

Race and the Group Bases of Public Opinion

Jane Junn, Tali Mendelberg, and Erica Czaja

Scholarship in political science on race and its impact on political preferences has undergone substantial transformation in the last quarter century. Once defined racially by black and white, today the U.S. population is characterized by a multiplicity of racial and ethnic group divisions. Hispanics are now the largest minority population in the United States, followed by African Americans and then Asian Americans and Native Americans. The “multi-racial” population—a category formed by counting more than one racial group and allowed by the census since 2000—is among the fastest-growing groups.¹ The United States is in the midst of the most significant wave of immigration in a century, and the vast majority of the newest Americans are no longer from Europe as they once were in the nineteenth century. Instead, more than half of today’s immigrants are from Latin America and another quarter come from Asia. While black migrants from Africa and the Caribbean constitute a much smaller share of new immigrants, their presence creates important diversity within the racial category of black.²

In this chapter we take the increased racial and ethnic diversity of the United States as a starting point, and analyze the significance of race and the group bases of political preferences. We begin with a discussion of categories of race and ethnicity in the United States and argue that these divisions are based not in “objective” biological difference, but rather in social constructions formed through the institutions and practices of U.S. government and society.³ Next we focus on individual-level measurements of psychological attachment to groups—group identity and consciousness—as critical intervening variables between racial group classification and the formation of political preferences. The contours of the relationships between racial group identity, racial group consciousness, and public opinion, particularly for Latinos and Asian Americans, are especially challenging for scholars because these populations and their politics are in flux. Finally, we proceed to analyze additional factors that may differentially influence the political opinions of individuals, depending in part on their racial group classifications and attachments, including party identification and mobilization, interpersonal contact and the racial and economic context, and perceptions of and experiences with discrimination.

Categorizing Race and Ethnicity

The practice of official racial classification in the United States dates to the nation's founding. Information on racial categorization was vital to the apportionment of legislative seats in the federal government. The now-infamous "Three-Fifths" compromise found in Article I Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution specifies that both taxes and the number of elected representatives be calculated by adding the number of free persons and three-fifths of all other persons, "excluding Indians not taxed." The enslaved population was black, and, hence, the enumeration by slave status was also an enumeration by race.

In every decennial census since the first in 1790, race has been recorded for each person counted. Political scientist Melissa Nobles demonstrates how government agencies such as the U.S. Bureau of the Census constructed categories of race in order to meet social and political goals of the time.⁴ It would take almost 100 years and a bloody civil war for the United States to abolish slavery, but, by then, race was embedded in the fabric of the polity, and the practice of recording race has continued unabated. Throughout the vast majority of the nation's history, racial categorization went hand in hand with preferential treatment—from citizenship and property rights to eligibility to vote—for those recognized as white. Political scientists have documented clear patterns of the role of the American state in the maintenance and definition of both racial categories and unequal treatment by race.⁵ These scholars argue that racial discrimination is deeply embedded in American political institutions and culture. Even when discrimination on the basis of racial categories was prohibited by law, as in the Fourteenth Amendment, state and local governments as well as private individuals found creative ways to use ostensibly race-neutral practices and rules to virtually eliminate racial minorities from public life from the 1860s until today. Some scholars draw an important distinction between systemic structures of discrimination, such as election rules that prevented African Americans from voting, and individuals' feelings of racial antipathy, arguing both that the former do not necessarily lead to the latter and that institutionalized racism is what matters for political outcomes.⁶

The long-standing patterns of racial categorization and white privilege in the United States have persisted at the same time that the categories themselves have undergone change. Individuals at any point in time may be designated as part of a racial group not because they are objectively Latino or black but instead because of a combination of social and political constructions that work together to ascribe a specific category of race to the person. Especially relevant is the move among "white ethnics" during the period of mass immigration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to be classified by the government as white.⁷ Some groups such as the Irish, Italians, and Jews were successful, while others including Asian Americans, were not able to get the courts to recognize them as white and thus eligible for the full privileges

of U.S. citizenship.⁸ Federal law prohibited Asian immigrants from naturalization until 1952, breaking more than 70 years of explicit Asian exclusion from the United States.⁹ From the 1860s, local, state, as well as the national government of the United States enacted laws targeting Asian Americans that barred property ownership, levied additional race-based taxes, and forcibly interned Americans of Japanese descent during World War II.¹⁰

Going beyond the traditional black–white racial binary, political scientist Claire Kim shows how Asian Americans have been placed in a “triangulated” position between blacks and whites.¹¹ Complicating matters further is the introduction by the federal government of a fourth major category, Hispanic or Latino. While developed decades earlier, the requirement of reporting Hispanic/Latino ethnicity along with other racial categories was implemented by the federal Office of Management and Budget in the 1970s. The complexity, multiplicity and fluidity of racial categories suggest that the study of race and groups should utilize categories of white, black, Latino, and Asian American carefully and with an awareness of their contingent nature and the role that cultural norms and politics play in shaping our perceptions of race.

