

U.S. National Elections

17.263/264

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Week 4: Identities

The Undecideds

[http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/
video/undecided-voter/n27698](http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/undecided-voter/n27698)

Themes of the Day

- 1 Social groups and identities are **fundamental** to social life.
→ Race, religion, gender
- 2 Social identities both **unite** and **divide**.
- 3 Social identities are **constructed** and **elective**.
- 4 The effects of social identities depend on **context**.

Key Terms: group threat, social contact, racial resentment, linked fate

Social Identity

- Groups are an essential part of social life and identity.
 - **Cognitive**: simplify by categorizing (schemas, stereotypes)
 - **Motivational**: self-worth through positive differentiation
- Social identity is partially **elective** (choose-able):
membership → identification → consciousness
- **Intersectionality**: male *and* white *and* Hispanic *and* young *and* evangelical *and* veteran *and* American. . .

Minimal Group Paradigm

Kandinsky...



Image is in the public domain.

or Klee?



Image is in the public domain.

Realistic Interests

- Minimal group paradigm characterizes social identity as easily altered, but is this realistic? Why are certain distinctions/groups salient while others are not?
- Groups have real differences in interests.
→ whites and blacks in the plantation South

Competing Hypotheses About Context

- 1 Group Threat:** antipathy towards other group increases with proximity (competition, threat)
 - Natural experiment in Chicago: demolition of black housing project \implies drop in white turnout in surrounding area
- 2 Social Contact:** prejudice reduced by social contact with other group (under equal, non-competitive conditions)
- 3 Selection:** people **choose** their neighborhood (or friends, etc.) based on their preferences \rightarrow homophily

Romney and Mormonism

- Mormons are like an ethnic group: **distinctive** culture and **insular** social networks → **disliked** by outsiders (as are Muslims, Buddhists, and the non-religious)
- Campbell et al. argue for a “curvilinear” version of the **social contact** hypothesis:
 - social contact fosters acceptance of Mormons (and Romney) only if it is extensive, not just in passing

- What **evidence** do Campbell et al. provide?
- What would a critique of this argument based on a **group threat** or **selection** hypothesis look like?
- Are there other possible explanations besides “irrational” antipathy towards Mormons?

The Two Sides of Mormonism

- Romney probably has/will be **hurt** among Republican primary voters who dislike Mormons.
 - objections in the conservative evangelical community
- He also **benefits** from the overwhelming support of Mormons (90%+ in Republican primaries and $\times 2$ turnout).
 - “**linked fate**”: group members (originally blacks) see their individual wellbeing as linked to that of group
- Will these patterns persist in the general election? Why might we expect them to disappear?

A Brief History of Racism in America

- Ideology of **white supremacy** used to justify domination over non-whites, especially Indians and blacks but eventually other groups (e.g., Chinese)
- Decline of “old-fashioned” racism since 1940s
- Today, near-universal endorsement of **egalitarian** norms
- But negative feelings and unfavorable stereotypes persist → tension between **explicit** and **implicit** attitudes (IAT)
- Racism has been partially folded into **conservatism** (partisan realignment) → welfare, affirmative action, crime

Racial Resentment / Symbolic Racism

- **Anti-black** affect (feelings) plus **conservative** values:
 - 1 Blacks no longer face much **discrimination**.
 - 2 Black disadvantage due to poor **work** ethic.
 - 3 Blacks **demand** too much, too fast.
 - 4 Blacks have gotten more than they **deserve**.
- 0 – 1 scale, with most on racially conservative side (> 0.5)
- Result of early **socialization**, not self-interest (threat)
- Puzzle: Racial resentment has moderately increased since 1980s (though didn't change in response to Obama).

More Key Terms

- **Accessibility:** degree to which an attitude or predisposition is at the front of one's mind; may be chronic or temporary
- **Racialization:** degree to which racial predispositions influence political evaluations
→ affected by context (framing, **priming**)

Hillary vs. Barack, 2008



Image is an Official White House Photo and is in the public domain.

Why was the 2008 Democratic primary such a good context for studying the effects of racial resentment?

