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## **Call to (In)Action: The Effects of Racial Priming on Grassroots Mobilization**

Hans J.G. Hassell  
Department of Politics  
Cornell College  
600 First Street SW  
Mt. Vernon, IA 52314  
hhassell@cornellcollege.edu

Neil Visalvanich  
Department of Political Science  
Bucknell University  
One Dent Drive  
Lewisburg, PA 17837  
nv007@bucknell.edu

### **Abstract**

Previous work on the effects of race on the political behaviors of white Americans is beset with two problems. First, much of the work on the effect of race has looked primarily at attitudes as opposed to political action around a policy. Second, studies of the relationship between race and policy have revolved around issues for which it is inherently difficult to separate the effects of racial prejudice from conservative ideology. To address these problems, we examine the willingness of individuals to write their member of Congress in support of a non-racial political cause, which we experimentally treat with racial cues. We also experimentally present a comparison with a non-racial but similar ‘specialized’ group, which allows us to distinguish concerns about race from concerns about specialized benefits objectionable to conservatives. We show that whites with higher levels of racial resentment are less likely to act politically in support of a policy perceived as benefiting ethnic and racial minorities.

**Keywords:** Race, Priming, Political Participation, Grassroots Mobilization

How salient are racial cues in moving the attitudes and the political actions of the American public? In the realm of public opinion, scholars have found that how issues are framed in regards to race has a significant influence on the political attitudes of the electorate. Specifically, many scholars have argued that race-based considerations are a significant motivating factor in the formation of the public opinions of white Americans on race-inspired policies, like affirmative action, welfare, and immigration (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Gilens 1995, 1999; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1982; Sears, Hensler, and Speer 1979; Merollo, Ramarkishan, and Haynes 2013).

Another strand of the literature acknowledges that while race once played a significant role in the formation of white political attitudes, the effects of these racial cues are now largely contextual, dependent on the respondent and the context in which the cue is delivered. One of the central points of contention between these two strands of literature is whether the origins of this opposition comes from an ideological opposition to government-sponsored social programs or from racial attitudes (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman et al. 1996). Many scholars argue that the strong effects of race on public opinion about social policies may be confounded by their close relationship to conservative opposition to policies that undermine principles of individualism (Abramowitz 1994; Carmines and Merriman 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

The problem with the ongoing discussion of the effect of racial cues and racial priming is two-fold. First, the focus on policy attitudes misses an important aspect of political behavior – political mobilization. Public engagement on an issue has a powerful effect on policy above that of public opinion (Bergen 2009). There is also a substantial difference between holding political opinions and taking political action. Acting on opinions requires time and energy that voters are often unwilling to expend (Schuman and Presser 1980; Stout and Kline 2008) and may involve

personal and economic consequences (LaPiere 1934). Thus, the opinions that individual respondents express are not always reflective of the actions they take (LaPiere 1934; Stout and Kline 2008). We argue that examining the relationship between racial cues and political action provides a clearer picture of the true effect race has on the different dimensions of political behavior.

Second, studies of the effects of race on public opinion have focused on policies that have both a strong racial implication and also a close connection with conservative ideological opposition (Sniderman and Carmines 1997). As such, it is difficult to separate the racial and the conservative component of these issues to get a clean comparison between the two types of opposition (Abramowitz 1994; Carmines and Merriman 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). While some argue that race continues to play a significant role in the formation of opinions (Federico and Sidanius 2002), others argue that it is nothing more than an artifact of opposition to policies on the basis of ideological conservatism (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Sniderman et al. 1996).

To address these problems, this paper provides a test of the effect of racial cues on grassroots mobilization of white Americans. While numerous studies have looked at the effect of race on the public opinions of white Americans around policy issues, we focus our study on a behavior that requires individuals to take action around that policy. Specifically, we look at the effect that racial cues embedded in a political appeal have on the willingness of individuals to become involved in the political process outside of the ballot booth. Political action provides us with a better test of the effect of racial bias on political behavior.

In addition, our study addresses the issue that previous work has had in confounding the effect of conservatism with negative racial attitudes in two ways. First, we focus on a non-racialized issue that conservatives should be more inclined to support – the reduction of

government bureaucratic regulation – then infuse a racial cue into that issue experimentally. This allows us to distinguish racial considerations from conservatism and gauge the effect of race on political behavior, separate from actual policy. Second, we present another experimental treatment that infuses the issue with a non-racial but similarly ‘specialized’ group cue. The purpose of this treatment is to compare its effects to the race treatment in order to see if the bias against minorities is also present for non-racial groups. This allows us to address concerns that biases against minority groups are the result of conservative objections to non-universalistic policies.

Using a survey experiment, we ask respondents to contact their member of Congress about an issue and randomize whether we describe the beneficiaries as being a racial minority group, another specialized non-racial group, or society as a whole. We then examine whether respondents in these experimental treatment groups are more or less likely to contact their representative. We find that the presence of explicit racial cues embedded in the call to action lowers the likelihood of participation, especially among those with higher levels of racial resentment. We find that this effect is not, however, the result of a preference for individualism. Rather, we find that when benefits of the policy are construed towards another non-racial specialized group, individuals are no more or less willing to contact their member of Congress than when the policy is universal.

### **Race, Public Opinion, and Political Action**

A significant portion of the literature on racial priming argues that negative racial attitudes among whites lead to opposition to social policies thought to benefit minority groups (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Gilens 1995, 1999; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1982; Sears, Hensler, and Speer 1979). These studies have found that policies

presented with a racial justification result in a significant decline in support among white respondents (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Skocpol 1991; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). Generally, these results have been attributed to the belief that the lack of economic progress in the black community is the result of laziness or other character shortcomings (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears and Henry 2003). In essence, whites are much less likely to support social programs, in part, because of the perception that blacks are overly reliant on them (Gilens 1995).

Whether the effects of race on opinions are also manifest in an individual's willingness to act around policy issues is another question. How people respond when asked their opinions may be different from the decision they take when presented with an actual choice of actions. Richard LaPiere's (1934) seminal work examined the difference between the expressed attitudes of hotel and restaurant purveyors towards Chinese-Americans and their actual actions. Most service providers surveyed expressed an unwillingness to serve or accommodate Chinese-Americans. However, when presented with the opportunity to provide services to individuals of Chinese descent, few of these same surveyed individuals actually denied service. Similarly, studies have shown that individuals are willing to lie or decline to respond when they know their views are not perceived as socially acceptable (Berinsky 1999, 2004; Hopkins 2009; Schuman and Presser 1980; Vogel and Ardoin 2008). While studies have regularly shown that race changes whites' opinions on policy issues, it is not as clear whether those opinions translate into political actions.