Key Concepts, Measurement, and Methodology

Key Concepts in the Study of Race and Groups

A central challenge facing researchers of race and groups is the clear, consistent conceptualization of variables within and across studies. Researchers are concerned with three key concepts: *racial group membership*, or what we have referred to above as racial categorization, *racial group identity*, and *racial group consciousness*. According to McClain et al. and to a long tradition of research, simply membership does not tell us how strongly a person identifies with the group or whether they view politics as relevant to the group.¹² “Group identification refers to an individual’s awareness of belonging to a certain group and having a psychological attachment to that group based on a perception of shared beliefs, feelings, interests, and ideas with other group members”; whereas

[g]roup consciousness is in-group identification *politicized* by a set of ideological beliefs about one’s group’s social standing, as well as a view that collective action is the best means by which the group can improve its status and realize its interests.¹³

The more strongly that society and politics define group members by their racial category, and the more isolated and discriminated against people are because of their assigned group membership, the more likely they are to identify with their assigned racial group, and the higher the potential for group members to view their unequal treatment as a condition created by

politics and to organize for political change. Paradoxically, then, the very conditions that stifle individuals can facilitate their political mobilization.

The interaction between the structure imposed by the state and society and the agency non-white minorities exercise within the limited choices available to them is well illustrated by another set of key concepts in the study of racial groups developed in the study of African American politics by Michael Dawson: *linked fate*, the *black counterpublic*, and the *black utility heuristic*.¹⁴ Linked fate is the idea among individual blacks that their fates are inextricably linked with the fate of the race as a whole; essentially, they believe that their success depends on the success of the group, so what is good for the race is good for the individual. According to Dawson, African Americans' unique history of racial subjugation and forced segregation has led to the transmission of notions of linked fate across generations, so that still today African Americans continue to receive messages that reinforce their sense of shared racial group interests through the black counterpublic—mainly, black media, predominantly black organizations, and, the mainstay of black public life, the black church. Information shared in these segregated spaces, Dawson argues, enables and encourages African Americans to evaluate politics using a rational, mental shortcut that he calls the “black utility heuristic.” That is, African Americans form their political opinions about political parties, candidates, and public policies by using their perceptions of what is best for the entire racial group instead of what they think is best for them individually. The sense of linked fate is so strong that it overcomes the force of class interests for the large black middle class and the lure of cultural conservatism, which resonates with many African Americans; it is the reason why African Americans vote nearly unanimously for the Democratic party in presidential and many lower-level electoral contests.

Researchers of Asian American and Latino politics are beginning to use both sets of concepts, but, we argue, should do so with care because of the different historical and contemporary experiences of racial groups. Today, for example, Asian Americans and Latinos are typically much closer to the immigration experience that helps shape political incorporation. Michael Jones-Correa's study of first-generation Latino immigrants in Queens, New York, suggests that there are important psychological and material costs in renouncing homeland citizenship that prevent some immigrants from becoming citizens.¹⁵ He argues that Latinos practice a “politics of in-between,” being torn between two nations, neither fully politically engaged in their new homes nor in their homelands. However, beyond such individual factors, he as well as others also identified a lack of institutional mechanisms to aid in the incorporation of immigrants, including exclusive local party machines.¹⁶ Latino organizations such as churches may be evolving to play an increasingly political role that could strengthen Latinos' identification with all Latinos rather than merely their national origin as, say, Mexicans, and enhance their sense of linked fate and group consciousness.

