President Obama on the Ballot: Referendum Voting and Racial Spillover in the 2014 Midterm Elections

Matthew Luttig
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Colgate University
mluttig[at]colgate.edu

Matthew Motta
PhD Candidate
University of Minnesota
motta018[at]umn.edu

Abstract:

The 2014 elections were widely viewed as a referendum on the presidency of Barack Obama. Republicans ran against the incumbent president, and many view the Republican Party's victories in 2014 as a mass rejection of Barack Obama's policies. We argue that this account of the 2014 elections is incomplete. We advance the theory of racial spillover—that associating an attitude object with President Obama causes public opinion to polarize on the basis of racial attitudes—to explain both vote choice and referendum voting in the 2014 elections. In an analysis of the CCES and an original survey, we show that congressional vote choice was strongly racialized in 2014. We go on to show that perceptions of the election as a referendum on Barack Obama were also racialized, and that these perceptions mediated the link between racial animus and 2014 congressional vote choice. This represents the first study to show that racialized congressional evaluations continued into 2014 and we provide direct evidence that attitudes about Obama strengthened the effect of racial animus on congressional vote choice. We conclude by discussing the implications for referendum voting, racial spillover, and the 2014 midterm elections.

Word Count: 8,646

Key Words: elections, voting behavior, Congress, racial priming, Barack Obama

"Make no mistake, [my] policies are on the ballot, every single one of them" (Barack Obama, 10/02/2014). By all accounts—including Barack Obama's own—the 2014 elections represented a referendum on the incumbent President, his governing performance, and his policies. The Republican Party's main campaign theme was that the 2014 election was a referendum on President Obama. Democrats, meanwhile, tried to shift the narrative to other issues. Indeed, David Axelrod even called Barack Obama's comments in the above speech a "mistake" because they played directly into the Republican Party's message during the 2014 elections. But the damage had been done. In total, the Republican Party gained 13 net seats in the House and picked up 9 seats in the Senate in 2014. As Jacobson nicely summarizes, (2015, 2), "Republican strategists sought to make the 2014 elections a referendum on the Obama administration, and they succeeded."

The conventional wisdom—at least within the media and among political elites—is that the public in 2014 reacted against Barack Obama's *policies*, in particular his executive actions on immigration. And this interpretation continues to be invoked by political actors today. For example, in explaining their refusal to consider Barack Obama's nomination to the Supreme Court, Senators Mitch McConnell and Chuck Grassley argued that a "lame-duck president whose priorities and policies [the electorate] just rejected in the most recent national election" should not decide who to place on the Supreme Court.[1]

This interpretation shares similarities with scholarly accounts of the 2014 elections, particularly those that draw from the referendum theory of midterm elections which states that midterms are a referendum on the incumbent president's governing performance (Fiorina 1981; Jacobson 2009; Tufte 1975). Thus, presidential approval and the state of the economy, in

[1] Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/28/opinion/let-voters-decide-the-courts-future.html

particular, provide a great deal of explanatory power in midterm congressional elections. And these factors can surely help us understand as well why the Republican Party did so well in the 2014 elections (e.g., Panagapolous 2014).

But we would note that these factors appear insufficient to understand the size and scope of Republican victories in 2014. Republicans performed better than many forecasts that rely on economic conditions and presidential approval predicted in the 2014 elections (see Jacobson 2015, 3). Thus, the state of the economy and presidential approval—the traditional ingredients of outcomes in midterm elections—cannot alone explain what happened in 2014.

Our paper provides an additional explanation for the 2014 elections that helps account for why the Republican Party over-performed expectations and that also provides an alternative view about the nature and consequences of perceiving one's vote as a referendum on President Obama. Specifically, we build on the theory of racial spillover (Tesler 2012; 2013; 2016a; Tesler and Sears 2010) to argue that racial animosity had a pronounced effect on both, (a) perceptions of the election as a referendum on President Obama as well as, (b) vote choice, in the 2014 congressional elections. Furthermore, we argue that referendum voting served an important role in helping voters link their racial attitudes with vote choice in the 2014 elections. That is, referendum voting mediated racialized congressional voting in 2014. For voters who did not see their vote as a referendum on Barack Obama, racial negativity had significantly less influence on vote choice. Thus, we argue that referendum voting in the 2014 elections was partly a racialized attitude that served to link racial animosity with candidate choice. In short, we argue that racialized perceptions of Barack Obama spilled over into congressional vote choice in the 2014 midterm elections.

These findings echo what happened during the 2010 midterm elections. Like in 2014, Republicans over-performed expectations in 2010. As Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2012) note about the 2010 midterm elections:

> the models used to estimate the 2010 elections share three things in common. All presume that the fate of the president's party at the midterm depends upon economic performance. All ignore the fact that the president in 2010 is of African descent. And all seriously underestimate the magnitude of the Democratic midterm disaster.

As both Luttig (2016) and Tesler (2016a) argue, one explanation for the disconnect between the forecasts and the outcomes in the 2010 elections was the unusual influence of racial antipathy on congressional vote choice in that election. Thus, in all midterm elections from 1986-2006, racial resentment had no effect on vote choice; in 2010, racial resentment had a substantial influence on congressional vote choice. We argue that, much like in 2010, the "usual suspects" in models of individual-level vote choice (e.g., party identification and ideology) cannot completely explain the 2014 midterm elections, and that we need to account for unique "short-term" factors like the priming of racial antagonism in the Obama era to explain voting patterns in the 2014 elections—even though Obama himself was not directly on the ballot.

Our first contribution, then, is to demonstrate that vote choice in the 2014 elections was racialized. In contrast to midterm elections from 1986-2006, racial resentment has a large and significant effect on vote choice in 2014, much like in 2010. While this represents another case of racial spillover in the Obama era of American politics, we would note that this finding is by no means preordained. For example, Hajnal (2007) shows that race often becomes *less* predictive of vote choice (for black mayors) in consecutive elections, which may lead to the expectation of decreased racial voting in 2014 relative to the midterm election of 2010 (see also

Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990). Thus, our study represents the first to demonstrate that the trend of racialized congressional vote choice continued—rather than abated—in 2014.

Furthermore, research suggests that Obama's race is not "chronically accessible," but can be deactivated in response to political communications by elite actors (Luttig and Callaghan 2016). Given that Democratic candidates tried to distance themselves from Obama in 2014, they may have succeeded in making racial considerations less accessible. However, we show that vote choice was heavily racialized in 2014. Thus, we demonstrate that vote choice and other political evaluations continued to be racialized in 2014, even though there are multiple theoretical reasons to think that the influence of race may have declined in 2014 relative to earlier in Obama's presidency.

Our second contribution is to show that "referendum voting"—i.e., perceiving one's vote as a referendum on President Obama—was a racialized attitude in 2014, and did not solely reflect voters' policy preferences (as the media often claimed in 2014). Nor was referendum voting solely a reflection of voters' evaluations of President Obama's governing performance.[2] Rather, we argue that referendum voting can *also* be—and was, in 2014—rooted in less ideologically substantive racialized evaluations of the incumbent President. Thus, we argue that referendum voting may not always operate as a normatively desirable mechanism of electoral accountability. Rather, referendum voting can also activate the public's latent predispositions, many of which are "group-centric" rather than ideological or a response to the nature of the times (e.g., Converse 1964).

[2] We do not dismiss the possibility that evaluations of an incumbent Presidents' performance may affect evaluations of congressional vote choice as a referendum. We simply identify a unique factor shaping referendum perceptions in the 2014 elections.

Finally, our third contribution is to show that perceiving one's vote as a referendum on Barack Obama mediated the link between racial resentment and vote choice in 2014. In the absence of experimental evidence, this mediating pathway provides strong observational support for our claim that widespread perceptions of the 2014 elections as a referendum on Barack Obama *caused* racial antagonism to spillover into vote choice in 2014. Our use of a direct survey question about whether or not respondents perceived the election as a referendum on President Obama advances existing literature on racial spillover in congressional elections by showing that the process of mentally linking congressional candidate evaluations with views of President Obama—and not some other factor—has led to a greater racialization of congressional elections in recent years.

In sum, this paper, (a) shows that racial antagonism played a sizeable role in vote choice among White voters in 2014, (b) highlights a novel mechanism by which 2014 congressional vote choice became racialized via perceptions of the election as a referendum on Barack Obama, and (c) documents some limits of referendum voting as a mechanism of democratic accountability.

