

Responding to Racial Resentment: How Racial Resentment Influences Legislative Behavior

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Abstract

Despite the growing body of scholarship urging congressional scholars to consider the racialization of Congress, little attention has been given to understanding how racial resentment impacts legislative behavior. To fill this gap, we ask if and how racial resentment within a member's home district influences the positions she takes on racially tinged issues in her press releases. Due to constituent influence, we expect legislators from districts with high levels of racial resentment to issue racially tinged press releases. Through an automated content analysis of more than fifty four thousand press releases from almost four hundred U.S. House members in the 114th Congress (2015–2017), we show that Republicans from districts with high levels of racial resentment are more likely to issue press releases that attack President Barack Obama. In contrast, we find no evidence of racial resentment being positively associated with another prominent Democratic white elected official, Hillary Clinton. Our results suggest that one reason Congress may remain racially conservative even as representatives' cycle out of office may be attributed to the electoral process.

Keywords

American politics, racial resentment, legislative behavior

During President Barack Obama's first State of the Union, Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) broke with House rules of decorum by yelling "You lie!" when the President said that his health care policy would not cover those who illegally immigrated to the United States. What is unique about this is not that a member of the opposing party would disagree or condemn the president. Rather, it was the undercurrent of disrespect and de-legitimization of the nation's first black president in Wilson's outburst that stood out as distinct from the criticism faced by past presidents. This was not the first nor last time Obama's legitimacy would be questioned by Republican members of Congress. While some may argue that this was politics as usual, to the former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, Rep. G.K. Butterfield (D-NC), the root of this behavior was clear:

I understand how government works and I know the deference traditionally given to the president that you do not see now [for President Obama]. You put all of these incidents together—questioning his citizenship, the Muslim stuff, the idea that he has been infected with anticolonists' views by his father he barely knew—and you have a strong circumstantial case. It certainly smells like racism.¹

The claim that the Obama presidency was viewed through a racial lens is nothing new. Several studies

have convincingly shown that racial resentment among the electorate not only shaped support of Obama but also influenced support for policies closely associated with him (Hutchings 2009; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Piston 2010; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010). In fact, we have long known that racial bias alters partisanship and policy attitudes among the electorate (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1992; Gilens 1999; Key 1949; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears 1993; Winter 2008).

However, despite this robust scholarship, little is known about how racial bias in the electorate shapes the behavior of members of Congress. To fill this void, we consider whether constituency attitudes influence the press releases issued by legislators on racially tinged topics, such as attacking the first black president. In answering these questions, we are able to gain greater insight into the relationship between race and representation.

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Despite a growing body of scholarship² urging congressional studies to seriously consider the ways that race shapes “institutional goals, structures, procedures and political actions,” little attention has been given to understanding how racial resentment in the electorate shapes legislative behavior (King and Smith 2005, 85). Our work suggests that racial biases enter Congress, at least in part, because of constituent influence. As a result, one reason that Congress may remain racially conservative even as representatives’ cycle in and out of office may be attributed to the electoral process.

To test whether racial attitudes within a member’s home district influences the positions they take on racially tinged issues, we use a content analysis of more than fifty four thousand press releases made by almost four hundred members of the 114th Congress (2015–2017). Due to the influence of constituents and the growing salience of race in recent years, we argue that U.S. House members from racially conservative districts will be more prone to make negative remarks about Barack Obama due to his race. Since the historical ties between the GOP and racial conservatism have only been strengthened during the age of Obama (Tesler 2016), we expect this relationship to be particularly true for Republican representatives. Moreover, we anticipate that each districts’ levels of racial resentment will not be a significant predictor of negative statements for high-profile white elected officials like Hillary Clinton. Instead, we believe that factors other than race will matter more to House representatives’ responses to the 2016 Democratic presidential nominee.

To test our hypothesis, we use a combination of manually coded and computer-coded press releases from U.S. House Representatives, which measure the presence/absence of anti-Obama or anti-Clinton press releases and average racial resentment scores from each district based on the 2010–2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. These data in combination with regression analysis reveals that Republican lawmakers from districts with high levels of racial resentment are significantly more likely to issue press releases which speak negatively about President Obama than Republicans in low racially resentful districts and Democrats from districts with high levels of racial resentment. In contrast, we find no support for racial resentment being associated with increases in representatives’ issuing of anti-Hillary Clinton press releases. The combination of results indicates that racial resentment in a representative’s district plays a significant role in influencing her responses to black politicians, but not white politicians. The findings presented here not only provide insight into understanding how race shapes legislative behavior but also allows for a deeper understanding of the racialized nature of American political institutions, namely the U.S. Congress.

Racial Resentment and Legislative Behavior

A central question among scholars of legislative behavior centers on understanding why members of Congress do what they do. Numerous studies show the proximate role constituencies play in influencing the actions of members of Congress (Bartels 1991; Erikson 1978; Fenno 1978; Hall 1996; Kingdon 1978; Miller and Stokes 1963; Page et al. 1984). This work has noted two primary ways constituents influence legislative behavior. The first is through reelection incentives. As “single-minded seekers of reelection” (Mayhew 1974), members of Congress strategically appeal to their constituents so as to maximize their likelihood of winning reelection. More particularly, members of Congress respond to their reelection constituency or those within their district whose support they deem as central to their ability to win reelection (Bishin 2009; Fenno 1978). The second way constituents influence legislative behavior is by electing like-minded representatives. Under these conditions, when a member of Congress follows her own convictions, she is also implementing her constituents’ will and desires. In this sense, constituent opinion “and the Congressman’s actions are connected through the Representative’s own policy attitudes” (Miller and Stokes 1963, 50).

Racial attitudes have played a growingly important role in American politics. Racial attitudes have recently been shown to impact public opinion on policy, candidate evaluations, partisanship, and vote choice (Gilens 1999; Parker and Barreto 2012; Piston 2010; Tesler 2016; White 2007; Winter 2008). In fact, Parker (2016) argues that “race has rarely mattered more in U.S. politics than it does now” (p. 217). We anticipate that due to constituency influence, legislative behavior should be shaped by these changing dynamics.

Initial findings show that racial resentment is at least correlated with what happens in Congress. Tesler (2016) shows that racial resentment was strongly tied to support for the 2013 government shutdown. He finds that members of Congress from the most racially resentful districts were 60 percent more likely to support the government shutdown than those in the least racially resentful districts (Tesler 2016). More broadly, we also know that as racial conservatism has become more closely tied with the Republican Party, the most rapid pace of Congressional polarization in more than thirty years has also occurred (Bonica 2014). Taken together, preliminary evidence suggests that there is some connection between racial attitudes and what goes on within Congress.