Measurement of Key Concepts

There are a number of important challenges in the measurement of racial group membership, identity, and consciousness, and we highlight two of the primary challenges here. The first emanates from the flexibility and contingent nature of racial identities among individuals, particularly those whose racial and ethnic backgrounds do not fit neatly into one of the four categories. In-person and telephone survey interviews are the most common ways to measure these concepts in the study of public opinion, but different individuals understand questions about race and ethnicity differently.¹⁷ In addition, as we have seen above, racial and ethnic groups have systematically varying levels of group identification and consciousness as a function of the way that politics and society shape the experience of what it means to be a group member.

Second, the survey questions that attempt to measure group-based identities vary widely in their wording, making it difficult to compare the specific type of psychological attachment being measured across measurements. Furthermore, racial identification and consciousness may vary depending on the context in which the survey is administered. Given the range of ethnic and national origin groups that make up the pan-ethnic categories of both Latino and Asian American, what it means to identify with a group depends upon the racial category posed to the respondent in a survey question. While Mexican Americans make up the largest share of the Latino population in the United States, the category of Hispanic or Latino also includes Cubans, Caribbeans, Puerto Ricans, and people from other Latin American countries. Similarly, there are as many national origin and ethnicity groups within the pan-ethnic racial category of Asian American, with the six largest groups being Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. Finally, while blacks demonstrate the highest degree of racial group consciousness, the internal diversity of this group is also in flux, with native-born African Americans included in the same racial category as new arrivals from the African continent as well as large numbers of Afro-Caribbeans.

Thus, differences in the ways in which individuals understand the same questions, differences in the ways that survey questions are worded, and the contexts in which these questions are administered complicate the measurement and comparison of group membership, identity, and consciousness across racial groups.

Methodological Challenges in Survey Research

There are also methodological challenges in collecting data on racial groups in the United States, particularly those heavily comprising immigrants. Geographic concentration and dispersion and the prevalence of speaking a language other than English characterize Latino and Asian American populations

today, and reaching individuals for interviews requires innovative methods of survey research designed specifically for these respondents.

Asian Americans and Latinos, and immigrant groups more generally, have increasingly complex patterns of geographic mobility. Once heavily concentrated in the southwestern United States and large urban metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and New York City, Latinos are moving in increasing numbers to the south, mid-Atlantic, and the plains states.¹⁸ At the same time, Asian Americans, while once heavily concentrated in a handful of states, are beginning to disperse as well, with sizeable populations in states such as Virginia, Florida, and Nevada. Sampling these populations for survey interviews is challenging, but making sure that subjects are not drawn only from high-density locations is critical for obtaining survey samples that are representative of the population.

Similarly, because eight in ten adult Asian Americans and nearly half of Latinos are foreign born, writing surveys in languages other than English and hiring interviewers who can speak in the respondent's native language greatly increase the likelihood of acquiring both a good sample and good data. While many immigrants speak English, it is a second language for many, and answering survey questions in their native language is preferable.¹⁹

Finally, given the high degree of internal heterogeneity within each of these groups, the size of the sample must be large enough to include sufficient numbers of respondents from specific national origin groups. For example, Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans not only have different migration histories to the United States, but they are also distinctive in their political beliefs.²⁰ National origin groups within the pan-ethnic rubric of Asian Americans demonstrate similar differences.²¹

Racial Group Identity and Racial Group Consciousness

There is no simple way to characterize the multiplicity of identities of Americans classified as racial minorities today. Moreover, the political influence of group identity and group consciousness may differ across racial categories and individuals. In this section, we examine the individual and contextual antecedents that impact racial group identity and consciousness as well as the ways in which racial identity and consciousness affect political attitudes.

Explaining Group Identity and Consciousness

Several recent studies demonstrate the contextual nature both of group identity and group consciousness and the ways in which they operate differently for different groups. First, with respect to racial identity, Pei-te Lien and colleagues illustrate that racial identification among Asian Americans is a complex choice for group members, not a fixed, objective membership

classification.²² They found that just one-sixth of all respondents identified with this pan-ethnic term. Identifying as Asian American also varied by national origin group, ranging from 23 percent of South Asians to 12 percent of Chinese respondents. In contrast, 34 percent of all respondents reported generally identifying as ethnic American (e.g., Chinese American) and 30 percent reported a general identification with solely their ethnicity of origin (e.g., Chinese).

