

“Racial Coding” and White Opposition to Welfare

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*Gilens, Martin. 1996. “Race Coding” and White Opposition to Welfare. American Political Science Review 90:3, 593-604.

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Main argument

Welfare, crime, drugs, and immigration policy are all shaped by race.

Welfare: “means-tested transfer programs that provide benefits directly to individuals”.

- White Americans opposition to welfare is rooted in their attitudes towards blacks
- Whites hold similar views of blacks, but negative views of blacks generate more opposition to welfare.
- Results in more support for welfare programs for whites than blacks.

Research



- **1991 National Race and Politics Study**
 - Nationwide random-digit telephone survey directed by Paul M. Sniderman, Philip E. Tetlock, and Thomas Piazza
 - 2,223 completed interviews, with a response rate of 65.3%
- **Using conventional survey modeling techniques**
 - 201 black respondents to the telephone survey vs 2,022 nonblack respondents
 - "The government in Washington tries to do too many things that should be left up to individuals and private businesses."
 - Graded with a four point agree/disagree scale & 0-10 scale

Main Findings

The way whites' view welfare is strongly influenced by their views of blacks.

-When whites' evaluate welfare they take race into consideration.

The popular belief that welfare is a “race coded” issue turned out to be true

-Racial views are not just of poor blacks or blacks on welfare but instead, **American blacks** in general.

-The influence of racial views on welfare is **stronger** than the effect of views about the poor in general.

-Whites perception of blacks as lazy is more important in creating opposition to welfare rather than perceptions of poor people as lazy.

-The welfare debate has become racialized to the point the white public is focused on blacks, a single subgroup of welfare recipients.

- **63%** of welfare recipients are non-black

Critiques

Making the arguments stronger.

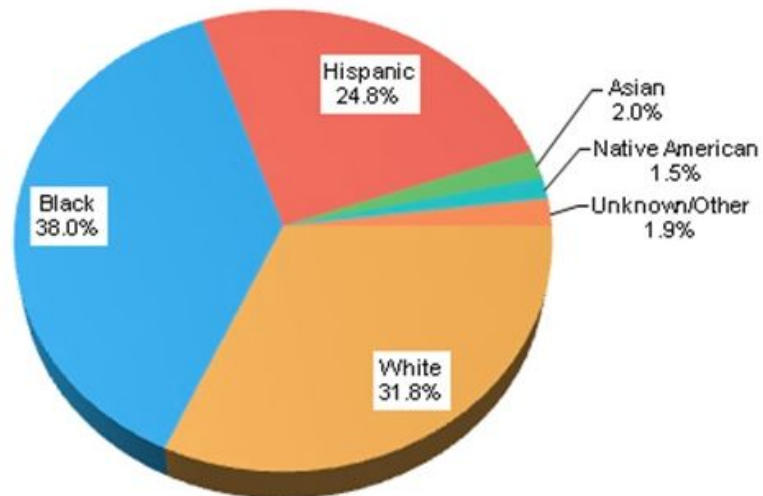
- Economic Interest
 - Support and Oppose welfare.
- The perception that blacks are lazy may not be exclusive to whites. Where did this originate from?
 - How was this perception created? The media? Interest groups?
- Framing
 - "The government in Washington tries to do too many things that should be left up to individuals and private businesses"
 - "Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy."
- "support for welfare is greatest among the least well off"
 - Therefore to take out the "economic self interest" variable we should survey whites who are not well off.

Real World Implications

- Welfare has a negative connotation
 - Predominantly towards black recipients
 - Not as negative towards white recipients
- Racial profiling
 - Racism
 - Race “determines” economic standing
 - Ex: Associate poor with black communities
- Economy
 - Debate whether or not welfare benefits the economy
 - Officials want to regulate Welfare and who receives it
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Race of TANF recipients

Families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), by ethnicity or race, fiscal year 2003



Note: Hispanic may be of any race.

Source: "TANF Seventh Annual Report to Congress," December 2006, Administration for Children and Families