

# Candidate Race, Partisanship, and Political Participation: When Do Black Candidates Increase Black Turnout?

Political Research Quarterly  
2015, Vol. 68(2) 337–349  
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/1065912915577819  
prq.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

A sizable literature in American politics documents increased levels of voter turnout among black citizens when coracial candidates are on the ballot or hold office. However, due to a paucity of black Republican candidates, existing research has been unable to identify whether increased participation occurs irrespective of the candidate's partisanship. Using data from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, we find that, while the presence of a black Democratic House candidate was associated with increased black voter turnout, there was no association between black Republican candidates and black turnout. These results are robust to model specification, issues of statistical power, and contextual differences across districts. We report further evidence that black citizens' perceptions of black candidates' ideologies and character traits differed substantially based on the candidate's party. Our results have implications for understanding how citizens engage in politics when salient political identities come into conflict. The results further suggest that Republican efforts to recruit black candidates are unlikely to mobilize black voters.

## Keywords

voter turnout, black political behavior, U.S. politics, partisanship, racial cues

Historic levels of turnout among black voters in 2008 were widely attributed to Barack Obama's presence as the first black presidential candidate. This phenomenon is unsurprising in light of the minority empowerment thesis (Bobo and Gilliam 1990), which states that racial minorities are more likely to participate in politics when a coracial candidate appears on the ballot. An enormous literature in American politics finds support for this claim. Black citizens exhibit higher levels of voter turnout when represented by a black mayor (e.g., Bobo and Gilliam 1990) or member of Congress (e.g., Griffin and Keane 2006; Hayes and McKee 2012), or when black candidates appear on the ballot (e.g., Lublin and Tate 1995; Tate 1991, 1994; Washington 2006). Furthermore, among black voters, ballot roll-off and uncounted vote rates are lower in contests in which black candidates seek office (e.g., J. M. Harris and Zipp 1999; Herron and Sekhon 2005; Vanderleeuw and Liu 2002; Vanderleeuw and Utter 1993). Coracial candidates have produced similar effects among Latinos (e.g., Barreto 2007; Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000) and Asian Americans (e.g., Lai 2000; Nakanishi 1986).

In contrast with previous research that studies these relationships exclusively in the context of black Democratic candidates and officeholders, we study how black citizens, the overwhelming majority of

whom vote for and identify as Democrats (Dawson 1994), respond to black Republican candidates. This context allows us to study how voters respond to the political environment when salient political identities are in conflict. While racial group identity plays an important role in influencing how and when black citizens engage in politics, partisan identity fundamentally shapes how citizens perceive and process the political world (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Thus, for the vast majority of black citizens, the presence of a black Republican candidate may introduce competing racial group and partisan stimuli.

Studying how black citizens respond to black Republican candidates also has important practical implications, particularly as Republican National Committee chair Reince Priebus and his predecessors Ken Mehlman and Michael Steele have all emphasized the importance

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for the Republican Party to increase their support among black voters by recruiting additional black candidates, and prominent black Republicans such as former Florida congressman Allen West, former Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain, and potential 2016 presidential candidate Ben Carson have asserted their ability to mobilize and win support among black voters. However, the dearth of black Republican candidates has presented an empirical roadblock to scholars interested in further examining how racial and partisan identities affect black political behavior.

We study this question using black voter turnout in the 2010 U.S. midterm elections, in which nearly three dozen black candidates sought the Republican nomination for Congress. Our findings show that the mobilizing effects of coracial candidates are heavily conditioned by partisanship. Across a wide range of model specifications and statistical tests, we find that black citizens who identify as Democrats or Independents were in fact more likely to turn out to vote when black Democratic candidates sought office, but black Republican candidates did not generate similar results. Moreover, we provide evidence that while candidate race provided a cue to black citizens about the likely ideological orientation of Republican candidates, shared partisanship appeared to be significantly stronger than the racial cue in influencing black citizens' interest in learning more about the candidates on offer. Because partisan identities significantly shape how citizens respond to political candidates, even in the presence of other salient identities such as racial group, Republican efforts in recruiting black candidates were ultimately unsuccessful at mobilizing black voters.

### Candidate Race and Minority Empowerment

A large literature examines the relationship between race and political participation. Rates of voter turnout and other forms of participation among black individuals have historically trailed those for white individuals (e.g., Bobo and Gilliam 1990). Several prominent models of turnout suggest that these differences may be attributable to gaps in education (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), socioeconomic status (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and mobilization (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). In light of the significant differences between black voters and white voters in their orientation to the political system (e.g., Shingles 1981), other explanations emphasize how the racial context of elections affects political behavior. Many of these accounts argue that racial minorities are more

inclined to participate in politics when they perceive opportunities for representation (e.g., Guinier 1994; Morris 1984). Consistent with this idea, Dawson (2001) reports that 65 percent of black citizens believe that white officials cannot represent black constituencies as well as black officials can. Thus, elections between non-black candidates may not generate high levels of black political participation because black voters do not believe that either candidate would provide a sufficient level of political representation.