Referendum Voting and the Potential for Racial Spillover in the 2014 Midterm Elections

As documented by numerous scholars, evaluations of incumbent presidents powerfully shape vote choice in U.S. midterm elections (Aldrich et al. 2014; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Fiorina 1981; Jacobson 2009; Kernell 1977; Tufte 1975). Jacobson's (2009) "referendum model" of midterm elections illustrates the strength of the referendum component to midterm elections by producing fairly accurate aggregate estimates of midterm election outcomes only on the basis of the unemployment rate, the president's job approval rating, and the number of seats held by the President's party.

In recent years, midterm elections have become increasingly nationalized, as district and state-wide voting in House and Senate elections are more highly correlated with district and state-wide voting for presidential candidates (e.g., Abramowitz and Webster 2016; see also Knotts and Ragusa 2016). At the individual level, too, more voters perceive their vote for congress as a referendum—both in support and opposition—on the incumbent president and/or their party. Jacobson (2011, 35) illustrates this growth in referendum voting over time, and shows that in 2010 56 percent of the electorate viewed their vote as a referendum on Barack Obama (27% for the President, 29% against the President). Weisberg (2011) too notes that the 2010 midterm elections were widely seen as a referendum on the first two years of Barack Obama's presidency. This centrality of Barack Obama in the public's general political evaluations in 2010 contributed to the heightened effect of racial animosity on congressional vote choice in that election (Luttig 2016; Tesler 2016a).

This referendum component to midterm elections was also strong in 2014. In an original survey collected by YouGov between October 23-30, 2014 (N=1,200), and following the question wording used by Gallup, we asked respondents, "Will your vote for a candidate be made in order to send a message that you SUPPORT Barack Obama, to send a message that you OPPOSE Barack Obama, or will you NOT be sending a message about Barack Obama with your vote?" All told, we find that *59 percent of White respondents* (24 percent in support, 35 percent in opposition) viewed their vote as a referendum on Barack Obama. These numbers are consistent with other results obtained by polling organizations.[3] In short, recent midterm elections, including the 2014 elections, contain record numbers of "referendum voters" (Jacobson 2011).

[3] For example, see Gallup: http://www.gallup.com/poll/178043/obama-factor-2014-vote-similar-2010.aspx

In theory, referendum voting may have a number of positive benefits as a mechanism of electoral judgment. By punishing or rewarding the incumbent president's party, voters can hold presidents accountable for their performance in office. As a result, presidents should be motivated to maintain a high approval rating in anticipation that their party will suffer in midterm elections if the public views their performance negatively or if they adopt policies out of touch with a majority of the electorate.

Despite the potential for referendum voting to improve electoral accountability between elites and the masses, we argue that referendum voting may also be subject to the same biases and shortfalls that affect electoral decision-making more generally. For example, perceptions of incumbents' performance may be a *product of* preexisting affect towards the incumbent rather than a *cause of* incumbent evaluations (e.g., Lenz 2013). Voters may also overweight recent performance relative to overall performance (Achen and Bartels 2004; Huber et al. 2012), and even incorporate states of the world unrelated to the incumbent's performance into their referendum judgments (e.g., Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010; Huber et al. 2012).

Most importantly for our purposes, we argue that referendum evaluations may reflect the general "group-centric" nature of mass belief systems and the limits of voters' ideological capabilities (e.g., Converse 1964; Kinder 2006; Nelson and Kinder 1996). Research has historically shown that group evaluations are central to the political beliefs of the American voter. Attitudes toward and prejudice against racial groups, in particular, play an important role in both public opinion (e.g., Gilens 1999; Hurwitz and Peffley 2005; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Kam 2010; Winter 2008) and electoral choice (e.g., Citrin, Green and Sears 1990; Hajnal 2007; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino et al. 2002; Sears et al. 1980).

This group-centric aspect of mass political reasoning may also shape "referendum voting," especially when the target of referendum evaluations is President Obama. As numerous scholars have documented, "group-centric" considerations (specifically feelings about African Americans and racial prejudice) are central to voters' evaluations of Barack Obama as well as their vote choice in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections (Clarke et al. 2015; Highton 2011; Jackman and Vavreck 2010; Jacobson 2015; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Pasek et al. 2009; 2014; Piston 2010; Schaffner 2011; Sides and Vavreck 2013; Stephens-Davidowitz 2014; Tesler 2016a; Tesler and Sears 2010; Weisberg and Devine 2010; Weisberg 2015; Windett et al. 2012). Research also shows that the public's racialized evaluations of Barack Obama have "spilled over" into a variety of other political evaluations. Thus, research shows that connecting Barack Obama to other political figures and policy issues increases the link between racial negativity and many otherwise ostensibly non-racial political evaluations (e.g., Tesler 2012; 2013; 2015; 2016a; Tesler and Sears 2010).

Racial spillover has also transferred to down-ballot electoral judgments. For example, Luttig (2016) analyzes the impact of racial resentment on congressional vote choice in midterm elections from 1986-2010, and finds essentially no effect of racial attitudes on vote choice prior to the 2010 midterm elections. Tesler (2016a) too shows that racial resentment has become a much more substantial predictor of vote choice in congressional elections after Barack Obama burst onto the political scene in 2008. In short, Barack Obama's presidency caused racial evaluations to spillover into vote choice in down-ballot congressional elections in 2010, because people linked their down-ballot candidate evaluations with their attitudes toward President Obama in that election. But no study has yet to examine whether this same process occurred in 2014. Based on previous findings of racial spillover in 2010, we hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Greater levels of racial resentment will increase the likelihood of voting for a Republican candidate (rather than a Democratic candidate) in the 2014 elections.

Our second hypothesis is that perceptions of one's vote as a referendum for or against Barack Obama will also be rooted in racial evaluations. We argue that perceiving one's vote as a referendum, either in support of or opposition to Barack Obama, is similar to general feelings about the incumbent President; those with more positive feelings of Barack Obama are likely to view their vote as referendum in support of the President, while those with negative feelings are likely to view their vote as referendum against Barack Obama. And previous research has demonstrated that general evaluations of President Obama, as measured by feeling thermometers or presidential approval, are strongly influenced by respondents' general feelings toward African Americans and measures of racial antagonism like racial resentment (e.g., Tesler and Sears 2010; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012). Thus, we hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Greater levels of racial resentment will increase the likelihood that one's congressional vote is perceived as a referendum *against* Barack Obama.

Previous research also suggests that evaluations of Barack Obama are *polarized* by racial attitudes: racial resentment decreases evaluations of Obama among racial conservatives, and increases evaluations of Obama among racial progressives (Tesler and Sears 2010). This is the *two sides of racialization* that we hypothesize below:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Lower levels of racial resentment will increase the likelihood that one's congressional vote is perceived as a referendum *in support* of Barack Obama.

Our final expectation is that evaluations of Barack Obama—as reflected in perceptions of one's vote as a referendum for or against the president—*caused* racial attitudes to spillover into congressional vote choice in 2014. This follows directly from the theory of racial spillover and from previous demonstrations that racial negativity did not affect congressional vote choice prior

to Barack Obama's presidency. Here, we try to establish—or at least provide the strongest evidence we can with our observational data—that linking one's vote directly to their views about President Obama *causes* a stronger relationship between racial resentment and congressional vote choice. One way to test this causal link is through mediation analysis. Thus, we argue that perceptions of one's vote as a referendum on Barack Obama mediates the relationship between racial resentment and congressional vote choice in 2014. If our argument is correct, congressional vote choice among those who *did not* view their vote as a referendum on Barack Obama should be significantly less racialized. While previous studies on racial spillover in congressional elections suggest that attitudes about President Obama mediate the link between racial negativity and congressional vote choice, this specific mechanism has yet to be directly tested.

> *Hypothesis 4:* Perceiving one's vote as a referendum on Barack Obama mediates the link between racial resentment and congressional vote choice in the 2014 midterm elections.

