Black Voters, White Interviewers: Revisiting Interviewer Effects in the Obama Era

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Abstract

In this paper, we expand the existing research on interviewer effects in telephone surveys by investigating how interviewees respond differently to interviewers from differing racial backgrounds, leveraging an experimental design based on an original telephone survey of African American southerners conducted in February 2009, shortly after the election of Barack Obama as president in which respondents were randomly assigned to white or black interviewers. We find, using logit models, that African American southerners offer different responses to white interviewers than black interviewers when prompted with racially-valenced questions, despite substantial political and social change over recent decades, although these differences do not emerge in questions that do not implicate race directly.

Previous research has demonstrated that survey participants may alter responses given to an interviewer of a different race (see e.g. Hyman et al. 1954; Schuman and Converse 1971; Davis 1997a,b; Anderson et al. 1988b). This phenomenon has often been most significant when a survey of an African American respondent is being administered by a white interviewer (Davis and Silver 2003). However, just as well established phenomena—such as racism among southern white males—continue, they also evolve in subtly important and measurable ways (Kuklinski et al. 1997). Does the uniformity in the difference in answers given by African American respondents to white interviewers still exist, or has a new pattern emerged? While pundits who were quick to herald a "post-racial America" in the wake of Barack Obama's election have been brought back to earth by the reality of continued racialized politics, no one has systematically explored the extent of racial interviewer effects after the election of the first black president. In this research, we confirm the continued existence of racial interviewer effects in the wake of Obama's historic 2008 election, but we also add to the literature by demonstrating that racial interviewer effects are no longer uniform. They primarily materialize for questions that are clearly racially valenced. Further, significant differences do not appear on questions that reference other races or ethnicities (other than the black respondent and white interviewer).

1   Change in the Political Environment

The American political landscape has undergone dramatic changes since the mid-point of the 20th century; nowhere has this change been more pronounced than in the American south, where until the 1960s African Americans lived under a political order that denied them fundamental rights in their interactions with both government and the private sector (Key 1949). The revolutionary changes that were brought on by the Civil Rights Movement have made it possible for African Americans to finally play a role in American politics at least somewhat proportionate with their

numbers (Davidson and Grofman 1994), culminating in the 2008 election of Barack Obama as president of the United States.

This sea change in the American political landscape begs an important question: do these political and social changes reflect increased political trust and more comfortable discourse across racial lines? Historically, there is substantial research in favor of the proposition that black Americans respond to white and black interlocutors, particularly on questions involving race, in different ways (Hyman et al. 1954; Anderson et al. 1988b; Davis 1997a). Yet even much of the "recent" research is from a different era in American politics, at a time when few African Americans had been elected to political office and the campaign of African American civil rights leader Jesse Jackson was seen by most political observers as a purely symbolic effort rather than a harbinger of political change. Since then, even in the South, considerable political evolution has taken place: two Deep South states have governors from minority ethnic and religious heritages (Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Nikki Haley of South Carolina, both descended from Indian subcontinent immigrants), a Vietnamese American has represented a majority-black House district in Louisiana, and several black representatives have successfully been elected from majority-white congressional districts across the region. In terms of the presidency, Obama won three southern states in the 2008 contest.

Here we reconsider the accepted wisdom of past generations of survey research in light of contemporary politics in the United States, using data collected soon after Obama's inauguration as the country's first African American president. Our findings indicate that while African American respondents continue to exhibit different response patterns to white interviewers than when interacting with fellow blacks, these effects are only prevalent in questioning that explicitly invokes race or racial identity. Hence, on the vast majority of political issues, we can be confident that African Americans' responses reasonably reflect their underlying attitudes regardless of the race of the interviewer they interacted with, subject (of course) to the same caveats regarding the measurement of opinion that apply to survey respondents in general.

2   Measuring Public Opinion among Blacks and Whites

Substantial gaps between the economic and political power of whites and blacks persist in the United States, particularly in the south. Some of these gaps arguably can be traced to a long-standing inability for white and black southerners to find common political ground, even in areas where there may be substantial cross-racial agreement on issues of concern.

The difficulties apparent in cross-racial communication among American

southerners—and among Americans in general—may be connected to other issues that arise when attempting to understand public opinion. Researchers who attempt to understand the mass public based on survey research of a sample of that population face a number of well-known challenges. Textbooks of American politics are replete with examples of naïve efforts to understand the public mind, such as the widespread use of "straw polls" and mail surveys based on non-random sampling approaches (including the notorious *Literary Digest* poll of the 1936 presidential election), problematic wording in survey questionnaires, and problems of non-response bias (see e.g. Warren 2002 and Asher 2007).

Another long-recognized problem is related to the process of survey research itself; except in the case of mail and Internet surveys, public opinion research is typically interview-based, requiring the involvement of two parties—the respondent, whose opinions we are interested in determining, and the interviewer, whose role is expected to simply be an instrument presenting prompts and recording the responses to the survey. Interviewers themselves, however, appear to influence the way in which survey respondents answer questions, a problem that has been recognized since the early era of mass surveys (Stock and Hochstim 1951; Boyd and Westfall 1955; Singer et al. 1983). Given recent scholarship on the nature of public opinion and the survey response (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Zaller 1992; Alvarez and Brehm 2002), moreover, we might not just be concerned that interviewers are causing respondents to (intentionally or otherwise) give misleading responses that do not reflect their opinions, but rather that interviewers are influencing the process by which interviewees arrive at their opinions *in the first place*. Because respondents are believed (in the Zaller-Feldman model and others) to be sampling from the relevant considerations in formulating their responses, the sampling process may be biased (consciously or unconsciously) by the respondent's reactions to the interviewer; we elaborate on how this sampling process may interact with race or other group identity below.

Despite these concerns, however, research designed to uncover the presence of interviewer effects has not always identified their presence. Tucker (1983), who examined telephone interviews conducted by the Gallup organization on behalf of media clients, found that interviewer effects were modest at best; Groves and Magilavy (1986) similarly studied interviews conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan over a six-year period, finding only very modest effects that were further reduced upon the introduction of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing at the SRC.[1] These findings would suggest that we might reasonably discount the importance of interviewer effects in survey research.

