrace negative stereotypes about African Americans might be less likely to support Obama than Americans who do not hold these views.

While there is considerable reason to expect that racism should have played a role in the 2008 election, there are three main considerations suggesting that racism might not have had a strong impact on affect toward the candidates. First, some past investigations have suggested that the impact of racism is in fact minor. Sniderman and Carmines (1997) contended that while racial prejudice has an impact on a variety of racial policies, the effect is modest and is not the primary reason for Americans' resistance to several progressive policies.²

¹ The "symbolic racism" thesis has been criticized as overly broad in its attempt to show how apparently principled arguments against policies, such as affirmative action, may in fact be mere rationalizations of racial prejudice. Sniderman and Tetlock (1986a, 1986b), for example, pointed out the difficulty of distinguishing a sincere statement of value from a negative affect toward African Americans that such value statements are supposed to disguise. In choosing the validated measures of "modern racism" for the present study, we have focused on questions that specifically compare African Americans' efforts to other minorities in the United States or place present-day notions of African Americans' effort and merit in the contexts of slavery and past discrimination.

² Sniderman and Carmines (1997) argued that support for certain policies, such as affirmative

Second, Obama was not strongly identified as an African American, as evidenced by the discussion about his racial background. Immediately after Obama announced his candidacy, pundits asked if his “mixed race” parentage meant that he was too White to be considered Black (Coates, 2007). Since Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) found that Whites do not spread their prejudice equally among all members of a minority group, but concentrate their prejudice on those members that are most strongly identified with the minority group, we might not expect racist attitudes to have had a large impact on affect toward Obama. Throughout the campaign, Obama also made an obvious and perhaps successful effort to frame the central issues of the campaign in a nonracial manner.

Third, race was made explicit throughout the campaign. Mendelberg (2001) argued that the number of explicit racial claims in American politics has decreased to the extent that they have almost disappeared, though implicit racial messages still exist. She noted that many White Americans do not want to admit that they are racist; however, when an implicit racist message is communicated, Whites will respond to it if their position can be justified easily on nonracial grounds. Therefore, she argued that campaigns using implicit racial messages are the most successful because most voters do not recognize them as being about race. Mendelberg’s research showed, however, that the best way to counteract the effects of implicit racial messages is to point out their underlying racial content, which instantiates a psychological process in which voters reject the now-explicit racial message and instead rely on their broader normative cultural standards, which tend to reject explicitly racial judgments. The 2008 presidential campaign was not generally characterized by explicit racial messages and because Obama brought the implicit use of the Reverend Wright issues into the open and addressed these issues forthrightly, we might expect that racism would not have had a major impact on affect toward Obama (Mendelberg, 2001).³

Effects of Sexist Attitudes

Similar to the literature surrounding racism, the sexism literature offers competing hypotheses for our investigation of the 2008 election. There is evidence suggesting that sexist attitudes should have reduced favorable feelings toward Palin, and other evidence indicating sexism should not have played a central role in the 2008 presidential election.

Traditionally, sexism was measured using the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS), which captured the degree to which people endorsed traditional gender

action, increases if they are framed in terms of exclusive benefits, rather than inclusive benefits for African Americans only.

³ Reverend Wright was Obama’s pastor whose inflammatory comments about the treatment of African Americans in the United States became a controversial “issue” during part of the campaign.

roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Spence & Helmreich, 1972; Swim & Cohen, 1997). As with racism, there has been a decline in the endorsement of overt sexist attitudes throughout the past few decades, though there is a more subtle, or modern, sexism that exists in American society. Modern sexism “is characterized by the denial of continued discrimination, antagonism toward women’s demands, and lack of support for policies designed to help women” (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Covert or subtle sexism is typically measured using the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995) and the Neosexism scale (Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995), both of which are modeled on the modern racism literature (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Masser & Abrams, 1999). Swim and colleagues (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995) found that the AWS and the Modern Sexism Scale are related, but measure somewhat different underlying constructs, which is expected since the former was designed to measure overt, blatant sexism while the latter was designed to capture the more subtle sexist attitudes that are now more commonplace in the United States. This leads us to expect that Americans who more strongly embrace modern sexist “ideals” would feel significantly less positive toward Palin running for vice president, a role that has generally been viewed as a man’s position.