Data and Measurement

To assess these hypotheses, we analyze the aforementioned YouGov study, which was fielded in the Fall of 2014 (exactly one week before the 2014 midterm elections), as well as the 2014 CCES.[4] We also present an analysis of vote choice in 2010 from the 2010 CCES to

[4] Yougov uses sample matching techniques to generate representative samples from non-randomly selected pools of respondents. For this study, Yougov interviewed 1,358 respondents who were then matched down to 1,200 respondents on the basis of: gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2010 American Community Survey (ACS). Although Yougov samples contain non-randomly selected respondents, it can in some respects be treated like a random sample and frequently produces estimates comparable to random samples such as the American National Election Studies (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Vavreck and Rivers 2008). In all of the following analyses, we apply the available survey weights.

compare whether and/or how the racialization of vote choice may have changed between 2010 and 2014.

To measure vote intention—our main dependent variable—respondents in the 2014 YouGov survey were asked, "If the congressional midterm elections were held today, who would you vote for to represent you in the U.S. House of Representatives?"[5] Respondents who indicated that they were "not sure" were asked a follow-up question: "Who would you lean toward voting for?" Out of these questions, we create a dichotomous indicator of whether a respondent indicated a preference for voting (or leaning towards voting) for the Republican candidate (1) or the Democratic candidate (0), and drop respondents who answered "not sure" to the follow-up question. Respondents in the 2010 and 2014 CCES were asked "for whom did you vote for U.S. House?" Respondents indicating that they voted for a Republican were assigned a score of one; those reporting voting for a Democrat were assigned a score of zero; and those who did not vote, were not sure if they did, or who voted for a third party candidate (less than 3% of cases in both studies) were treated as missing data.

The YouGov survey contains the measure of referendum voting described above, which allows us to test hypotheses 2-4. This survey question was asked immediately after the vote choice question, so that the vote choice measure was not biased by first mentioning President Obama. And while this is likely an imperfect indicator of reasons for one's voting behavior, we think the measure provides a reasonably valid indicator of whether President Obama was an accessible consideration when identifying a vote intention. Specifically, we would note that perceptions of voting as a referendum on the incumbent president tracks closely with other

[5] The response options were: 1 – The Republican Candidate; 2 – The Democratic Candidate; 3 – Not Sure.

indicators of the nationalization of midterm elections (e.g., Jacobson 2011; 2015), that referendum perceptions map onto partisanship in predictable ways,[6] and supplemental analyses suggest that the measure is reasonably accurate.[7] These indicators provide some reassurance that the referendum question provides a valid indicator of whether or not Barack Obama was an accessible and/or salient consideration in an individual's vote choice, albeit one that (like all survey questions) contains some measurement error.

In the YouGov study, the racial resentment measure is an index of four questions (Kinder and Sanders 1996): (1) "The Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors," (2) "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class," (3) "over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve," and (4) "It's really just a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well of as white" ($\alpha = 0.86$). In the 2014 CCES, racial resentment is an index of questions 1 and 2 above ($\alpha = 0.76$). In the 2010 CCES, racial resentment is also an index of questions 1 and 2 above ($\alpha = 0.77$).

[6] See supplementary Appendix A1: Democrats are most likely to cast "pro-Obama" votes, Republicans to cast "anti-Obama votes," and Independents to cast "neither pro- or anti-Obama" votes.

[7] In addition to having high face-validity, referendum attitudes were highly correlated with Republican vote choice (such that most anti-Obama voters selected Republicans, and pro-Obama voters did the opposite; Figure A2). This was especially true when accounting for voters' partisan preferences (Figure A3). Critically, though, it is important to point out that referendum attitudes and vote choice *are distinct theoretical constructs*. While the two are correlated, Table A5 shows that there is sufficient variation for the types of tests we run later on (which consider referendum attitudes as a right-hand side variable in a model of vote choice in order to conduct the mediation tests).

Our control variables include: party identification,[8] ideology, and demographic information (sex, region, education, income[9], age). We also control for the percentage of African Americans in each respondent's state, as racial context may directly increase voting for conservative candidates (e.g., Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Enos 2015). Thus, we estimate the effect of racial resentment while controlling for many standard individual-level predictors of vote choice. With the exception of percent African American in each state, this model is identical to that used by Tesler and Sears (2010) in their study of racial voting in presidential elections.

One possible criticism is that our models are underspecified because they do not control for citizens' policy preferences. However, we would note that policy and retrospective economic attitudes have themselves become racialized in the Obama era of American politics (see Tesler 2016a). Thus, these "short-term" preferences are in many respects "post-treatment" and would introduce bias into our direct estimates of the effect of racial resentment on vote choice in 2014. Furthermore, policy preferences are often endogenous to vote choice, a product of rather than a cause of candidate preference (Lenz 2013). Predispositions like partisanship and racial resentment, however, are less susceptible to endogeneity concerns (Tesler 2015). These findings lead us in the context of a cross-sectional analysis to include on the right-hand side stable predispositions—partisanship, ideology, and racial resentment—but not policy preferences.

[8] Our measure of party identification in the 2014 YouGov survey is a 5-point scale: Democrat, lean Democrat, Pure Independent, lean Republican, Republican. The YouGov study did not ask the traditional follow-up question to distinguish strong from not strong partisans, so for comparability across datasets, we fashion similar scales in both CCES studies.

[9] Approximately 12% of cases in the YouGov study failed to provide an answer to the household income question. To preserve statistical power in this sample, non-responses on the income question were assigned the sample's mean income value (0.3, on a scale ranging from 0-1). Luckily, taking this step was not necessary in the CCES, because their samples were so large (despite having similarly-high levels of missing data on the income question in 2010 - 12% - and 2014 - 11%). However, when we take the same step in the CCES, the effects presented in Table One do not substantively change.

Nevertheless, we note that all of our main findings are robust to alternative model specifications that include policy preferences (see Tables A1-A5 in the Supplemental Materials).

Indeed, even controlling for partisanship is likely to *underestimate* the effect of racial resentment on congressional vote choice, as partisans have increasingly sorted themselves into the parties on the basis of racial resentment since Barack Obama's election in 2008 (Tesler 2013). Therefore, to the extent that racial resentment matters while controlling for party identification, we can be confident that racial resentment is a meaningful predictor of vote choice in 2014. We test whether or not our models underestimate the effect of racial resentment by removing the partisan identity and ideology controls from all models (Tables A1-A5 in the Supplemental Materials). Indeed, with models that do not account for partisanship and ideology, the impact of racial resentment on vote choice appears much greater.

To simplify interpretation of the following tables, we re-code each of the variables to range from 0-1. On the measures of party identification, ideology, and racial resentment, higher values are coded to indicate more conservative preferences. Precise question wording for each variable is described more in the Appendix. Finally, because the analyses below use an item intended to measure White respondents' attitudes toward African Americans (racial resentment) we confine all analyses to White respondents.[10]

Results

To assess our first hypothesis—that racial resentment shapes vote choice in 2014 congressional elections—we ran a logistic regression model, regressing the dichotomous vote choice variable on levels of racial resentment and other political and demographic control

[10] However, the results are essentially identical if analyzed among the entire sample (available upon request).

variables. To demonstrate that these results mirror findings from the previous midterm election cycle and are robust to other surveys of the American electorate, we fashioned analogous models in the 2010 and 2014 CCES (see the notes in Table One for more information). The results are displayed in Table One.

TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

As Table One suggests, racial resentment was positively and significantly ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 2.77, $p < 0.05$) associated with Republican vote choice in the 2014 YouGov study (column 1), even when controlling for a number of other factors known to play a powerful role in shaping citizens' electoral preferences (e.g., partisanship, ideology). Holding all other factors constant, a first difference in White respondents' levels of racial resentment (i.e., moving from the lowest to highest observed values on the variable) increased the likelihood of voting Republican by about 13 percentage points (with those scoring highest on the scale voting for Republicans 59% of the time). Unsurprisingly, the most substantively powerful predictors of Republican vote choice include individuals' partisan identity ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$= 6.64, $p < 0.05$) and ideology ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 7.10, $p < 0.05$). All else equal, a first difference in party ID (moving from being a strong Democrat to a strong Republican) increased Republican vote choice by 66 percentage points, while a first difference in ideology (from extreme liberalism to extreme conservatism) boosted it by 59 percentage points.