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[1] The use of CATI and similar techniques like CASI and web-based interviewing has of course become the standard approach to public opinion research, except in mail surveys and exit polls, as of this writing.

3   The Intersection of Interviewer and Interviewee Characteristics

While researchers have been unable to identify *generalized* interviewer effects, more specialized studies have suggested that social stratification may have significant effects on survey responses. Dohrenwend et al. (1968) advanced a generalized argument that survey respondents may be less forthcoming with interviewers with dissimilar social and ethnic backgrounds, but might also not be completely candid with interviewers perceived to be of the same socioeconomic status either. Their argument suggests that some degree of "social distance" is necessary to minimize bias, as interviewers who are *too* similar to respondents may not maintain enough interpersonal distance to get unbiased results.

The findings of Dohrenwend et al. generalize an earlier line of research that was primarily concerned about interviewer effects among African American respondents. Hyman et al. (1954), for example, noted that the responses of blacks to interviews by whites were markedly different from their responses to black interviewers in the Jim Crow south; Lenski and Leggett (1960) found similar effects in Detroit, suggesting that the maintenance of legal segregation was not the only factor that might discourage black respondents from giving the same answers to white and black interviewers.

After the Civil Rights Movement and the decline of legal segregation, researchers continued to find significant variation in responses based on interviewers' racial backgrounds; Schuman and Converse (1971) found that black interviewees in the 1968 Detroit Area Study tended to respond differently to black interviewers than white interviewers, particularly in response to questions with a racial dimension where the prompt requested an opinion rather than factual information. Hatchett and Schuman (1975) subsequently reported similar effects among white respondents to the 1971 Detroit Area Study.

Research in other settings tended to reinforce these findings; Cotter et al. (1982), in a survey of adult citizens in Alabama, found that race-of-interviewer effects persisted even when interviews were conducted by telephone without a visible racial cue, rather than in person, while Campbell (1981) found that Atlanta-area high school students, who presumably had been socialized in a more racially egalitarian era, nonetheless persisted in responding differently to interviewers of a dissimilar race.[2] In general, similar patterns emerged as in the research based on the Detroit Area Study: respondents demonstrated little or no difference in how they answered questions *except* when those questions had a racial dimension.

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[2]Past research has demonstrated that listeners can fairly reliably determine the race of someone on the other end of a telephone call; see e.g. Giles and Bourhis (1976), Walton and Orlikoff (1994), and Trent (1995).

More recent research based on national samples has been generally consistent with these findings. Anderson et al. (1988b) suggested that research that used surveys from the SRC/CPS National Election Studies series that failed to account for race-of-interviewer effects may have overestimated change in racial attitudes among the American public over time; they had earlier found (Anderson et al. 1988a) that race-of-interviewer effects also extended to increasing the likelihood of voting among African American respondents who had been interviewed by a black interviewer. Davis (1997a) suggests that some respondents in the 1984 National Black Election Study moderated their views of white political figures and the Republican Party in an effort to accommodate the views of white interviewers; in further research using the 1984 NBES, Davis (1997b) indicated that a measure of black racial consciousness was biased—leading to a decrease in its estimated effect on support for Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson—because it failed to account for blacks' accommodation to white interviewers in responding to the questions that formed the racial consciousness scale. In addition to the racially-associated questions identified in previous surveys, the measurement of political knowledge also appears to be influenced by race-of-interviewer effects as a result of "stereotype threat" (Davis and Silver 2003).

Researchers have also considered the possibility that race-of-interviewer effects might have contributed to the 1980s phenomena known as the "Bradley effect" or "Wilder effect," in which pre-election polls suggested that an African American candidate for public office would gain a larger share of the vote than he actually ended up receiving. Demonstrating this effect, Finkel et al. (1991) found a significant decrease in the willingness of white respondents to declare their support for Republican candidate Marshall Coleman in the 1989 Virginia gubernatorial contest when interviewed by blacks. While Democratic candidate Douglas Wilder did win the 1989 election (unlike Tom Bradley in the 1982 California governor's race), he did so with a much narrower margin than the polls had predicted during the campaign.

Researchers have also tried to study race-of-interviewer effects beyond the traditional telephone and in-person interview settings. Krysan and Couper (2003) conducted an experimental study of race-of-interviewer effects in which they found that using a video recording of an interviewer had similar effects as having the interview conducted face-to-face by the same interviewers, suggesting that interviewer effects are not driven by any conscious effort to please the interviewer by the respondent. In a followup study, Krysan and Couper (2006) attempted to replicate these findings with a random sample based on an Internet-based panel using a still image of a supposed "interviewer" to produce a racial cue to respondents, but were unable to do so—perhaps, in part, because the racial cues used in the Internet-based study were much less pervasive than in their 2003 study.

Interviewer effects are not confined to African Americans and whites; they have also been identified among Hispanics and non-Hispanics (Reese et al. 1986; Hurtado 1994), between men and women (Huddy et al. 1997), and among Native Americans and Chinese-Americans (Weeks and Moore 1981). While these effects would not all be considered to be "racial" in character, nonetheless the mechanism appears to be very similar in all of these cases.

4   Toward a Theory of Race-of-Interviewer Effects

In general the existing research suggests that interviewers may affect how respondents answer questions in surveys, at least under certain circumstances. What is lacking, however, is a strong, modern theoretical basis for this consistent finding—in particular, existing explanations largely rely on an understanding of the survey response that predates contributions from political psychology (so-called "black box" models, of the form criticized by Lodge et al. 1990). We would suggest that rather than "donning the black mask" (Davis 1997a) as a conscious or semi-conscious response to the racial identity of the interviewer,[3] the true explanation for race-of-interviewer effects can be found in the Zaller-Feldman memory-based model of opinionation (Zaller and Feldman 1992). This model suggests that respondents to surveys are not recalling preexisting opinions in response to questions, but rather that survey respondents form opinions after the question is asked in response to survey questions based on the "considerations" that are elicited by the question asked.