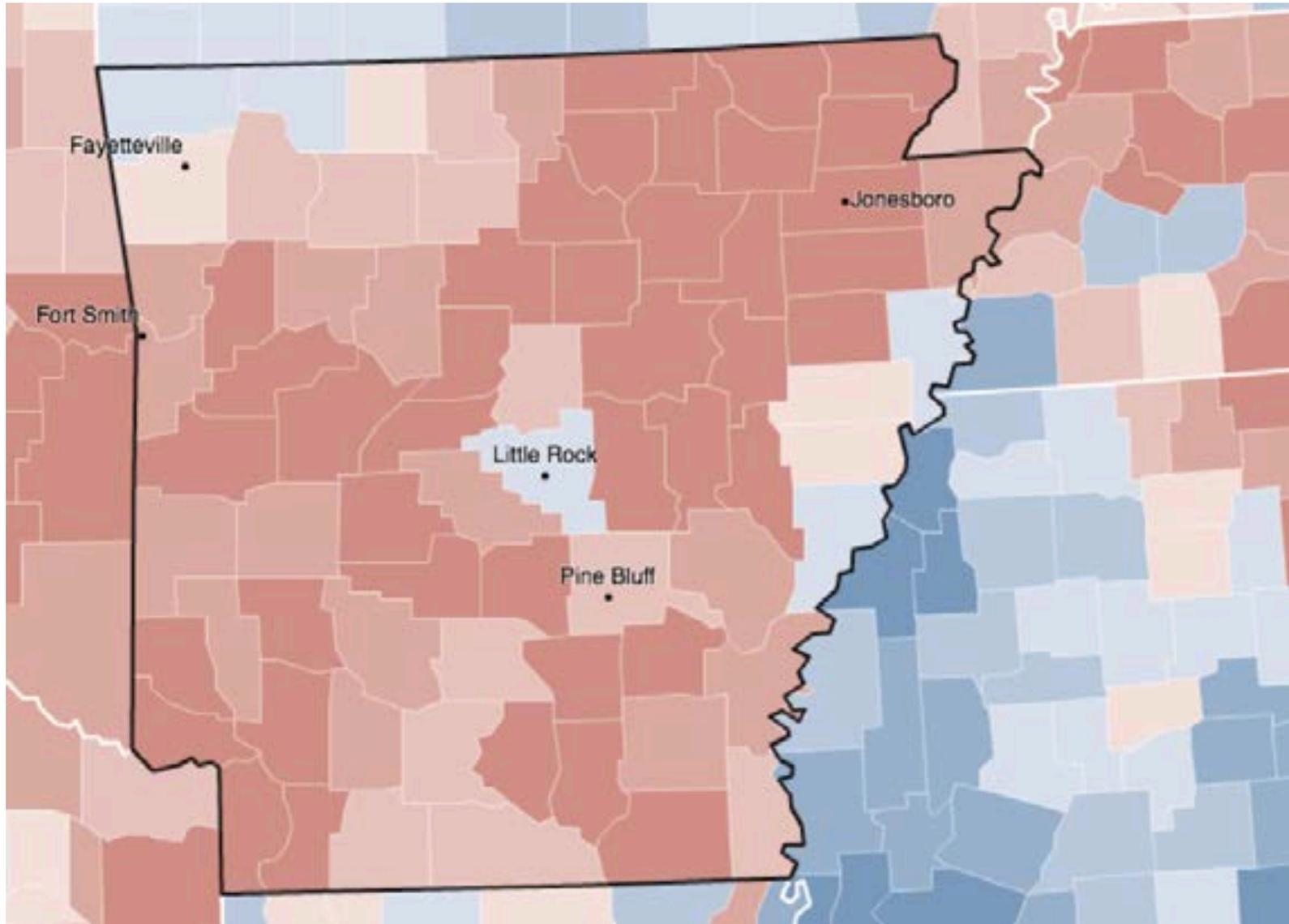
Obama's Race: The Democratic Primary

- Racial predispositions were **chronically accessible** in 2008.
→ What are the implications of this fact?
- **Two sides of racialization:**
 - 1 Racial conservatives \implies unusually low support for Obama
 - 2 Racial liberals \implies unusually high support for Obama
→ eventually, overwhelming black support (linked fate)
- Paradox: **gender** conservatives support Clinton (how?)