### **Public Opinion and Political Outcomes**

Public opinions do not necessarily translate into political outcomes, either. While public opinion can have an effect on the actions of political elites under certain circumstances (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978), the opinions of legislators' constituents are often not well known (Butler and

Nickerson 2011; Miller and Stokes 1963). Instead, legislators rely extensively on other forms of inference, such as constituent initiated contact through phone calls, postcards, and email (Ainsworth 1993; Bergan 2009; Cigler and Loomis 2011; Kollman 1998), which in turn rely on the willingness of individuals to become involved in the political process. Thus, while racial priming may affect the formation of opinions among white Americans, it is unclear how racial priming or racial cues embedded in social and policy issues affect an individual's willingness to become politically involved, a decision which has a greater effect on political policy outcomes.

The ideological and social cues contained in calls to action can have a significant effect on the willingness of individuals to become involved with and donate to political causes (Han 2008; Levine 2015; Miller and Krosnick 2004). At the same time, research about campaign donors suggests that not all donors respond to the same set of appeals (Brown, Powell, and Wilcox 1995; Francia et al. 2003; Malbin 2009) and that campaigns vary their messages to target donors with a message designed to elicit the best response (Cho and Gimpel 2007; Hassell and Monson 2014; Hassell 2011; Shea and Burton 2006). There is reason to believe that, as with other primes in political mobilization efforts, racial primes may influence some individuals, while having no effect on others. Building off of these previous findings, the next section details our theory of political action and racial cues.

### **Expectations and Hypotheses**

If racial priming has an effect on white Americans, it is important that we document that it affects not only political attitudes, but political action as well. As such, we hypothesize that the presence of a racial cue should have a negative effect on the willingness of individuals to engage politically on an issue beyond just stating an opinion. Thus, even when the political issue

at hand is an issue that the respondent would normally be inclined to support, the presence of racial cues will lower the likelihood of participation.

*Hypothesis 1 – If race remains a significant variable in the political decisions of white Americans then the presence of a racial cue in a political appeal should make whites less likely to respond to attempts at political mobilization compared to a race-neutral appeal.*

On the other hand, if the opposite is true, and if race is no longer the overriding influence it once was, we should observe no tangible differences between the racial appeal and the race neutral appeal.

In addition, scholarship has suggested that the effects of racial appeals may vary depending on the racial attitudes of the individual (Francia et al. 2003; Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Sears and Henry 2003). In order to further test the effect of race on different subgroups, we incorporate a standard measure of racial resentment to measure a respondent's underlying attitudes towards minorities (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Using this measure of racial resentment, we posit a second hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2 – Respondents who score higher on the racial resentment scale will be less likely to mobilize in the racial experimental scenario when compared to the control appeal. However, the experimental variation will have no effect on those with lower levels of racial resentment.*

Several scholars have challenged Kinder and Sanders's claim that the measurement of racial resentment effectively measures the salience of race in the minds of individuals. Scholars have long had a difficult time disaggregating racial prejudice from conservative views on social welfare policy (Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Sears et al. 1997; Sidanius et al. 2000). Kinder and Sanders (1995) make the claim that, while overtly racially prejudicial views are considered taboo, these views now manifest themselves as symbolically racist views, in which whites are hostile towards policies that promote the social standing of minorities. Kinder and Sanders argue

that these racial attitudes can be teased out with questions that indirectly elicit racial attitudes, more commonly known as racial resentment questions.

On the other hand, some scholars have argued that because contemporary racial policies have become subsumed in the policies identified with political liberalism, opposition to these policies is actually an artifact of political conservatism as opposed to racial prejudice (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Feldman and Huddy 2005). In this view, racial resentment actually captures opposition to all policies tailored to benefit narrow political subgroups, as opposed to racially prejudicial attitudes.

In order to test these two competing theories, we can experimentally vary the use of implicit cues in appeals to action in a crucial way. In one experimental condition, we include a racial cue that indicates that the benefits of the policy would primarily affect “minority workers.” In another experimental condition, we include a cue indicating that a non-racial but specialized group (“construction workers and building contractors”) would receive the primary benefits. If racial prejudice is the main motivating factor in deciding whether an individual becomes involved in support of a policy, rather than adherence to an ideology of individualism, our results should confirm a third hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 3 - Respondents with higher levels of racial resentment will be more likely to mobilize in response to the non-racial specialized group appeal when compared to the racial appeal.*

## **Method and Research Design**

In order to test the effect of racial cues on the willingness of individuals to become politically involved we designed an experiment that manipulated information individuals were given about a political issue embedded in a call to action similar to the appeals interest groups send out to activate grassroots support. A group of 720 white U.S. Citizens over the age of 18

was recruited via Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk website in early 2012 to complete a survey hosted on Qualtrics.<sup>1</sup> Amazon's Mechanical Turk is a website where requesters publish tasks (Human Intelligence Tasks or HITs) and provide payment to those who choose to participate. Those who request a task can limit the availability of the task to respondents who have certain characteristics such as age or location. Recruitment through Mechanical Turk is similar to other web-based approaches, such as YouGov, that maintain panels of participants and invites them to participate in studies in exchange for a payment or other incentives. Previous research has shown that samples collected from Mechanical Turk are more representative of the U.S. population than undergraduate samples or samples populated from those who respond to web advertisements (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014). Additionally, studies run from samples collected from Mechanical Turk have been shown to replicate important experimental findings in psychology and sociology (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011), including experiments using longer vignettes (Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014). We recognize the inherent limitations of using Mechanical Turk. Samples from Mechanical Turk are not nationally representative and the small payments to respondents have the potential to threaten the external validity of our study. However, although a sample may not be entirely representative of the general population, its usefulness is contingent on the amount of variation on relevant moderating characteristics (Druckman and Kam 2011). As we detail below, among the characteristics that we hypothesize would moderate the decision to act politically in the presence of a racial prime, we do find variation similar, but not identical, to more representative samples.

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents were recruited through Mechanical Turk and then routed to complete the survey in Qualtrics where the random assignment was completed. After the respondents completed the survey in Qualtrics, they were given an individualized code which they were required to enter at the Mechanical Turk HIT page to receive payment for their task. Respondents were paid 75 cents for their responses to the survey which took respondents, on average, 8 minutes to complete, a payment level that is higher than that of other similar experimental survey HITs (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Krupnikov and Levine 2014).

Other issues with convenience samples, such as Mechanical Turk, revolve around the concern that the treatment effects, or lack thereof, may be driven by homogeneity of unmeasured characteristics of the subjects in the sample.<sup>2</sup> It is conceivable that characteristics of the Mechanical Turk sample could confound the heterogeneous treatment effects, however, previous work has indicated a convergence of these effects, rather than a divergence, and in experimental treatments that require the subject to trust information provided by the experimenter (Krupnikov and Levine 2014). On the other hand, others have found no confounding of heterogeneous treatment effects, even in experimental treatments that require significant “buy-in” from respondents (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014). While our sample may not be a perfect representation of the general public, we believe it reasonably represents the variation within the greater population on the variables of interest and provides insight into the actions of the general public.

