

2011

## Threat, violence, and voters: race and context in the 2008 presidential election

Matthew Fowler

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses)



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fowler, Matthew, "Threat, violence, and voters: race and context in the 2008 presidential election" (2011).  
*LSU Master's Theses*. 2806.

[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses/2806](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2806)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

THREAT, VIOLENCE, AND VOTERS:  
RACE AND CONTEXT IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

In

The Department of Political Science

by  
Matthew Fowler  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2008  
May 2011

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
PREVIOUS LITERATURE.....	3
Media, Campaigns, and Race.....	3
Persistence of Racial Prejudice.....	5
Southern Whites.....	7
Black Candidates.....	8
THEORY AND HYPOTHESES.....	11
DATA AND METHODS.....	16
RESULTS.....	22
Multivariate Models.....	24
CONCLUSION.....	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	38
VITA.....	44

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Descriptive Statistics: Total Sample.....	16
2. Descriptive Statistics: South.....	17
3. Descriptive Statistics: Non-South.....	17
4. State-Level White Vote for Barack Obama in 2008 Presidential Election.....	18
5. Obama White Support Proxy Pearson Correlation Statistics: Total, South, Non-South.....	22
6. OLS Multivariate Regression Results Predicting White Support for Barack Obama: Total Sample.....	24
7. OLS Multivariate Regression Results Predicting White Support for Barack Obama: South Sample.....	27
8. OLS Multivariate Regression Results Predicting White Support for Barack Obama: Non-South Sample.....	28

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. The relationship between Black <sup>2</sup> and White Support (Model 3).....	30
2. The relationship between Black <sup>2</sup> and White Support (Models 6 and 9).....	31
3. The relationship between Racial Income Inequality and White Support (Model 3).....	32
4. The relationship between Racial Income Inequality and White Support broken down by region (Models 6 and 9).....	33
5. The relationship between Racial Income Inequality and White Support in the South (Models 6).....	33

## **ABSTRACT**

The 2008 Presidential Election brought into office the first African-American president in U.S. history. This paper analyzes variations in White support for Barack Obama based on a number of county-level contextual factors, which are hypothesized to influence aggregate White voter support for the Democratic candidate. Based on the well-known racial threat theory, this paper will explore how racial composition and income inequality effect White support for Barack Obama. Another key explanatory variable, violence, is thought to influence White voter support because of the preconceptions some of these voters hold about African-Americans. Violence helps shape the stereotypes White voters hold, and these stereotypes are not left behind when entering the voting booth. If violence helps explain variation in county-level White support for Barack Obama, this paper offers preliminary evidence that stereotypes about violence may have a significant influence on voting and African-American candidate strategies may not have the sway necessary to overcome some of these barriers in the electoral arena.

## INTRODUCTION

Race is an inescapable dynamic in American politics. The unique historical context of the United States with regard to race relationships suggests it is still a salient issue in the minds of voters. Much has been written on the dynamics of out-group and in-group interaction. The relationship between Black and White has a peculiar manifestation in the United States, though. The development of a multiracial society and tolerance toward out-groups has come up short and is still considered a world largely seen in Black and White. Viewing race as Black and White is not an American phenomenon, yet the way racial perception and the social construction of race has developed in America has led to a unique dichotomy.

Though the racial dynamic today is not overwhelmingly represented by the overt racial prejudice which dominated during the pre-civil rights era, race continues to be a significant force in American politics. Consequently, White candidates have continued to utilize race-specific electoral strategies. The subtle manner with which these appeals are made is still blatantly race-coded, yet rarely consciously perceived as such by the mass public. The Southern Strategy championed by Richard Nixon and the Republican Party brought implicit racial associations into their strategy and helped solidify the certain partisan realignment of Southern Whites. By emphasizing “law and order” and being “tough on crime,” White candidates have been able to make subtle racial appeals to White voters and this strategy has and continues to work. These racial perceptions are certain to also influence how Whites view Black candidates.

The racial threat thesis states that variations in the Black proportion of the population will cause variations in the attitudes and behavior of Whites because of the perceived threat of racial competition. Though theorized and measured in many ways, accounts of the racial dynamic of competition lead to threat hypotheses. Whether through politics, economics, crime and violence, or social control, all these theories suggest that perceived and real competition between the races produces distinct attitudes and behaviors on part of the groups in question.

Though this relationship can be analyzed at the individual-level, analyses of that sort are often plagued with measurement and validity issues, social desirability being one of them. Those with negative racial sentiments are often not compelled to disclose such attitudes because of the societal pressures against overt racism. Another, possibly more valid, modeling of racial threat dynamics is to analyze contextual factors and electoral behavior. Though this does not allow for generalizations about individual-level White attitudes, these sorts of analyses can be useful as preliminary examination and suggestive of racial salience as a contextual influence.

This study emerged from an attempt to demonstrate how violence influenced Southern political culture (Fowler et al., 2011, Fowler, 2011). But violence does not only influence White Southern attitudes and behavior with regards to Black candidates, but should sway White non-Southerners, as well, just to a lesser extent. The literature continues to show mixed results on how context influences racial attitudes and voting behavior. Both contact and threat theories can show promise, depending on the context analyzed. So then, which of these theories holds water when analyzing the election of a Black presidential candidate? The election of Barack Obama offers a chance to test these theories. If racial voting is influenced by measures of racial context, then we can assume that Whites may be influenced by their racial attitudes when voting for Black candidates. By analyzing a candidate such as Barack Obama, who portrayed an aracial identity in his campaign, we are able to see whether these proxy measures of racial threat still have substance in a campaign where race supposedly held little salience with White voters.

## PREVIOUS LITERATURE

### Media, Campaigns, and Race

Though racial priming certainly influences Whites' evaluations of Black candidates, cues need not be given for race to become a salient campaign factor. The existence of a Black candidate is sufficient for this dynamic to occur. Though, when racial priming does occur this effect is increased. Implicit appeals are often those used in the present day because of explicit racial appeals violate social norms. Implicit appeals certainly influence the expression of racial attitudes (Mendelberg, 2001 and Valentino et al., 2002), but Huber and Lapinski (2006) come up with null results when analyzing whether appeals are actually effective. They claim that only with certain groups in society, particularly the less educated, does this dynamic become apparent. Mendelberg (2008), on the other hand, "show that racial cues do in fact racialize opinion" (p.109) and education may matter, but the better educated are not immune. These appeals can cause voters to access racial opinions without realizing why or even that they are doing so. They can remain subconscious, but manifest in behavior.

The infamous Horton ad, though not explicitly mentioning race, is clearly an attempt at racial priming. This worked extremely well, as Mendelberg (1997) shows that the ad caused priming of racial attitudes, not crime. Entman and Rojecki (2000) offer an important contribution to the literature on race, crime, and the media, showing how the images portrayed of Blacks are perceived by whites and how these images are used in decision processing. The images of Blacks in nearly all facets of popular media are distorted in a way that causes negative stereotyping of Blacks as a group. Movies, television, music, and news media all contribute to this dynamic of culture that helps people dodge the information processing necessary to make cues more complex and representative of reality. These media depictions could be particularly influential in White homogeneous areas where opportunities for significant contact are few and far between.

Particularly important are depictions of crime and violence in the news. Local television news across the country has largely turned to an “info-tainment” style. This unfortunately has involved relating stories about crime and violence to Blacks. These news stories also tend to portray the world as a violent place without showing efforts to control any of this chaos (Entman and Rojecki, 2000). This is not just a violent world, but news media also tends to portray Black criminals in a remarkably different fashion than White criminals. This contributes to the degeneration of racial progress and “could reduce apparent and real responsiveness of White-dominated society to the needs of poor minorities, especially Blacks” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, p.91).

Entman (2006) suggests local news portray Blacks and Whites differently in news stories about crime and politics and this may encourage hostility, resistance to Black political interests, and denial of racial discrimination. This dynamic is enhanced by the simultaneous presence of Black journalists and these portrayals, suggesting that racial discrimination is not an issue. Furthermore, the author states this could be local news stations, perhaps unconsciously, playing out as a “cultural forum” where television influences “changing yet preserving racism as a component of American culture” (Entman, 2006, p.226).

These racial attitudes could also be carried into attitudes about the president. Valentino (1999) shows that racial stereotypes about Blacks and crime influence how people evaluate the president. If these attitudes were primed when evaluating a White president, the effect is likely to increase when evaluating a Black president. Though this paper does not have the data necessary to analyze such a relationship as the impact of media on aggregate electoral behavior, one is assumed to exist. With the popularity of local news media, whether people watch or not they are exposed to the views espoused through interaction with those that do watch television news. This means that those who are exposed to television news and stereotypical depictions of Blacks are likely to influence those they relate with.

## **Persistence of Racial Prejudice**

Racial context can help explain White racial attitudes, racial threat dynamics, and voting behavior. This has been suggested for decades and is often credited to V.O. Key (1949)'s racial threat thesis. This hypothesis suggests that the level of the Black population influences White attitudes and behavior, with more Blacks facilitating a fear of competition and threat component in the White mind.

Black strangers induce more fear than White strangers in both White and Black respondents (Heald-Moore, 1995). This is not surprising given the depictions of Blacks in the media and persistence of racial discrimination in America. St. John and Heald-Moore (1996) show that this fear is particularly apparent among Whites who hold racial prejudice. This racial prejudice is intimately connected to welfare and crime. Peffley et al. (1997) offer support for the ability of racial conservatives to sway prejudice Whites without explicit racial appeals, but rather with talk of doing away with welfare and protecting law and order.

Attitudes about crime are constructed using elements of racial stereotypes and are influenced by the racial environment. Racial composition of a given area, particularly perceived racial composition, influences fear of crime among Whites. This is often operationalized as fear of criminal victimization. Chiricos et al. (1997) find that this effect is strong among Whites who perceive themselves to be in the racial minority. Chiricos et al. (2001) offer similar support, with the inclusion of perceived Hispanic composition, as well. Not fear of crime, but the perceived level of crime is also influenced by racial composition. Increasing Black, male populations causes the perceived level of crime to also rise when controlling for objective crime rates (Quillian and Pager, 2001). These interconnected attitudes about race and crime are influenced by both racial context and local news viewing. Gilliam et al. (2002) finds some support for contact hypothesis for Whites in heterogeneous racial contexts. Whites in homogeneous contexts were more likely to be influenced by news stories utilizing racial stereotypes.