Research examining the effects of sexist attitudes demonstrated that modern sexism attitudes have an impact in a variety of instances, including vote preference. Swim et al. (1995) found that attitudes on the modern sexism scale, and not on the old-fashioned sexism scale, impacted voters’ preferences for a male or female senatorial candidate. They also concluded that modern sexism had an impact on issues that do not deal directly with politics, such as job segregation explanations and the number of women estimated to work in male-dominated professions (Swim et al., 1995). This research suggests that sexist attitudes exist and influence Americans’ behavior, both politically and otherwise. Thus, we might expect that people who hold more sexist attitudes will feel less favorably toward Palin.

Though there is ample reason to expect that sexism may have had a negative impact on affect toward Palin, there is also some research suggesting that sexism should not have played much of a role in the 2008 presidential election. In an investigation of whether women are penalized for success at tasks that are traditionally viewed as male, Heilman and Okimoto (2007) found that women are indeed punished for violating stereotype expectations, but that if women are depicted as nurturing and sensitive or identified with a parenting role, the effects are mitigated. Extending this research to the political context, a woman running for high political office may be viewed negatively and penalized for seeking office, but if her campaign successfully depicts her as having positive female qualities, she may be spared. Since Palin was often depicted as a nurturing mother grappling with parenting issues, we might expect that the effects of sexism would be significantly reduced.

Although Mendelberg’s (2001) analysis was mainly about racism, she also discussed the differences between campaigns using racial messages and sexist

messages. She contended that because of existing coalitions, the parties are concerned with winning women's votes and are not willing to win the votes of sexist Americans and risk the votes of women and men who do not embrace sexist ideals by playing on sexist stereotypes. Therefore, candidates may be less likely to appeal to the underlying modern sexist predispositions than they are to appeal to the underlying racial stereotypes that exist within the electorate. As a result, it may have been easier to protect Palin from sexist innuendo than to prevent subtle racism from resulting in negative affect toward Obama.

Racism, Sexism, and Electoral Behavior

In addition to the examination of the general effects of racism and sexism, studies have explored the impact of these attitudes on electoral outcomes, providing a basis for our examination of the 2008 election. In their investigation of mayoral races in Los Angeles in the late 1970s, Kinder and Sears (1981) found that symbolic racism, rather than direct racial threats on Whites' self-interest, had an impact on whether or not voters were willing to support the African-American candidate. Looking at later elections, McDermott (1998) found that the race and gender of candidates provide cues to voters in low-information elections and activate stereotypes that are consequently used in candidate evaluation. Based on this analysis, it is possible that Palin's and Obama's presence in the 2008 presidential election activated stereotypes which played such a role. Examining more high-stakes elections, analysis of past presidential campaigns has indicated that racism may, but does not always, play a role. Kinder and Sanders (1996) argued that racial issues played a major role in the 1988 presidential campaign, but were not a major factor in the 1992 presidential election. They also contended that when racism does appear in presidential campaigns, it does so in less obvious ways, such as in the use of coded words. Therefore, the extent to which racial issues and racism played a role in the 2008 presidential election needs careful investigation, especially since Kinder and Sanders' findings were from presidential elections featuring only White candidates.

Since we are dealing with presidential elections, where party identification plays perhaps the most central role in voters' evaluations of the candidates (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002), we examine partisan differences. Although there are reasons to suspect that the effects of racist attitudes on candidate evaluations interact with partisanship, with racist Republicans differing from nonracist Republicans and Democrats, Sniderman and Carmines (1997) demonstrated that while racial prejudice may be more widespread among members of the ideological right, it still can be a powerful and prevalent force among liberals, with the power to divide coalitions that might otherwise form. As a result, our analysis will examine whether there are effects of racism and sexism within political parties.