Table 1 compares our sample with some metrics from white Americans in the 2010 American National Election Evaluations of Government and Society Study II (ANES), which was also conducted online in conjunction with Knowledge Networks. Compared to ANES, our sample has several notable differences. Consistent with other published research using Mechanical Turk, the majority of our sample had an income of less than \$40,000 per year and is significantly younger, more educated, and leans liberal and Democrat (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011; Krupnikov and Levine 2014; Paolacci, Chandler, and Stern 2010). It is important to note that the attributes of our sample actually make it harder for us to find the effects we expect because the sample is younger, more educated, and leans liberal and Democrat, and thus lower in racial resentment overall.

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<sup>2</sup> Most relevant to this work is evidence that the college environment influences measures of racial prejudice in undergraduate samples (Henry 2008).

[Table 1 about here]

Sixty-six percent of respondents reported voting and 43% reported having contacted a member Congress in the past four years. While our study population is more politically active in areas other than voting, political campaigns and interest groups specifically target more politically active individuals with their calls to action (Grant and Rudolph 2002; Hassell and Monson 2014).

Consistent with other studies that use racial resentment as a variable, we asked respondents at the end of the survey whether they agreed with the same six statements Kinder and Sanders (1996) used to evaluate racial resentment.<sup>3</sup> Respondents in our survey had slightly lower levels of racial resentment than those in the more representative ANES.<sup>4</sup> In our study 32% indicated through their answers that they held no racial resentment, compared to 23% of white respondents in the ANES.<sup>5</sup> There was, however, no significant variation in the distribution of racial resentment across ideological and partisan subgroups when compared to the ANES sample. Roughly 45% of liberals had no racial resentment in the ANES sample compared to

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<sup>3</sup> Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the following six statements: “Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.”; “Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve.”; “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.”; “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.”; “Government officials usually pay less attention to a request or complaint from a black person than from a white person.”; “Most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried.”

<sup>4</sup> We placed the racial resentment questions at the end of the survey because we did not want them to contaminate our treatments rendering “the entire sample one big treatment group, washing out any effect of the racial messages” (Mendelberg 2008, 137). However, it might be that concerned individuals who read the experimental treatment that contained the racial and ethnic prime might express different levels of racial resentment as a result of being exposed to the racial prime. However, we found that this was not the case. Individuals who read the text emphasizing the benefits for minorities did not differ in their levels of racial resentment from other groups. Hotelling balance tests reveal no significant differences between the groups on racial resentment.

<sup>5</sup> While our survey used a battery of six questions to reveal an individual’s level of racial resentment, the ANES used only four. For the purposes of comparing samples we restrict the analysis of our survey to the same four questions that were asked on the ANES.

41% of self-identified liberals in our sample. Likewise, 16% of self-identified conservatives in the ANES sample indicated having no racial resentment while in our sample it was 12%. The percentage of Republicans and Democrats in our sample with no racial resentment was 15% and 43% respectively compared to 13% and 35% respectively in the ANES sample. Table 2 presents summary statistics of racial-resentment and conservative ideology.<sup>6</sup> Levels of racial resentment within our sample are uniformly distributed, while ideology is more normally distributed, albeit with a liberal skew.

[Table 2 about here]

After gathering basic demographic information, we implemented a single factor survey experiment with three levels. Respondents were asked to read a text and we varied the text between subjects. There was no within subjects manipulation. The baseline text followed the typical structure of information presented in political mail and email (Godwin 1988; Hassell 2011). The text highlighted the importance of the “Regulatory Accountability Act” which would decrease the regulatory burdens on small businesses and allow businesses to increase employment levels. The text also emphasized the need for the respondent to lobby their member of Congress to help pass the law.<sup>7</sup> The first experimental treatment text was identical to the

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<sup>6</sup> Although some argue that racial resentment is also highly correlated to the politics of individualism (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Schuman 2000), the measure has been shown to be a consistent measure of internal beliefs distinct from ideological conservatism, and not an artifact of shared-item content with policy-attitude items (Tarman and Sears 2008). We recognize the critique that some scholars have of the racial resentment scale. Within our sample, our measure of racial resentment correlates with our measure of conservatism at .48. This shows us that, while there is some relationship between conservatism and racial resentment, the racial resentment measure is still capturing attitudes for which political conservatism does not account.

<sup>7</sup> Although previous work has found that subjects recruited via Mechanical Turk are just as attentive as subjects recruited to participate in an onsite laboratory (Paolacci, Chandler, and Stern 2010), we were concerned that individuals might not carefully read the treatments and process the information we were presenting which would make it more difficult to draw substantive conclusions (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko 2009). As such, we included a manipulation check to detect whether individuals were reading the directions and paying attention to the questions immediately prior to the treatment. Because failure to pass manipulation tests also correlates with other politically relevant characteristics (Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances 2013), we should not to discard these responses. Berinsky and his coauthors (2013) also find that making individuals aware of their failure to pay close attention to instructions causes them to pay attention and engage at similar levels as those who did not fail manipulation checks.

baseline text but added phrases emphasizing the high levels of unemployment among racial and ethnic minorities and the effect that the legislation would have on increasing employment among minorities rather than the general public (the full text of all treatments is available in the Appendix). Some scholars have posited that individuals may not take action because the targeting of benefits to a specialized group violates ideological preferences for individualism (Abramowitz 1994; Carmines and Merriman 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). To distinguish whether ideological preferences or racial bias is the primary motivating factor, a second experimental treatment text was used. This text was again identical to the baseline text, but contained additional phrases emphasizing the high level of unemployment among building contractors and construction workers and the effect that such a change in policy would have on these individuals.

Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of these three texts using Qualtrics's complete randomization process. Hotelling balance tests show that our randomization was successful and reveal no significant differences between the groups on partisanship, ideology, age, income, past political involvement, or levels of racial resentment.

At the bottom of each text was the call to action, inviting respondents to write a letter to their member of Congress advocating support for the Regulatory Accountability Act.<sup>8</sup> If

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As such, instead of excluding these individuals from the sample, we indicated to respondents who failed the manipulation check that they had failed to read the directions and asked them to read the directions more carefully going forward. However, if we follow the more common, but erroneous, practice of removing individuals who failed the manipulation check from the sample the results are no substantively and significantly the same and all differences in response rates shown in the figures continue to be significant at a minimum at the  $p < .05$  level.

