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Cycles of Prejudice

Explicit Appeals in the Donald Trump Era

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Abstract

For much of US history explicit prejudice was commonplace during election cycles. Through a series of landmark judicial rulings and legislation norms of equality began to shift, leading to a reliance on implicit appeals to activate out-group resentment without violating social norms. The US seems to be in a transition back to explicit prejudice as exemplified by the 2016 election in which we saw an explosion of explicitly anti-Muslim messages that were aimed at activating Islamophobic sentiments. What has caused the rise in explicit prejudice? Further, what responses do these appeals illicit from the American public? I argue that a confluence of factors from a heightened racial environment, a recent economic recession, and the conclusion of the partisan realignment has caused a cycle back to explicit prejudice. A series of survey experiments indicate that explicitly anti-Muslim appeals are more acceptable to the public than explicitly anti-Black appeals, and that the subject of the appeal, purveyor of the appeal, and a host of individual-level characteristics of audience members influence how the message will be received.

“I think Islam hates us. There’s something there that — there’s a tremendous hatred there. There’s a tremendous hatred. We have to get to the bottom of it. There’s an unbelievable hatred of us.”

- Donald Trump¹

During the 2016 presidential election, a myriad of explicitly prejudicial rhetoric was levied at various groups, notably Muslims. Muslims were labeled un-American and religious extremists. Thus, explicit group-based appeals came to the forefront of American politics in the 2016 election. As exemplified by the quote above, Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign made several incendiary comments about Muslims including banning all Muslims from entering the US. Explicit appeals to Islamophobia were not exclusive to Donald Trump, either. Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio, among others, made explicitly anti-Muslim comments during the GOP primary.

¹ The above quote comes from an interview Donald Trump did with CNN's Anderson Cooper on March 6, 2016: <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/09/politics/donald-trump-islam-hates-us/>.

Yet, even before the 2016 election explicit appeals to anti-minority sentiments were on the rise. After the election of Barack Obama in 2008, explicitly racist posters began regularly appearing at Tea Party rallies (Valentino, Neuner, and Vandebroek 2017). During the 2012 election, the Right made numerous explicit appeals to race, comparing Barack Obama to a chimpanzee and explicitly evoking the stereotype of African American laziness (McIlwain and Calliendo 2014).

Trump's campaign was strongly characterized by hostility towards many groups, but Muslims in particular. Not coincidentally, attitudes toward Muslims were strong predictors of vote choice in the 2016 election (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). Recent work further suggests that attitudes toward this group are likely to continue to be strong predictors in future elections to come. Tesler (2017) argues that attitudes towards Muslims have emerged as a significant determinant of partisanship due to the strong effects of Islamophobia on opposition to Barack Obama.

Data from the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES) indicates that attitudes toward Muslims had a strong and significant effect on voting for Donald Trump (see Figure 1). Higher favorability predicts a steep decrease in support for Trump. Moving from lowest favorability to highest favorability predicts a decrease in support for Trump of more than 60%.

[Figure 1 here.]

Why this particular group? Extant scholarship has examined explicitly anti-Black appeals, but very little attention has been given to the use of explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric in U.S. politics. Muslims have consistently been viewed harshly by the American public. Time series data from the ANES can help demonstrate how groups are viewed relative to one another.

Figure 3 displays feeling thermometer scores for Blacks, Whites, Latinxs, gays and lesbians, undocumented immigrants, and Muslims.²

[Figure 2 here.]

Three notable results are evident: (1) Blacks, Whites, and Latinxs are viewed similarly based on feeling thermometer ratings. This of course does not mean that these groups are treated similarly or face the same challenges in society. Rather, norms dictate that these groups be viewed as equal and people tend to abide by those norms. (2) Muslims and undocumented immigrants are viewed significantly worse throughout history. Averaging together the results of every year since 1988, undocumented immigrants are rated roughly 28 points less favorably than Whites and about 24 points less favorably than Blacks. Though Muslims are viewed slightly more favorably, the average rating since 2004 (when data was first collected on Muslims in the ANES) Muslims are rated about 22 points less favorably than Whites. The same norm that dictates equality among racial groups does not seem to be present for undocumented immigrants or Muslims. (3) Feeling thermometer scores for the LGBTQ community have shifted markedly over time. In 1988, the LGBTQ community was viewed slightly less favorably than undocumented immigrants, but as of 2016 were rated about 19 points more favorably (and just six points less favorably than Whites).

The results help illuminate why it might be acceptable to explicitly derogate some groups and not others. It is no coincidence that Muslims were strongly targeted in the last presidential election and are also viewed less favorably than other minority groups. Additionally, the LGBTQ example demonstrates how norms can change over time, and improve the relative status of a group.

² Feeling thermometer data from the ANES is missing for some election years.

The conventional wisdom has been that appeals to race must be implicit to effectively activate out-group sentiment without being rejected by the public (Mendelberg 2001). *Racial Priming Theory* suggests that when race is subtly cued, the power of racial attitudes on political evaluations is heightened. But when race is explicitly cued, these appeals should be rejected. This has been challenged in more recent literature that has suggested that explicit appeals may also be effective (Huber and Lapinski 2006; Valentino et al. 2017). This puzzle, combined with the growing prevalence of explicit appeals, especially directed towards Muslims, has informed the questions asked in this study.