Citizens may turn out to vote at higher levels for coracial or coethnic candidates due to the importance of group identity. Group membership—including racial group membership—is “a powerful basis for the development of self-identity and perceptions of individual interest” (Bobo 1983, 1200). In the political realm, a person's racial group identification may affect her decision to support a particular candidate based on a perception of which alternative is more likely to advance the group's interests. Building upon this literature, Dawson (1994) posits a black utility heuristic, according to which black citizens use their perceptions of black group interests as a proxy for their own. When seeing a black candidate for office, then, black voters' sense of “linked fate” may lead them to view a black candidate's success as their own success.

The pioneering work of Bobo and Gilliam (1990) first provided empirical support for this claim, showing that black voters were more likely to turn out to vote in areas they termed “minority empowerment zones,” which they operationalized as cities that were governed by black mayors. Their account emphasizes the increased levels of efficacy and political capital felt by black citizens who are represented by a black elected official. Subsequent work finds support for this thesis in a variety of contexts. For instance, Lublin and Tate (1995) find that the presence of a black mayoral candidate increases black voter turnout, Tate (1991) shows that the candidacy of Jesse Jackson increased black participation in the 1984 and 1988 Democratic primaries, and Washington (2006) reports that the presence of black congressional and statewide candidates boosts black (and white) voter turnout more generally. Related research also finds that roll-off and uncounted vote rates are lower among black voters when there is a black candidate on the ballot (J. M. Harris and Zipp 1999; Herron and Sekhon 2005; Vanderleeuw and Liu 2002; Vanderleeuw and Utter 1993), which suggests that black political decisions are indeed sensitive to the racial context of the electoral choice. Black voters are also more likely to be mobilized in elections featuring black candidates (Bositis 1998; Leighley 2001; Voss and Lublin 2001), thereby increasing black turnout in those contests.<sup>1</sup>

## Partisan Identity, Racial Group Attachments, and Political Engagement

Previous research on the minority empowerment thesis and black political participation focuses on how black voters respond to black Democratic candidates. And for good reason: few black candidates run for office as Republicans, and prior to the 112th Congress, only two black Republicans (Gary Franks of Connecticut and J. C. Watts of Oklahoma) served in the U.S. House over the last several decades. Thus, as an empirical question, it remains unclear whether black citizens respond in similar ways to black Republican candidates—who have sought office at increasing rates in recent years—as they do in the presence of black Democratic candidates. Moreover, identifying how black citizens respond to black Republican candidates has important theoretical implications for understanding how voters engage with the political environment when salient political identities are in conflict.

Although race and racial group identity play important roles in shaping how black citizens engage with politics, other identities also have high degrees of political relevance. Partisanship, operating as a kind of social identity similar to race, religion, or region (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), plays a key role in influencing how citizens perceive and engage with the political world. Partisanship plays an especially consequential role in shaping how black citizens engage with electoral politics given the historic ties between blacks and the Democratic Party (Dawson 1994) and the party's embeddedness in black institutions such as churches (F. C. Harris 1999). For the vast majority of blacks who identify as Democrats,<sup>2</sup> then, the presence of a black Republican candidate may introduce competing partisan and racial group stimuli.

Given the fundamental importance of partisanship in shaping how citizens make sense of the political alternatives offered to them, however, it is unclear that the presence of a black Republican candidate would have a mobilizing effect on black voters. Beyond operating as a social identity, partisanship also operates as a perceptual screen that influences how citizens process and evaluate political stimuli (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Rahn 1993). As Campbell et al. (1960, 128) argue, “[P]arty has a profound influence across the full range of political objects to which the individual voter responds.” Rahn (1993, 473) elaborates, “In partisan elections, the most powerful cue provided by the political environment is the candidate's affiliation with a particular political party.” Thus, if citizens first evaluate candidates through a partisan lens, citizens encounter information about a candidate's race only after they have discerned the candidate's partisanship. In the case of a black Republican candidate, once black citizens (again, most of whom are

Democrats) are aware of the candidate's race, the racial cue may not be sufficient to overcome citizens' proclivities for copartisan candidates. Put in altogether different terms, the presence of a coracial candidate may not “distract” citizens from the partisan choice on offer.

The accounts outlined above generate two primary competing predictions about how black candidates affect black voter turnout. Consistent with the minority empowerment thesis, coracial candidates—of either party—may mobilize voter turnout, perhaps by appealing to a shared racial identity and increasing political efficacy and trust. If so, we would expect that black Democratic candidates and black Republican candidates have an equivalent effect on black voter turnout. Alternatively, due to the historical links between black voters and Democrats and the strong perceptual influences of partisanship, black Democratic candidates may increase turnout among black citizens, while black Republicans do not have a similar effect.

Our primary contribution in this paper is to distinguish empirically between these competing hypotheses. In doing so, we seek to better understand the relationship between racial and partisan identities, and how they influence political behavior. We offer two empirical interventions to answer these questions. First, we expand upon prior research on the minority empowerment thesis by including electoral campaigns in which the partisanship of the black candidates varies. Second, to address inconsistencies found in earlier research, we employ a wide range of statistical tests and model specifications to evaluate the sensitivity of our results.