These results might suggest that ethnicity is more central to the group identities of Asians living in the United States than the pan-ethnic identifier of Asian American. However, when respondents who did not immediately self-identify as Asian American were asked the follow-up question, "Have you ever thought of yourself as an Asian American?" approximately 50 percent of respondents provided an affirmative response.²³ Combining the results of both the first and the second questions, Lien et al. found that "[t]ogether, close to six in ten respondents (57 percent) would consider themselves panethnic American ("Asian American") at some point in time; that percentage ranges from 50 percent for Chinese and Korean to 66 percent among Filipino respondents."²⁴ These results highlight the multiple identity options for Asian Americans, as well as the possibility of adopting different identities at different times. Ethno-racial identity among Asian Americans is influenced by context, including both the immediate survey context and the diverse experiences of different Asian American descent groups.

Second, with respect to racial group consciousness, the evidence suggests that environmental cues can play a role in whether one's racial group identity becomes politicized. Jane Junn and Natalie Masuoka conducted a survey experiment intended to uncover the potential effects of descriptive representation—that is, representation by an elected official who shares a particular demographic characteristic, in this case race—on African American and Asian American racial group consciousness.²⁵ In the experiment, half of the participants in each racial group were randomly assigned to a treatment condition in which they were exposed to photographs and brief biographies of U.S. presidential cabinet members who shared their race while the remaining participants in each racial group were not.

Junn and Masuoka hypothesized that African Americans' typically high levels of group consciousness would be unlikely to increase much further as a result of cuing descriptive representation in the treatment condition. However, they expected Asian Americans' group consciousness, though lower than that of African Americans' overall, to be more malleable in response to contextual cues that remind them of "the political consequences of being Asian American," such as exposure to same-race political actors. They found Asian Americans who received the descriptive representation treatment scored significantly higher on measures of racial group consciousness than the control group of Asian Americans. People who were exposed to the treatment were more likely than control subjects to agree that their individual

fates are linked to those of Asian Americans as a group and to say that being Asian/Asian American is at least “somewhat important” to their political identity and “ideas about politics.”²⁶ The treatment condition resulted in similar but weaker effects among African Americans, confirming Junn and Masuoka’s expectations that a ceiling effect would be in operation among this already highly race conscious group. These results support their contention that racial groups have very different levels of racial group consciousness and, as a result, that they are also not influenced by the political environment to the same degree.

In his study of mayoral elections in five major U.S. cities, Matt Barreto provides evidence that a similar latent group consciousness may operate among Latinos.²⁷ He compared consecutive mayoral elections in Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, and New York—one in which a competitive Latino candidate was on the ballot and one in which a Latino candidate was not—in order to test whether Latino candidates would be more likely than non-Latino candidates to mobilize Latinos. He finds that “[p]recincts with larger proportions of Latino registrants were more likely to evidence high rates of turnout when a Latino candidate was running for office.”²⁸ Ethnic and racial identity may be a critical factor enabling racial minorities to overcome their relative disadvantage in resources such as education, employment, and interest in politics, which have proven crucial for participating in politics.²⁹ Descriptive representation may activate and politicize these identities and help to level the political playing field.

Beyond candidate co-ethnicity, numerous other features of contemporary campaigns heighten Latino voters’ awareness of their ethnic identity “in a way that directly connects Latino identity with politics.”³⁰ Personalized mobilization of Spanish-surname voters, targeted ads stressing the immigrant experience, Spanish-language campaign materials, and candidate endorsements by well-known Latinos may all serve to mobilize and engage Latinos.³¹ In addition, Barreto and Pedraza argue that a steady stream of immigration from Latin America anchors Latino identities in the immigrant experience and garners popular attention for Latinos, including negative attention in the form of discriminatory public discourse and policies.³² All of this serves to further politicize Latino identity and elevate Latino group consciousness, an effect we noted earlier with regard to African Americans experiences of racial discrimination.

At the same time, Cristina Beltrán argues for greater scrutiny of the conventional wisdom of the existence of a coherent Latino political agenda in *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*.³³ Taking an historical and theoretical approach to the question of Latino political identity, Beltrán documents the distinctive ways Latinos have forged both shared similarities and distinctive perspectives in U.S. politics.