We replicate this basic finding in the 2014 CCES in column 2, Table 1 ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 2.16 $p < 0.05$). A first difference of racial resentment among White respondents in the 2014 CCES is associated with a 27 percentage point increase in the likelihood of voting Republican.[11] Thus,

[11] It is worth noting that this effect is somewhat larger, substantively, in the CCES. This difference could arise due to several factors; when and how the data were collected, their sizes and compositions, etc. What is important to take away from these results, we argue, is the size, direction, and statistical significance of the two effects – and their robustness across samples and estimation strategies.

both the 2014 CCES and the 2014 YouGov study suggest that racial resentment had a large effect on congressional vote choice in 2014. This is consistent with what others have shown about congressional voting in 2010, which we replicate and present in column 3 of Table 1 ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 1.80 $p < 0.05$). In 2010, a first difference in racial resentment leads to a 16 percentage point increase in Republican vote choice. In sum, these analyses demonstrate that racial attitudes had large effects on congressional vote choice in midterm elections in the Obama era, including 2014.

These findings are consistent with our first hypothesis. Further, we find a similar pattern of results when we remove partisan and ideological controls, as well as when we add several indicators of voters' policy attitudes.[12] Collectively, these results suggest that racial resentment had a similar effect on vote choice in 2014 to its effect in 2010. This is in spite of the fact that by 2014 the American electorate should have been exposed to more information about Barack Obama, information that might have individualized and de-racialized their evaluations of the sitting president (e.g., Hajnal 2007). Instead, the effect of racial animus on the American public's electoral calculus remained large and meaningful in the 2014 elections.

However, this result raises another important question. The impact of racial resentment on congressional vote choice is a fairly new phenomenon. Is the effect of racial resentment on congressional vote choice partly a product of "racial spillover" (i.e., associating congressional

[12] As Table A1 in the Supplemental Materials demonstrates, the effect of racial resentment holds when the model is run without partisan and ideological controls ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 6.36, $p < 0.05$). It is also robust to the addition of issue preference controls when specifying the model without partisan and ideological controls ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 3.02, $p < 0.01$), and is marginally significant when including both partisan and issue preference controls ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 1.22, $p < 0.10$, one-tailed). It is perhaps unsurprising that this latter finding narrowly misses attaining two-tailed significance, because (as noted earlier) this model controls for several variables that introduce post-treatment bias into our estimates and that are endogenous to vote choice. Critically, though, as Table A2 demonstrates we note that the effect of racial resentment on Republican vote choice replicates at the $p < 0.05$ level (two-tailed) in all 2014 CCES models ($p < 0.05$ in all cases).

candidates with President Obama), even though President Obama himself was not directly on the ballot in the midterm elections?

To examine whether the racialization of Barack Obama spilled over into congressional vote choice in 2014, we first investigate whether or not Whites' levels of racial resentment lead them to view the 2014 Midterms as a referendum for or against President Obama. These variables took on a value of one if the respondent saw the election as a positive or negative referendum on Obama (respectively), and zero if they did not. Respondents selecting zero in both cases saw the election as neither a positive nor negative referendum on the sitting president. To perform this analysis, we again ran a series of logistic regression models in which we regressed attitudes about whether or not a respondent viewed their vote in the 2014 elections as a positive or negative referendum on Barack Obama on racial resentment while controlling for the political and demographic factors included in Table One.[13] The results are displayed in Table Two.

TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, increased levels of racial resentment positively and significantly boosted the extent to which individuals thought of the 2014 Midterms as a negative referendum on President Obama (column one).[14] Indeed, racial resentment has a very large effect on whether or not individuals endorsed this position ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = 3.29$, $p < 0.05$). In this case, racial resentment is *not* secondary to classic predictors of electoral behavior like partisan identity ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ =

[13] We also add an indicator of political knowledge to this model, in order to account for the possibility that more sophisticated individuals are better equipped to view elections as referendum.

[14] Table Two restricts analysis to only those voters who indicated a vote choice (i.e., only respondents in Table One could be included in Table Two). However, when we look at all White voters in the dataset, the results are substantively similar. Racial resentment was still the strongest predictor of anti-Obama referendum endorsement ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = 1.58$), and was statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. As reported above, racial resentment was correctly signed - but statistically insignificant - in predicting pro-Obama referendum support ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = -0.45$, $p > 0.10$).

2.62, $p < 0.05$) and ideology ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = 1.77$, $p < 0.05$), but is in fact actually larger. A first difference in racial resentment increased the likelihood that individuals viewed the election in this way from 13% at low levels of resentment to 60% at the scale's maximum (a 47 percentage point increase). First differences in party ID (45 percentage points) and ideology (24 percentage points) had similar, but smaller, effects on viewing the campaign as a referendum against Obama.[15] Overall, we find that anti-Obama referendum attitudes are heavily influenced by racial resentment, consistent with our second hypothesis.

Second, and also consistent with our expectation in hypothesis 3 and the *two sides of racialization* thesis, we find that lower levels of racial resentment increase the likelihood of viewing the 2014 campaign as a positive referendum on President Obama (column two) ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = -1.26$, $p = 0.051$). The substantive results, while somewhat more modest than those in the anti-referendum models, were nevertheless supportive of our expectations. A first difference in racial resentment decreased the likelihood of viewing the election as a positive referendum on Obama from 21% to 9% (a 12 percentage point decrease). First differences in party ID (21 percentage point decrease) and ideology (24 percentage point decrease) yielded somewhat larger effects. Thus, racial resentment did play a role in shaping the view that the 2014 elections was a *positive* referendum on Barack Obama, though partisanship and ideology had relatively larger effects on pro-Obama referendum perceptions. Democrats and ideological liberals are most likely to

[15] In Tables A2-A3 of Supplemental Materials, we replicate these results with the inclusion of respondents' issue preferences ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$ for anti-Obama attitudes; $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ -0.67, $p > 0.10$ for pro-Obama attitudes), and without their partisan and ideological preferences ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = 5.69$, $p < 0.05$ for anti-Obama attitudes; $\boldsymbol{\beta} = -4.15$, $p < 0.05$ for pro-Obama attitudes). On the anti-Obama referendum side, the results in Tables A3 and A5 closely mirror the results presented in Table 2. However, because the pro-Obama referendum results presented in Table 2 are more modest, it is unsurprising that these effects fall short of attaining conventional levels of significance in the model that adds policy preferences in Table A3. As we mentioned earlier, these variables likely introduce post-treatment bias into our estimates, posing a highly conservative test of the *two sides of racialization* thesis.

possess a pro-Obama referendum attitude in 2014. Figure One plots the differential impact of racial resentment on both pro- and anti-Obama referendum attitudes.

FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

Overall, Table Two and Figure One suggest that racial resentment played an important role in shaping the attitude that the 2014 election was a negative referendum on the nation's first Black President. Thus, negative referendum voters in 2014 were partly animated by racial animosity towards the sitting president. Also evident in Figure One is the much weaker relationship (though marginally significant) between racial resentment and pro-Obama referendum attitudes. Thus, negative referendum voters in 2014 in particular were strongly motivated by racial antagonism, while positive referendum voters were more weakly motivated by racial liberalism. This analysis shows then that "referendum voters" were not *solely* rejecting Barack Obama's policies in the 2014 elections, as the media and Republican elites widely claimed. Rather, referendum voters (especially anti-Obama referendum voters) were also characterized by high levels of racial resentment. This effect, we believe, is probably unique to elections where Barack Obama or another highly racialized political figure is the target of the public's referendum evaluations. We argue that these widespread racialized referendum perceptions contributed to the spillover of racial antagonism into vote choice in 2014.

Our next analysis evaluates this last claim by examining the extent to which negative referendum attitudes mediated the link between racial hostility and vote choice. In the absence of experimental assignment to a negative referendum treatment condition, evidence that negative referendum attitudes mediate the link between racial resentment and vote choice provides the strongest evidence to support our claim that Barack Obama's centrality in voters' minds in the 2014 elections helped cause racialized vote choice in the 2014 elections. To do this, we assess

(1) whether or not anti-Obama referendum opinions statistically mediate the relationship between racial resentment and vote choice and (2) the size of this potential mediating effect. In line with Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations, we can determine whether or not mediation occurred statistically if racial resentment plays a statistically significant role in explaining anti-Obama referendum attitudes (the mediator), and if the effect of racial resentment is weakened (or erased entirely) when included in a vote choice model along with the hypothesized mediator.