Hypotheses

Based on the relevant literature, we have competing hypotheses for both the effect of racism on affect toward Obama and the effect of sexism on affect toward Palin. People who are more racist could have had less favorable feelings toward Obama (H1a). However, since racism was raised as an explicit issue in the 2008 campaign, enough people might also have held in check their negative stereotypes to reduce the measured effects of racism on affect toward Obama (H1b). Similarly, we believe that people who embrace more sexist attitudes could have felt less favorable toward Palin (H2a). Yet, we noted several persuasive reasons to believe that there may have been little or no effect of sexism on affect toward Palin (H2b). Based on past analyses of racism, sexism, and electoral behavior, we expect that any effects we find will persist when interacted with partisanship (H3).

Methods

Our analysis of data from an original national opinion survey, conducted in October 2008 by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut, allows us to determine whether modern racism and modern sexism played a role in the 2008 presidential election. A total of 781 respondents were interviewed, 520 via random-digit dialing from all United States telephone exchanges, excluding Alaska and Hawaii, and an additional 261 respondents who were recontacted from similar surveys we had conducted in 2002 and 2004.

The models that follow are ordered probit models, since the dependent variables—*affect toward Obama* and *affect toward Palin*—are five-point ordinal variables, with a one indicating very negative feelings toward Obama/Palin and a five indicating very positive feelings toward Obama/Palin. The key independent variables are a modern racism scale and a modern sexism scale, compiled from questions that are routinely used in the literature (e.g., Sears et al., 1997; Swim et al., 1995). The questions in the racism scale ask respondents about their beliefs that Blacks should overcome prejudice as other minorities have done in the past; that over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve; that Blacks need to try harder; and that slavery and discrimination have created difficult conditions for Blacks. The racism scale ranges from 0 to 16 and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .75. The questions in the sexism scale ask respondents about whether they believe that women miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination; whether society has reached the point that women and men have equal opportunities; and whether they understand why women's groups are concerned about the limitation of women's opportunities. The sexism scale has a reliability coefficient of .66 and ranges from 0 to 12. Higher values indicate that the respondent holds more racist or sexist attitudes. One of the modern sexism variables, labeled *sexism tv*, which refers to a question asking respondents whether

they believe it is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television, is included separately because factor analysis indicates that it does not belong in the scale. We also include controls for other relevant variables that are known to influence attitudes toward political candidates as well.⁴ All coefficients reported are unstandardized.

Results

Models 1 and 2, presented in Table 1, are additive models examining the impact of racism and sexism on affect toward Obama (Model 1) and Palin (Model 2).

The coefficients for ordered probit models are not as straightforward to interpret as coefficients for regression models. Although the dependent variables are measured as five-point ordinal variables, we assume that these categories represent an underlying continuous latent variable of feelings toward Obama or Palin and discuss the coefficients accordingly. For Model 1, the negative, statistically significant coefficient for *racism* indicates that a one-unit increase on the racism scale results in a .070 decrease in favorable feelings toward Obama on the underlying latent variable. In other words, the more racist someone is, the less favorable he or she will feel toward Obama. The influence of subtle racism can be seen in other ways as well. The coefficient for the dummy variable for race, indicating that the respondent is White, is statistically significant and negative, showing a White respondent will feel less positively toward Obama, all else equal, even controlling for racist attitudes. The coefficients for the two sexism variables are not statistically significant. The control variables are in the expected direction. For instance, the coefficient for Bush approval is statistically significant indicating that the more someone approves of Bush, the less positive he will feel toward Obama. A Republican respondent will feel less favorable toward Obama, whereas a Democratic respondent will have more positive feelings toward Obama compared with an Independent. Additionally, a liberal respondent will feel more favorable toward Obama on the underlying latent variable than a conservative. A person who is more politically knowledgeable will also feel more negatively toward Obama. The other control variables were not statistically significant. Overall, this model suggests that racist attitudes played a role in the 2008 election; respondents who were more racist were much more likely to feel negatively toward Obama, all else equal.

