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Abstract

Jessor and Sears analyze measures of whites' political responses to racial issues within the context of competing theories of group dynamics. Jessor and Sears first examine the relationships among the 1985 Pilot Study group measures. They find: (1) consistent with theories of symbolic politics, affect towards racial groups is a major determinant of the racial attitudes of whites; (2) consistent with theories of group conflict, perceptions of conflict between the races is linked to feelings of conflict between individual respondents and blacks; (3) while measures of ingroup conflict and outgroup interdependence are related to some extent, perceptions of intergroup conflict may have a symbolic component apart from outgroup interdependence; and (4) an outgroup focus may be more central than an ingroup focus in explaining whites' attitudes towards blacks. Jessor and Sears also examine the relationship between the group measures and racial policy preferences. They find: (1) Perceptions of group conflict have a strong effect on whites' racial policy preferences. (2) This group conflict motive cannot be explained by the self-interest-based version of realistic group conflict theory. (3) Symbolic group affect does not seem to operate in a simple bipolar manner. Instead, outgroup affect seems to play a larger role. (4) Perceptions of group conflict and group affect both play an important role in determining whites' racial attitudes. They overlap to some extent, but each contribute large, unique variance to explaining policy preferences. Finally, Sears and Jessor find that the measure of interaction uncovers different motivations underlying racial conflict among respondents who have different amounts of contact with blacks. Moreover, perceptions of intergroup conflict and outgroup affect may play stronger roles among respondents who place themselves high on the white identification item.