

**The Face of Immigration:  
The Effect of Racial Primes on Attitudes about Immigration**

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## **Abstract**

As the immigration issue has gained renewed attention in national politics and a more restrictive sentiment has spread among the mass public, many scholars assert that immigration has returned as the new contemporary race issue for American politics. We posit that for both white and black Americans, the perceived race or ethnicity of the immigrant group strongly influences their understandings of immigration and immigration policy. To test this, we utilize an embedded survey experiment that allows us to analyze the effect of implicit racial primes on individual attitudes towards immigration. The experiment was designed to observe whether viewing immigrants as Latino versus Asian American increases intolerance toward immigrants and engenders support for more restrictive immigration policies. We hypothesize that messages which link Latinos with immigration are more likely to garner stronger support for restrictive immigration policies than racialized messages that link other groups such as Asian Americans. Although the experiment yielded findings that suggest that whites and blacks may not perceive non-black minority groups as threatening as scholars have hypothesized, the results more importantly raise new issues about the unique effects of implicit racial appeals that target non-black minority groups on individual racial attitudes.

During the 1994 race for California governor, Republican Pete Wilson ran television advertisements highlighting his position on the issue of immigration by showing a film of people running across the border. Despite the grainy image, many would argue that the implicit message was clear: the border in question was between the United States and Mexico and the immigrants were Latino. Wilson was re-elected in the same year that Proposition 187, an anti-immigrant initiative, passed with the support of 59% of the voters. Scholars have pointed to Wilson's campaign strategy as a deliberate attempt to fuel anti-Latino hostility that sought to mobilize the support of white voters in California, mirroring the effect of the Willie Horton ad used in the 1988 Presidential race (Alvarez and Butterfield 2000; Tolbert and Hero 1996). With immigration now an issue on the national stage, Presidential candidates such as Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo are using anti-immigrant messages to mobilize voters. In a campaign advertisement later dubbed "Someone Needs to Say It," the self-described "border hawk" explicitly linked immigration and terrorism.<sup>1</sup> Where public policy on welfare and affirmative action once defined racial issues, the contemporary hot-button issue of immigration policy has new racial and ethnic undertones.

While the use of race in short-term communications remains a potent campaign tactic, how voters react to racialized frames that target non-black minority groups remains ambiguous. Similarly, the contours of public opinion on the issue of immigration policy are only beginning to emerge as the nation grapples with challenges in the incorporation of millions of new Americans. Since 1965, when longstanding restrictions to foreign migration were relaxed, immigrants have arrived not only in unprecedented numbers, but now also contribute to the substantial racial diversity Americans witness today. Latinos are now the largest racial and ethnic minority group (13%), followed closely

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<sup>1</sup> The Wilson ad can be viewed on the website: <http://pcl.stanford.edu/campaigns/campaign1994/index.html> (see "Immigration: Border"). The Tancredo ad can be viewed on the website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3ERcvnnsiU>

by blacks (12%), and Asian Americans (4%). The country has moved demographically beyond the black-white binary, yet the study of public opinion on racial issues in political science has been slow to adapt to this change. Although racial appeals targeting new immigrant groups is a growing trend in politics, scholars have little empirical or theoretical understanding of how these appeals shift public opinion. Models of racial attitudes were developed from the study of white Americans' beliefs on racial policies about blacks, yet it is questionable whether these models can be applied to opinion on issues that implicate other racialized minority groups.

In this study we focus on public opinion about immigration in order to disentangle perceptions about race and ethnicity from attitudes about political issues that are closely tied to racial categories. We ask does the “face” of the immigrant implicitly influence a person’s opinion about immigrants and immigration policy? Given the manner in which immigration is framed in the public debate—with the U.S.-Mexico border, Spanish-speaking families and undocumented farmworkers as common images in the public eye—many critics would argue that anti-immigrant hostility is simply a mask for racial hostility against Latinos. Thus, when immigrants are presented as Latino, do individuals have more restrictive views about immigration as compared to when the immigrant is presented as, say, Asian American? On a broader level, understanding the implicit racial messages embedded in debates about immigration allow us to examine the contours of racial attitudes as they apply to the racially diverse environment of today and, in so doing, help us to expand our theories about racial group threat which have been so central to the study of American public opinion. Do implicit messages about non-black minority groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans produce similar changes in racial attitudes as what previous studies using primes of blacks have found? To answer these research questions, we consider the scope of both white and black racial attitudes and how each of these two groups respond to implicit visual primes of Asian Americans and Latinos. We begin by reviewing past research on racial attitudes in order to establish the baseline

assumptions from which we draw upon in this study. Next, we discuss the stereotypes most commonly applied to each of the two groups primed in our study. Generally speaking, we very have little systematic knowledge about white and black racial attitudes towards non-black minority groups, let alone the effect of implicit appeals of these groups on public opinion. By outlining the stereotypes associated with Latinos and Asian Americans, we derive hypotheses about how whites and blacks may react to each of the groups. We then analyze data from an embedded experiment in a new survey conducted in 2006 with a nationally representative random sample of white and black adults. The experiment was designed to observe whether viewing immigrants as Latino versus Asian American increases intolerance toward immigrants and engenders support for more restrictive immigration policies. Although the experiment yielded findings that suggest that whites and blacks may not perceive non-black minority groups as threatening as scholars have hypothesized, the results more importantly raise new issues about the unique effects of implicit racial appeals that target non-black minority groups on individual racial attitudes.

