We are One: Understanding the Maintenance of Black Democratic Party Loyalty

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Abstract
Despite growing ideological diversity within the group, black Americans have been able to maintain their overwhelmingly unified support for the Democratic Party. We argue that black Democratic partisanship is upheld, in part, through black Americans’ use of social sanctions (both positive and negative) to encourage compliance with a group norm of Democratic Party support. Leveraging the exogenous assignment of racial social context provided by the race of interviewer in face-to-face American National Election survey interviews of black respondents, we demonstrate the racialized social imperative of black Democratic Party identification. We show that black respondents are more likely to identify as Democrats in the presence of other blacks, particularly those whose conservative ideological placement provides cross-pressuring incentive to otherwise make an alternative partisan choice. Our social explanation of black partisan homogeneity is a significant departure from previous accounts that have focused almost exclusively on attitudinal ascriptions to racial shared fate.

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Much has been made of African Americans’ nearly unanimous support for the Democratic Party in the post-Civil Rights era. Indeed, since 1976 black support for Democratic presidential candidates has rarely dipped below 80% and has exceeded 90% in some elections. In explaining blacks’ unified commitment to the Democratic Party, scholars often point to the presidential election of 1964, Democratic support for the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1965 Voting Right Act as defining moments that crystallized the idea of the Democrats as the party of black interests (Rigueur 2014). While important, it is not obvious that events from over fifty years ago can explain why the unanimous black support for the Democratic Party remains steadfast, particularly in the face of growing political conservatism within the black community (Tate 2010).

In fact, the curiosity of blacks’ persistently high levels of Democratic identification becomes more striking when placed alongside the trends of increasing ideological sorting across parties for other racial/ethnic groups in recent years. And while research has cast doubt on the idea that liberal/conservative ideology is the primary basis for citizen’s partisanship (Converse 1964; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), for white and Hispanic Americans, at least, the two beliefs are certainly strongly related. Using data from the 2012 and 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys, figures 1a and 1b demonstrate the strong connection between Democratic Party identification and liberal/conservative ideology for white and Hispanic Americans. However, the figures also demonstrate that the relationship between black Democratic identification and liberal/conservative ideology is remarkably weak. Of particular note: approximately 75 percent of self-identified black conservatives still identify as Democrats.²

² The 2012 and 2016 ANES did not include a sufficient number of Asian Americans with which to replicate this analysis.
Figure 1. Probability of Identifying as a Democrat by Ideology and Race, 95% Confidence Intervals

2012 ANES

2016 ANES

Note: Results are marginal effects of the bivariate relationship between ideology and Democratic Party identification with 95% confidence intervals. These results are only for respondents interviewed in face-to-face ANES interviews.

In this paper, we take up and answer the question of why black conservatives are so unwilling to abandon the Democratic Party. We contend that supporting the Democratic Party is understood by black Americans as a normalized form of black political behavior, a behavioral choice for which blacks hold one another accountable. This explanation builds on work in role identity theory, which highlights that social interactions inform how individuals see themselves as members of a group. In-group connectedness therefore provides social accountability as a constraint on black political behavior, and the social benefits of conformity and likely social consequences for defection from expected group behavior are made salient even by the simple presence of other in-group members. Thus, high degrees of social interconnection among blacks constrain even those who have ideological reasons to defect from the group norm of supporting the Democratic Party (i.e., black conservatives) from doing so.

We test our argument by leveraging data from social interactions during the face-to-face survey interview process. We find that when asked to report their party identification in face-to-face
surveys, the presence of a black interviewer powerfully constrains black respondents’ willingness to identify as anything other than a Democrat. The differences in party identification across race of interviewer are most pronounced among exactly those whose individual preferences and social identification diverge: blacks who identify as ideologically conservative. We interpret this as evidence to support the argument that racialized behavioral expectations, not just shared policy attitudes or group affinities, play an important role in the maintenance of black political unity.

**Understanding Black Partisanship**

The dominant theoretical perspective for understanding attitudinal constraints on black political opinions has been Dawson’s (1994) black utility heuristic model. Dawson’s central idea is that of a notion of shared or linked fate—that African Americans have come to see their individual interests as inseparable from the interests of the larger racial group. The interests of the racial group thus become central to black political judgements via cues that activate this latent predisposition (White 2007).

Linked fate is commonly measured by just a single survey question that asks blacks whether they think that what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in their individual lives. Dawson and others have shown that not only do a high proportion of African Americans agree with this statement, but also that their endorsement of linked fate is a reliable predictor of a range of political positions, namely support for racial policies and black political figures (Allen, Dawson, and Brown 1989; Brown and Shaw 2002; Dawson 1994, 2003; Gay 2004; Gurin, Hatchett, Jackson 1990; Hajnal and Lee 2011; Miller, Gurin, Gurin and Malanchuk 1981; Simien 2005; White 2007).

Yet, the linked fate paradigm is not without its limitations. In particular, linked fate does not seem to be particularly useful in explaining black Democratic Party identification (Hutchings and Jefferson 2014). Indeed, while Dawson’s own work frequently alludes to a connection between black
group interest, as measured by linked fate, and party identification, there is, in fact, little empirical
evidence demonstrating such a relationship, and a growing number of studies showing at best a
weak or conditional relationship between Democratic Party identification and linked fate (Hajnal

We took up our own analysis on the connection between linked fate and black identification
with the Democratic Party by analyzing six different surveys\(^3\) that span more than thirty years, from
1984 to 2016. For each survey, we built a simple model of Democratic identification that included
controls for age, sex, education and liberal/conservative ideology. The predicted effect of black
linked fate on blacks’ willingness to identify as Democrats across the surveys is presented in Figure
2. As the figure illustrates, the connection between the linked fate measure and Democratic Party
identification is, in nearly all cases, weak or nonexistent. Although higher levels of linked fate
generally do appear to increase the probability of a black person identifying as a Democrat, the
average effect size of linked fate across all these data sources is about four percentage points. At no
point does the probability of low linked fate blacks identifying as Democrats dip below .80. If linked
fate plays a significant role in explaining black Democratic partisanship, it is not in the
straightforward way alluded to by Dawson.

