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Reports

Evaluations of presidential performance: Race, prejudice, and perceptions of Americanism[☆]Eric Hehman^{a,*}, Samuel L. Gaertner^a, John F. Dovidio^b^a Department of Psychology, University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA^b Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA

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ABSTRACT

Earlier research suggests that despite President Obama's election, racial prejudice persists and continues to shape reactions to his presidency. The current work examines the role of Whites' prejudice in shaping perceptions of Obama's Americanism, and ultimately evaluations of his performance. Specifically, this research proposes that "how American" Obama is perceived will mediate the relationship between racial prejudice and evaluations of his performance for White, but not Black participants and only for Obama and not for Vice-President Biden. Data were collected from 295 Black or White students surveyed 1 year after Obama's election. Supportive of our hypotheses, racial prejudice predicted Whites' negative evaluations of Obama's performance, and this relationship was mediated by how American Obama was perceived. Additionally, these relationships were not obtained among Black participants or when Blacks or Whites evaluated the Americanism and job performance of Vice-President Biden.

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Barack Obama's election as the first Black president of the United States spurred substantial discussion about whether it was an indication that racial bias is no longer a significant barrier to Blacks, and if it signaled the beginning of a "post-racial America." Obama's "Blackness" was highlighted as a step toward progress for America (Gallup/USA Today, 2008; see also Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008). In fact, several studies conducted in the months leading up to and directly following the election documented the "Obama effect," in which both implicit bias of Whites toward Blacks (Plant et al., 2009) and stereotype threat experienced by Blacks (Aronson, Jannone, McGlone, & Johnson-Campbell, 2009; Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009) had been reduced or eliminated. Nevertheless, other work reveals that, despite Obama's election, racial prejudice persists and continues to shape reactions to both Blacks generally (Kaiser, Drury, Spalding, Cheryan, & O'Brien, 2009; Schmidt & Nosek, 2010) and Obama specifically (Dovidio et al., in press). The current work directly examined the role of Whites' prejudice in shaping perceptions of Obama's Americanism, and ultimately evaluations of his performance.

Race pervasively influences how Whites view others, particularly within the political sphere. Although White Americans may not overtly state that they view Blacks as less American than Whites because of strong egalitarian norms (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004;

Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997), they more strongly spontaneously associate Whites with being American and as representing American values than Blacks (Devos & Banaji, 2005). When race was salient, people were more likely to associate Obama with being Muslim and believe other stigmatizing political allegations (Kosloff, Greenberg, Schmader, Dechesne, & Weise, 2010). In addition, implicitly prejudiced Whites evaluated a healthcare plan more negatively when it was attributed to Obama rather than to Bill Clinton (Knowles, Lowery, & Schaumberg, 2010). Thus, it appears that Whites' racial prejudice may play a role in several controversies regarding Obama, such as challenges regarding Obama's birth country and the validity of his U.S. citizenship (Memmott, 2009), characterizations of his proposed legislation as socialist (see Tapper & Travers, 2009, para. 16), and misperceptions of his religion, as recent polls reveal that 18% of Americans incorrectly believe Obama to be Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The influence of racial prejudice in contemporary U.S. society is typically manifested in subtle, indirect forms of bias. Due to prevailing norms of equality, most Whites attempt to avoid appearing biased in their evaluations of Blacks, in part because of a genuine desire to live up to their egalitarian standards, but also because of concern regarding social censure (Plant & Devine, 2003). As a consequence, Whites' prejudice is more likely to be expressed in discriminatory responses when these actions can be justified by other factors (see Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009). For instance, prejudiced Whites were less supportive of a Black candidate than a White candidate for admission to their college only when candidates had a mixed record of achievement; when the candidate's record was impeccably strong, or obviously weak, racial prejudice did not influence recommendations

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(Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002). In the present research, we hypothesized that questions about Obama's "Americanism" may provide one justification for more prejudiced Whites to express more negative views of his performance as president.