Figure Two presents some initial evidence as to why we might expect anti-Obama referendum attitudes to mediate the relationship between racial resentment and vote choice. The figure plots the predicted probability of Republican vote choice across racial resentment levels in Table One (solid line), as well as a model that adds the referendum attitude indicator to that model, presented in Table Three (dashed line).

FIGURE TWO & TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE

Figure Two shows that the model including anti-Obama referendum attitudes substantively depresses the direct relationship between racial resentment and vote choice. Because the inclusion of referendum attitudes decreases the explanatory power of racial resentment, and is itself shaped by racial resentment, we suspect that mediation is occurring. We perform more formal tests for mediation in line with Baron and Kenny's recommendations in Table Three, and find that this is in fact the case. Evidence for mediation is apparent by observing that the coefficient on racial resentment in Table 1 which does not control for anti-

Obama referendum attitudes ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 2.77, $p < 0.05$) is somewhat larger than in Table 3 which does control for anti-Obama referendum attitudes ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 1.82, $p < 0.05$).[16]

However, Figure Two and Table 3 does not explain *how much* of the effect of racial resentment is mediated by anti-Obama referendum attitudes. To do this - in line with Imai and colleagues' (2011) recommendations - we use the MEDIATE package in Stata to decompose the effect of racial resentment into indirect (i.e., channeled through anti-Obama referendum voting) and direct effects. This method is particularly advantageous for our purposes, as its inferential algorithm is flexible enough to handle situations in which both dependent and mediating variables are dichotomous.[17] We replicate both sets of analyses for both party identification and ideology as well, in order to demonstrate the unique mediating relationship between anti-Obama referendum voting and racial resentment. All models used to construct the mediation analysis control for the covariates displayed in Tables One and Two. The results are summarized in columns 2-4 of Table Four.

TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE

[16] Again, we replicate these results with the addition of policy controls and with the removal of partisan and ideological controls (Table A4) in the Supplemental Materials. Consistent with our expectations, the effect of racial resentment shrinks from $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 6.36 (Table A2) to $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 4.58 (Table A4) when anti-Obama referendum attitudes are added to the model without partisan and ideological controls, and even falls short of attaining statistical significance when policy issues are added to the model ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 0.25, $p > 0.10$). Notably, formal mediation (see Table 4) tests provide *even stronger* evidence for mediation (43%) when policy issues are added to the model displayed in Table 3. Overall, these robustness checks provide strong evidence for mediation.

[17] Moreover, it is important to point out that while mediation analyses are often associated with causal inference in the experimental environment, random assignment to "treatment" conditions is difficult to satisfy in observational research. Luckily, as Imai and colleagues (2011) show, the limitation can be overcome so long as the Sequential Ignorability Assumption is satisfied. This can be done by controlling for all factors that might confound the relationship between the hypothesized treatment (in this case, racial resentment) and the outcome variable (Republican vote choice).

Table Four shows that 30% of the effect of racial resentment on vote choice is explained via anti-Obama referendum attitudes.[18] Put differently, this means that nearly one third of the total effect of racial resentment on GOP vote choice is *indirectly* channeled through negative attitudes toward Obama, while the remainder of the variable's total influence *directly* shapes citizens' electoral preferences. By contrast, partisan identity yielded stronger direct effects on Republican vote choice than did racial resentment (as Table One might lead us to suspect), but the amount of that effect channeled through negative attitudes toward the President was comparatively much smaller (14%). Ideology too exhibited large direct effects on vote choice, and also played a role in shaping anti-Obama referendum attitudes. Yet, like partisanship, a much smaller amount (11%) of this variable's influence on vote choice was channeled through anti-Obama referendum attitudes. Thus, while all three factors played an important role in directly shaping Republican vote choice in 2014, racial resentment is uniquely mediated by negative attitudes toward President Obama.

Thus, perceiving one's vote as a referendum against Obama in 2014 increased the power of racial negativity—more so than partisanship or ideology—on congressional vote choice. This analysis provides stronger evidence than previous studies of racial spillover in congressional elections that it is perceptions of President Obama—rather than some other factor such as a growing partisan divide over racial rhetoric and policies—that caused racial antagonism to play a larger role in the public's evaluation of congressional candidates than in past midterm elections.

[18] We also considered whether or not the *negative* effect of racial resentment on Republican vote choice might be mediated by *pro*-Obama referendum voting. Constructing an analogous mediation model using the MEDIATE package, we find that mediation does occur. However, the amount of the effect of racial resentment on vote choice channeled through pro-Obama referendum attitudes (13%) is smaller than that of the effect channeled through anti-Obama referendum attitudes, reported above.

Together, these results identify strong racial spillover effects in the 2014 midterm elections. Racial resentment played a key role in determining whether or not individuals thought of the 2014 election as a negative referendum on President Obama, which in turn mediated the relationship between negative racial attitudes and vote choice in the 2014 congressional elections. Thus, even though he was not directly on the ballot in 2014, President Obama appears to have contributed to racializing voters' electoral evaluations in the 2014 midterm election.

In summary, we find support for hypotheses 1-4. Racial resentment affected vote choice in 2014 (H1), perceptions of the 2014 elections as a negative and positive referendum on Barack Obama (H2 and H3), and negative referendum perceptions mediated the link between racial antipathy and vote choice (H4). However, we think it is noteworthy that racial resentment had a substantively larger effect on negative, rather than positive, referendum perceptions in the 2014 elections. This is an important asymmetry, as it indicates that racial attitudes motivated vote choice for racial conservatives more than racial progressives in this election (though African American voters may have somewhat offset these patterns, as they supported Obama at record levels in 2008 and 2012 but made-up a slightly smaller proportion of the 2014 electorate than the electorate in presidential election years).[19] In particular, this one-sided pattern may shed insight into why referendum perceptions seemed to play to the Republican Party's advantage in the 2014 elections. By motivating those individuals who are predisposed to vote against Barack Obama more than those predisposed to vote for him on the basis of race, referendum perceptions helped tilt the electoral environment to the benefit of the Republican Party.

[19] Specifically, 11.7% of the electorate identified as Black or African American in 2014, compared to 12.9% in 2012 and 12.1% in 2008 (source: File, 2015: https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p20-577.pdf).

Conclusion

As has been now widely documented, Barack Obama's presidency has caused racial attitudes to spillover into a number of political evaluations that were previously not racialized (e.g., Tesler 2016a). This includes the 2010 midterm congressional election when Barack Obama himself was not directly on the ballot (Luttig 2016; Tesler 2013). Our study contributes to this literature by showing that the 2014 elections too were racialized. While this may seem a natural extension of previous findings of Obama-induced racial spillover, other studies have shown that the influence of race in evaluations of Black politicians can decline over time (Hajnal 2007). The findings in the present paper suggest that this pattern of de-racialization did not occur for President Obama. Rather, the effect of racial resentment on congressional vote choice was similar in 2014 as it was in 2010.

The second major contribution of this paper is to isolate the effect of President Obama's presence as president specifically as a cause of racial spillover in congressional vote choice in the 2014 elections. Thus, our use of the Obama referendum item helps to better establish the claim that attitudes toward Barack Obama are—at least in part—the reason why race has mattered more in the midterm elections of 2014 and 2010 than in previous midterm elections.

The findings we present in this paper also have a number of broader implications for referendum voting in elections and the politics of race and ethnicity in America. As noted by Jacobson (2011; 2015), congressional elections are increasingly perceived as a referendum on incumbent presidents. Yet no research has examined what drives individual-level perceptions of an election as a referendum on the incumbent president, nor whether or how "referendum voters" differ in the manner in which they decide who to vote for compared to non-referendum voters. Most studies assume that referendum voting is a reaction to the incumbent's governing

performance, while the media and political elites interpret referendum voting in terms of the parties' and candidates' ideological platforms. We do not suggest that these interpretations are wrong. Quite the contrary, we agree that referendum perceptions may very well be shaped by perceptions of incumbents' governing performance, though we lack the data to examine that hypothesis specifically. And we do find some, albeit limited, evidence that ideology is related to referendum perceptions. But we also note that referendum voting is likely subject to a range of cognitive and perceptual biases and other shortcomings that scholars have widely demonstrated in studies of public opinion and electoral behavior.

