Politics and policies: attitudes toward multiracial Americans

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Abstract

The growing prominence of the multiracial population in the United States is prompting new questions about attitudes toward multiracial people and popular opinion of policies designed to protect them from discrimination. Currently, American anti-discrimination policies are directed at groups who identify with a single race, but the rising profile of multiracial groups introduces new complexity into questions about racial policy. In this study, we find generally positive affect toward multiracial people, although monoracial minorities are more positive toward multiracial people than whites are. About half of the monoracial minorities and the majority of whites oppose including multiracial people in anti-discrimination policies. Attitudes are associated with traditional predictors such as education and political beliefs, and also with the racial heterogeneity of the local context and intimate contact with other racial groups. Although multiracial people report experiencing discrimination at levels similar to those of monoracial minorities, our results suggest there may be significant resistance to anti-discrimination policies that include multiracial groups.

> ... the seemingly trivial decision to allow people to identify with multiple racial heritages ... [will] introduce new questions and controversies into an already volatile debate on race-conscious public policy. (Williams 2006, p. 111)

There is a vast literature documenting attitudes toward monoracial minority groups and policies to protect them from discrimination.

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However, there is no representative survey evidence about attitudes toward multiracial adults or policies that might affect them. These attitudes are important because they shape public policies and reactions to policies. Current anti-discrimination policies were written to redress discrimination experienced by particular racial groups with particular histories of exclusion. Thus, the policies specify protection for monoracial groups and do not address the status of multiracial people. There are no U.S. laws or court decisions specifically protecting multiracial groups from discrimination today (Williams 2006). The federal Office of Management and Budget has allocated multiracial individuals to single-race categories for the purposes of enumerating populations for civil rights monitoring, but this leaves unresolved questions about multiracial individuals' eligibility for programmes like racially targeted small business loans and affirmative action (Goldstein and Morning 2002). Multiracial people believe they are experiencing discrimination (as we will show below), so it is important to consider how they fit into public discourse about anti-discrimination policies. Future courts and legislatures will have to address this question, and they will make those decisions based in part on how multiracial groups are perceived. Our study contributes to a general understanding of the role of racism and anti-government sentiment in attitudes toward anti-discrimination policies. Furthermore, it is the first nationally representative survey of attitudes toward multiracial people and public support for including them in anti-discrimination policies. Although public opinion does not always affect public policy, its potential to do so, as well as the importance of public reactions to policies after they are put in place, prompts us to examine these attitudes.

What do we know about attitudes toward multiracial people?

There are no representative surveys that tell us whether or not there is racism toward multiracial people, and relatively few studies that could provide material from which to develop hypotheses. Studies have provided anecdotal evidence regarding attitudes toward multiracial people, but this evidence is contradictory. Some would lead us to suspect that multiracial people are (and were historically) viewed very positively. For example, Nakashima (1992) and Rosa (2001) argue that multiracial people are stereotyped as 'beautiful' or 'exotic', Park (1928) asserted that they were 'cosmopolitan' and acted as 'bridges' between racial groups, and Gulick (1937) called multiracial people a 'super-race'. Ropp's (1997) survey respondents also reported that 'multiraciality is the future' and 'soon we will all be mixed and nonracist'. Thus, one set of stereotypes and attitudes clearly idealizes multiraciality.

However, if the attitudes of the larger society were really so positive, multiracial people would not report experiencing the significant amounts of discrimination that they do. Multiracial college students report enduring higher levels of discrimination than black students (Brackett et al. 2006), and Herman (2004) finds that part-black multiracial adolescents encounter higher levels of ethnic discrimination than monoracial minority adolescents. Echoing Park's classic 'marginal man' argument, several authors have argued that multiracial people experience racism from multiple groups (Smith and Moore 2000; Aranda and Rebollo-Gil 2004; Jenkins 2005). For example, at a predominantly white university, biracial part-black students were more likely to report feeling alienation from and having negative experiences with black students (Smith and Moore 2000; Renn 2004). Extended interracial families often express negative attitudes toward multiracial children (Childs 2002). Anecdotal evidence also shows that multiracial people experience unique forms of discrimination. A famous example is ReVonda Bowen, a black-white multiracial student at an Alabama high school whose principal banned interracial couples at the prom. When ReVonda asked whom she could take as a date, the principal publicly announced that the 'mistake' of her existence was the reason for his ban (Williams 2006).

Multiracial people are also sometimes treated as though their minority ancestry is their *only* ancestry because rules like the one-drop rule, which forced those with any black ancestry to accept a monoracial black identity, make it difficult to claim multiracial identities (Davis 2001). We provide further evidence below that multiracial people experience similar levels and forms of discrimination as monoracial minorities.

Affect toward racial groups

Research on *affect* toward racial groups has been somewhat limited compared to research on attitudes toward racial *policies*, in part because the only widely used measure of affect is the thermometer question, in which respondents are asked how warmly they feel toward a given group (Krysan 2000). Warmth and policy attitudes are associated; the more positive the thermometer rating, the more favourably the respondent typically feels toward integration, anti-discrimination policies, etc. (Schuman et al. 1997). White warmth toward blacks is also positively associated with education and living in the north or west of the United States (Schuman et al. 1997). Interestingly, although the mean thermometer rating of blacks by white survey respondents has not changed since researchers began using the measure in 1964, specific policy questions associated with the

thermometer scores have changed significantly. For example, public support for integrated public accommodations (hotels, restaurants, etc.) increased approximately 20 per cent between 1964 and 1974, while affect toward blacks remained steady (Schuman et al. 1997). This pattern could mean that thermometers are less accurate than specific policy questions, or it could mean that basic warmth toward blacks has been relatively constant despite shifting opinion about public policies.