Finally, the socioeconomic context in which African Americans live matters. Cohen and Dawson found that poor and isolated black neighborhoods

generate more hopelessness.³⁴ Gay found that the lower the quality of one's neighborhood in terms of the maintenance and value of homes, cleanliness and safety of streets, and accessibility of public and private services like reliable trash removal and grocery stores, the higher was African Americans' sense of linked fate.³⁵

Diversity vs. Solidarity in Group Identity and Consciousness

Beginning with Michael Dawson's seminal work, *Behind the Mule*, the political impact of racial group consciousness, usually measured with questions about racial linked fate, has primarily been studied within the African American population.³⁶ Dawson's work has been used to explain the apparent homogeneity in political opinions within the black community across other lines of difference, such as class, and to explain African Americans' near universal support for the Democratic Party since the mid-1960s.

However, Cathy Cohen argues the notion of linked fate itself is limited and that

a more accurate characterization of the political positioning of most black Americans is that of a *qualified linked fate*, whereby not every black person in crisis is seen as equally essential to the survival of the community, as an equally representative proxy of our own individual interests, and thus as equally worthy of political support by other African Americans.³⁷

Cohen demonstrates the consequences of this qualified linked fate through her in-depth study of the African American political response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s. She focuses on the actions of black media, organizations, and leaders in New York City, and finds that, despite eventually acknowledging that AIDS severely affects many in the black community and attempting to provide services for afflicted individuals, these black elites ultimately failed to transform most African Americans' thinking about the disease. African Americans do not view AIDS as an issue of primary importance to the black community nor are those living with AIDS in the black community "embraced and 'owned' as essential members of the group."³⁸

Generalizing beyond the HIV/AIDS case, Cohen contends that black politics has historically been focused on "consensus issues construed as having an equal impact on all those sharing a primary identity based on race";³⁹ but increasingly, cross-cutting issues relating to the particular concerns of vulnerable or stigmatized subpopulations within the black community—usually along the lines of class, gender, and sexuality—are competing for a place on the black political agenda.

Further, these issues bring into question and cast doubt on the idea that a shared group identity and feelings of linked fate can lead to the unified group resistance or mobilization that has proved so essential to the survival and progress of black and other marginal people.⁴⁰

Cohen's study challenges us to think more carefully about how racial minority groups address internal heterogeneity, highlighting the complexities of group consciousness and its dependency both on context for activation or development and on the subpopulation and issue area to which it is applied.

Building on Dawson's historical account of the heterogeneity of black ideological traditions,⁴¹ Melissa Harris-Lacewell examines the adult socialization processes that occur in the contemporary black counterpublic—including social spaces like barbershops, churches, and media outlets. She demonstrates that ordinary African American citizens make sense of the world and form “identifiable patterns of public opinion that can be understood as ideologies” through processes of “everyday talk.”⁴² In the segregated spaces of the black counterpublic, African Americans can feel free to candidly talk to each other “beyond the gaze of racial others,” particularly whites, and this conversation serves to socially (re)construct a variety of unique black worldviews.⁴³ Harris-Lacewell identifies four black political ideologies that continue to operate today: Black Conservatism, Liberal Integrationism, Black Feminism, and Black Nationalism. While there are similarities between these ideologies and the traditional liberal-conservative spectrum used in survey research (developed to understand white ideology), the relevant difference between the two overall frameworks is in whether there is a deliberate recognition of race as politically salient. Whereas the white ideological spectrum is, on its face, race neutral, Harris-Lacewell argues that all of the black political ideologies are built upon a kind of black race consciousness that she calls “black common sense.”⁴⁴ Exactly *how* one believes that being black matters is proscribed by one's ideology.

Work on other racial groups also emphasizes the important types of diversity within each group. Abrajano, for example, argues that Latinos who speak English orient more toward the substance of issues in political campaigns, while Latinos who speak only Spanish are more oriented toward easily digestible cues to their ethnic identity and language.⁴⁵ More generally, some scholars raise questions about the downside of group solidarity and political unanimity. Blacks have been called a “captured” group with the Democratic Party, and thus they lack the influence that comes with the credible threat of defecting to the other party.⁴⁶ Latinos vote Democratic but in less consistent and uniform numbers, and this may give them leverage to get more of what they want from politics.⁴⁷ In addition, when group membership becomes a simplistic cue, it can produce support for co-ethnic leaders or for parties at odds with what fully informed voters would choose.⁴⁸

Taken together, these studies of minority group identity and racial consciousness illustrate the complexity of conceptualizing and measuring how Asian Americans, Latinos, and African Americans understand their relationships to one another, and how these factors are related to public opinion.

What Influences Public Opinion?

