

Racial Cleavages in American Public Opinion

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Teaching Agenda

- 1 Setting the Academic Debate: Foundational Work
- 2 The Role of Cleavages in the Immigration Debate

How do citizens hold elites electorally accountable?



Motivating Question

Do you think Americans are polarized on public policy on the basis of racial cleavages? If so, how does this look like? If not, what does that look like?

Setting the Academic Debate: Are Social Cleavages Important?

The Importance of Cleavages in the Literature

“...a person thinks politically, as he is socially. Social characteristics determine political preferences.” (1948,27)

- ▶ What does this quote fundamentally mean about how citizens think of politics in contemporary society? What are social characteristics?
- ▶ We do know there are racial differences in public opinion, but fundamental question is why there are racial differences on public policy?

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Potential Explanations of Racial Cleavages

Kinder & Winter (2001) propose four possible explanations as to why there are racial differences in the polity:

- ➊ Racial divide in opinion is a reflection of differences between blacks and whites in *social class*
- ➋ Racial divide in opinion is an expression of differences between blacks and whites over fundamental *principles*
- ➌ Cleavages rooted in *social identity* and affinity with their own racial group and in the resentments they feel toward each other
- ➍ Cleaves rooted in differences in the *audience* to which blacks and whites address their opinions

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Setting the Stage: Does a Racial Divide Exist?

TABLE 2 Differences between Blacks and Whites on Class, Principles, and Social Identity

Variable	n	Whites Mean	SD	n	Blacks Mean	SD	Difference
Social Class							
Homeowner	1,949	0.689	0.463	296	0.459	0.499	0.229
Income (logged)	1,912	0.653	0.221	282	0.530	0.250	0.123
Education	2,019	0.482	0.280	314	0.389	0.270	0.093
Principles							
Egalitarianism	1,871	0.622	0.194	286	0.779	0.173	-0.158
Limited government	1,856	0.378	0.378	283	0.143	0.221	0.235
Social Identity							
In-group identification	1,706	0.248	0.290	266	0.609	0.349	-0.361
Out-group resentment (t-scores)	1,827	0.371	0.234	275	0.336	0.277	0.035
Racial resentment	1,870	0.611	0.281	285	0.366	0.217	0.245

Source: 1992 National Election Study. All variables coded 0–1.

Assessing the Racial Divide

- ▶ Differences fundamentally rooted in racial issues & government role in this domain
- ▶ What do we see with respect to racial cleavages in social welfare policies? Is there anything in this divide that surprises you?
- ▶ Clear divide, **but** still a good degree of liberalism among white Americans
- ▶ What could explain this?

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Measurement in Kinder & Winters

- 1 Social class rooted in differences in status: homeowner, income, education
- 2 Principles: *egalitarianism & limited government*. Note that egalitarianism = equality, measured as questions alluding to equality of opportunity and not explicitly policy
- 3 Audience: Race of interviewer as a “treatment”
- 4 Group affinity: in-group identification and out-group resentment (feeling thermometers)

Evidence of Racial Divide & Simulation

TABLE 3 Reducing the Racial Divide I: Differences between Blacks and Whites in Opinion on Race Policy Under Various Hypothetical Conditions

	Equal Employ. Opportunity	School Integration	Spending for Blacks	Programs to Help Blacks	Preferential Hiring	College Quotas
Raw Divide	0.362	0.355	0.388	0.183	0.430	0.519
Divide after simulating change in:						
Social Class	0.340	0.340	0.385	0.165	0.361	0.497
Principles	0.229	0.233	0.314	0.125	0.377	0.400
In-Group Identification	0.353	0.366	0.356	0.151	0.324	0.465
Out-Group Resentment	0.336	0.349	0.336	0.130	0.341	0.456
Audience	0.309	0.342	0.291	0.154	0.335	0.502
Net Divide	0.118	0.208	0.130	-0.007	0.018	0.246

Source: 1992 National Election Studies. Simulations calculated using overall sample average values for independent variables and coefficients from the appendix. Class Simulation calculated by setting black respondents to the white average level for education, income, and home ownership. Principles simulation calculated by setting all respondents to the midpoint between the black and white average levels for equality and limited government. In-Group simulation calculated by setting black respondents to the white average level for in-group closeness. Out-Group simulation calculated by setting each racial group's thermometer evaluation of the other to the average thermometer evaluation of their own group. Audience simulation calculated by setting the probability of a black interviewer to .50 for all respondents. Net Divide is the racial divide in opinion after all simulations are conducted simultaneously.

