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Trumping the equality norm? Presidential tweets and revealed racial attitudes

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Abstract
One noteworthy characteristic of Donald Trump's candidacy and subsequent presidency is his willingness to use racial rhetoric. This is especially the case on Twitter, where he communicates directly with millions of followers. This article utilizes a survey experiment to understand how Trump's tweets influence subjects' revealed racial attitudes. Subjects are exposed to one of three tweets made by Trump: a control tweet about the economy, a tweet with an implicitly racist message, or a tweet with an explicitly racist message. Analyses indicate that while exposure to racist messages does not influence respondents' issue prioritization, both implicitly and explicitly racist messages interact with racial resentment to increase the propensity to describe African-Americans in starkly stereotypical and negative language. These findings suggest that the norm of racial equality, long thought to dampen support for elites who invoke explicitly racist rhetoric, has weakened in the Trump era.

Keywords
Elite cues, race, racial resentment, racism, Twitter

Introduction

Ever since Donald Trump stepped into the political arena, he has received attention for his racial rhetoric. Early in Trump's political career, he made the legitimacy of Barack Obama's presidency a defining issue. Dubbed "birtherism," Trump repeatedly questioned whether Obama was born in the United States, going so far as to tweet that "an 'extremely credible source' called my office and told me that Barack Obama's birth

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certificate is a fraud." Critics contend that such rhetoric is an example of thinly veiled racism against the nation's first African-American president, while Trump's defenders argue that birtherism is a legitimate issue that has nothing to do with race.

Despite the attention Trump's comments receive, coded racist appeals are nothing new in politics. Following the successes of the Civil Rights Movement and the resulting societal change of attitudes toward issues of race, political elites recognized that White audiences (at least publicly) rejected explicitly racist appeals (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McIlwain and Caliendo, 2011; Mendelberg, 2001; Tokeshi and Mendelberg, 2015). In place of overtly racist appeals, elites began advocating for socially conservative positions on issues adjacent to race. For example, rather than espouse support for segregation, politicians would stress the importance of states' rights; rhetoric supporting the overt disenfranchisement of Blacks gave way to concerns of voter fraud. These supposedly "color-blind" issues allow politicians to obliquely disparage and discriminate against racial minorities while maintaining plausible deniability over the racist motivations of their actions (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Mendelberg, 2001).

The advent of social media allows such rhetoric to reach audiences without the filter or added commentary of a traditional news outlet. Most politicians today maintain active social media accounts, using Facebook or Twitter to communicate with their constituents directly. In traditional media environments such as television and newspaper, elite political rhetoric often only reached those who followed the news closely (Prior, 2007; Zaller, 1992); those uninterested in politics tuned out such discussions in favor of more entertaining options (Arceneaux and Johnson, 2013). However, social media regularly expose users to political information inadvertently; a user who logs onto Twitter for diversionary purposes may see a friend's retweet of a politician, thus exposing her to elite rhetoric she might not have seen in traditional contexts.

This dynamic is especially important given President Trump's use of Twitter. Trump sent more than 7700 tweets or retweets in 2019 (up from approximately 3600 in 2018), an average of over 21 tweets per day. According to one analysis, a majority of Trump's tweets promote himself or his administration, while a third attack his political opponents or critics.[1] Some of these tweets have racist overtones, both implicit and explicit. In one instance, Trump was accused of anti-Semitism for his (now changed) tweet of a picture of Hillary Clinton that originally included a Star of David featuring the words "Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!"[2] In another tweet, Trump shared a campaign ad portraying immigrants as violent and dangerous.[3] In addition, Trump has been known to retweet White nationalist groups and to use Twitter to criticize prominent Black or Hispanic individuals. With approximately 78 million people following Trump's Twitter account, it is important to understand the effects that both implicitly and explicitly racist tweets have on his audience.

In order to better understand the effect that Trump's tweets have on his Twitter followers, I conducted a survey experiment that exposes subjects to one of three randomly selected tweets made by Trump: a tweet about the economy, which serves as the control group; an implicitly racist tweet that decries the prevalence of crime in inner cities; or an explicitly racist tweet that claims that Blacks were responsible for 81% of White homicide victims (a claim debunked by PolitiFact as "Pants on Fire"). Findings indicate that racial resentment's effect interacts with both implicitly and explicitly racist messages, causing

an increase in the negative stereotyping of Blacks. These findings suggest that the norm of racial equality, which had previously caused voters to publicly distance themselves from those espousing overtly racist language, has weakened in the Trump era.