Beyond this, however, racial attitudes should shape what members of Congress do for additional reasons. Studies have shown that racial attitudes have not only become stronger determinants of partisanship, but also of

vote choice since Obama's election (Parker and Barreto 2012; Tesler 2016). This, in combination with the high levels of partisan gerrymandering, means members of Congress are being elected by growingly more cohesive blocs of racially liberal and conservative voters. In response to their constituents, we expect members of Congress to mirror their racial attitudes.

Electoral minded members of Congress will reflect their constituents' racial attitudes as a way to appeal to their reelection coalition. As the cohesion around racial attitudes grows, the potential costs associated with invoking racial appeals declines. Therefore, the more racially resentful the constituency, the more likely members of Congress are to mirror their constituents' racial resentment due to electoral incentives. Moreover, the use of subtle racial appeals has proven to be successful for Republicans during their campaigns (Mendelberg 2001; Nteta and Tarsi 2016; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). Since members of Congress, and in particular members of the House, are constantly running for reelection (Heberlig and Larson 2011; Ornstein and Mann 2000), there is little reason to believe that the use of racial appeals would cease once they entered office.

It is also possible, however, that as constituencies become more cohesive in their racial attitudes, they are better able to elect legislators who hold those same attitudes. Here, we would again expect members of Congress to mirror their constituencies' racial attitudes. Regardless of electoral prospects, all members of Congress try to portray a positive image of themselves to their constituents (Fenno 1978). By conveying a "sense of identification" with their constituents, legislators seek to build trust and support (Fenno 1978, 58). For members of Congress coming from racially resentful districts, they may do this by mirroring their constituents' racial attitudes. Thus, whether due to reelection incentives or sharing the same attitudes as their constituents, racially resentful districts should elect members of Congress who reflect their racial resentment.

Republicans and Racial Resentment in the Age of Obama

We expect that representatives will issue racially tinged press releases when they come from districts with high levels of racial resentment. However, we expect this to be particularly true of Republicans. A solid body of work has shown a link between racial attitudes and partisanship (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1992; Key 1949; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Beginning in the 1960s with the advancement of civil rights legislation under Democratic presidential administrations, the GOP began positioning itself as the new home for white racial conservatives. By opposing civil rights and policies seen

as benefiting African Americans (see Carmines and Stimson 1989; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), as well as invoking racial stereotypes and subtle racial appeals through the use of code words and imagery in their campaigns (Mendelberg 2001), disaffected white voters shifted their support to the Republican Party. Because of the success of these implicit racial appeals at the national level, Republican candidates running for office at all levels of government began relying on these strategies to build electoral coalitions (Mayer 2002).

Additionally, recent evidence suggests that the role of race and racial attitudes has only grown more important for Republicans in recent years. Rather than ushering in an era of post-racial politics, the Obama presidency brought with it a "most racial political era" (Tesler 2016). Despite Obama's effort to deracialize his campaign and presidency (see Coe and Reitzes 2010; Gillion 2016; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Lopez 2014; Tesler and Sears 2010), racial attitudes proved consequential to both. During the 2008 and 2012 elections, racial resentment and anti-black stereotypes were strong predictors of vote choice and this was particularly true for Republicans (Hutchings 2009; Piston 2010; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010). In fact, racial resentment played a larger role in these two elections than it had in all previous presidential elections from 1988 to 2004 (Tesler 2016).

During the Obama years, racial attitudes became a stronger predictor of white partisanship than they had in previous eras (Tesler 2016). In particular, many racially resentful white voters began to switch their allegiance from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. Under Obama's presidency, the relationship between district-level racial conservatism and the Republican vote share in congressional elections was stronger than in previous elections (where it had been nearly nonexistent; Tesler 2016). Given that the significance of racial resentment has risen in American politics and is playing a larger role for Republicans, it would not be surprising to find that the actions of House Republicans are especially reflective of racial resentment in their district.

Expectations

Rooted in our understanding of the impact that the electoral process has on legislative behavior and the growing racialization of American politics, we hold two primary expectations. First, as a result of constituent influence, we expect Republicans from racially conservative districts to reflect their constituents' racial attitudes by issuing personal criticisms of President Obama. As previously stated, the campaign and presidency of the nation's first black president was highly racialized (Tesler and Sears 2010). Therefore, one of the clearest ways House

Republicans can mirror their district's racial conservatism is through their personal criticisms of Obama.

Of course, the highly polarized nature of the 114th Congress (see Loomis and Schiller 2018; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006) might suggest that partisanship rather than race is driving representatives' responses to President Obama. To better isolate the relationship between racial resentment and representatives' responses to high-profile politicians, we include a comparative analysis of how often representatives spoke negatively about Hillary Clinton, the 2016 Democratic Presidential nominee, in their press releases.

We believe that Clinton serves as a good comparison for several reasons. First, Clinton, like Obama, was often the target of conservatives in the 114th Congress (2015–2017) because she was the presumptive Democratic Party presidential nominee for most of 2015 and 2016 and then the official nominee in June of 2016. Given her prominence in the opposing party, it is not surprising that she would be the target of Republican attacks similar to Obama (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2017). Second, Clinton and Obama were both polarizing figures with high levels of support from co-partisans, but low levels of support from those in the opposing party (Elder, Frederick, and Burrell 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2017). Finally, both Clinton and Obama were the subject of multiple investigations by the Republican Congress. For example, Republicans in Congress investigated both Obama and Clinton numerous times around their response to the attack in Benghazi. If partisanship and candidate ideology are driving negative statements of representatives and not their race, we should see that Clinton too is more harshly punished from representatives who reside in racially conservative areas.

The Significance of Press Releases

Scholarship evaluating the effect constituencies have on legislative behavior has largely focused on congruence between constituent opinion and legislative tactics, like roll call voting (Bartels 1991; Miller and Stokes 1963) and committee work (Hall 1996). However, growing research has begun to focus on constituent communications (Cormack 2016; Grimmer 2013; Lipinski 2004). We build on this work by looking at the effect that district-level racial resentment has on what members of Congress communicate to their constituents via press releases. More particularly, we see whether legislators from high racial resentment districts are more likely to issue racially tinged press releases.