<sup>8</sup>Although the cues we provided respondents explicitly relied upon race, many techniques in grassroots mobilization rely on implicit associations, both racial and non-racial (Levine 2009; Mendelberg 2001; Strickland and Whicker 1992; Weaver 2012). Scholars, however, continue to debate whether implicit racial appeals are still effective in the Post-Civil Rights era (Huber and Lapinski 2006; Mendelberg 2001, 2008). Although we do not report our findings here, we also ran the same experiment alternatively using images of white or black workers and found no effects. Our treatment manipulations, however, were not as extensive in their use of implicit associations as previous work that has found effects (Mendelberg 2001).

individuals indicated they were willing to write a letter, they were directed to a page with a link to an interest group's website where they filled out their address and personal information and could edit the text that the interest group would send to their member of Congress. In order to assure that respondents who expressed a willingness to act had actually filled out the form we coded individuals who spent less than 20 seconds (about the amount of time it took the authors to speedily fill out the basic information requested) on the interest group's website before continuing with the survey as not having sent a letter to their member of Congress.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Decision to Act Politically**

We begin by comparing the willingness of white respondents to contact their member of Congress about the Regulatory Accountability Act in each condition: the control group (which received no group cue), the racial treatment group, and the non-racial treatment group. Figure 1 shows the percentage of individuals who sent a message to their member of Congress about the Regulatory Accountability Act in the control and experimental groups.

[Figure 1 about here]

The results show the likelihood that a white individual sent a message to their member of Congress through the interest group's website is significantly lower for those who were shown

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<sup>9</sup> While many organizations regularly use click-through rates as a means of analyzing the effectiveness of grassroots appeals (Congressional Management Foundation 2008), because we did not have the ability to assess whether individuals actually filled out the letter and submitted it to be sent to their member of Congress we were forced to rely on an assumption that individuals did fill out the form and then returned to the survey. Respondents were asked to fill out their name, address, and to review the text of the communication that would be sent to the member of Congress. On average, respondents who spent more than 20 seconds spent just under a minute and a half before returning to the survey, with the longest spending five minutes filling out the form and editing the text of the letter. Of the 243 individuals who indicated that they were willing to write a letter to their member of Congress, 135 (64%) of them spent twenty seconds or more. Although ideally we would prefer to have more complete measures of participation, informal conversations with colleagues working in issue advocacy grassroots efforts indicated that our click-through to conversion percentage is roughly in line, or perhaps a little higher than the results that advocacy organizations get from email solicitations, and in line with previous informal analysis (Congressional Management Foundation 2008). Raising the minimum amount of time necessary to be considered as having completed the form to 30 seconds (lowering the completion rate to 48%) has no significant effect on the outcomes.

the appeal containing racial cues. Almost 19% of respondents in the control group which saw no racial or specialized group cue agreed to write the letter to the member of Congress compared to only 12% of those individuals who were shown a treatment containing racial language ( $p < .01$ , two-tailed test). There is, however, no significant difference between the response rates of the control group and those individuals shown the treatment containing language referring to construction workers. This central finding confirms our first hypothesis: that a race specific appeal has a significant and negative influence on mobilizing political action. When compared to the other appeals, the racial appeal leads to significantly less political engagement.

### **The Effect of Racial Resentment**

In order to examine the moderating effect of racial resentment on our outcome of interest, we divide the sample of respondents into those who have high levels of racial resentment and those who have low levels of racial resentment.<sup>10</sup> When we divide the sample in this way, we observe a different pattern of behavior for those with high levels of racial resentment and those with low levels of racial resentment. Figure 2 shows the results for both groups separately. Only 5% of white respondents with high levels of racial resentment who were shown an appeal containing racial cues sent the letter to their member of Congress compared to 17% of similar respondents who were shown appeals without racial cues ( $p < .01$ , two-tailed test).

[Figure 2 about here]

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<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of these figures, we created a scale of racial resentment from zero to one using the responses to the six racial resentment questions. Individuals with a racial resentment score of  $\frac{1}{2}$  or greater were considered to have high racial resentment, and individuals with scores of less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  were considered to have low racial resentment. This divided the sample roughly in half and displays a high level of consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .902$ ). Other alternative cut points resulted in lower levels of consistency measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . In the models detailed further on in the text, however, we use a scale of racial resentment rather than a strict cut point. Those models show the same results.

As expected, while we find strong effects for those individuals with high levels of racial resentment, we find no effect of the racial cue for those with low levels of racial resentment. When presented with the generic appeal, 21% of respondents with low levels of racial resentment sent a letter to their member of Congress, compared to an insignificantly different 20% of those who were presented with the racial primed version of the appeal.

This result confirms our second hypothesis that respondents who score higher on the racial resentment scale will be less likely to mobilize in favor of the race-based appeal. These results show that the negative effect of the race-based appeal is especially strong among those with high levels of racial resentment, while having no significant effect on those with low levels of racial resentment. Simply, race-based appeals do not affect the population in a uniform manner. In the next section, we test whether the source of this opposition is a result of the politics of individualism, as opposed to racial resentment.

### **The Response to Other Specialized Non-Racial Groups**

Although the issue of deregulation is largely considered an item on the conservative agenda, it could be that respondents identified as having higher levels of racial resentment also hold preferences towards policies promoting individualism. In that situation those individuals would oppose policies designed to favor a specific group of individuals regardless of that group's race and ethnicity. To examine this possibility, in Figure 3 we also compare actions taken by those with high levels of racial resentment in the control group to those with high levels of racial resentment who saw a call to action indicating that the effect of the Regulatory Accountability Act would benefit construction workers and building contractors.

[Figure 3 about here]

Unlike the results previously shown in Figure 2, in this case respondents with high levels of racial resentment are no more or less likely to contact their member of Congress after reading a call to action that indicated that the legislation would benefit construction workers and building contractors when compared to similar individuals in the control group. The increase from 17.3% to 17.4% of individuals who contacted their member of Congress is statistically indistinguishable.<sup>11</sup> While an explicit statement indicating that racial minorities will benefit from the implementation of the legislation under consideration substantially decreases the willingness of individuals with racial resentment to take political action, there is no effect on the willingness of these individuals to participate when the benefits are designated to another specific non-racial subgroup. These results confirm our third hypothesis, which is that racially resentful respondents are more likely to mobilize in favor of the non-racial specialized group cue when compared to the race-based group cue.

### **Modeling Race Motivated Political Behavior**

To model the effects of racial resentment on the willingness of individuals to respond to grassroots mobilization, we build a model interacting respondents' racial resentment with the different treatments. In this model, we do not divide respondents into two artificial groups of high and low racial resentment, but rather scale a respondent's answers to the racial resentment questions onto a scale from zero to one. Table 3 contains a logit model predicting the likelihood that a respondent wrote a letter to a member of Congress after reading the appeal to do so. As we have mentioned previously, a common criticism of the racial resentment measure is that it actually captures political conservatism as opposed to racial resentment (Feldman and Huddy

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<sup>11</sup>There is also no significant difference between those individuals with low levels of racial resentment, although, in this case, the percentage of respondents who contacted their member of Congress declined slightly.