Evidence of Racial Divide & Simulation

TABLE 4 Reducing the Racial Divide II: Differences between Blacks and Whites in Opinion on Social Welfare Policy Under Various Hypothetical Conditions

	Spending versus Services	Spending on Education	Spending on the Poor	Spending on Financial Aid	Spending on the Unemployed	Spending on the Homeless	Government Health Insurance	Government Job Guarantee
Raw Divide	0.166	0.121	0.162	0.128	0.225	0.102	0.075	0.193
Divide after simulating change in:								
Social Class	0.156	0.119	0.148	0.147	0.184	0.104	0.040	0.148
Principles	0.097	0.050	0.083	0.053	0.148	0.040	-0.003	0.121
In-Group Identification	0.133	0.152	0.169	0.146	0.232	0.103	0.063	0.194
Out-Group Resentment	0.134	0.115	0.129	0.104	0.197	0.095	0.064	0.198
Audience	0.143	0.111	0.117	0.102	0.147	0.076	0.044	0.221
Net Divide	-0.001	0.063	-0.002	0.041	0.009	0.012	-0.093	0.107

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Summing up the Pivotal Study

- ▶ “... we have discovered there are in fact two divides: one over racial inequality, the other over the welfare state.”
- ▶ “Our analysis suggests that the racial divide cannot be explained in any simple or straightforward way by class.”
- ▶ Eliminating racial differences in key covariates reduces the racial divide **but** does not eliminate racial divides in society
- ▶ What do you think is missing from the analysis? Why are there still racial differences on public policy even after for accounting for disparities in the study's key independent variables?

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Variation within Cleavages: The Case of the South

- ▶ Valentino & Sears (2005) asks if there is variation in the public opinion between white and non-white southerners
- ▶ They argue that *racial conservatism* is central to Southern white realignment from the Democratic to the Republican party—key to white political identity in the American south
- ▶ Elite realignment in the national political context: "...party elites did not change only on racial issues. Democratic elites began to move to more liberal positions on non-economic issues such as national defense or abortion in the 1970's, and the Reagan era heightened the distinctive economic conservatism of the Republican party."
- ▶ However, race dominant in southern politics and the onset of realignment inherently tangled in race given *critical juncture of 1964*

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- ▶ However, race dominant in southern politics and the onset of realignment inherently tangled in race given *critical juncture of 1964*

Four Hypotheses

- 1 Regional differences in racial conservatism have persisted since Civil Rights era, even given general decline of racism throughout the nation & south
- 2 Regional differences large & significant even after controlling for more general political conservatism, and across several measures of racial animosity
- 3 White Southerner's vote & partisanship have become increasingly tied to racial attitudes since Civil Rights Era—no similar increase exists outside of the south
- 4 In contemporary era, racial attitudes have a significantly strong impact on white Southern partisanship than elsewhere

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Regional Differences in Racial Attitudes

TABLE 2 Contemporary Regional Differences in Whites' Racial Conservatism

	Deep South	Outer South	North + West	Total	F (2df)
Symbolic racism (NES 1990, 1992, 1994, 2000)	55% (173)	39% (468)	32% (1,238)	35% (1,879)	37.68***
Negative black stereotyping (NES)	49 (127)	39 (378)	37 (1,143)	38 (1,648)	7.21***
White-black feeling thermometers (NES)	47 (177)	38 (591)	34 (1,596)	36 (2,364)	29.78***
Jim Crow racism (GSS)	43 (133)	34 (348)	23 (758)	27 (1,239)	55.81***