Press releases provide a good source for evaluating how members of Congress want to present themselves to their constituents (Grimmer 2013). For one, press releases are valuable to legislators because they provide an

opportunity for them to directly reach their constituents without filters. Grimmer (2013) cites one congressional press secretary who states that “press releases are the cornerstone of our communication strategy” (p. 31). While only the most politically active constituents might seek out their representative's press releases, studies have shown that they are able to reach a broader audience. For instance, local media within a member's district, particularly newspapers, tend to either quote heavily or the entirety of press releases issued by members of Congress (Grimmer 2013; Schaffner 2006; Vinson 2003). Additionally, the rise of Twitter has led members of Congress to post press releases in their entirety on the venue. Therefore, if members of Congress are responding to their constituents' racial resentment, we should expect press releases to be one venue through which they do this.

Moreover, while press releases serve as a venue for racial appeals, they also should not be mistakenly categorized as purely symbolic. Because politicians have a disproportionate say in which issues and events garner media attention (Bennett 1990), the quick issuing of press releases can play a large role in its framing. As Gillion (2016) shows, what members of Congress say can shape the institution, its actions, and what society deems important. Moreover, how an issue is framed and what it is associated with can have clear implications on the likelihood of policy passage (see Tesler 2016).

Data and Methods

Dependent Variable: Racially Resentful Press Releases

To test our hypotheses, we first used a web scraper to obtain the complete collection of press releases from almost the total universe of U.S. House Representatives in the 114th Congress. For each representative, we collected the universe of press releases from the start (January 3, 2015) to the conclusion (January 3, 2017) of the 114th Congress. In all, we collected about fifty four thousand press releases from 377 U.S. House Representatives during this time period. Our data set represents about 87 percent of the membership in the 114th U.S. House of Representatives. The only representatives we were unable to obtain data for were those whose websites could not be scraped, did not have a press release section, or who retired and websites could not be opened with the internet archive. Our own analysis suggests that representatives who we could not get information from do not significantly differ from those whose websites we could access in their partisanship, gender, race, or Cook's partisan voting index score (see Supplemental Appendix). Thus, we do not expect that the exclusion of these individuals will systematically bias our results.

Following our acquisition of the representatives' press releases, we combined manual content coding with automated content coding for negative statements about Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. For the former, press releases were coded as negative toward Obama if they were critical about Obama or painted Obama in a negative light and *did not* simply criticize his policies. Thus, they were personal attacks which could not be justified as being simply differences in policy preferences. For example, Todd Rokita's (R-IN) criticism of Obamacare in the following statement was not coded as a negative statement against Obama because he never mentioned Obama personally, but instead attacks his signature policy the Affordable Care Act. "They were told that this massive new entitlement program would actually reduce the national debt. Now five years later, Americans realize that ObamaCare is just a big government boondoggle that increases their out-of-pocket costs."

Instead, negative comments about Obama could come from critical statements about his actions. This is evident in Representative Virginia Foxx's (R-NC) comments: "President Obama's *stubborn* insistence on fulfilling an ill-advised campaign promise to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay distracts from ongoing threats to American national security and *highlights the failures* of his foreign policy agenda . . ." Representative Foxx's comments which mentioned that Obama was stubborn was coded as an anti-Obama statement. Additionally, Tom Marino (R-PA) was coded as making an anti-Obama statement when he argued that Obama's actions in addressing tough issues were being divisive. "Unfortunately, President Obama only knows one way to address tough issues in America: *divide, divide, divide*."

Anti-Obama comments can also come in the form of personal attacks. French Hill (R-AR) was coded as making a negative-Obama statement when his release mentioned that "President Obama has *stooped to a new low* by choosing to advance his own domestic agenda over our national security interests." Along the same lines, Diane Black (R-TN) was coded as making an anti-Obama statement when she argued that Obama's administration was incompetent and/or unsympathetic to the American public. "Rep. Black Demands Answers. Is this Administration *truly that incompetent*, or do they just not care?" For the most part, anti-Obama press releases in the 114th Congress dealt with Obama's positions on Iran, gun control, and immigration. Anti-Obama press releases also often attribute blame to Obama for disasters, high-profile crimes, or social unrest.

Like Obama, our coding for Hillary Clinton focused on press releases containing personal attacks against her or releases which were aimed at damaging her reputation. Attacks on Clinton were coded as 1 if they attacked her character (untrustworthy, corrupt, unlikable, extremist

political values). This was a common theme in discussions around Clinton in the 114th Congress. For example, Ron Desantis (R-FL) was coded as making an anti-Clinton statement by arguing that she was reckless and insinuated that she believed she was above the law:

Using an unsecured, private email server to send and receive information at the Top Secret level is *absolutely reckless* . . . What is more, *Secretary Clinton's mocking of the seriousness of the issue* is appalling given that members of the military and intelligence communities have been—and continue to be—prosecuted for conduct far less egregious. *Secretary Clinton does not believe the same rules should apply to her as they do to everyone else.*

Along the same lines, negative Hillary Clinton statements could come from discussion of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigations around her use of emails from an unprotected server or from the House investigations regarding her role in discussions around the Benghazi attacks. The former is exemplified in Bruce Babin's (R-TX) press release where he argued that Clinton's poor decision making was not only corrupt, but jeopardized national security:

The FBI's decision to reopen its investigation into Secretary Clinton raises serious questions about what was discovered in these emails and whether there was an explicit intent to violate the law. We already know that *Hillary Clinton's callous disregard* for national security procedures through the use of her unsecured, private email server *put America at risk*.

The latter is demonstrated in Todd Rokita's (R-IN) statement in which he argues that Clinton, along with Obama, lied to the public about Benghazi to protect their own legacies. "With 56 days before the 2012 presidential election, it is clear that President Obama and *Secretary Clinton were more concerned about their own legacies* than getting the facts of the Benghazi attack out to the American people." Finally, negative statements about Clinton were coded as 1 if they questioned her ability to be President. Bill Johnson (R-GA) was coded as making such a statement when his press release noted,

. . . *how reckless Hillary Clinton was with sensitive national security information—putting her own personal needs for secrecy above national security*. The FBI has now fully exposed her *deceit*. In my view, *she has disqualified herself* from being able to serve as our Commander-in-Chief.

The full codebook for our coding is available in the Supplemental Appendix.

We coded each press release in a dichotomous manner. If the representative made at least one statement which attacked Obama or Clinton in the press release,

the entire press release was coded as 1. Hypothetically, press releases could be coded as 1 in each category if they criticized both Obama and Clinton. Given that we have 54,294 press releases, manual coding for all of them would be a difficult, if not an impossible task. Instead, we rely on automated content analysis through RTextTools and a hand-coded subset of four thousand press releases (Jurka et al. 2013).