The main question this study seeks to answer is *when and why are explicit appeals to prejudice effective?* To answer this, I examine how people respond to explicit group-based appeals. Which kinds of appeals do people respond favorably to? Who are the people who are activated by these appeals? In contrast, who are the people who reject these appeals? To answer these questions I first review the literatures on racial priming and prejudice. I then build from this literature to develop my theory and hypotheses. Subsequent sections detail the experimental design used in this study, and present and discuss the findings. I conclude with implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Explicit appeals came to the forefront of the 2016 presidential election in a way that few could have predicted. The 2016 election highlighted not just that these appeals can be used without being outright rejected by the public, but that these appeals may have mobilizing capacity. There is a sizeable segment of the public that responds favorably to explicitly prejudicial appeals. In this section, I conceptualize norms and detail a *theory of differential*

norms to identify when and why explicit group-based appeals can be effective in mobilizing political support.

Racial Priming

When making evaluations of candidates and policies, individuals tend to sample from easily accessible considerations, or those that are at the “top of the head” (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992). Mass opinions regarding most political issues are generally weakly formed (Zaller 1992), making it difficult to prime people’s positions. However, racial issues, and particularly group affect, tend to be crystallized and easier to prime with new information (Tesler 2015). Subtle cues of race can activate racial attitudes, bringing them closer to the top of the head. A long history of racial priming literature has documented the use and effectiveness of subtle racial cues (Gilens 1999; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002).

According to Mendelberg’s (2001) Implicit/Explicit (IE) model of racial priming the key component to the effectiveness of the appeal is the covert manner in which the appeal is deployed. She argues that politicians use implicit racial appeals because while they have incentives to mobilize voters who are racially resentful, they also face incentives to not violate norms of racial equality. Presidential candidates at least since Barry Goldwater in 1964 have used implicit racial messages to mobilize voters. Over time, a partisan realignment has occurred with elites from both major parties overtly signaling their stances on racial issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

By the early 2000s, the partisan realignment had sorted most racially resentful whites into the GOP (Valentino and Sears 2005). This process has intensified since 2008, as there has been a significant ‘white flight’ away from the Democratic Party and into the Republican Party (Tesler 2016b). Republican candidates can now be more explicit in signaling their positions, including

positions on racial issues (Valentino et al. 2017). In fact, the bases of both major parties have become more homogenous in their racial views, removing much of the constraint leaders from both parties had in overtly indicating their stances.

Leaders in both parties are more likely to be explicit in their stances, and their supporters may be also. Mendelberg (2001) argues that when norms are inegalitarian, voters expect “candidates to establish racist credentials” (p. 8). I argue in the next section that certain groups in American society have inegalitarian norms attached to them which incentivize candidates to establish hostile credentials towards those groups.

Performance-Based Norms

Mendelberg (2001) argues that when a norm of equality exists, racial appeals must be implicit in order to adhere to the norm and not be rejected outright by the public. When racial appeals are rendered explicit, voters are less likely to support the candidate and it “prevent(s) their negative racial predispositions from influencing their opinions on issues of race” (4). So for groups that have a norm of equality attached to it, explicit appeals should not be effective in activating out-group sentiments without being rejected by society. However, for groups which do not have a norm of equality attached, explicit appeals may be effective.

But what is this norm of equality and what function does it hold? Mendelberg argues that people want to avoid having a public perception of being racist and also avoid viewing themselves as racist. A norm is a grammar of social interactions, helping specify what is and is not acceptable in society, and is generally accepted by most members of society (Mendelberg 2001; Bicchieri 2005). The function of following the norm is, “to avoid social censure or the pangs of conscience” (Mendelberg 2001, 17). It is not necessary that people who are following norms regarding racial issues have internalized the norms. Put another way, an individual who

adheres to the norm does not necessarily believe that the action is problematic, merely that the individual understands that it is socially unacceptable to perform this action and wants to indicate that she accepts the norm.

I argue here that group-based norms have developed as *performance-based norms*. For a norm to be performance-based it means that the function of following the norm is performative. For example, if there is a norm against using a particular derogatory term, an individual may not use the term so as to indicate to others that she accepts the norm regardless of how she actually feels about it.

Goffman (1956) states that impressions are important and individuals have incentives to try and control the impressions other people receive. People put on a “performance”, which is the activity, whether verbal or otherwise, in front of others that has an effect on outside observers (13). Individuals work to create a positive image which is delineated by social attributes that have been approved by society (Goffman 1967). Thus, people’s words and actions in front of others are a performance put on to adhere to accepted norms and attributes.

Political theory has a long history of scholarship regarding performance-based norms, but the concept has not been developed in the context of norms of equality until recently (Kim forthcoming). However, norms regarding racial equality have been performance-based throughout US history. This is not to say that no one deeply holds norms of equality. Of course there are people who strongly accept the norm of racial equality. But a significant portion of the public adhere to norms due to societal pressure to do so rather than because they have internalized the norm.