### **Foundations: White Racial Attitudes, Racial Resentment and American Public Opinion**

The literature in American public opinion and political psychology underscores the influence of race on individual attitudes. Most of this literature has focused on white attitudes about blacks. However, as the American population grows increasingly diverse, the question remains whether the theories that have appropriately described white attitudes about blacks can also explain racial attitudes more generally. Recognizing the diversity in the population means we must acknowledge that public opinion reflects attitudes of white *and* minority respondents and that racial prejudice may be aimed at other minority groups besides blacks. Theoretically, the critical challenge is to identify a more generalizable theory that can describe the formation and utility of racial attitudes for individual political attitudes and behavior. As this literature review documents, while the research on white

racial attitudes provides scholars with an important starting point, these findings cannot be appropriately applied to racial attitudes as a whole.

Longitudinal trends on white public opinion demonstrate that racial prejudice against blacks has declined since the civil rights era (Schuman et. al. 1997; Tuch Sigelman and Macdonald 1999). However, many scholars argue that racial antagonism against blacks continues to persist and influence individual political choices (Bobo and Klugel 1993; Feldman and Huddy 2005; Sears and Kinder 1971; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). One well documented debate in this literature is over how to explain the nature of this new racism. One position posits that ideology and other political attitudes, rather than racial prejudice, dictates positions on racial issues (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993), while the opposing position argues that whites express their racism indirectly and through the use of political symbols such as racially targeted policies (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1986). The data used to substantiate these two competing positions has largely been derived from experimental survey designs and has focused on the distinction between “old” and “new” racism, with implicit forms (subtle and indirect references about minorities) describing the latter and explicit forms (open hostility or stereotyping of minorities) describing the former. While this debate is ongoing, most significant is the consistent finding that racial prejudice against blacks persists today and that stereotypes against blacks are overwhelmingly negative and widespread.<sup>2</sup>

More recent research focuses on the influence of racial prejudice on white public opinion and political behavior. In particular, scholars have focused on how elite-sponsored racial appeals are used to mold white opinion on candidate choice and certain policy issues. In her focus on the 1992 presidential campaign and the infamous Willie Horton commercial, Mendelberg (2001) demonstrated that elites can effectively activate white racial resentment through the use of implicit

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<sup>2</sup> See also in social psychology Devine 1989; Devine et. al. 2002.

racial appeals, which in turn, can persuade white voters to support the conservative candidate. According to Mendelberg, implicit racial appeals are effective because they allow whites to express their resentment against African Americans without violating the prevailing norm of racial equality (see also Taber and Burdein 2004; Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002). From Mendelberg's study, we have learned that a more robust measure of white racial resentment is derived through the use of implicit primes – primarily in the form of visual stimuli – rather than survey questions that measure self-reported attitudes about race.<sup>3</sup>

While there is extensive research on white racial attitudes, there is far less work on black racial attitudes. One important conclusion from this research is that the theories and methodologies used to explain white racial attitudes may not be entirely applicable to blacks. Like whites, black racial attitudes may also be swayed by racial appeals, but since blacks also have the personal experience as being part of a marginalized racial minority group, the scope of black racial attitudes is governed by a different set of considerations. Blacks are normally the focus of a racial appeal which means that these appeals may not necessarily mobilize negative thinking about race among blacks. White (2007) found that explicit reference to race activated black in-group identification while implicit references activated negative stereotypes about subpopulations of the in-group, a pattern opposite to that among whites. Furthermore, blacks have strong perceptions of racial group linked fate which encourages them to remain loyal to their racial group and more supportive of redistributive policies as compared to whites (Davis and Brown 2002; Dawson 1994; Tate 1993). Studies on black public opinion also offer some information on how blacks view other minority groups, primarily Latinos.<sup>4</sup> Although theories of realistic group conflict may appropriately apply to

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<sup>3</sup> For other extensions on implicit primes, see also Gilens (1996), Huber and Lapinski (2006), Hurwitz and Peffley (2005), and Valentino (1999).

<sup>4</sup> But see Meyers (2001) for a discussion about African American views toward Asian Americans.

black attitudes about other minority groups, studies have found that blacks only feel threatened by Latinos in the context of certain issues such as job security not simply their growing presence in society (Carter 2007; Gay 2006; McClain et. al. 2008; Meier et. al. 2004). Thus, blacks may be more prone to consider other issue dimensions before they choose to rely on simple racial appeals.

The above studies demonstrate the significant effort aimed at understanding the nature of racial prejudice and how white and black racial attitudes may differ from one another. However, application of these findings to a racial context that is not characterized by a simple white-black binary is unknown. As the lack of research demonstrates, we know very little about racial attitudes towards non-black minority groups. To our knowledge, there are no studies which examine the effect of implicit messages using non-black minority groups and so it is unknown how racial tropes are applied to non-black minority groups, such as Asian Americans and Latinos, nor how these stereotypes are used to mold public opinion (but see Perez 2007; Short and Magana 2002; Sniderman et. al. 2004). Furthermore, studies on black public opinion already demonstrate that different racial groups make different considerations when responding to a racial appeal. Given this, we are posed with the challenge of identifying how generalizable findings about white attitudes towards blacks are to racial thinking about other groups.

There are two competing responses to this challenge. On the one hand, we may simply be able to apply the assumptions that are used to describe white attitudes about blacks to racial thinking more generally. This position assumes that racial identity may be more broadly understood as a social group identity that is governed by a generalizable set of behaviors. Thus, regardless of the racial identities involved, we can assume that racial attitudes can be generally be explained by one set of theories. Helpful here is social group identity theory which suggests that an individual will classify

others as members of either their in-group or those of an out-group.<sup>5</sup> In this case, prejudice and intolerance of other groups may be generalizable regardless of the social identities involved. Also relevant are dimensions outlined in the racial group threat hypothesis (Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). This hypothesis asserts that prejudice arises out of a sense of group competition. Political struggle arises when an individual or group of individuals feel threatened by a competing group and react to protect their sense of group position. The racial group threat hypothesis is an example of a theory that has been proposed as a more parsimonious model for describing racial attitudes since it can be applied across all racial and ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, white racial attitudes about blacks may only represent one intergroup relationship and so we need to create new theories that effectively describe racial attitudes towards non-black minority groups. Social dominance theory contends that the hierarchical ordering of social groups in a society dictates that some prejudice is worse than others (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Particularly important is the consistent finding that out-groups are clustered around politically-relevant dimensions, which means that we cannot expect individuals to apply stereotypes about blacks to other racial identity groups (Leyens et. al. 2003). It is important to note that the racial appeals used in the foundational studies on white racial attitudes only target blacks and make references to specific racially-coded public policy issues such as crime and affirmative action. These studies rely on the idea that, among native born Americans, there are certain racial stereotypes about