\(^3\) All 6 surveys are probability samples with over-samples of black Americans.
Figure 2.
Relationship Between Linked Fate and Democratic Party Identification

Note: Includes controls for age, sex, education and liberal/conservative ideology. Bivariate models produce similarly small relationships. Results represent the marginal effect of linked fate on Democratic Party identification with 95% confidence intervals. Results from the 2012 and 2016 ANES only include data from face-to-face interviews.

Perhaps one might reason that linked fate fails to empirically predict Democratic Party identification is because there is so little variation in Democratic Party identification to be explained.
We are less concerned, however, with the empirical predictive power of linked fate for Democratic Party identification than with its theoretical purchase. In Dawson’s linked fate framework, support for the Democratic Party is expected even for those whose ideological, class, or other individual interests do not align very well with that of the Democratic Party’s platform because they perceive the Democratic Party to be more likely to represent the interests of blacks as group (Dawson 2003; xii). Put more simply, linked fate makes Democrats of even black conservatives because race still aligns their interests with those of the group. It is this particular theoretical argument that we take on in our investigation of black conservatives’ loyalty to the Democratic Party.  

It remains unclear, however, why individual black Americans, like black conservatives, with self-interested or ideological incentives to support the Republican Party would not simply rationalize the Republican Party’s positions on race to bring them more in line with their own beliefs. Republicans, after all, frequently offer explanations for why it would be in black Americans’ collective and individual interests to support the Republican Party. Many of the limited government, self-help, personal responsibility, and moral arguments offered to blacks by Republicans are couched in terms of black empowerment and racial group uplift. Why, then, would those blacks who see it in their individual or ideological interest to support the Republican Party not simply use these arguments as a means of resolving the linked fate dissonance?

Role Identity

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4 We recognize that the explanation we will offer in this paper to explain why black conservatives are loyal to the Democratic Party is potentially one of several. However, we place our focus on challenging Dawson’s linked fate framework because it is the predominant theory used to explain black political behavior and decision-making.
To resolve our questions about the tenuous connection between linked fate and black Democratic Party identification in the face of cross-cutting pressures, we turn to work on role identities (Turner 1978; Stryker 1980; Hogg, Terry and White 1995). What role identity theory (sometimes known as Identity Theory, see Hogg, Terry and White 1995) offers is an interpretation of black political behavior that centers on the shared social understandings and expectations that have grown out of these experiences as well as the internalization of shared experiences. Frequently used to explain gender identity, role identity theorists consider one’s sense of self to be the outcome of the individual’s interactions with others (Mead 1934) and not simply the result of a mere psychological connection with a social category (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Hogg et al (1995) describe role identities as “self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves…Ultimately it is through social interaction that identities actually acquire self-meaning; they are reflexive” (256-257). The theory also focuses on the expectations of other group members and how group members will respond to noncompliance with group expectations. Hogg et al (1995) state:

...a role is a set of expectations prescribing behavior that is considered appropriate by others … The perception that one is enacting a role satisfactorily should enhance feelings of self-esteem, whereas perceptions of poor role performance may engender doubts about one's self-worth, and may even produce symptoms of psychological distress ... Distress may arise if feedback from others—in the form of reflected appraisals or perceptions of the self-suggested by others’ behavior—is perceived to be incongruent with one's identity. (p.257)

A focus on role identity would alter the way we understand black political decision-making by moving our attention away from a perspective that necessitates a strict connection between individual and group interest, to a focus on relational interactions that would account for both
interpersonal interactions and importantly intra-racial norms and expectations (Brewer 2001) about how one should behave politically as a black person.

Although they do not explicitly reference role identity theory, this is essentially what White, Laird and Allen (2014) describe in their discussion of their experiments examining black political decision making during the 2012 election. In an effort to understand how blacks make tradeoffs between group and simple self-interest, White et al. (2014) demonstrate that social pressure from other blacks to conform to expectations of “black” political behavior can powerfully constrain black political decisions. While persuasive, the applicability of the White et al (2014) argument to understanding black decision making in different political contexts, and to specifically explaining black partisan homogeneity, remains somewhat unclear. By applying the insights gained from role identity theory and White et al (2014), to the understanding of black partisanship, we are better able to understand how norms and expectations of partisan identification get enforced within an individual’s dominant racial context. In short, in order to understand the maintenance of black partisan solidarity, we must consider how role identity and intra-racial social constraint influence black political behavior.

We argue that many years of essentially undifferentiated black support for the Democratic Party have resulted in the normalization of Democratic Party identification within the black community, such that identifying as a Democrat is a well-understood expectation within the black community of how one should behave politically. Awareness of these expectations is illustrated nicely in the results of a 2016 survey conducted by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Research. In a nationally representative sample of black and white Obama voters, researchers asked the following question: “If you had instead voted for Romney/Ryan in 2012, to what extent would your friends/family members be supportive of this decision.” The survey found that while the vast majority of African American Obama voters (75%) felt that their friends and family members would
not be supportive of such a decision, only a little more than half of white Obama voters (54%) reported the same. This result suggests that African Americans face a unique set of expectations (or norms) of political behavior that they understand as likely enforced through close social ties with other blacks. These expectations, we argue, have led to an understanding within the black community that supporting the Democratic Party is “just something that black people do.” Given the widespread reinforcement of this norm, through repeated observation that most blacks do in fact support the Democratic Party, the act of publicly supporting the Democratic Party among blacks could reasonably be seen as a racial identity (or role) confirming behavior that individual blacks perform in an attempt to obtain social confirmation or status from other blacks. Once this behavior is confirmed and/or rewarded, individual blacks then come to see these acts as linked to identity affirmation and thus the behavior is repeated. Likewise, publicly supporting the Republican Party would likely be viewed as an anti-social or anti-group behavior as it reflects a rejection of the expected group behavior.