In 2002, Trent Lott, then a Republican Senator from Mississippi, was pressured to resign as Senate Minority Leader following controversial comments he made praising Strom

Thurmond. Just fourteen years later Donald Trump was elected president of the United States not just in spite of, but in large part due to, his explicitly prejudicial rhetoric. The natural question to ask is what changed? What happened to the norms that were at play when Lott resigned his Senate leadership post? Many salient events have taken place since then including Barack Obama's presidency, the crystallization of the partisan realignment, and the largest economic recession since the Great Depression. But at the heart of this answer is that norms of equality were present in 2002 and they are still present today. These norms, however, are performance-based making them easy to manipulate.

When Donald Trump rode down the golden escalator and announced his candidacy for President, it provided the opportunity to those who have not internalized the norm of equality to stop performing. The explicitly prejudicial rhetoric used by Donald Trump and other prominent politicians signaled to the public that it may now be acceptable again to hold and express prejudicial views, at least about certain groups like Muslims and undocumented immigrants. Norms of equality being performance-based helps explain the transition from how the public reacted to Trent Lott to the reaction to Donald Trump.

A Theory of Differential Norms

In Chapter one of *The Race Card*, Mendelberg provides a narrative of how norms transitioned from inegalitarian to egalitarian in the early to mid 20th century. In this review, she provides several avenues for the creation of norms of equality. Social movements seeking to improve the status of a group, combined with assistance from influential leaders can erase inegalitarian norms and establish norms of equality. Discrediting norms of inequality and the adherents of that norm can also be a useful avenue to the creation of norms of equality. The most effective avenue, according to Mendelberg, is "to pass landmark legislation, to issue momentous

judicial rulings, and to engage in other highly salient signals of commitment to the new norm” (p. 17). Mendelberg then provides a convincing account of the establishment of the norm of racial equality in the United States using the means described above.³

I augment this argument to say that there is no universal norm of equality and that each societal group has a different set of norms attached to it. There may be a set of standards such that the group members are not viewed as inferior, but no such norms necessarily exist for another group. For each group there is a line that demarcates what is and is not socially acceptable. For example, a line separates covert white supremacy which is generally socially acceptable from more overt white supremacy which is not socially acceptable. This demarcation line is different for African Americans, Muslims, undocumented immigrants and other groups.

A Typology of Explicit Appeals

We should not expect that all explicit appeals, even those directed at groups that do not have the norm of equality attached, to be effective. Nor would we expect that all members of the public are influenced the same way by explicit appeals. Certain appeals are more suited to mobilize the public depending on the subject and substance of the appeal. Similarly, certain individuals are more likely to respond favorably to the appeal depending on their racial attitudes and information levels. This section will outline the theoretical expectations for when explicit appeals will be effective and when they will be rejected.

The main question being examined in this study is why and when explicit appeals to prejudice effectively activate out-group sentiment without being rejected by the public. To answer this question I build a typology below. Several variables interact with each other to determine the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of a given appeal.

³ See chapter 1 of *The Race Card*.

The group matters

The first level is group, which has been split into two categories; groups for which the norm of equality *is* present and groups for which the norm of equality *is not* present. The results from Figure 2 can help determine which groups do and do not have a norm of equality attached. For example, although Blacks have faced intense discrimination throughout U.S. history and continue to face strong prejudice, favorability measures of Blacks are similar to Whites. It is reasonable to expect that a norm dictating overt prejudice against Blacks exists in today's society. However, groups like Muslims and undocumented immigrants are viewed significantly less favorably, indicating that a norm of equality is unlikely to exist.

Racial attitudes of the target audience

Next, the target audience contributes to whether the appeal will be effective or not. Individuals who score high in racial resentment and old fashioned racism are significantly more likely to be activated by racial appeals (Mendelberg 2001). Those who score low in racial resentment and old-fashioned racism are less likely to be activated and more likely to outright reject the appeal. This also means that candidates in districts with a higher percentage of racially resentful people are more likely to utilize explicit appeals in their campaign messages.

Extant scholarship suggests that education level (Huber and Lapinski 2006) and region (Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin 2010) influence the level of acceptance of explicit prejudice. However, a more recent study finds broad acceptance from whites (Valentino et al. 2017).

How much information do you have?

The amount of information that an individual has about the subject of the appeal can influence the effectiveness of the appeal. Public figures such as Barack Obama and Donald Trump are so well known, and public attitudes towards both individuals are so crystallized, that

it is unlikely for an explicit appeal (or any kind of appeal) to have an effect on people's evaluations. Explicit appeals are more likely to have an effect on people's evaluations of candidates and policies that the public has less prior information about.

Racialization of the subject

Finally, the subject matter influences the effectiveness of the appeal. Appeals to policies that are already racialized are unlikely to activate out-group hostility because the policies themselves already do that. This is also true for Obama-era policies such as the Affordable Care Act (Tesler 2016a). Similarly, racial appeals are less effective for increasing support for highly racialized candidates (Banks and Hicks n.d.). There is more room to activate out-group sentiment when the subject of the appeal (whether a policy or candidate) has not yet been racialized.

Combined, the four factors of group, audience, information, and subject interact simultaneously to determine whether (1) the appeal is rejected outright by the public, (2) the appeal is accepted by the public, or (3) the appeal is accepted by the public and has mobilizing capacity. The typology is summarized in the figure below.