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<sup>5</sup> Also relevant for this discussion is Gibson and Gouws' (2000) testing of the relationship between social identity theory and political tolerance. They find that stronger in-group identities, such as racial identities, encourages stronger intolerance for out-groups.

<sup>6</sup> However, although perceptions of group threat can explain racial attitudes for whites, blacks, Asian Americans and Latinos, Bobo and Hutchings (1996) also found that the predictors and sources of racial group threat do vary by racial group. Thus, the authors could not apply one overarching explanation for all four of the racial groups they examined.

blacks that are systemic and universally accepted. But prejudice against blacks is longstanding and deeply embedded in American society. Thus, racial thinking about blacks may represent a unique attitude dimension that is separate from perceptions about other racial and ethnic groups.

We hypothesize that this latter hypothesis is a more accurate explanation for racial attitudes than the former. Given that each racial group is framed by distinctive stereotypes and racialized tropes, we cannot expect the effects of racial appeals that target non-black minority groups to have the same type of impact as appeals that target blacks. To develop our hypothesis further, we must first review the competing racial tropes that frame both Asian Americans and Latinos. Since we are interested in testing the effects of implicit primes, we must identify the stereotypes that motivate individual attitudes about Asian Americans and Latinos and a relevant policy context to test the effects of these stereotypes.

### **New Immigration and Contemporary Racialization of Asian Americans and Latinos**

Immigration is a particularly useful policy context to understand the effects of implicit racial primes on individual political attitudes given the racial rhetoric that has historically surrounded debates on immigration policy groups (Jacobson 1998; Ngai 2005; Tichenor 2002). Even more importantly, racial appeals such as those identified in the introduction above demonstrate how elite-sponsored racial appeals are already being used in discussions about immigration policy. Since racial appeals rely on prevailing racial stereotypes, we outline the types of racialized tropes that these appeals may be attempting to signal to native-born Americans.

Latinos have become the most obvious target group in contemporary discussions about immigration. National policy debates have been dominated by the debate over undocumented immigration from Mexico (Newton forthcoming 2008). This was made obvious by the mass immigrant – and predominantly Latino – protests in the Spring of 2006. Although Passel (2005)

estimates that the majority of undocumented immigrants come from Latin America, at least 60% of Latinos are citizens. But given that the contemporary immigration debate has focused primarily on “illegal” immigration, elites have effectively directed the public’s blame at Latino immigrants, subsuming both legal and undocumented Latinos into one undesirable general category. Further, data also suggests that there is a tension between the types of racial tropes that are applied to Latinos. For example, Americans reject providing social services to Latinos but also believe that Latinos are hard working (PEW 2006). This suggests that implicit primes using Latino immigrants may effectively alter individual support for immigration reform but it is unclear which of the competing racial tropes causes these shifts in opinion. Most importantly, the rapid growth rate of the Latino population makes their presence more intimidating given that Latinos have been identified as threats not only to American jobs but also to the cultural fabric of the nation (see Huntington 2004).

In contrast, Asian Americans, more than two-thirds of whom are immigrants, are characterized by a distinctive set of racialized frames. Pundits have pointed to the high average levels of socioeconomic status and residential integration that characterizes the Asian American community as examples of their successful assimilation into the American mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003; Haney-Lopez 2006; Huntington 2004).<sup>7</sup> Whether or not the model minority stereotype for Asian Americans is desirable remains controversial, and the construction of Asian Americans as a model minority works hand-in-hand with another common characterization of Asians as perpetual foreigners (Junn 2008; Lowe 1996; Tuan 1998). Furthermore, the model minority also carries with it other negative attributes, among them the construction of a new yellow peril, this time invading the universities and gated communities of America (see Kim 1999). Conservative commentators have

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, these economic and educational advantages vary by national origin group (Lien, Conway and Wong 2006).

described the substantial flow of Asian immigrants as unwanted competition. Asian Americans today compete, perhaps most visibly, with whites seeking admission to the nation's top colleges and professional schools (Egan 2007).

We note two important considerations when thinking about contemporary racial stereotypes and immigration policy. First, both of the minority groups we focus on in this paper are currently framed by competing positive and negative stereotypes. Latinos are perceived as both hard working but also as poor and uneducated illegal laborers. Asian Americans are perceived as both model minorities but also perpetual foreigners. Indeed, although both groups are subject to pejorative racial stereotypes, it is also possible to present a competing positive stereotype which may, in effect, encourage an individual to critically evaluate a racial appeal presented to them by an outside source. Second, the topic of immigration conjures different normative debates in the American mind such as those dealing with national identity, economic well-being and national security (see Citrin et. al. 1997; Huntington 2004; Lee and Ottati 2004; Neiman et. al. 2006; Schildkraut 2003; Tichenor 2002). Thus, immigrant groups can pose a direct personal threat at many levels with some perceived as a greater threat in terms of jobs while others as a threat to American culture and traditions. We argue that the prevailing stereotypes that are applied to each minority group influence how an individual responds to an implicit racial appeal. For example, those groups framed as stereotypically non-threatening in terms of job security will not elicit perceptions of threat regarding the economy. We argue the need to classify different forms of perceived threat since the prevailing racial stereotypes attached to new immigrant groups interacts with the effect of a racial appeal.