We would contend that, as a natural extension to Zaller and Feldman's model, the broader context of the interview, in addition to the question itself, influences the considerations elicited from the respondent. For example, we would reasonably expect that in a hypothetical survey, if the respondents were asked to evaluate President Obama's job performance after a series of questions asking about the economy, the respondents' response to the job performance question would be based largely on economic considerations, whereas a series of questions about current international issues would lead to respondents' evaluations of the president's conduct of his office being based on the foreign policy sphere (see, for example, the existing research on question order effects: McFarland 1981; Krosnick and Alwin 1987; Schwarz et al. 1992).[4] Moreover, the script

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[3]This approach leaves it unclear whether respondents are being *more* or *less* honest with interviewers of the same race; Davis (1997a) suggests that black interviewees are giving their genuine opinions to black interviewers, but it is certainly conceivable that black respondents might be socially pressured to express opinions that conform to norms of racial solidarity and group consciousness when confronted by black interviewers. Given the broad ideological range of contemporary black political thought (Dawson 2002; Harris-Lacewell 2004, 2007), either prospect seems possible.

[4]Lodge et al. (1990) would argue that the evaluations would be formed "online" at the time of questioning, while Zaller and Feldman would argue the evaluations are largely memory-based; either way, the priming effect suggested

of the interview is not the only part of the survey experience that may prime responses by interviewees; the perceived identity of the interviewer, when one is present, may also have an effect. In particular, we believe that this interviewer identity effect is stronger when the combination of the *interviewer*'s identity, the *respondent*'s identity, and the explicit *content* of the question interact to raise the salience of the respondent's identity in the mind of the respondent, thus leading to substantially different responses when there is congruence of interviewer and respondent identity, as opposed to when the identities are disjoint.

In the context of this paper, we consider identity first and foremost in terms of African American racial identity, although the theory should equally hold in the case of other situations where there exists a group consciousness based on shared identity (such as in other racial/ethnic/national group contexts or in the cases of gender or sexual orientation). We believe this theory explains the past findings of race-of-interviewer effects, as well as the findings we present here.

5   How Does Race Matter Today?

While there is no paucity of research examining the attitudes of both blacks and whites, with the exception of the studies by Krysan and Couper (2003, 2006), research on *race-of-interviewer effects* in surveys conducted since the 1980s appears to be limited. Although it may be reasonable to assume that race-of-interviewer effects are an established fact, it may also be reasonable to believe that social and political circumstances have significantly changed since the 1980s. Additionally, their full scope as well as the degree of issue specificity has yet to be fully explored. For example, despite fears that a "Bradley effect" or "Wilder effect" might emerge in opinion polling for the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries or the 2008 general election, presidential candidate Barack Obama's support at the polls differed very little from the support level we would have projected from pre-election surveys (Hopkins 2009).

While controversies about race remain in the public consciousness, as evidenced by the role of controversial statements by Rev. Jeremiah Wright in Obama's 2008 campaign, accusations of racial insensitivity aimed at George W. Bush in the wake of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and the 2009 statement by U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder that "average Americans simply do not talk enough with each other about race" (Barrett 2009), there is a substantial risk of racial attitudes becoming more latent than expressed in public discourse, in part due to a minority president's understandable desire to avoid making his racial identity an issue and thus potentially

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here would be present.

undermine his cross-racial support (see, for example, Meier et al. 2005). Despite the relative lack of recent scholarly interest in the question of the scope of race-of-interviewer effects, nonetheless it appears worthy of investigation.

6 Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

In line with the existing research, we consider whether race-of-interviewer effects persist in telephone surveys, with particular attention to questions that would appear to have a clear racial dimension.

Our primary hypothesis is that respondents will be more likely to indicate that racism is a less serious problem to white interviewers than to non-white interviewers, and to be less likely to divulge socially undesirable opinions related to race to white interviewers than to non-white interviewers. As discussed above, while we do not believe that the interviewers—intentionally or inadvertently—are producing biased responses in the interviewees, nonetheless we expect that respondents are reacting to the (perceived) race of the interviewer they are interacting with as part of the survey. Our specific research hypotheses are as follows:

1. Black respondents will be less likely to express the belief to white interviewers that the Republican Party is reaching out to African Americans. We speculate that African Americans may be concerned that white interviewers would see an affirmative response as a potential blanket endorsement of Republican policies, both historic and current. Conversely, conversations which are seen as "behind the veil" with a non-white interviewer are likely to be seen as less fraught with implication.

2. Black respondents will be more likely to express greater acceptability of interracial marriage to white interviewers. We speculate that conversations about interracial marriage with an interviewer of another race invokes the respondent's predispositions for egalitarianism by keeping the concept in the abstract.

3. Black respondents will be more likely to express the belief to white interviewers that progress has been made for African Americans, both in the South as well as the nation as a whole. We speculate that black respondents are concerned about playing into perceived white interviewers' stereotypes about African Americans. However, we do not believe that black respondents will be any more likely to express a specific attitude to a white, versus non-white, interviewer concerning progress for other racial groups since the fear of stereotyping will be less.

4. Black respondents will be less likely to express the belief to white interviewers that blacks are currently economically worse off than whites, despite currently available data demonstrating that this is, in fact, true. We speculate that black respondents are concerned about playing into perceived white interviewers' stereotypes about African Americans.