Group	Audience	Information	Subject
(1) Norm of equality <i>is present</i>	(1) Low racial resentment	(1) High information	(1) Racialized policy/candidate
(2) Norm of equality <i>is not present</i>	(2) High racial resentment	(2) Low information	(2) Non-racialized policy/candidate

The figure indicates the different paths that appeals can take. There are three possible results; (1) the appeal is rejected outright by the public, (2) the appeal is not rejected outright by the public but does not necessarily have strong mobilizing capacity, and (3) the appeal is not rejected outright *and* has the capacity to mobilize voters.

Norms of equality and the effectiveness of explicit appeals

We cannot expect all explicit appeals to be effective at mobilizing the public in support of any candidate or policy. We also cannot expect that all members of the public respond in a similar fashion to explicit appeals to prejudice. Rather, the conditions that are most auspicious for a strong mobilizing effect of explicit appeals are as follows: (1) the group that is the subject of the appeal *does not* have the norm of equality attached, (2) the audience members have high levels of racial resentment, (3) the subject of the appeal is a non-racialized policy or candidate, and (4) audience members have low levels of information about the policy or candidate.

Case Study – Muslim Americans

While prejudice towards most groups in the United States has been on the decline over the last few decades, Muslims have continued to be viewed unfavorably relative to most other out-groups (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009). The percentage of Americans who say that Muslims “do not at all agree with my vision of American society” is similar to that for atheists and the LGBT community and significantly higher than for other groups including Asians, Hispanics, Jews, African Americans, and whites (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006, 218). Similarly, Sides and Gross (2007) find in an examination of stereotype evaluations that Muslims are rated more negatively on trustworthy-untrustworthy and peaceful-violent scales.

Kalkan and his co-authors (2009) differentiate between two types of out-groups; those that are defined by ethnic, racial, and religious characteristics, and those that are defined by “behaviors or values that many find unusual or offensive” (848). Behaviorally defined out-groups may be different for a variety of reasons. Citizens in the mainstream are more likely to avoid contact with members of these groups. Similarly, members of these groups may be more likely to isolate themselves from mainstream society. When contact does occur it may have the effect of reinforcing perceptions of incompatible values and behaviors.

Muslims are distinct in that they are viewed by mainstream society as both a racial and religious out-group, as well as a behavioral out-group (ibid). Therefore, prejudice towards Muslims is structured differently than other out-groups.

I contend that explicitly anti-Muslim appeals are effective at activating out-group sentiment for three reasons: (1) Partisan realignment has sorted most racial conservatives into the Republican Party (Lublin 2004; Valentino and Sears 2005). Parties now have less to fear from making their stances overt, thus removing some of the risk of using explicit appeals as voters are less likely to punish candidates for overtly signaling views on racial policies (Valentino et al. 2017). (2) Muslims are among the least favored groups in American society (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslander 2009; Tesler and Sears 2010; Sides and Gross 2012). (3) Issues regarding Muslims and Islam have become politically salient in recent elections (Tesler 2017; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). Combined, these ideas indicate that explicit anti-Muslim messages should effectively activate out-group hostility without being rejected outright.

Figures 1 and 2 in the introduction indicate that Muslims are among the least favorable groups in the United States and that low favorability had a strong impact on support for Donald Trump. In addition, there is also growing concern of Islamic extremism in the US. According to another 2014 survey conducted by PEW Research Center, 62% of Americans report being “very concerned” about rising Islamic extremism (PEW 2014a). When first asked in 2007, the share was only 48%. This is particularly true for Republicans among whom 82% are concerned about Islamic terrorism.

Given the growing importance of Islamophobia on partisan preferences and vote intentions (Tesler 2017), it follows that explicitly anti-Muslim appeals are unlikely to be rejected

by the Republican base and have potential to be effective in activating out-group prejudice, and increasing support for candidates and policies.

Experimental Design

To test the theory of differential norms, I constructed a fictional candidate survey experiment. The fictional candidate used in this experiment is Mark Williams, the Republican nominee for a position in the U.S. House of Representatives. Respondents read a short biography of the candidate and then answer a series of questions evaluating the candidate. Each treatment group reads a biography that paints Mark Williams as a moderate who wants to “rebuild crumbling infrastructure” and “bring jobs back to the district”. with one of the following explicit appeals added in: (1) “Candidate Williams will work hard to protect the community by increasing spending for law enforcement to crack down on violent Muslim extremists”, (2) “violent illegal immigrant gangs”, or (3) “violent black crime”. Then, they answer a series of questions about Mark Williams to gauge support for the candidate.

The experiment is set up to isolate the explicit appeal. Therefore, allowing for a better test of the effectiveness of the appeal. Candidate Mark Williams is a non-racialized candidate and survey respondents have no prior information about him. Thus, this experiment isolates the subject and audience of the appeal as the variables of interest.

Three groups are included as subjects of the appeal in the three treatment groups: Muslims, “illegal” immigrants, and Blacks. Given partisan alignment, low favorability, and increased political salience, I contend that Muslims and undocumented immigrants *do not* have the norm of equality attached to their group.⁴ Therefore, explicit appeals are likely to be accepted by society and may have mobilizing capacity depending on the conditions.

⁴ Results for priming respondents with anti-immigrant rhetoric are not discussed in this study.

