

Proposal for the ANES 2016 Pilot Study: Measuring Resentment of Black Americans¹

Since 1986, the American National Election Studies time series studies have included four items measuring a concept known as racial resentment and symbolic racism. Researchers have claimed that responses to these items reflect "a new expression of prejudice that has developed in the United States...based on the belief that blacks violate key American values, particularly the idea of individualism" (Henry and Sears 2008: 111). Research indicates that these items associate with important election- and participation-related phenomena such as white opposition to black political candidates (Ford et al. 2010), Tea Party membership (Tope et al. 2015), and non-voting in the 2008 election (Pasek et al. 2009). However, research indicates that these racial resentment items do not adequately measure antiblack attitudes, either as stand-alone items or with the help of statistical control.

The Inferential Problem with the ANES's Current Racial Resentment Items

The ANES's current racial resentment items ask respondents to agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each of these statements:

1. Irish, Italians, Jewish 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.

¹ Keywords: race, racial resentment, symbolic racism, bias, experiment

4. 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.

Researchers using these items to measure attitudes toward blacks face an inferential ambiguity because the items conflate antiblack bias with nonracial attitudes: for instance, a person who agrees that blacks should work their way up without special favors might dislike blacks, dislike special favors for identity groups, or dislike both blacks and special favors for identity groups.

Some researchers have used statistical control to try to isolate the racial component of racial resentment (e.g., Pasek et al. 2009: 949). The typical racial resentment research design has thus been to place the racial resentment scale into a regression alongside controls for conservatism and then to interpret the residual effect of racial resentment as antiblack bias. However, past and contemporary research indicates that statistical control for conservatism does not isolate antiblack attitudes in the racial resentment scales.

Kinder and Sanders (1996) used racial resentment to predict values of nonracial dependent variables. Based on data from the 1986 and 1992 ANES studies, regressions that controlled for attitudes about limited government and equal opportunity indicated that racial resentment associated at a statistically significant level with attitudes about family leave and childcare policies, attitudes about parental consent and spousal notification for abortion, attitudes about gays in the military and gay adoption, and attitudes about the US stance toward the Soviet Union (p. 122).

More recently, Zigerell (2015) reported results from the ANES 2012 Time Series Study indicating that racial resentment associated at a statistically significant level with ostensibly nonracial dependent variables such as patriotism, positive feelings toward the

military, and conservative attitudes about women, even when the statistical control included extensive controls for conservatism. In these results, the association of racial resentment with the ostensibly nonracial dependent variables was not detected simply because a large sample size permitted detection of statistical significance: the standardized effect sizes for racial resentment in predicting patriotism, positive feelings toward the military, and conservative attitudes about women were respectively 0.10, and 0.14 and 0.11, while the respective standardized effect sizes for the possibly racialized items of Tea Party support, opposition to the 2010 health care law, and negative ratings of President Obama were 0.10, 0.09, and 0.09.

The traditional racial resentment research design conflates antiblack attitudes with nonracial attitudes, and then uses statistical control to try to isolate the antiblack attitudes; however, unless antiblack attitudes influence attitudes about the Soviet Union and women, the evidence above suggests that this traditional research design does not work. Researchers thus need a new method for assessing the influence of resentment of black Americans.

Proposed New ANES Items Measuring Resentment of Black Americans

Evidence that statistical control is insufficient for isolating the effect of a variable invites an experimental solution, which can provide stronger causal inference. This type of experiment has already been conducted at least twice. Sniderman and Carmines (1997: 136-138) reported results from a survey experiment in which some respondents received the racial resentment item about blacks working their way up without special favors and other respondents received the same item with "blacks" replaced by "new immigrants from

Europe"; response values for white respondents were 79% agreement that blacks should work their way up and 79% agreement that new immigrants from Europe should work their way up. More recently, Enos and Carney (2015) varied targets in racial resentment items using groups such as blacks, whites, Hispanics, and the Taiwanese; results indicated that "average resentment, as measured by modern racism scales, is similar across all target groups" (p. 25).

Moore (2012) suggested replacing "blacks" with "the poor" and "whites" with "the wealthy" in racial resentment items. However, respondents might perceive the distance in outcomes between blacks and whites to be different than the distance in outcomes between the poor and the wealthy. The proposed replacement is instead to use poor blacks as the target for half of respondents and to use poor X as the target for the other half of respondents, in which X is the respondent's racial or ethnic group (white, black, Asian, or Hispanic), with black respondents in the second sample receiving poor whites as the target. The poor X group can serve as a baseline for measuring racial resentment, similarly to the way thermometer ratings of outgroups are often compared to thermometer ratings that the respondent has made of the respondent's own group.

Proposed New Racial Resentment Items

Responses to the three proposed items below will be measured on a five-point scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly):

1. Most poor [blacks/whites/Asians/Hispanics] are poor because they don't work hard enough.

2. Most poor [blacks/whites/Asians/Hispanics] who receive money from welfare could get along without it if they tried.
3. Most poor [blacks/whites/Asians/Hispanics] face conditions that make it difficult for them to work their way out of the lower class.

These three items were designed to reflect the racial resentment items that currently appear on the ANES Time Series Studies, but were modified to permit realistic symmetry between racial and ethnic groups; for example, mention of slavery was eliminated, and the focus on groups such as poor whites and poor blacks instead of whites and blacks was designed to reduce the possibility that responses reflect attitudes about socioeconomic status instead of race. The touchtone of item design was to tap the belief that "blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and...take what they have not earned" (Kinder and Sanders 1996: 106).

To ensure that the statistical analyses include only respondents who received the "treatment" of the group target in the resentment items, it is proposed that respondents receive a manipulation check item after the three resentment items:

4. The previous items asked about which group?
 - poor blacks
 - poor whites
 - poor Asians
 - poor Hispanics [options randomized]

Proposed Method of Analysis

To assess the degree to which responses to the resentment items are driven by the race/ethnicity of the target, means for the "poor black" and "poor X" resentment items can be compared to each other using a t-test for each item and for a scale of the three items. These resentment scales can also be used to predict responses to dependent variable items such as vote choice or electoral participation: the regression coefficient for the resentment scale in the "poor black" group can be subtracted from the corresponding coefficient for the resentment scale in the "poor X" group, to assess the size of the antiblack bias associated with responses to the dependent variable. Suppose that coefficients predicting a dependent variable were statistically different and had respective values of 2.5 and 1.2 for the "poor black" and "poor X" resentment scales; this would indicate that a one-unit increase on the "poor black" resentment scale corresponded to a predicted point estimate of a 1.3-unit increase in the dependent variable that is entirely attributable to the presence of poor blacks as the target of the resentment items instead of poor members of the respondents' racial or ethnic group. Importantly, because experiments can eliminate alternate explanations, this regression would not need to include any control variables, thus eliminating a common researcher degree of freedom (Simmons et al. 2011).

Contribution to Science and Society

Racial bias is an important topic of study for social science because racial bias can harm people's lives and affect electoral politics. Racial resentment serves as a common unobtrusive method to measure racial bias, but multiple studies have provided evidence that the standard racial resentment research design does not isolate the racial component

of racial resentment. However, the proposed experimental design is able to isolate the antiblack component of racial resentment in an efficient fashion, using a split ballot instead of statistical control.

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