⁴ A more detailed explanation of the control variables can be found in the notes section of each table. We include control variables for both party identification and ideology; however, since the ideology measure is only dichotomous, it is not strongly correlated with party identification, with a zero-order correlation of .272 between liberal ideology and Democratic identification and a correlation of $-.294$ between liberal ideology and Republican identification.

Table 1. Impact of Racism and Sexism on Affect toward Obama and Palin

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Obama affect			Palin affect		
	Coefficient	Std. Error	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	Std. Error	<i>p</i> value
Racism	-0.070	0.013	<.0001	0.052	0.013	<.0001
Sexism TV	0.023	0.036	0.521	-0.026	0.035	0.458
Sexism	-0.001	0.018	0.945	-0.003	0.017	0.840
Bush approval	-0.518	0.057	<.0001	0.569	0.057	<.0001
Republican	-0.648	0.125	<.0001	0.676	0.127	<.0001
Democrat	0.767	0.128	<.0001	-0.614	0.121	<.0001
Political interest	-0.107	0.076	0.157	-0.019	0.072	0.788
Age	-0.006	0.003	0.083	0.0003	0.003	0.920
Female	0.023	0.105	0.823	0.079	0.103	0.441
White	-0.387	0.174	0.026	0.279	0.154	0.070
Liberal ideology	0.568	0.105	<.0001	-0.394	0.105	<.0001
Education	0.075	0.054	0.165	-0.079	0.052	0.128
Income	0.014	0.016	0.381	-0.023	0.015	0.131
Knowledge	-0.142	0.049	0.004	-0.031	0.046	0.495
<i>N</i>	622			622		
Log likelihood	-639.066			-683.669		
LR chi ²	536.83			483.68		
Prob > chi ²	<.0001			<.0001		

Notes. An ordered probit model was used to estimate the coefficients for both models. The dependent variable in Model 1 is a five-point ordered variable measuring affect toward Obama; the dependent variable in Model 2 is a five-point ordered variable measuring affect toward Palin. Higher values correspond with more positive feelings for Obama/Palin. Both models were estimated with four cutpoints that are not reported. All tests of significance are two-tailed tests.

The main independent variables are the racism and sexism scales. One of the sexism variables, sexism tv, is included separately and refers to a question about whether respondents believe it is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television. The control variables include: approval of President Bush, age of the respondent, income of the respondent, political interest, a political knowledge scale, and education, with higher values indicating higher levels of each of these variables. We also include variables for identification with the Republican Party and identification with the Democratic Party, with Independent respondents acting as the base category. We also include dummy variables for race, gender, and liberal ideology, with a value of one indicating White, female, and liberal ideology, respectively.

Our second model examines the effect of racism and sexism on affect toward Palin. The *racism* coefficient in this model is also statistically significant, though in a positive direction, suggesting that as someone becomes more racist, he or she is more likely to feel positively toward Palin. Thus, racist attitudes helped Palin and harmed Obama. However, the sexism variables are not statistically significant in this model, either. While the coefficients on the control variables are in the expected direction, the expected direction for Model 2 is opposite the expected direction for Model 1 because the dependent variable is different. For example, on the *Republican* variable, we expect and observe a negative coefficient for affect toward Obama and a positive coefficient for affect toward Palin. While the coefficient for *White* is not statistically significant at the .05 level, it is significant

at the .10 level. This suggests that Whites are more likely to feel favorable toward Palin, regardless of their levels of racism, just as there was an effect above and beyond racist attitudes for evaluations of Obama. Based on Models 1 and 2, it appears that sexism did not play a significant role in these 2008 candidate evaluations.

To determine whether there is an impact of racism and sexism uniquely among Republicans or whether it exhibits a common impact among both partisan groups, we specified two multiplicative models. The dependent variable in Model 3 in Table 2 is affect toward Obama and includes multiplicative variables for *Racism * Republican* and *Racism * Democrat*. In Model 4, the dependent variable is affect toward Palin and two multiplicative variables are included: *Sexism * Republican* and *Sexism * Democrat*.

