

Statement of Research Interests

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My work focuses on race and ethnic politics, identity politics, and intersectionality in the U.S. context. My two largest projects focus on: (1) racial rhetoric (my dissertation) and (2) race, identity, and policing. To make progress in these areas, my work makes use of pre-registered survey experiments, analyses of political media, and “big” administrative data.

The Acceptance of Explicit Racial Appeals (Dissertation)

How is racial fear and threat mobilized in American politics for political gain? Why are there periods of increased denigration of racial minorities, and periods of rhetorical commitments to racial equality? Recently, overt references to race and identity in U.S. politics have started to rise. Contextualizing this recent resurgence in the longstanding role that racial appeals have played in American politics, my dissertation investigates: (1) why explicit racial appeals receive public support sometimes, but elicit backlash other times; (2) the factors that are most deterministic in garnering support for explicit racial appeals; and (3) when politicians use explicit racial appeals to mobilize support for their campaigns and policies. In short, I propose and find that when members of a dominant group perceives a threat to their status, they are more willing to accept negative, explicit racial appeals that denigrate a minority group.

The first chapter of my dissertation tests this central claim with a pre-registered, nationally-representative survey experiment, with a two-wave, between subjects design. I find that when white respondents are reminded that they will soon be a demographic minority group in the U.S. (a perceived threat), they are more willing to accept and agree with a political flyer denigrating African Americans. To investigate the causal mechanism producing this effect, I employ a mediation model. I find that this effect is at least partially attributable to the development of anxiety, a marker of feeling threatened, upon reading the treatment article about demographic change. When under threat, white respondents were more likely to say that the racist flyer made a fair point, that they would vote for the politician who put out the racist flyer, and that they agreed with the claims made about African Americans in the flyer. An earlier draft of this chapter was presented at several conferences, including the Harvard Experimental Working Group conference and the annual meeting of the Society for Political Methodology. It won my department’s 2019 James W. Prothro award for best graduate student paper.

Although Chapter 1 demonstrates that heightened perceived threat leads to positive evaluations of explicit racial appeals, it leaves open several questions about the effects that different types of threat may have. In my second chapter, I evaluate whether economic or cultural perceived threats lead to greater acceptance of an explicit racial appeal in a pre-

registered, nationally representative survey experiment that builds on findings from my first chapter. This time, there are two treatment conditions. The first is an excerpt from a news article that reports that racial minorities are outpacing whites in hiring (the economic threat) and the other reports that racial minorities are overtaking whites in language and religion (the cultural threat). I find that compared to economic threats (or to the control condition), cultural threats are more likely to induce greater anxiety in white respondents, and in turn, produce support for an explicit racial appeal that denigrates African Americans. This expands on findings from the first chapter of my dissertation by illustrating that all perceived threats are not equal in their ability to elicit support for negative, explicit, racial appeals — instead, cultural threats have a greater ability to activate prejudice and produce support for racist appeals. The data collection and analyses for this chapter are complete; and writing is currently in progress.

While survey experiments are useful for drawing causal claims about the relationship between perceived threat and the approval of explicit racial appeals, they are limited to a particular moment in time. Examining how racial appeals have been used over time — and testing hypotheses about circumstances under which they are more and less likely — requires different tools. My third chapter uses two sets of political media data to better understand the connection between perceived threat and racial appeals longitudinally and cross-sectionally. I develop a coding scheme to classify racial appeals in television advertisements. Using this, I first analyze about 400 presidential television advertisements from 1952 to 2016 for their use of implicit and explicit racial, ethnic, or identity appeals. To my knowledge, this is one of the first observational analyses of the occurrence racial appeals that examines appeals related to groups beyond African Americans, like Latino/as and Middle Easterners. I find that while negative, explicit racial appeals are rarely used in this setting, implicit racial appeals are more common.

I then extend my analysis of racial appeals to the congressional and gubernatorial level. I am in the process of coding over 1,900 political advertisements from 2016 House campaigns, collected by the Wesleyan Media Project, for their use of implicit or explicit identity-based appeals. The presence of explicit appeals in certain districts, during certain political contests will serve as my dependent variable. Then, I plan to predict this with a measure of district-level perceived threat. I am on track to finish data collection and analysis by December 2019.

Next Steps: Book Project

My dissertation makes the connection between threat and racial appeals to demonstrate that when member of a dominant group *feels* threatened, they are more willing to express their prejudice against racial minorities — which politicians seize upon for their own gain. Because this threat is not necessarily connected to reality, politicians are able to generate periods in which it is heightened even when there is no objective threat to white dominance. I plan to compile a book manuscript by supplementing my dissertation work with observational survey data and additional experimental data that explore racial appeals that denigrate groups beyond African Americans. While an ugly reality, understanding when white racial prejudice is activated and mobilized for political gain is necessary in working to combat such prejudice.

Additional Research: Race, Identity, and Policing

Broadly, I am interested in the politics of race and identity. This has led me to a large-scale data collection and analysis project on policing. In an article that grew out of my Master's thesis (which won my department's award for best thesis in 2018), I use data on more than 20 million traffic stops in Illinois to demonstrate that theories of intersectionality can help us better understand the way that individuals are treated during police-citizen interactions. Stereotypes based on race, gender, age, and class all contribute to both the level of targeting *and* the level of leniency that drivers are afforded by law enforcement. While we often think of men as more heavily targeted by the police than women, for example, employing an intersectional lens reveals that black and Latina women are targeted for searches more than white or Asian men. This paper has been accepted with minor revisions (resubmitted August 2019) by *Politics, Groups, and Identities*.

Building on this work, with a team of collaborators, I have collected and analyzed publicly available data on police traffic stops to understand the dynamics of profiling in policing across states, departments, and municipalities. To date, this effort has resulted in four papers. The first examines the individual and institutional features of racial disparities across two states: North Carolina and Illinois. We find that even after accounting for a multitude of potential explanations for disparities, the race and gender of drivers still significantly predict whether or not they will be searched following a traffic stop: Black men are 123% more likely than white men to experience a discretionary search in North Carolina and 194% more likely to experience such a search in Illinois, all else equal. We also find that the race of the police chief can play a role in mitigating these disparities as black police chiefs tend to lead to declines in discretionary searches. This paper has been conditionally accepted by *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*.

Two papers are currently under review. One demonstrates that when a municipality is more reliant on fines and forfeitures for revenue, black-white racial disparities in policing are more pronounced. The second finds that when there is substantial black representation on the city council, treatment of black drivers by law enforcement improves and black-white racial disparities in traffic stop searches declines. Finally, a working paper investigates whether the initial reason for a stop amplifies the disparities produced.

Future Directions

Going forward, I plan to continue to investigate the way that identity shapes disparate realities for individuals and groups in American politics. I want to examine the rhetoric about identity and policing to better understand when policing becomes racialized, gendered, or classed, and the effects of this rhetoric on policy change and public opinion. Further, I want to understand the way that threat affects groups beyond whites. For example, how do African Americans respond to the "threat" of immigration? How does their position as a non-dominant group in the racial hierarchy condition their response? There is every sign that these issues will continue to occupy a central role in the future of American politics, so it is important that they be a focus of social science research.