Data for the current study were collected approximately 1 year after Obama's election. To examine the role of racial prejudice in evaluations of Obama, we assessed participants' racial attitudes (Brigham, 1993), how "American" they perceived Obama to be, and their evaluations of his performance on a number of different issues. We hypothesized that Whites' prejudice would predict more negative evaluations of Obama's performance. We further predicted that perceptions of Obama as un-American could provide a justification for a negative evaluation of Obama. Although, overall, Whites may be reluctant to blatantly describe Obama as un-American (see Devos & Banaji, 2005) we expected that racially prejudiced participants would be more susceptible to allegations questioning Obama's Americanism (Kosloff et al., 2010), which would then lead to more negative evaluations of his performance. Thus, we hypothesized that the relationship between Whites' racial prejudice and negative evaluations of Obama's performance would be mediated by perceptions of his un-Americanism.

Due to the specific nature of Whites' prejudice toward Blacks, we posited that these effects would not occur when the target was White rather than Black. Thus a comparison to a White target in a role similar to that of Obama is desirable. We believe the most comparable target is Vice-President Joseph Biden. We recognize and discuss the limitations of this comparison more fully in the discussion section, but as being White is synonymous with being American both in terms of implicit associations and self-reports (Devos & Banaji, 2005), we did not expect perceptions of Biden's Americanism to be a factor in Whites' evaluations of his performance.

In addition, we anticipated that Black participants would generally view Obama as more American and as performing better than would White participants. However, we did not have specific hypotheses about how Blacks' prejudice toward Whites would influence evaluations of Obama's performance. Furthermore, because Blacks associate Blacks and Whites equally with the category of American (Devos & Banaji, 2005), we did not anticipate that their perceptions of Obama's or Biden's Americanism would relate to their evaluations of their performance. Thus, we hypothesized that the mediated link between greater racial prejudice and lower perceptions of performance, through perceptions of his un-Americanism would occur uniquely for White participants' responses to Obama.

Method

Participants and procedure

Data were collected from 295 students at a mid-Atlantic American university in September and October of 2009, about a year after Obama's election (101 Black, 37 Black male, 58 White male, mean age = 20). Students were approached by undergraduate research assistants at various public locations around campus and asked to participate in an anonymous "On-Campus Political Opinions Survey." Completion of the survey took approximately 5–7 min and asked participants to evaluate the performance of either President Obama or Vice-President Biden.

Instructions informed participants that the survey was interested in seeing how much students agreed or disagreed with political analysts' evaluations of the target. Several critical issues facing the nation were listed (Iraq, alternative energy, increasing jobs, education, national deficit, health care, Afghanistan, economic reform). Participants were instructed to circle the two issues they considered most important and then rated the target's performance on these issues before completing the remainder of the survey. Asking participants to self-select the issues that were most important to

them was intended to increase the likelihood that their performance evaluations of the target regarded issues they valued.¹

Measures

Participants answered four questions assessing the performance of the survey target (Obama or Biden). The first two questions asked participants to rate the target's performance on the self-selected issues (1 = "Very Badly" to 7 = "Very Well": ...how well do you think [target] handled this issue?). The two subsequent questions involved evaluations of the target's performance in general (1 = "Very Badly" to 7 = "Very Well": In general, how well do you think [target] is doing as [President/Vice-President]). These 4 items formed a single factor ($\alpha = .89$). The proposed mediator was assessed by measuring the degree to which participants perceived the target as American (1 = "Not at all" to 7 = "Very Much": When I think of [target]... I see him as an American).

Although separate scales exist to measure different aspects of Whites' attitudes toward Blacks (Henry & Sears, 2002) and Blacks' attitudes toward Whites (Johnson & Lecci, 2003), our goal was to assess Whites' and Blacks' attitudes in as comparable a manner as possible. Therefore, levels of prejudice of both Whites and Blacks were assessed with a set of six shared items from Brigham's (1993) Attitudes Toward Blacks (ATB) scale and Attitudes Toward Whites (ATW) scale, adapted to create identical wording. The ATB and ATW scales contain additional items that differ in content, but we chose only the common items to ensure that any potential differences in results for the two scales could not be attributed to the different topics and focus of questions asked of Whites and of Blacks. In addition, we did not include items from the Governmental Policy subscale of Brigham's scales, for purposes of limiting conceptual overlap between our predictor (prejudice) and our outcome of interest (support for Obama's policies).