2005). As an additional test of the different effects of racial resentment and conservatism above what we have previously done, we add an interaction between being shown the experimental texts and political conservatism of the respondent in a second model to see whether our results are driven by political conservatism.<sup>12</sup> Comparing the coefficients in the racial resentment model and the conservatism model show that our results are not driven by conservatism.

[Table 3 about here]

In the model featuring the racial resentment variables, we find a consistent effect of the interaction between an individual's level of racial resentment and having seen the appeal containing racial cues. While the appeal containing the racial prime does not have an independent significant negative effect on the likelihood that the respondent will take action, those individuals who have higher levels of racial resentment are less likely to act when presented with a call to action that contains racial cues.

This response, however, is not the result of a conservative worldview that discourages government intervention or assistance. If the results are driven by political conservatism, we should expect respondents with a conservative ideology to disengage when shown both specialized group cues.<sup>13</sup> However, the second model shows the conservatism interaction to be insignificant with the racial cue and positive and significant with the non-racial specialized group cue. The insignificance of the conservatism interaction in conjunction with the significance of

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<sup>12</sup> Although we have previously demonstrated that random assignment was successfully implemented, we also tested models that contained a battery of socioeconomic and controls routinely found to influence an individual's participation rates, as well as summary variables for an individual's political involvement in a range of political participatory activities in the past four years. The addition of these controls does not change the effects.

<sup>13</sup> One might be concerned that businesses looking to hire minority employees might be viewed as "progressive" by conservative respondents. If so, we would expect ideology to have a negative effect when interacted with the racial priming treatment, and not racial resentment. We do not find that to be the case, suggesting that the decreased willingness of individuals to write their member of Congress after reading the text containing the racial and ethnic cues was not the result of conservatives being disinclined to support businesses they perceived to be progressive.

the racial resentment interaction indicates that the racial resentment measure captures racial attitudes that the conservatism measure does not.

In addition, we should expect conservatives to support regulatory reforms that would lessen the role of government intervention in the business world. In confirmation of this, we find that individuals with a conservative ideology were marginally, albeit not quite significantly, more likely to respond to the call to action about regulatory burdens than the general public.

Interestingly, the interaction between conservatism and the construction worker appeal is significant and positive, indicating that those who are politically conservative are actually more likely to support a construction worker appeal. We interpret this result to mean that political conservatives can be influenced by certain non-racialized group-specific appeals. Our findings indicate that respondents with higher levels of racial resentment were not acting in response to a conservative world view that disdains acting in support of a policy aimed at a specialized subgroup. Instead, these individuals were disinclined to support policies that specifically target ethnic minorities.

To illustrate the racial resentment interaction more meaningfully, we plot the predicted probability of political mobilization based on differing levels of racial resentment, while holding the other contributing factors at their means. These results are illustrated in Figure 4. As an individual's level of racial resentment increases from zero to one, the likelihood of an individual in the control group sending a letter to their member of Congress does not vary. The change in likelihood of those in the racial cue treatment group writing a member of Congress, however, decreases significantly and substantially from just under 19% to under 6%, as a respondent's level of racial resentment increases from zero to one.

[Figure 4 about here]

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our primary goal in this paper was to study the unexplored link between racial priming and political behavior. The findings presented here reflect previous findings that race plays a significant role in the public's evaluation of policy. More importantly, however, they also show that the addition of a racial cue has a significant influence on the decision of individuals to participate in the political process. Expressed opposition to public policies does not appear to be mere cheap talk, but also has a large effect on political behaviors as well. The effect of framing a policy as benefiting minorities has a significant effect, not only on the opinions of whites, but also on their willingness to become involved. The choices groups make to frame political debates not only affect public opinions, but they also affect the dynamics of who chooses to become involved in the political process. We show that those with higher levels of racial resentment are less likely to be willing to take political action in support of a cause that they perceive as benefitting ethnic and racial minorities.

Prior studies have tried to link racial attitudes with policy attitudes, but it has proven difficult to determine whether opposition to these policies is the result of racial animus or the politics of individualism (Kinder and Sanders 1996, Sniderman and Carmines 1997, Feldman and Huddy 2005). Taken in their totality, our findings have significant implications in the study of how racial attitudes affect political behavior. By using a policy that conservatives should support, we differentiate between the effect of a conservative ideology (a positive effect) and the effect of racial resentment (a negative effect) on the likelihood of an individual taking political action in response to an appeal that contained racial cues. The results of this study show that the pervasiveness of negative racial attitudes reaches into other aspects of political behavior. The magnitude of our results suggest that racial animus may manifest itself even more significantly in other types of political behavior that have not been traditionally studied in the literature.

Why might racial attitudes have such a strong effect on political engagement? The decision to engage in politics is an action that is distinct from the expression of political attitudes (Schuman and Presser 1980; Stout and Kline 2008). Recent work has suggested that social constructs play a role in the decision to vote and that political participation is a means of social expression (Garcia Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Rogers, Fox, and Gerber 2012). Race and ethnicity are key constructs in the creation of a social identity and the identification of in-group and out-group perceptions (Kinder and Kam 2010). As such, the connection of race to a social identity could play a large role in the decision to participate in a range of political activities.

Another possible explanation is that respondents might be less likely to racially self-monitor in an experiment about political engagement as opposed to a study that explicitly tries to link racial attitudes to political attitudes. Racial self-monitoring has been found to have a significant effect on political behavior (Terkildsen 1993). Our test may be capturing the effect of racial attitudes without the moderating effect of racial self-monitoring.

The implications of our study are potentially far-reaching. Political action has a significant influence on public policy by acting as a direct link between citizens and their elected representatives and is considered one of the central pillars of a healthy and responsible democracy (Ainsworth 1993; Bergan 2009; Butler and Nickerson 2011; Cigler and Loomis 2011; Kollman 1998). If racial attitudes have such a significant effect on political engagement, it is feasible that political elites or interest groups could use racial priming, either intentionally or unintentionally, to motivate or demotivate political action. In addition, as America becomes an increasingly diverse country, race will also likely become a more prevalent influence on our political and social identities (Craig and Richeson 2014). Given the changing racial dynamics in America, the pervasive effect of race on political action may become even more significant over time.

While we find strong evidence that racial cues can demotivate whites from participating politically, we recognize that this study remains narrow in its focus. In this study, we focus on race as primarily a demotivating variable in political action among whites. We also believe it is theoretically plausible that racial cues could motivate these same individuals to participate. Racial cues, along with the right political action appeals, could possibly move those with high-degrees of racial resentment into political action. Likewise, racial cues might also be an effective tool in mobilizing minority groups into political action as well. The results from this study open up new avenues of research in order explore these possibilities.

In closing, while others have suggested that the effects of race no longer influence the actual political behaviors of white Americans, we find evidence to the contrary. We find that that race continues to play a significant and substantial role in the decision of white Americans to participate in political activities. Racial primes reduce the likelihood that white Americans will respond to grassroots mobilization techniques commonly found in political calls to action.