Among the multiple facets of public opinion and factors influencing political attitudes, we focus on: (1) party identification and mobilization, (2) interpersonal contact and the racial and economic context, and (3) perceptions of and experiences with discrimination. It is crucial to consider how and why the same antecedents might work in distinctive ways for different groups.

Partisan Identification

Scholars have consistently identified partisanship as the most enduring, stable, and powerful of all political predispositions.⁴⁹ For white Americans, party identification amounts to an early emotional attachment to one party or the other, often learned through socialization in the home or other institutions. The available evidence indicates that (overwhelmingly Democratic) partisanship is acquired through similar processes of institutional socialization for African Americans, though for this group, partisanship appears to be more instrumental and group-interested than affective.

It is unclear how immigrant-based racial groups acquire partisanship when often their early and even adult political socialization does not occur in the United States and, as demonstrated by the work of Rogers⁵⁰ and Jones-Correa,⁵¹ they encounter numerous barriers to institutional incorporation once in the United States. Wong argues that the longer an immigrant resides in the U.S.,⁵² the greater political exposure she will have, the more likely she is to become a citizen, and the more likely she is to learn English proficiently; thus, the more likely she will be to identify with one of the political parties.

Wong and her colleagues also examined partisan *choice* among the Asian American respondents interviewed in the 2008 National Asian American Survey and found that, overall, 48 percent of Asian Americans identify as Democrats, 31 percent as independent, and 22 percent as Republicans.⁵³ There was internal variation among Asian Americans by national origin group, with Japanese, Koreans, Asian Indians, and Filipinos being the most Democratic (50 percent or more), Chinese being most likely to call themselves independents (46 percent) or Democrats (41 percent), and Vietnamese being most likely to identify as Republican (45 percent).

Party mobilization (or lack of it) also seems to be a pivotal factor in whether and how immigrant groups are incorporated into the American polity. Being ignored or excluded by local political parties discourages naturalization,⁵⁴ which in turn depresses the acquisition of partisanship, while

becoming a citizen and being brought into the fold by the political parties encourages immigrants to adopt a partisan identification, likely that of whichever party is most welcoming.⁵⁵

Race Relations

Developed under the black–white paradigm, two primary hypotheses have been advanced relative to the impact of cross-racial exposure: the *threat hypothesis* and the *contact hypothesis*. Most basically, greater exposure between members of different races will worsen race relations according to the threat hypothesis but improve race relations under the contact hypothesis. Classical formulations of the threat hypothesis predict that dominant groups will perceive increasing threats to their political and economic privileges as the population of subordinate group members in the immediate environment increases; then, as threats to resources increase so do dominant group hostilities toward subordinate groups.⁵⁶ The contact hypothesis, on the other hand, predicts improved racial relations and cooperation through interpersonal contact under certain ideal conditions of equal status and shared objectives.⁵⁷ Because of the different ways in which Asian Americans and Latinos have been incorporated into and racialized within U.S. society, it is unclear whether and how these hypotheses may apply to whites' attitudes toward these non-black groups. Locations with larger populations of Latinos and African Americans show systematic differences in opinion and behavior.⁵⁸ Similarly, how these frameworks might operate among racial minorities to inform their attitudes toward other minority groups and whites remains to be seen.

Several recent studies help to remedy these uncertainties by taking a closer look at environmental particulars and extending research to a multiethnic context. Welch et al. provide support for the contact hypothesis in their finding that integrated neighborhoods actually reduce racial hostilities by promoting interactions between members of different racial groups.⁵⁹ At the same time, the prevalence of racially segregated neighborhoods noted by Massey and Denton⁶⁰ calls the primary mechanism of the racial threat hypothesis in question; that is, whites are unlikely to live in neighborhoods with African Americans, so observing the size of the black population and thus perceiving a threat to one's resources and privileges would appear to be an unlikely source of white hostility (note that by this same logic, interracial contact also seems unlikely to occur).⁶¹ Accordingly, Oliver and Mendelberg emphasize the importance of analyzing environmental factors at both the smaller neighborhood level and the larger metropolitan level.

