

**Proposal for the ANES 2016 Pilot Study:
Supplementing Skin tone Measurement from the 2012 ANES**

Keywords: Skin tone; measurement; discrimination; colorism

A variety of social science and public health research has demonstrated the importance of skin tone in the every day life of African Americans. For example, when comparing light and dark skinned blacks, it is consistently found that darker skinned blacks experience worse socioeconomic outcomes (Branigan et al. 2013; Hill 2000; Monk 2014), greater labor market and wage discrimination (Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity 2007; Harrison and Thomas 2009; Wade Romano, and Blue 2004), more punitive criminal justice decisions (Blair et al. 2004; Eberhardt et al. 2006; Viglione and DeFina 2010), greater social rejection from whites (Hebl et al. 2012), as well as poorer physical and mental health related outcomes (Klonoff and Landrine 2000; Thompson and Keith 2001). Still, the field of political science has had little opportunity to explore how skin tone relates to the political world given the lack of measurement of skin color.

For the 2012 ANES, however, interviewers recorded their assessment of respondents' skin tone using the Massey-Martin (2003) New Immigrant Survey Skin Color Scale at the end of the pre-election survey. These data are valuable to social scientists interested in public opinion and political attitudes given the wealth of social scientific and public health research demonstrating the more negative life experiences of darker skinned blacks relative to lighter blacks. Thus, with the ANES' addition of interviewer-assessed skin tone, scholars can now explore the relationship between skin tone and various political attitudes and behaviors (e.g., partisanship, vote choice, policy preferences). Indeed, several scholars have either already

published with these data (Hannon 2014) or are currently pursuing projects relying on this item (Piston Nd, Hutchings et al. Nd).

The inclusion of the interviewer-assessed measure of skin tone is a good first step, but in an effort to explore the potential limits of this approach, we recommend the inclusion of respondents' self-assessment of their skin tone. Furthermore, we think the ANES is uniquely positioned to help scholars understand better the salience of skin color as a means of stratification in the U.S. by including questions that might shed light on the differential ways in which Americans of varying backgrounds face discrimination, not simply on the basis of race, but also on the basis of their skin color

The Need for a Better Understanding of Skin Tone

At the outset, we should note that skin tone or skin color is not some arbitrary, esoteric individual characteristic that exists without consequence. Although not studied in political science until recently, skin tone is a concept with clear real-world applicability. Compelling evidence exists suggesting that African Americans are acutely aware of their skin tone and of the skin tone of other blacks (Parrish 1946, Wilder 2010). Still, it is not known how these skin tone perceptions relate to political outcomes. Using interviewer-assessed skin tone included in the 2012 ANES and data from a unique priming experiment, Hutchings et al., in work presented at the Midwest Political Science Association and the American Political Science Association's annual meetings, find that darker skinned blacks, who on balance have lower incomes and worse personal health statuses, are more supportive of a range of redistributive policies and, when primed, report a stronger attachment to the racial group.

The 2010-2014 General Social Survey (GSS) Panel had interviewers assess skin tone in waves two (2012) and three (2014). Here, the Pearson's correlation coefficient between the two

measures is only 0.74, suggesting inconsistencies between the ratings. In fact, looking at the difference measure of skin tone across the two waves, we find that nearly 70 percent of black respondents receive skin tone ratings within one or two shades across waves. For the other 30 percent of the black sample, however, the measurement varies from three to six shades different between waves.

Because the GSS changed interviewer codes across waves, it is not possible to know which respondents were re-interviewed by the same person in both waves. Based on demographic matching, however, it appears that nearly 20 percent had the same interviewer in both waves two and three. Of black respondents who likely had the same interviewer in both waves, only nine percent had ratings of three or four shades different between waves. Of those with different interviewers, however, this variation increased such that nearly 30 percent received a rating more than three shades lighter or darker than their initial skin tone rating. This high amount of variability across interviewers and across years is indicative of potential biases in interviewer-assessed measures of skin tone and our own investigation suggests that interviewer skin tone itself is predictive of respondent skin tone. This latter point might simply reflect the ANES' goal of matching interviewers with individuals of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, but might well suggest that interviewer-assessed measures of skin tone are systematically biased, as interviewers use their own skin tone as a reference point when assessing the skin tone of the respondent. At the very least, the addition of respondents' self-assessed skin tone will allow scholars to investigate the extent to which they should worry about this bias when using interviewer-assessed measures of skin tone.

In the aforementioned experiment that supplemented the ANES data used by Hutchings and colleagues, there is some evidence that self-assessed skin tone is related to a number of

questions political scientists care about. It is a predictor of beliefs about who benefits from various policies, is predictive of adherence to negative stereotypes about those who belong to different skin tone categories, and the distribution of respondent-assessed skin tone in this convenience sample of MTurk participants is roughly similar to the distribution found in the 2012 ANES. Not only does this suggest that individuals can easily use the skin tone scale included in the ANES, but it also suggests that such a self-assessment is a meaningful measure of the concept. The extent to which it is different from an interviewer-assessed measure cannot yet be determined, however. The ANES is uniquely positioned to allow for such a comparison.