Racist rhetoric and its effects

Following the Civil War and through the first half of the 20th century, many Whites adhered to a racial "norm of inequality," or the notion that Blacks were fundamentally inferior to Whites and were therefore undeserving of equality in public accommodations or civil rights (Mendelberg, 2001). Southern political elites, in particular, would explicitly appeal to Whites' sense of superiority in their rhetoric. Even as late as the 1948 presidential race, Dixiecrat politicians referred to Blacks as "howling, screaming savages" (Feldman, 1995: 132) and a "mongrel, inferior race" (Klinker and Smith, 1999: 222). This rhetoric certainly found an audience, as public opinion polls conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) in the 1940s found that almost half of Whites considered Blacks to be less intelligent and less capable of learning (Erskine, 1962: 138).

However, in the mid-20th century, political institutions began to promote racial equality with a string of Supreme Court decisions, the elimination of the White primary, and the desegregation of the military. Along with this institutional change came a rejection of the explicitly racist appeals made by political elites. Recognizing a new "norm of equality" (Mendelberg, 2001), many voters rejected such stark language (at least publicly). The emerging sentiment of the 1950s and 1960s was that explicitly negative portrayals of African-Americans were no longer acceptable, and that candidates espousing such views were too extreme for mainstream politics (Schuman et al., 1997). Indeed, this is reflected in a NORC poll conducted in 1956, in which about 20% of Whites considered Blacks to be less intelligent, down from nearly 50% only a decade earlier (Erskine, 1962: 138).

Yet, this is not to suggest that ideas of White supremacy or racial resentment disappeared completely. Although the country's new norm of equality made Whites reluctant to express these now frowned-upon attitudes publicly, such sentiments are still prevalent among Whites. Indeed, research has found that ordinary people regularly invoke racial hierarchy, negative stereotypes, and racial slurs in private conversation (Myers and Williamson, 2001). However, when in public, individuals are more likely to mask their true feelings in order to present themselves in a manner acceptable to society (Berinsky, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Phillips and Clancy, 1972). For example, one study estimated that though half of White respondents resented affirmative action programs, only 70% of those individuals were willing to express that resentment publicly (Gilens et al., 1998).

Despite the norm of equality, racial resentment remains a powerful determinant for a host of social and political attitudes. Racial resentment is a broad concept that covers a range of negative racial predispositions, including outright racism, harmful racial stereotypes, and attribution of blame to the individual rather than systemic institutional racism. In their seminal book on the concept, Kinder and Sanders (1996) describe racial resentment as

> a new form of prejudice . . . that is preoccupied with matters of moral character, informed by the virtues associated with the traditions of individualism. At its center are the contentions that

> blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and that they take what they have not earned. (pp. 105–106)

Because of resentment's ability to predict attitudes on race-related policies and candidate evaluations, scholars consider it one of the most fundamental factors in how Whites interpret political developments (Jardina, 2019; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001). Kinder and Sanders (1996), for example, find such resentment to be a strong predictor of White opinion on racially charged issues such as welfare, affirmative action, school desegregation, and the plight of the inner city. In a phenomenon dubbed "aversive racism" by Dovidio and Gaertner (1986), Whites generally support the principle of racial equality, but still possess (possibly subconscious) negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks. These competing forces of equality and resentment create ambivalence among Whites (Mendelberg, 2001: 112), which elites can exploit through the use of coded racist appeals.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the new norm of equality caused politicians to shift away from the language of White supremacy to the use of more coded appeals. For example, Alabama Governor George Wallace, infamous for his "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" inaugural speech in 1963, shifted away from explicit appeals to more ambiguous language in the late 1960s (Black, 1976). Richard Nixon would also adopt a strategy that deemphasized race while highlighting race-adjacent issues such as forced busing, drugs, and law and order (Wills, 1969). Lee Atwater, who would work with both Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, as well as serve as the chair of the Republican National Committee, would later reflect on this shift in rhetoric:

> You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968, you can't say "nigger." That hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now, you're talking about cutting taxes and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is that blacks get hurt worse than whites. (Lamis, 1990)

It is important to note that this shift in rhetoric was not limited to elites alone. Although ordinary Whites are reluctant to use explicitly racist language publicly, qualitative research has found that many have adopted rhetorical tricks to criticize racial minorities without actually invoking race. These include an ostensible commitment to individualism and equal opportunity, as well as an emphasis on cultural (i.e. not racial) differences or on the fact that Jim Crow-style racism is a thing of the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2018: 56–57).