## Black Republican Candidates and the 2010 Midterm Elections

Republican leaders have long recognized their party's failure to recruit support from black voters. More than twenty years ago, RNC chair Lee Atwater argued that the party could appeal to black constituencies by recruiting black candidates. The possibility that Colin Powell would seek the Republican presidential nomination in 1996 buoyed the party's hopes of recapturing the White House and was a source of great consternation for Democrats, in large part due to the belief that his candidacy would mobilize black voters in support of Powell. In the last decade, past RNC chairs Ken Mehlman and Michael Steele expressed in no uncertain terms their view that recruiting black Republican candidates for office would be critical for increasing the party's support among black voters. And in the hand-wringing among Republicans after Mitt Romney failed to defeat Barack Obama in November 2012, many Republican strategists and elected officials again stressed the importance of reaching out to black voters and recruiting black candidates.

Whether or not these party leaders' statements reflected a genuine commitment to winning the support of black voters, in 2010, Republicans recruited a substantial number of black congressional candidates—nearly three dozen in all.<sup>3</sup> Of these, fourteen black candidates successfully won the Republican Party nomination and competed in the 2010 general election. There was considerable geographic and contextual variation across these fourteen districts. Half of them were in the South, whereas the remaining half were distributed across the Northeast (NY), the Mid-Atlantic (MD), the Midwest (IN and IL), the West (CO), and the Pacific Coast (CA). Seven of the districts were majority–minority districts; a plurality of the populations in NY-15 and TX-30 were Latinos, while a majority of residents of IL-2, MD-4, MS-2, TN-9, and VA-3 were blacks. In addition, five black Republicans—Charlotte Bergmann, Robert Broadus, Ryan Frazier, Bill Randall, and Allen West—competed against white Democratic candidates.

While on the campaign trail, black Republican candidates for the U.S. House appeared not to go out of their way to completely de-emphasize their race. For instance, Ryan Frazier, who sought election in Colorado's suburban Denver seventh district, routinely spoke of his connections with the black community in his district and said that he believed that Republicans could win black votes if they sought to engage them.<sup>4</sup> Running in California's thirty-seventh district, Star Parker emphasized her experiences as a single mother on welfare while calling for reforms to public housing that many other Republicans oppose.<sup>5</sup> And while Allen West stood out as a black candidate who attempted to run a relatively deracialized campaign (for instance, he emphasized that he was running as an "American candidate" rather than as a "black candidate"), on the campaign trail, he pledged to join the Congressional Black Caucus to ensure that "competing voices" are heard while discussing issues that are important to the black community.<sup>6</sup>

All but two of these races were also contested by Republicans in 2008, and the 2008 Republican candidates in these districts were white. Each of the 2010 black Republican candidates received a larger vote share, moreover, than their 2008 white counterparts,<sup>7</sup> and culminated in the election of the first Southern black Republicans since 1878.<sup>8</sup> How did black voters respond to the candidacies of these black Republicans? To answer this question, we now describe our survey data and empirical approach in greater detail.

## Data and Method

To examine the relationship between candidate race and voter turnout, we rely upon the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). Due to the

presence of a relatively large number of black Republican candidates, as noted above, the 2010 congressional elections provide the first opportunity to systematically assess the relationship between candidate race and voter behavior. The CCES was administered to 55,400 respondents in two waves. The preelection module was fielded in the month preceding the 2010 midterm general elections, and postelection module was fielded in the month immediately following the November election. The surveys were conducted over the Internet by YouGov/Polimetrix and used sample matching to create a respondent pool that is representative of the U.S. population. The sampling frame is U.S. citizens aged eighteen and older. Although the survey is not intended to be representative of states or congressional districts, respondents from all 435 congressional districts are included in the survey. On average, 104 respondents per district are included, ranging from a minimum of 35 to a maximum of 297. Because of its wide coverage across districts and the large number of respondents within districts, the CCES is a nearly ideal data source. For our analyses, we include only the CCES respondents who identify as black or African American. We further restrict our attention to districts in which both major parties fielded candidates. Full demographic information is available for more than 3,300 respondents, for whom all relevant descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

For the most part, Table 1 reveals no major differences in the demographic profiles of respondents who lived in districts in which black candidates appeared on the ballot. To be sure, black respondents living in districts with black Democrats on the ballot identified as Democrats at slightly higher rates than black respondents living in districts with black Republicans on the ballot, while black respondents living in districts with a black Republican candidate reported higher levels of income than black respondents living in other districts. Elections were more competitive in districts with black Republican candidates, and least competitive in districts where a black Democrat ran against a black Republican. On the whole, though, districts with black candidates do not appear to be systematically different from districts with nonblack candidates in ways that complicate efforts to compare them.

We examine the relationship between candidate race and voter turnout, which is self-reported by the CCES respondents in the postelection wave of the survey. The hypotheses outlined above require us to compare the effects of candidate race based on the partisan affiliation of the candidate. Thus, the primary independent variables in our statistical models are indicators for whether the respondent lives in a district where the Democratic and/or Republican candidates are black. To the extent the coefficients differ across these indicators enables us to make some headway in testing the hypotheses described above.