On August 25, 2017 I finished collecting data for a pilot study using the fictional candidate experiment described above. The pilot study includes a sample of 1,220 adult US residents collected using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (hereafter referred to as MTurk).

MTurk has been criticized due to its opt-in nature but it provides several advantages to this study. Recent research has demonstrated that treatment effects from MTurk studies are comparable to those found in nationally representative surveys (Mullinix et al 2015, Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011). Studies of MTurk respondents also indicate that they are more representative of the population than other convenience samples (Huff and Tingley 2015, Buhrmester et al. 2011). Some scholars have argued that the selection process used by MTurk invalidates studies of many of the central political science topics. However, recent work by Clifford, Stewart, and Waggoner (2015) show that liberals and conservatives in MTurk samples "closely mirror" those in the mass public. The results of their study indicate that MTurk is a valid tool for recruitment of survey participants for questions regarding political ideology. Thus, I am able to collect an affordable convenience sample using MTurk.

Results

Figure 3 indicates that respondents are much more likely to vote for Mark Williams when he uses an anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant appeal than when he uses an anti-Black appeal.

[Figure 3 here.]

This indicates that the public may be willing to accept anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant appeals, but anti-Black appeals still lead to backlash against the candidate. Not only does using explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric not lead to a backlash against the candidate, but there is a strong mobilizing effect. Using the explicitly Islamophobic appeal increases vote intention for the candidate by a substantial 41% over the anti-Black treatment group. The results are replicated for

two additional dependent variables; how well the candidate represents the interests of respondents and a feeling thermometer of the candidate.⁵

Interestingly, Figure 4 indicates that the results are similar for both major parties. Both Republicans and Democrats are significantly more supportive of the candidate when he uses an anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant appeal in his campaign message than when using an anti-Black appeal. While the level of support is higher for Republicans than Democrats, a similar pattern emerges for both groups.

[Figure 4 here.]

Further analysis provides preliminary evidence of conditional effects. Figure 5 demonstrates that racial resentment has a strong mediating effect on support for the fictional candidate. Not surprisingly, the likelihood of voting for candidate Mark Williams among respondents highest in racial resentment is almost 50% higher than those lowest in racial resentment among the sample that received the explicitly anti-Black appeal. Among the sample that received the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant appeals, the increase in likelihood of voting for Mark Williams is more than 45%. Future experiments will use an old-fashioned racism scale rather than a racial resentment scale to more effectively gauge out-group prejudice.

[Figure 5 here.]

Discussion

The results presented above provide some suggestive evidence for the theory of differential norms and for the typology specified above. Use of explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric by candidate Williams increased support among respondents relative to the anti-Black treatment group. Meanwhile, explicitly anti-Black messages decreased support. The group being derogated

⁵ See Appendix B and Appendix C.

has a strong influence on the acceptability of the explicit appeal. Elites are likely to face backlash from voters when explicitly derogating Blacks, but explicit derogation of Muslims or Islam may be an effective campaign strategy.

The racial attitudes and partisanship of the audience predictably influence the acceptance of the appeal. Racial resentment and identification with the Republican Party make it much more likely for an individual to support the candidate when he uses explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric.

Given that Mark Williams is a fictional candidate, he is non-racialized and respondents have no information about him. According to the typology presented above, these are ideal conditions for the effectiveness of explicit appeals. The results are likely to be different for a real candidate with greater name recognition because respondents have more options for evaluating the candidate. If the candidate is highly racialized (e.g. Barack Obama or Donald Trump), then explicit appeals may not substantially impact candidate evaluations because there is less room to activate out-group sentiment.

Conclusion

“Teachers have noted an increase in bullying, harassment and intimidation of students whose races, religions or nationalities have been the verbal targets of candidates on the campaign trail.”

- Southern Poverty Law Center⁶

In spring of 2016 the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) released a report detailing the effect of the 2016 GOP primary on schools and school children titled *The Trump Effect*. In this document the SPLC demonstrated that campaign rhetoric was “producing an alarming level of

⁶ The quote comes from a report released in 2016 by the Southern Poverty Law Center titled, *The Trump Effect*. For the full report see here: https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/splc_the_trump_effect.pdf.

fear and anxiety among children of color and inflaming racial and ethnic tensions in the classroom” (4). Many students were worried about being deported or having a family member deported. Others were emboldened by the rhetoric and lashed out at people whose identities were under attack during the campaign, thereby stoking racial animosity. The effects of political rhetoric are not merely ensconced in a given election or policy debate. The impact is felt throughout the country in our schools, homes, and places of work. Understanding when and why explicit appeals to prejudice are effective can provide insight into racial animosity and the changing political landscape. Discovering how to diffuse explicitly hostile rhetoric can help us do something about it.

This study detailed the conditions ripe for mobilizing capacity of explicit appeals in U.S. politics. There are several areas of study that are not addressed here that I hope to address in follow-up work.

This study focuses on the priming effects of Islamophobic rhetoric on candidate evaluations. Future work can examine the effects of explicit rhetoric derogating other groups such as undocumented immigrants and the LGBTQ community. It will also be enlightening to examine the effects of explicit appeals on group evaluations, issue positions, and racial and political attitudes more broadly.