There are other considerations with thermometer questions, such as how to compare responses meaningfully across respondents. We will address this below, when we describe our own thermometer questions. It is also important to note how social desirability bias affects the collection of racial affect data, particularly when it is gathered in face-to-face interviews. With white interviewers, black warmth toward whites has been higher than white warmth toward blacks. However, when the interviewer is black, black warmth toward whites is lower than white warmth toward blacks (Schuman et al. 1997). Despite these considerations, thermometer ratings provide a measure of feelings for which there is no immediate substitute in survey research. Since many argue that these emotions are the basis for our interactions and for attitudes of symbolic racism, it is important to use thermometers carefully rather than restricting our surveys to questions of policy alone.

Attitudes toward anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action

Although there is no nationally representative research on attitudes regarding multiracial people's eligibility for affirmative action, there is extensive attitudinal research on the correlates of support for such policies generally. This research shows that only 20–40 per cent of whites support affirmative action policies favouring blacks (Schuman et al. 1997). Items phrased broadly (e.g. 'are you in favor of affirmative action?') show significantly higher levels of support than those that ask about specific policies (e.g. 'do you favor or oppose colleges and universities reserving a certain number of scholarships exclusively for minorities and women?') (Steeh and Krysan 1996). Furthermore, there is more support for enhanced opportunity policies than targeted set-aside policies (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Tuch and Hughes 1996).

Explanations for the generally low level of support for such policies fall loosely into three categories (Bobo 1998). The first is simple racism: negative attitudes about a racial group are associated with negative attitudes toward affirmative action for that group. The second explanation is conservative ideology: individuals broadly opposed to government 'dictates' typically oppose affirmative action and other

policies in which government intervenes in individual and business affairs (Schuman et al. 1997). The third explanation suggests that anti-affirmative action attitudes are associated with group self-interest: individuals oppose policies that would help groups other than their own (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Kinder and Winter 2001). However, it is complicated to measure self-interest because expressing it directly is socially unacceptable and expressing it behaviourally is indistinguishable from expressing racism or anti-government sentiment. Furthermore, it is unclear how to define self-interest where multiracial people are concerned because monoracial groups, particularly monoracial minorities, may have some loyalty to specific multiracial groups.

Our study's contributions

Our study is the first representative survey of US attitudes toward multiracial people. We present measures of affect toward multiracial people and attitudes toward policies that would affect multiracial adults. In addition, a rich set of control variables allows us to test several popular explanations for these attitudes. Finally, our study offers a perspective on multiracial adults that has been missing from most of the multiracial literature: since the multiracial population has only recently become prominent enough to be the subject of surveys and substantive research, much of the research on the multiracial population has focused on the experiences of multiracial youth. Our analysis of attitudes toward multiracial adults is a step toward filling this gap in the literature.

Our first hypothesis is that groups that have consistent patterns of more negative attitudes toward single-race minority groups (residents of the south, individuals who are less educated, political conservatives, etc.) will have more negative attitudes toward multiracial groups. Secondly, following the contact hypothesis, we predict that multiracial individuals, those who are close to multiracial individuals, and those who have had an interracial relationship or other intimate contact with members of other racial groups are both more supportive of including multiracial people in anti-discrimination policies and will have more positive affect toward multiracials (Smith 1998). Our third hypothesis is that these two outcomes are related: those who express more negative affect toward multiracial groups will also oppose anti-discrimination policies for multiracial people.

Data and methods

The nationally representative 2006 and 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Surveys (CCES) were cooperative surveys with over thirty colleges and universities involved in data collection. Half of the

survey consisted of 'core' questions, asked of the entire 30,000 person sample, and the other half included questions designed by research teams at each university and administered to a subset of respondents. Thus, a subset of the 30,000 respondents was asked the questions we designed to understand attitudes toward multiracial people and anti-discrimination policies.

The sample was selected using a matched random sampling technique developed by Polimetrix, the survey firm which gathered the data on our behalf – see Vavrek and Rivers (2008) for extensive details. Polimetrix began with a list of people who had agreed to take internet surveys and had provided Polimetrix with demographic information. This list was not necessarily representative of the adult American population, but individuals were chosen from it who *matched* a random sample of the adult American population drawn from the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS), conducted by the US Bureau of the Census, which is a probability sample of 1,194,354 American adults with a response rate of 93.1 per cent. Thus, 'for each respondent in the Polimetrix-drawn ACS sample, the closest matching active Polimetrix panelist was selected using a weighted absolute distance measure on four Census variables – age, race, gender, and education, plus on imputed values of partisanship and ideology' (Vavrek and Rivers 2008, p. 361). The sample Polimetrix drew for CCES was a stratified national sample of registered and unregistered voters. In this way, Polimetrix was able to create a nationally representative sample of US adults using appropriate sample weights.

The internet survey sample was gathered in three stages: (1) participants were screened for eligibility using a series of profile questions; (2) they completed a demographic survey; and (3) a random subset of the respondents answered survey questions before and after the 2006 and 2008 national elections. The questions in our study were asked of a subset of n $=1,000$ respondents (n $=200$ racial/ethnic minorities) for the 2006 sample and n $=1,000$ respondents (n $=246$ racial/ethnic minorities) for the 2008 sample. Our analyses are weighted to approximate the national adult population using weights created from the 2004 and 2006 American Community Surveys. Table 1 includes means, standard deviations and proportions for the dependent and independent variables of both samples.
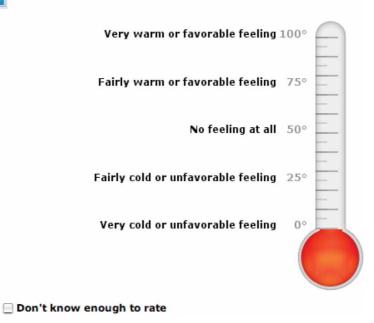
Dependent variables: affect

In 2006 our 'thermometer' question measured warmth toward five racial groups (white, black, Latino, Asian and multiracial people) and three additional groups ('working class people', 'people on welfare' and 'illegal immigrants'), presented in randomized order. Our question asks:

Figure 1. *The feeling thermometer*

Click on thermometer to give your rating.