While the *racism* coefficient in Model 3 is statistically significant, given the nature of interaction terms, it is necessary to calculate linear combinations of coefficients and tests of significance (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2005). The coefficient on *racism* simply indicates that among Independents, a one-unit increase on the racism scale leads to a .060 decline in affect toward Obama. By calculating the appropriate linear combination of coefficients, we are able to determine that the partial slope coefficient for the interaction term *Racism * Republican* is $-.096$, indicating that among Republicans, a one-unit increase on the racism scale results in a .096 decrease on the underlying latent variable of affect toward Obama.⁵ In other words, a racist Republican will feel less positive toward Obama than a Republican with a low level of racial resentment. The partial slope coefficient for the *Racism * Democrat* interaction term is $-.081$ with a *p* value of .06. This negative coefficient indicates that among Democrats, as a respondent becomes more racist, he or she is less likely to feel positive toward Obama.

While racism influenced affect toward Obama among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, the linear combinations of interaction terms included in Model 4 demonstrate that a similar relationship does not exist for sexism. The partial slope coefficients for the interaction terms in Model 4 and the coefficient for the sexism scale are not statistically significant. Again, it appears that sexism did not play a role in determining respondents' affect toward Palin.

Robustness

Our results indicate that racist attitudes decreased positive feelings toward Obama and increased positive feelings toward Palin. Sexism, on the other hand, did not have a significant effect on feelings toward Palin or Obama in the 2008 campaign. Yet, as shown by the conflicting literature, these relationships are not

⁵ This coefficient is significant at the .01 level. Standard errors for the partial slope coefficients are calculated from the variance-covariance matrices.

Table 2. Multiplicative Models of the Impact of Racism and Sexism among Party Identifiers

Variable	Model 3			Model 4		
	Obama affect			Palin affect		
	Coefficient	Std. Error	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	Std. Error	<i>p</i> value
Racism	-0.060	0.015	<.0001	0.053	0.013	<.0001
Sexism TV	0.021	0.036	0.571	-0.025	0.035	0.471
Sexism	0.004	0.019	0.831	-0.003	0.026	0.923
Bush approval	-0.521	0.057	<.0001	0.565	0.058	<.0001
Republican	-0.281	0.304	0.355	0.602	0.222	0.007
Democrat	0.859	0.198	<.0001	-0.524	0.198	0.008
Political interest	-0.106	0.076	0.162	-0.022	0.072	0.758
Age	-0.006	0.003	0.072	0.0003	0.003	0.911
Female	0.020	0.105	0.848	0.082	0.103	0.429
White	-0.408	0.175	0.020	0.280	0.154	0.069
Liberal ideology	0.577	0.106	<.0001	-0.390	0.105	<.0001
Education	0.073	0.054	0.175	-0.076	0.052	0.144
Income	0.014	0.016	0.361	-0.023	0.015	0.124
Knowledge	-0.142	0.049	0.004	-0.036	0.046	0.443
Racism * republican	-0.036	0.027	0.185			
Racism * democrat	-0.022	0.042	0.603			
Sexism * republican				0.015	0.037	0.686
Sexism * democrat				-0.027	0.042	0.523
<i>N</i>	622			622		
Log likelihood	-638.115			-683.206		
LR chi ²	538.73			484.61		
Prob > chi ²	<.0001			<.0001		

Notes. An ordered probit model was used to estimate the coefficients for both models. The dependent variable in Model 3 is a five-point ordered variable measuring affect toward Obama; the dependent variable in Model 4 is a five-point ordered variable measuring affect toward Palin. Higher values correspond with more positive feelings for Obama/Palin. Both models were estimated with four cutpoints that are not reported. All tests of significance are two-tailed tests.