The United States is not nearly the only country that is seeing a significant increase in explicit group-based appeals. Marine Le Pen in France and Nigel Farage in the UK are two high profile politicians who have gained power in recent years. Candidates in Germany, Austria, Hungary and other countries have also used explicit appeals to activate out-group hostility,

particularly of Muslims and immigrants. Future work can test the theories presented in this study on explicit appeals to prejudice in Europe and other regions of the world.

Future work can also examine explicit appeals that are aimed at activating positive or sympathetic attitudes towards minority groups. Democrats were significantly more explicit in signaling their racial attitudes and stances on racial policies in the 2016 election than in any other recent election. This has remained the case since.

Finally, and most importantly, future work can find ways to diffuse explicit appeals. Several theories for diffusing implicit racial appeals have been tested in previous literature (e.g. Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). This may be a fruitful starting point for testing the diffusion of explicit appeals.

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Figures

Figure 1: Muslim favorability on support for Donald Trump. Data comes from the 2016 American National Election Study.

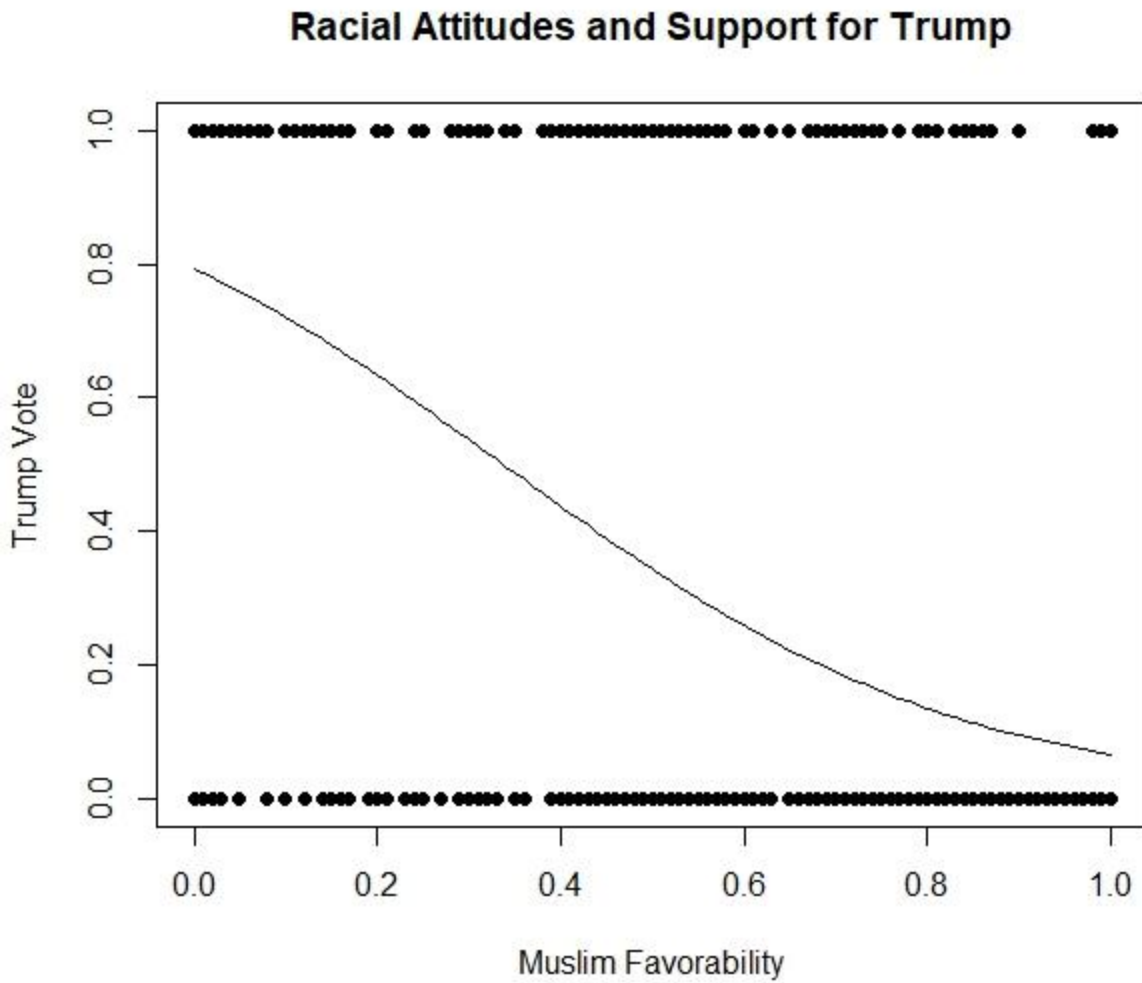


Figure 2: Favorability of racial groups over time. Data comes from the 2016 American National Election Study.