Very warm or favorable feeling 100°

Fairly warm or favorable feeling 75°

No feeling at all 50°

Fairly cold or unfavorable feeling 25°

Very cold or unfavorable feeling 0°

☐ **Don't know enough to rate**

We'd like to get your honest feelings about some groups in American society. Please rate each group with what we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorably toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably towards the group. If you don't have any particular feelings toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees.

Figure 1 illustrates the thermometer question. The means for the five racial groups ranged from 65 for Latinos to 75 for whites. The responses from our survey are similar to those of other current national surveys. For example, the average white rating of blacks in our survey is 67, similar to a 2004 rating of 69 on a nationally representative survey (Krysan 2008).

One limitation of our 2006 measure of affect toward multiracial people is that it asks about multiracial people in general, rather than about a specific multiracial group. Although this allowed us to test the feelings and attitudes of respondents toward the general idea of multiraciality, it is also ambiguous; we could not be sure exactly who respondents had in mind when they answered. In the 2008 CCES survey, therefore, our thermometer questions asked about specific

multiracial groups (black-whites and Asian-whites), to test for variation across multiracial groups. While these two biracial groups are not the largest biracial groups in the US, they are comparatively large and are discussed in popular media more than most multiracial groups. We focus on these two groups because blacks and Asian Americans were historically the focus of anti-miscegenation legislation prohibiting marriages with whites, while the difference in these groups' social distance from whites suggests that the two groups may be perceived very differently. Our 2008 findings for specific multiracial groups suggest that while the ratings from white respondents are affected little by the group named, the same is not true for other respondents, as we will show below.

As we mentioned above, there are several concerns regarding the use of feeling thermometers to measure feelings. The first is that the status characteristics of the interviewer can affect the respondents' answers, but this is not a concern for our study because of the internet survey format (Schuman et al. 1997). However, even in the absence of an interviewer, a second concern is social desirability bias against expressing dislike for certain groups (Krysan 2000). In order to encourage a wide variation in responses, including negative ones, we included two thermometer questions featuring social categories about which it is socially acceptable to express negative feelings ('illegal immigrants'[1] and 'people on welfare') as well as one about which it is common to express positive sentiments (the 'working class'). This strategy was successful: there was considerable variation across the eight thermometer ratings, with the highest average ratings for the working class (mean = 83) and the lowest for illegal immigrants (mean = 30). Thus, we concluded that most 2006 respondents did not simply rate every group the same because of social desirability pressure. However, we were concerned about a group of respondents (N = 184 for 2006, N = 236 for 2008) who rated every *racial* group the same or with only one point variation among the racial groups. We considered dropping them for lack of variation (i.e. we gain no information about their relative preferences for one group compared to another), but we concluded that we should not discount these individuals' expression of lack of racial preferences or non-racism. The third concern is about question order effects, which we controlled by randomizing the order in which the social groups were presented.

Thermometers also present a methodological challenge because each respondent has a different 'baseline' warmth toward all groups, different variation across the warmth scale and different floor and ceiling levels of warmth. Thus, while one person may feel that a rating of 50 (neutral) is 'typical' and may rate all other groups relative to that baseline, another respondent may start with 75 (fairly warm) and rate all other groups relative to that. Some respondents may never give

above a 70 and some may never give below a 50. Consequently, we standardized each respondent's ratings of multiracial groups by subtracting the respondent's average rating of all racial groups from his/her rating of the multiracial group. We did the same for each single-race group: we subtracted the respondent's average thermometer rating from his/her rating for each racial group. These ratings are presented in Figure 2a and 2b. In other words, these values indicate how much a respondent likes (positive numbers) or dislikes (negative numbers) a given group compared to that respondent's average feelings toward all of the racial groups.

Dependent variables: attitudes toward policies and politicians

Our second set of dependent variables measure respondents' willingness to consider multiracial people a minority group under anti-discrimination laws, to include multiracial people in affirmative action programmes and to vote for multiracial political candidates. The first of these (in 2006) asked:

> People have different opinions about how multiracial people (people with parents of different races) should be classified. Do you think multiracial people should be considered minorities under laws against racial discrimination?

The second (also in 2006) asked:

> Do you think multiracial people should be considered minorities for the purposes of affirmative action?

When analysing the second question it is important to keep in mind that some respondents do not favour affirmative action policies for *any* group. To control for this issue, we analysed these anti-affirmative action respondents separately.[2] These questions are also broadly written and general (i.e. not about a specific education or work policy, but about 'affirmative action' overall). Thus, because people express more favourable responses to broad questions about these policies than about highly specific ones (as we explained above), the results we are presenting constitute a generous estimate of the amount of support for these policies. These two policy questions were only asked of the 2006 respondents.

In 2006, the voting questions asked:

> If your party nominated a multiracial person to be your member of Congress, would you vote for him if he was qualified for the job?

If your party nominated a multiracial person (someone with one black parent and one white parent) for President, would you be willing to vote for him if he were qualified for the job?[3]

In 2008 we repeated the presidential candidate question.