One likely limitation of referendum voting, we argue, is that it is subject to the public's general "group-centric" orientation to politics (e.g., Converse 1964). That is, many voters perceive the political world in terms of social groups, not in terms of programmatic ideological goals or perceptions about the nature of the times. As a result, when voters perceive their vote as a referendum on an incumbent politician or their party, the social group imagery associated with that candidate or party is likely to influence their referendum perceptions.

We argue that Barack Obama's position atop the Democratic Party in 2014 is likely to have made referendum perceptions during this midterm election particularly "group-centric," and specifically racialized. Research has consistently demonstrated that racial attitudes have large effects on citizens' direct evaluations of Barack Obama. And when Barack Obama is connected to other political figures and issues, those figures too become evaluated more on the basis of racial attitudes (e.g., Tesler 2016). Indeed, we found considerable support for our argument that perceptions of the 2014 election as a referendum against Barack Obama were rooted largely in racial attitudes, and that these perceptions mediated the link between racial resentment and congressional vote choice in the 2014 elections. Thus, negative referendum voters were not

exclusively reacting to Barack Obama's policies or their evaluations of his governing performance. Rather, many negative referendum voters were expressing their general hostility to African Americans. At least in 2014, then, negative referendum voting would seem, in at least some cases, to violate normative standards for good democratic citizenship.

As we look ahead, our findings also provide testable expectations about when congressional voting in midterm elections is most likely to be racialized. Specifically, racialized voting in midterm elections is most likely when (a) the incumbent president is strongly racialized and, (b) when many voters view their vote as a referendum on the sitting president. In 2010 and 2014, the race of the sitting president (Barack Obama) served as the basis for racialization, while the growing nationalization of midterm elections made these racialized views a widespread consideration in voters' evaluations of congressional candidates. In 2018, the explicitly ethno-nationalist and racial appeals of Donald Trump has similar potential to serve as a springboard for racialization (Tesler 2016b). As long as midterm elections continue to be perceived as a referendum on the sitting president in 2018—and there is no reason to suspect an abatement of the nationalization of American electoral politics—then views about Donald Trump might serve as a source of racialization in this upcoming election. We look forward to future research on these topics, and suspect that as long as racial attitudes are strongly related to views of the incumbent president, racial attitudes will play an important role in the increasingly nationalized context of midterm elections.

Finally, we conclude by noting that the Republican landslide victory in the 2014 should not be solely interpreted as a public repudiation of Barack Obama's policies or his governing performance. As this paper shows, one important explanation for the Republican Party's success in the 2014 elections is the emergence of race in evaluations of congressional candidates, which

we demonstrate has emerged partly as a consequence of voters perceiving the election as a referendum on Barack Obama. The effects of racial polarization are partly mitigated by the high levels of support for Barack Obama among African Americans, but in total racial polarization appears to benefit the Republican Party. Thus, our paper illustrates the persistence of racial animosity as a force in American politics in the Obama era. Far from the post-racial hopes that greeted Barack Obama's candidacy in 2008, ours is another sobering account of how far American politics has to come to be a post-racial society.

Reference:

Abramowitz, A. I., & Webster, S. (2016). The rise of negative partisanship and the nationalization of US elections in the 21st century. *Electoral Studies*, *41*, 12-22.

Abrajano, M., & Hajnal, Z. L. (2015). *White backlash: immigration, race, and American politics*. Princeton University Press.

Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2004). Blind retrospection: Electoral responses to drought, flu, and shark attacks.

Aldrich, J. H., Bishop, B. H., Hatch, R. S., Hillygus, D. S., & Rohde, D. W. (2014). Blame, responsibility, and the tea party in the 2010 midterm elections. *Political Behavior*, *36*(3), 471-491.

Ansolabehere, S., & Rivers, D. (2013). Cooperative survey research. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *16*, 307-329.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *51*(6), 1173.

Citrin, J., Green, D. P., & Sears, D. O. (1990). White reactions to black candidates: When does race matter?. *Public opinion quarterly*, *54*(1), 74-96.

Clarke, H., Reifler, J., Scotto, T. J., Stewart, M. C., & Whiteley, P. (2015). Valence politics and voting in the 2012 US presidential election. *Electoral Studies*, *40*, 462-470.

Converse, P. E. (1964). "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *Ideology and discontent*, 206-61.

Cox, G. W., & Katz, J. N. (1996). Why did the incumbency advantage in US House elections grow?. *American Journal of Political Science*, 478-497.

Ehrlinger, J., Plant, E. A., Eibach, R. P., Columb, C. J., Goplen, J. L., Kunstman, J. W., & Butz, D. A. (2011). How exposure to the confederate flag affects willingness to vote for Barack Obama. *Political Psychology*, *32*(1), 131-146.

Enos, R. D. (2016). What the demolition of public housing teaches us about the impact of racial threat on political behavior. *American Journal of Political Science*, *60*(1), 123-142.

Erikson, R. S., MacKuen, M. B., & Stimson, J. A. (2002). *The macro polity*. Cambridge University Press.

File, Thom. (2015). "Who Votes? Congressional Elections and the American Electorate: 1978-2014." *US Census Bureau, July*.

Fiorina, M. P. (1981). *Retrospective voting in American national elections.*

Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. University of Chicago Press.

Hajnal, Z. L. (2007). *Changing white attitudes toward black political leadership*. Cambridge University Press.

Healy, A. J., Malhotra, N., & Mo, C. H. (2010). Irrelevant events affect voters' evaluations of government performance. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *107*(29), 12804-12809.

Henry, P. J., & Sears, D. O. (2009). The crystallization of contemporary racial prejudice across the lifespan. *Political Psychology*, *30*(4), 569-590.

Highton, B. (2011). Prejudice rivals partisanship and ideology when explaining the 2008 presidential vote across the states. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *44*(03), 530-535.

Huber, G. A., Hill, S. J., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Sources of bias in retrospective decision making: Experimental evidence on voters' limitations in controlling incumbents. *American Political Science Review*, *106*(04), 720-741.

Hurwitz, J., & Peffley, M. (2005). Explaining the great racial divide: Perceptions of fairness in the US criminal justice system. *Journal of Politics*, *67*(3), 762-783.

Hutchings, V. L. (2009). Change or more of the same? Evaluating racial attitudes in the Obama era. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *73*(5), 917-942.

Imai, K., Keele, L., Tingley, D., & Yamamoto, T. (2011). Unpacking the black box of causality: Learning about causal mechanisms from experimental and observational studies. *American Political Science Review*, *105*(04), 765-789.

Jackman, S., & Vavreck, L. (2010). Primary politics: race, gender, and age in the 2008 Democratic primary. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *20*(2), 153-186.

Jacobson, G. C. (2004). *The Politics of Congressional Elections, 7th Edition*. New York: Longman.

Jacobson, G. C. (2011). The Republican resurgence in 2010. *Political Science Quarterly*, *126*(1), 27-52.

Jacobson, G. C. (2015). Obama and Nationalized Electoral Politics in the 2014 Midterm. *Political Science Quarterly*, *130*(1), 1-25.

Jones, D. R. (2010). Partisan polarization and Congressional accountability in House elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, *54*(2), 323-337.

Kam, C. D., & Kinder, D. R. (2012). Ethnocentrism as a Short-Term Force in the 2008 American Presidential Election. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(2), 326-340.

Kernell, S. (1977). Presidential popularity and negative voting: An alternative explanation of the midterm congressional decline of the president's party. *American Political Science Review*, *71*(01), 44-66.

Kinder, D. R. (2006). Belief systems today. *Critical Review*, *18*(1-3), 197-216.

Kinder, D. R., & Dale-Riddle, A. (2012). *End of Race?: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*. Yale University Press.

Kinder, D. R., & Kam, C. D. (2010). *Us against them: Ethnocentric foundations of American opinion*. University of Chicago Press.

Kinder, D. R., & Sanders, L. M. (1996). *Divided by Color*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Knotts, H. G., & Ragusa, J. M. (2015). The Nationalization of Special Elections for the US House of Representatives. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 1-18.

Lenz, G. S. (2009). Learning and opinion change, not priming: Reconsidering the priming hypothesis. *American Journal of Political Science*, *53*(4), 821-837.

Lenz, G. S. (2012). *Follow the leader? How voters respond to politicians' performance and policies.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Luttig, M. D. (2015). Obama, race, and the Republican landslide in 2010. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 1-23.