When used by political elites, coded appeals give racially resentful Whites the ability to support candidates espousing seemingly color-blind policy positions that are, in actuality, discriminatory against Blacks. This provides aversive racists plausible deniability, allowing them to claim that their attitudes are not driven by anti-Black sentiment, but instead by preferences such as less government spending or increased states' rights. However, interviews suggest this commitment to racial color-blindness is rather superficial, as many are unable to coherently explain their attitudes on race-related issues in

terms that do not include race (Bonilla-Silva, 2018: 91). Such individuals are not interested in interrogating their true attitudes on race and racial issues, but instead seek the plausible deniability that color-blind preferences provide, however artificial it may be.

Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that coded messages are quite effective at influencing White audiences. Studies have shown that implicitly racist cues can prime racial attitudes (Valentino et al., 2002), evoking anxiety (Brader et al., 2008) and anger (Banks and Valentino, 2012), causing voters to prioritize race-adjacent issues (Mendelberg, 2001). This article first tests the ability of implicitly and explicitly racist messages from President Trump to influence the highlighted issue's salience among subjects with the following hypotheses:

H1a. Exposure to an implicitly racist message will increase racial resentment's effect on the salience of the highlighted issue.

H1b. Exposure to an explicitly racist message will increase racial resentment's effect on the salience of the highlighted issue.

In addition to issue salience, this article also examines whether and how implicitly and explicitly racist rhetoric influences subjects' perception of the targeted group. In light of resurgences in White identity politics (Jardina, 2019) and White supremacy (Horowitz et al., 2019), recent scholarship has focused on whether the norm of equality still causes voters to publicly reject explicitly racist rhetoric. Concurrent with the rise in White identity has been political elites' tendency to invoke explicitly racist rhetoric, which, according to classic research on the subject, should dampen resentment's effects on revealed attitudes (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986; Mendelberg, 2001). However, more recent research has found that the norm of equality may not be as strong these previous studies suggest, as online comment sections are rife with racist remarks (Hughey and Daniels, 2013) and many voters appear largely unbothered by explicitly racist rhetoric in the Trump era (Banks and Hicks, 2019; Valentino et al., 2018). It would seem whether and how explicitly racist rhetoric influences audiences is once again open for debate.

Social media provide a new avenue for research of how racist rhetoric is used by elites and received by voters. Since their creation in the early 2000s, social media platforms have become an integral part of campaigning and political communication. Perhaps no one has revolutionized the political use of social media more than Donald Trump, whose victory in the 2016 presidential campaign is sometimes attributed to his adept (and controversial) use of Twitter (Enli, 2017; Ott, 2017). In addition to Trump's use of social media, others have credited his 2016 victory to his ability to tap into issues with a racial or ethnic dimension (Sides et al., 2018), such as terrorism (MacWilliams, 2016) and immigration (Pettigrew, 2017).

However, what separated Trump from other candidates was his willingness to use explicitly racist appeals during the campaign (Schaffner et al., 2018). Trump announced his candidacy in June 2015 with the characterization of Latino immigrants as rapists who bring crime and drugs into the country. Other instances include his implication that a slain soldier's Muslim religion prohibited his mother from speaking, his suggestion that

several first-term Congresswomen of color go back to the "crime-infested places from which they came," and his claim that a federal judge was unable to do his job because of his Mexican heritage—a comment US House Speaker Paul Ryan rebuked as "the textbook definition of a racist comment."

Although use of racist language existed well before Trump's entrance into politics, Trump's critics claim that his overt displays of racism and sexism have further weakened the norm of equality to the point that many no longer feel the need to hide socially undesirable attitudes. Although classic theories of ambivalence and aversive racism predict that only implicit messages should amplify the effects of his audience's racial resentment (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986; Mendelberg, 2001), recent research suggests the norm of equality has weakened to the point where many voters tolerate (if not embrace) racist rhetoric (Banks and Hicks, 2019; Valentino et al., 2018). This produces the following additional hypotheses, which will also be tested using the experiment described below:

H2a. Exposure to an implicitly racist message will increase racial resentment's effect on the propensity to describe African-Americans in stereotypically negative terms.

H2b. Exposure to an explicitly racist message will increase racial resentment's effect on the propensity to describe African-Americans in stereotypically negative terms.

Research design

In order to study the interaction effects of racist appeals and racial resentment, I recruited a sample of subjects through Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform in October 2018. MTurk is an online platform in which researchers can recruit workers for Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs), such as participating in a survey experiment, in exchange for a small monetary compensation. Despite concerns over how well MTurk samples represent the larger population, studies show that MTurk samples compare favorably to more conventional samples (Berinsky et al., 2012; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Paolacci and Chandler, 2014), even outperforming typical convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2012). The task for this study asked workers to "Answer a survey about who you'd follow on Twitter," and was otherwise vague so as to avoid selection effects. Participants were required to live in the United States, be at least 18 years of age, and have at least a 50% HIT approval rating. Because the competing forces of White supremacy and racial equality create the most ambivalence in Whites (Mendelberg, 2001), all racial and ethnic minorities were dropped from the analyses. Descriptive statistics of the sample and balance tests are located in the Supplemental Appendix.