The six items, drawn from Brigham's (1993) ATB and ATW scales, were modified to permit the measure to be administered to participants from several different racial groups simultaneously and asked participants to respond (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree") to the statements: (a) I would rather not have other-race students live in the same apartment building I live in; (b) It would not bother me if my new roommate was of a different race (reverse-scored); (c) It is likely that a person of a different race than myself will bring violence into neighborhoods when they move in; (d) If a person of a different race were put in charge of me, I would not mind taking advice and direction from him or her (reverse-scored); (e) Some people of other races are so touchy about race that it is difficult to get along with them; (f) Interracial marriage should be discouraged to avoid the "who-am-I?" confusion which the children feel.² Although the ATB and ATW contain subscales, since its introduction researchers have commonly validated the scale using an overall score (e.g., Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009; Monteith, Mark, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010; Plant & Devine, 2009) or using a selected subscale (Shelton, Richeson, & Bergsieker, 2009) rather than distinguishing among the subscales. Thus, we computed overall prejudices scores for Whites and for Blacks based on the average of the six items. As Brigham (1993) found, the ATW items were less internally consistent than the ATB items (Whites: $\alpha = .66$, Blacks: $\alpha = .45$). Finally, general

¹ Prejudice scores, ratings of Obama and Biden's Americanism, and their performance evaluations were unrelated to the issues selected.

² To ensure that using identical wording in the six common prejudice items for Whites and Blacks maintained the meaning of the scales, we conducted pilot research with Black ($n = 10$) and White ($n = 36$) participants. Participants were asked to indicate the race (selecting from Whites, Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, or Other) they were thinking of when completing the scale. As intended and expected, Black participants overwhelmingly reported they thought of Whites (90%; $\chi^2(5) = 6.40, p = .011$), and Whites thought primarily of Blacks (89%; $\chi^2(5) = 55.20, p < .001$).

demographic information such as political party affiliation, age, gender, and race was collected at the end of the survey.

Results

We employed a statistical procedure integrating moderated regression and path analysis to simultaneously test both mediation and moderation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007), because more traditional methods of combining moderation and mediation have methodological issues that can conceal the nature of the underlying effects. For instance, running moderation and mediation tests independently do not reveal in which path the mediation is moderated (i.e., the path leading from the independent variable to the mediator, or the path leading from the mediator to the dependent variable) (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Thus, a constrained nonlinear regression module was used to derive coefficients from 1,000 bootstrap estimates, producing bias-corrected confidence intervals while controlling for political party affiliation. Tests of simple paths, direct effects, indirect or mediated effects, and differences in these effects at selected levels of the moderator variables were then calculated based upon these confidence intervals.

Regression coefficients are presented alongside 95% confidence intervals (CIs). CIs are superior to *p*-values in representing the potential for replication, and are considered significant if the intervals between the two values (e.g., [−.150, −.100]) do not include zero (Cumming, 2008).

Preliminary analyses

The means and standard deviations of the variables of interest are reported in Table 1. Overall, as expected, White participants tended to view Obama as less American, $t(156) = 1.66, p = .099$, and evaluated his performance more negatively, $t(156) = 4.96, p < .001$, than did Black participants (see Table 1). Moreover, Whites higher in prejudice rated Obama as less American, $b = -.390, [-.830, -.123]$, and as performing more poorly as president, $b = -.340, [-600, -120]$.