The main independent variables are the racism and sexism scales. One of the sexism variables, sexism tv, is included separately and refers to a question about whether respondents believe it is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television. The control variables include: approval of President Bush, age of the respondent, income of the respondent, political interest, a political knowledge scale, and education, with higher values indicating higher levels of each of these variables. We also include variables for identification with the Republican Party and identification with the Democratic Party, with Independent respondents acting as the base category. We also include dummy variables for race, gender, and liberal ideology, with a value of one indicating White, female, and liberal ideology, respectively.

clear-cut. Despite the complexity, our results are robust. We ran models with White respondents only, with fewer predictors, without ideology, and with party identification as a seven-point variable.⁶ The substantive findings were unchanged,

⁶ We also calculated disattenuated correlations. The disattenuated correlation between racism and affect toward Obama was .5396 and the attenuated correlation was .4673. The disattenuated correlation between sexism and Palin was .288 and the attenuated correlation was .2339.

providing confidence that racist attitudes resulted in less-favorable feelings toward Obama but sexist attitudes did not influence feelings toward Palin.

In order to investigate further the potential effects of sexist attitudes, we specified a model including each of the sexism variables separately, rather than combining them into a scale. For three of the sexism coefficients, the coefficients are not statistically significant. However, the coefficient for *sexism groups* is .093 and approaches statistical significance (.054). The positive coefficient means that respondents who are more sexist on this indicator, who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement “It is easy to understand why women’s groups are still concerned about societal limitations of women’s opportunities,” feel more favorably toward Palin. Given portrayals of Palin during the 2008 presidential campaign as a nurturing mother with traditional values, it is unsurprising that her supporters were disproportionately unsympathetic toward groups still pushing for expanded opportunities for women.⁷

Discussion

While Palin was a candidate for vice president and Obama was a candidate for president, we do not believe that our results are driven solely by this distinction, for several reasons. First, while the vice presidency was once a supportive position, that is no longer the case (Goldstein, 2008). Vice presidents Mondale, Gore, and Cheney certainly played more than a supportive role and fundamentally changed the job description of this position. Second, as the oldest candidate ever to run for a first term as president and with a history of health problems, McCain’s choice of vice president was perhaps even more consequential than for other candidates. Third, there is no evidence to indicate that sexist attitudes only have an impact at certain levels of political office. Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) found that people associate male qualities with national offices more generally (the presidency and congressional seats). Since people associate male qualities with national office, of which the vice presidency certainly qualifies, the vice presidency is no longer merely a supportive role, and voters knew about McCain’s age and health conditions, we think it is highly unlikely that our findings indicating a lack of a relationship between sexist attitudes and feelings toward Palin are merely a result of the different positions Obama and Palin were seeking.

The racism relationship is also complex despite being consistently strong. We know from our findings that racist attitudes had an impact on affect toward Obama in the 2008 campaign, but we have not yet shown where exactly racism plays a role

⁷ Binary probit models were also run with the dependent variables being vote intention for McCain or Obama. The impact of racism was robust across models, regardless of the dependent variable. The one statistically significant finding for sexism on affect toward Palin did not appear when using vote intention for McCain as a dependent variable. However, this is not surprising given that the vote intention question was about John McCain rather than Sarah Palin.

in people's feelings toward Obama. As levels of racial resentment increase, are people feeling much more negative toward Obama or just slightly more negative? We graphed the predicted probabilities of affect toward Obama, using the equation from Model 1, for an "average" Democrat and an "average" Republican as the level of racism was varied. For the Republican graph, the respondent was modeled to be neutral on the *sexism tv* variable, have a score of 5 out of 12 on the *sexism scale*, be a 53-year-old White male, with a conservative ideology, a moderate amount of knowledge, and an income between \$50,000 and \$60,000, who had completed high school, approves of Bush somewhat, and follows politics some of the time. The Democratic respondent was modeled to have all of the same characteristics except he has a liberal ideology and disapproves of Bush somewhat.⁸