After agreeing to participate in the survey, respondents answered basic questions about their demographic information. Following that, the survey measured subjects' racial resentment. Direct measures of such predispositions often provide inaccurate results, as subjects may feel the need to hide their true attitudes if they feel those attitudes would be frowned upon. Instead, scholars have developed indirect measures to gauge feelings of racial resentment and racism. One such battery has been adopted by the American National Election Study (ANES) and has been used in countless studies of

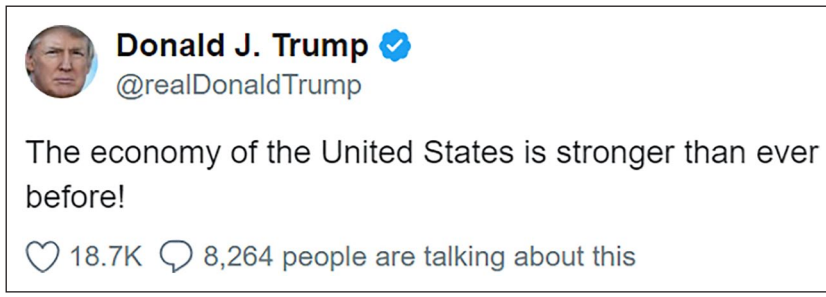

Figure 1. Control group tweet.

racial attitudes (see Kinder and Sanders, 1996 for a validation). This study utilizes the ANES racial resentment battery, which measures resentment with the four prompts below, each using a 5-point Likert-type agreement scale (those marked with an asterisk are coded in reverse). The responses to each prompt were then added into a total racial resentment score, ranging from 0 to 16.

> Most people – blacks and whites alike – agree that the average white person in America is more likely to have a good income, get a good education, and to have a regular job than the average black person. Here are some reasons that have been given as to why the average black American is not as well off as the average white American. Please indicate your agreement with each of the following reasons:
>
> Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
>
> Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.*
>
> 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.
>
> Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.*

Subjects then moved on to the Twitter portion of the survey. Here, subjects answered basic questions about their Twitter usage and indicated which celebrities and politicians they would follow from a pre-made list (see Supplemental Appendix). After these responses, subjects were told they were to view tweets from a person randomly selected from the list of celebrities. However, instead of a random celebrity, all users randomly received one of three tweets made by Donald Trump: an innocuous tweet praising the performance of the economy (control group, Figure 1), a tweet with an implicitly racist message (implicit group, Figure 2), or a tweet with an explicitly racist message (explicit group, Figure 3). Although each tweet was edited slightly to remove the date and to standardize the number of retweets and favorites, they are otherwise presented as originally tweeted in order to preserve external validity.

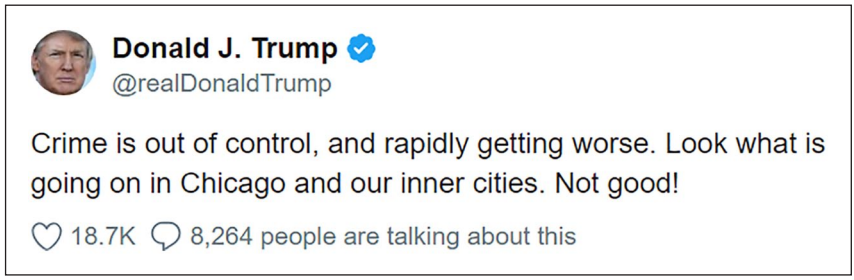

Figure 2. Implicit group tweet.

Figure 3. Explicit group tweet.

The implicit tweet does not reference race. Instead, it highlights the issues of crime and the plight of inner cities. Without any explicit appeals, Trump's tweet is ambiguous: is it simply a tough-on-crime message, or is it a coded message that criticizes the state of the Black community? There may be reason to suspect the latter, as Trump has a reputation for linking both issues to racial minorities. In addition to his campaign announcement speech linking Latino immigrants to crime, he also made the explicit connection of inner-city problems to the African-American community in a Michigan speech: "What do you have to lose? You're living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs, 58% of your youth is unemployed. What the hell do you have to lose?" However,

this treatment tweet avoids such explicit language and the resulting ambiguity serves the experiment well: if Trump's seemingly color-blind rhetoric regarding crime and the inner cities interacts positively with racial resentment as H1a and H2a predict, then we can be that much more confident in the power of implicitly racist appeals.