To test these propositions, we use data collected as part of [an ongoing, commissioned survey research project conducted by an academic survey research center in the southeastern United States] in February 2009. This 69-question survey (including branches) consisted of CATI-based telephone interviews of 659 African Americans from eleven southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) conducted by the [academic survey research lab], with interviews taking place between February 6 and February 22, 2009, approximately 2–5 weeks after Barack Obama's inauguration as president. The primary motivation of this survey was to identify the reactions of African American southerners to the 2008 presidential contest, as well as investigating blacks' attitudes toward the state of the economy, racial relations in America and the South, and politics in general. [5]

A majority of interviewers were undergraduate students at [the academic institution]; however, a majority of the interviewers were paid lab employees, although some interviewers participated for class credit as students in classes taught by one of the co-authors. Regardless of experience, all interviewers were extensively trained before they were placed in the field. The interviewers included both men and women; the vast majority of interviews were conducted by either white or black interviewers. 303 interviews were conducted by (self-identified) whites, 297 by African Americans, and 21 by persons of other racial identities (classified here as non-white); the choice of classification, or the omission of interviewers with neither white nor black identity, makes no substantive difference in the findings we present here. While there was not a conscious random assignment of interviewers to respondents, the CATI system inherently randomly assigned interviewers to respondents when apportioning numbers to call to interviewers, thereby producing an appropriate experimental design for our study. As the survey was exclusively conducted by telephone, and interviewers did not identify their race or ethnicity as part of the protocol, respondents' cues of interviewer race were limited to sound cues and (potentially, in some cases) interviewers' first names.[6]

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[5]We include the exact wording of the questions used to construct variables in this paper in the appendix, below.

[6]Finkel et al. (1991, 317–18) discuss at length the processes that might lead respondents to be able to identify the interviewer's racial identity using aural cues. As discussed above, past and contemporary research in the field of psycholinguistics seems to support their explanations.

Response rates for surveys can vary greatly, and the effects of response rates on data quality is unclear. However, substantial research has demonstrated that the substantive findings differed little when comparing surveys with widely varying response rates (in some cases, the non-response in one survey was double that in a comparable survey, resulting in little variation in substantive findings; see e.g. Keeter et al. 2000; Curtin et al. 2000; Langer 2003; Abraham et al. 2006; Olson 2006; Keeter et al. 2006). Langer notes:

> Noncontact and nonresponse should not affect data quality to the extent that they occur randomly. While it is reassuring to see the limited effect of nonresponse in the studies cited above, it doesn't mean that nonresponse bias does not occur. Instead, the simple fact is that the level at which response rates do begin to affect data quality, which data are and are not affected, and the nature and significance of any effect remain to be established. (18)

When the general decline in response rates is combined with the fact that the survey reported here was an ethnically-targeted survey and not a general population survey, we are satisfied with an AAPOR response rate of 23.3% and a cooperation rate of 52.7% (The American Association for Public Opinion Research 2008).[7]

When surveying African Americans, the survey facility that conducted this research uses a stratified random-digit dialing (RDD) sample supplemented by an ethnically-targeted (Census surname-based) probability sample. The strata cut-points for the stratified RDD sample were over 55% African American population, 35–55% African American population, and under 35% African American population. Non-black respondents in the sample were screened out and diverted to a brief, alternative questionnaire, the results of which were not analyzed in this paper.

We present multivariate tests using binary logit models (Aldrich and Nelson 1984) of responses to each question, incorporating response weighting based on the survey design and controlling for several respondent-specific factors in addition to interviewer race, to ensure the robustness of our findings given the lack of random assignment to interviewers in this research design. A number of potentially-confounding variables were introduced as controls; they are listed in the appendix. In some models, responses were converted to dichotomous variables as follows:

Economic conditions Coded 1 for respondents who indicated the economy was "worse" for blacks than for other groups; 0 for respondents who suggested the economy was the same or better.

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[7]The response rate and cooperation rate were calculated using respective formulae 1, including fully-complete interviews only.

Republican attempts to attract black voters Coded 1 for respondents who responded "yes" to the question, "Do you feel that the Republican Party is currently working to attract African American voters?"; 0 for responses of "no" and "not sure."

Interracial marriage Coded 1 for respondents who classified interracial marriage as "strongly acceptable"; 0 for other response categories. (We collapsed the other categories because "strongly acceptable" was the response of a majority of respondents; an ordinal model using all response categories produces similar results at the cost of less efficient parameter estimates.)

Progress for blacks and others Coded 1 for respondents who said there had been "a lot of real progress"; 0 otherwise ("there hasn't been a lot of real progress" or "not sure").

Cases with missing data were omitted from the analysis. Both the chi-square tests of association and logit models were analyzed using the per-respondent sampling weights associated with the survey design. Analyses were conducted in R 2.11.0 using the `memisc`, `survey`, and `Zelig` packages (R Development Core Team 2013; Elff 2013; Lumley 2004, 2010; Imai et al. 2010).

7   Results

Somewhat surprisingly, our results reflect a great deal of continuity with research from previous generations that identified substantial differences in blacks' responses to interviewers based on the interviewer's race, at least in the case of racially-valenced questions. To further illustrate these differences, in each table we pair racially-valenced items with other questions from the study that reflected similar social or political concerns, but lacked a clear racial cue in the question's phrasing or frame. We generally find statistically and substantively-significant effects of the interviewer's race on questions with racially-valenced content, even in the presence of statistical controls for potentially confounding effects; furthermore, these race-of-interviewer effects usually (but not always) disappear when the racial cue is absent.

7.1   Generalized Race-of-Interviewer Effects

In their report on the 1968 Detroit Area Study, which they consider "a basically racial questionnaire," Schuman and Converse (1971) find that 74% of the questions did "not show reliable differences by race of interviewer" regardless of their racial content, and 83% of the "nonracial questions" displayed no race-of-interviewer effects (50–51). If the overwhelming majority of non-racially valenced questions in an explicitly racially-oriented survey taken 11 months after race-related riots and two weeks after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King

failed to show race-of-interviewer effects, there is every reason to believe that non-racially valenced questions would fail to show race-of-interviewer effects 3 to 5 weeks after the election of the first African American president.