**Race of Interviewer Analysis**

*Design*

To demonstrate the process by which black party unity is maintained through racialized social pressure to comply with black role expectations, we leverage the interracial constraints on black political beliefs created through the assignment of black and white interviewers to black respondents during the face-to-face survey interviews of the cumulative American National Election Study.

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5 We use only face-to-face interviews because they more accurately capture meaningful social interactions.
The analysis of the cumulative ANES includes all years that the ANES recorded interviewer race (black/non-black) for face-to-face interviews. These years include 1988, 1992, 1996, 2008 and 2012. For many of the midterm elections the ANES conducted telephone interviews. The 2000 ANES was also conducted via telephone. We did not use the 2004 ANES since interviewer race was only recorded as white or nonwhite. In an effort to avoid contamination effects all analysis relies only on pre-election interviews.

While the 2016 ANES was available at the time of the submission of this paper, its interviewer characteristics measures were not yet available.
face interviews but also conducted simultaneous interviews online. The use of the data from the online interview sample will give us something approximating a control group, allowing us to compare how blacks would respond to identical questions without the biases associated with an interviewer’s presence.

This design allows us the ability to leverage these counterfactual conditions to better understand how radicalized social constraint shapes black partisanship. We are also moving beyond simple attitudinal models of party identification to examining how social context affects partisan political behavior. It is also important to note that black and white interviewers in face-to-face surveys are not typically randomly assigned to respondents. Our own correspondence with ANES officials and documentation from the organization that conducts the GSS suggests that while interviewers are certainly not able to select respondents (or vice versa), interviewers do tend to come from geographic areas proximate to the respondent which may be the same city or region.\(^8\) While we have no reason to believe this would bias blacks’ responses to the party identification question, we nonetheless think it prudent to account for possible confounders that may emerge from this assignment strategy. Thus, we attempt to account for the lack of random assignment in several ways. First, we attempt to ensure the reliability of the results by replicating the analyses in multiple years of the ANES and GSS cumulative data files that contain race of interviewer data. This includes the 1988, 1992, 1996, 2008 and 2012 ANES surveys and 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016 for the GSS.\(^9\) Assuming that any biases that exist are not likely to manifest in the same way across all years of both the ANES and the GSS our ability to replicate the effects across time and study


\(^9\) Others have done analysis of race of interviewer effects using earlier years of the ANES however this information is not included in the current ANES cumulative data file.
should increase confidence that any relationships we observe are not likely the result of systematic bias in interviewer assignment.\textsuperscript{10} Secondly, we also employ multiple adjustment procedures to account for possible confounders. We adjust for pre-treatment covariates using logistic regression and propensity score matching. This allows the ability to essentially approximate random assignment and compare individuals who are as similarly situated as possible across interviewer type. Lastly, we also replicate our findings in a set of large N telephone surveys. Since telephone surveys do not typically assign interviewers based on residential proximity (as telephone interviews are typically conducted from centralized call centers), we can be more confident that the assignment of interviewer to respondent more closely approximates random assignment. Similarly, compared to face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys offer a conservative test of our argument, as the degree of possible discomfort experienced in a telephone interview is not as strong as that experienced in face-to-face interviews (Davis 1997).

Given this, we have the following set of expectations for the relationship between interviewer race and partisanship. First, given that black identity is so enmeshed with Democratic Partisanship, we expect that those black respondents who are interviewed by co-racial interviewers will be more likely than those interviewed by non-black interviewers to identify with the Democratic Party than with either independents or Republicans ($H_1$). Because, we expect that in the absence of a black interviewer, black respondents will \textit{not} feel pressure to affirm their status as a group member and conform to racial group norms, we believe that respondents interviewed by a white/non-black interviewers or who complete the online questionnaire will report partisanship that more accurately

\textsuperscript{10} Given that all of these studies are done by the same organization, there certainly could be something related to how all these studies are conducted that could potentially confound our results. This is why we also employ multiple adjustment procedures.
reflects their individual ideological preferences. Thus, they will report partisanship that is significantly less Democratic than those black respondents interviewed by black interviewers (H2). These expectations (H1 and H2) are supported by previous scholarship that shows the effect of social interaction on partisan attitudes. Klar (2014) for example, demonstrates that social context has a significant effect on partisan based motivated reasoning. Klar compares the policy attitudes of individuals based on their interactions with varying types of partisans to attitudes when there is no social interaction. Engaging in social interactions (policy dialogue) with homogenous partisan groupings resulted in heightened levels of partisan motivated reasoning for individuals that were of the same party identification as the group. Interaction with heterogenous partisan networks resulted in ambivalent policy positions for both strong and weak partisans (see also Klar and Krupnikov 2016). Similarly, Levitan and Vesser (2009) find that individuals in attitudinally diverse social networks have a propensity for more ambivalence in their policy attitudes relative to those individuals in attitudinal congruent networks.

We also expect that interviewer race should also condition self-reported Democratic partisanship in the context of telephone surveys (H3). While we certainly expect this effect to be much smaller in the context of the telephone survey compared to face-to-face social interaction where there exists a greater potential for ridicule and derision, we nonetheless expect black interviewers to constrain blacks’ expressions of Democratic Partisanship.