Stein et. al. (2000) looks at how contact theory works at the behavioral and contextual levels. Though the analysis is on attitudes toward Hispanics, the need to examine both levels is important for better analyses

and conclusions about these units of analysis. Perhaps even more important, the authors show that including an interaction shows that high minority population alone may increase negative affect, but with meaningful contact these attitudes become more tolerant (Stein et. al., 2000). Dixon and Rosenbaum (2004) analyze whites' stereotypes about Blacks and Hispanics pertaining to racial context and find that threat theory does a better job of explaining negative Black affect than negative Hispanic affect. Going a step further, Oliver and Wong (2003) examine prejudice in multiracial contexts. They find support for the contact theory, showing that those that live in proximity to their in-group are likely to hold stronger prejudices than those in environments with more out-group members. Though contact theory may hold substance in the right context with significant interaction occurring, racial threat or group conflict theory better explains White racial attitudes. Non-Black respondents in Glaser (2003)'s study became less accepting of proportional government allocation as the proportion of the Black population rose.

How are these feelings of competition and threat created? They are a mix of a number of social psychological elements involving individual perceptions and objective contexts. Bobo and Hutchings (1996) find support that self-interest, prejudice, beliefs about social inequality, and Blumer's group position theory all contribute to perceptions of racial competition. The group position theory suggests that "feelings of competition and hostility emerge from historically and collectively developed judgments about the positions in the social order that in-group members should rightfully occupy relative to members of an out-group" (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996, p.955).

If the racial context is likely to influence attitudes held by Whites about Blacks generally, and about their actions in public spaces specifically, then the context is also likely to influence the decisions Whites make in the voting booth. This may be the more likely place to find "true" racial attitudes being espoused because of the anonymity of the vote, alluding back to the Bradley effect where attempting to ascertain attitudes toward Black candidates causes a gap between poll data and election returns.

## Southern Whites

The literature on White attitudes continues to show that a Southern uniqueness exists. Southern Whites are more likely to hold negative affect toward Blacks (Kuklinkski et al., 1997). Southern Whites also express these attitudes in their vote choice for Black candidates (Liu, 2007), White candidates who run racialized campaigns (Giles and Buckner, 1993), and even in campaigns where race is not an apparent factor (Knuckley and Orey, 2000). Continuity of Old South culture can help explain this Southern distinctiveness. The Southern historical context is defined by race and this dynamic continues to permeate the Southern White psyche. Contemporary studies consistently show this to be the case (Fowler et al., 2011).

Racial environment is key to conceptualizing the idea of racial threat theory. As the proportion of Blacks in a county varies, so does White reactions to this change in the racial dynamic. Research continues to show that racial context has an influence on the attitudes and behaviors of White Southerners. Though Glaser (1994) finds that partisanship is not influenced by racial context at the individual-level, but that attitudes toward racial policies is. Giles and Hertz (1994) offer an analysis that finds racial context and partisanship may be linked at the county-level. They show that Louisiana parishes with higher Black percentages tend to have less white Democrats and more Republicans (Giles and Hertz, 1994).

Southern historians explain the influence of climate and a “culture of honor”, among other factors, when characterizing the South (Nisbett and Cohen, 1996). Places that are hotter tend to have higher violent crime (Anderson and Anderson, 1996). The South continues to have high violence, which influences the behavior of White Southerners (Fowler, 2011) and this can partially be explained as an element of Southern culture (Fowler et al., 2011).

The election involving David Duke, a White, conservative candidate for Senate in 1990 who was once part of the Ku Klux Klan, has sparked a conversation among researchers about the relevance of racial threat in an obviously racially tinged contest. Giles and Buckner (1993) present evidence that Black population does

influence the White vote for Duke. Voss (1996) attempts to show that this effect holds only for smaller, rural areas, but more urban areas have more Whites voting for Duke when the Black population is low.

Though racial context in the South may influence the development and expression of attitudes about Blacks, Glaser and Gilens (1997) find support for the argument that environment matters, and those who migrate into or out of the South experience a shift in racial prejudice and racial policy attitudes. Despite mixed results, the South continues to exhibit distinctiveness on race, yet some of these racial dynamics are not completely restricted to the South. Violence should also influence how non-Southerners view Blacks and Black candidates.

### **Black Candidates**

In a country where Black candidates are largely representing majority-Black areas, can Black candidates overcome racial barriers to electoral office elsewhere? Swain (2006) offers evidence that Black candidates can win in majority-white districts if they run the right campaign and that candidate race matters little for quality representation. The analysis she brings to bare does not convincingly show this to be the case. If substantive representation is influenced by descriptive representation, which research shows to be the case (Whitby, 2000 and Tate, 2003), then the goal of Black leadership is normatively appealing. But, candidate strategy is not enough to overcome the persistence of racial prejudice in the electorate. Reeves (1997) shows that race permeates elections that involve only tangential mentions of racial issues. Even non-racial issues facilitate the development of false perceptions about Black candidate personality and issue positions (Moskowitz and Stroh, 1994). White voters continue to express their racial preferences when voting for Black candidates.

Black candidates take a number of different campaign strategies depending on a number of factors, but often the electoral context is key. Majority-white districts will present different challenges than majority-Black districts. Blacks are more likely to support Democratic candidates, and often overwhelming support Black candidates. However, majority-white districts are not as welcoming. Attempts to appear aracial are often seen from Black candidates in an attempt to not appear as representing only Black interests. When

exhibiting behaviors stereotypical of Black candidates, such as the militant style associated with Jesse Jackson, or appearing to give priority to Black interests, Black candidates risk putting off White voters who fear Black political agency because of the loss of status quo.

Context heavily influences the election of Black candidates. Just the presence of a Black candidate inserts race into the campaign. Black candidates with flexible campaign strategies in more liberal districts with a positive political situation are more likely to succeed than those in other situations (Sonenshein, 1990). The candidate need not turn away from a liberal ideology, but some issues are deeply connected with racial feelings. Crime, welfare, and affirmative action all have racial undertones which insert race into a campaign.

Candidate race alone can account for an approximate 10% projected loss in White vote for a Black candidate (Bullock and Dunn, 1999). This suggests that race certainly matters to White voters, but other factors can influence this relationship. Lui (2001b, 2003) shows that Black candidate strength is also important. Incumbency, candidate strategy, and media influence can influence the success of Black candidates. Incumbency is consistently shown to increase the likelihood of white crossover voting (Stein et al. 2005, Voss and Lublin, 2001, & Bullock, 1984). Deracialization has been found to increase the likelihood of White crossover voting in urban contexts (Liu and Vanderleeuw, 2001), whereby an aracial campaign strategy is utilized by the Black candidate. Citrin et al. (1990) shows that importance of candidate strategy in white crossover voting. Those Black candidates who downplay their race and racial policy preferences are able to garner more White support than those who appear more “militant”.

Factors which provide information, such as endorsements from the media or time spent under a Black official, can potentially discount any uncertainty voters have about Black elites. Those employing contextual analyses often disregard elite strategies and the agency of groups other than Whites, which leaves theories and conclusions pertaining to threat inadequate (McClerking, 2001). Hajnal (2001) shows that time under Black leadership tends to ease Whites’ attitudes toward Blacks, but a large Black population tempers this effect with higher Black populations being related to Whites’ negative views of Blacks and Black leadership

(Hajnal, 2007). The key point is that Black representation matters, not only for Blacks, but also for decreasing the continued racial prejudice in the White electorate.

Another influence on how Whites perceive Black candidates is skin color. Historically, skin pigmentation has been related to social constructions of groups. Those with lighter skin are perceived differently than those with darker skin, regardless of race. Terkildsen (1993) finds that candidate skin color has an influence on White voter perceptions, which is tempered by racial prejudice, but dark-skinned candidates are evaluated less favorably than light-skinned candidates.

The election of Barack Obama offers an opportunity for scholars to study how a successful Black presidential candidate fared with white voters and the stereotypes they hold. He ran a strong campaign against a weak Republican candidate, John McCain, but did not have the advantage of incumbency. His relative inexperience, at least in how he was portrayed by the media and perceived by the public, would contribute to the probability of racial cues being utilized. Barack Obama was also able to run an aracial campaign. This means his strategy involved persistently distancing himself from notions about how Blacks, and Black candidates in particular, stereotypically behave. He remained moderate and rarely mentioned race or prioritized issues in a way that could be perceived as appealing to “Black interests”. If racial threat has an influence on the election of Barack Obama, then candidate strategy, among other factors, may not have the power to overcome prejudice within the White electorate.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The continued existence of racial prejudice in the electorate leads to the need for more research on how this prejudice influences electoral choices. Contextual analyses can help shed light on the factors that cause variation in White support for Black candidates. This study specifically examines the effect of racial threat theses on support for the Democratic candidate in the 2008 Presidential Election, Barack Obama. Do White voters take racial context into account when making electoral decisions? Is this relationship based on political, social, economic evaluations of Blacks as a group? This assumption will be tested not through individual-level attitudes, which can be skewed, but rather through contextual analyses.

To suppose that racial context influences behavior, attitudes must also be taken into account. The literature certainly shows that racial composition influences White racial attitudes. Which context, though? Any geography from precinct and neighborhood to city and county are utilized to test the influence of racial context. Liu (2001b) and Baybeck (2006) both take into account the possibility of contextual effects varying significantly in multiple units. This includes both social and political contexts, which can influence the existence of threat. Liu (2001b) shows that contact theory may hold water, but Baybeck (2006) finds support for racial threat when accounting for multiple contexts.