Luttig, M. D., & Callaghan, T. H. (2016). Is President Obama's Race Chronically Accessible? Racial Priming in the 2012 Presidential Election. *Political Communication*, 1-23.

McCloskey, H., & Zaller, J. (1984). *The American Ethos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mendelberg, T. (2001). *The race card: Campaign strategy, implicit messages, and the norm of equality*. Princeton University Press.

Nelson, T. E., & Kinder, D. R. (1996). Issue frames and group-centrism in American public opinion. *Journal of Politics*, *58*, 1055-1078.

Panagopoulos, C. (2014) "Preference Dynamics in the 2014 Congressional Midterm Elections." Forum 12 (4): 729-737.

Pasek, J., Tahk, A., Lelkes, Y., Krosnick, J. A., Payne, B. K., Akhtar, O., & Tompson, T. (2009). Determinants of turnout and candidate choice in the 2008 US presidential election illuminating the impact of racial prejudice and other considerations. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *73*(5), 943-994.

Pasek, J., Stark, T. H., Krosnick, J. A., Tompson, T., & Payne, B. K. (2014). Attitudes Toward Blacks in the Obama Era Changing Distributions and Impacts on Job Approval and Electoral Choice, 2008–2012. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *78*(S1), 276-302.

Piston, S. (2010). How explicit racial prejudice hurt Obama in the 2008 election. *Political Behavior*, *32*(4), 431-451.

Schaffner, B. F. (2011). Racial salience and the Obama vote. *Political Psychology*, *32*(6), 963-988.

Sears, D. O., Lau, R. R., Tyler, T. R., & Allen, H. M. (1980). Self-interest vs. symbolic politics in policy attitudes and presidential voting. *American Political Science Review*, *74*(03), 670-684.

Sides, J., & Vavreck, L. (2013). *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election.* Princeton University Press.

Stephens-Davidowitz, S. (2014). The cost of racial animus on a black candidate: Evidence using Google search data. *Journal of Public Economics*, *118*, 26-40.

Tesler, M. (2012). The spillover of racialization into health care: How President Obama polarized public opinion by racial attitudes and race. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(3), 690-704.

Tesler, M. (2013). The return of old-fashioned racism to White Americans' partisan preferences in the early Obama era. *The Journal of Politics*, *75*(01), 110-123.

Tesler, M. (2015). The Conditions Ripe for Racial Spillover Effects. *Political Psychology*, *36*(S1), 101-117.

Tesler, M. (2016a). *Post-Racial or Most-Racial?: Race and Politics in the Obama Era*. University of Chicago Press.

Tesler, M. (2016b). "Views about race mattered more in electing Trump than in electing Obama." *The Washington Post*, accessed November 28, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/22/peoples-views-about-race-mattered-more-in-electing-trump-than-in-electing-obama/

Tesler, M., & Sears, D. O. (2010). *Obama's race: The 2008 election and the dream of a post-racial America*. University of Chicago Press.

Tufte, E.R. 1975. "Determinants of the Outcomes of Midterm Congressional Elections." *American Political Science Review* 69:812-26.

Valentino, Nicholas A., Vincent L. Hutchings, and Ismail K. White. "Cues that matter: How political ads prime racial attitudes during campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 01 (2002): 75-90.

Vavreck, L., & Rivers, D. (2008). The 2006 cooperative congressional election study. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *18*(4), 355-366.

Weisberg, H. F. (2011). The 2010 US congressional election. *Electoral Studies*, *31*(1), 228-231.

Weisberg, H. F. (2015). The decline in the white vote for Barack Obama in 2012: Racial attitudes or the economy?. *Electoral Studies*, *40*, 449-459.

Weisberg, H. F., & Devine, C. J. (2010). Partisan defection and change in the 2008 US presidential election. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *20*(2), 213-240.

Windett, J. H., Banda, K. K., & Carsey, T. M. (2013). Racial stereotypes, racial context, and the 2008 presidential election. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *1*(3), 349-369.

Winter, N. J. (2008). *Dangerous frames: How ideas about race and gender shape public opinion*. University of Chicago Press.

Table One. The Effect of Racial Resentment on Republican Vote Choice

	YouGov 2014	**CCES 2014**	**CCES 2010**
Racial Resentment	2.77**	2.16**	1.83**
	(0.75)	(0.11)	(0.20)
Party ID	6.64**	3.59**	4.97**
	(0.87)	(0.11)	(0.19)
Ideology	7.10**	3.37**	4.23**
	(1.16)	(0.15)	(0.25)
Female	-0.45	-0.08	0.01
	(0.39)	(0.06)	(0.09)
South	-0.02	0.30**	0.64**
	(0.55)	(0.08)	(0.12)
Education	1.65**	-0.05	-0.40**
	(0.61)	(0.11)	(0.20)
Age	-1.17	-0.05	0.17
	(0.97)	(0.17)	(0.26)
Income	-1.28	0.28*	0.21
	(0.91)	(0.16)	(0.18)
% Black in State	4.66	0.87*	-0.44
	(2.94)	(0.49)	(0.72)
Constant	-8.34**	-5.16**	-5.71**
	(1.05)	(0.17)	(0.33)
N	732	22,447	18,814

Note: All variables coded to range from 0-1. Logistic regression parameters presented, with standard errors in parentheses. All survey data are weighted, and analysis is restricted to White voters only. Because the YouGov study had a (comparatively) smaller sample size, missing data on the income variable is imputed. It was not necessary to take this step in the CCES data, although the results were unchanged when imputing the missing values there as well.
*** p<0.05; * p<0.10 (two-tailed)*

Table Two. The Effect of Racial Resentment on Anti and Pro-Obama Referendum Attitudes (2014 YouGov)

	Anti-Obama	**Pro-Obama**
Racial Resentment	3.29**	-1.26*
	(0.70)	(0.65)
Party ID	2.74**	-3.11**
	(0.48)	(0.81)
Ideology	1.77**	-3.05**
	(0.76)	(0.82)
Political Knowledge	-0.69	-0.86
	(0.65)	(0.80)
Female	0.41	-0.36
	(0.30)	(0.32)
South	0.15	-0.01
	(0.35)	(0.36)
Education	0.42	-0.41
	(0.49)	(0.49)
Age	0.30	2.39**
	(0.57)	(0.64)
Income	-0.60	-0.84
	(0.83)	(0.84)
% Black in State	-0.85	-1.10
	(2.33)	(1.86)
Constant	-4.77**	1.23
	(0.78)	(0.86)
N	701	701

Note: All variables coded to range from 0-1. Logistic regression parameters presented, with standard errors in parentheses. All survey data are weighted, and analysis is restricted to White respondents only who indicated a vote preference in Table One. Outcome variables are whether or not individuals thought of the 2014 campaign as a negative or positive referendum on Obama (where the base category are all respondents not picking that choice).
*** p<0.05; * p<0.10 (two-tailed)*

Table Three. Adding Anti-Obama Referendum Attitudes to Column One of Table One

	DV = Republican Vote Choice
Racial Resentment	1.82**
	(0.76)
Party ID	6.26**
	(0.95)
Ideology	6.99**
	(1.14)
Female	-0.95*
	(0.50)
South	0.31
	(0.64)
Education	2.41**
	(0.72)
Age	-1.43
	(1.09)
Income	-1.37
	(0.94)
% Black in State	6.20*
	(3.22)
Anti-Obama Referendum Attitudes	2.88**
	(0.63)
Constant	-8.73**
	(1.23)
N	731