Based on the racial tropes we identified above, we hypothesize that between our two immigrant groups of interest, Latinos will evoke the strongest perceptions of fear about immigration given that the contemporary political discourse focuses heavily on immigration from Latin America and that Latinos are framed as "illegal" immigrants. However, given the content of the racialized

tropes that are applied to Latinos, we believe Latinos are perceived as the most threatening in the context of national economic security and language issues. Consistent with the findings on black public opinion, we also expect there to be differences between white and black attitudes on immigration. In particular, blacks may be more likely to perceive an economic threat from Latinos as compared to whites, since Latinos are stereotyped as service laborers who will most likely compete directly with blacks for jobs. In contrast, we hypothesize that, due to the strength of the model minority trope, responses to Asian American immigrants will be positive. However, individuals may perceive Asians as a threat to American norms and culture given their persistent stereotyping as cultural outsiders. Since there is very sparse existing literature on racial attitudes about Asian Americans, it is unclear if there will be differences between white and black reactions to Asian immigrants.

## **Data and Methods**

With these analytical starting points, this paper reports on findings from an embedded experiment in a survey administered to a random national sample of white and black adults.<sup>8</sup> This survey was collected between late-December 2006 and January 2007 by Knowledge Networks of Palo Alto, California. In total, our sample included 433 White and 438 Black respondents.<sup>9</sup> The Knowledge Networks panel is a probability sample, and unlike many social science experiments that are tested

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<sup>8</sup> The study also included samples of Latinos and Asian Americans, though given the goals of this paper, these data are not discussed here. It is difficult to obtain robust national samples of these two groups because of the high degree of heterogeneity in terms of ethnic and national origin, and because a large percentage of the potential respondents are foreign-born and speak a language other than English. The resulting interview samples for these two populations tend to be more heavily U.S.-born and English-speaking than that found in the national population.

<sup>9</sup> Appendix Table A1 reports the demographics for each of these two samples.

on college students, our data from a probability sample of the U.S. population allows us to draw generalizations about each racial group. The surveys are delivered *via* the Internet,<sup>10</sup> allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire themselves, reducing the potential bias of interviewer effects, and also to view the visual primes used for the embedded experiments.

Respondents began the survey with standard items on interest in politics, voting behavior, and political participation. Following these questions was the embedded experiment. The experiment was conducted with a split-third design, where random thirds of each of the racial group samples were assigned to either one of two conditions or the control group. The respondents assigned to Condition A were shown a photograph of an Asian American family with one child, while those assigned to Condition B were shown a picture of a nuclear Latino family with one small child. These photos are reproduced in Figures 1a and Figure 1b respectively. Under each picture the following text was included: “The United States is experiencing a significant wave of immigration, and more than 10 million people from other countries have entered the United States since 1996.” Those assigned to the control group saw a screen with no photograph and only the text above that was the caption to the photographs in the 2 conditions.<sup>11</sup> Images were selected from the U.S. Census Bureau website in order to portray racial images of Asian Americans and Latinos that are sponsored by the state and present both groups in as uniform a fashion as possible. What remains constant for respondents across the two conditions and the control group is the text, which informs the reader that the current wave of immigration is “significant” and represents a number greater than 10 million. Our goal with this experiment was to induce perceptions of threat from

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<sup>10</sup> Panel participants are not limited to only those with computer access. Those who do not have computers are provided access by Knowledge Networks.

<sup>11</sup> The sample sizes for Condition A, Condition B and the control are respectively 140, 167 and 126 for whites and 139, 142 and 157 for blacks

immigration as a general phenomenon of many newcomers, and to vary only the cue of the race and ethnicity of the immigrants.

[Insert Figures 1a and 1b]

After the first experiment respondents answered a range of questions about immigrants and immigration policy. These dependent variables can be classified into three general dimensions and are repeated from other public opinion studies on immigration. The first dimension measures the respondent's general perceptions about increases in immigration: how concerned they were about the rising number of immigrants in the United States, whether they felt the number of immigrants to the U.S. should be increased or decreased and whether they felt that the political influence of people like you (with the respondents' racial and ethnic group inserted in the question stem) would increase or decrease with more immigrants. The second dimension measured the specific forms of threat the respondent thought immigrants posed to the U.S. Respondents were asked their opinion, from strongly agree to strongly disagree on the following three statements: "It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American," "The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values," and "Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs." Finally, the third dimension measured the respondent's support for specific redistributive policies aimed at new immigrant groups: whether all immigrants in the U.S. should be eligible for social services provided by the state, and whether they support or oppose a constitutional amendment to make English the nation's official language. The question wording and coding for these questions is listed in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1]

Our experiment measures how answers to questions about immigration policies and the consequences of immigration change when paired with distinctive racial cues. Our strategy was to provide a cue to race and ethnicity with the photograph, but not ask explicitly about the group

pictured. The photographs for the treatment groups were deliberately chosen to prime the respondent to think about a specific racial or ethnic group but not communicate a specific negative stereotype about that group. By relying on visual primes for the experiment, we wanted respondents to communicate their perceptions about Asian Americans and Latinos without also thinking that they were violating the established norm of racial equality (Mendelberg 2001). We test the effect of the experiment by comparing responses between the treatment and control groups on the eight dependent variables. Thus, we want to determine if those respondents who are primed to think about a specific racial/ethnic group are more restrictive on immigration policy than those who did not view faces of immigrants. The variety of the dimensions measured in our set of dependent variables allows us to determine if the type of threat (i.e. cultural or economic) matters. In so doing, so we seek to determine whether or not cueing respondents to think about non-black minority groups has consequences for political attitudes. Aside from the more specific interest in public attitudes on immigration, these data can also help to shed light on a longstanding debate on implicit racism among public opinion scholars. We can determine which racial and ethnic group is most potent in evoking perceptions of threat by comparing attitudes across stimulus groups.