Nonetheless, race-of-interviewer effects did appear in responses to 17% of the non-racially valenced questions in the 1968 survey. Additionally, Davis (1997a) discovered race-of-interviewer effects in responses to questions that were not overtly racially valenced, such as feeling thermometer ratings of Ronald Reagan (313–15). Hence we did test for the presence of race-of-interviewer effects in non-racial questions as well.

In general we found that most questions that lacked a racial component failed to demonstrate any race-of-interviewer effect. Pearson's chi-square test of association demonstrates that the interviewer's race did not substantially affect responses to a question on attitudes toward having children out of wedlock ($n = 614$; $\chi^2(4) \approx 3.62$) or attitudes toward the morality of abortion ($n = 610$; $\chi^2(3) \approx 4.34$); we also found no significant differences in the respondents' choice of the most important issue facing the country ($n = 620$; $\chi^2(24) \approx 27.42$). However, we did identify a distinction in which respondents were substantially—approximately ten percentage points—more likely to approve of Congress' performance when asked by a white interviewer; interestingly, the rates of *disapproval* were almost identical, while respondents to non-white interviewers were more likely to give a "not sure" response ($n = 616$; $\chi^2(2) \approx 9.09$; $p \approx 0.011$).

7.2   Perceptions of the Republican Party

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 1 demonstrates that even when controlling for a host of control variables, speaking with a white interviewer had a statistically significant, negative impact on whether a respondent acknowledged G.O.P. outreach efforts; *ceteris paribus*, the presence of a white interviewer is estimated to reduce the chances of reporting that the Republicans are trying to attract black voters by nearly 40%. Whether respondents truly believe there have been legitimate outreach efforts or not, the significant difference in responses to white versus non-white interviewers offers evidence of a race-of-interviewer effect.

One might argue that the Republican Party *has* been working on reaching out to African American voters. Whether these efforts were seen as legitimate or not, however, is another matter. In recent years, the Republican Party has made at least a cursory effort to appeal to black voters. Such attempts include: President George W. Bush nominating General Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice for high-level cabinet positions; former Republican National Committee

chairman Ken Mehlman appearing before largely black audiences to apologize for the party's use the "southern strategy" (Benedetto 2005); running black gubernatorial candidates in both Ohio and Pennsylvania; and electing former Maryland lieutenant governor Michael Steele to serve as chairman of the RNC just days after the inauguration of the first African American president.

While it is true that the G.O.P. has reached out to African Americans, it is also true that the party's brand is tainted as far as many blacks are concerned. Years after Nixon exploited racial hostilities to win white support, some office-seeking Republicans became particularly adroit at using both racialized and non-racialized gestures, code words, and policy proposals to continue such appeals. For instance, Reagan's "ostensibly neutral language" during the 1980s became the basis for articulating opposition to issues like affirmative action and busing without appearing intolerant or anti-black "to whites" (Edsall and Edsall 1991). Similarly, George H.W. Bush played to white racial resentment and fear of black crime by making use of the story of an escaped inmate, Willie Horton (Kinder and Sanders 1996).[8] Recent efforts to re-brand the Republican Party were undermined—among other things—by the federal government's mishandling of the Hurricane Katrina crisis, as a vast majority of blacks believed that "racial bias was a factor in slowing the government's response" (Saad 2005). All of this suggests that black respondents might be hesitant to acknowledge Republican attempts to woo black voters out of fear that a white interviewer might interpret such recognition as an endorsement of the party. It appears that respondents were more willing to acknowledge the outreach effort of Republicans, successful or not, to non-white interviewers. Interpersonal interaction with non-white interviewers may be less fraught with concerns of misinterpretation of motive. This is consistent with earlier work which suggests that blacks, and even whites, sometimes express different viewpoints when such conversations are thought to occur within the confines of "the veil," that is, between group members (Kinder and Sanders 1996).

We also found that more educated respondents were *less* likely to perceive efforts by the Republicans to reach out to blacks (inconsistent with suggestions that greater education leads to more political awareness, although potentially consistent with stronger liberalism and Democratic attachment among more highly-educated African Americans). Conversely, respondents in counties and Virginia independent cities with a greater black population share were more likely to perceive Republican outreach, perhaps because of a need for Republican candidates to attract non-white support to win elections in those contexts.

Notably, the race-of-interviewer effect is absent when asking about which party is better

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[8]In May 1988, Horton, while on furlough from a Massachusetts prison, escaped to Maryland, raped a woman, and stabbed her companion. The Bush campaign used this story to launch a pointed critique of then Massachusetts governor and presidential candidate Michael Dukakis.

for the economy, suggesting that respondents were not simply tailoring their responses to white interviewers to comport with stereotypically-white partisan predispositions (or vice-versa); the absence of a race-of-interviewer effect is also robust to the complement of control variables used in the more racially-loaded question.

7.3 Opinions about Interracial Marriage

[Table 2 about here.]

Interracial marriages between blacks and whites in the United States, even today, are rare. Today, despite the nation's growing diversity, black-white marriages comprise around nine percent of all black marriages and account for about one percent of all white unions (Fryer 2007; Passel et al. 2010).[9] In our survey, an overwhelming majority of black respondents said that interracial marriages were "acceptable." This was true whether they were talking to white or non-white callers. The logit model in Table 2 shows that speaking with a white interviewer has a positive statistically significant impact on showing strong approval of interracial marriage, even in the presence of a number of controls for likely confounding factors. Given the particular pall of history cast upon notions of relations between black males and white females in the South, this model also included a control for when a male respondent was taking the survey from a white female interviewer. Based on the results of this model, we would expect respondents to be approximately 73% more likely to express the position that interracial marriage was "strongly acceptable" if interviewed by a white individual.

Other researchers have found that friendship and social intimacy are significant factors when explaining black attitudes on interracial marriage (Jacobson and Johnson 2006; Fryer 2007). That is, under favorable circumstances, contact between blacks and whites can create opportunities for social associations which, in turn, lead to meaningful relations that might reduce discrimination and stereotyping.