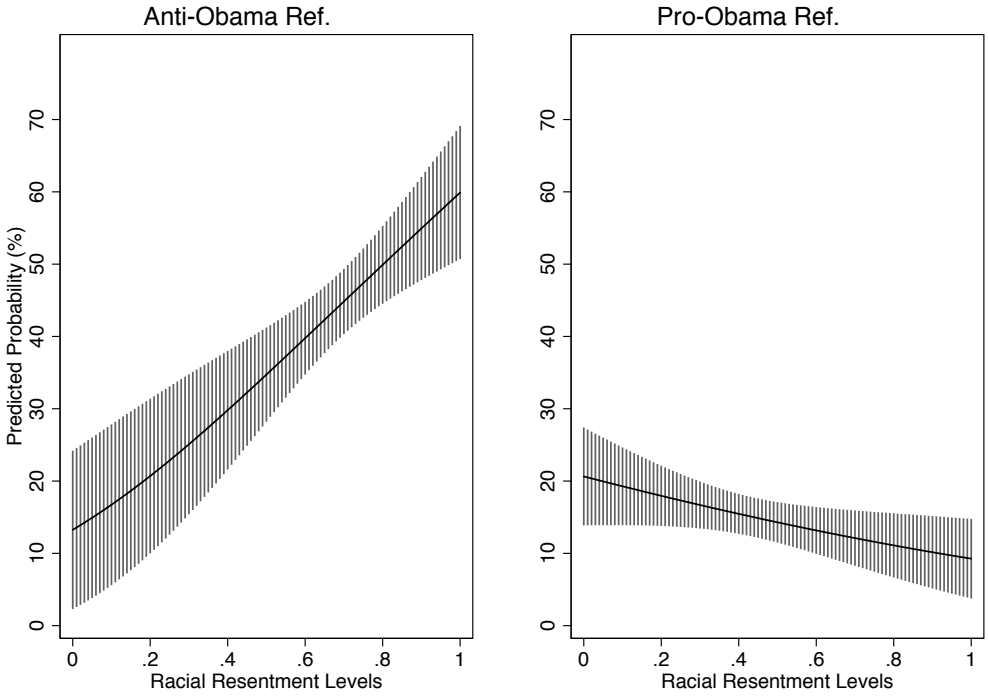
Note: All variables coded to range from 0-1. Logistic regression parameters presented, with standard errors in parentheses. All survey data are weighted, and analysis is restricted to White respondents only, who indicated a vote preference in Table One. The outcome variable is whether or not individuals reported voting for a Republican House candidate.
*** p<0.05; * p<0.10 (two-tailed)*

Table Four. Mediation Tests for Anti-Obama Referendum Voting

	Mediation	**Indirect Effects**			**Direct Effects**			**Mediated**
	Baron & Kenney	B	95% CI		B	95% CI		Percent
Racial Resentment	Yes	0.05	0.02	0.08	0.13	0.05	0.23	30%
Party ID	Yes	0.06	0.04	0.08	0.56	0.41	0.70	14%
Conservatism	Yes	0.04	-0.01	0.05	0.27	0.11	0.47	11%

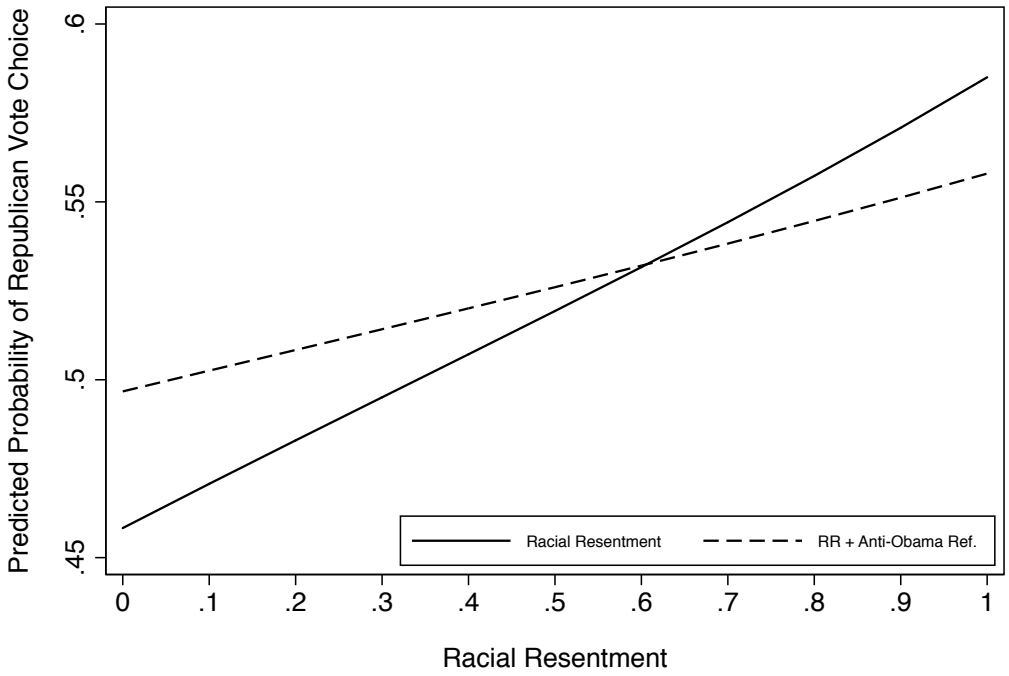
Note: Mediation tests in column one are conducted in line with Baron and Kenny's 1986 recommendations. A relationship is deemed to be mediating if the variable listed in each row: (1) significantly increases anti-Obama referendum attitudes, (2) is significantly associated with Republican vote choice without considering the anti-Obama referendum attitudes on vote choice, and (3) either decreases in effect size or falls from statistical significance when anti-Obama referendum attitudes are included in the vote choice model. "Indirect Effects" refer to the size of the effect of the variable listed in each row on Republican vote choice explained via anti-Obama referendum voting, while "Direct Effect" is the size of that same effect explained independently of the hypothesized mediator. "% Mediated" is the ratio of the indirect effect to the sum of the indirect effect and direct effect (i.e., the "total effect").

Figure One. The Effect of Racial Resentment on Anti- and Pro- Obama Referendum Attitudes



Note: Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals. Probabilities are calculated holding all other covariates constant.

Figure Two. The Direct Effect of Racial Resentment on Republican Vote Choice is Weakened when Accounting for Negative-Obama Referendum Attitudes



Appendix

Question Wording:

Partisan Identification (**YouGov**):

"Generally Speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

a) Democrat
b) Republican
c) Independent

IF CONSIDERS SELF AN INDEPENDENT

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

a) Closer to the Democratic Party
b) Closer to the Republican Party

Partisan Identification (**CCES 2010 & 2014**)

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a …?

a) Democrat
b) Republican
c) Independent
d) Other [open-ended text box in 2014 CCES]
e) Not Sure

IF CONSIDERS SELF AN INDEPENDENT

a) Lean Democrat
b) Independent
c) Lean Republican
d) Not Sure

Ideology (**YouGov**)

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

1 - Extremely Liberal
2 - Liberal
3 - Slightly Liberal
4 - Moderate; Middle of the Road
5 - Slightly Conservative
6 - Conservative
7 - Extremely Conservative

Ideology (**CCES 2010 & 2014**)

Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?

a) Very Liberal
b) Liberal
c) Moderate
d) Conservative
e) Very Conservative

Vote Intention (**YouGov**)

If the congressional midterm elections were held today, who would you vote for to represent you in the U.S. House of Representatives?

1 - The Republican Candidate
2- The Democratic Candidate
3 - Not Sure

If Not Sure, Who would you lean toward voting for?

1 - The Republican Candidate
2 - The Democratic Candidate
3 - Not Sure

House Vote Choice (**CCES 2010 & 2014**)

a) The Democratic Candidate
b) The Republican Candidate
c) A Third Party Candidate
d) Other [Filled in with her/his name]
e) I did not vote in this race
f) I did not vote
g) Not sure

Referendum Voter (**YouGov**)

Will your vote for a candidate be made in order to send a message that you SUPPORT Barack Obama, to send a message that you OPPOSE Barack Obama, or will you NOT be sending a message about Barack Obama with your vote?

1 - Message of Support for Obama
2 - Message of Opposition to Obama
3 - Neither a Message of Support nor Opposition to Obama

Racial Resentment (**YouGov, * Indicates also asked in 2010 and 2014 CCES**)

Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors. *

1 - Agree Strongly
2 - Agree Somewhat
3 - Neither agree nor disagree
4 - Disagree Somewhat
5 - Disagree Strongly

Generations of Slavery and Discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.*

1 - Agree Strongly
2 - Agree Somewhat
3 - Neither agree nor disagree
4 - Disagree Somewhat
5 - Disagree Strongly

Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

1 - Agree Strongly
2 - Agree Somewhat
3 - Neither agree nor disagree
4 - Disagree Somewhat
5 - Disagree Strongly

It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

1 - Agree Strongly
2 - Agree Somewhat
3 - Neither agree nor disagree
4 - Disagree Somewhat
5 - Disagree Strongly