Obama's Race: The General Election

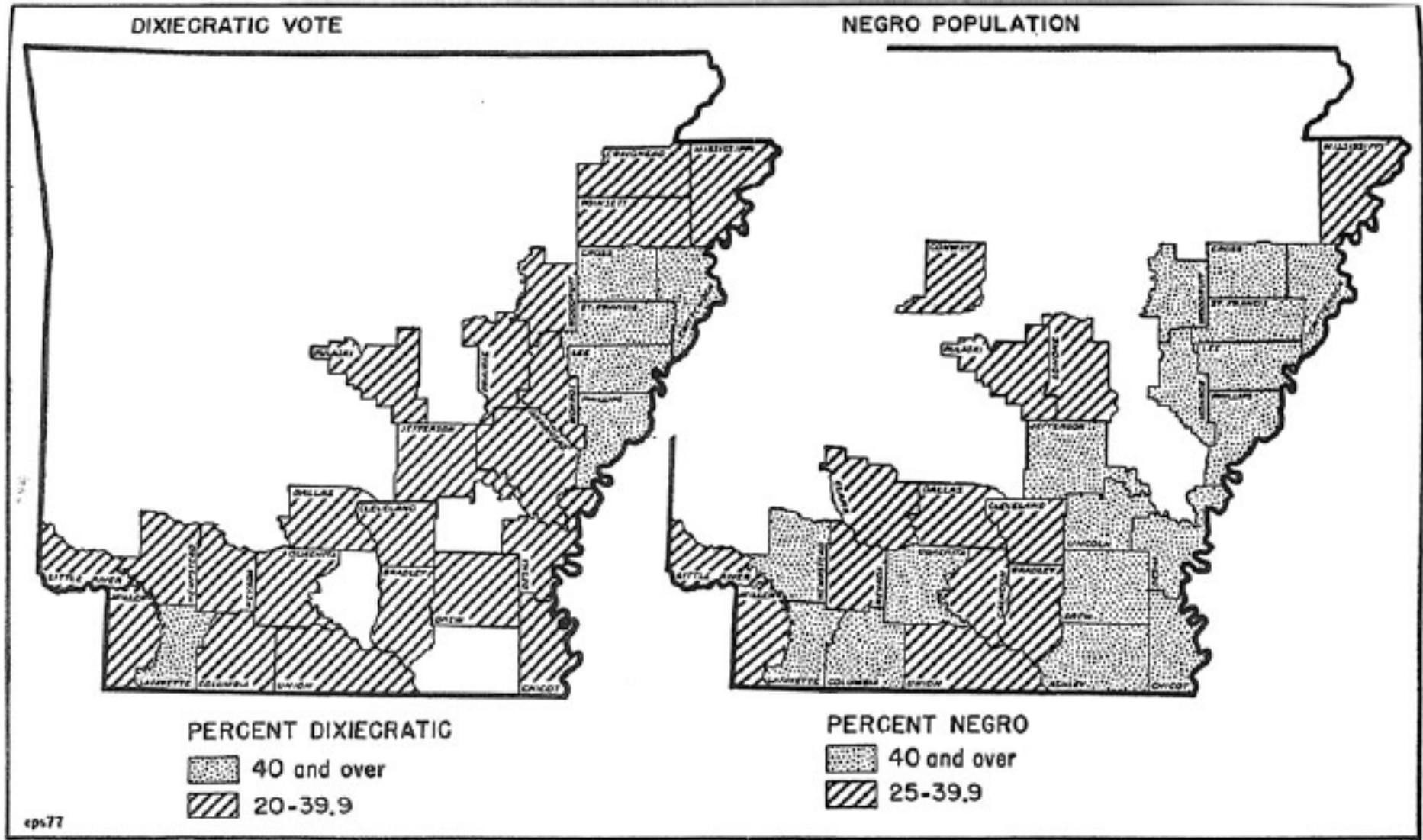
- How might we expect the racialization patterns in the primary to change in the general election against McCain?

Obama's and the *Southern* white working class



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“Dixiecrat” Vote in Arkansas, 1948 (V. O. Key)



The Effect of Being Black

Was Obama **helped or hurt** by being black? In other words, did being black cause Obama to do better or worse than he would otherwise have done?

- Difficulty of defining counterfactual
- Potential baselines
 - Everyone racially liberal
 - Everyone at midpoint (0.5)
 - Forecasting models (“candidate-less”)

Obama's First Term

- **Spillover of racialization:** Americans brought their attitudes towards policies and personalities associated with Obama in line with their racial attitudes (tax policy, health care).
- What are the **future** political implications of racialization?
 - 2012 election
 - Policymaking

Racial Resentment Scale

- 1 “Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.”
- 2 “Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.”
- 3 “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.”
- 4 “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.”

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