**Table 1.** Summary Statistics.

Variables	All districts	Black Democratic candidate only	Black Republican candidate only	Black Democratic and black Republican candidates
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Democrat	0.75 (0.43)	0.79 (0.41)	0.68 (0.47)	0.75 (0.43)
Republican	0.04 (0.19)	0.02 (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)	0.04 (0.19)
Independent	0.19 (0.34)	0.17 (0.37)	0.27 (0.44)	0.18 (0.38)
Age	44.08 (14.94)	43.51 (14.88)	41.94 (17.02)	44.20 (13.92)
Female	0.52 (0.50)	0.56 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)
College degree	0.19 (0.39)	0.19 (0.40)	0.24 (0.43)	0.19 (0.39)
Income	6.75 (3.41)	6.60 (3.20)	7.46 (3.45)	6.75 (3.36)
Ideology	2.89 (0.89)	2.87 (0.93)	2.78 (0.88)	2.83 (0.84)
Mobilized	0.56 (0.50)	0.59 (0.49)	0.52 (0.50)	0.58 (0.49)
Margin of victory	15.87 (10.09)	23.66 (9.41)	14.58 (7.68)	28.00 (8.98)
Total spending (millions)	2.17 (1.89)	1.18 (0.85)	3.25 (2.66)	1.23 (0.83)
Open contest	0.09 (0.29)	0.12 (0.32)	— (—)	0.04 (0.20)
Voted	0.65 (0.48)	0.73 (0.44)	0.62 (0.49)	0.74 (0.44)
n (respondents)	3,358	808	113	263
n (districts)	338	29	5	9

Source. 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (contested congressional elections only).

Entries reflect summary statistics for black respondents. Data are weighted to national population parameters.

Table 1 allows us to make some preliminary comparisons in turnout rates based on the presence of a black candidate. Overall, 65 percent of black respondents reported voting in 2010. A total of 73 percent of respondents, however, reported voting in races with a black Democratic candidate, and 75 percent in races reported whether both the Republican and Democratic candidates were black. Only 62 percent of respondents in races with a black Republican candidate reported voting. Although these self-reported measures of voter turnout are higher than actual levels of turnout, we find the same patterns when using a measure of validated turnout. Using this validated vote measure reduces the overall size of the sample due to the lack of voter history records, and indicates that the overall turnout rate among blacks was 49 percent.<sup>9</sup> Black turnout in districts with a black Democratic candidate (and a nonblack Republican candidate) was 54 percent, compared with 47 percent in districts where a black Republican competed against a nonblack Democrat. On the basis of the raw data, then, the data suggest that candidate race did in fact matter for black voter turnout, and that turnout was higher in districts with black Democratic candidates, but lower in districts with black Republican candidates.

## The Impact of Black Candidates

We begin by first presenting results without disaggregating black candidates by party and seek to identify whether these data allow us to recover the basic finding from previous research: the presence of a black candidate increases

voter turnout. The ability of our data to convincingly distinguish between the more specific hypotheses we outlined depends, at least in part, on its ability to replicate this core idea. Our key independent variable here is simply an indicator for whether at least one of the candidates in the congressional race is black. As mentioned above, the dependent variable is an indicator for whether CCES respondents reported voting in the 2010 midterm election. Due to the binary nature of the dependent variable, we use logistic regression here and throughout our analyses.

The results of this first analysis are shown in Table 2. We begin by estimating a simple model in which turnout is regressed on an indicator for whether respondents lived in a House district with at least one black candidate (column 1). We then included a series of standard demographic and contextual control variables (column 2).<sup>10</sup> The standard errors are clustered by congressional district to account for any local correlation in the error term that does not apply to other districts.

Consistent with prior research, we find that candidate race has a significant effect on political participation. Respondents reported significantly higher rates of voter turnout in districts in which a black candidate appeared on the ballot. On the basis of results much like these, previous scholars have claimed that minority candidates have a mobilizing or empowering effect on minority voters. As we discussed above, however, these results cannot tell us very much about whether such phenomena transcend the deep ties of partisanship.

**Table 2.** Candidate Race and Voter Turnout.

Independent variables	(1)	(2)
Black congressional candidate on ballot	0.19* (0.09)	0.30* (0.13)
Party identification		-0.13* (0.03)
Mobilized		1.06* (0.09)
Open contest		-0.28 (0.17)
Total spending (logged)		0.01 (0.03)
Competitiveness (tens of percentage points)		-0.02 (0.07)
Ideology		-0.03 (0.05)
Female		-0.21* (0.10)
College degree		0.29* (0.10)
Age (decades)		0.42* (0.04)
Income		0.09* (0.01)
(Constant)	1.07* (0.06)	-2.10* (0.88)
N	3,363	3,363
AUC	0.52	0.76
Clusters	338	338

Source. 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (black respondents only).

Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, clustered by House race. The dependent variable is whether respondents reported turning out to vote. AUC = area under the curve.

\* $p < .05$ .

## Candidate Race, Partisanship, and Political Participation

We now examine the effects of candidate race by partisanship. To do so, we include indicators for three types of congressional elections: those in which a black Democratic candidate ran against a nonblack Republican; a black Republican candidate ran against a nonblack Democrat; and where a black Republican candidate competed against a black Democratic candidate. Thus, elections between a nonblack Republican and a nonblack Democrat are the excluded category, and the coefficients for the indicators describe the increase or decrease in black voter turnout relative to elections without a black candidate on the ballot. We examine the relationship between candidate race and voter turnout by estimating two models to account for the many other individual-level and contextual factors that also affect individuals' decisions to vote. As in Table 2, we first estimate a simple model in which we regress voter turnout on the indicators for candidate race, and then estimate a fully specified model that includes a full battery of demographic and contextual covariates. The results are shown in Table 3.