Lastly, we expect that the race of the interviewer will condition the effect of liberal/conservative ideology on black partisanship (H4). We expect that the relationship between ideology and partisanship for blacks will be strongest in the presence of a white interviewer or no interviewer. In these contexts, we expect that conservative blacks will be less likely to identify as Democrats. On the other hand, in the presence of a black interviewer, we believe that blacks will exercise more constraint and suppress their ideological preferences. When interviewed by a black
interviewer we expect that liberal/conservative ideology will have no meaningful relationship with black Democratic Party identification. In this context, black conservatives and black liberals should be equally likely to identify as Democrats.

**Results**

To test our initial expectation (H1) that in the presence of another black person, black Americans will seek to conform to the norm of identifying with the Democratic Party, we examine whether the percentage of blacks who identify as Democrats, varies as a function of the race of the interviewer in face-to-face surveys of black Americans. In Table 1 we analyze data on the distribution of black partisanship and race of interviewer for the cumulative American National Election Surveys (ANES) and cumulative General Social Survey (GSS).\(^1\) We analyze the results for Democrats including leaners and Republicans including leaners and true independents. We treat leaners as partisans for two reasons. First, there is a great deal of research that suggests that leaners are actually partisans and behave much more like partisans than true independents (Keith et al 1986; Greene 1999), thus it would important to know how social pressure impacts actual partisan beliefs. Secondly, given the branching nature of the party identification question we expect that at each level of questioning racialized social pressure exerts increased influence on black party identification.

\(^1\) We are limited to the 1988, 1992, 1996, 2008 and 2012 American National Election Surveys. We are aware that race of interviewer was collected for earlier years however race of interviewer is not included in the ANES Cumulative file and our correspondence with the ANES suggested that they are unable to locate these data. See Anderson, Silver and Abramson, 1988 for information on other years.
Table 1. Distribution of Black Party Identification by Race of Interviewer, ANES Cumulative File and the GSS Cumulative File (FTF Surveys), 95% CI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANES</th>
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<th>GSS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Black Interviewer</td>
<td>Black Interviewer</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>Non-Black Interviewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>7.4 [6.0, 8.8]</td>
<td>2.5 [1.1, 3.9]</td>
<td>-4.9*</td>
<td>8.6 [7.3, 9.9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Inc Leaners)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>80.5 [78.4, 82.5]</td>
<td>93.3 [91.1, 95.5]</td>
<td>12.8*</td>
<td>74.1 [72.0, 76.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Inc Leaners)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1,357</td>
<td>479</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,724</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: *=p<.05; Includes Democratic leaners. 95% CI in brackets.

The results presented in Table 1 show strong support for our expectation that social pressure from other blacks to conform to norms of black political behavior increases blacks’ willingness to identify with the Democratic Party. Looking at the last row of Table 1, we see that black respondents clearly express greater levels of Democratic partisanship in the presence of a black interviewer. In both the cumulative ANES and cumulative GSS we observe greater reported Democratic partisanship when respondents are interviewed by black interviewers than when they are interviewed by non-black interviewers. In the ANES the Democratic Party identification gap between blacks interviewed by either black versus non-black interviewers is 12.8 percentage points, moving the percentage of blacks who identify as Democrats from about 80 percent in the presence
of a non-black interviewer to over 93 percent when partisanship is asked by a black interviewer.\textsuperscript{12} While the Democratic Party identification gap resulting from having a black interviewer is smaller in the GSS, 7.2 percentage points, it is still substantively large and statistically significant. In both data sources, the presence of a black interviewer, appears to encourage black respondents to identify as Democrats, while similar black respondents, interviewed by non-black interviewers, identify as either Republican or independent.

Although the results presented in Table 1 suggest that the race of the interviewer present during face-to-face surveys can strongly influence blacks’ willingness to identify as Democrats, it is important to keep in mind that this is not a true experimental design as neither the ANES nor the GSS surveys randomly assign interviewers to respondents. While we can be confident that interviewers are not likely explicitly selecting respondents based on their partisanship, we nonetheless think it is important to account for, as best we can, any pre-existing differences that might exist between those respondents interviewed by black interviewers and those interviewed by white interviewers. In order to ensure that these two groups of respondents are as similar as possible we adjust for pre-treatment respondent characteristics\textsuperscript{13} (sex, age, southern region), pre-treatment interviewer characteristics in ANES (interviewer gender)\textsuperscript{14} and pre-treatment survey characteristics

\textsuperscript{12} When non-black interviewers are restricted to white interviewers the interviewer gap is even larger, approximately 13 percentage points. The vast majority of non-black interviewers are white.

\textsuperscript{13} Although sex and age are technically post-treatment as these characteristics were asked by the interviewer, they are not likely to be influenced by the interviewer.

\textsuperscript{14} ANES only.
(year of survey).\textsuperscript{15} We adjust for these possible confounders using both matching estimators and logistic regression models. Once the observed differences in confounders between the treatment and control groups have been taken into account, we then re-estimate the effects of interviewer race on Democratic Party identification (including leaners). The results from this analysis are presented in Table 2A and 2B. The first rows of Table 2A and 2B present the raw unadjusted percentages of black Democratic Partisanship by race of interviewer pooled across all years of the ANES and GSS that we have race of interviewer data (same as last row of Table 1), the second rows present the results of race of interviewer effects adjusting for pretreatment characteristics using logistic regression and the last rows of Table 2A and 2B present race of interviewer effects on Democratic partisanship adjusting for pretreatment characteristics using propensity score matching. Comparing across these different adjustment strategies we see that while the adjustments for pre-treatment covariates at times reduce the effect of the black interviewer on black Democratic Party identification, the effect remains large and statistically significant in both data sources. These results should make us more confident that what we are observing is in fact the result of black Americans altering their self-reported Democratic Partisanship in response to the race of the person interviewing them and not any preexisting difference in the type of respondents interviewed by black and white interviewers. This change in partisan affiliation supports our claim that when one’s role as