The explicitly racist tweet, on the other hand, boldly claims that 81% of White homicide victims were killed by African-Americans. The claim has since been debunked by fact checkers, as FBI data indicate that only 15% of White homicide victims are killed by Blacks. The veracity of the explicit tweet's statistics notwithstanding, what distinguishes this tweet from the implicit tweet is its explicit use of race, both in its depiction of young Black man wearing a bandana and brandishing a gun, and its explicit depiction of both Black-on-White and Black-on-Black crime. Although this tweet has since been deleted from Trump's Twitter account, it is especially apt for use as an experimental treatment for its combination of a racialized message with a visual.[4] This explicitly racist tweet leaves no room for an ambiguous interpretation as described above. Trump's linking African-Americans to homicide may cause Whites to see crime as an important issue (H1b). Furthermore, if the norm of equality no longer holds, this explicit message will interact positively with racial resentment, causing subjects to describe African-Americans in stereotypical or negative terms (H2b).

Following exposure to the randomly selected tweet, the survey asked subjects additional demographic information in order to create distance between the treatments and the dependent variable measures. Immediately following the second round of demographic questions, subjects were told to identify the four most important issues facing the country from a list of 21 possible choices. Among these choices was "crime," which was the issue featured in both the implicit and explicit experimental conditions. To avoid confounding factors, issues adjacent to crime (e.g. gun control, prison reform) were intentionally omitted from the list. Following Mendelberg (2001), subjects' selection of crime as one of the most important issues (thus indicating Trump's tweets' ability to set the political agenda) serves as one of the dependent variables in the analysis section (p. 189).

The final section of the survey measured subjects' overt attitudes toward African-Americans. Specifically, subjects were told that "For the final question, we are interested in attitudes towards certain groups, such as men, women, millennials, immigrants, and so on. On the next page, we will randomly select a group for you to describe." The survey software then indicated to subjects it was "Randomly selecting a group . . ." but no randomization actually occurred. Instead, all subjects were asked to select from a list of 44 adjectives (adapted from Katz and Braly, 1933) that they would attribute to African-Americans as a group. Adjective selection exercises provide insight of inter-group social attitudes and can be useful when assessing stereotypes associated with certain groups (Iyengar et al., 2012).

Four adjectives in the exercise (dangerous, suspicious, cruel, and aggressive) were related to crime, while the rest either had positive or negative connotations and were unrelated to crime (see Supplemental Appendix). The number of crime-related and negative adjectives selected each serve as dependent variables in the following analyses. Because Trump highlights crime in both the implicit and explicit tweets, the selection of crime as an important issue measures his ability to set the agenda using racist appeals.

Table 1. Probability of following Trump.

	Follow Trump
Racial resentment	–.084 (0.059)
Conservatism	**.68 (0.063)**
Age	.008 (0.007)
Male	**.43 (0.16)**
Education	.064 (0.066)
Income	–.012 (0.039)
Twitter user	**.64 (0.23)**
Constant	**–3.50 (0.66)**
Observations	875
Pseudo R^2	.15
LR chi-square	166.84

LR: likelihood ratio.
Standard errors in parentheses.
Coefficients significant at the $p < .05$ level are in bold.

Furthermore, the use of negative and/or crime-related adjectives allows for the determination of whether racist messages from the 45th President can trump the equality norm's desirability bias.

Results

Table 1 presents the results from a logistic regression that consider which factors influence the likelihood of following Donald Trump on Twitter, as measured by the Twitter selection exercise described above. As seen in Table 1, conservatives, males, and Twitter users were more likely than their counterparts to choose Trump during the selection exercise. It is also worth noting that despite claims that those harboring racial resentment are drawn to Trump, such resentment is not correlated with following Trump on Twitter. However, as future analyses will show, racial resentment manifests itself in meaningful ways when paired with implicitly and explicitly racist appeals.

However, before analyzing how racial resentment interacts with Trump's rhetoric, it is important to first understand the uninteracted effects of the different racial messages. Table 2 presents the results from three regressions analyzing each treatment's effect on three different measures of racial attitudes. Model 1 is a logistic regression estimating the likelihood of selecting crime as one of the nation's top problems, thus testing Trump's ability to influence issue salience with his tweets. This analysis is the subtler measure of the tweets' effects, as respondents may be more willing to cite the plausibly color-blind issue of crime than they would be to use crime-related adjectives or other adjectives with negative connotations (the dependent variables of the Poisson regressions in Models 2 and 3) to describe African-Americans.

As shown in Table 2, racial resentment only seems to manifest itself through an increased probability of choosing crime as one of the country's top problems. Uninteracted

Table 2. Uninteracted treatment effects on racial attitudes.