Both specifications produce similar results.<sup>11</sup> Across both models, the table shows that respondents were significantly more likely to vote in districts with black Democratic candidates. Based on the results in column (2), we estimate that the presence of a black Democratic candidate alone is associated with a 5.4 percentage point increase in the probability of turning out to vote.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in both models, the coefficient for black

Republican candidate is negative, but it is not statistically significant in the fully specified model, and thus we are reluctant to make much of the coefficient shown in the simple model. Thus, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that black Republican candidates have no effect on black voter turnout. Furthermore, in both columns, we see that the indicator for districts with black Republican *and* Democratic candidates is positive and statistically significant (which corresponds to a 6.3 percentage point increase in the predicted probability of voting), though it is not significantly different from the coefficient for districts in which only the Democratic candidate is black. This suggests that to the extent black turnout is higher in the presence of a black Republican candidate, these effects appear only when the Democratic candidate is also black. On the basis of these results, then, we conclude that black citizens are more likely to vote when there is a black Democratic candidate running for Congress; however, there appears to be no relationship—or perhaps a negative one—between voter turnout and the presence of a black Republican candidate when running against a white Democrat.

We used other model specifications and approaches to study these relationships. For instance, we used genetic matching (Sekhon 2011) to investigate the robustness of these results with respect to concerns about common support among the covariates, dependence upon parametric assumptions, and the additive functional form assumed about the relationship between the covariates and political participation. Although our basic descriptive comparisons shown above are reassuring, the first concern is

**Table 3.** Candidate Race and Voter Turnout.

Independent variables	(1)	(2)
Black Democratic candidate only	0.22* (0.09)	0.37* (0.14)
Black Republican candidate only	-0.22* (0.07)	-0.13 (0.16)
Black Democratic candidate and black Republican candidate	0.31* (0.19)	0.44* (0.19)
Party identification		-0.13* (0.03)
Mobilized		1.06* (0.09)
Open contest		-0.30 (0.18)
Total spending (logged)		0.02 (0.03)
Competitiveness (tens of percentage points)		-0.00 (0.07)
Ideology		-0.03 (0.05)
Female		-0.22* (0.10)
College degree		0.30* (0.10)
Age (decades)		0.42* (0.04)
Income		0.09* (0.01)
(Constant)	1.07* (0.06)	-2.16* (0.88)
N	3,363	3,363
AUC	0.53	0.76
Clusters	338	338

Source. 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (black respondents only).

Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, clustered by House race. The dependent variable is whether respondents reported turning out to vote. AUC = area under the curve.

\* $p < .05$ .

perhaps the more serious of the three. Black respondents who live in congressional districts in which black Republican candidates seek office could simply be very different from black respondents who live in districts in which the Republican candidates are white. Thus, matching enables us to compare participation rates across subpopulations that are otherwise identical across observed characteristics. Genetic matching is a generalization of propensity score matching that iteratively checks and improves covariate balance across the treated and control observations to minimize observed differences between them. The results are consistent with those reported above: black Democrats and Independents do not turn out to vote or participate in campaign activity at greater rates in the presence of a black Republican candidate. These results weigh strongly against the hypothesis that black candidates—regardless of partisan affiliation—increase black turnout.

We also investigated the possibility that the results shown above are spurious. Instead, perhaps the findings shown above result from systematic differences across districts that are correlated with the presence of black candidates, and thus affect voter turnout. Should this be the case, we would expect that turnout would increase among all respondents in those districts, regardless of race. We investigate this possibility by estimating the models shown in Table 3 on the white CCES respondents. The results indicate that turnout among white respondents, in fact, was not sensitive to the presence of black

congressional candidates. The indicators for candidate race are small in magnitude and fail to approach standard levels of statistical significance.<sup>13</sup> These results boost our confidence in our causal interpretation of the findings from Table 3 and demonstrate the importance of candidate race for explaining turnout among black voters.

Finally, we explored the possibility that our results are due to systematic over-reports of turnout. As Table 1 showed, 65 percent of black respondents reported voting in the 2010 CCES. However, this figure likely is well above the actual turnout rate. Thus, we replicated the analyses reported above using the validated voter information contained in the 2010 CCES. The results shown in Tables 2 and 3 are nearly identical when using the validated turnout measure, indicating that our results are not an artifact of over-reports of voter turnout.

## Empirical Extensions

We now investigate possible explanations for the results found above. One hypothesis elaborated above indicates that the relationship between candidate race and voter turnout may be conditioned by shared partisanship. Another possibility is that there is something about the qualitative nature of the candidates that generates the results shown above. Perhaps, for instance, the results are driven entirely by the kinds of low-quality candidates often found in uncompetitive districts. A third possibility is that incumbency confounds the relationship between