While much has been written about the advantages and disadvantages of machine learning content analysis (see Barberá et al. 2016; Grimmer and Stewart 2013), recent research demonstrates that it performs better than dictionary coding approaches and within the proper environment as well as manual coding (Barberá et al. 2016; Gibbons et al. 2017). RTextTools combines multiple machine learning algorithms to assist in the content coding of different documents. In particular, we use RTextTools to content code our press releases using the following estimators: support vector machine, maximum entropy, scaled linear discriminant analysis, bagging analysis, random forest analysis, and regression tree algorithms (see Jurka et al. 2013).

All of these estimators rely on manually coded sample sets of press releases. Using our manually coded four thousand press releases as guide, the estimators predict different cut-off points for categories based on the combination of words in each press release for the remaining 50,294 uncoded press releases. For our purposes, the automated content coders simply estimate whether the press release had an anti-Obama statement, an anti-Clinton statement, or no negative statement about either candidate for the 50,294 press releases which were not hand coded. This was estimated with two different models in R. The first explores the presence of an anti-Obama statement or not and the second estimates the presence of an anti-Clinton statement or not. To improve the accuracy of our estimates, we removed commonly used words in the English language such as “the” or “that.” We also stemmed the words, so all suffixes are removed. Both techniques have been shown to improve the accuracy of automated content coding (Loper and Bird 2002). Following the estimation, RTextTools compares the results of the six different estimators and codes each press release as having or not having an anti-Obama/anti-Clinton statement based on what the majority of estimators agree is correct.

One of the most important aspects of machine learning is to ensure that the algorithms worked correctly (see Grimmer and Stewart 2013). One of the main advantages of RTextTools is that the output provides researchers with information on how often the different content coding algorithms agreed and how well it predicted the actual score of the articles when they did agree (Collingwood and Wilkerson 2012). This requires a test

of only hand-coded articles to assess whether the computer-assisted program would have coded the press releases in the same way as the individual coder. To test the accuracy of RTextTools, we used our manually coded four thousand articles; 3,500 of these manually coded articles were used to create a basis for the automated coding algorithms. We then asked RTextTools to predict the remaining five hundred manually coded articles to assess whether it was accurate in assigning scores the same way as the human coders (Collingwood and Wilkerson 2012). Based on this approach, we found that when at least five of the six algorithms agreed, the ability of the automated content analysis to correctly predict the hand code of the press release was about 99 percent. Moreover, at least five of the algorithms agreed in about 95 percent of the cases (see Supplemental Appendix for more the complete analysis).

The high level of accuracy in the automated content coder is in large part driven by the fact that the algorithms in combination can easily identify when there are no negative-Obama or negative-Clinton press release, which represents the overwhelming number of press releases in our data (in our hand-coded sample of five hundred tester press releases, only 3.8% are coded as negative Obama and 2% are coded as negative Clinton). In our sample, of five hundred, when at least five of the six algorithms agreed, only twice did the RTextTools label the press release as a 1 when hand coders labeled it as a 0 for anti-Obama statements and did not provide any false positives for Clinton. In contrast, it performed slightly worse when predicting the presence of an anti-Obama or anti-Clinton press release. When at least five of the six algorithms agreed, RTextTools correctly predicted the presence of an anti-Obama statement in a press release 74 percent of the time and an anti-Clinton statement in a press release 84 percent of the time. This indicates while not perfect, the overall accuracy of the computer program in our sample is considerable. When fewer than five of the six algorithms agreed, the accuracy fell further to 47 percent for negative-Obama press releases and 63 percent for negative-Clinton press releases.³

Following the assessment of the accuracy of the computer-aided content analysis program, we used the 4,000 hand-coded cases to predict the remaining 50,294 uncoded press releases. Given that the accuracy was lower in cases where there was disagreement among the coding algorithms,⁴ we hand coded those in which less than five of the six agreed to increase the accuracy of our analysis. Following this process, we created our two dependent variables which are the percent of the press releases that each representative put out in the 114th Congress (2015–2017) which contained (1) anti-Obama statements or (2) anti-Clinton statements. These were created by taking the total number of press releases with

mentions of our topic of interest and dividing that by the total number of press releases posted in the 114th Congress for each member.

Independent Variables

Our main independent variable of interest is the average levels of racial resentment in the representative's congressional district. Following the analysis of Tesler (2016), we calculated the racial resentment score in each district by combining the levels of racial resentment in the three Congresses prior to the 114th Congress using the 2010, 2012, and 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES). Given that these surveys were collected before the start of the 114th Congress, these levels of racial resentment precede, and are not affected, by U.S. House representatives' statements in the Congress that we consider. It is important to note that the CCES is based on a national stratified sample and thus is not meant to be representative at the district level. While not perfect, by combining the 2010, 2012, and 2014 CCES, we attain a large number of respondents in each district ($N > 100$). Using this estimate, we gain some meaningful information about how racially resentful the district is.

However, given that precision is key to our analysis and the external validity of our study, we also used a separate measure of district racial resentment which was derived from each district in the CCES after it was weighted to match the demographic characteristics of the district according to the U.S. Census. In particular, we created sample weights for each respondent so that the aggregated sample in each district mirrored the U.S. Census estimates for the district's gender (% female), education (% College Graduate), age (%18–29 years, %40–59 years, and %60 years or Older), and race (% white, % non-white). We accomplished this goal using Anesrake (Pasek 2016), which uses an iterative approach to find the best weights to match the sample's demographic characteristics to the desired characteristics in the district according to the U.S. Census. To ensure that no one person was weighted too heavily, we restricted the highest sample weight per respondent to be five, as suggested by Pasek (2016). As a result of weighting (see Supplemental Appendix), 433 of the 435 districts did not significantly differ from the U.S. Census' estimate of the district in gender, age, education, or race (see Supplemental Appendix for results). As a result, the weighting of the data in part helps us correct for the fact that the CCES is not sampled to be representative at the district level.

While the traditional racial resentment scale includes four questions, unfortunately, the CCES only includes two of these questions.⁵ The first asks respondents how much on a 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*)-point scale do they agree with the following statement:

"The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors." The second asks the respondents on the same scale how much they agree with the statement: "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class." These variables were coded so that high scores indicate high levels of racial resentment and low scores represent the opposite. Following this coding for all three Congresses (2010, 2012, and 2014), we created a new variable which represents the mean level of racial resentment for all individuals that reside in that congressional district. We calculated this measure twice. First, for the unweighted sample of the CCES and then for the weighted sample of the CCES.