Independent variables

In both the 2006 and 2008 analyses, we control for demographic characteristics that are related to racial attitudes, such as *age*, *gender*, *race* and *foreign birth*. The race item asked respondents 'What racial or ethnic group best describes you?' with response options of 'White, Black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Asian-American, Native American, Mixed Race, Middle Eastern, and Other (please specify)'.[4] For those who checked Mixed Race, there was a follow up question asking 'What main racial or ethnic groups do you belong to? (check all that apply)' and offering the same categories. We included two measures of social class: *family income* in thousands of dollars and education (*Bachelor's degree or more*). We chose this cut-off because there is evidence that suggests that racial attitudes are influenced by college attendance (Schuman et al. 1997).

Because conservative political beliefs are associated with general disapproval of policies that involve government intervention or enforcement (Lye and Waldron 1997), we include a scale of *political conservatism*, constructed from two items: party identification (a seven-point scale ranging from 'strongly Republican' to 'strongly Democrat') and an ideology scale that asked respondents to identify how liberal or conservative they are. These two items were standardized and averaged ($\alpha = 0.80$ in 2006, 0.79 in 2008). We also include a measure of general racial attitudes or racism: *warmth toward racial outgroups*, constructed from the racial feeling thermometers. We created a standardized scale of attitudes toward each of the racial out-groups compared to the respondent's rating of his/her own group. It is important to note that this variable was constructed differently from the dependent variable of warmth toward multiracial people (which was created by subtracting the respondent's *average* rating from the rating for multiracial people). This warmth toward racial outgroups item was constructed from feelings toward *out-groups* compared to the respondent's *own* group. The alphas for each racial group ranged from 0.78 to 0.89.

We include a measure of interracial contact by asking respondents whether they have ever *dated interracially* in 2006 and 2008, and whether they *know any multiracial people* (including themselves, family members, friends and acquaintances) in the 2008 sample. Given the importance of regional differences in racial attitudes (Schuman et al. 1997) and regional differences in the prevalence of multiracial

Table 1. *Weighted descriptive statistics, 2006 and 2008 CCES data*

	2006 Mean or Proportion N = 1000	Std.Err.	**2008** Mean or Proportion N = 1000	Std. Err.	Range	
Dependent variables: Attitudes towards Multiracial Groups						
Warmth to Multiracials, compared to average	2.04	.50			−71.8	43.2
Warmth to Black-White Multiracials, compared to average			.35	.48	−60.2	57.2
Warmth to Asian-White Multiracials, compared to average			−.65	.45	−51.2	33.8
Approval of minority status for Multiracials	36%				0	1
Approval of affirmative action for Multiracials	29%				0	1
Would vote for Multiracial Presidential candidate	92%		88%		0	1
Would vote for Multiracial Congressional candidate	91%				0	1
Would vote for *both* a Presidential and Congressional candidate	90%				0	1
Individual characteristics						
Age (years)	44.12	.48	45.80	.72	18	97
Male	48%		48%		0	1
Bachelor's degree or more	25%		25%		0	1
Income, in thousands of dollars	64.62	1.64	57.40	1.57	5	175
Race						
White	72%		75%		0	1
Black	10%		10%		0	1
Latino	12%		9%		0	1
Asian	1%		1%		0	1
Multiracial	2%		2%		0	1
Other (Native American, Middle Eastern, "Other")	3%		2%		0	1
Foreign-born	16%		17%		0	1

Table 1 (*Continued*)

	2006 Mean or Proportion $N = 1000$	Std.Err.	**2008** Mean or Proportion $N = 1000$	Std. Err.	Range	
Warmth to racial out-groups (standardized scale)	−.03	.05	−.02	.04	−3.77	2.51
Political conservatism (standardized scale)	−.03	.04	−.34	.08	−1.72	1.61
Opposition to affirmative action in general						
Percent supporting affirmative action	33%				0	1
Percent neutral on affirmative action	21%				0	1
Percent opposing affirmative action	46%				0	1
Importance of affirmative action issue (1 =not important, 4 =very)	2.58	.04			1	4
Have dated interracially	29%		15%		0	1
Do not know any multiracial people			18%		0	1
Southern residence	34%		35%		0	1
Racial heterogeneity of zip code	.33	.01	.34	.01	0	.77
Intend to vote in the upcoming election	85%		83%		0	1

Notes: All variables are weighted to approximate the 2004 or 2006 adult population of the U. S., based on the ACS.

   "Warmth to Multiracials" =feelings towards the Multiracial group minus average feeling towards racial groups.

   "Warmth to racial out-groups" =standardized scale constructed from feelings towards each racial out-group minus feelings towards one's own racial group.

   "Racial heterogeneity of zip code" =probability that any 2 randomly selected individuals in that zip code will belong to different racial groups (Moody 2001).

   "Have dated interracially" in 2006 refers to all groups, and in 2008 refers only to dating Blacks and Asians.

identification (Farley 2001), we include a dummy variable for *south*. We also consider the effect of the more local social context in which the respondent lives, using variables that we constructed from the 2000 Census and merged with the 2006 and 2008 datasets. Racially diverse communities may have a liberalizing effect on racial attitudes, as well as increasing interracial contact and the opportunity to form interracial relationships. Therefore, we control for the *racial heterogeneity of the zip code* in which the respondent lives, calculated across seven racial/ethnic groups (Latino, white, black, American Indian, Asian, 'other race' and multiracial respondents). Heterogeneity is calculated as

$$Heterogeneity = 1 - \sum_k \left(\frac{n_k}{N}\right)^2$$

where N = total population size and n_k = number of people in group k. This heterogeneity index can be interpreted as the probability that any two randomly selected people in the zip code are different races (Moody 2001). We considered, instead, using the percentage of the neighbourhood that belongs to a different racial group than the respondent in order to capture interracial contact, but this measure had no relation to our dependent variables in the models.[5]

For the analyses of attitudes toward affirmative action for multiracial people, we divided the sample by a measure of people's general *attitudes toward workplace affirmative action* for blacks:

> Some people think that if a company has a history of discriminating against blacks when making hiring decisions, then they should be required to have an affirmative action program that gives blacks preference in hiring. What do you think? Should companies that have discriminated against blacks have to have an affirmative action programme?