If we apply our above hypotheses to the experiment, we expect that for both whites and blacks in the treatment groups viewing the picture of Latinos will evoke stronger perceptions of fear about immigration than will the group receiving no visual stimulus (the control): responses to the public opinion questions on immigration will be more negative and restrictive among the group given the Latino treatment than those not given the Latino treatment. At the same time, we expect that the experiment has different effects on white and black respondents, with the latter more likely to say that immigrants threaten jobs when primed with the Latino photograph. In contrast, we hypothesize that respondents viewing the Asian American prime may have more positive views about immigrants and have more inclusive views on immigration policy. If we find negative effects

from the Asian American prime, we expect these effects to occur in questions regarding American culture or identity.

## **Analysis and Findings**

To determine the effects of the two treatments, we first ran a manipulation check in which respondents were asked the question: “How do you think the nation’s population is divided among White Americans, Blacks, Latinos and Asian Americans? Check your best guess of the percentage for each group: <5%; 5-15%; 16-25%; 26-50%; 51-75%; or 76%+” The survey experiment was designed to encourage respondents to believe that there are more immigrants entering the country and that these immigrants are of a specific racial or ethnic background. The manipulation check was designed to determine if, in fact, respondents who were assigned to one of the two treatment groups estimated a higher percentage of either Latinos or Asian Americans in the population than those who did not view a racial cue. Although previous studies have already found that individuals tend to overreport the size of minority populations and underreport the size of the white population (Nadeau, Niemi and Levine 1993), we believed that the manipulation check would measure how malleable these perceptions are in response to an implicit prime. Respondents have a preconceived idea of what the makeup of our population looks like (whether they be accurate or inaccurate), and our manipulation check determines to what extent can perceptions about minority populations be altered from short-term communications.

Table 2 presents the average responses on the manipulation check question for white and black respondents separately. Looking first at the estimates of the Asian American population, we see that respondents generally believe that the size of the Asian American population is larger than it is in reality (at 4% of the population). As hypothesized, those given the Asian American treatment estimated an even larger Asian American population than those in the control group. Therefore, our

manipulation check suggests that respondents' views about Asian Americans are malleable and can be primed to react in the expected fashion. Alternatively, we see racial differences regarding the effects of the Latino treatment. Although respondents generally overreported the size of the Latino population (which is 13% of the population), the treatment only appears to work in the hypothesized direction for blacks. Alternatively, the experimental treatment did not induce white respondents to estimate a larger Latino population than the control group. In fact, the average responses on the manipulation check demonstrate that the prime may have dampened whites' perceptions that there are more Latinos in the U.S. Whites may already perceive immigrants as Latino and so the experimental prime does not encourage thinking that counters what they already have in mind. Thus, as a baseline, whites most likely perceive the "face" of the immigrant as Latino unless they are encouraged to think otherwise. Alternatively, racial appeals may effectively activate racial thinking for blacks.

[Insert Table 2]

After checking our experimental treatments, we must also establish baseline attitude scores on immigration and immigration policy. Given that immigration is not a standard topic included in longitudinal studies of American public opinion, we cannot make assumptions on how attitudes are distributed on various issues about immigration. We also need to establish these baseline scores in order to determine both the magnitude and direction of the effects from our implicit primes. Returning back to Table 1, we present all eight of our dependent variables along with the average responses of the black and white respondents. Higher average scores report more restrictive or intolerant views about immigration. These scores report attitudes of the control group, since they were not primed to think of a specific racial or ethnic group and so reflect responses not influenced by an experimental manipulation. Generally speaking, the relatively high means on all eight questions demonstrates that both whites and blacks have significant concerns about immigration.

However, blacks are slightly less restrictive about immigration than are whites. These patterns are unexpected because public opinion research on other racialized issues such as affirmative action have consistently found clear distinctions between white and black attitudes while our survey finds that the racial distinctions are less apparent on the immigration issue. There are statistically significant differences on only four out of the eight questions and these differences are modest. So while scholars of public opinion normally expect there to be clear racial distinctions on racialized public policy issues, public opinion on the issue of immigration may have its own unique patterns.

Tables 3 and 4 present the results of the experiment. To determine the effect of the experiment, we first calculated the average responses on our eight dependent variables for each of the two treatment groups and the control groups. Since our baseline attitudes reported in Table 1 demonstrated there to be some differences across white and black respondents, we continued to disaggregate attitudes based on the race of the respondent. We then ran simple difference of means tests between each of the two treatment groups and the control group on all eight dependent variables in order to determine if there was a statistically different change in attitudes as a result of the experimental manipulation.<sup>12</sup> Tables 3 and 4 only report those differences between the treatment group and control group that are statistically significant and the direction of that difference. The dependent variables shaded by a green box reflect when the treatment group has significantly more open views about immigration as compared to the control group. Those variables shaded by a red box reflect when the treatment group has significantly more restrictive views about immigration than the control group. Those dependent variables with unshaded boxes reflect when

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<sup>12</sup> Respondents were randomly assigned to our treatment and control groups and we did not find distinctive biases in our treatment and control groups. Due to random assignment of our samples in the experiments, we did not need to add demographic or regional controls into our analyses.

there is no significant difference between the treatment group and the control group. The means used to calculate these differences are presented in the appendix tables A2 and A3.