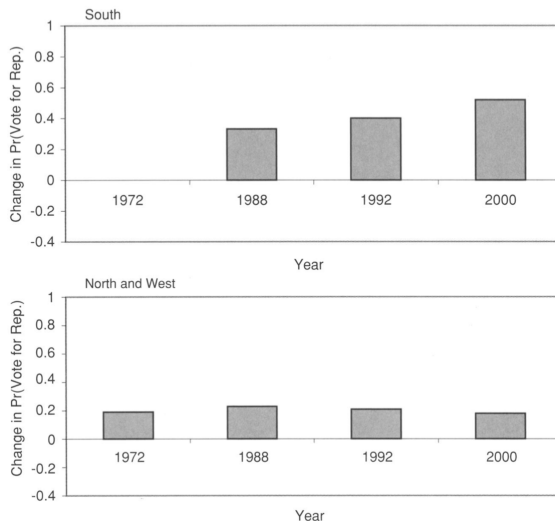
Source: Symbolic racism- NES 1990, 1992, 1994, 2000; Stereotypes- NES 1992, 1996, 2000; Feeling thermometers- NES 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000; Jim Crow racism- General Social Surveys 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996.

Note: Entries are percentage falling in approximately the top third of the distribution of each attitude scale, except for Jim Crow racism, on which the cut point is at the 73rd percentile, because 73% of the distribution received the lowest possible score for this scale in the 1990s. The exact cut points are given in column 4. Cell N's in parentheses. F's are drawn from analyses of variance testing for regional differences controlling for education, age, gender, and ideology.

***p < .001.

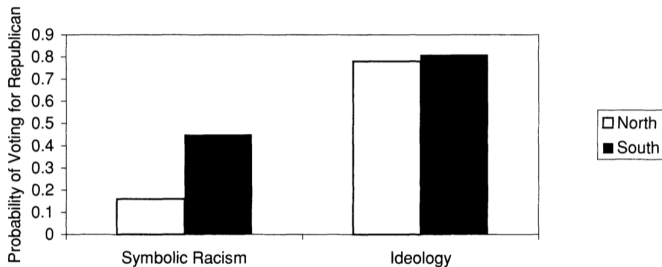
Impact of Racial Conservatism on Republican Vote

FIGURE 2 The Impact of Symbolic Racism on Republican Vote over Time



Comparing Racism & Ideology in the South and Non-South

FIGURE 3 The Impact of Symbolic Racism and Ideology on Republican Vote in the 1990s, by Region



Note: Y axis is change in the probability of voting for the Republican candidate associated with a change from two standard deviations below to two standard deviations above the mean on the symbolic racism or liberal-conservative ideology scale.

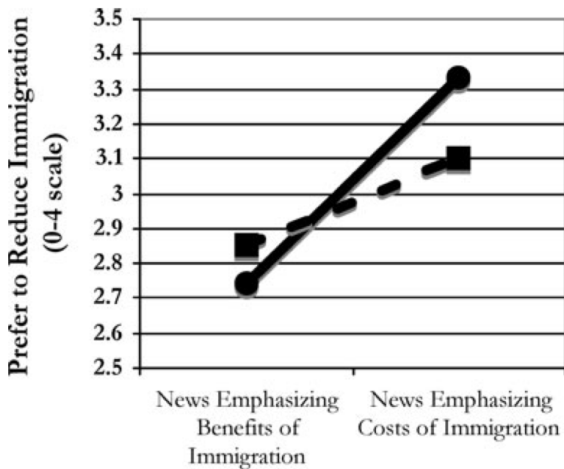
Cleavages Around Immigration

- ▶ Since 2004, immigration has ranked as a salient political issue both in the United States and in other western democracies
- ▶ As a consequence, political actors are facing pressure to deal with the issue—in the U.S., this means comprehensive immigration reform
- ▶ What causes citizen attitudes about immigration? Particularly public opposition to immigration policy?
- ▶ Brader, Valentino & Suhay argue:
 - ① Examine the impact of group cues in immigration discourse on perceived threat & emotions
 - ② Test whether changes in those perceptions, emotions, or both mediate the impact of discourse on opinion and behavior