On a seven-point scale of '1 = strongly support affirmative action' to '7 = strongly oppose affirmative action', the mean was 4.5, with 10 per cent choosing 'strongly support' and 30 per cent choosing 'strongly oppose.' Respondents also rated the importance of this issue on a scale of 1 to 4. In addition to dividing the sample based on support for affirmative action, our model controlled for the individual's rating of the importance of the issue.
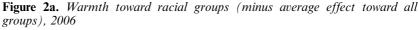
Finally, for the models of attitudes about voting, we included a measure of the person's intention to vote in the upcoming election. This variable separates those who intend to vote or have already voted early (absentee, for example), from those who do not intend to vote. This question was asked immediately before the November elections in 2006 and 2008, so *intention to vote* is an indicator of how involved the individual is in

thinking about an election that will be occurring soon. It is also a conservative measure of voting behaviour, since there is significant social pressure to express an intention to vote and because it is being asked in the period right before an election.
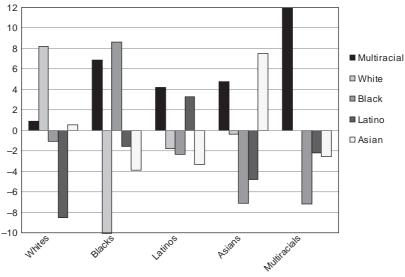
Finally, we asked 2006 respondents 'Have you ever been treated unfairly by any of the following people because of your ethnic background?' On a five-point scale of 'never, once, sometimes, rarely or often', respondents rated the ethnic discrimination or racism they had experienced from employers, neighbours, family members, friends, police and sales clerks. We used these data to explore whether multiracial people experience ethnic discrimination at levels similar to that of monoracial minorities and to illuminate the question of whether multiracials need protection under anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies.

Results

Affect

Figure 2a shows that all racial groups except Latinos expressed more warmth toward their own group than toward any outgroup. Warmth toward the broad category of multiracial people was fairly high, often coming in a close second to warmth toward one's own group. Oddly, whites expressed significantly lower affect toward 'Hispanics/Latinos'

Figure 2a. *Warmth toward racial groups (minus average effect toward all groups), 2006*
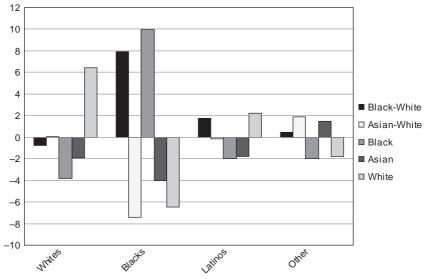
than toward blacks. We suspect these attitudes toward Latinos are conflated with attitudes toward 'illegal immigrants', a category also included in the thermometer ratings and thus salient to respondents. Blacks have the least warmth toward whites, and Latinos seem to have moderate feelings toward all groups. Similarly, the 2008 thermometer ratings, in Figure 2b, show that blacks have the least warmth for whites and Asian-whites and the most warmth for blacks and black-whites, suggesting that their warm feelings toward the in-group do also extend to a multiracial group that shares a racial background. Although the number of Asian respondents is too small to support any strong claims, the same general pattern emerged for Asian respondents: they rate Asians most positively, followed by Asian-whites, and rate all other groups more negatively. Whites have similarly neutral or average affect toward both multiracial groups. The remaining groups (Latinos, as well as the aggregate 'other' minority category) have relatively moderate feelings toward all groups. These 2008 data show that whites may not differentiate much between multiracial groups, but other monoracial groups distinguish between these two multiracial groups.

To test the relationship between affect toward multiracial people and the independent variables described above, we estimated an OLS model of warmth toward multiracial people (minus average warmth toward racial groups). Table 2 shows that among the 2006 sample, warmth toward multiracial people varies with age, race and conservatism, all in the expected directions. We found support for our first

Figure 2b. *Warmth toward racial groups (minus average effect toward all groups), 2008*

Table 2. *Perceptions of Multiracial Americans, Policiesand Politicians: 2006 and 2008 CCES data*