In terms of comparisons between ratings of Obama compared to Biden, although the means reported in Table 1 did not reveal that Obama's Americanism or job performance was lower than Biden's, additional analyses revealed that the difference in rating these two political figures was moderated by White participants' level of prejudice (see Aiken & West, 1991). For Whites, there was a significant Prejudice \times Target (Obama vs. Biden) interaction on Americanism, $b = .858, [.198, 1.583]$. As illustrated in Fig. 1A, Whites

low in prejudice (1SD below the mean) rated Obama as significantly more American than Biden, $b = -.539, [-.934, -.146]$. In contrast, Whites high in prejudice (1SD above the mean) viewed Obama as less American than Biden, $b = .319, [-.154, .828]$, although this difference was not significant. The Whites' Prejudice \times Target interaction on performance ratings was also significant, $b = .561, [.033, 1.056]$. As illustrated in Fig. 1B, the pattern was similar to that of ratings of Americanism. Specifically, Whites low in prejudice evaluated Obama's performance as better than Biden's, $b = -.360, [-.708, .017]$, whereas Whites high in prejudice rated Obama's performance lower than Biden's, $b = .200, [-.147, .553]$.

Why low prejudice Whites perceived Obama as higher in Americanism and performing better than Biden is not entirely clear. One possibility is that people see presidents, as the primary national leader, as more prototypical of the group and thus more American than vice-presidents (Hogg, 2005; Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998). Alternatively, the differential response of low prejudice Whites to Obama and Biden may reflect their concern with appearing nonprejudiced, particularly during a period when the election of a Black president was lauded as a sign of progress for not only Blacks but America more generally (Gallup/USA Today, 2008; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2009). Regardless of the specific reason for this effect, we note that although Table 1 (which collapses across White high and low prejudice participants), reveals that Obama's and Biden's mean ratings are equivalent, this conclusion ignores the Prejudice \times Target interaction effects among White participants. Therefore, tests of our primary hypotheses focused on the relationships among prejudice, perceptions of Americanism, and evaluations of performance, rather than on the mean levels of these variables.

Tests of main hypotheses

We predicted that that Whites' prejudice would predict more negative evaluations of Obama (but not Biden), and this relationship would be mediated by stronger perceptions of Obama as un-American. Models depicting simple paths relating to Whites' and Blacks' responses to Obama and Biden are shown in Fig. 2.

Whites regarding Obama

Supportive of mediation, when prejudice and Americanism were simultaneously included as predictors, Obama's perceived Americanism was positively related to Obama's performance evaluations, $b = .410, [.170, .590]$, while prejudice was no longer significantly related to evaluations of his performance, $b = -.180, [-.410, .050]$ (see Fig. 2A). Mediation was thus demonstrated by a significant indirect effect of prejudice on performance evaluation through Americanism, $b = -.164, [-.352, -.045]$. Together, these analyses reveal that higher prejudice predicted Whites seeing Obama as less American, which, in turn, predicted lower evaluations of his performance.

Whites regarding Biden

Our claim that negative evaluations of Obama stem from racial bias and operate through the mechanism involving a belief that "White is synonymous with American" conceptualization would be more strongly supported if such a relationship was absent regarding a comparable White target. Thus, we explored whether Obama or Biden as the target of evaluation would operate as a moderator of the mediated effect. Indeed, the overall indirect effect was moderated by target, $b = .184, [.059, .413]$. Americanism did not mediate the relationship between racial prejudice and Biden's performance evaluations, $b = .020, [-.002, .126]$. Examination of the paths involved in mediation revealed that while racial prejudice led to seeing Obama as un-American, it was unrelated regarding Biden, $b = .120, [-.080, .360]$, and that Biden's Americanism did not predict evaluations of his performance, $b = .170, [-.050, .460]$ (see Fig. 2C).

Table 1
Means and standard deviations (in parentheses).

White participants	
Rating Obama	<i>n</i> = 104
Prejudice	2.55 (0.71)
Obama's Americanism	6.40 (1.34)
Obama's performance	4.44 (1.25)
Rating Biden	<i>n</i> = 90
Prejudice	2.37 (0.68)
Biden's Americanism	6.22 (0.97)
Biden's performance	4.32 (1.01)
Black participants	
Rating Obama	<i>n</i> = 54
Prejudice	2.47 (0.69)
Obama's Americanism	6.70 (0.70)
Obama's performance	5.55 (1.00)
Rating Biden	<i>n</i> = 47
Prejudice	2.30 (0.61)
Biden's Americanism	6.51 (0.85)
Biden's performance	4.88 (0.78)