We also identified other important factors in the model. While there was no "third rail" effect for the interaction between interviewer gender and interviewees' gender, we did find that older and female respondents were less sympathetic towards interracial marriage than younger and male respondents;[10] respondents in communities with a greater black population also appeared to be less approving of interracial marriage.

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[9]According to Passel et al. (2010), even among interracial marriages white-black unions are relatively uncommon, accounting for only 11% of new interracial marriages in 2008.

[10]This finding is consistent with research by Jacobson and Johnson, who find that "men are more likely to approve of interracial marriage than are women. Furthermore, those men who attend college are significantly more likely to approve of interracial marriage than those men who have not. The contact African American men have in attending

In summary, it is possible that African Americans, when engaged in abstract conversations about interracial marriage with white callers, offer more egalitarian viewpoints on the issue than in insular conversations with non-whites wherein they might contemplate the practical implications of such choices (Harris-Lacewell 2003; Smith and Seltzer 1992).

When comparing these findings to those on a question on homosexuality, where the question lacks an obvious racial dimension, we again find that the race-of-interviewer effect is absent. This finding again suggests that the hypothesized interviewer effects are confined to questions tied directly and explicitly to race.

7.4   Perceptions of Racial Progress

[Table 3 about here.]

The logit models presented in Table 3 suggest that blacks offered more optimistic responses about racial progress in America when interviewed by whites. Even in the presence of control variables, speaking with a white interviewer had a positive impact on whether a respondent reported that they believed there had been a lot of real progress at getting rid of discrimination in the South and in America. The results for the race of interviewer in the South model approach statistical significance, but the results for the race of interviewer variable in the America model are highly statistically significant; interviewees were approximately 36% more likely to report "a lot of real progress" in the South, and 83% more likely to report national-level progress, to whites than non-whites.

It is possible that black respondents offered a somewhat rosier outlook on racial progress when interviewed by whites because they did not want to be seen as whiners. Some scholars argue that, for many whites, race and racism remain problems only because of the behavior of racial and ethnic minorities themselves (Essed 1991). "Most whites believe that if blacks and other minorities would just stop thinking about the past, work hard, and complain less (particularly about racial discrimination), then Americans of all hues could 'all get along'" (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 1). While the current milieu has made it unpopular to overtly convey bigoted views, it also has made it difficult for minorities to raise allegations of discrimination without being seen as "oversensitive," self-serving, or "playing the race card." Rather than acknowledge that racism—structural racism, in particular—can at least partially explain persistent gaps in the economic and social status between whites and racial minorities, "whites rationalize minorities'

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college appears to increase their acceptance of interracial marriage more than it does for African American women" (2006, 580–82).

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contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations." (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 2) Thus, it is clear that black and white Americans have a different read on the power of race and that black respondents might have this in mind when speaking with white interviewers (Davis 1997a). However, without the threat of triggering stereotypes against one's own group when speaking about "other minority groups," the race-of-interviewer effect disappears.

The models of perceptions of racial progress for blacks also exhibit strong gender effects, with female respondents being 39% less likely to report progress in the South than men, and 30% less likely to report progress in the nation as a whole. We also found that mixed-race respondents were also much less likely to report national-level progress, with a 39% lesser chance of perceiving progress.

7.5   On the National Economy

[Table 4 about here.]

The logit model in Table 4 shows that blacks also appeared more optimistic about the economy when interviewed by whites, when including controls for full-time employment and concerns over losing one's job, as well as the controls included in previous models. The race of interviewer variable remains significant and in the expected direction; we found that respondents were 35% less likely to report the economy was "worse" for blacks to whites than non-whites.

Considering the status of African Americans in the current economic atmosphere is no simple task. An assessment of the position of blacks in the national economy indicates that there has been both advancement and continued adversity over the last few decades. While many African Americans today are in a much stronger position than their ancestors, many continue to experience unemployment, underemployment, and poverty at much higher rates than their white counterparts (Wilson 1996; Lacy 2007). In many respects, the current recession has exacerbated black privation. Consequently, a wealth gap exists between blacks and whites that can be traced back to discriminatory practices in both the public and private sectors (Shapiro 2004; Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Thus, in a comparative sense, things really *are* worse for African Americans.

Despite the empirical reality, however, black respondents were more likely to tell white interviewers that the nation's current economic environment was the same for both blacks and whites. Similarly, they were less likely to tell white callers that conditions were worse for African Americans. Part of this may be rooted in blacks being aware of how they are sometimes viewed by whites. Public opinion researchers have found that blacks and whites oftentimes see things

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differently when the subjects include race, opportunity, and discrimination (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Bonilla-Silva 2006). In addition, blacks are the racial group that the public most readily associates with poverty and many whites view blacks as undeserving of assistance because of the assumption that they "lack a work ethic" (Gilens 1999; Williams 2003). Therefore, it is again feasible that black respondents, aware of both perception and reality, do not want to be labeled as complainers in the eyes of their white interviewers.

The model also revealed that older respondents were substantially more likely to perceive the economy as worse for African Americans, as were more educated respondents; respondents of mixed race, on the other hand, were significantly *less* likely (48% less likely) to report the economy was worse for blacks than other Americans.

Again, we find that when examining a similar question without an explicit racial dimension—in this case, on the state of the economy in the country as a whole—the race-of-interviewer effect seen in the racially-valenced question is absent. Thus we are very confident that it is the interaction of the interviewer's race and racially-valenced questions that matters, rather than simply the interviewer's race alone.

8   Conclusions

In this paper, using newly-collected data, we found that race-of-interviewer effects persist in responses to racially-valenced questions in public opinion surveys. Some of these effects are quite robust and persist even after controlling for several confounding factors. Moreover, the direction of these effects cannot be disentangled from the context of particular issues or types of questions. This implies that in future research, race-of-interviewer effects need to be remediated on an issue-by-issue basis, but only on particularly racially-valenced questions and, even then, only when the racial valence directly relates to the perceived differences between the race of the respondent and that of the interviewer. The robustness and multi-directionality of the race-of-interviewer effects presented here may prove to have far-reaching implications as researchers look to dig deeper into racial attitudes as we move deeper into the Obama presidency. The findings are also generally consistent with our theory and other contemporary models of opinionation (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Alvarez and Brehm 2002) that suggest that opinions are generally generated "online" in response to survey questions rather than being formed prior to the interview, suggesting that race-of-interviewer effects are largely operating at a subconscious or unconscious level.