\textsuperscript{15} As all questions are asked during the survey process we do not adjust for any measures that would likely be influenced by the treatments. We adjust on age, sex, region and year of survey because we see these the variables least likely to be influenced by the treatment, thus any differences across black and white interviewer are likely the result of preexisting differences which could potentially contaminate our treatment effect.
a group member has the potential to be challenged or subject to negative sanctions from racial in-
group members, blacks alter their behavior to be more in line with the established group norm. 16

**Table 2A & 2B. Percentage of Self-Identified Black Democrats (Including Leaners) by Race of Interviewer, ANES & GSS Cumulative Files**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANES</th>
<th>Non-Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unadjusted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>12.8*</td>
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<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>[78.4, 82.5]</td>
<td>[91.1, 95.5]</td>
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<td>Adjusted:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logistic Regression</td>
<td></td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>10.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>[79.1, 83.2]</td>
<td>[89.2, 94.7]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Propensity Score Matching (ATE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3*</td>
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<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
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Note: *=p<.05; Pre-treatment adjustments for year of survey, age, sex, south, married, interviewer gender. 95% CI in brackets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GSS</th>
<th>Non-Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unadjusted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>74.1</td>
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<td>95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>[72.0, 76.1]</td>
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<td>Adjusted:</td>
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16 Using the 2012 ANES we were also able to adjust for the percentage of blacks in the respondent’s neighborhood (zipcode). These adjustments had no measurable impact. See Table A1 in the Appendix for the analysis.
Logistic Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>74.2</th>
<th>81.4</th>
<th>7.2*</th>
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<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>[71.1, 77.2]</td>
<td>[77.6, 85.2]</td>
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Propensity Score Matching (ATE)

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<th>9.5*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
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</table>

Note: *=p<.05; Pre-treatment adjustments for year of survey, age, sex, south. 95% CI in brackets.

To further ensure that this relationship is not simply a design artifact of face-to-face surveys we also test for this effect in the context of telephone surveys. Again, one concern with face-to-face surveys such as the ANES is that they tend to assign interviewers from areas proximate to the respondent, as a result it is possible that black interviewers are more likely to interview a certain type of black person who may for whatever reason be more predisposed to identify as a Democrat. Although we are confident that we sufficiently account for much of this difference with the adjustment procedures presented above and in particular the adjustments for percentage black in one’s neighborhood presented in Appendix A1, to add another layer of certainty that what we are observing is in fact the result of racialized context we replicate our analysis in the context of a phone survey. Phone surveys generally operate from centralized call centers and to the extent there is no explicit attempts to match interviewers by some criteria related to the race or background of the respondent, telephone surveys may better meet the “as if random” criteria of a good quasi-experimental design ensuring more equivalent groupings. There are, however, drawbacks to using telephone surveys to test this question. In particular, the social distance between interviewer and respondent during phone surveys, can greatly reduce our ability to observe a treatment effect. Although phone surveys do not eliminate the potential threat posed by the interviewer, interviewer behaviors such as facial gestures and body language cannot be conveyed over the phone. As a result, we cannot expect the effect of interviewer race on Democratic Party identification to be as large as
that observed in the face-to-face context. Similarly, given the ambiguity present in determining a
person’s racial background via voice recognition we would expect there to be significantly more
variation in individual responses to the treatment (interviewer race). In sum, while we certainly
expect black interviewers to heighten black Democratic Party identification (H3), we also expect this
effect to be considerably smaller than that observed in face-to-face interviews as phone surveys
represents a somewhat less direct test of our theory.

To test this, we examine public opinion data from the widely available Pew Research Center
data archives and Gallup News Service Polls.\(^{17}\) These data are useful because both are publicly
available data sources that consistently report interviewer race, Pew, after 2007, and Gallup after the
middle of 2011. These data sources also have measures of party identification and identify leaning
Democrats and Republicans. Because we expect small effects in response to interviewer race over
the phone and because the average survey from these sources has only about 150 black respondents
we pooled over 100 randomly selected surveys from Pew’s U.S. Politics & Policy data archive from
2008 to 2014 and more than 50 Gallup News Service Polls from the middle of 2011 to the middle of
2015. The result is a dataset with 13,138 black respondents from the Pew data and 4,648 black
respondents from the Gallup data with corresponding race of interviewer and party identification
data.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{18}\) The advantage of using Pew and Gallup data over the pooling the few academic phone surveys of
African Americans is 1) the Pew surveys give us relative consistency in sample design and data
collection procedure. 2) Both Pew and Gallup data are clustered around the same time period as our
face-to-face surveys while most of the well known academic phone surveys of blacks were done in
the 1980’s and 1990’s. 3) We can have much more statistical power using Pew and Gallup data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Non-Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republican (Inc Leaners)</strong></td>
<td>9.5 [8.8, 10.2]</td>
<td>7.9 [7.3, 8.5]</td>
<td>-1.6*</td>
<td>15.5 [14.4, 16.6]</td>
<td>13.9 [10.9, 17.0]</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrat (Inc Leaners)</strong></td>
<td>81.6 [80.6, 82.5]</td>
<td>83.7 [82.8, 84.5]</td>
<td>2.1*</td>
<td>73.7 [72.4, 75.1]</td>
<td>78.5 [74.8, 82.1]</td>
<td>4.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>5851</td>
<td>7287</td>
<td></td>
<td>4160</td>
<td>488</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *=p<.05 Includes Democratic leaners. Non-black only includes white. 95% CI in brackets.