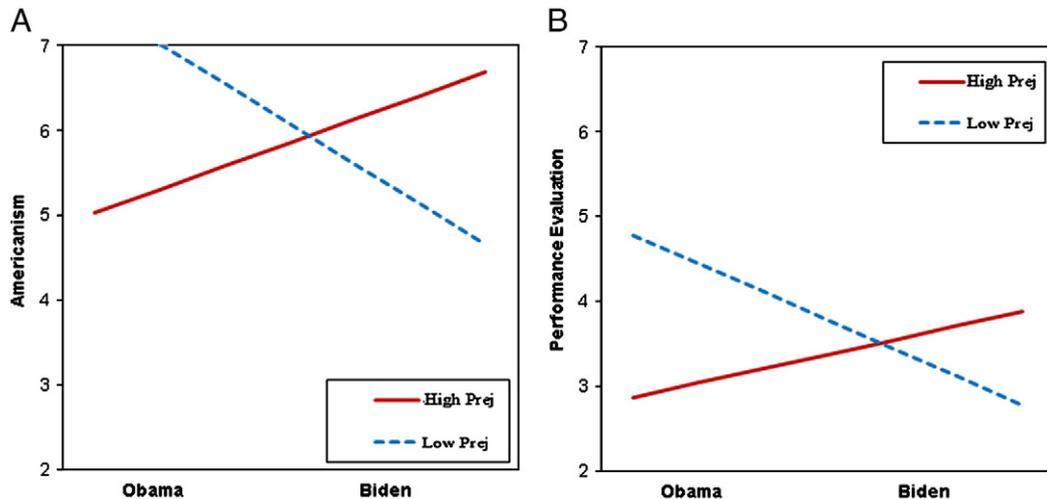


Fig. 1. (A and B) Comparisons of low prejudice (−1SD) and high prejudice (+1SD) participant ratings of both Obama and Biden on Americanism and performance evaluations.

Blacks regarding Obama

While we have determined that perceptions of Obama as American mediate the relationship between prejudice and performance evaluations for Whites, we have not yet explored whether this relationship is moderated by race. Thus, we examined whether each path and the overall indirect effects were moderated by participant race. Confirming our hypotheses, results revealed that the overall indirect effect was indeed moderated by race, $b = .170$, $[.046, .382]$. While Obama's perceived Americanism mediated the relationship between prejudice and evaluations of his performance for Whites, it did not do so for Blacks, $b = -.031$, $[-.162, .026]$. Closer inspection revealed that while Whites' prejudice toward Blacks led to weaker perceptions of Obama as American, Blacks' prejudice toward Whites was unrelated to their perceptions of Obama's Americanism, $b = -.060$, $[-.290, .050]$. However, Blacks perceiving Obama as American did predict more positive evaluations of his performance, $b = .520$, $[.248, .699]$ (see Fig. 2B).

Blacks regarding Biden

Finally, we did not expect Blacks' anti-White prejudice to predict Biden's perceived un-Americanism, nor Americanism to influence evaluations of his performance. These predictions were supported, as prejudice was not related to Biden's perceived un-Americanism, $b = .160$, $[-.083, .430]$, and un-Americanism did not predict evaluations of his performance, $b = .150$, $[-.190, .430]$ (see Fig. 2D).

Discussion

Overall, the results support our hypothesis that negative evaluations of Obama by White participants may be racially motivated. Whites are guarded about openly endorsing the view that Blacks are less American than Whites (Devos & Banaji, 2005), which may suppress overall mean differences in performance ratings and perceptions of Obama being un-American. However, bias in viewing Blacks as less American than Whites appeared to implicitly underlie Whites' negative evaluations of his performance. Also, consistent with previous research, Blacks did not demonstrate such a relationship, nor did Americanism mediate the relationship between prejudice and performance evaluations when Vice-President Biden acted as target for either Whites or Blacks. Whereas previous work has linked White prejudice with negative perceptions of Obama (Dovidio et al., in press; Knowles et al., 2010), the current work reveals a mechanism that may be largely responsible for this effect, Obama's non-prototypicality (largely in terms of his race) and thus reduced perceptions of his Americanism.