As survey research moves increasingly to the online, impersonal setting, one question

researchers will have to tackle is whether or not these interview modes are fully capable of capturing opinions of members of historically disadvantaged groups. If it is true that minority respondents are less candid with non-minority interviewers, and respondents perceive Internet-based surveys as being inherently part of the "outgroup," these interview modes may omit valuable nuance in the expression of minority opinions, whether due to conscious efforts on the behalf of respondents to obfuscate their true beliefs to outsiders or a more subtle process like the one we suggest here. It would thus perhaps be valuable to see if there are ways we can deliberately inject interviewer effects into surveys, as Krysan and Couper (2006) attempted to do; with the advances in web technology it may be feasible to have respondents listen to, or view, questions presented by identifiable interviewers in a more natural way than was the case in their attempts to manipulate respondents' perceptions of the interviewing party.

Finally we would also suggest the need for further research on interviewer effects is needed, in part to determine whether the conventional wisdom remains true for groups other than African Americans. Given the seeming disappearance or decline of the "Bradley/Wilder effect" among white voters, it is possible that interviewer effects are more present for some, but less or others and that the effects re-emerge only on certain issues. The increasing proportion and political importance of Americans of Hispanic and Asian origin also suggests a need for further investigation of interviewer effects beyond the traditional black/white dichotomy in the study of American politics.

A   Appendix: Wording of Questions Included in the Analysis

Note: not all of the questions appearing in the original survey were analyzed in this paper.

- "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the United States Congress is handling its job?" Approve/Disapprove/Not Sure (vol.).

- "What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?" (Open-ended, coded by caller.).

- "Do you feel that the Republican Party is currently working to attract African American voters?" Yes/No/Not Sure (vol.).

- "Regardless of how you usually vote, do you think the Republican party or the Democratic party is more likely to ensure a strong economy?" Republican/Democratic/Both (vol.)/Neither (vol.).

- "[S]ex between two adults of the same sex. Is that acceptable or unacceptable? [CALLER: wait for answer] Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?" Strongly acceptable/somewhat acceptable/somewhat unacceptable/strongly unacceptable/don't know or unsure (vol.).

- "[M]arriages between blacks and whites. Is that acceptable or unacceptable? [CALLER: wait for answer] Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?" Strongly acceptable/somewhat acceptable/somewhat unacceptable/strongly unacceptable/don't know or unsure (vol.).

- "[H]aving a child without being married. Is that acceptable or unacceptable? [CALLER: wait for answer] Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?" Strongly acceptable/somewhat acceptable/somewhat unacceptable/strongly unacceptable/don't know or unsure (vol.).

- "Do you think abortion should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?" Legal under any/legal under certain/illegal under all/not sure (vol.).

- "Some people say that since the 1960s there has been a lot of real progress in getting rid of racial discrimination against blacks *in the South*. Others say that there hasn't been much real progress for blacks over that time. Which do you agree with more? Would you say there's been a lot of real progress getting rid of racial discrimination or hasn't there been much real progress?" A lot of real progress/hasn't been much real progress/not sure (vol.).

- "Now thinking about the country as a whole, some people say that since the 1960s there has been a lot of real progress in getting rid of racial discrimination against blacks *in America*. Others say that there hasn't been much real progress for blacks over that time. Which do you agree with more? Would you say there's been a lot of real progress getting rid of racial discrimination or hasn't there been much real progress?" A lot of real progress/hasn't been much real progress/not sure (vol.).

- "What about for other minority groups? Would you say there's been a lot of real progress getting rid of discrimination in America or hasn't there been much real progress?" A lot of real progress/hasn't been much real progress/not sure (vol.).

- "Right now, do you think that economic conditions in the country as a whole are getting better or getting worse?" Getting better/getting worse.

- "Thinking about the economy, do you think things are better for blacks than other groups, about the same for blacks, or worse for blacks in the current economic environment?" Better/about the same/worse.

- "How concerned are you about the possibility of losing your job in the next year? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not at all concerned?" (Additional options: don't work outside the home/retired/unemployed.)

- "How would you describe your political beliefs, Very Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Moderate, Somewhat Conservative, [or] Very Conservative?"

- "Which of the following best describes your regional identity?" (Rotated:) non-southern/converted southerner/native southerner/not sure (vol.).

- "Do you consider yourself mixed race?" Yes/no or not sure.

- "Which of the following most accurately describes you? Are you employed full-time outside the home, employed part-time outside the home, retired, a homemaker, unable to work due to disability, or a full-time student who may or may not also work?"

- "What is the highest level of education you have completed?" Less than high school/high school graduate or GED/some college/two-year or tech college grad/four-year college degree/post graduate.

B   Appendix: Control Variables

The following potentially-confounding variables were introduced as controls:

Respondent's gender (female) Coded by the interviewer at the conclusion of the interview; 1 for female respondents, 0 for male respondents.

Age The respondent's self-reported age, in years.

County percent black Percentage of the respondent's county's[11] population that is African American, according to July 1, 2008 Census Bureau estimates. This variable was introduced to account for the varying racial contexts of survey respondents.

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[11]Or Census Bureau county-equivalent: includes consolidated city-counties in several states, parishes (and consolidated city-parishes) in Louisiana, and independent cities in Virginia.

Native southerner Coded 1 for respondents who considered themselves "native southerners"; 0 for respondents who did not grow up in the south.

Mixed-race respondent Coded 1 for respondents who self-identified as mixed-race; 0 for respondents who identified as black only.

Educational attainment An ordinal scale, coded with the following values:

1. Less than high school.
2. High school graduate or GED.
3. Some college.
4. Two-year/technical college graduate.
5. Four-year college degree.
6. Post-graduate study or degree.