Table 3 presents the results for the white respondents. Across all 8 of the questions, the only significant differences between the control and stimulus group are for those provided the Asian American prime and the results are opposite of the negative direction that we had hypothesized. Consistently across 5 of the 8 items, whites who are cued to see immigrants as Asian Americans are more positive about an open immigration policy, and less likely to view immigrants as threatening either culturally or economically than those who are not primed to see immigration framed implicitly by any particular racial or ethnic group. These findings for the Asian American treatment group are in many ways dramatic and unexpected given previous research which has found that racialized appeals have mainly negative effects on individual political attitudes. Alternatively, there are no significant differences between the control group and the Latino treatment group. Contrary to our expectations, whites did not display more negative views about liberalizing immigration policy or stronger perceptions of threat when they viewed the photograph of Latinos on any of the items as compared with the control.

[Insert Table 3]

Table 4 presents the results for the black respondents. Unlike the results for the white respondents, both the Latino prime and Asian prime effectively change opinions about immigration. Yet, as with whites, the effects are opposite of what we had hypothesized. Looking first at the results for the Asian American treatment, there are significant differences on 4 of the 8 measures. Most of the effects are positive: blacks in this treatment group are less likely to feel immigrants are a threat to jobs, feel they have more political power, and have a less restrictive position on increasing immigration than those in the control. However, the Asian American prime also encourages a more restrictive view in terms of language: blacks in the treatment are significantly more supportive of a

constitutional amendment to make English the official language than the control. For the Latino treatment, the treatment has a significant effect on 2 out of the 8 measures and for both cases the effect is positive: blacks in the treatment are actually less likely to say that the number of immigrants should be reduced and are more likely to think they will have more influence in politics than those in the control group.

[Insert Table 4]

### **Discussion of Results**

The absence of data to support our initial hypotheses that both whites and African Americans would exhibit more restrictive attitudes on immigration policy when faced with a visual image of Latinos can be explained in a number of ways. First, we recognize that our choice of visual cues—the use of families—may have influenced the effects of the racial appeal. We could have instead included photographs of illegal immigrants running across the U.S.-Mexico border, or pictures of Chinese stowaways in ships, or some other more explicitly threatening photographs. But we reasoned that these types of images too closely couple specific stereotypes about Latinos and Asian Americans with the threat of immigration. In contrast, our objective was to see if race and immigration could be disentangled, and to observe whether it is the race or ethnicity of the immigrant or a general xenophobic reaction to immigrant newcomers that drives immigration opinion. This design clearly sets the bar higher to obtain a finding, but in our judgment, we believed that this higher bar was necessary to understand the specific effects of race on attitudes towards immigration.

Our general explanation is that there is a humanizing effect when respondents were provided a photograph of the immigrants in question, but one that varied by both the racial and ethnic background of those pictured in the photograph as well as by the race of the respondent. This suggests that there are distinct contrasts in how whites and blacks couple race with

immigration. Among whites, the race of the immigrant does appear to influence an individual's openness towards immigration. Our manipulation check suggests that when whites think about immigration they are envisioning a link with Latino immigrants. Thus, when whites are presented with alternative racial groups, in this case Asian Americans, they become more open towards immigration. On the one hand, positive racial stereotypes such as the “model minority” stereotype which are attached to Asian immigrants, appears to resonate strongly for white respondents and influences perspectives about the immigrant group in question. On the other hand, the Asian prime most likely presented whites with a counter-stereotype about immigration which presented a different cognitive task when evaluating immigration (see Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002).

This counter-stereotype explanation also accounts for the null effects from the Latino prime among white respondents. Since the Latino prime presented whites with the assumed race of the immigrant, the attitudes of the treatment group did not vary significantly from those in the control group who were not given a picture of Latinos. Thus, both the control group and Latino treatment group were engaged with similar cognitive tasks. We find it interesting, however, given public concerns about over-population and the depletion of social services, that the Latino prime failed to induce *increased* negative thinking about immigration. The migration of Latino families is not necessarily a counter-stereotype nor a positive stereotype about Latino immigrants. While our null results can easily be explained, past theories about the effects of implicit racial appeals predicts that our Latino prime should have elicited heightened anxiety about immigration. Implicit primes targeting blacks whether they be visual or the use of racially-coded phrases consistently demonstrate increased negative thinking about blacks. Thus, implicit racial appeals targeting Latinos, although similar, may not have the same effects as those appeals that target blacks.

These explanations for the white respondents do not necessarily apply to the experimental results on the black respondents. Like whites, the effects of the primes generally produced positive

or humanizing effects on black attitudes towards immigration. However, black respondents appear to be relying on different considerations than white respondents when they deliberate on the immigration issue. The manipulation check suggests that the experimental treatments were more effective on the black respondents since both the Latino prime and the Asian prime heightened stronger connections between race and immigration. In a sense, blacks do not attach immigration directly to Latinos or Asians. Given that blacks in the control group report fairly strong concerns about immigration, this raises an interesting question about what the imagined “face” of the immigrant looks like in the minds of blacks when they report their concerns about immigration. So by encouraging blacks to attach a race to the immigrant, either Asian or Latino, they report fewer concerns about immigration. Interestingly, blacks do not reveal a sense of racial group threat even in terms of their perceived political influence. Thus, the implicit primes appear to make blacks more aware that immigration is a racialized issue, which as a result makes them more hesitant to oppose the issue. Of course, the negative result of the Asian prime on the language issue reveals that blacks do engage in some negative thinking about other minority groups, but this negative thinking does not overpower blacks’ considerations about immigration more generally. Our findings parallel those found by White (2007) who argues that racial attitude activation works different for blacks than whites. Racial priming has the potential to activate in-group attachments as well as specific negative stereotypes about sub-populations.