Beyond practical measurement concerns, having access to both a self-assessed measure of skin tone and an interviewer-assessed measure could allow scholars to investigate gaps in self-perceptions and others' perceptions of the self. The 1995 Detroit Area Study (DAS), for instance, measured both interviewer and self-assessed skin tone. This afforded scholars an opportunity to examine how people view themselves vs. how they are perceived by interviewers. The correlation between self-assessed and interviewer-assessed skin tone was only 0.72 in this sample. Broken down by respondent's sex, the correlation for black women between self-assessment and interviewer assessment was 0.74, whereas it was only 0.66 for black men. Unfortunately, there is no interviewer demographic information available about interviewers in the 1995 DAS, so it is not possible to know what effect race or sex of interviewer has on the interviewer-assessed skin tone measure in this study.² In contrast to the moderately high and positive relationship between self-assessed and interviewer-assessed skin tone, there is perfect

² Hill (2002) found evidence in the 1992-1994 Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality that white interviewers rated black respondents as much darker than black interviewers would have rated the same respondent.

correlation between interviewer assessments of race and respondents' self-assessments in the 1995 DAS.

The items related to discrimination based on skin tone have also been pre-tested with the MTurk sample of blacks. This provided one of the first opportunities to measure discrimination based on skin tone given the association we know exists between skin color and socioeconomic outcomes and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. We ask respondents, just as the ANES does, to rate their perception of discrimination faced by blacks and whites. In addition to these two questions, we also include items that ask for perceptions of discrimination toward light-skinned and dark-skinned blacks. As expected, we find individuals do perceive there to be different levels of discrimination faced by whites and blacks, but more interestingly, they also report different perceptions of discrimination toward those with different skin tones. On a 0-1 scale, respondents perceive the least amount of discrimination toward whites (mean .24; st. dev .02), with lighter-skinned blacks (mean .48; st. dev .02) coming in a distant second. Blacks, in general, are thought to face more discrimination than whites and lighter-skinned blacks, specifically, (mean .60; st. dev .02), but are thought to face less discrimination than dark-skinned blacks (mean .67; st. dev .02). We also find that increased perceptions of discrimination toward dark-skinned blacks is associated with opposition to increased immigration ($p=.019$), support for the use of affirmative action by universities ($p=.005$), a belief that being black is important to one's identity ($p=.036$), and a more liberal self-identification ($p=.095$). Of note, these associations hold in models that include standard political measures (party identification and ideology), demographic measures (gender, age, income, education), and other measures of perceptions of discrimination (discrimination toward blacks, discrimination toward the self based

on race, discrimination toward the self based on skin color, and discrimination toward light-skinned blacks).

These items regarding skin color discrimination have never been asked with respect to other races, but we propose they be administered to the entire sample as members of all racial groups face differential levels of discrimination based on skin tone. The group discrimination items are an attempt to measure an alienation of sorts, which we expect could affect other things social scientists care about. Put differently, those at opposite ends of the spectrum (i.e., those who claim their group faces discrimination vs. those who believe their group does not face discrimination) likely also have very different policy opinions.

Given that a body of social scientific research shows that discrimination is disproportionately distributed based on skin tone, it is worthwhile to explore what effect skin tone has on perceptions of discrimination towards one's racial group and the self. Indeed, this may even be the case for whites, given that the 2012 ANES data reveals that lighter skinned whites are significantly more likely to be conservatives and Republicans relative to their darker white counterparts. In addition, on the items related to specific racial groups having too much influence, darker whites are significantly more likely than lighter whites to believe whites have too much influence. Other research also suggests that there are important differences among whites based on skin tone. For example, Branigan et al. (2013) shows an association between skin color and educational outcomes – with darker individuals performing more poorly – among white women, but not white men. Thus, we believe the importance of these skin tone-based discrimination items extends beyond blacks as a racial group and the items should be asked of *all* racial groups.

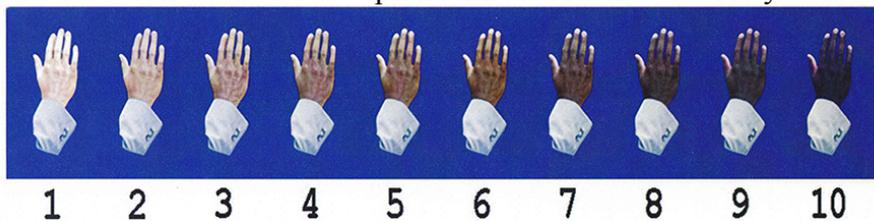
Summary

Skin color is an important and meaningful feature of American society. Above and beyond racial considerations, skin color appears strongly related to outcomes that political scientists care about. Getting the measurement of skin tone right is, therefore, an important task to take up. Including a respondent-assessed skin tone measure in the 2016 ANES alongside an interviewer-assessed measure will allow scholars to investigate potential biases in either measure and will help highlight the shortcomings and advantages of both.

Recognizing that skin tone matters also requires that we take seriously the different ways those who belong to different skin tone categories experience the world. Asking respondents to assess their perceptions of discrimination faced by members of different skin tone categories will not only provide interesting insight into the nuances of race in American society, but might well demonstrate that when we ask about policies thought to affect a particular racial group, a more specific subset of that group is actually being called to mind.

The Proposed Questions

1. As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical characteristics. One of these is skin color. Displayed above is a skin color scale that ranges from 1 (representing the lightest possible skin color) to 10 (representing the darkest possible skin color). The 10 shades of skin color are represented by a hand of identical form, but differing in color. Please indicate which hand depicted below comes closest to your skin color.



2. How much discrimination have you personally faced because of your skin color (e.g., light, medium, or dark)?
 - a. A great deal
 - b. A lot
 - c. A moderate amount
 - d. A little
 - e. None at all

3. How much discrimination is there in the United States today against dark skinned [*respondent's racial group*]?
 - a. A great deal
 - b. A lot
 - c. A moderate amount
 - d. A little
 - e. None at all

4. How much discrimination is there in the United States today against light skinned [*respondent's racial group*]?
 - a. A great deal
 - b. A lot
 - c. A moderate amount
 - d. A little
 - e. None at all

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