The racial environment within one inhabits not only influences attitudes and arrest rates, but also interacts with electoral behavior. This seems to be the appropriate way to analyze whether people translate their racial attitudes into electoral behaviors. This racial voting effect is measured in a number of ways. Liu (2001a) analyzes White crossover voting for and finds weak support for the contact hypothesis, but this is at the neighborhood, not county level. The author is able to utilize King (1997)'s EI method to estimate the vote by race, using this measure of white crossover voting as the dependent variable. Liu (2001b) also shows that this relationship between Black electoral strength and White crossover voting exists at the election unit, or precinct, level as a strategic reaction by Whites to protect their interests, rather than react with fear. Liu and

Vanderleeuw (2007) present evidence that when it comes to racialized voting, it is “the political competition between the two racial groups in the electoral arena, rather than social interaction in neighborhoods, that has a greater effect” (p.114). So, Liu is able to find weak support for contact hypotheses at the smallest social and electoral units, but what of county-level analysis? This is the geographic level originally hypothesized by Key (1949) that should be of interest in threat theories. Also, the two ideas of contact and threat need not be in opposition. There could be different configurations which support contact theories, and other situations which manifest various threat theories.

Some have suggested that analyses of racial threat are too simple (McClerking, 2001). To propose that simply a linear relationship between Black population and threat exists oversimplifies reality. Also, scholars often include total Black population, ignoring that threat theory speaks of Blacks in the political realm. McClerking (2001) suggests utilizing voting-age Blacks, rather than the total population. Remedying the problem of oversimplification, some scholars have attempted to include multiple measures of threat and conceptualizations of the theory into their models (Eitle et al., 2002 and Parker et al., 2005).

This study supposes that political context is key, therefore leading to the use of Black citizen voting-age population as the first main explanatory variable of threat. This will be measured both as a linear and curvilinear relationship. So the analysis will test the possibility that the larger the Black population, the more racialized voting. The other possibility is that the relationship is conditioned where more equitable distributions of the races lead to more competition, higher threat, and more racialized voting. This should manifest as a curvilinear, U-shaped relationship.

Another conceptualization of threat involves economic competition. This racial economic threat is perceived as between Black and White, and can be measured as such through examining median income at the county level. Blalock (1967) was one of the first to suggest this path of analysis. This takes into account the ratio of White to Black median income. Parker et al. (2005) measure economic threat with a similar ratio between races, but with three other possible indicators of economic competition. The authors use the White

to Black ratio of unemployment and educational attainment of a bachelor or high school degree. They find, using an index of economic disadvantage, that the more economic inequality between the races, the more Black arrests occur in U.S. cities (Parker et al., 2005). This relationship should also hold for political behavior.

Therefore, the second variable of interest is income inequality between Blacks and Whites at the county level, which measures economic threat. Places with more racial income inequality are expected to have less whites voting for Barack Obama because of a perception of economic threat between races. There could also be a modern day Proto-Dorian Bond effect, whereby elite agency causes poor Whites in these areas to vote against the Black candidate because economic conditions are blamed on the Black population.

The conceptualization of threat as fear of Black crime is often the way this theory is tested. Racial threat is analyzed utilizing social control of Blacks as the dependent variable. Eitle et al. (2002) finds that Black on White violent crime influences Black arrest rates, but no evidence of a political or economic threat influencing these arrest rates. The problem is that this approach assumes that political, economic, and fear of Black crime threats all influence Black arrest rates. This supposes that these effects are translated through police forces, ignoring the agency of citizens in expressing this threat dynamic. If racial threat exists, this relationship is likely to influence the mass population and manifest in their behavior, not just that of police officers.

The third variable of interest is violence. This is expected to influence White voting for a Black candidate because of the stereotypes these voters hold about Blacks. The literature shows that media depictions of Blacks have facilitated the development of stereotypes about Blacks as violent. This evaluation is taken into account when voting for Black candidates. So, places with more violence are expected to have less Whites voting for Barack Obama.

The literature seems to suggest some variables of interest in this analysis of threat theories in the 2008 Presidential Election. Common controls are also included. Of key importance in contextual analyses of white crossover voting is urban context. Lui (2003) shows that increasing Black presence in urban areas may show a

positive relationship with white crossover voting, contrary to racial threat theory. The rural/urban dichotomy will be included in the analysis with the expectation that rural areas will be less likely to support Barack Obama. Age should influence racialized voting because older cohorts are more likely than younger cohorts to hold negative racial affect. Oliver and Mendelberg (2000) further the conversation by including socio-economic status as an important indicator and suggesting that threat theories may need more theorizing. More importantly, the authors further suggest that real, actual measures of racial competition and threat may be inadequate. Rather, they attempt to show that this dynamic is also influenced by psychological responses which assume “the social environment can influence racial attitudes in ways that have little to do with racial composition or with interracial competition for resources” (p.575). They show that education may matter more than Black population in determining White racial attitudes creating a low-status environment where out-group hostility is prevalent. Education will be included in the analysis because areas with more highly educated populations will be less likely to exhibit racialized voting. Income should influence the relationship because places with higher income levels will be more likely to support the Democratic candidate.

This study attempts to further the approach of including implicitly racial variables by testing a new measure, violence, seeking whether threat theories are useful for evaluating the election of a Black president. Also, the Black population variable will be tested as exhibiting a linear relationship and a U-shaped curvilinear relationship. The linear relationship generally hypothesized is that as the Black population rises, so does racial threat. The curvilinear relationship, as suggested by Blalock (1967), attempts to show that threat is greatest when racial groups are proportionate. Liu (2007) finds support for a U-shaped relationship, where white crossover voting occurs more in white dominant contexts. The variations in racial, economic, and political contexts will be taken into account in this analysis of threat and contact theories pertaining to the election of a Black president. The explanatory variables lead to three hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** The level of the Black population will have a negative relationship with the White vote measure. This relationship will also be conditioned by the existence of a curvilinear relationship,

where the highest level of racial voting will appear in places where Black and White populations are relatively even.

**Hypothesis 2:** The level of economic threat will be negatively related to the White vote measure.

**Hypothesis 3:** The level of violence will be negatively related to the White vote measure.

## DATA AND METHODS

The unit of analysis is the county-level. This variable is small enough to allow for plenty of variation and small enough to take into account the possibility for interaction, both socially and politically, between races. The data is analyzed through the use of bivariate Pearson’s correlations and OLS multivariate regression. Except for the south dummy, all variables are continuous and, where possible, are coded between 0-1 for ease of interpretation.

<b>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Total Sample</b>					
Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Obama White Support Proxy	1614	0.33821	0.1587614	0	0.85996
Violent Crime Rate	1614	328.95	244.634	0	2333
South	1614	0.52045	0.4997366	0	1
Rural	1614	0.55355	0.3138759	0	1
Median Age	1614	39.5235	4.646272	21.8	55
Median Income	1614	44741.8	12372.65	19425	113313
College	1614	0.1294	0.0590617	0.03458	0.50867
Black Citizen Voting-Age Population	1614	0.09089	0.1311024	0	0.81855
Median Income Difference	1614	14642.5	18827.33	-143028	75902

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the descriptive statistics for the full, south, and non-south samples, respectively. At the county-level, the full sample shows a mean of 34% White support for Barack Obama, while the southern sample shows a mean of 24%. This table also illustrates that the southern sample has a higher violent crime rate, higher Black citizen voting-age population, and greater income inequality between Blacks and Whites than the non-south sample.

This analysis uses county-level units from 27 states around the country<sup>1</sup>. Table 4 shows the white vote in the states under analysis. A county-level analysis of this many states allows for enough observations to make comfortable generalizations about the effect of the explanatory variables on the 2008 Presidential

---

<sup>1</sup> Alabama, California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Election. The data clearly show that Whites were more averse to voting for Barack Obama in the South than elsewhere. The table also shows that the dependent variable has plenty of variation at the state-level.

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Obama White Support Proxy	840	0.24151	0.13165	0	0.84401
Violent Crime Rate	840	356.8	253.77	0	1549
South	840	1	0	1	1
Rural	840	0.58872	0.31721	0	1
Median Age	840	38.9723	4.6437	21.8	54.6
Median Income	840	41741	11594.6	19425	113313
College	840	0.11819	0.05589	0.03458	0.50867
Black Citizen Voting-Age Population	840	0.13925	0.15449	0	0.81855
Median Income Difference	840	16912.2	14208.1	-143028	75902

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Obama White Support Proxy	774	0.44315	0.11222	0.0778	0.85996
Violent Crime Rate	774	298.726	230.702	0	2333
South	774	0	0	0	0
Rural	774	0.51538	0.30588	0	1
Median Age	774	40.1218	4.57745	23.6	55
Median Income	774	47998.6	12374	24502	102500
College	774	0.14157	0.06003	0.04552	0.43208
Black Citizen Voting-Age Population	774	0.0384	0.06826	0	0.67691
Median Income Difference	774	12179.2	22558.4	-123588	68051

The dependent variable is a White vote measure for the Democratic candidate in the 2008 Presidential Election<sup>2</sup>. The data needed to construct this variable is obtained from the respective state election websites and the U.S. Census. The citizen voting-age Black population and percent vote for Barack Obama at the county-level will be used to construct the dependent variable. Though this measure is not perfect, this proxy for White support is the best available measure of this phenomenon<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> One observation for this variable had to be coded from -0.002 to 0.

<sup>3</sup> Not all states collect registration by party and even less collect registration based on race and calculating the vote based on race can be an even more difficult task in smaller locations. Scholars have suggested fixes for this exact problem, as well (King, 1997a,

**Table 4. State-Level White Vote for Barack Obama in 2008 Presidential Election**

STATE	PERCENT WHITE VOTE
Alabama	10
California	53
Delaware	55
Florida	42
Hawaii	70
Illinois	51
Maine	58
Maryland	56
Massachusetts	56
Michigan	51
Missouri	42
Nevada	47
New Jersey	49
New York	52
Oklahoma	29
Oregon	60
Pennsylvania	48
Rhode Island	57
South Carolina	26
Tennessee	34
Texas	26
Vermont	65
Virginia	39
Washington	59
Wisconsin	54
Wyoming	33

Note: Data from Times-Picayune.