As mentioned above, we expect that Democrats will not issue racially tinged press releases given that the Democratic Party is generally more racially progressive than the GOP. Moreover, Democratic representatives may rely on black voters for electoral support. Considering this, Democrats lack the constituent impetus to invoke racial resentment in the same way as Republicans. In contrast, Republicans may feel freer to speak negatively about Obama and Clinton. Moreover, because of the increasingly connected relationship between partisanship and racial resentment, constituent influence in districts held by Republicans should lead them to mirror their constituents' levels of racial resentment. Based on this, we interact the district's average racial resentment score by political party of the member of Congress with the expectation that Republicans in high racial resentment districts will be more likely to make negative-Obama statements than Republicans in low racial resentment districts and Democrats in comparable districts.

To isolate the influence of this interactive relationship between district racial resentment, party, and anti-Obama/anti-Clinton press releases, we control for several variables. First, we control for the partisanship of the district using Cook's Partisan Voting Index scores. Higher scores on this index indicate that Democratic candidates perform well in these districts and lower scores reflect the opposite. This control is essential to show that racial resentment has a unique effect on representatives' decisions to make racially regressive remarks above and beyond the partisanship of the district. Along the same lines, we control for the average levels of approval for Obama based on a question in the Cooperative Congressional Election Study which asks respondents how much they approve of Obama's performance as president on a 1 "*Strongly Disapprove*" to 4 "*Strongly Approve*" point scale. We took the average score on this 4-point measure in each district across the 2010, 2012, and 2014 CCES to create this measure of Obama

approval. The inclusion of this control ensures that our results are not simply driven by lower levels of support for Obama in each district.

We also control for whether the representative belonged to the Freedom Caucus in the 114th Congress. The Freedom Caucus is a conservative coalition in the U.S. House that in part came from the Tea Party Movement (Parker and Barreto 2012). Members of the Freedom Caucus tend to be the most conservative members in the House and as a result may be the most likely to criticize both Obama and Clinton. Given their coordinated efforts, their high levels of conservatism, and their high likelihood of coming from racially conservative districts, it is important to ensure that membership in this caucus is not influencing the relationships between racial resentment in the district, partisanship, and negative statements about Obama or Clinton.

We also control for electoral competitiveness. One of the main reasons why representatives take positions on an issue is to appease their electorate and ward off credible challengers (Milita, Ryan, and Simas 2014). This responsiveness can be tied to the electoral vulnerability of the candidate. To ensure that there is not a spurious relationship between racial resentment, partisanship, electoral vulnerability and our dependent variables, we control for three measures of district competitiveness. The first is whether the representative is a Freshman in the 114th Congress or not. Given their lack of experience and fundraising, Freshman in the U.S. House are more likely to be defeated than comparable incumbents (Davidson et al. 2013). Second, we control for the candidate's margin of victory in the previous election (i.e. the 2012 national elections). Representatives with a smaller margin of victory are more likely to be vulnerable in the next election because they draw more quality challengers. Moreover, a small margin of victory in one election may signal the representative is electorally vulnerable. Finally, we control for whether the representative faced a primary challenge in the previous election. The presence of a primary challenger may signal that the representative is a target for co-partisans (Davidson et al. 2013).

We also control for the percent black in the district. We expect that in more diverse districts, representatives will feel more pressure to appeal to different racial/ethnic groups and will not produce as many racially resentful press releases. We also control for whether the elected official represents a southern state given the tumultuous racial history of the region.⁶ Additionally, we control for whether the representative is female. We expect that women may feel less pressure to react to racial resentment in their district given that they are often more liberal and more conscious of marginalized groups than men. We control for whether the representative is white or not because we expect that whites will be more likely to

engage in racially resentful press releases than their underrepresented counterparts. Finally, we account for the number of press releases the representative put out during the 114th Congress (2015–2017).

Results

Figure 1 presents four scatterplots and best fitting lines for the percent of (1) anti-Obama press releases and (2) anti-Clinton press releases against the unweighted CCES district's average racial resentment score. Figure 1 also presents the percent of (3) anti-Obama press releases and (4) anti-Clinton press releases against the weighted CCES district's average racial resentment score. The results are disaggregated by the partisanship of the representative. The results show some evidence in support of our hypothesis. In all four figures, there appears to be a positive relationship between the district's average level of racial resentment and negative statements about both Obama and Clinton for Republicans. This occurs regardless of whether each district from the CCES is weighted to mirror the demographics based on the U.S. Census or not. However, there does not appear to be a relationship between the district's average racial resentment score and the number of press releases which contain at least one negative-Obama or negative-Clinton statement for Democrats. As expected, Democrats largely refrain from criticizing prominent members of their political party.

Racial resentment appears to be a particularly strong predictor of negative statements about Obama for Republicans. The correlation between district's average level of racial resentment and the percent of press releases for each representative that include attacks on Obama has a Pearson's *R* of .21 for the weighted data and a Pearson's *R* of .19 for the unweighted data. Both are statistically significant at .05. In contrast, the same relationship for Democrats has a Pearson's *R* of .03 for the unweighted data and $-.04$ for the weighted data and is insignificant.

We find similar results for the district's average levels of racial resentment and Republicans likelihood of making anti-Clinton statements in press releases. Figure 1B and 1D show that the increase in the district's weighted and unweighted racial resentment score is associated with a growth in anti-Clinton statements among Republicans. However, the slope appears to be slightly weaker for this relationship than the correlation between Obama and the district's average racial resentment. Pearson's *R* for the relationship between the unweighted (.16) and the weighted (.14) district's racial resentment score and Republicans issuing of negative-Clinton press releases are statistically significant at .05. Democrats remain unlikely to speak poorly about Clinton regardless of the levels of racial resentment in their district. The combination of results in Figure 1 suggests that the district's racial