**Table 4.** Candidate Race and Voter Turnout.

Independent variables	Voter partisanship		Competitiveness		Black Democratic opponent	
	Democrats	Republicans/ Independents	High	Low	Incumbent	Challenger
Black Democratic candidate only	0.34* (0.16)	0.58 (0.31)	0.35 (0.22)	0.37* (0.19)		
Black Republican candidate only	0.04 (0.12)	-0.58 (0.67)	-0.22 (0.16)	0.19 (0.17)	-0.02 (0.17)	-1.14 (0.65)
Black Democratic candidate and black Republican candidate	0.44* (0.18)	0.40 (0.57)	0.67* (0.17)	0.25 (0.21)		
Party identification						
Mobilized	-0.39* (0.07)	0.39* (0.12)	-0.13* (0.04)	-0.13* (0.06)	-0.13* (0.07)	0.04 (0.25)
Open contest	1.05* (0.10)	1.04* (0.23)	1.02* (0.11)	1.17* (0.16)	1.02* (0.20)	1.49* (0.40)
Total spending (logged)	-0.38* (0.20)	-0.16 (0.27)	-0.30 (0.21)	-0.34 (0.25)		
Competitiveness (tens of percentage points)	0.02 (0.04)	0.05 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)	-1.09* (0.25)
Ideology	0.00 (0.08)	-0.05 (0.17)	0.02 (0.15)	-0.31 (0.17)	0.05 (0.10)	1.40* (0.48)
Female	-0.12* (0.06)	0.28* (0.13)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.08)	0.02 (0.10)	0.37 (0.30)
College degree	-0.17 (0.12)	-0.43 (0.23)	-0.29* (0.12)	-0.05 (0.21)	-0.39 (0.26)	-0.39 (0.44)
Age (decades)	0.29* (0.11)	0.51 (0.26)	0.32* (0.13)	0.25 (0.18)	0.14 (0.22)	-0.41 (0.33)
Income	0.42* (0.04)	0.34* (0.09)	0.41* (0.05)	0.41* (0.06)	0.37* (0.07)	0.23 (0.29)
(Constant)	0.09* (0.02)	0.06 (0.04)	0.09* (0.02)	0.10* (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)	0.22* (0.10)
<i>n</i>	-1.51 (1.07)	-5.95* (2.20)	-1.35 (1.23)	-4.55* (1.29)	-2.72 (1.53)	28.04* (7.91)
AUC	2,844	519	2,310	1,053	898	120
Clusters	0.76	0.80	0.75	0.77	0.74	0.82
	328	226	271	67	27	8

Source. 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (black respondents only).

Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, clustered by House race. The dependent variable is whether respondents reported turning out to vote. AUC = area under the curve.

\* $p < .05$ .

candidate race and voter turnout. Black candidates may increase turnout among black voters when they are the incumbent (or, alternatively, the challenger), but not vice versa. We investigate these possibilities in turn.

The results are shown in Table 4. First are the results for partisanship. The first and second columns of coefficients report the relationship between turnout and candidate race for Democrats, and Republicans and Independents, respectively.<sup>14</sup> The results are consistent across both columns. Black Democratic candidates were associated with significantly increased turnout among black Democrats as well as black Republicans and Independents. Black Republican candidates appeared to decrease turnout among black Democrats and black Republicans and Independents, though neither of these coefficients is statistically distinguishable from zero. Furthermore, the presence of two black candidates appeared to increase turnout among blacks, though this coefficient is indistinguishable from zero for black Republicans and Independents. In sum, it appears that black Democratic candidates do mobilize black voters of all partisan leanings, while, in the most generous interpretation, black Republican candidates increase turnout among black voters only when there is also a black Democrat in the race.

The findings also are not driven by some feature of the districts included in the sample. Following Abramowitz, Alexander, and Gunning (2006), we split the sample of districts based on whether the victor won less than 60 percent of the vote ("high" competitiveness) or more than 60 percent of the vote ("low" competitiveness). The pattern of results is again fairly similar. Black Democratic candidates appear to increase turnout, while the other coefficients evince inconsistent relationships, none of which are distinguishable from zero. In the main, however, we can conclude that black Democratic candidates increase voter turnout across all levels of electoral competition, while black Republican candidates may—and we emphasize may—do so only in those districts with lopsided electoral results.

Finally, there appear to be no differences on the basis of incumbency. Perhaps, for instance, black Democratic incumbents have cultivated a personal following that largely mutes the potential mobilizing effects that may be associated with the presence of a black Republican candidate. We estimated two models; one for districts with a black Democratic incumbent and another for districts with a black Democratic challenger in an open race.<sup>15</sup> Across both subsets of districts, the presence of a black Republican did not increase turnout and may have



decreased it. Neither coefficient is statistically distinguishable from zero, but they are both negative. These results further indicate that black Republican congressional candidates had little effect on black turnout in 2010; and to the extent that they did, they may have reduced turnout.

In sum, our results provide consistent and robust support for previous research that has found that the presence of black Democratic candidates increases turnout among black voters. We find that the estimated effects of black Democratic candidates are statistically distinguishable from those for black Republican candidates. Importantly, though, the data indicate that the presence of black Republican candidates appears to have had no discernible association with black voter turnout.<sup>16</sup>

### **Discussion: Partisan Influences on Evaluations of Black Candidates**

The evidence assembled here indicates that black Democratic candidates increased turnout among black voters in the 2010 midterm elections, while black Republican candidates did not. Here, we explore a possible theoretical mechanism: the perceptual influence of partisanship. In particular, we assessed the hypothesis that black political candidates evoke different behavioral responses because black citizens distinguished them on the basis of their partisan labels.