This study utilizes data from a variety of sources. First, data was obtained from the U.S. Census for all variables available in 2008, and supplemented with those that are not by 2000 data. The key explanatory variable from the Census is the proportion of the Black citizen population 18 years old and over. This variable

---

Liu, 2007). Gary King (1997) developed a method that attempts to help fix the ecological inference problem. His technique involves taking the turnout, registered voters, and racial make-up of the voting-age population and through a statistical solution can pull out the estimated vote by race. Liu and Vanderleeuw (2007) show that these estimates do match up quite nicely with actual measures based on race. Using King's program, EZI, could potentially provide a more accurate estimate of the white vote (King, 1997b). The data necessary to construct this variable for the sample under use is not available, so the best available measurement will be utilized.

ascertains the electoral strength of the Black population and indicates a politicized racial context. This county-level variable is used to determine their relationship with the White vote for Barack Obama in the 2008 Presidential Election. As the Black population rises, the white vote measure should decrease. In addition to a linear relationship possibly influencing the white vote measure, a nonlinear relationship is also hypothesized to influence the dependent variable. This is done through the use of a quadratic term for the Black population variable, where Black population and Black population squared are both included in the model (Liu and Vanderleeuw, 2007). This measure is expected to also have a positive relationship with the White vote measure, where racialized voting is higher when there is a more equitable race distribution in the population. The more complex relationship between racial context and racially motivated behavior can be taken into account through using this more theoretically parsimonious measure.

Another explanatory variable, economic threat is operationalized using the difference between White household median income and Black household median income.<sup>4</sup> The data is obtained from the U.S. Census. This measurement takes into account income inequality based on race in a county. The higher the difference between the two, the lower the white vote measure. Including the degree of income inequality as an indicator allows for the possibility that the White vote is influenced by how people perceive this income inequality as economic competition between the races.

The final explanatory variable, violence, was obtained from County Health Rankings. This data is taken from the 2005, 2006, and 2007 FBI Uniform Crime Reports and combined into a summary measure<sup>5</sup>. This variable is coded as the violent crime per 100,000 in the population. Though violent crime by race would be more theoretically justified, this data is unavailable. This should not cause a problem, though, because it is the existence of violence itself which matters. Whether between Blacks or Whites, living in a context of general

---

<sup>4</sup> GINI coefficient was also tested as a measure of income inequality, but this measure does not take into account racial differences in income. Rather, the racial income inequality measure based on median income between White and Black is more parsimonious with theory and will be utilized. The results are not significantly different.

<sup>5</sup> One outlier from Hawaii was dropped due to measurement error. After dropped, the variable became more robust.

violence should translate into a racial perception because of the stereotypes about Blacks and violence. The lagged nature of the variable allows for violence in the years leading up to the 2008 election to be taken into account, rather than violence at the time of the election. This assumes that time is taken from exposure to violence to occur and time to process the environment one lives in.

The problem of missing data, though small, has to be dealt with in this analysis for the violent crime rate variable<sup>6</sup> and racial income inequality<sup>7</sup>. Luckily, scholars have come up with a statistical fix using multiple imputations for this often encountered problem (Rubin, 1987, Allison, 2002, and King et al., 2001). The approach, EMis, improves upon earlier multiple imputation methods using importance resampling (King et al., 2001). The program, ICE, will be used to perform these imputations (Royston, 2007).

The remaining variables in the analysis are nearly as important as the explanatory variables in this model. Urban is controlled for because past research has shown that the racial dynamic in rural areas is much different than urban ones (Liu, 2003). This variable is taken from the Census and is coded 0 to 1. The expectation is that the more urban the county, the higher the White vote measure. This is both because rural areas tend to have more traditional racial norms and because urban areas offer greater opportunity for interaction between races.

Another key variable is whether the county is in the South or not. The South is shown to be unique when it comes to race and this analysis expects that Southern counties are more averse to electing a Black president. For this reason, Southern counties should be negatively related to the White vote measure. This variable will be coded 1 for Southern counties and 0 otherwise. The South in this analysis is defined as Alabama, Florida, Oklahoma, South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, Tennessee and Virginia. The models are also run for the southern and non-southern counties separately.

---

<sup>6</sup> Six observations were negative after imputation, these were coded 0. The results were not significantly influenced.

<sup>7</sup> After supplementing this variable's 2005-2009 data with 2000 data, only a few observations needed imputation.

Finally, two often-used control variables associated with socioeconomic context will be included in the model. The median income in a county will be taken from Census data and coded as the actual median income in a county. The expectation is that counties with higher median incomes will be more likely to score high on the White vote measure. In addition to income, education will be included in the analysis. This is measured as the proportion of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher. Higher educated populations are more likely to be at least more tolerant of out-groups than the less educated. This leads to the expectation that places with more educated people will be more likely to score higher on the White vote measure than places with less educated people.

## RESULTS

The results turned out generally as expected, though some findings were surprising. The sample size and states included allow for a fair amount of generalization to other states, as well as the regional comparison. The south variable correlate shows a strong, negative relationship with the White proxy measure. The overwhelming performance of the south variable, as well as the expectation that a southern culture significantly influences White support for Barack Obama, leads to breaking down the sample between south and non-south to run the regression models. This allows for a comparison between southern and non-southern states with regards to racial and contextual influences in the 2008 presidential election.

**Table 5. Obama White Support Proxy Pearson Correlation Statistics: Total, South, Non-South**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>Non-South</u>
Black Citizen Voting-Age Population	-0.5309***	-0.4945***	-0.2013***
Violent Crime Rate	-0.1179***	-0.0449^	-0.0705*
Median Income Difference	-0.1115***	-0.1014**	0.0029
Rural	-0.2609***	-0.2882***	-0.1853***
Median Age	0.0044	-0.1427***	-0.0377
Median Income	0.2678***	0.0905**	0.209***
College	0.3807***	0.264***	0.4282***
South		-0.6347***	

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05, ^p<0.1

Nearly all of the Pearson's correlation results, displayed in Table 5, panned out as hypothesized. For the total sample, all variables except the median age variable were as expected and significant. The key Black citizen voting-age variable is overwhelmingly significant and negative. The violent crime rate is also negative and significant, indicating that counties with more violence are likely to have had less White support for

Barack Obama. This is in line with the idea that race and violence are inextricably linked in the White mind and may play a role in the political evaluation of Black candidates by White voters.

The racial income inequality variable is also negative and significant suggesting that counties with more income inequality between Whites and Blacks, measured by the difference in median income between these groups, are predicted to exhibit less White support for Barack Obama. This lends credence to the idea that the effects of economic inequality between the Whites and Blacks can manifest in political behavior. The variable is not significant for the non-south sample, but has a significant, expected effect for the southern sample. This finding goes along with the idea that the south has a unique history with regards to race that continues to permeate racial attitudes and political behavior.

The control variables generally performed as expected. Counties with older populations and more rural areas are expected to exhibit less White support for Barack Obama. The rural variable exhibits a negative, moderate relationship and is significant in all samples. The southern sample is of a slightly higher magnitude, though, suggesting the effect of an agrarian southern history may still hold some water. The median age variable is only significant for the southern sample and is in the expected direction. Again, this appears to be an effect from a southern culture where older populations are likely to hold more Old South views than younger southerners (Fowler, Parent, Petrakis, 2011).

The socioeconomic contextual variables also performed as expected, but have a greater effect in the non-south. Both variables exhibit positive, significant relationships with the White support proxy measure in all three samples. The counties with higher socioeconomic statuses, measured as median income and educational attainment, tend to have more white support for Barack Obama than counties with lower socioeconomic characteristics. Now these variables will be included in OLS multivariate regression models to determine their collective impact on county-level White voting behavior.

## Multivariate Models

The multivariate OLS regression analysis turned up mixed results<sup>8</sup>. The analysis is run for a southern sample (N=840), a non-southern sample (N=774), and the full sample (N=1614)<sup>9</sup>. Three models are utilized for each sample, as well. One model is run on all variables except the Black population variable with the expectation that this variable will wash out the others. The other two models are run with the Black citizen voting-age population variable and then with its corresponding quadratic term<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 6. OLS Multivariate Regression Results Predicting White Support for Barack Obama: Total Sample**

<i>Variable</i>	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>		<u>Model 3</u>	
	b ( $\beta$ )	t	b ( $\beta$ )	t	b ( $\beta$ )	t
Violent Crime Rate	-0.0000884 (-0.1361583)	-5.82***	0.0000124 (0.0191067)	0.9	0.0000208 (0.0320553)	1.52
Racial Income Inequality	-6.52E-07 (-0.0773075)	-3.45***	-3.53E-07 (-0.0418207)	-1.99*	-2.95E-07 (-0.0349748)	-1.66*
South	-0.183962 (-0.579061)	-31.89***	-0.1480018 (-0.4658685)	-25.58***	-0.1387582 (-0.4367722)	-22.23***
Rural	-0.0716738 (-0.1417012)	-4.65***	-0.0521954 (-0.1031919)	-3.74***	-0.056574 (-0.1118484)	-4.05***
Median Age	-0.0018966 (-0.055506)	-2.21*	-0.002809 (-0.0822064)	-3.61***	-0.0029504 (-0.0863468)	-3.81***
Median Income	-2.62E-06 (-0.2042488)	-6.78***	-2.67E-06 (-0.208329)	-7.72***	-2.39E-06 (-0.1864906)	-6.95***
College	0.9748475 (0.3626584)	13.04***	0.9838169 (0.3659951)	14.06***	0.9665042 (0.3595545)	13.73***
Black Population			-0.4543672 (-0.3752086)	-19.8***	-0.7521957 (-0.6211502)	-12.7***

<sup>8</sup> The models were run with various interactions which could have changed the influence of other explanatory variables in the model. These results did not pan out as expected and are not included in the analysis.

<sup>9</sup> The sample was also broken down by region and state, but these analyses are not shown. The breakdown by south and non-south is the appropriate way to go about this analysis.

<sup>10</sup> VIF tests confirmed that multicollinearity was not an issue. Violation of the homoscedasticity assumption was also a possible issue, which was remedied by using White's Robust Standard Errors.