## Appendix

The full text of the baseline appeal to action with the racial prime in parentheses and italics was as follows, with the bold emphasis is in the original:

“Our nation’s economic recovery needs job growth. Yet, increased regulatory burdens are instead stopping companies from hiring, with employers citing 'regulatory uncertainty' as their top reason for their inability to hire new (*racial and ethnic minority*) workers and get our economy moving again. (*The group most hurt by these unfair regulations is minority workers.*) According to the Small Business Administration, the annual cost of federal regulations increased to more than \$1.75 trillion in 2008. While all citizens pay some portion of these costs, the distribution of the burden heavily falls on businesses, with small businesses bearing the largest impact. This is one of the major barriers to increasing employment (*among minorities*). However, recently the Regulatory Accountability act was introduced in the House and Senate to improve accountability and the integrity of the rulemaking process.

**We need your support to reform the way regulation is formed in Washington and help businesses hire more (*minority*) workers. If you are willing to write a letter to your senator to tell your members of Congress to support the Regulatory Accountability Act, which would update the process by which federal agencies promulgate regulations, easing the burden on small businesses and allowing businesses to hire new workers and decrease the nation’s unemployment rate (*among minorities*), please check yes below.”**

The full text of the appeal to action that included the construction workers and building contractor prime was as follows, with the bold emphasis is in the original:

“Our nation’s economic recovery needs job growth. Yet, increased regulatory burdens are instead stopping companies from hiring, with employers citing 'regulatory uncertainty' as their

top reason for their inability to hire new workers and get our economy moving again. The group most hurt by these unfair regulations is building contractors and construction workers.

According to the Small Business Administration, the annual cost of federal regulations increased to more than \$1.75 trillion in 2008. While all citizens pay some portion of these costs, the distribution of the burden heavily falls on businesses, with small businesses and building contractors bearing the largest impact. This is one of the major barriers to increasing employment among construction workers. However, recently the Regulatory Accountability act was introduced in the House and Senate to improve accountability and the integrity of the rulemaking process.

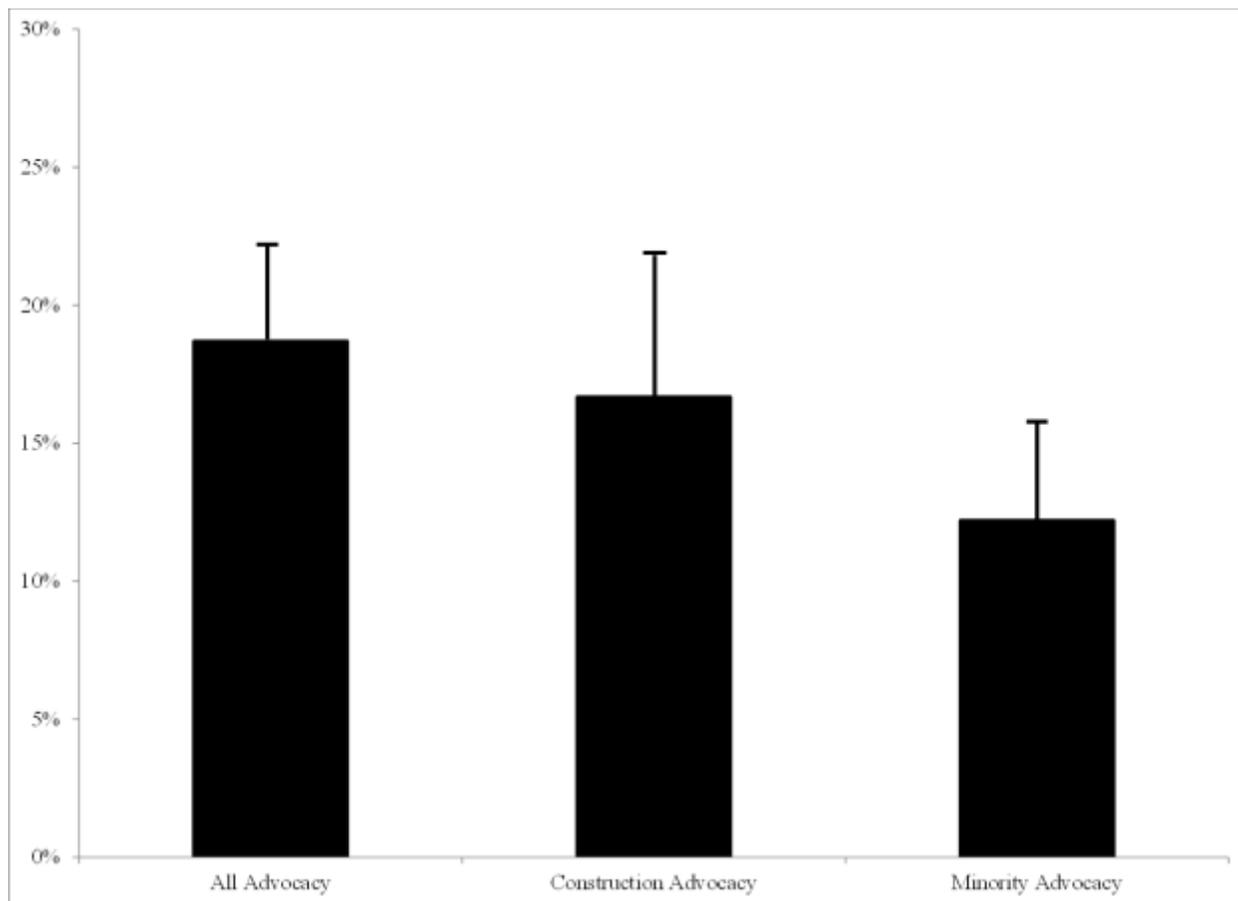
**We need your support to reform the way regulation is formed in Washington and help businesses, especially building contractors, hire more workers. If you are willing to write a letter to your senator to tell your members of Congress to support the Regulatory Accountability Act, which would update the process by which federal agencies promulgate regulations, easing the burden on small businesses and allowing building contractors to hire new construction workers and decrease the nation's unemployment rate in the construction industry, please check yes below.”**