	Crime as problem (1)	Crime adjectives (2)	Negative adjectives (3)
Implicit message	–.29 (0.22)	.10 (0.11)	.044 (0.046)
Explicit message	**–.45 (0.22)**	–.23 (0.12)	**–.15 (0.050)**
Racial resentment	**.17 (0.07)**	.025 (0.035)	.009 (0.015)
Conservatism	**.34 (0.07)**	**.34 (0.033)**	**.27 (0.014)**
Age	–.005 (0.008)	–.001 (0.004)	**–.004 (0.002)**
Male	**–.42 (0.9)**	.072 (0.094)	.056 (0.040)
Education	**–.21 (0.072)**	–.007 (0.038)	.011 (0.016)
Income	.071 (0.043)	**–.077 (0.038)**	**–.065 (0.010)**
Control	**–2.86 (0.71)**	**–1.57 (0.37)**	**.52 (0.15)**
Observations	876	876	876
Pseudo R^2	.061	.066	.072
LR chi-square	51.08	123.79	420.39

LR: likelihood ratio.
Standard errors in parentheses.
Coefficients significant at the $p < .05$ level are in bold.

with the treatment messages, racial resentment does not influence subjects' likelihood of describing African-Americans using negative or stereotypical language. As for the uninteracted treatment effects, those exposed to the implicitly racist message exhibited no difference on these measures than those in the control group. Those exposed to the explicit message treatment, however, were *less* likely to cite crime as a top problem and selected *fewer* negative adjectives to describe African-Americans. This suggests that for the entire explicit group, the norm of equality still holds. Taken on face value, these findings indicate that much of the concern over the effect of Trump's racist tweets is unwarranted, as it would seem explicitly racist messages produce a backlash effect so that subjects report fewer anti-Black attitudes, while implicit messages have no effect at all. While such results appear normatively reassuring, analyses of Table 2 only consider the message effects on each treatment group as a whole. However, it may be that such tweets interact with racial resentment to exacerbate anti-Black attitudes, as predicted by the hypotheses above.

Turning to these interacted treatment effects, Figure 4 displays racial resentment's effect on the selection of crime as a top problem in the implicit and explicit message conditions, as compared to the control group indicated by the 0 line (full analyses in Supplemental Appendix). Perhaps because the racially resentful are already likely to cite crime as a top problem, even without priming (see Table 2), racial resentment's effect in both the implicit and explicit groups is statistically indistinguishable from that of the control group. In this situation, Trump's racist rhetoric does not amplify racial resentment's effect, thus failing to provide support for both H1a and H1b. However, the issue selection exercise is the more subtle measure of elite messaging effects. As the next analyses will show, Trump's racist tweets interact with racial resentment to produce normatively undesirable effects, particularly the tendency to use stereotypical and negative language to describe African-Americans.

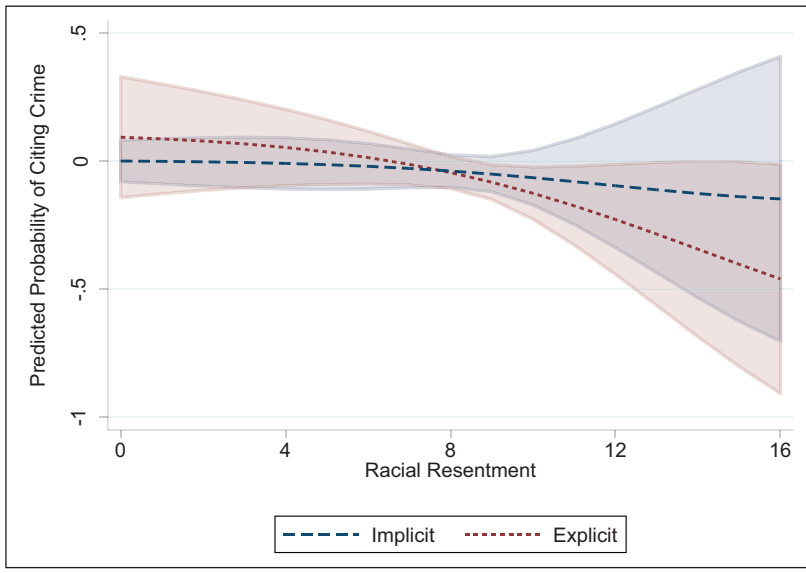

Figure 4. Selection of crime as a top problem.