### **Conclusion: Racial Attitudes in a Diverse Society**

Racial rhetoric – visible all over campaign communications in this election cycle – is certainly more subtle than it once was, but it is also far more complex in the multiracial environment of the U.S. in 2008. Much of the rhetoric on the right has explicitly and repeatedly made the claim that it is defensible – even desirable – to discriminate against blacks and recently has expanded to include

new immigrants. Creators of the “Jose, Can you See?” cover on the March 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy* will find kindred spirits in conservative media consultants ready to mobilize around Huntington’s claim, “There is no Americano dream.” Taken together, the results of the research reported here provide a window into the dynamics of racial attitudes in an increasingly diverse society. Many of our assumptions about racial attitudes are grounded in studies based on the observation of white attitudes about government policies most often associated with blacks. While many would like to hypothesize that these assumptions could apply to perceptions about non-black minorities in the U.S., our results suggest that there is a different dynamic at work for racial attitudes aimed at these non-black minority groups.

In addition to testing different representations of new immigrant groups, we argue for the need to better understand how minorities are de-humanized in public policy and other political debates. Elites can use short-term communications to conjure antipathy and fear among viewers, but may also be able to humanize a political issue by personalizing immigrants. The public fear of immigration may be due to the de-humanized quality attached to immigrants and not simply the immigrant group’s race or ethnicity (see Harris and Fiske 2006; Zebrowitz 2007). For example, instead of human faces, grainy images of humans running were shown in the 1994 Wilson commercial while a person in a hooded sweatshirt was used in the 2007 Tancredo ad. These representations are distinct from the message used in the Willie Horton ad in 1992 which is centered on a headshot of a black man. Although the Wilson and Tancredo ads allude to the race and ethnicity of the immigrants, we wonder about the substantive differences between the implicit primes using humanized and de-humanized subjects and their relationships with racialized frames.

Our ambition for this research is that the data contribute to the development of robust and innovative theories to explain the role race plays in political attitudes. That would be a mean feat, and we recognize the limitations of the study design to reach this lofty goal. Having said that,

political scientists need to recognize the immense variation in the ethnic and racial diversity of Americans today, re-tool the measurements used to measure racial attitudes, reconsider the methods and analytical strategies employed in this type of research, and articulate more carefully models developed to explain differences in political attitudes on racial issues. We hope that this research begins a much-needed extension of previous studies on racial priming and public opinion in response to foundational studies which primarily study white attitudes.

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**Table 1. Comparison of Mean Responses for White and Black Attitudes on Immigration Policy (control group only)**

Survey Question	Whites	Blacks	
How concerned are you about the rising number of immigrants in the U.S.? <i>1=Not concerned; 4=Very Concerned</i>	3.19 (.89)	2.76 (.08)	***
Do you think the number of immigrants to America nowadays should be <i>1=increased a lot; 5=reduced a lot</i>	4.19 (.09)	4.05 (.07)	
If immigration to this country continues at its present rate, how much political influence do you believe people like you will have? <i>1=much more influence; 4=a lot less than now</i>	2.75 (.06)	2.55 (.06)	**
It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American <i>1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree</i>	2.56 (.08)	2.61 (.07)	
The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values. <i>1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree</i>	2.79 (.07)	2.69 (.07)	
Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs <i>1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree</i>	2.70 (.07)	2.73 (.07)	
Should all immigrants who are in the U.S. be eligible for social services provided by state and local governments? <i>1=eligible; 2=not eligible</i>	1.83 (.03)	1.68 (.04)	***
Would you support a constitutional amendment to make English the nation's official language? <i>1=Strongly Oppose; 4=Strongly Support</i>	3.62 (.06)	3.43 (.06)	**
N	126	157	

Difference of means significant at: \*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05

**Table 2. Results on the Manipulation Check**

Question: “How do you think the nation’s population is divided among White Americans, Blacks, Latinos and Asian Americans? Check your best guess of the percentage for each group. 1 = <5%; 2 = 5-15%; 3 = 16-25%; 4 = 26-50%; 5 = 51-75%; 6 = 76%+”

<u>Estimated Size of Asian population</u>		
<b>Race of Respondent</b>	<b>Treatment Mean Response</b>	<b>Control Mean Response</b>
Whites	2.43	2.25
Blacks	2.65	2.52

  

<u>Estimated Size of Latino population</u>		
<b>Race of Respondent</b>	<b>Treatment Mean Response</b>	<b>Control Mean Response</b>
Whites	3.22	3.24
Blacks	3.74	3.56

**Table 3. Results of the Embedded Experiment for White Respondents**

	<b>Asian Prime</b>	<b>Latino Prime</b>
How concerned are you about the rising number of immigrants in the U.S.?	Inclusive	
Do you think the number of immigrants to America nowadays should be increased or decreased?	Inclusive	
If immigration to this country continues at its present rate, how much political influence do you believe people like you will have? (A lot or Not Very Much)		
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American	Inclusive	
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values	Inclusive	
Should all immigrants who are in the U.S. be eligible for social services provided by state and local governments?		
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs	Inclusive	
Would you support a constitutional amendment to make English the nation's official language?		

Note: Shaded cells depict statistically significant by at least the 0.10 level. Differences in mean responses between the treatment and control groups. Green cells depict differences when treatment group has more positive views about immigration than the control group. Red cells depict differences when treatment group has more negative views about immigration than the control group.

**Table 4. Results of the Embedded Experiment for Black Respondents**

	<b>Asian Prime</b>	<b>Latino Prime</b>
How concerned are you about the rising number of immigrants in the U.S.?		
Do you think the number of immigrants to America nowadays should be increased or decreased?	Inclusive	Inclusive
If immigration to this country continues at its present rate, how much political influence do you believe people like you will have? (A lot or Not Very Much)	Inclusive	Inclusive
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American		
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values		
Should all immigrants who are in the U.S. be eligible for social services provided by state and local governments?		
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs	Inclusive	
Would you support a constitutional amendment to make English the nation's official language?	Restrictive	

Note: Shaded cells depict statistically significant by at least the 0.10 level. Differences in mean responses between the treatment and control groups. Green cells depict differences when treatment group has more positive views about immigration than the control group. Red cells depict differences when treatment group has more negative views about immigration than the control group.