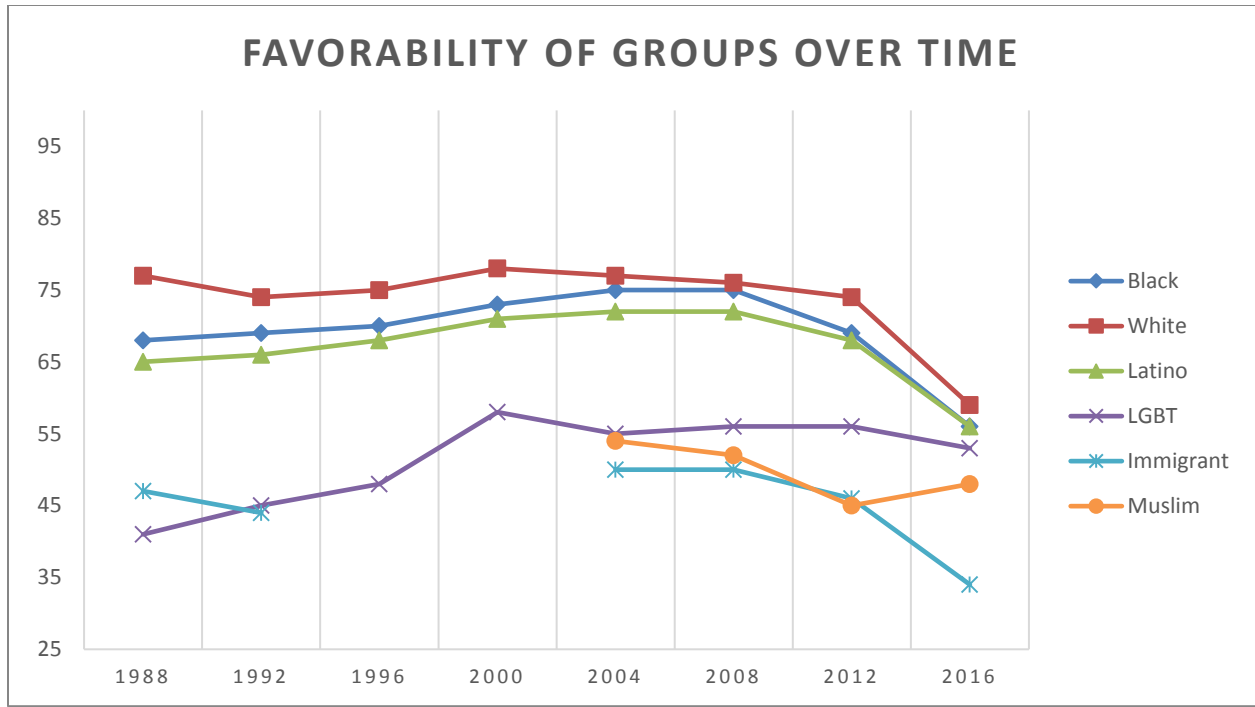


Figure 3: The effect of anti-black, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim appeals on vote intention for candidate Mark Williams. Data comes from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.