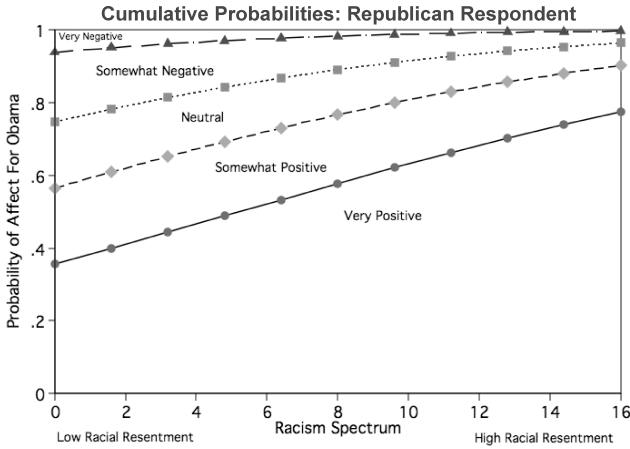
The graphs reflect the cumulative probabilities of the modeled respondent being in each of the categories of the dependent variable (affect toward Obama), allowing us to explore how the probabilities change as the respondent becomes more racist. For instance, in Figure 1a, a Republican respondent with these characteristics and low levels of racial resentment has almost a .6 probability of feeling somewhat negative or very negative toward Obama.⁹ As racial resentment increases, the probability of being in one of these two categories increases to approximately .8. In addition, as racial resentment increases, the probability of feeling somewhat positive or very positive toward Obama decreases. Thus, as expected, as racial resentment increases, a Republican respondent is less likely to feel positively toward Obama and more likely to feel negatively toward him, with the largest increase in the very negative category.

In Figure 1b, we present a similar graph for a Democratic respondent. If the Democratic respondent scores very low on the racial resentment scale, the respondent is highly likely, with a probability of more than .8, to feel very positively toward Obama.¹⁰ However, as racial resentment increases, the respondent is less likely to feel positively toward Obama. If the respondent has the highest level of racial resentment, the probability of feeling very positively toward Obama is only around .5. As we would expect, as racial resentment increases, the respondent is more likely to feel very negative, somewhat negative, or neutral toward Obama.

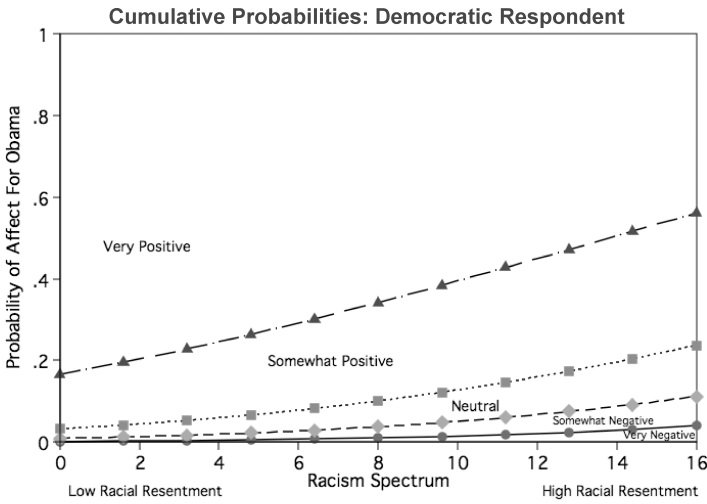
⁸ All of the values selected are close to the mean value; however, they are actual values that could be represented by a respondent. For example, a respondent who follows politics some of the time would have a value of 3 on the corresponding variable, but the mean of the political interest variable is approximately 3.5, a value that no respondent can have. Similarly, interesting values were chosen for the dummy variables since a dummy variable never takes its mean. Also, graphs were created (but are not pictured) with the same demographics described above, but for a female Republican and a female Democrat. The graphs and the interpretation are substantively similar, regardless of gender.

⁹ The probability of a Republican respondent with a score of 0 on the racial resentment scale has approximately a .38 probability of feeling very negative toward Obama and approximately a .20 probability (.58 - .38) of feeling somewhat negative toward Obama, which results in a probability of approximately .6 of the respondent feeling somewhat or very negative toward Obama.