**Figure 1a. Image used for the Asian Prime**



**Figure 1b. Image used for the Latino Prime**



**Appendix: Additional Data Tables**

**Table A1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

	White	Black
N	433	438
Age		
18-29	16%	22%
30-44	28%	24%
45-59	29%	35%
60+	27%	19%
% Female	47%	61%
% Foreign born	3%	3%
Education		
Less than HS degree	9%	20%
HS degree	33%	39%
Some college	24%	26%
Bachelors or more	33%	15%
Household Income		
Less than \$15K	11%	29%
\$15K - \$30K	17%	26%
\$30K - \$50K	25%	25%
\$50K - \$75K	22%	11%
\$75K - \$100K	12%	6%
\$100K+	12%	4%
% Married	64%	30%
Region		
Northeast	20%	17%
Midwest	26%	23%
South	33%	50%
West	19%	9%
Party Affiliation		
Republican	31%	3%
Democrat	34%	70%

**Table A2. Mean Responses to Immigration Questions by Treatment and Control Groups for White Respondents**

	<b>Asian Prime</b>	<b>Latino Prime</b>	<b>Control Group</b>	<b>Diff Asian - Control</b>	<b>Diff Latino -Control</b>
How concerned are you about the rising number of immigrants in the U.S.? <i>1=Not concerned; 4=Very concerned</i>	3.01 (0.86)	3.11 (0.07)	3.19 (0.89)	<b>-0.18*</b> <b>(0.11)</b>	-0.08 (0.10)
Do you think the number of immigrants to American nowadays should be <i>1=Increased a lot; 5=Reduced a lot</i>	3.92 (0.08)	4.05 (0.07)	4.19 (0.09)	<b>-0.27**</b> <b>(0.12)</b>	-0.14 (0.11)
If immigration to this country continues at its present rate, how much political influence do you believe people like you will have? <i>1=Much more influence; 4=A lot less than now</i>	2.76 (0.06)	2.65 (0.06)	2.75 (0.06)	0.01 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.08)
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American <i>1=Strongly disagree; 4=Strongly agree</i>	2.36 (0.07)	2.43 (0.08)	2.56 (0.08)	<b>-0.20*</b> <b>(0.10)</b>	-0.14 (0.10)
The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values. <i>1=Strongly disagree; 2=Strongly agree</i>	2.57 (0.07)	2.74 (0.07)	2.79 (0.07)	<b>-0.23**</b> <b>(0.10)</b>	-0.06 (0.10)
Should all immigrants who are in the U.S. be eligible for social services provided by state and local governments? <i>1=Eligible; 2=Not eligible</i>	1.78 (0.04)	1.80 (0.03)	1.83 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs <i>1=Strongly disagree; 4=Strongly agree</i>	2.47 (0.08)	2.55 (0.07)	2.70 (0.07)	<b>-0.22**</b> <b>(0.11)</b>	-0.15 (0.10)
Would you support a constitutional amendment to make English the nation's official language? <i>1=Strongly oppose; 4=Strongly support</i>	3.49 (0.07)	3.51 (0.07)	3.62 (0.06)	-0.13 (0.09)	-0.11 (0.09)

Calculations may not be exact due to rounding. Standard errors are presented in the parentheses.

Difference of means significant at: \*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.10

**Table A3. Mean Responses to Immigration Questions by Treatment and Control Groups for Black Respondents**

	<b>Asian Prime</b>	<b>Latino Prime</b>	<b>Control Group</b>	<b>Diff Asian -Control</b>	<b>Diff Latino -Control</b>
How concerned are you about the rising number of immigrants in the U.S.? <i>1=Not concerned; 4=Very Concerned</i>	2.66 (0.08)	2.63 (0.08)	2.76 (0.08)	-0.10 (0.11)	-0.13 (0.12)
Do you think the number of immigrants to America nowadays should be <i>1=Increased a lot; 5=Reduced a lot</i>	3.84 (0.08)	3.81 (0.09)	4.05 (0.07)	<b>-0.20*</b> <b>(0.11)</b>	<b>-0.23**</b> <b>(0.11)</b>
If immigration to this country continues at its present rate, how much political influence do you believe people like you will have? <i>1=Much more influence; 4=A lot less than now</i>	2.36 (0.06)	2.36 (0.07)	2.55 (0.06)	<b>-0.19**</b> <b>(0.09)</b>	<b>-0.19**</b> <b>(0.09)</b>
How strongly do you agree with the following statement: It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American <i>1=Strongly disagree; 4=Strongly agree</i>	2.61 (0.07)	2.62 (0.08)	2.61 (0.07)	0.00 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)
The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values. <i>1=Strongly disagree; 2=Strongly agree</i>	2.58 (0.07)	2.56 (0.07)	2.69 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.10)
Should all immigrants who are in the U.S. be eligible for social services provided by state and local governments? <i>1=Eligible; 2=Not eligible</i>	1.66 (0.04)	1.67 (0.04)	1.68 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)
Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs <i>1=Strongly disagree; 4=Strongly agree</i>	2.55 (0.06)	2.63 (0.08)	2.73 (0.07)	<b>-0.18*</b> <b>(0.09)</b>	-0.10 (0.10)
Would you support a constitutional amendment to make English the nation's official language? <i>1=Strongly Oppose; 4=Strongly Support</i>	3.58 (0.06)	3.44 (0.07)	3.43 (0.07)	<b>0.15*</b> <b>(0.09)</b>	0.01 (0.09)

Calculations may not be exact due to rounding. Standard errors are presented in the parentheses.

Difference of means significant at: \*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.10