(table continued)

Black Population <sup>2</sup>					0.5805173 (0.2481824)	6.57***
Constant	0.5783097	13.37***	0.5898231	15.2***	0.5914233	15.48***
N	1614		1614		1614	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.5123		0.6074		0.6153	

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

The full sample is analyzed in Models 1, 2, and 3, shown in Table 6. The first model is run without the Black citizen voting-age population variables. The results of Model 1 indicate a significant, negative relationship for the violent crime and racial income inequality measures, as hypothesized. The relative predictive power of these variables, indicated by the standardized coefficients, is still lower than socioeconomic and south variables, though. Model 1 would predict that as the violent crime rate or racial income inequality rises in a county, this lowers the White support for Barack Obama.

This model is incomplete, though. To get a more accurate picture we need to include the Black citizen voting-age variables, which is done in Models 2 and 3. The factor differentiating these models is the addition of a Black variable under the assumption of linearity, while Model 3 adds the squared term of Black population and takes into account the possibility of a curvilinear relationship. This quadratic Black variable can go beyond the traditional linear modeling of the influence of a threat or contact dynamic. The curvilinear model can show that there is not a consistent relationship between Black population and White voting behavior, rather showing where this influence transitions from a negative into a positive relationship. Model 2 includes this variable and we find that, as expected, the Black population variable accounts for much of the explained variation in the White proxy measure. The only variable which has more predictive power is the south variable. The Black population variable causes the violent crime variable to lose significance, but the racial

income inequality measure remains significant. As the income inequality between Whites and Blacks rises, White support for Barack Obama declines. The control variables in the model remain relatively the same.

The  $R^2$  for Model 1 is .51, but this jumps to .61 in Model 3, indicating that 61% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the full model. This also speaks to the predictive power of the Black population variable. Model 3 includes the quadratic term for Black population, taking into account whether a curvilinear relationship exists between Black population and White support for Barack Obama. The fully specified model does, indeed, show there to be a nonlinear, U-shaped relationship. This is indicated by the negative direction of the Black population variable and the positive direction its squared term variable. This clearly points to a racial threat dynamic in the 2008 election, whereby as the Black population increases, the vote for Barack Obama decreases. Once the Black population reaches a point, though, the model predicts that White support rises.

Rural counties and those with older populations are also predicted to have less support for Barack Obama. The socioeconomic variable results were mixed. The median income variable was significant, but displayed a negative relationship with the dependent variable. This indicates that richer counties showed less White support for Barack Obama. The educational attainment variable, though, performed as expected and the standardized coefficient indicates that counties with more educated populations were more likely to support Barack Obama. The south is always pegged as unique and this model is no different. The south variable is robust, negative, and significant in every model. The predictive power of this variable is only matched by the Black population variables. The sample size allowed for splitting the model to run analysis on both southern and non-southern samples.

Analysis of the southern sample points to a southern culture explanation for the behavior of White voters. Models 4, 5, and 6 are run with the southern sample, shown in Table 7. All variables reach significance in Model 4, which also has an  $R^2$  of 0.19. The violence, rural, and SES variables carry most of the predictive power. Model 5 adds the black population variable, which drops the significance from the violence variable

**Table 7. OLS Multivariate Regression Results Predicting White Support for Barack Obama: South Sample**

Variable	<u>Model 4</u>		<u>Model 5</u>		<u>Model 6</u>	
	b ( $\beta$ )	t	b ( $\beta$ )	t	b ( $\beta$ )	t
Violent Crime Rate	-0.0001077 (-0.207585)	-5.48***	8.43E-06 (0.0162547)	0.5	0.0000157 (0.0302031)	0.95
Racial Income Inequality	-1.43E-06 (-0.1539552)	-2.77**	-6.67E-07 (-0.0720093)	-1.48^	-6.00E-07 (-0.0647038)	-1.34^
Rural	-0.1099635 (-0.2649491)	-5.39***	-0.0688334 (-0.1658491)	-3.83***	-0.0714386 (-0.1721261)	-3.94***
Median Age	-0.0027298 (-0.0962867)	-2.22*	-0.0038603 (-0.1361619)	-3.51***	-0.0039404 (-0.1389861)	-3.59***
Median Income	-2.74E-06 (-0.2413219)	-4.53***	-3.13E-06 (-0.2758069)	-5.74***	-2.72E-06 (-0.2396409)	-5.04***
College	0.8694688 (0.3691454)	7.31***	0.8613922 (0.3657164)	7.77***	0.8271183 (0.3511649)	7.35***
Black Population			-0.4404702 (-0.5168852)	-18.18***	-0.7094017 (-0.8324724)	-10.74***
Black Population <sup>2</sup>					0.5100318 (0.3347439)	5.18***
Constant	0.4867916	7.56***	0.5309967	9.19***	0.5342349	9.37***
N	840		840		840	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.1907		0.401		0.4145	

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05, ^p<0.1

and lowers the significance of racial income inequality to the p<0.1 level. The SES, rural, and median age variables remain highly significant. The full model, Model 6, shows a strong negative relationship between Black population and the dependent variable, as well as a positive, significant relationship from the Black population<sup>2</sup> term. Though violence is not significant, racial income inequality does remain slightly significant. As income inequality rises between Whites and Blacks in the south, White support for Barack Obama declines.

Other key variables in the southern sample are rural and median age, which shows that counties with older, more rural populations predict less White support for Barack Obama.

**Table 8. OLS Multivariate Regression Results Predicting White Support for Barack Obama: Non-South Sample**

Variable	<u>Model 7</u>		<u>Model 8</u>		<u>Model 9</u>	
	b (β)	t	b (β)	t	b (β)	t
Violent Crime Rate	-0.0000593 (-0.1219977)	-2.65**	0.0000382 (0.0786106)	1.47	0.0000377 (0.077597)	1.47
Racial Income Inequality	-3.08E-07 (-0.0619228)	-1.76*	-2.01E-07 (-0.040401)	-1.17	-1.64E-07 (-0.0329811)	-0.95
Rural	-0.0124653 (-0.0339755)	-0.56	-0.0260385 (-0.0709704)	-1.27	-0.0310746 (-0.0846968)	-1.51^
Median Age	-0.0010748 (-0.0438404)	-1	-0.0015723 (-0.0641313)	-1.53^	-0.0017092 (-0.0697158)	-1.67*
Median Income	-2.04E-06 (-0.2244508)	-4.31***	-1.82E-06 (-0.2007659)	-4.04***	-1.79E-06 (-0.1976382)	-3.99***
College	1.094867 (0.5856233)	12.26***	1.110737 (0.5941121)	13.23***	1.110394 (0.5939284)	13.26***
Black Population			-0.5949291 (-0.3618688)	-7.75***	-0.7983611 (-0.4856074)	-6.84***
Black Population <sup>2</sup>					0.5314446 (0.1332806)	3.02**
Constant	0.456886	10.35***	0.4636754	11.2***	0.4747045	11.5***
N	774		774		774	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.2202		0.2952		0.2993	

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05, ^p<0.1

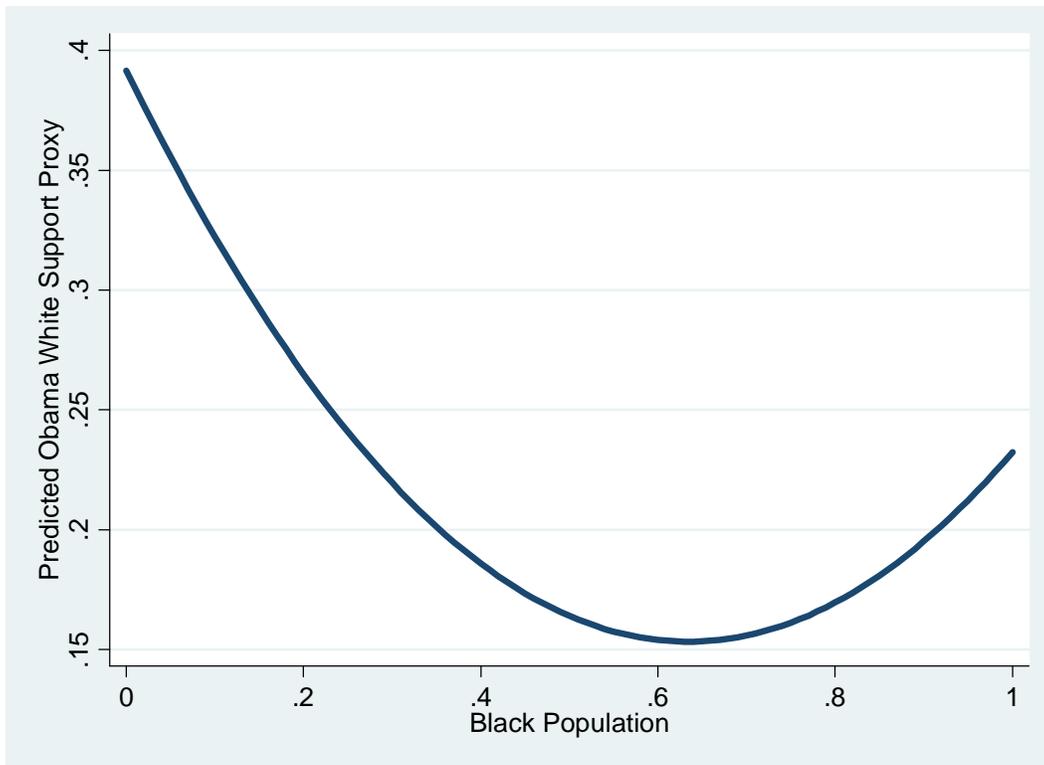
Socioeconomic context and Black population are the key factors in predicting White support in the non-south. The non-south sample is tested in Models 7, 8, and 9, shown in Table 8. Model 7 indicates that violent crime rate and racial income inequality are both significant and negatively related to the dependent

variable. For every one standard deviation change in violent crime, there is a corresponding -0.12 standard deviation change in the White support proxy measure, controlling for the other variables in the model. The socioeconomic characteristics, median income and college education, are the most significant predictors in the model. For every one unit increase in college education, there is a 1.09 unit increase in the dependent variable, controlling for the other variables in the model. The median income variable again is not in the expected direction. Model 8 includes the Black population variable, which takes away the predictive power of the other variables in the model, except for median income, college education, and median age (which is only significant at the  $p < 0.10$  level). The fully specified model, Model 9, does not change the results much from Model 8, showing that Black population and socioeconomic characteristics are robust indicators of White support outside the south.