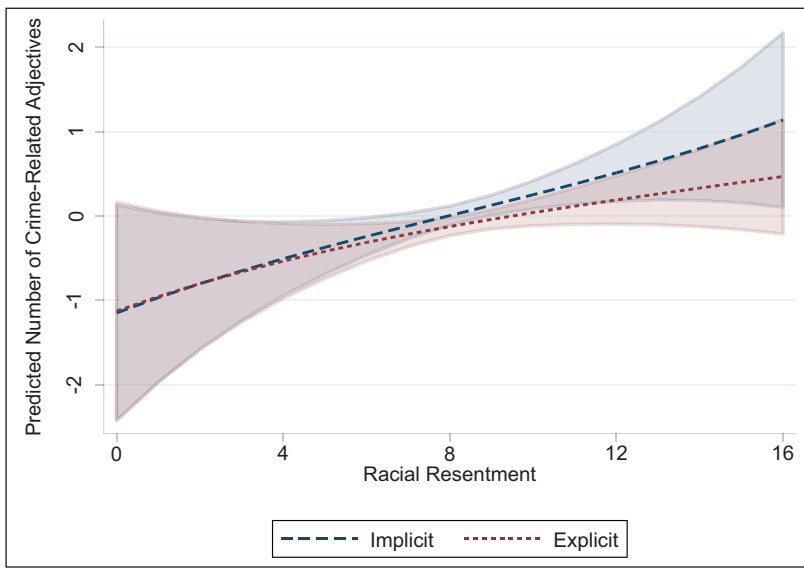

Figure 5. Selection of crime-related adjectives.

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate how racial resentment influences the number of crime-related and negative adjectives selected for the implicit and explicit conditions, relative to the control group (see Supplemental Appendix for full analyses). Recall that Table 2

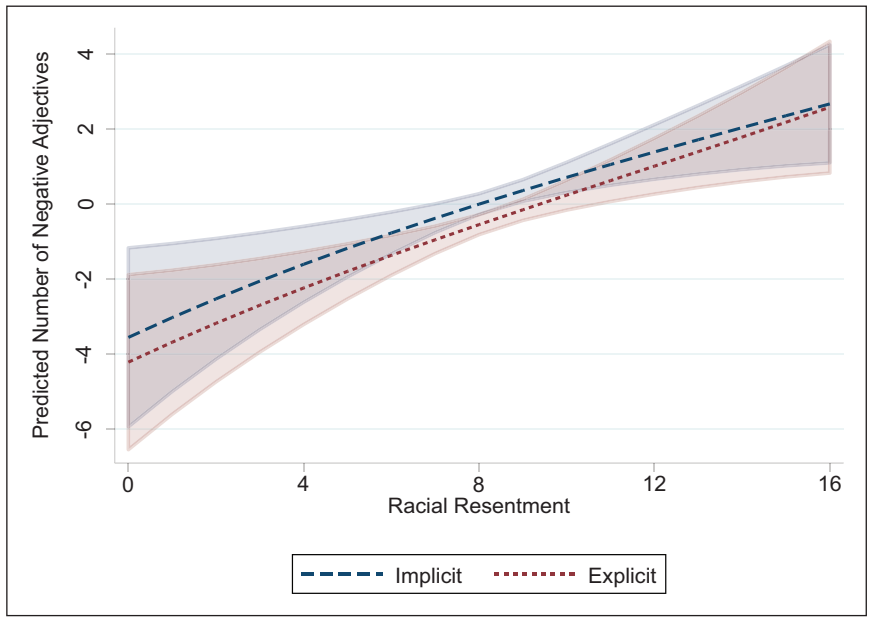

Figure 6. Selection of negative adjectives.

indicates that racial resentment does not have any uninteracted effect for either adjective exercise. In the absence of any racialized cue, subjects are less likely to describe African-Americans using either crime-related or negative words, possibly due to the norm of equality. However, resentment's effect changes drastically when paired with a racist prime.

H2a predicts that racial resentment's effects interact positively with the implicitly racist message to increase the tendency to describe Blacks using stereotypical or negative language, a prediction supported by Figure 5. Although the tweet makes no explicit mention of race, the reference to crime and inner cities may bring the African-American community to mind. In doing so, the implicit message may activate racial resentment in a way not observed in the control group. Among the implicit group, moving from minimum to maximum resentment is associated with more than a one-word increase in the selection of the four available crime-related adjectives. On average, the most resentful individuals exposed to the implicitly racial message selected 1.44 crime-related adjectives; in the control group, the most resentful only selected .20 crime-related adjectives. Although the implicitly racist tweet failed to increase racial resentment's effect in the issue selection exercise shown in Figure 4, Figure 5 provides support for H2a by demonstrating how implicit messages are able to link African-Americans with crime in the minds of the racially resentful.