	Warmth toward Multiracials	Warmth toward Black-Whites	Warmth toward Asian-Whites	Approval of minority status	Approval of affirmative action status		Willingness to vote for Multiracial candidates[a]	
	2006, OLS	*2008, OLS*	*2008, OLS*	*2006, Logit*	*2006, Logit*		*2006, Logit*	*2008, Logit*
					Generally opposed	***Generally in support***		
Age	−0.093**	−0.063	0.008	−0.011	−0.034*	−0.017	0.014	−0.017
	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.030)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Male	−1.887	−0.157	0.540	−0.044	−0.236	−0.499	−0.471	0.394
	(1.084)	(1.173)	(1.205)	(0.288)	(0.420)	(0.437)	(0.396)	(0.429)
Bachelor's degree or more	−0.107	1.403	1.032	0.782**	−0.493	−0.030	0.603	1.187*
	(1.078)	(0.712)	(0.698)	(0.301)	(0.541)	(0.447)	(0.677)	(0.471)
Family income, in thousands	−0.001	−0.028*	0.034**	0.002	0.009*	−0.004	0.010	0.007
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Racial minority					1.023*	−0.275	−0.406	2.037*
					(0.470)	(0.524)	(0.623)	(0.952)
Black	5.008**	7.946**	−6.265	0.749				
	(1.756)	(2.936)	(3.085)	(0.617)				
Latino	3.496*	3.370	−1.380	0.588				
	(1.513)	(1.949)	(1.587)	(0.408)				
Other (not Black or Latino)	4.562	2.117	1.639	0.895				
	(2.392)	(2.040)	(1.165)	(0.655)				
Warmth to racial out-groups (scale)				0.218			0.816**	0.928**
				(0.154)			(0.216)	(0.191)
Conservatism (scale)	−1.335*	−2.725**	1.691**	−0.495**	0.028	−0.567	−0.382	−0.493
	(0.597)	(0.541)	(0.473)	(0.159)	(0.306)	(0.313)	(0.222)	(0.267)

Table 2 (*Continued*)

	Warmth toward Multiracials	Warmth toward Black-Whites	Warmth toward Asian-Whites	Approval of minority status	Approval of affirmative action status		Willingness to vote for Multiracial candidates[a]	
	2006, OLS	*2008, OLS*	*2008, OLS*	*2006, Logit*	*2006, Logit*		*2006, Logit*	*2008, Logit*
Have dated interracially	−0.110 (1.056)	2.828* (1.181)	0.520** (0.571)	0.310 (0.296)	−0.202 (0.491)	1.446** (0.440)	2.925* (1.158)	0.167* (0.765)
Don't know any multiracial people		−2.209 (1.360)	−1.017 (1.099)					−0.679 (0.405)
Affirmative action issue is important					0.371 (0.200)	0.596* (0.283)		
Foreign-born	−0.160 (1.335)	−2.144 (1.195)	1.407 (1.126)	−0.751 (0.411)	−0.491 (0.605)	−1.383* (0.645)	0.115 (0.743)	−0.387 (0.506)
South	−2.173 (1.117)	−0.028 (1.253)	−0.557 (1.444)	−0.070 (0.307)	0.142 (0.463)	−0.693 (0.532)	−0.627 (0.429)	0.088 (0.393)
Heterogeneity of zip code	0.213 (2.670)	−1.802 (2.430)	1.530 (2.616)	1.693* (0.687)	2.162* (1.006)	2.664* (1.167)	−0.283 (1.120)	−0.599 (1.114)
Intent to vote							0.588 (0.521)	1.053* (0.555)
Constant	6.563** (2.230)	3.935 (2.566)	−2.572* (1.890)	−1.202 (0.649)	−2.701* (1.194)	−1.300 (1.129)	0.956 (0.841)	2.154 (0.767)
Observations	722	701	695	435	303	177	539	634

*p <.05;**p <.01
[a]The 2006 model predicts support for both a multiracial member of Congress and a President. The 2008 is a Presidential candidate only, with only Whites, Blacks and Asians.

hypothesis that groups with consistent patterns of negative attitudes toward single-race minorities are also more negative toward multiracial people: older people and political conservatives feel less warmth toward multiracial people. Blacks and Latinos expressed significantly more warmth toward multiracial people than whites did. Controls for gender, region, education, income, experience with interracial dating and living in a heterogeneous neighbourhood were not significantly associated with warmth toward multiracial people. Thus, our second (contact) hypothesis was not supported by the 2006 data.

The 2008 models, also presented in Table 2, examine attitudes toward Asian-whites and black-whites. Black respondents expressed significantly more warmth toward black-whites than whites did, even after controlling for other demographic characteristics, but other racial minority groups did not. Black respondents conversely expressed less warmth toward Asian-whites than whites did. Income, education, conservatism and having dated interracially were also associated with affect toward black-whites and Asian-whites, but income and conservatism had an intriguing relationship: wealthier and more politically conservative respondents had *less* warmth for black-whites and *more* warmth for Asian-whites. These relationships suggest that the public's perception of these two groups is not only distinctive but varies in important ways across subgroups. This pattern may be related to the literature on attitudes toward monoracial Asians, which typically find more positive attitudes about Asians' competence but less warmth toward the group (Lin et al. 2008).

The 2008 data provided some modest support for our second (contact) hypothesis: having dated interracially was positively associated with warmth toward black-whites. However, this limited support was tempered by another finding: knowing multiracial people was not significantly associated with affect toward these groups, nor was having multiracial people in one's family (models not shown).

Policies and politics

Despite relatively warm feelings toward multiracial people, the 2006 respondents were unlikely to support including multiracial people in anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action policies. Figure 3 shows the (weighted) rates of support by race. Whites were least likely to support affirmative action in general (24 per cent) or for multiracial individuals (23 per cent). Among racial minorities, support for affirmative action was generally higher but only approximately half of the sample supported applying the policy to multiracials. Whereas Asians and Latinos supported affirmative action similarly in general (40 and 46 per cent respectively), and for multiracial people (35 and 43 per cent respectively), blacks supported affirmative action for
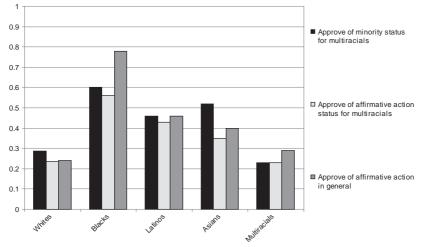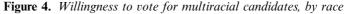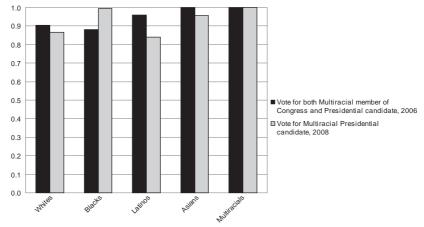
Figure 3. *Approval of minority status and affirmative action for multiracial individuals, 2006*