When comparing the southern and non-southern samples, we find that these geographies are quite distinct in what factors influence electoral outcomes. The non-south model's  $R^2$  is .29, whereas the southern model improves on explained variance in the dependent variable with an  $R^2$  of 0.41. Though the violence variable is not significant in the full models, Model 4 shows this variable has nearly twice the magnitude variable in the southern sample compared to the non-southern sample (Model 7). In the full models (Models 6 and 9), we see that income inequality based on race is a significant factor in the south, but not in the non-south. The coefficient for this variable in the south is more than three times that of the non-southern analysis.

In addition to the main explanatory variables, the separate samples also show differences with respect to the controls. Socioeconomic context appears to carry more predictive power outside the south. Education and median income seem more important outside the south, but much of their predictive power is taken by the median age and rural variables in the south model. Socioeconomic factors are still important within the south, but the rural and median age variables also show significance in the south. The continued prevalence of Old South norms in some counties can account for this effect. These factors continue to be slightly significant in the non-south, but the coefficients indicate that these variables have twice the magnitude in the

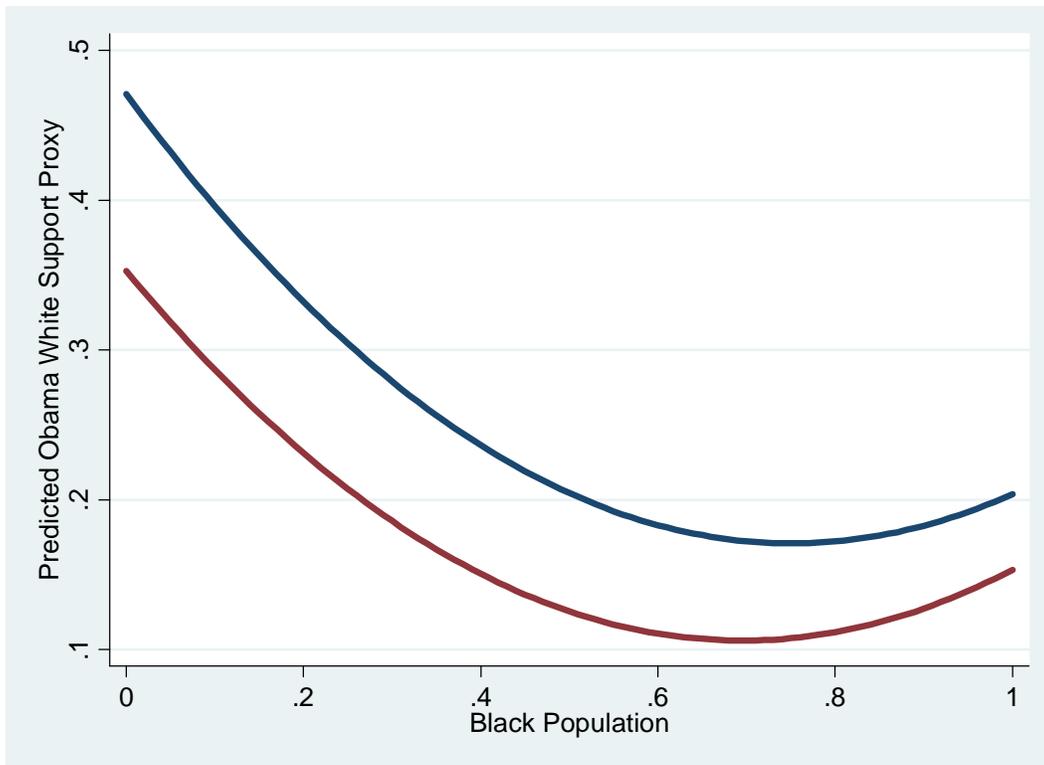
southern sample. Finally, the predictive power of the main explanatory variable, Black citizen voting-age population, holds much more weight in the southern sample, carrying a standardized coefficient of -0.83, whereas in the non-southern sample, college education shows the highest beta.



**Figure 1. The relationship between Black<sup>2</sup> and White Support (Model 3)**

Figures demonstrating the predictive power of the main explanatory variables can hopefully illustrate their influence. When predicting the effect of Black population on the Obama White proxy measure, the full models (3, 6, and 9) are utilized. This allows for the prediction to take on a nonlinear relationship more in line with a Key black belt hypothesis (Key, 1949). The effect of Black population on the dependent variable should be most negative when the racial mix of the population is close to equal. The negative relationship for the Black Citizen Voting-Age Variable and the positive relationship for the Black population squared variable suggest a U-shaped relationship. Figure 1 shows this suggested relationship does, indeed, hold water. Predicted from Model 3, the prediction line drops between 0 and 60% and then takes on an upward slope. In counties with little to no Black population the model predicts around 39% White support for Barack Obama,

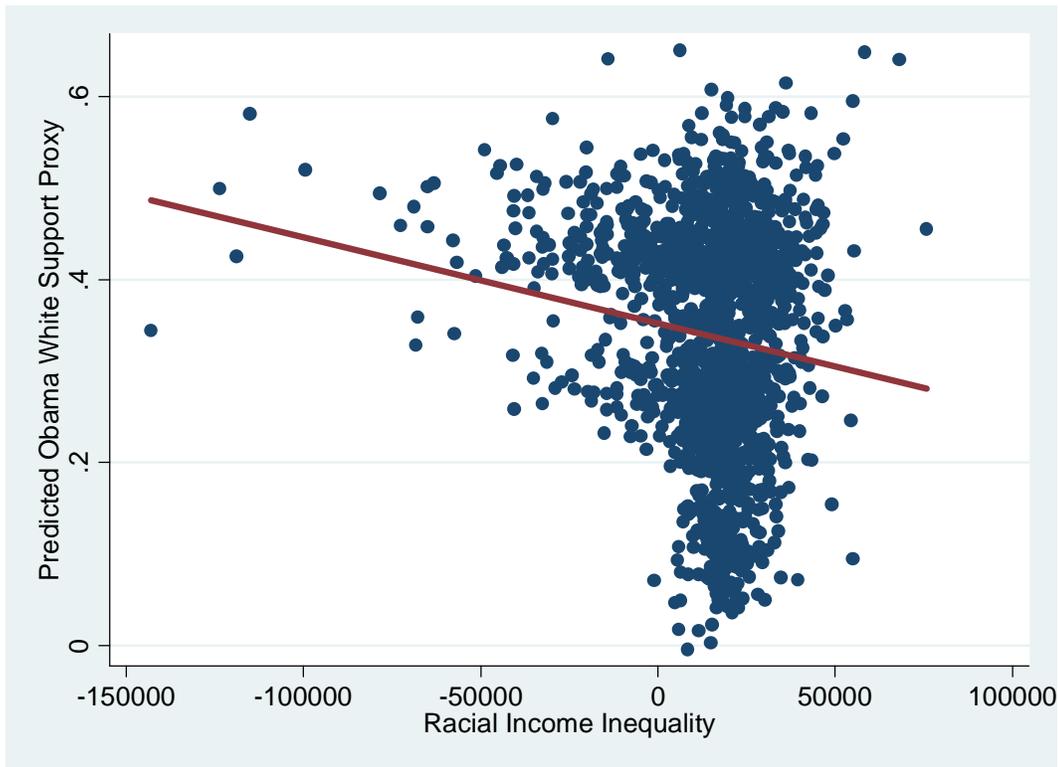
whereas in those with around 60% Black population the prediction is around 15% white support. The prediction line begins to rise, though, showing that counties with about 35% Black population and 90% Black population exhibit the same prediction of about 20% White support. Figure 2 shows the effect of Black



**Figure 2. The relationship between Black<sup>2</sup> and White Support (Models 6 and 9)**

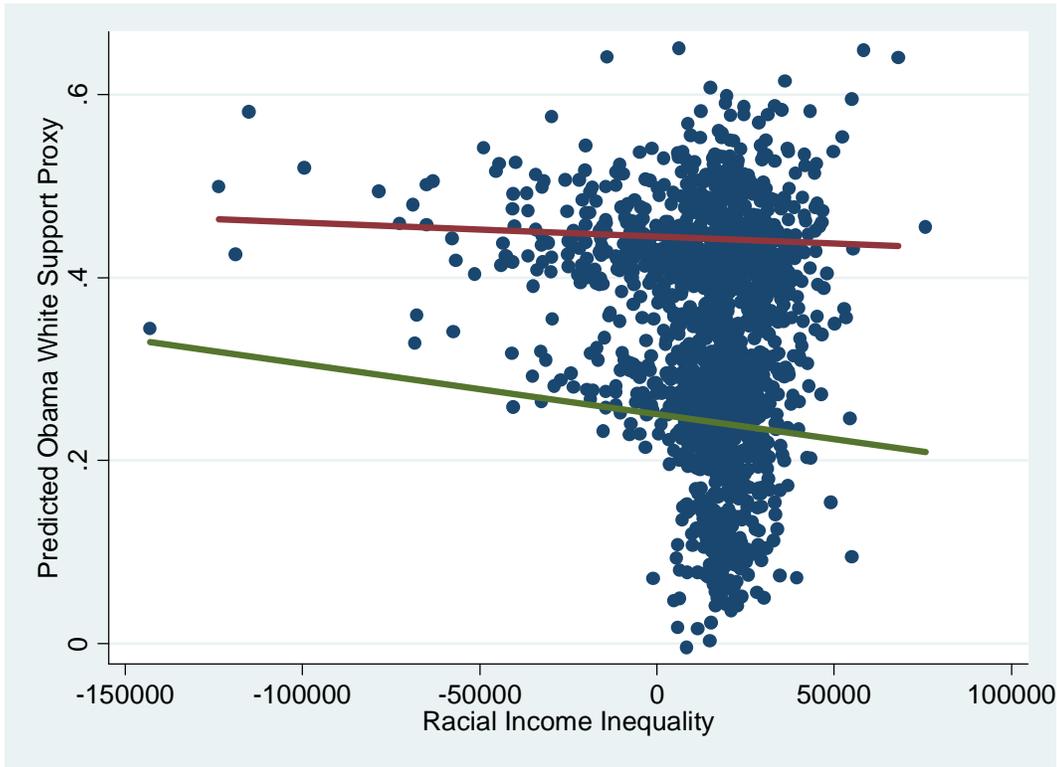
population on the dependent variable for the southern and non-southern samples (Models 6 and 9). Both prediction lines exhibit the same shape as in Figure 1, but the southern sample sits below the non-southern prediction. As the Black population grows, though, the lines converge but never cross. The southern model predicts 13% White support in counties with both 50% and 90% Black populations.