Digging into the Theoretical Model

- ① Opposition to pro-immigration policy predicated on which group is perceived to be salient (Latino or European)
 - ② More information (news) about the “costs” of immigration should increase the perception that immigration is harmful to Americans, particularly if its about Latinos rather than European populations
 - ③ Anxiety should mediate the effects of opposition to pro-immigration policies, with greater anxiety and information leading to more opposition to these policies
- ▶ Testing these hypotheses experimentally: Control & Treatment to a news story about immigration Governor’s conference and the tone of the story (emphasizing benefits or emphasizing costs)

FIGURE 1 Impact of News Frame and Ethnic Cue on Immigration Policy Preferences



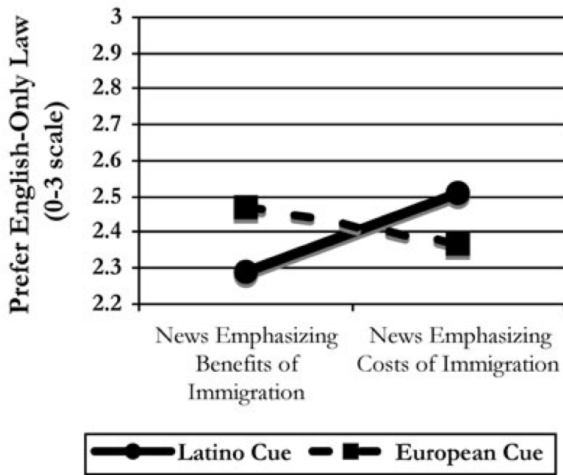


FIGURE 2 Impact of News Frame and Ethnic Cue on Information Seeking and Political Action

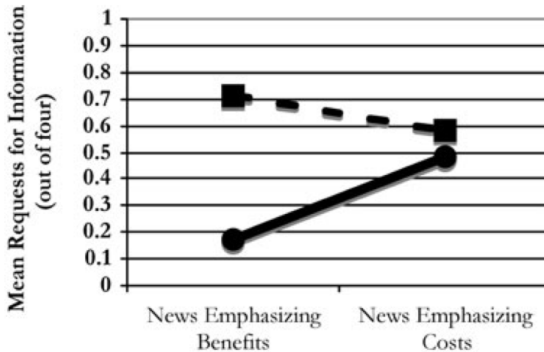
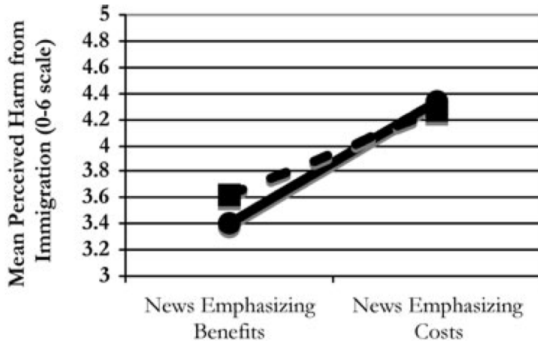
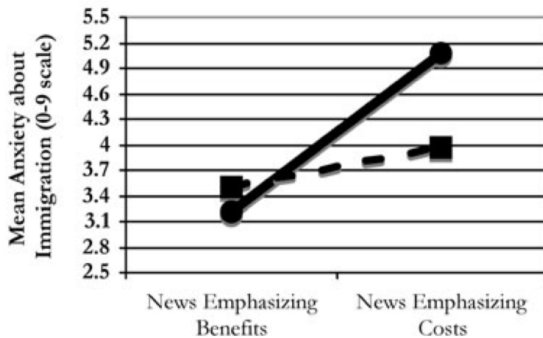


FIGURE 3 Impact of News Frame and Ethnic Cue on Perceived Harm from Immigration and Emotional Reactions to Immigration





Key Points

- ➊ Racial cleavages are at the forefront of American public opinion
- ➋ Kinder & White (2001) explore differences in public opinion across racial divisions
- ➌ They hypothesize that racial divide in opinion can be rooted in *social class, principles, social identity, and audience*
 - ▶ Even after simulating “away” differences in class, principles, identity, and audience—still resentment cleavages
- ➍ Racial conservatism key to understanding variation among white electorate, key source of white racial identity
- ➎ Support for comprehensive immigration reform hinge on tone and ethnic frames (Latino vs. European) among white electorate