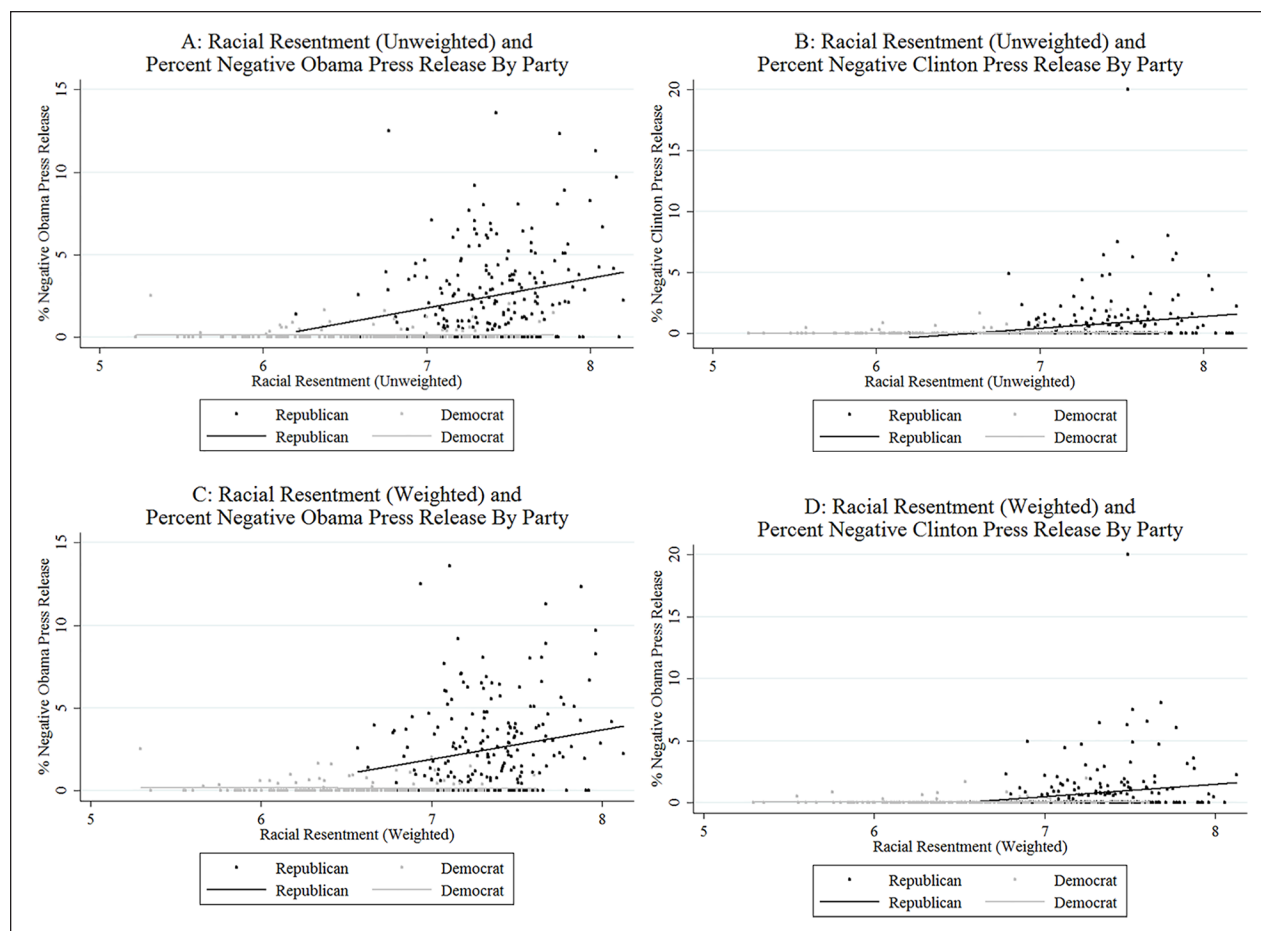


Figure 1. Percentage of representative press releases which are (A) anti-Obama against unweighted district racial resentment score, (B) anti-Clinton against unweighted district racial resentment score, (C) anti-Obama against weighted district racial resentment score, and (D) anti-Clinton against weighted district racial resentment score.

The lines represent betting fitting lines. The lighter markers represent Democrats and the darker markers represent Republicans.

resentment leads Republicans to be more likely to make anti-Obama and anti-Clinton statements. As a result, we have mixed findings which suggest that racial resentment may be driving Republicans critiques for both black and white opposition leaders. As a result, the findings may indicate that racial resentment may be cueing partisanship rather than negative racial attitudes in their response to prominent Democratic leaders. We turn to regression analysis to assess this possibility.

Table 1 presents the results of four separate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses predicting the percent of (1) anti-Obama press releases with the unweighted district racial resentment score, (2) anti-Obama press releases with the weighted district racial resentment score, (3) anti-Clinton press releases with the unweighted district racial resentment score, and (4) anti-Clinton press releases with the weighted district racial resentment score.⁷ Figure 2 presents corresponding marginal effects for the difference in Republicans'

and Democrats' anti-Obama and anti-Clinton press releases across average levels of district racial resentment from the regression models. Our main independent variable of interest in these models is the interaction between the district's racial resentment score and the representative's party.

The results in both Table 1 and Figure 2 provide strong support for our hypotheses. Both the unweighted and weighted district racial resentment scores are a strong predictor of U.S. House members putting out negative-Obama press releases above and beyond the partisan and racial makeup of the district. In fact, the slope assessing the relationship between the district's average racial resentment score and anti-Obama press releases is significantly steeper for Republicans than it is for Democrats in both the unweighted and weighted analyses. This indicates that Republicans are significantly more responsive to higher levels of racial resentment in their districts in speaking negatively about Obama than are Democrats.

Table 1. OLS Regression Predicting the Number of Anti-Obama Press Releases by Representatives in the 114th Congress (2015–2017).

	A	B	C	D
	Unweighted CCES	Unweighted CCES	Weighted CCES	Weighted CCES
	Anti-Obama	Anti-Clinton	Anti-Obama	Anti-Clinton
Republican Rep* District Racial Resentment	1.12** (0.55)	0.67 (0.41)	1.20** (0.60)	0.59 (0.45)
District Racial Resentment (Unweighted)/ (Weighted)	−0.60 (0.50)	0.11 (0.38)	−0.65 (0.47)	0.04 (0.35)
Republican Rep	−6.93* (3.95)	−4.53 (2.95)	−7.43* (4.27)	−3.99 (3.20)
Cook's PVI	−0.04** (0.02)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.04** (0.02)	−0.02 (0.01)
District Obama Approve	−0.41 (1.05)		−0.06 (0.93)	
Freedom Caucus	0.66* (0.38)	0.91*** (0.28)	0.66* (0.38)	0.92*** (0.28)
Percent Black in District	0.98 (1.11)	0.35 (0.83)	0.90 (1.10)	0.39 (0.83)
Female Rep	0.21 (0.28)	−0.16 (0.21)	0.18 (0.28)	−0.16 (0.21)
White Rep	0.13 (0.33)	−0.15 (0.25)	0.14 (0.34)	−0.16 (0.25)
Freshman	0.19 (0.30)	−0.04 (0.22)	0.20 (0.30)	−0.02 (0.23)
Cand Marg of Victory	0.15 (0.42)	0.42 (0.31)	0.13 (0.42)	0.45 (0.32)
Primary Challenge	0.05 (0.24)	−0.13 (0.18)	0.06 (0.23)	−0.11 (0.18)
Total Press Release	0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
South	0.95*** (0.29)	−0.29 (0.22)	0.94*** (0.29)	−0.27 (0.22)
Constant	5.03 (5.49)	−0.69 (4.10)	4.58 (4.76)	−0.03 (3.56)
Observations	375	375	375	375
R ²	.34	.12	.34	.12