multiracials less (56 per cent) than they did in general (78 per cent). Interestingly, support for applying affirmative action laws to multiracial people was low even among respondents who self-identified as multiracial, but we are guarded in our interpretation of these results due to the low number of multiracials in the sample who answered this question (n = 10). These findings point to the importance of considering general attitudes when examining these questions; those who oppose affirmative action generally are unlikely to believe that including multiracial people in the policy is a good idea. All groups were slightly more likely to approve of protecting multiracial people under anti-discrimination laws than they were to approve of affirmative action eligibility.

Figure 4 shows willingness to vote for multiracial candidates in 2006 and 2008, broken down by the race of the respondent. Although the black respondents appear least willing to vote for a multiracial candidate in 2006 and Latinos were least willing in 2008, these differences are minor, with all race groups claiming over 80 per cent approval in both years. In addition, the subsamples for 2008 were small: only eighty-nine Latino respondents answered the question, and twelve Asians. Still, these high approval ratings overall are consistent with the high support expressed for black presidential candidates in other surveys. In 1996, NORC found that 92 per cent of respondents supported a black presidential candidate and Gallup recorded 95 per cent support in 1997 (Schuman et al. 1997). Thus, approval of multiracial candidates may be similar to approval for black candidates, or true differences may be masked by social desirability bias for one or both groups. Of course, tapping

Figure 4. *Willingness to vote for multiracial candidates, by race*

attitudes toward multiracial candidates may also be inherently ambiguous if respondents are not aware of multiracial people, let alone candidates. Even the data gathered in 2008, after Barack Obama became a national household name, may not have stimulated reflection about President (then candidate) Obama from our respondents, because most election coverage simply identified him as a black candidate, not a biracial candidate.

In order to test the relationships between these outcomes and individual characteristics and attitudes, we estimated regressions for the two policy questions and questions about voting for multiracial candidates (see Table 2). The first of these, asked only in 2006, examines whether multiracial people should be considered minorities for the purposes of laws about racial discrimination. We found a negative association for political conservatism and a positive association for education and living in a more heterogeneous zip code.

In considering whether multiracial people should qualify for affirmative action, we extended our first hypothesis about conservative opposition to affirmative action to reason that those who opposed the general policy of affirmative action would have different patterns of support for extending the policy to multiracial people than those who supported the general policy. Therefore, we divided the sample based on their support for affirmative action in general. On a 7-point scale of strongly oppose to strongly support, with 4 being 'neutral,' we grouped those who had some level of support together and grouped those who had some level of opposition together. We did not include the neutral respondents. The outcome variable for this model is a binary variable of support or opposition for affirmative action for multiracial people.

The results provided some support to the first hypothesis, showing that (among those who oppose affirmative action in general) youth, minorities and wealthier people were more supportive of extending the policy to multiracial individuals, as were those who lived in more heterogeneous neighbourhoods. Otherwise, there were no relationships between individual-level factors and support for affirmative action for multiracial people. In a similar vein, we found that among those who *do* favour affirmative action generally, none of the demographic characteristics were associated with support for multiracial affirmative action. However, having dated interracially, living in a heterogeneous zip code and feeling strongly about the general issue of affirmative action were positively associated with support for multiracial affirmative action, and immigrant status was negatively associated. Among those who supported affirmative action generally, racial minorities were not significantly different from whites in approval for extending affirmative action to multiracial people, which is surprising given minorities' strong warmth toward multiracial people and more favourable attitudes toward affirmative action in general. One explanation for this is that it is rational for groups who benefit from affirmative action to want to preserve that benefit for the fewest number of in-group members.
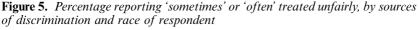
As we demonstrated in Table 1 and Figure 4, most 2006 respondents said they would vote for a multiracial presidential or congressional candidate. Combining the two questions to use the most stringent criteria for 'supporting multiracial candidates', we found that 90 per cent of respondents report they would vote for both a multiracial presidential candidate *and* member of Congress. Estimating a model to explain this relatively small amount of variation in the 2006 data shows that warmth toward racial outgroups and experience with interracial dating were positively associated with expressing willingness to vote for a multiracial candidate. None of the demographic characteristics was associated with support for multiracial candidates.
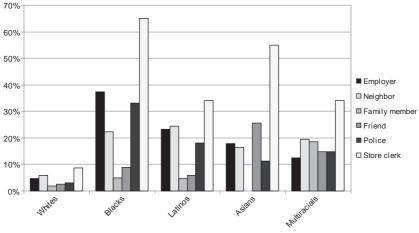
The 2008 election brought the hypothetical vote posed in this question into reality. When we asked this question the *week before* the 2008 election, 88 per cent of respondents said they would vote for a multiracial presidential candidate who shared their views. Having a particular person in mind may have shaped voters' stated preferences and made the question less abstract. When we modelled this preference on the 2008 data we discovered that education, and warmth toward outgroups were positively associated with willingness to vote for a multiracial candidate, as was being a racial minority. All of these findings support our third hypothesis that warmth toward racial outgroups is positively related to willingness to vote for a multiracial candidate (but not for protecting multiracials under anti-discrimination laws).