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. Here we see that in the pooled Pew data that there are, on average, 2.1 percent more blacks identifying as Democrats when they are interviewed by black interviewers and in the Gallup data that number increases to 4.7 percent. These results are as we expected smaller than what we observed in the face-to-face studies but not only are they statistically significant (p=.00), they are also substantively meaningful in that they replicate the findings of the face-to-face studies while at the same time offering a more conservative test of our expectations.

**Race of Interviewer Effect in Face-to-Face and Online Interviews**

To this point we have seen strong evidence for our role identity argument, observing that there is in fact a strong connection between interviewer race and reporting of Democratic Party identification among black respondents in face-to-face and telephone surveys. When black
respondents are interviewed by black interviewers they appear to express significantly greater levels of Democratic Party identification. We have also seen that this relationship remains quite strong even when controlling for pretreatment characteristics of the respondent and survey context. While we certainly see these results as compelling, the nature of this relationship is still somewhat unclear. For example, instead of adhering to norms of black political behavior, when interviewed by a black interviewer, blacks may instead be responding to the white interviewer. Davis (1997) posits that when interviewed by a white individual, black respondents are more likely to respond in counter-stereotypic ways to distance themselves from other blacks (320). Given that the nature of white partisanship is more heterogeneous than it is for blacks, when interviewed by a white person, black respondents who are not sure of the interviewer’s partisan leaning may simply desire to portray themselves as less stereotypical. In the results presented thus far, we have only compared the effects of black interviewers to white interviewers, what we still do not know is what blacks’ partisanship would be in the absence any interviewer (or a control). Without a comparison group (control) we cannot confidently say whether what we are observing is the effect of a black interviewer encouraging blacks to identify as Democrats or alternatively white interviewers encouraging blacks to report less Democratic identification, or both. Knowing what black partisanship would be in the absence an interviewer would be particularly useful because it would give us a baseline group by which we could sort out the effects of black and white interviewers on black Democratic Party identification. Indeed, this is a problem that characterizes much of the existing research on race of interviewer effects (see Rhodes 1994).

To get around this problem, we turn to the 2012 ANES. In addition to having results for those who participated in face-to-face interviews with white and black interviewers, the 2012 ANES also featured an online component which was conducted at roughly the same time as the face-to-face survey and asked identical questions but was completely self-administered. This offers us a
unique opportunity to estimate the percentage of blacks who likely would have identified as Democrats in the absence of an interviewer (H2).\textsuperscript{19} The effect of interviewer race by mode of survey on Democratic Partisanship from the 2012 ANES is presented in Table 4. The results presented in Table 4 reveal that in the presence of a non-black interviewer, 84% of blacks identified as Democrats but in the presence of a black interviewer that number increases by 11 percentage points to 96%.\textsuperscript{20} When we compare these results to respondents who completed the online questionnaire, we see that the percentage of blacks who identify as Democrats in our online control group is 85%, which is essentially indistinguishable from the reported Democratic partisanship of those blacks interviewed by non-black interviewers (.1 percentage point difference) and about 11 percentage points less than that of blacks interviewed by black interviewers.

The lack of random assignment to the interviewer conditions and to the online questionnaire suggest that we should once again adjust for pretreatment characteristics. Because the online mode had no interviewers we will not be able to adjust for interviewer characteristics, however we do have respondent characteristics that were not likely affected but the treatment: gender, age, living in the south. Once again, the results of adjustments appear to do very little to alter the relationship between interviewer race and Democratic Party identification (See Appendix A1 for Results). This particular pattern of results confirms our expectations (H2) that black interviewers have a unique

\textsuperscript{19} We understand that there are very different procedures underlying how the online and FTF samples of the 2012 ANES were drawn. To account for these differences we will, later in this paper, employ adjustment procedures meant to obtain balance.

\textsuperscript{20} The 2012 ANES has a more nuanced measure of race than that included in the cumulative file. Here we include all individuals who identify as black while the ANES cumulative file only includes non-Hispanic blacks.
effect on how black respondents report their partisanship during surveys. Returning to our role identity argument, these results show that social interactions which lead to concern for potential sanctions or activating one’s willingness to conform to group expectations leads to changes in a black individual’s reported affiliation with the Democratic Party.

Table 4. Distribution of Black Party Identification by Race of Interviewer and Online Mode, 2012 ANES (FTF and Online), 95% CI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Online (Control)</th>
<th>Non-Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(C)</td>
<td>(B-A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Inc Learners)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[3.2, 6.9]</td>
<td>[3.9, 10.5]</td>
<td>[0.2, 3.7]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[7.4, 12.4]</td>
<td>[5.2, 12.5]</td>
<td>[0.0, 3.1]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Inc Leaners)</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[82.0,87.9]</td>
<td>[79.2, 88.6]</td>
<td>[94.2,98.7]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>255</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *=p<.05. 95% CI in brackets.

Who is Constrained?

We have provided more evidence for our role identity argument by showing that the presence of a black interviewer creates a social interaction through which blacks feel compelled by racialized social pressure to conform to racial group expectations (i.e. identifying as a Democrat), we now turn to examining who exactly is being constrained by this racialized interaction. As discussed earlier, given the widespread awareness of the norm of identifying as a Democrat within the black community, we believe that it is those individuals who have ideological reasons for behaving in ways inconsistent with the racial group norm, in particular black conservatives, that will be the most likely
to be constrained in the presence of a black interviewer (H4). Absent this social interaction with a co-racial interviewer, we believe that blacks who identify as ideological conservatives will be less likely to identify as Democrats because there will be little if any social pressure to conform to group expectations. However, because black conservatives are very much aware of the social consequences of defecting from the norm of Democratic partisanship that exists within the black community, when questioned about their partisanship by a black interviewer they will feel constrained by these social expectations and instead choose to behave in a way inconsistent with their own ideological interest and identify as Democrats so as not to jeopardize their standing in the eyes of a fellow racial group member.