Oliver and Mendelberg find that the size of the African American population is unrelated to white racial attitudes at the neighborhood level, though it is moderately related to whites' anti-black stereotypes at the metropolitan level. However, the strongest contextual effects come from neighborhood educational composition, a measure of white economic vulnerability, not

racial composition. Furthermore, whites living in low-education contexts are not only more racially prejudiced but also more anti-Semitic and authoritarian than whites living in higher education contexts. They attribute this generalized out-group hostility to the psychological stresses of living in economically vulnerable environments and suggest that in the specific racial context of the United States, such generalized out-group hostility is perhaps most often directed at African Americans. Considering the rapidly changing racial topography of the United States, future research should explore the impact of these psychological stresses on attitudes toward other racial minorities as well.

Contrary to Oliver and Mendelberg's findings in the case of whites and African Americans, Claudine Gay finds that the *overall* economic conditions of a neighborhood do not influence African Americans' expressions of anti-Latino prejudice.⁶² Instead, it is the *relative* economic positions of the two racial groups that matter. That is, African Americans who shared neighborhoods with economically advantaged Latinos exhibited more prejudice against Latinos, were less supportive of "special preferences in hiring and promotion" for Latinos than they were for themselves, and agreed more with the statement "more good jobs for Latinos means fewer good jobs for Blacks."⁶³ Both racial prejudice and unsupportive policy attitudes intensified somewhat as the size of the Latino population increased but only in contexts of Latino economic advantage. When African Americans are better off than or economically equal to their Latino neighbors, the groups' relative positions have no impact on blacks' attitudes toward Latinos. These results lend partial support to the threat hypotheses and suggest that interpersonal contact may only be effective under conditions of economic equality.

Oliver and Wong take the research that can be used to adjudicate between the threat and contact hypotheses several steps further by using interview data taken from all four of the primary racial groups while analytically distinguishing between smaller neighborhood and larger metropolitan contexts.⁶⁴ They examined racial prejudices among these groups and found that among whites, African Americans, and Latinos the more integrated the neighborhood the less hostility they expressed toward racial out-groups. Asian Americans who were interviewed in English followed a similar pattern; however, Chinese and Korean respondents who were interviewed in their native languages reported greater prejudice when living in more integrated neighborhoods. The authors speculate that these findings may be related to the lower level of incorporation that non-English-speaking Asian Americans experience, or possibly to the violence in Los Angeles against Asian American small businesses that occurred shortly before the survey was administered. Overall, these neighborhood-level findings provide support in favor of the contact hypothesis but against the threat hypothesis.

Oliver and Wong's key finding, however, is that these effects were most apparent in metropolitan areas in which there were large populations of racial

out-groups—a central tenet of the threat hypothesis. For example, African Americans and whites living in racially homogeneous neighborhoods in Los Angeles displayed much higher rates of anti-Latino sentiment than their counterparts in Atlanta because the size of the Latino population in the Los Angeles metropolis is much greater than in Atlanta.⁶⁵ Their different findings relative to minority group size depending upon whether the analysis was conducted using the neighborhood or the city as the unit of analysis helps to explain why previous research on the threat and contact hypotheses has been so mixed: researchers were using different units of analysis. Moreover, as Oliver and Wong conclude, their “findings strongly suggest that it is not only critical to consider the effects of local context on racial attitudes, but also how these attitudes depend to some degree on the relationship between neighborhood and larger metropolitan contexts.”⁶⁶

Discrimination

Dennis Chong and Dukhong Kim’s “theory of opportunities” echoes our theme, that “[t]he assimilation of a minority group into American society depends not only on the actions of group members but also on the reception accorded that group by the majority population.”⁶⁷ Specifically, they ask why members with higher economic status sometimes continue to have strong racial group consciousness. They find that the effects of class will depend upon racial group members’ perceptions of opportunities for social mobility—beliefs about their chances of moving up in the world.

At the group level—that is, looking at between-group differences among African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos—Chong and Kim find that economic status has the smallest effect on African Americans’ levels of group consciousness. They find that support for policies that benefit the group is least affected by improved economic fortunes for African Americans, relative to other racial groups, because of frequent experiences with discrimination and perceptions that blacks have fewer opportunities relative to whites. In contrast, improved economic status for Asian Americans and Latinos is often accompanied by fewer experiences with discrimination and a more positive outlook on U.S. society, making increased economic status for these groups a significant predictor of diminished support for racial group interests.