Our findings are consistent with work revealing that Whites' racial prejudice is now typically expressed in a subtle, rationalizable manner (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Whereas the aversive racism framework originally proposed that subtle, indirect manifestations of bias would mainly characterize the responses of low prejudice scoring Whites, while high-prejudice scoring Whites would express their bias more directly (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), the increasing strength of

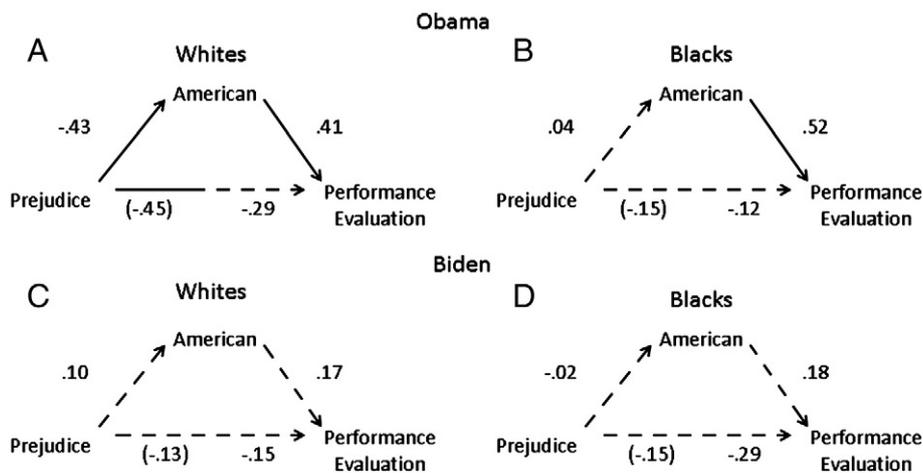


Fig. 2. (A, B, C, and D) Mediation models showing simple paths for each participant race and target. Values in parentheses indicate the relationship before the mediator was entered into the model. Solid lines indicate reliable paths while dashed lines indicate non-significant paths.

egalitarian norms (Schuman et al., 1997) may lead even high-prejudice scoring Whites to express their bias more subtly (Pearson et al., 2009). That is, due to social norms declaring that racial prejudice is inappropriate, even highly prejudiced Whites may feel a need to legitimize their beliefs about Obama by attributing them to some factor unrelated to race, such as his un-American social policies. Our data support this perspective. Perceptions of Obama's un-Americanism mediated the overall relationship between racial prejudice and negative performance evaluations. However, as anticipated, this effect occurred only for White participants' evaluations of Obama, but not of Biden.

There were no systematic effects associated with Blacks' prejudice toward Whites. A methodological explanation for this absence could be the relatively weak reliability of Blacks' prejudice in our sample. This may reflect conceptual differences in Whites' and Blacks' prejudice towards one another, as previous research has found that Black prejudice has a strong reactive component, centering on the anticipation of discrimination (Johnson & Lecci, 2003), whereas White anti-Black prejudice is more affective in nature. There is no reason to believe that reactive anticipation of stigmatization would predict evaluations of political figures, whereas affective reactions would, and thus this interpretation is consistent with our results.

An unanticipated result of the current research was that ratings of Obama's Americanism predicted his performance evaluations equally for both Blacks and Whites. Biden's Americanism, however, was unrelated to his evaluations. Thus, the relationship between Americanism and perceptions of performance did not vary by participant race, but by the position of the president as compared to the vice-president. The President of the United States functions as the iconic representation of America, and one explanation for this result is that Americans generally (i.e., including both Black and White) expect the president to be "American" and associate this quality with positive performance. This finding is consistent with previous research. Individuals prototypical of the ingroup are perceived to be more effective leaders than those perceived as non-prototypical (Hogg et al., 1998). Furthermore, recent work shows that the more participants held implicit beliefs that a prototypical American was White, the less likely they were to hire non-Whites for jobs in which Americanism was a valued trait (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010).