**Figures 3A- 3F. Black Democratic Party Identification by Liberal/Conservative Ideology and Race of Interviewer, 95% Confidence Intervals**

1988-2012 ANES

3A. 7-Point Party ID

3B. Democratic PID vs. Independent & Republican

Note: Marginal effect of liberal/conservative ideology on probability of identifying as Democrat. Includes controls for sex, age, south, interviewer sex and study year fixed effects.
2004-2016 GSS

3C. 7-Point Party ID 3D. Democratic PID vs. Independent & Republican

Note: Marginal effect of liberal/conservative ideology on probability of identifying as Democrat. Includes controls for sex, age, south, interviewer sex and study year fixed effects.

2012 ANES

3E. 7-Point Party ID 3F. Democratic PID vs. Independent & Republican

Note: Marginal effect of liberal/conservative ideology on probability of identifying as Democrat. Includes controls for sex, age, south.

Figures 3A-3F summarize the effect of the interviewer’s race on blacks’ self-reported 7-point party identification and 2-point Democratic partisanship by the respondent’s score on the 7-point liberal/conservative ideology measure in the 1988-2012 cumulative ANES, 2004-2016 GSS
and the 2012 ANES.\textsuperscript{21} Beginning with those blacks interviewed by non-black interviewers we see that across all three data sources, the probability of a black person identifying as a Democrat declines sharply as they become more conservative. In the 1988-2008 cumulative ANES (Figure 3B), we see the probability of a black person identifying as Democrat decreases by more than 20 percentage points from around .90 among blacks that are strong liberals to about .60 for blacks that are strong conservatives. Not only is this decrease statically significant (p<.05), but it is also roughly the same magnitude as the decrease in the GSS surveys (3D). In the 2012 ANES (3F), the difference is even greater with the model predicting .97 probability of identifying as a Democrat among strong liberals interviewed by non-black interviewers and a .56 probability of identifying as Democrat among self-identified strong conservative blacks, a 41 point decrease (p=.00) in the probably of identifying as a Democrat.

A similar pattern exists for black respondents who answered the 2012 online survey. Free of the constraints that an interviewer might impose, the model predicts that there is roughly a .96 probably of black liberals in the online portion of the ANES identifying as Democrats and only a .49 probably of black conservatives in the online 2012 ANES identifying as Democrats. This represents a 47 point decrease (p=.00) in the probably of identifying as a Democrat; a pattern consistent with standard accounts of how liberal/conservative ideology should relate to party identification.

Turning our attention to the black interviewer condition we see that this well recognized relationship between party and ideology is broken when blacks are asked about their partisanship by

\textsuperscript{21} Because there is not a well understood norm in the black community with regard to ideology, we do not expect it to vary as a function of the interviewer's race. In the 2012 ANES the correlation between race of interviewer and ideology is .02 (p=.53) in the GSS it is .00 (p=.88) and in the cumulative ANES it is .07 (p<.00).
a black interviewer. Consistent with our expectations, it appears that when interviewed by a black interviewer, black Americans regardless of ideology express a strong and largely undifferentiated willingness to identify as Democrats. As we can see in the ANES analysis, while it is not surprising that nearly all liberals in the black interviewer conditions identify as Democrats, in neither the cumulative ANES nor the 2012 ANES does the probability of black conservatives identifying as Democrats ever dip below .90 when a black interviewer is present. While black interviewers exert less constraint in the GSS data, there nonetheless exists little change in predicted party identification across ideology measures for either the 7-point Party Identification measure or Democratic PID measure. In fact, the interactive model testing the ability of black interviewers to conditioning the effects of ideology on both the 7-point party identification and Democratic PID measure, we observe a statically significant ($p<.05$) interaction effect for all of the 7-point party identification models and for the 2-point Democratic PID model in the cumulative ANES ($p<.05$) and Cumulative GSS ($p=.10$). These results suggest that the presence of a black interviewer almost completely constrains black conservatives, largely eliminating the link between ideology and partisanship for blacks.

Lastly, if we are correct that the effect of black interviewers on black Democratic Partisanship is the result of black interviewers holding black conservatives accountable to the norms

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22 The lack of a statically significant interaction result in the Democratic ID models for the 2012 ANES may be the result of a lack of statistical power, particularly at the tails of conservative ideology. While we would ideally like a larger sample our ability to find statically significant interaction effects in the Cumulative ANES and GSS along with all of the 7-point PID scale models makes us confident that black interviewers are in fact altering the effect of ideology on black party identification.
of black political behavior then we should also be able to observe this effect across other measures of conservatism. Therefore, we examine the ability of black interviewers to condition the relationship between expression of Democratic partisanship and two distinct forms of conservatism: economic/free market conservatism and moral/traditionalist conservatism. Free market conservatism has its basis in the belief that government should play only a very limited role in regulating the U.S. economy. We measure this concept with two questions from the 2012 ANES that assess blacks’ opinions about how much government regulation of business is good for society and whether the free market or government is better equipped to handle today’s complicated problems. Conservative responses to these questions prioritize free market solutions and downplay government intervention. We measure moral/traditionalist conservatism with a number of measures that assess the need to preserve traditional lifestyles such as “do you think newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of society?” and “how tolerant should society be of people who have different moral standards?” Conservative responses to these questions prioritize the need to preserve traditional values and ways of living. Both these concepts are measured in the 2012 ANES.

