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Title: Revitalizing the Measurement of White Americans' Racial Attitudes

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Dataset(s): 1984 National Election Survey, 1985 Pilot Study

Abstract

Kinder and Sanders evaluate the 1985 Pilot Study experimental items pertaining to racial attitudes of white respondents. The authors find that the public's thinking on race policy is organized into distinct packages, based on beliefs concerning the government's proper role in reducing inequality -- on both general and domain-specific levels -- and affirmative action. Moreover, Kinder and Sanders find that public opinion on racial policy is correlated across these three dimensions, indicating a firm overall structure to racial beliefs. The authors also examine the political correlates of opinion concerning racial policy and find that partisan identification, liberal/conservative beliefs, and the more general ideological stances of respondents are important determinants of such opinions. Kinder and Sanders then address the political consequences of race policy opinions. They find that the impact of opinions concerning race policy on vote choice, and evaluations of presidential performance and prominent political figures, are comparatively modest, but still appreciable and politically significant, especially in the South. Kinder and Sanders add that the experimental measures of racial attitudes are superior to the traditional measures in this context, because the standard NES item may seriously underestimate the apparent political effects of opinion concerning racial issues. The authors also examine the antecedents to race opinion. Kinder and Sanders find that the opinions of white Americans pertaining to race policy appear to primarily reflect: perceptions of conflict between blacks and whites (group conflict), moralistic resentments that mix racial prejudice and traditional American values (symbolic racism), and commitment to equality as a general social principle (equality).