Additionally, evaluations of culturally important dimensions have previously been linked with electoral popularity and success. For instance, in Japan, ratings of warmth predicted electoral success, whereas in America, competence was the dimension best predicting election (Rule et al., 2010). The current research indicates that other dimensions, such as prototypicality as American, may be additionally important under certain circumstances. Future research might thus productively investigate the role of cultural embodiment in leadership performance evaluations (see also Hogg, 2005).

One limitation of the current cross-sectional design is that although the results were supportive of the proposed model, the direction of causality cannot be definitively determined. Specifically, we postulated that Whites' racial prejudice would predict the perceived Americanism of Obama, rather than the reverse. Some research involving prototypicality would support this criticism. For instance, the perceived prototypicality of a group predicts the level of prejudice felt towards that group (Waldzus, Mummendey, & Wenzel, 2005). However, the current research diverges from prototypicality research in that our targets were single individuals, Obama and Biden. We believe it much more likely that one's preexisting levels of racial prejudice would influence perceptions of these targets, rather than opinions regarding Obama and Biden influencing prejudice towards Black and White outgroups as a whole. Additionally, an alternative model would be that disapproving of a target's performance leads to questioning their American values. However, because our mediation model works only for Whites evaluating Obama, our findings are more consistent with previous research indicating that Whites associate Whites more strongly with America

than Blacks (Devos & Banaji, 2005). Nevertheless, the influence of performance on evaluations of a target's Americanism is still plausible. Future work might consider manipulating the strength of Obama's association with Americanism to better assess how this influences evaluations of his performance.

Another limitation of the current research is the lack of a directly comparable White target. Biden has neither the power nor the publicity that Obama enjoys. In fact, pilot testing revealed that the large majority of undergraduates (and many graduates) have no solid conception of the vice-president's duties. Although we believe we successfully avoid this issue in our design, claims of bias are undoubtedly stronger when targets are directly comparable, and perhaps here they are not. However, in order to study perceptions of presidential performance, no precisely equivalent comparison exists. Ultimately, we believe that the president and vice-president are similar enough such that the strength of the evidence demonstrated allows for claims of bias to be more plausible. Furthermore, recent work found that prejudiced Whites evaluated a healthcare plan more positively when it was attributed to former president Bill Clinton rather than to Obama (Knowles et al., 2010). Therefore, even had our comparison target been precisely equivalent, results similar to that of the current study may have been obtained.

As with much psychological research, our sample is composed of university undergraduates uncharacteristic of the national voting population. Indeed, university students are generally less racially biased and more Democratic than the general population, which polling data collected at our institution during the spring of 2009 confirm, as 47.4% of 814 respondents identified as Democratic and 19.3% as Republican (Wilson, 2009). Additionally, 76.9% reported voting for Obama, and 87% then held a favorable view of him. It is quite possible, therefore, that our relatively high-prejudiced Whites may not reflect the kind of extreme negativity, which may be expressed blatantly and without the need for justification, in the White population more generally. However, Obama's campaign was unique in its success in mobilizing college-age voters (Cave, 2008), and we argue that the opinions of this newly influential population are noteworthy. Furthermore, if these generally liberal and egalitarian voters exhibit the prejudicial tendencies reported in the current research, we believe that our effects would only be exaggerated in the national population, and view the current work as a conservative test of our hypotheses.

In a country with quickly growing minority populations, evaluation of minority Americans in leadership positions is an increasingly important issue. The current findings join a growing body of research showing that prejudiced Whites do not trust minority American leaders and look to criticize them for reasons unrelated to race or ethnicity (Knowles et al., 2010; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010). An important goal of future research is therefore how to reduce perceptions of minority leaders as un-American. The current work suggests that targeting associations between being White and a prototypical American is a viable starting point.

Finally, many in the media have speculated that current criticisms of Obama are a result of his race, rather than his agenda. We believe that the current results are an empirical demonstration that this is sadly the case. As the United States approaches important decisions regarding issues such as economic reform, health care, and overseas military interventions, the intrusion of racial attitudes in the evaluation of political leaders' performance is ironically inconsistent with what many believe to be "American."

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