This suggests that the black threat hypothesis may still have some utility in explaining political behavior. This does not exclude the usefulness of a modified contact theory, though. Contact may not have the greatest effect in locales with equitable racial distributions, but rather in places where Blacks make up the majority. This allows for a greater probability that frequent and significant contact between Blacks and Whites will occur.

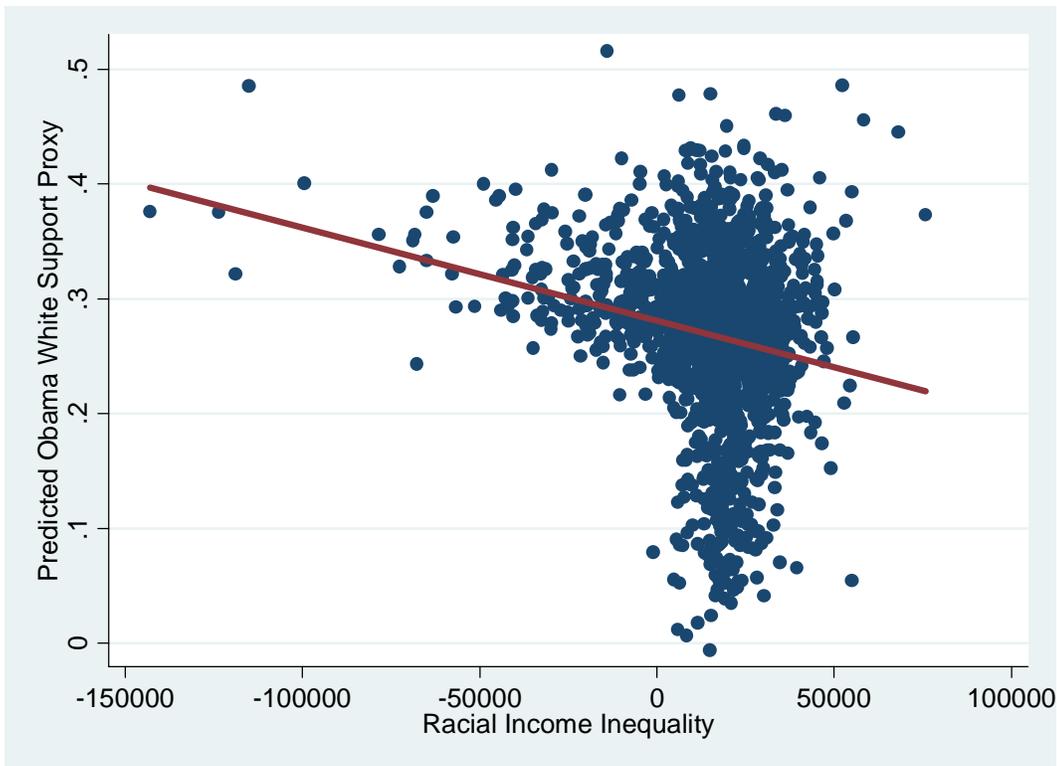


**Figure 3. The relationship between Racial Income Inequality and White Support (Model 3)**

Figures 3, 4, and 5 show the relationship between racial income inequality and the White proxy measure. Model 3, the full sample, fully specified model, predicts that going from low income inequality to high income inequality there is about a 20 point drop in White support for Barack Obama. Figure 4 breaks this down by south and non-south. We see that the red line, the non-south prediction, is almost straight across, while the green line indicating south drops more than 10% between the lowest and highest points. To get a better picture of the effect of this variable in the south, Figure 5 shows the same relationship, but for Model 6. This indicates almost a 20 point drop from around 40% when the variable is very low to about 22% White support when income inequality is very high. Though the violence variable did not reach significance for the full models, Figure 6 shows the relationship between violent crime rate and White support using Model 1. Both the south and non-south show little drop in support as violence rises.



**Figure 4. The relationship between Racial Income Inequality and White Support broken down by region (Models 6 and 9)**



**Figure 5. The relationship between Racial Income Inequality and White Support in the South (Models 6)**

## CONCLUSION

The American experience is inseparable from racial reality. People encounter race in their everyday affairs and make subjective evaluations of what this social dynamic means to them. In the United States, this has largely led to a dichotomous perception of White and Black. The media has a substantial impact on these perceptions because of the racialized nature of portrayals of Black and White. Theories about in-group and out-group relationships indicate that Whites respond to variations in the proportion of the Black population. This is often characterized as a relationship between political, social, or economic competition translating into threat perceptions. This threat, whether real or perceived, can be measured at the county-level to ascertain its effect on electoral behavior.

This study analyzes the 2008 Presidential Election with the expectation that race certainly influenced the White vote in this election. Using measures commonly associated with contextual analyses of racial threat, and some that are not, this author has found that threat theory still may have some usefulness in contemporary studies of race and politics. The purpose of the study is to show that racial voting occurs even in presidential elections and this effect may be derived from influences completely out of the control of the candidate.

Barack Obama's campaign fits clearly into a strategy of deracialization, whereby candidates attempt to distance themselves from being perceived based on racial preconceptions. This still was not enough to overcome racial factors influencing voting behavior in this election. This paper has shown that Black population and racial income inequality can influence how white voters respond to a Black candidate, regardless of a deracialization strategy. This is likely to be true in other cases as well, and further research should attempt to gauge this relationship for various types of elections.

Various possible manifestations of racial threat are taken into account in this analysis of the election of a Black presidential candidate. First, a political threat is ascertained by including the Black citizen voting-age

population in the models. Second, economic threat is taken into consideration by including the difference in median income between Whites and Blacks into the models. Third, fear of crime is tested by including actual violence in a county as another contextual measure of racial threat. Some of these variables exhibited a negative effect on the White vote measure for Barack Obama, but the dynamics of these relationships is slightly different for each of the variables. The relationship between political threat and racial voting looks different than between economic threat and racial voting. As income inequality raises higher, the White vote measure declines. As the proportion of the Black population rises, though, there is a cut point where the relationship begins to turn around.

This analysis has found the existence of a racial dynamic influencing the 2008 election, regardless of region. There is a clear relationship between the Black citizen voting-age population and county-level White support for Barack Obama. Hypothesis 1 is satisfied in all samples tested. Not only does a negative linear relationship exist, but the hypothesized curvilinear U-shaped relationship is also shown. Hypothesis 2, that there is a relationship between economic threat and white support, is only partially supported. The total sample and the southern sample show a relationship between racial income inequality and county-level White support. Hypothesis 3 was not satisfied by the analysis. Though this variable is as expected in the stripped down models, this relationship does not hold in the fully specified models.

There are several reasons why this variable did not pan out as expected. First, race-specific violence seems more parsimonious with theory, but data of this kind at the county level is largely nonexistent. Violent crime rate is just a proxy measure and does not take into account race-specific violence. If more accurate, reliable, and pertinent data were available, this relationship could become a more robust finding. Second, the measurement of this variable could be causing this null finding. This relationship may show up if the time frame under analysis were shortened. Maybe there is not a lagged effect of violence and, instead, violence's influence on this behavior could be temporal. It could be that violence within closer proximity to the time of voting may be a more reliable indicator. The local evening news the night before could be the necessary

variable. Then again, it could be that the violent crime rate is just not the right measurement. Third, a model that includes individual level variables could shed some light on the situation, but this data is also unavailable. Knowledge of violence in the community or local television news viewing time could both be important indicators of this phenomenon. Finally, the answer may lie in the manifestation of race and violence in the White mind. The disappearance of violence as a significant force in the full model does not necessarily lose parsimony with the theory that these factors influence political behavior. The overwhelming impact from the Black citizen voting-age population variable demonstrates that this variable is what is of key importance, no matter what manifestation the threat perception takes within an individual. Violence need not exist for prevalence of the prejudices and behaviors associated with generating stereotypes of this sort. Whether violent crime is high or not in a county, race-specific or not, racial prejudice does not require objective evidence.

In addition to the significance of the variables in the models, the south has again shown distinctiveness compared to the rest of the country. Southern counties exhibited a lower White support for Barack Obama and the variables predicting this support tended to be more inflated than in the non-south sample. Black population, racial income inequality, age, and rural variables all outperformed their counterparts in the non-south sample. This may point to a southern cultural influence on White political behavior with regards to race.

Studies of racial threat are normally conducted on lower-level elections, but this analysis suggests that other variables may need inclusion in these models. Mayoral elections, state-wide elections, and Congressional election analyses involving racial threat should consider the inclusion of violence as an explanatory variable, as well as racial income inequality. In addition, scholars can no longer treat the Black threat effect as a linear phenomenon, but should assume that a nonlinear relationship exists between Black population and political behavior or attitudes.