The implicit message's amplification of racial resentment's effect is not limited to the use of crime-related words. In addition to causing the resentful to associate African-Americans with crime, Trump's implicit tweet also led the resentful to describe Blacks

using adjectives with negative connotations at an increased rate (Figure 6). The words "loud," "argumentative," "quick-tempered," and "impulsive" were especially popular among the implicit group that scored on the top half of the resentment scale. In fact, movement from minimum to maximum resentment is associated with a +10 increase in negative words chosen. That the implicitly racist tweets elicited such negative descriptions of African-Americans, unrelated to crime, provides further evidence in support of H2a.

Although previous research on the effects of explicitly racist rhetoric by political elites has produced mixed results, H2b predicts that racial resentment's effects would interact with the explicitly racist message to increase revealed anti-Black attitudes. Indeed, both Figures 5 and 6 provide evidence that when paired with an explicitly racist Trump tweet, the racially resentful are significantly more likely to describe African-Americans using crime-related and stereotypically negative language than the resentful in the control group. Indeed, on average, the most resentful in the control group selected .21 crime-related adjectives and 1.56 stereotypically negative adjectives to describe African-Americans, while the most resentful in the explicit group selected .73 crime and 4.2 negative adjectives. It seems that witnessing the president portraying African-Americans in such overtly negative terms emboldens the resentful to use language to describe Blacks that those in the control group (where no such portrayal was made) were unwilling to use. These findings provide evidence in support of H2b.

Conclusion

Although overtly racist messages have become significantly less common since the 1960s, elites still invoke such rhetoric. President Trump's use of explicit racist appeals is well-documented, but others have also received criticism for such language. In 2018, ABC canceled Roseanne Barr's sitcom after she compared a Black White House aide to an ape on Twitter. A year later, Iowa Representative Steve King was stripped of his committee assignments after questioning how the language of White supremacy became offensive. The swiftness with which these acts were condemned is indicative that the norm of equality still operates to some extent today. However, this article's analyses suggest that that norm is weakening, particularly among the racially resentful.

The results presented in this article demonstrate the power of racist Twitter messages from President Donald Trump. The evidence presented above is generally consistent with research on implicit messages (Banks and Hicks, 2019; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986; Mendelberg, 2001), further confirming that implicitly racist appeals cause individuals to feel more comfortable expressing socially undesirable attitudes on race and race-adjacent issues. Despite the lack of any overt mention of race, coded racist rhetoric can amplify racial resentment's effects. Although implicit messages had no effect on issue prioritization in the above analysis, they caused the racially resentful to describe African-Americans using negative and stereotypical language. These results are especially concerning, considering both elites and ordinary voters invoke coded racial messages much more often than explicitly racist messages (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Mendelberg, 2001).

In addition, the experiment also demonstrated that explicitly racist messages cause resentful subjects to describe African-Americans with stereotypically negative language.

Although early research on the subject suggested that voters would reject starkly negative portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986; Mendelberg, 2001), the results presented here suggest that the norm of equality no longer holds for the racially resentful. The resurgence of overt racism—both among elites and among voters—is a notable development, especially given recent scholarly emphasis on coded messages and color-blind racism (see Burke, 2017).

Because racist ideologies are shaped, in part, by discursive engagement (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Doane, 2017), social media may have an outsized role in their development. Social media allow users to move from passive audiences to active participants, all without the filter of a traditional news outlet. While this article examined the effects of *viewing* racist rhetoric on social media, race and communication scholars should also consider the effects of *participating* in such discussions, as well. It is possible that participating in racist discussions online correlates with engaging in racist behaviors offline, as social media scholars have consistently found links between one's online and offline activities (Bond et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Mano, 2014; Steinert-Threlkeld et al., 2015).

Finally, it is important to note that Donald Trump's particular divisiveness could have skewed the results of this experiment. Whether the results generalize to other elected officials, political pundits, or friends and family members is an open question. After all, social media facilitate a certain opinion leadership that enables everyday citizens to influence their social networks (Anspach, 2017). As social media audiences are more likely to believe their friends and family members over elites (Anspach and Carlson, 2020), scholars should study the effects of racist rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) from our close online ties (Myers and Williamson, 2001). Although the norm of equality appears weakened to the point that some voters no longer reject explicitly racist language, it is essential that scholars continue to study the evolving nature of racist communication and how to remedy its most deleterious effects.

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Supplemental material

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Notes

1. https://www.politico.com/interactives/2018/interactive_donald-trump-twitter-2018-analysis/
2. https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/749261175968436224
3. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1057728445386539008
4. For more detail on the effectiveness of pairing racialized messages with racialized visuals, see Mendelberg (2001).

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