Discussion

The thermometer questions from both surveys show that all racial groups *feel* positively toward multiracial people, and that these positive feelings are stronger among minority groups who share one racial background with a multiracial group (i.e. blacks feel more positively about black-whites). The 2008 survey also shows that many people report knowing multiracial people; more than half of all respondents report having a multiracial friend whom they see at least once a week. The puzzle for us is that these positive feelings and relatively frequent social interaction were not accompanied by agreement that multiracial people deserve anti-discrimination protections or affirmative action privileges. What explains this gap between the positive feelings toward the group and the negative feelings toward policies that might benefit the group? Does it represent covert/unconscious racism? Anti-government sentiment? Yes, but we have controlled for these two factors using political conservatism (anti-government sentiment) and warmth/contact with outgroups (covert racism). We suggest that some of the remaining variance could be explained by the idea that respondents feel positively about multiracial people but are unaware that multiracial people experience discrimination and therefore do not believe that multiracial people *need* the protection of anti-discrimination policies. Tuch and Hughes (1996) found that people who believe that racial discrimination affects blacks are most likely to support policy interventions. However, we know of no good measures of whether Americans generally think multiracial people face discrimination, pointing out an important avenue for future research.

However, as Figure 5 demonstrates, the (n = 18) multiracial people *reported* experiencing discrimination at a rate similar to monoracial minorities in 2006. Most groups reported experiencing the least discrimination in intimate contexts, such as among family and friends, and experiencing the most in public contexts such as with store clerks. However, multiracial people were more likely than any other minority group to experience discrimination in family contexts (19 per cent), supporting the idea that multiracial groups are most likely to experience discrimination from others who share at least some of their racial ancestry. Multiracial people were also likely to experience discrimination in public (e.g. 34 per cent report discrimination from sales clerks) and from neighbours (19 per cent). Blacks are, unsurprisingly, the group most likely to report experiencing discrimination in most contexts, particularly with sales clerks (65 per cent) and employers (37 per cent). But multiracial respondents' reports of experiencing discrimination are

Figure 5. *Percentage reporting 'sometimes' or 'often' treated unfairly, by sources of discrimination and race of respondent*

similar to those of other racial minorities and very different from the reports of whites.

Thus, the relatively high rates of multiracial people experiencing discrimination combined with low rates of public support for anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies for multiracials are worrisome. These findings mean that although multiracial individuals report experiencing discrimination and therefore might need affirmative action and protection from discrimination, public opinion may not validate these needs. Our results indicate that multiracial people's experiences of discrimination, like those of monoracial minorities, are probably going unrecognized.

One important caveat is that the 2006 survey items about discrimination and affirmative action did not ask respondents to distinguish between different multiracial groups. Survey respondents may not have a clear idea of a 'multiracial person' when they respond to these items and therefore their perceptions may be vague rather than specific. Furthermore, respondents' perceptions of how much discrimination multiracial people experience (and therefore how deserving they are of protection and affirmative action) may vary widely across the different multiracial groups. For example, respondents may see part-black multiracials as more 'deserving' because of their ancestry and the history of slavery that prompted the development of affirmative action policies.

Questions for future research may include: Is there a status hierarchy of 'deserving-ness' among multiracial groups that is

correlated with perceptions of oppression? If there is such a hierarchy, will discussing it provoke controversy about group membership, i.e. who qualifies as 'really' black, Native American, Asian or Latino? Furthermore, will the complications of discussing and implementing affirmative action policies eventually lead to the demise of the policies rather than their evolution to meet the public's changing perceptions and society members' changing needs?

As Goldstein and Morning (2002) note, we face a dilemma that is perhaps unique in United States history. Collection of racial statistics has typically *followed* legislative or judicial decisions that required that information. In this case, we have created new racial categories *before* we created the legal structure to use those categories. The evidence we show here suggests we will see legal claims based on multiracial status in the future, and that those legal claims are likely to be controversial given the significant division in responses to policies that include multiracial people. This debate could be important for several different political agendas. Individuals on the right and left of the political spectrum have both used the multiracial population in the past: one to argue for the 'end of race' and the other to argue for the continuing complexity of racial categories, inequality and discrimination (Williams 2006). It is not yet clear what direction this debate will take, and therefore it is of considerable importance that we continue to gather information about attitudes toward multiracial people, attitudes toward policies that include them and their experiences of discrimination.

Notes

1.   We deliberately chose the phrase 'illegal immigrant' rather than the more accurate phrasing such as 'undocumented migrant' in order to choose a term with negative associations in popular discourse.

2.   Because so few minority respondents were opposed to or neutral about affirmative action, we could not control for specific racial groups for this model. Instead, we controlled for minority status.

3.   We deliberately used the male pronoun for both questions about voting because previous versions of these types of questions pertaining to black candidates have used the male pronoun (Schuman et al. 1997) and because we did not want to conflate our question about race with another about gender.

4.   We recoded individuals who selected 'other race' and wrote in a clearly recognizable response into the appropriate category (for example, we recoded respondents who wrote in 'Caucasian' as white). This affected 13 cases in the sample. Ideally, we would prefer to separate each racial group in our analyses, but our small sample size made this impossible. In 2006, there were 800 whites, 50 blacks, 92 Latinos, 13 Asians, 18 multiracial people and 27 others (Native Americans, Middle Easterners and others) in the sample. In 2008, there were 754 whites, 105 blacks, 90 Latinos, 12 Asians, 14 multiracial people and 25 others in the sample.

5.   We also considered using the isolation index, which is a measure of the probability that a randomly drawn person in the geography will be of the same race as the respondent

(Massey and Denton 1988). However, we rejected this approach because it captures only intra-racial contact and does not distinguish between a neighbourhood with two racial groups versus one with many racial groups.

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