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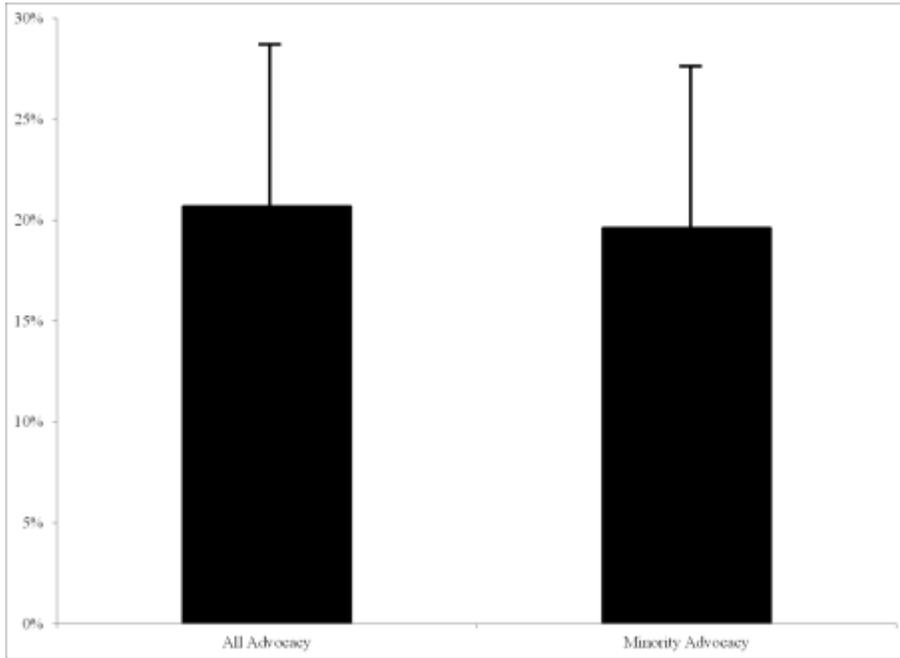
The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

Figure 1  
Percentage of Respondents Who Wrote their Member of Congress

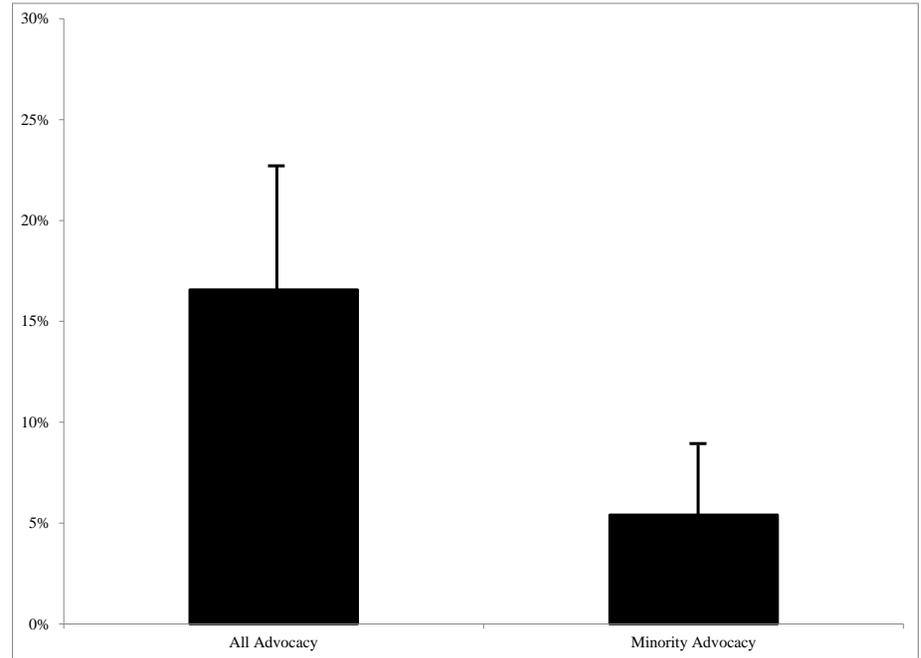


Note: There is a significant difference between response rate to the Minority Advocacy appeal and the Control (All Advocacy),  $p < .05$ . There is no significant difference between the Construction Advocacy appeal and the Control.

Figure 2  
Percentage of Respondents Who Wrote their Member of Congress by Levels of Racial Resentment



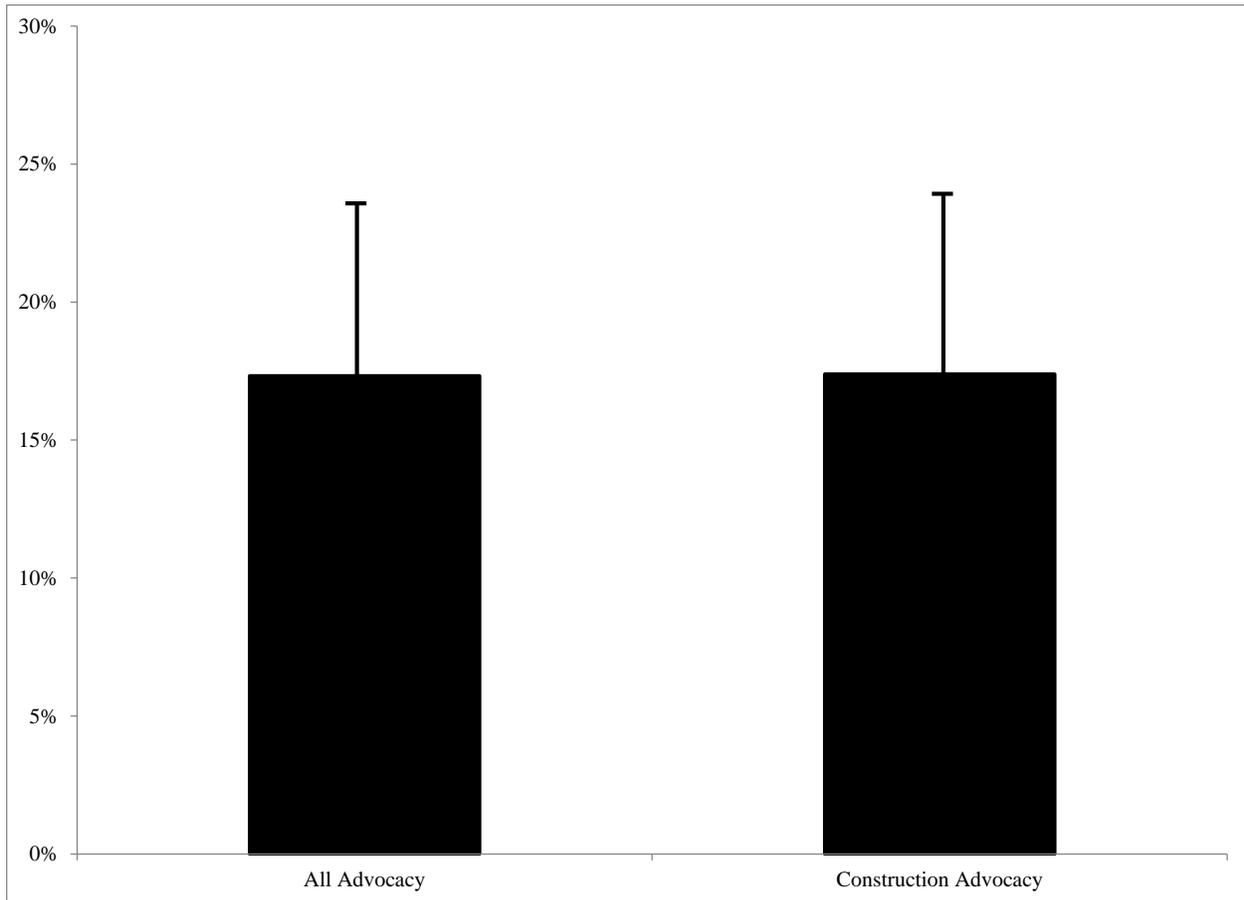
Respondents with Low Levels of Racial Resentment



Respondents with High Levels of Racial Resentment

Note: The difference between the response rates to the two calls to action for individuals with high levels of racial resentment is significant at  $p < .01$ . There is no significant difference between the response rates of individuals with low levels of racial resentment.