Analyzing one presidential election, though a conservative test of this phenomenon, does not allow for the generalizations necessary to stand on firm ground when making claims about racial threat theories. The

sample only offers a glimpse at a snapshot in time. To truly determine the possible influence of violence on racial evaluations, attitudes, and behaviors, more research needs to be done. This analysis does hope to show, however, that Black presidential contenders may not be safe from racial evaluations, like Black candidates in lower-level elections have been shown to face. The American dilemma continues to sway the populace in ways that punch holes in arguments of a democratic exceptionalism.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, P.D. (2002). *Missing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Anderson, C.A. & Anderson, K.B. (1996). Violent crime rate studies in philosophical context: A destructive testing approach to heat and southern culture of violence effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*(4): 740-756.
- Baybeck, B. (2006). Sorting out the competing effects of racial context. *The Journal of Politics, 68*(2): 386-396.
- Blalock, H.M. (1967). *Toward a theory of minority-group relations*. New York, N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Bobo, L. & Hutchings, V.L. (1996). Perceptions of racial group competitions: Extending Blumer's theory of group position to a multiracial context. *American Sociological Review, 61*(6): 951-972.
- Bullock, C.S. (1984). Racial crossover voting and the election of Black officials. *The Journal of Politics, 46*(1): 238-251.
- Bullock, C.S. & Dunn, R.E. (1999). The demise of racial districting and the future of Black representation. *Emory Law Journal, 48*: 1209-1253.
- Cash, W.J. (1941). *The mind of the South*. New York: Knopf.
- Chiricos, T., Hogan, M., & Gertz, M. (1997). Racial composition of neighborhood and fear of crime. *Criminology, 35*(1): 107-131.
- Chiricos, T., McEntire, R., & Gertz, M. (2001). Perceived racial and ethnic composition of neighborhood and perceived risk of crime. *Social Problems, 48*(3): 322-340.
- Citrin, J., Green, D.P., & Sears, D.O. (1990). White reactions to Black candidates: When does race matter? *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 54*(1): 74-96.
- County Health Rankings. (2010). [State Data sets]. Retrieved from <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>.
- Dixon, J.C. & Rosenbaum, M.S. (2004). Nice to know you? Testing contact, cultural, and group threat theories of anti-Black and anti-Hispanic stereotypes. *Social Science Quarterly, 85*(2): 257-280.
- Eitle, D., D'Alessio, S.J., Stolzenberg, L. (2002). Racial threat and social control: A test of the political, economic, and threat of Black crime hypotheses. *Social Forces, 81*(2): 557-576.

- Entman, R.M. & Rojecki, A. (2000). *The Black image in the White mind: Media and race in America*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Entman, R.M. (2006). Blacks in the news: Television, modern racism, and cultural change. In A. Reynolds & B. Barnett (Eds.), *Communication and law: Multidisciplinary approaches to research*. (p.205-228). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Fowler, M. (2011). Old South political culture in contemporary North Carolina. Presented at the 2011 Southern Political Science Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA.
- Fowler, M., Parent, T.W., & Petrakis, P. (2011). When white goes right: The Old South in the 2008 Presidential Election. *American Review of Politics*.(Forthcoming)
- Giles, M.W. & Buckner, M.A. (1993). David Duke and Black threat: An old hypothesis revisited. *The Journal of Politics*, 55(3): 702-713.
- Giles, M.W. & Hertz, D. (1994). Racial threat and partisan identification. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(2): 317-326.
- Gilliam, F.D., Valentino, N.A., & Beckmann, M.N. (2002). Where you live and what you watch: The impact of racial proximity and local television news on attitudes about race and crime. *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(4): 755-780.
- Glaser, J.M. (1994). Back to the Black Belt: Racial environment and White racial attitudes in the South. *The Journal of Politics*, 56(1): 21-41.
- Glaser, J.M. (2003). Social context and inter-group political attitudes: Experiments in group conflict theory. *British Journal of Political Science*, 33(4): 607-620.
- Glaser, J.M. & Gilens, M. (1997). Interregional migration and political resocialization. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61(1): 72-86.
- Hajnal, Z.L. (2001). White residents, Black incumbents, and a declining racial divide. *The American Political Science Review*, 95(3): 603-617.
- Hajnal, Z.L. (2007). *Changing White attitudes toward Black political leadership*. New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press.
- Highton, B. (2004). White voters and African-American candidates for Congress. *Political Behavior*, 26(1): 1-25.

- Huber, G.A. & Lapinski, J.S. (2006). The "Race Card" revisited: Assessing racial priming in policy contests. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2): 421-440.
- Key, V.O. (1949). *Southern politics in state and nation*. New York: Knopf.
- King, G. (1997a). *A solution to the ecological inference problem: Reconstructing individual behavior from aggregate data*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- King, G. (1997b). EZi [computer software]. Available at <http://gking.harvard.edu/stats.shtml>.
- King, G., Honaker, J., Joseph, A., & Scheve, K. (2001). Analyzing incomplete political science data: An alternative algorithm for multiple imputation. *American Political Science Review*, 95(1): 49-69.
- Knuckley, J. & Orey, B.D. (2000). Symbolic racism in the 1995 Louisiana gubernatorial election. *Social Science Quarterly*, 81(4): 1027-1035.
- Kuklinski, J.H., Cobb, M.D., & Gilens, M. (1997). Racial attitudes and the "New South". *The Journal of Politics*, 59(2): 323-349.
- Liu, B. (2001a). The positive effect of Black density on White crossover voting: Reconsidering social interaction theory. *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(3): 602-615.
- Liu, B. (2001b). Racial contexts and White interests: Beyond Black threat and racial tolerance. *Political Behavior*, 23(2): 157-180.
- Liu, B. (2003). Deracialization and urban racial contexts. *Urban Affairs Review*, 38(4):572-591.
- Liu, B. (2007). EI extended model and the fear of ecological fallacy. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 36(3): 3-25.
- Liu, B. & Vanderleeuw, J.M. (2001). Racial transitions and White-voter support for Black candidates in urban elections. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 23(3-4): 309-322.
- Liu, B. & Vanderleeuw, J.M. (2007). *Race rules: Electoral politics in New Orleans, 1965-2006*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- McClerking, H.K. (2001). Looking for "threats" in all the wrong places: A critique of the current use of race as a contextual effect in political science. *Politics & Policy*, 29(4): 637-649.
- Mendelberg, T. (1997). Executing Hortons: Racial crime in the 1988 presidential campaign. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61(1): 134-157.

- Mendelberg, T. (2001). *The race card: Campaign strategy, implicit messages, and the norm of equality*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Mendelberg, T. (2008). Racial priming revived. *Perspectives on Politics*, 6(1): 109-123.
- Moskowitz, D. & Stroh, P. (1994). Psychological sources of electoral racism. *Political Psychology*, 15(2): 307-329.
- Nisbett, R.E. & Cohen, D. (1996). *Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the South*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Oliver, J.E. & Mendelberg, T. (2000). Reconsidering the environmental determinants of White racial attitudes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 44(3): 574-589.
- Oliver, J.E. & Wong, J. (2003). Intergroup prejudice in multiethnic settings. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(4): 567-582.
- Parker, K.F., Stults, B.J., Rice, S.K. (2005). Racial threat, concentrated disadvantage and social control: considering the macro-level sources of variation in arrests. *Criminology*, 43(4): 1111-1134.
- Peffley, M., Hurwitz, J., & Sniderman, P.M. (1997). Racial stereotypes and Whites' political views of Blacks in the context of welfare and crime. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(1): 30-60.
- Quillian, L. & Pager, D. (2001). Black neighbors, higher crime? The role of racial stereotypes in evaluations of neighborhood crime. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 107(3): 717-767.
- Reeves, K. (1997). *Voting Hopes of FEARS? White voters, Black candidates & racial politics in America*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.
- Royston, P. (2006). ICE [computer software]. MRC Clinical Trials Unit: London.
- Royston, P. (2007). Multiple imputation of missing values: further update of ice, with an emphasis on interval censoring. *The Stata Journal*, 7(4): 445-464.
- Rubin, D.B. (1987). *Multiple Imputation for Nonresponse in Surveys*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Sonenshein, R.J. (1990). Can Black candidates win statewide elections? *Political Science Quarterly*, 105(2): 219-241.
- St. John, C. & Heald-Moore, T. (1995). Fear of Black strangers. *Social Science Research*, 24: 262-280.

- St. John, C. & Heald-Moore, T. (1996). Racial prejudice and fear of criminal victimization by strangers in public settings. *Sociological Inquiry*, 66(3): 267-284.
- StataCorp. 2005. *Stata Statistical Software: Release 9*. College Station, TX: StataCorp LP.
- Stein, R.M., Post, S.S., & Rinden, A.L. (2000). Reconciling context and contact effects on racial attitudes. *Political Research Quarterly*, 53(2): 285-303.
- Stein, R.M., Ulbig, S.G., & Post, S.S. (2005). Voting for minority candidates in multiracial/multiethnic communities. *Urban Affairs Review*, 41(2): 157-181.
- Swain, C.M. (2006). *Black faces, Black interests: The representation of African-Americans in Congress*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
- Tate, K. (2004). *Black faces in the mirror: African-Americans and their representatives in the U.S. Congress*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, M.C. (1998). How White racial attitudes vary with the racial composition of local populations: Numbers count. *American Sociological Review*, 63(4): 512-535.
- Terkildsen, N. (1993). When White voters evaluate Black candidates: The processing implications of candidate skin color, prejudice, and self-monitoring. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(4): 1032-1053.
- United States Census. (2010). *American Fact Finder* [Data files]. Retrieved from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=DEC&\\_submenuId=datasets\\_1&\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=DEC&_submenuId=datasets_1&_lang=en).
- Valentino, N.A. (1999). Crime news and the priming of racial attitudes during evaluations of the president. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63(3): 293-320.
- Valentino, N.A., Hutchings, V.L., & White, I.K. (2002). Cues that matter: How political ads prime racial attitudes during campaigns. *The American Political Science Review*, 96(1): 75-90.
- Vanderleeuw, J., Liu, B., & Marsh, G. (2004). Applying Black threat theory, urban regime theory, and deracialization: The Memphis mayoral elections of 1991, 1995, and 1999. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 26(4): 505-519.
- Voss, D.S. (1996). Beyond racial threat: Failure of an old hypothesis in the New South. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(4): 1156-1170.

Voss, D.S. & Lublin, D. (2001). Black incumbents, White districts: An appraisal of the 1996 Congressional elections. *American Politics Research*, 29(2): 141-182.

Whitby, K.J. (2000). *The color of representation: Congressional behavior and Black interests*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

## VITA

Matthew Fowler was born in 1985 and grew up on the northshore of Lake Pontchartrain in Mandeville, Louisiana. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Louisiana State University in December 2008 with a major in political science and a minor in African and African-American studies. Matthew is currently a graduate student expecting to be awarded his Master of Arts in political science from Louisiana State University in May 2011. He plans to attend Indiana University-Bloomington in the fall of 2011 where he will work towards a doctorate in political science. His research interests include race and politics, gender and politics, southern politics, and political behavior.