Standard errors are given in parentheses. OLS = ordinary least squares; CCES = Cooperative Congressional Election Studies; PVI = partisan voting index.

*Significant at .10. **Significant at .05. ***Significant at .01.

This difference is not only significant but also substantial. In Figure 2A, for example, Democrats and Republicans do not statistically differ in the percentage of press releases which speak negatively about Obama when racial resentment in their district is low. However, when racial resentment levels reach 7 out of 10 or higher, House Republicans put out significantly more anti-Obama press releases than their Democratic counterparts. For example, when the average racial resentment score in a district is 7 of 10, Republicans put out about 1 percent more anti-Obama press releases than their Democratic counterparts in both the unweighted and weighted sample. Both differences are statistically significant at .05. This partisan anti-Obama press release gap grows to 2.04 percent when the district's racial resentment score reaches 8 in the unweighted sample and 2.2 percent in the weighted sample. While 2 percent may not seem like much, given that representatives put out press releases on often hundreds of different topics (from policy to recognition of local leaders, to announcements about jobs and district-level contests, etc.), such a concentrated amount being focused on attacks on Obama is quite substantial.

Table 1B and 1D and Figure 2B and 2D demonstrate that the same relationship does not hold for Clinton. Republicans are not significantly more likely to make

negative-Clinton appeals than Democrats regardless of the levels of racial resentment in each district. Moreover, once other factors are controlled for racial resentment is not a significant predictor of anti-Clinton statements for either Democrats or Republicans. This result provides support for our hypothesis that there is something about Obama, most likely his race, which increases the influence of each district's levels of racial resentment on a representative's likelihood of critiquing him.

Outside of our independent variable of interest, few other variables predicted the likelihood that a representative would make anti-Obama or anti-Clinton press releases. Not surprisingly, politicians who represent more liberal districts as measured by Cook's partisan voting index were less likely to put out press releases criticizing Obama. Moreover, representatives from the Freedom Caucus were significantly more likely to issue anti-Obama and anti-Clinton press releases than comparable members who were not in the caucus. The combination of results suggests that while racial resentment explains a significant amount of why Republicans respond to Obama, partisanship and party allegiances matter in predicting who speaks out against prominent elected officials. Surprisingly, white representatives were as likely as non-white representatives to issue negative press releases about Obama and Clinton,

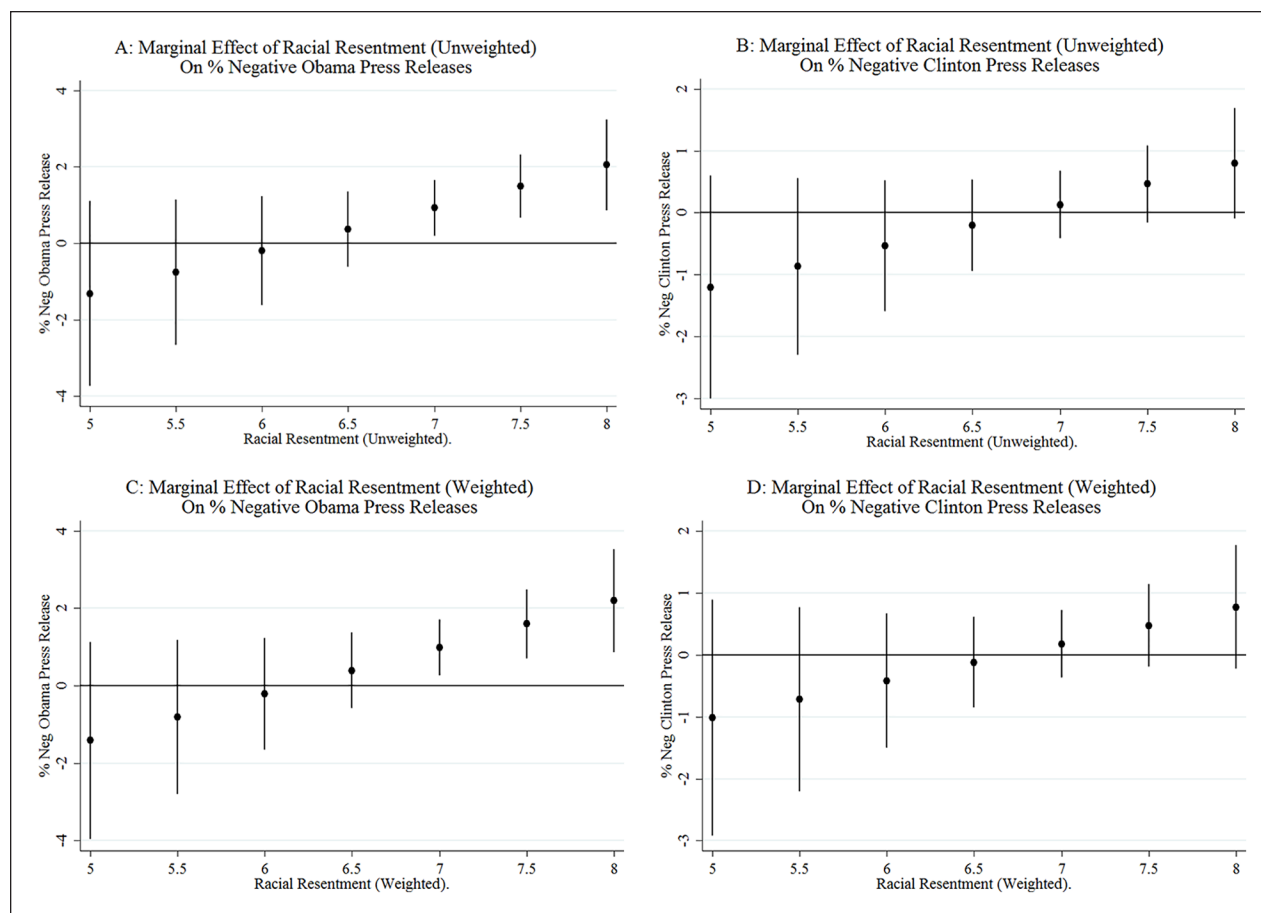


Figure 2. Marginal effect of republican on press releases which are (A) anti-Obama by unweighted district racial resentment score, (B) anti-Clinton by unweighted district racial resentment score, (C) anti-Obama against weighted district racial resentment score, and (D) anti-Clinton against weighted district racial resentment score.