Figure 3  
Percentage of Respondents with High Levels of Racial Resentment Who Wrote their Member of Congress



Note: There is no significant difference between the response rates to the two calls to action for individuals with high levels of racial resentment to the treatment (Construction Advocacy) and the control (All Advocacy).

Figure 4  
Likelihood of Respondent Contacting Member of Congress

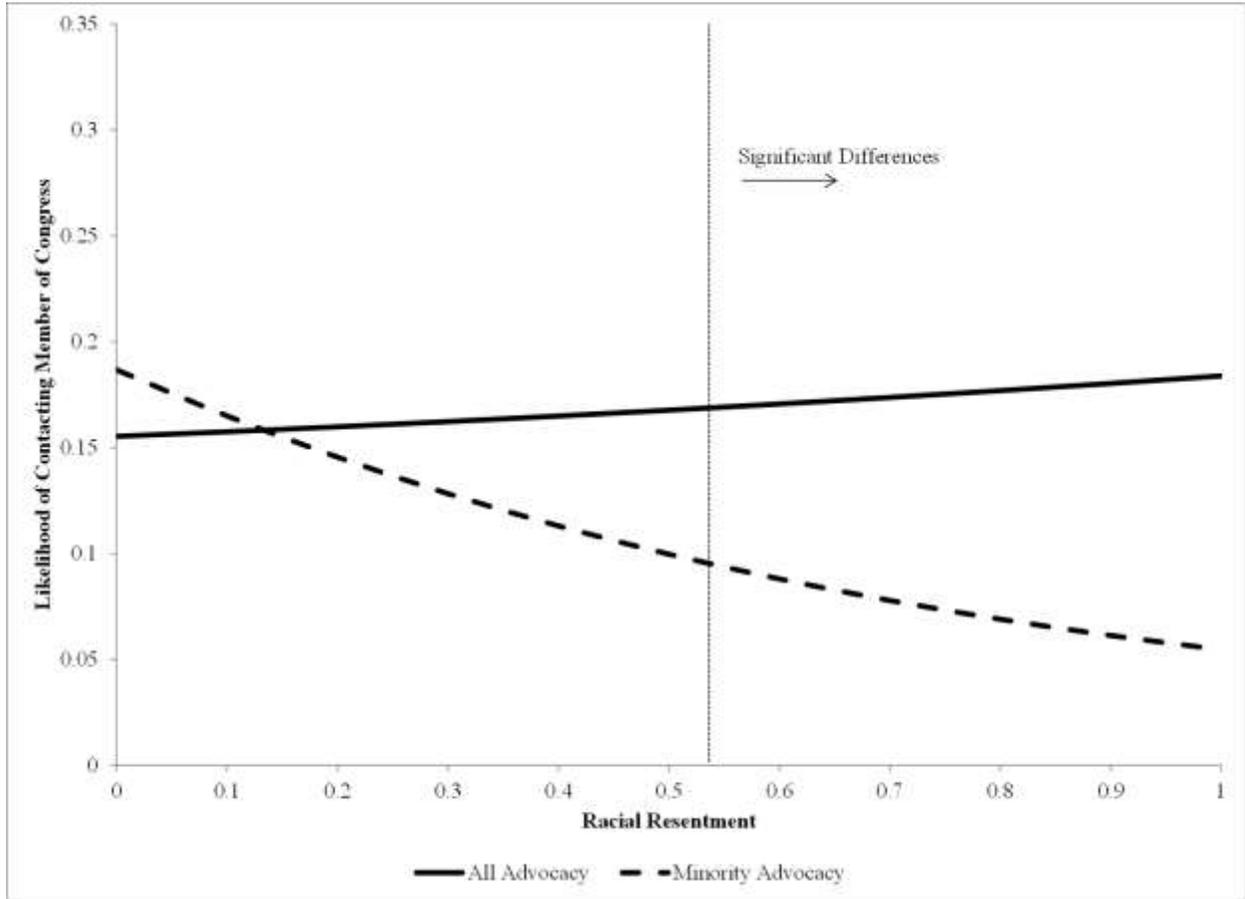


Table 1  
 Comparison of Survey Sample to 2010 ANES Evaluations of Government and Society Study II

	Survey Sample	ANES 2010
% Voted in 2008 Election	68.89	78.04
% Previously Contacted Public Official	43.47	20.88
% Volunteered with a Campaign	9.17	6.79
% with Income <\$40K	63.61	28.29
% with less than a College Degree	50.56	66.77
% Under 35	64.86	18.72
% Conservative or Very Conservative	21.38	28.19
% Republican	19.59	33.02
% No Racial Resentment	31.90	22.95

Table 2  
 Comparison of Racial-Resentment and Conservatism Among Whites in the Sample

<b>Levels of Racial Resentment</b>	Frequency	Percent
Racial-Resentment 1	135	18.75
Racial-Resentment 2	84	11.67
Racial-Resentment 3	88	12.22
Racial-Resentment 4	96	13.33
Racial-Resentment 5	94	13.06
Racial-Resentment 6	116	16.11
Racial-Resentment 7	107	14.86
<b>Ideology</b>		
Very Liberal	119	16.53
Liberal	249	34.58
Moderate	198	27.50
Conservative	131	18.19
Very Conservative	23	3.19

Table 3  
Likelihood of Individuals Contacting Member of Congress

	(1)	(2)
	Wrote Letter	Wrote Letter
Race Primed Appeal	0.062 (0.406)	-0.393 (0.437)
Construction Primed Appeal	-0.493 (0.440)	-1.230** (0.485)
Racial Resentment	-0.395 (0.507)	-0.641 (0.356)
Racial Resentment X Race Appeal	-1.621* (0.784)	
Racial Resentment X Construction Appeal	0.507 (0.717)	
Conservative Ideology	0.592 (0.466)	-0.044 (0.649)
Conservatism X Race Appeal		-0.634 (0.990)
Conservatism X Construction Appeal		2.519** (0.954)
Constant	-1.508** (0.466)	-1.136** (0.294)
Observations	720	720
Pseudo R-Squared	0.026	0.0323
Log-Likelihood	-298.0	-296.2

Logit Coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

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