Chong and Kim find the same dynamic at work at the individual level. In other words, when they focus on the between-person differences within each racial minority group, they find that economic status has no effect on group consciousness for minority individuals, including Asian Americans and Latinos, who frequently experience discrimination and perceive unequal opportunities. In contrast, high economic status reduces support for group interests among individuals from all racial minority groups who have few experiences with discrimination and believe that U.S. society offers equal opportunities for all.

Importantly, Chong and Kim's research contradicts earlier scholarship on black public opinion. Sigelman and Welch found that African Americans' perceptions of group discrimination influenced their views about the sources of racial disparities, and both these perceptions and explanations influenced the policy solutions that African Americans preferred to remedy racial inequality.⁶⁸ Furthermore, they found that African Americans perceived much higher levels of discrimination against blacks as a group than they reported experiencing personally, and, as such, personal experiences with discrimination had little effect on their attitudes.

But why do personal experiences with discrimination impact African Americans' opinions in Chong and Kim's 2006 study but not in that of Sigelman and Welch in 1991? In answering this question, it is critical to look at the ways in which the different pairs of researchers measured their personal discrimination variables. Chong and Kim used a combination of seven wide-ranging questions to measure respondents' levels of perceived discrimination, including questions that ask whether respondents have experienced discrimination in the past ten years or have ever been "physically threatened or attacked" or "unfairly stopped by police."⁶⁹ Respondents in Chong and Kim's 2006 study were also asked about the frequency with which they have been given "less respect" and "poorer service" (while shopping or dining) than others, as well as about how often people insult or call them names or seem fearful of them because of their race. In contrast, Sigelman and Welch used four questions about basic "quality of life" issues, which they acknowledged were "fairly crude," including whether respondents had ever been discriminated against in getting "quality education" and "decent" housing, jobs, and wages.⁷⁰ Sigelman and Welch astutely note that their measurements "ignore possible discrimination in the daily routines of life," like shopping, eating at restaurants, and interacting with others in the community.⁷¹ As Chong and Kim's measures highlight, Sigelman and Welch's research also fails to capture discrimination at the hands of state actors like the police.

The causes of others' perceptions of discrimination against out-group members are also important to understand because of the consequences these perceptions have for public opinion about policies intended to benefit racial minority groups. Whites' belief that blacks are discriminated against is positively correlated with white support for a range of policies that serve to ameliorate racial inequality, like affirmative action, as well as less race conscious policies.⁷² Believing that African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans continue to be discriminated against is positively related to support for policies intended to benefit all racial minorities, including job training, educational assistance, and preferential hiring and promotion programs, among white, African American, Latino, and Asian American respondents.⁷³

Concluding Remarks

We began our review of research in political science on race and the group bases of public opinion by describing the complexity and the socially constructed nature of racial categories in the United States. Despite the inherent difficulties in measuring these concepts, race and ethnicity remain among the most important divisions in political attitudes among Americans. To better understand the group bases of public opinion, researchers have attempted to define, measure, and examine the three key concepts of *racial group membership* (what we have referred to as racial categorization), *racial group identity*, and *racial group consciousness*. Most scholarship has focused on one of the four primary racial groups: whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Michael Dawson developed the concept of *linked fate* from the experiences of African Americans in U.S. politics. This idea has been influential in scholarship in racial and ethnic politics; however, the extent to which the concept is applicable to other minority populations facing different political circumstances, including Asian Americans and Latinos, is not clear. Differences in the ways in which individuals understand the same questions on surveys, and the distinctive contexts in which surveys are administered, complicate the measurement and comparison of group membership, identity, and consciousness across groups.

We conclude that the contours of the relationships between racial group identity, racial group consciousness, and public opinion, particularly for Latinos and Asian Americans, are not well understood because of the dynamic nature of these populations and the still-early stage of systematic research. For members of these pan-ethnic racial groups, identification is a complex choice. For all racial and ethnic groups, membership and identity are fluid and primarily based on the forces of politics and the circumstances of society. They are not fixed or objective. Within all groups, there are important tensions between unity and difference, favored status and marginalization.

Finally, we reviewed three widely studied causes of public opinion, including party identification, race relations, and perceptions of discrimination. In terms of race relations, the contextual interaction between neighborhood and metropolis and the mixture of the resident groups is key to understanding public opinion. In terms of discrimination, it is crucial to understand how the discriminatory treatment directed at a group member, and her interaction with society, vary systematically as a function of her group membership. The different historical and current circumstances of groups explain the varied outlooks their members adopt on individual opportunity.

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