The graphs above represent the marginal effects derived from Table 1. Republicans display more anti-Obama\Clinton press releases when the estimate is above 0 and the 95% confidence interval does not cross the zero line. Conversely, Democrats display more anti-Obama\Clinton press releases when the estimate is below 0 and the 95% confidence interval does not cross the zero line.

all else being equal. We believe that this unexpected result may be explained by the fact that non-white legislators are disproportionately Democratic. As a result, they, like their white Democratic counterparts, are going to be unlikely to speak poorly about leaders within their party.

Conclusion

While there has long been claims that Congress is a racially regressive institution, less has been written about why this may be the case. While institutional pressures may lead individuals to become more racially conservative, we find evidence that constituent influence matters as well. Whether it be in an effort to gain support of their constituents or the result of holding similar attitudes as their constituents, Republican members of Congress invoke racial resentment by taking public positions on racially tinged issues. Namely, House Republicans are

more likely to put out press releases which attack Obama more than their Democratic colleagues as the levels of racial resentment in their district rise. The relationship between the district's average level of racial resentment and Republican likelihood of speaking out against Obama is significant above and beyond the district's partisanship and racial makeup. At the same time, more racially conservative districts do not push House Republicans to criticize all Democratic candidates. Our analysis of anti-Clinton press releases demonstrates that partisanship is a stronger predictor of anti-Clinton statements than is racial resentment. The combination of these results indicates that Republican representatives mirror the levels of racial resentment in their district which leads them to be more hostile the first black president.

There is a significant amount of research which demonstrates that representatives conform to the expectations of their district when making decisions in elected office

(Achen 1978; Fenno 1978; Kingdon 1989; Mayhew 1974; Miller and Stokes 1963), we find that this holds true for racial resentment as well. As the public increases in their levels of racial resentment over time, so do House Republicans. Thus, it is possible that one of the reasons we have seen a rise in the number of racially conservative members in Congress is due to growing racial resentment in the electorate.

While not causal, our analyses demonstrate that racial resentment in a district is associated with representatives' likelihood of making racially conservative statements. However, this does not preclude a reciprocal relationship from occurring. Namely, representatives responding to pressures from their constituents to display racially regressive behaviors (which is what we find in this paper), could then increase racial resentment in the district (see Lenz 2009; Levendusky 2009). This cycle may explain why the country has become more racially polarized in recent years and why conservative districts have displayed more racially biased behavior (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2017; Tesler 2012). In combination, the relationship between racially conservative politicians and their electorate may lead to more racial polarization in the future. While we are unable to completely address the problem of causality, we hope that future researchers assess this possibility.

We also hope that future analyses explore why district levels of racial resentment influence legislative behavior. While we propose numerous mechanisms in our theoretical discussion, our own empirical analysis in the Supplemental Appendix demonstrates that no one factor can explain why higher levels of racial resentment are associated with Republicans issuing more anti-Obama press release. We assessed whether DW-nominate score and Freedom Caucus membership interacted with racial resentment in a district to predict the issuing of anti-Obama press releases. While imperfect, we hoped that this measure would allow us to assess whether candidates who represent more conservative districts and who focus on their base would be the most likely to respond to racial resentment in their district. These interactions were insignificant. Second, we interacted a factor score which combined whether the respondent was a Freshman in the 114th Congress, their margin of victory in the 2014 election, and whether they were challenged in their party's primary in 2014. We hoped that such an interaction would show that representatives are most responsive to racial resentment when electoral conditions necessitate mirroring the district's preference most. This too was insignificant. While we are able to show that a district's average level of racial resentment is tied to legislative behavior, we hope the future research further explores why this association exists.

In addition to this, we also hope that future research addresses other shortcomings in our analysis. For example, our measure of racial resentment in the CCES only

includes two questions from the original four questions used in the traditional measure (Kinder and Sears 1981). It is difficult to find a data set with a large enough sample of respondents in each district to estimate average levels of racial resentment. The CCES, given its large sample size, provides this opportunity even if it means making some sacrifices. Our own analysis indicates that the estimates of the districts racial resentment score in the CCES, which asks two questions, is highly correlated (Pearson $R = .44$) with the American National Election Studies (ANES), which has the full battery of racial resentment questions, but has fewer respondents in each district and is only recorded every four years. We hope that future research finds alternative ways to assess racial resentment in the district as better data become available.

Additionally, we examine only one form of racially resentful outreach: anti-Obama press releases. While this topic was salient in the 114th Congress (2015–2017), more work needs to be done to explore whether other underrepresented groups such as Latinos, Asian Americans, Muslims, or women are the targets of negative press releases in racially resentful districts. Our own analysis finds limited support that racially resentful districts lead to more anti-immigrant press releases. However, given that the measures of racial resentment ask specifically about blacks, future research should replicate our analyses with other group-specific measures of subtle racism. While more work is necessary, we hope that this study provides important information about the link between racial resentment in the public and the responsiveness of government.

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Notes

1. Fletcher (2016).
2. See Canon (1999); Hawkesworth (2003); Tate (2003); Tyson (2016).
3. See Supplemental Appendix for more information about the accuracy of our coding including n-folds analysis for each algorithm.

4. Our own cursory analysis suggests that the program was less likely to have disagreement among the algorithms when Obama's name was mentioned rather than "This Administration" or "The President." The algorithms were also more likely to agree when attacks on Obama focused on immigration, terrorism, Guantanamo Bay, and the Iran Nuclear Deal.
5. See Citrin et al. (2017) and Nteta and Tarsi (2016). Both use the CCES to measure racial resentment.
6. While the South is highly correlated with racial resentment (.35), racial resentment is a distinct measure above and beyond region.
7. See Supplemental Appendix for analysis examining only co-partisan racial resentment scores.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (PRQ) website.

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