The following explanatory variables were only included in certain models:

Resp. fears losing job Coded 1 for respondents who reported being "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about losing their job in the next year; coded 0 for respondents who were less concerned, did not work (or only worked at home), or who were unemployed. (Economic conditions model only.)

Resp. employed full-time Coded 1 for respondents who reported being employed full-time outside the home; 0 otherwise. (Economic conditions model only.)

Male interviewed by white female Coded 1 for respondents who were male and interviewed by a white female; coded 0 for all female respondents and all males interviewed by non-white and/or male interviewers. This variable was added to the interracial marriage model (only) due to the particularly fraught history of intimate interactions between white females and black males in the South (including most infamously the cases of the "Scottsboro Boys" and Emmett Till), and to account for potential gender-of-interviewer effects (Huddy et al. 1997).

Resp. religiosity scale A scale from 1–12 constructed from responses to questions on the frequency of church attendance and prayer by the respondent, with higher values representing a greater degree of religious adherence.

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Table 1: Logit models: attitudes toward the Republican Party

	GOP outreach to blacks	Dems not better for econ
Constant	−0.820	−1.925**
	(0.505)	(0.622)
White interviewer (dummy)	−0.521*	−0.295
	(0.202)	(0.255)
Female respondent (dummy)	−0.099	−0.152
	(0.204)	(0.258)
Respondent's age	−0.004	−0.024**
	(0.006)	(0.009)
Black pct. pop. in county	0.015*	0.003
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Native southerner (dummy)	−0.024	−0.331
	(0.243)	(0.288)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	−0.229	0.108
	(0.255)	(0.322)
Educational attainment	−0.166*	0.072
	(0.065)	(0.086)
Resp. lib-con self-identification	0.170†	0.377***
	(0.088)	(0.112)
N	564	541
Likelihood-ratio	75.616	55.569
p	0.000	0.000

- Dependent variables: G.O.P. is trying to attract black support = 1; G.O.P. equally good or better for the economy = 1.

- Entries are probability-weighted binary logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

- $\dagger : p \leq .10; * \leq .05; ** \leq .01, *** \leq .001$.

Table 2: Logit models: tolerance of interracial marriage and homosexuality.

	Interracial marriage	Homosexual conduct
Constant	2.175***	1.224*
	(0.555)	(0.584)
Male interviewed by white female (dummy)	0.026	
	(0.310)	
White interviewer (dummy)	0.580*	0.106
	(0.247)	(0.217)
Female respondent (dummy)	−0.540*	0.592*
	(0.242)	(0.232)
Respondent's age	−0.013*	−0.005
	(0.007)	(0.006)
Black pct. pop. in county	−0.009	0.007
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Native southerner (dummy)	−0.330	0.069
	(0.257)	(0.255)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	0.362	0.327
	(0.281)	(0.269)
Educational attainment	0.069	−0.091
	(0.065)	(0.066)
Resp. lib-con self-identification	−0.102	−0.074
	(0.088)	(0.090)
Resp. religiosity scale (1–12)		−0.220***
		(0.037)
N	563	487
Likelihood-ratio	78.430	208.257
p	0.000	0.000

- Dependent variable: interracial marriage is "strongly acceptable" = 1; homosexual conduct is not "strongly unacceptable" = 1.

- Entries are probability-weighted binary logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

- $\dagger : p \leq .10; * \leq .05; ** \leq .01, *** \leq .001$.

Table 3: Logit models: perceptions of racial progress.

	Progress in South	Progress in USA	Progress for others
Constant	0.337	0.212	0.400
	(0.471)	(0.460)	(0.457)
White interviewer (dummy)	0.408*	0.647***	0.229
	(0.186)	(0.188)	(0.186)
Female respondent (dummy)	−0.466*	−0.307	−0.262
	(0.190)	(0.195)	(0.188)
Respondent's age	0.001	−0.001	−0.004
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Black pct. pop. in county	−0.002	−0.004	−0.008
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Native southerner (dummy)	0.395†	0.330	0.086
	(0.224)	(0.223)	(0.222)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	−0.190	−0.437†	−0.208
	(0.243)	(0.240)	(0.242)
Educational attainment	−0.038	0.022	−0.009
	(0.058)	(0.060)	(0.059)
Resp. lib-con self-identification	−0.096	0.025	−0.065
	(0.079)	(0.082)	(0.078)
N	567	566	564
Likelihood-ratio	72.803	80.553	61.044
p	0.000	0.000	0.000

- Dependent variable: "a lot of real progress" for blacks/others = 1.

- Entries are probability-weighted binary logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

- $†: p \leq .10; * \leq .05; ** \leq .01, *** \leq .001$.

Table 4: Logit models: is the economy getting worse?

	For blacks	In general
Constant	−0.800	−0.655
	(0.580)	(0.645)
White interviewer (dummy)	−0.420*	−0.044
	(0.202)	(0.248)
Female respondent (dummy)	−0.355†	0.152
	(0.206)	(0.258)
Respondent's age	0.018**	0.021**
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Black pct. pop. in county	−0.007	−0.010
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Native southerner (dummy)	−0.018	0.242
	(0.240)	(0.301)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	−0.788**	−0.031
	(0.261)	(0.300)
Educational attainment	0.246***	0.340***
	(0.068)	(0.087)
Resp. lib-con self-identification	−0.140	−0.050
	(0.086)	(0.101)
Resp. fears losing job (dummy)	0.017	0.045
	(0.224)	(0.274)
Resp. employed full-time (dummy)	0.269	0.895**
	(0.217)	(0.276)
N	534	492
Likelihood-ratio	103.231	97.801
p	0.000	0.000

- Dependent variable: economy is worse for African Americans than others = 1; economy is getting worse = 1.

- Entries are probability-weighted binary logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

- $† : p \le .10; * \le .05; ** \le .01, *** \le .001$.