To do so, we used the survey item that invited CCES respondents to place themselves and each of their congressional candidates on a 7-point ideological scale that ranged from “very liberal” to “very conservative,” and compared the relative ideological positions at which black respondents placed the congressional candidates in their districts. Previous research indicates that mobilization by coracial candidates occurs at least in part because citizens perceive that coracial candidates share their interests to a greater degree. Thus, we compared how citizens viewed the ideological locations of black Democratic and Republican candidates. If race is the dominant lens through which citizens evaluate how well candidates reflect their interests, we would expect black citizens to not distinguish ideologically between black candidates on the basis of party. In contrast, if our results shown above are explained by black citizens’ assessments that black Republican candidates do not sufficiently share their interests, we would expect to find that black citizens do distinguish black Republican candidates from black Democratic candidates.

The data indicate that both race and party matter for how black citizens evaluate political candidates. First, black Republican candidates (mean placement = 4.8) were viewed to be significantly more conservative than

black Democratic candidates (mean placement = 3.3). Thus, black citizens do not view all black candidates in the same way; instead, black candidates are distinguished ideologically on the basis of their partisan label. Overall, black citizens (mean ideological self-placement = 3.7) believe that black Democratic candidates share many of their political values and ideology, while they view black Republican candidates as being substantially more out of step. At the same time, however, black citizens do distinguish Republican candidates on the basis of their race, as black Republican candidates (mean placement = 4.8) were perceived to be somewhat less conservative than nonblack Republican candidates (mean placement = 5.3), and this difference is statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .<sup>17</sup>

We find similar results when examining other dimensions of candidate evaluation. For instance, black respondents rated black Democratic and black Republican candidates more highly than white candidates on scales that ranged from 1 to 7 and measured perceptions of candidate integrity and competence.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, black respondents rated white Democratic candidates higher than black Republican candidates on both integrity (5.1 vs. 4.0, respectively) and competence (5.1 vs. 3.8, respectively). Reflecting these advantages for Democratic candidates among black voters, in additional analyses, we find no evidence that black voters are more likely to vote for Republican congressional candidates when the Republican candidate is black.<sup>19</sup>

These patterns show that race and partisanship interact to shape how black citizens evaluate and respond to the presence of political candidates. Partisanship fundamentally shapes how citizens perceive political candidates, and though there is clearly room for other factors and identities, such as race, to influence how citizens respond to political candidates, these evaluations occur once citizens have viewed the candidates through partisan lenses. Thus, while black citizens do distinguish black Republican candidates from nonblack Republican candidates, they also distinguish black Republicans from black Democrats. At the same time, black citizens appear to conclude that they do not share common political values with Republicans, whether black or not. As a consequence, black Republican candidates simply do not evoke the same response from black citizens as black Democratic candidates.

### **Conclusion: Republicans, Black Voters, and the Future of Minority Representation**

This paper examines the intersection of partisan and racial identities as they play out in the decision to vote. The 2010 U.S. congressional elections provided an

opportunity to evaluate the extent to which Republican black candidates motivate increased participation among coracial voters. Consistent with previous research in American politics, we find that black citizens—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike—are more likely to turn out to vote when a black Democratic candidate appears on the ballot. However, the same does not apply for black Republican candidates; black voters are not mobilized by the presence of a black candidate when that candidate is Republican.

In the contemporary United States, the minority empowerment thesis is not wrong so much as it is in need of refinement. Partisanship exerts an enormous influence over how citizens experience the political world. In spite of the importance of racial group identity for black political behavior, partisanship remains the key factor which citizens orient themselves to political candidates. In this way, while black citizens' evaluations of partisan candidates are influenced by candidate race, black citizens' application of partisan lenses enables them to use partisanship as a simplifying heuristic for political decision making.

A contributing factor for why black Republican candidates fail to mobilize black voters may have less to do with the candidates themselves than with the mobilization tactics they employ. Historically, black Democratic candidates—including many of the black Democrats currently holding office in the U.S. Congress—have relied heavily on their ties to institutions indigenous to the black community (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989) such as churches (F. C. Harris 1999) to recruit and mobilize supporters. Given that it appears that black Republican candidates are more likely to be recruited by party elites rather than through more traditional grassroots channels, black Republicans may not have the infrastructure in place to reach out to and mobilize large numbers of black voters.

In addition, black Republican candidates may fail to mobilize black voters due to systematic differences in how black candidates of the two parties present themselves to the electorate. Although black candidates in general tend to de-emphasize their race and thus deracialize their campaigns, black Republican candidates may be especially likely to do so. For instance, black mayoral candidates competing against white candidates in largely white cities have often used deracializing campaign strategies to recruit multiracial support (e.g., Jennings 1994; Orey 1999). In a unique survey experiment, Andersen and Junn (2010) find that the partisan match between candidates and voters conditions the impact of deracialization. Thus, if black Republican candidates tend to run more deracialized campaigns than black Democratic candidates, black voters may not respond to the presence of a black Republican candidate with the same levels of enthusiasm.

Finally, it seems likely that many of the black Republican congressional candidates in 2010 simply had little chance of winning, which thus limited any opportunities for mobilization. For instance, SC-1 was the only district with a black Republican House candidate that supported John McCain (57.1% of the two-party vote) over Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election, and Obama received less than 60 percent of the vote in only two other districts (FL-22 and NC-13). While the lack of competitiveness in congressional elections is not surprising, the nomination of black Republican candidates in these districts could have been seen by black voters as a cynical attempt to nominate candidates with little chance of winning.