¹⁰ This is calculated from determining that the probability of feeling somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative is less than .20.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 1. (a) The cumulative probabilities for an average Republican Respondent in his affect toward Obama. The probability of being in each response category for each level of racial resentment is reported. For each level of racial resentment, the probability of being in one of the five categories is equal to one. (b) The cumulative probabilities for an average Democratic Respondent in his affect toward Obama. The probability of being in each response category for each level of racial resentment is reported. For each level of racial resentment, the probability of being in one of the five categories is equal to one.

At the lowest level of racial resentment, there is only about a 5% probability he will be in one of these categories, but that probability increases to approximately 20% if he is very racist.

One complexity depicted in this graph of a Democratic respondent is that as racial resentment increases, the probability of the respondent feeling somewhat, but not very positive, toward Obama also increases.¹¹ This might be explained in three ways. First, an increase in the somewhat positive category may simply be a function of the decrease in the very positive category, meaning that increased racism reduces the likelihood that a respondent falls into the very positive category, but may not move the respondent to the extreme represented by the very negative category. Second, it may be that Obama's other traits, namely, his status as the Democratic candidate, outweighs misgivings that a Democrat who scores high on racial resentment may have about Obama's candidacy. Finally, this finding might illustrate the explicit racism effect described by Mendelberg (2001). As a Democrat becomes more racist, he or she may not be willing to admit feeling very negatively toward Obama, making the potentially more palatable characterization of somewhat positive more likely. Such a response would account for the overall change from the category very positive to that of somewhat positive in Democrats' affect toward Obama for increased levels of racial resentment. By examining these graphs, we see that while racist attitudes impact affect toward Obama, the probability of being in a certain category of affect depends on partisanship and the level of racist attitudes present.

Conclusion

Racist attitudes still play a significant role in American electoral politics. Wilson (1996) found that while there is no clear trend for younger generations to be less prejudiced than older generations, there is a difference in levels of prejudice in generations before and after World War II, with the younger cohorts less prejudiced than the pre-War generations. Our findings confirm that racism still exists in the United States and can negatively affect African-American politicians.

Our results demonstrate that racism played a substantial role in the 2008 presidential election, dampening positive feelings toward Obama and increasing positive feelings toward Palin. Despite the impact of racial prejudice on affect toward Obama, he managed to win the presidency. However, without these racist attitudes, it is likely that he would have won by an even greater margin.

Sexism, on the other hand, did not play a significant role in this particular election despite the fact that a woman was running for vice president. In fact, one of our findings, though it only approached statistical significance, suggests that people who do not understand why women's groups are concerned with women's opportunities actually feel more favorable toward Palin. Though sexist attitudes did not play a significant role in evaluations of Palin, they undoubtedly would

¹¹ Note the increasing gap in cumulative probabilities for the "somewhat positive category" relative to the "neutral category" as racial resentment increases on the x-axis.

have been a significant force in influencing evaluations of Hillary Clinton had she obtained her party's nomination for President. Ms. Clinton was depicted very differently than Palin, often as cold, strong, and capable (Sykes, 2008). Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) argue that groups are judged on two dimensions, warmth and competence, that explain when and why stereotypes are applied. Since Clinton most likely would have been ranked high on competence and low on warmth, with Palin characterized in exactly the opposite manner, this may help to explain when sexist attitudes will harm a candidate and when they will not. Sexist attitudes are probably more likely to hurt female candidates who are seen as competent but lack warmth; these findings should provide guidance to campaign managers trying to determine how to market their female candidates.

Based on our analysis of the 2008 presidential election, it appears that campaigns may be able to counteract sexist attitudes successfully by depicting the candidate as a nurturing parent. Our analysis indicates that female candidates, if depicted in a specific manner, may garner more-favorable evaluations among voters than African-American candidates, after taking into account other relevant factors. Racist attitudes, however, may be more difficult to circumvent, even when race is discussed explicitly, as it was with regard to Obama.

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