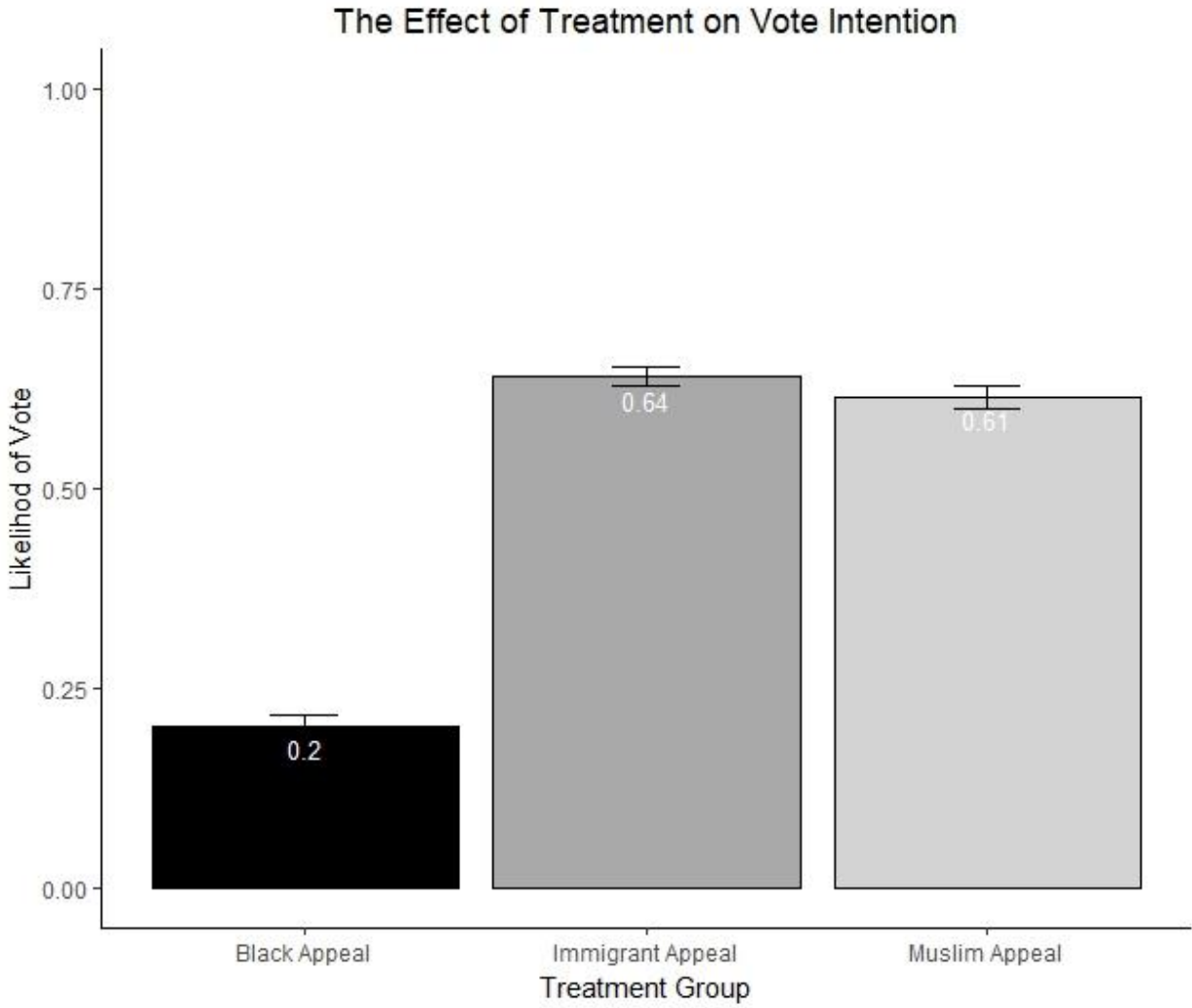


Figure 4: The effect of anti-black, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim appeals on vote intention by party identification. Data comes from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.

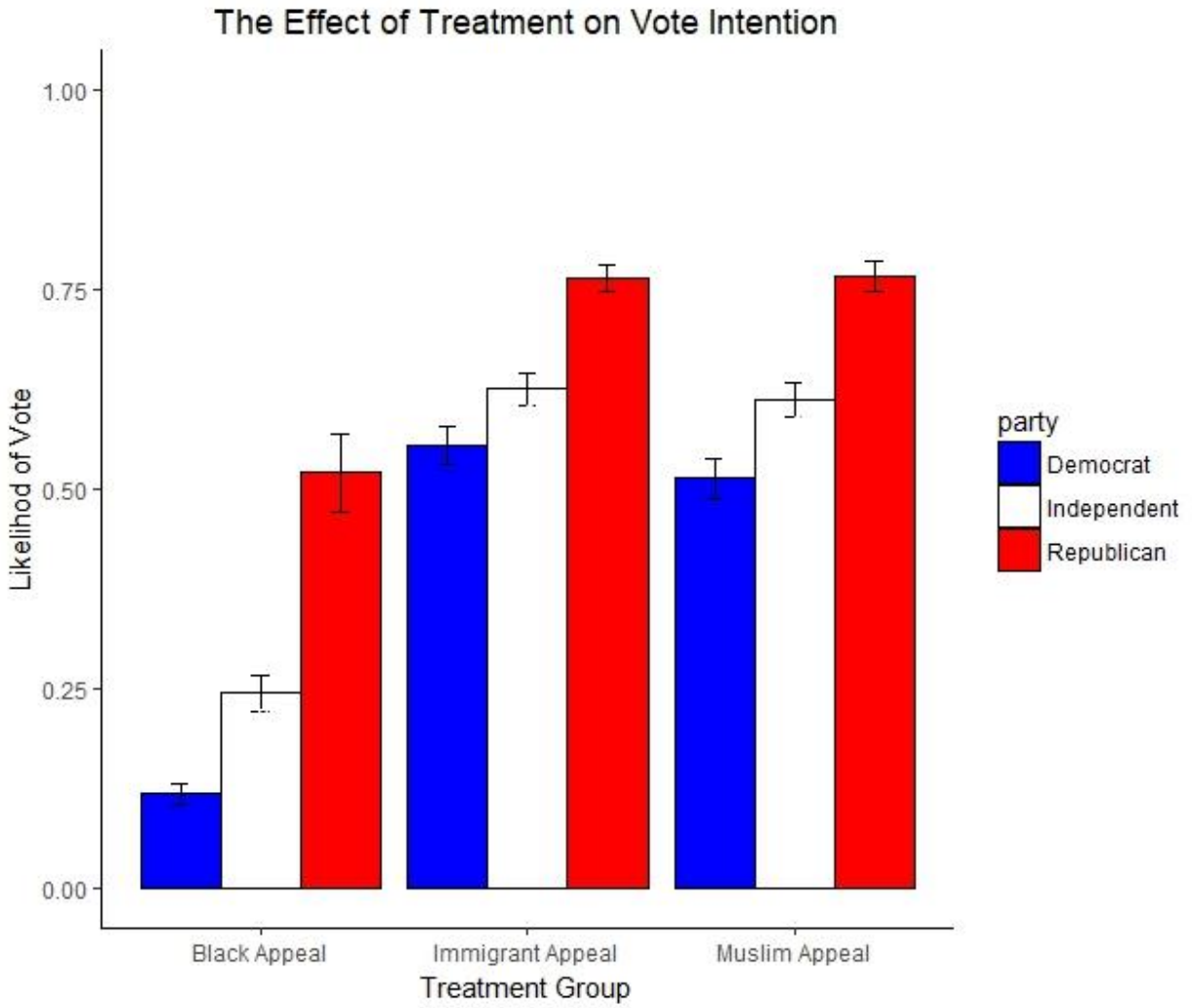


Figure 5: The effect of anti-black, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim appeals on vote intention, conditioned on racial resentment. Data comes from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.