As more black Republican candidates seek office, we hope to have laid a foundation for future research to further study the intersection of partisan and racial identities. In addition to exploring the causal mechanisms underlying black Republican candidates' failure to mobilize coracial voters, future work might examine whether black Republicans make explicit appeals to black voters in ways that contrast with white Republican campaign strategies. In addition, little is known about whether and how race affects the relationship between constituents and elected officials; for instance, are black constituents more likely to contact Republican elected officials when the official is black? How does race and partisanship interact to affect constituents' perceptions of the performance of their elected officials? These questions can be addressed through a variety of methodologies and provide an opportunity to better understand the dynamics of race and partisanship in electoral politics.

We end with a caveat. This paper has examined the minority empowerment thesis in the context of black Americans. However, as Dawson (1994) and many others have shown, historical legacies provide deeply rooted ties between blacks and the Democratic Party. These ties may simply render it impossible for Republicans—black or otherwise—to move public opinion or mobilize voters among blacks, absent extraordinary circumstances. Thus, future research should examine similar partisan asymmetries on other populations of color—such as Latinos or Asian Americans—whose political identities are distributed over a wider partisan spectrum.

### Acknowledgment

We thank Eric Oliver, Michael Cobb, Yanna Krupnikov, Julie Merseth, Tatishe Nteta, Spencer Piston, Claudia Sandoval, three anonymous reviewers, and the editors for comments that significantly improved the paper.

### Authors' Note

Replication files for the analyses reported in this paper can be accessed at the corresponding author's website (<http://rogowski.wustl.edu>).

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes

- Other scholars have studied this question specifically in the context of descriptive representation, though the evidence is more mixed. For instance, individual-level studies of participation find that descriptive representation can increase turnout among black citizens (e.g., Griffin and Keane 2006; Hayes and McKee 2012), while research using higher levels of aggregation finds no evidence of an association between descriptive representation and turnout (Brace et al. 1995; Gay 2001; Henderson, Sekhon, and Titiunik 2014; Keele and White 2011; Tate 2003).
- For instance, based on data from 2012, 69 percent of blacks identified as Democrats, with another 22 percent identifying as Independents. These figures have remained largely stable over the last several decades. See, for instance, "Partisan Polarization Surges in Bush, Obama Years," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/06-04-12%20Values%20Release.pdf>.
- We identified the black Republican candidates from the website The Root, which describes itself as "the premier news, opinion, and culture site for African-American influencers." The candidates were the subject of a feature on the black Republicans who sought election to Congress in 2010, accessed October 26, 2013, <http://www.theroot.com/multimedia/gallery-black-republicans-running-congress>.
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- Although exploring black support for black candidates is an important question of interest, we note that our focus in this paper is on the extent to which black candidates mobilized black voters. Discussions among Republican Party officials have often implicated the presence of black candidates as a precondition for increasing levels of support among black voters.
- We point out, however, that the successful black Republican candidates were the only two candidates out of the fourteen to compete in a relatively safe Republican seat (Tim Scott, SC-1) or a competitive seat (Allen West, FL-22).
- Following the advice of Ansolabehere (2012), we coded individuals for whom there was no evidence on whether or not the respondents voted and who lived in Virginia (for which no vote history data are available) as missing.
- Open* indicates a race in which there was no incumbent; *Mobilized* indicates whether the respondent reported contact from a party or candidate; *Competitiveness* reflects the closeness of the election, in tens of percentage points; *College* is whether the respondent has a four-year college degree; *Ideology* is the respondents' self-placement on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *liberal* to 5 = *conservative*; and *Party identification* is a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strong Democratic* to 7 = *strong Republican*.
- Although we estimated the models in Table 4 without the use of survey weights, we obtain substantively identical results when doing so.
- We estimated these probabilities using the coefficients from column 2 while holding the control variables constant at their mean values (medians in the case of dichotomous variables). In a district with no black candidates, the predicted probability of turnout was .793. This increases to .847 in districts with a black Democratic candidate (and a white Republican candidate), and this difference is statistically significant.
- See Table S1 in the supplementary appendix (<http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>).
- Unfortunately, there are simply too few black Republican Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) respondents to reliably estimate these coefficients among this group. However, to the extent that coracial candidates can appeal to voters who are, at minimum, not aligned with the opposite party, we can still recover reliable estimates of the relationship between race, partisanship, and turnout.
- There were no black Republican incumbents in 2010.
- We used permutation inference to examine whether the coefficients for *black Republican candidate only* failed to reach statistical significance due to insufficient statistical power. The results of this exercise, however, do not allow us to reject the null hypothesis that black Republican candidates alone have no association with voter turnout. See the supplementary appendix for additional details.
- Furthermore, these patterns are not explained by the differential willingness of CCES respondents to provide a candidate placement based upon candidate race; 32.0 percent of black respondents placed the Republican candidate when the Republican candidate was white, compared with 31.2 percent of respondents who placed the Republican candidate when the Republican candidate was black.
- See Table S2 in the supplementary appendix for additional information.
- See Table S3 in the supplementary appendix.

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