**Figures 4A – 4D. Economic/Free Market and Moral/Traditionalist Conservatism by Black Democratic Party Identification and Race of Interviewer/Mode, 2012 ANES, 95% Confidence Intervals**

4A. 7-Point Party ID

4B. Democratic PID vs. Independent & Republican
4C. 7-Point Party ID  4D. Democratic PID vs. Independent & Republican

Note: See Appendix for model estimates

Figures 4A to 4D summarize the results of this analysis. We see that, generally both the free market and moral/traditionalist results seem to mirror that of the liberal/conservative ideology results presented in Figure 3. For blacks in the white interviewer and online conditions the more conservative the respondent, the less likely he or she is to identify as a Democrat and for blacks in the black interviewer condition the relationship between these ideological values and Democratic partisanship is once again essentially zero. Interestingly, there appears to be a slight increase in Democratic partisanship among morally conservative blacks interviewed by a black interviewer. This we think highlights the interesting confluence of black moral conservatism and black Democratic Partisanship that exist among religious blacks and the black church (McDaniel 2008).

The results from this analysis demonstrate that social interactions between black individuals can powerfully constrain black partisan political behavior. As we have seen, those blacks who have ideological reasons for defecting from the group norm of political behavior, black conservatives, resist doing so in the presence of a black interviewer. However, when allowed to answer these questions in the privacy of their own homes or when interviewed by a white interviewer, black conservatives behave as one might expect, by identifying as independents or Republicans. These findings complement the previous analysis presented and provide strong support for role identity.
theory’s ability to explain black Democratic Party affiliations maintenance. Social interactions with fellow group members constrain black political behavior, and that the presence of other blacks induces norm conformity because blacks succumb to racialized social pressure in order to avoid negative sanctions from racial group members.

**Conclusion & Implications**

In this paper, we sought to investigate the factors that explain the persistence of African Americans’ overwhelming support for the Democratic Party. Despite the numerous political alternatives and economic incentives offered to blacks by the Republican Party and despite lure of political independence and third-party identification, the vast majority of blacks still affiliate with the Democratic Party. Existing literature offers linked/shared fate as an explanation for this unwavering affiliation, but closer examination shows that the relationship between shared fate and the Democratic Party affiliation is, at best, weak. This leads to the question- How have African Americans been able to maintain such strong support for the Democratic Party?

We have argued that, supporting the Democratic Party is one of the most well defined and visible norms of the black community, and that racialized social norms can lead black individuals to constrain their behavior in order to stay within the bounds of black community expectations. We position this argument in the context of role identity theory which suggests that strong black support for the Democratic Party results from constraints placed on blacks by racialized social pressure meant to maintain adherence to the norms and expectations of the group. This theoretical framework moves beyond the standard linked fate model which suggest that black political behavior/party identification results from a psychological attachment to the racial group to a model that relies more on social connections and the perceptible social costs and benefits that come with compliance with and defection from the roles and norms associated with these social attachments.
We have offered a great deal of evidence to support this claim. Here we elucidate the mechanism underlying the process of social control by examining how partisanship varies by the race of the interviewer in cumulative 1988-2008 and 2012 American National Election Studies, The General Social Survey and Pew and Gallup news polls. Our results reveal that simply being in the presence of a black individual significantly alters the behavior of blacks, causing them to fall more in line with the partisan expectations of the black community. We observe that blacks who were interviewed by a black individual show significantly higher identification with the Democratic Party. We also showed that identification with the Democratic Party was greatest among those blacks that hold conservative political dispositions, demonstrating that racialized social context most effectively constrains those blacks who have an ideological incentive to defect from this norm.

This study adds a great deal to our knowledge of black political behavior. First, it deviates significantly from existing literature as it offers an alternative explanation for how black racial identity factors into black decision making; suggesting that black partisanship has more to do with blacks’ sense of what is expected of them from other blacks than their perceptions of how what happens to blacks as a group affects them as individuals. Moreover, we believe that the inclination to fall within the boundaries of the group’s norms, despite the potential for going against one’s ideological self-interest, is driven by a desire to be accepted and respected amongst fellow blacks. Behaving in a way consistent with the group’s expectations helps to affirm one’s status within the group while deviating from these expectations can raise questions about an individual’s commitment to the group, and potentially open one up to sanctions. We show that concern about being considered an outcast or a sellout leads those blacks, who may otherwise not identify with the group norm, to affiliate with the Democratic Party.
References


Appendix

Adjustment of percentage of blacks in zipcode:

Table A1. Percentage of Self-Identified Black Democrats (Including Leaners) by Race of Interviewer, 2012 ANES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANES</th>
<th>Non-Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Black Interviewer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unadjusted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[75, 87]</td>
<td>[94, 99]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistic Regression</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>[81, 94]</td>
<td>[94, 99]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propensity Score Matching</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>[74, 84]</td>
<td>[94, 99]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *=p<.05; Pre-treatment adjustments percentage of blacks in zipcode, age, sex, south, married, interviewer gender. 95% CI in brackets. Adjusted and unadjusted results were calculated using the same sample of respondents accounting for listwise deletion.

Using the 2012 ANES we were also able to adjust for the percentage of blacks in the respondent’s neighborhood (zipcode). These adjustments, presented in Table A1, also had no real measurable impact on the effect that black interviewers had on black Democratic Party identification. Although, using logistic regression adjustments, the difference in race of interviewer effects between the adjusted and raw percentage of blacks who identify as Democrats decreases by 6 percentage points, there remains an 8 percentage-point difference between the rate of Democratic Party identification among blacks interviewed by black vs. non-black interviewers. On the other hand, propensity score matching actually increases the difference between the rate of Democratic Party identification among blacks interviewed by a black vs. a non-black interviewer by about 3 percentage points. These results should help allay concerns about the role that geographic biases interviewer assignment might play in mediating the effect that black interviewers have on black Democratic Party identification.