How "American" is Barack Obama? The role of national identity in a historic bid for the White House

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the 2008 presidential election, we examined the extent to which the American identity was implicitly and explicitly associated with Barack Obama compared to Tony Blair (Study 1), Hillary Clinton (Study 2), and John McCain (Studies 3 and 4). When conscious control was relatively limited and targets were categorized based on race, the American identity was less strongly associated with Obama than with the other candidates. This effect was stronger than when the candidates were categorized based on their personal identity (Studies 1–4), gender (Study 2), political affiliation (Study 3), or age (Study 4). In addition, the extent to which candidates were differentiated in terms of implicit and explicit associations with the American identity predicted the relative willingness to actively support them.

Throughout the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama's national identity underwent intense scrutiny. Concerns about Obama's lack of patriotism were raised when he declined to wear a flag pin and failed to salute the U.S. flag on one occasion. Opponents emphasized his foreign-sounding middle name (Hussein) and ties with Indonesia and Kenya in order to weaken his perceived Americanness. And in the most direct challenge to Obama's national identity, the so-called "birthers" vocally alleged Obama is not a U.S. citizen. Some claimed that he was born in Hawaii before it became part of the United States, while some maintained that he was actually born in Indonesia. Even well into his presidency, attempts to invalidate Obama's citizenship persist. In an effort to put this issue to rest, the White House released the Long Form Birth Certificate of President Obama on April 27, 2011. Despite this, the issue of President Obama's place of birth has flared up yet again during his reelection campaign.

One could attribute these instances to the adversarial rhetoric of political contests; however, the sentiment that Obama is not truly American might also be symptomatic of a pervasive difficulty people have in granting American status to non-White Americans. Indeed, researchers have shown that the American identity is more strongly associated with Americans of European descent than with African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/as, and even Native Americans (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos, Gavin, & Quintana, 2010;

Nosek, Smyth, et al., 2007). The propensity to equate being American with being White is particularly robust on implicit measures and occurs even when explicit knowledge and perceptions indicate otherwise.

Put simply, the label "American" is more swiftly granted to people of European descent than to members of ethnic minorities. This phenomenon can be conceptualized as a form of exclusionary patriotism (Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001): National attachment becomes inextricably linked to a relative exclusion of subgroups that do not embody the dominant definition of the national identity. In line with this idea, survey data showed that the more White respondents, particularly those in the working class, expressed an attachment to U.S. symbols, the less likely they were to vote for Obama (Parker, Sawyer, & Towler, 2009). Similarly, a longitudinal study revealed antiegalitarian voters opposed Obama due to his perceived foreignness (Knowles, Lowery, & Schaumberg, 2009).

The purpose of the current studies was twofold. First, we sought to document more directly that Obama was less closely associated with U.S. symbols than White politicians and that this effect stemmed at least to some extent from racial categorizations. Second, we examined whether individual differences in the ease with which people associated Obama with U.S. symbols predicted willingness to support him relative to White politicians. Regarding the first aim, we

examined whether individuals' difficulty associating Obama with American was particularly pronounced when he was construed as a Black person.[1]

Targets (individuals or groups) can be categorized along multiple dimensions. Depending on how they are construed within the parameters of a given social context, specific subsets of associative knowledge are likely to be activated (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). In line with this perspective, previous research documents that making different categories or identities salient affects performance on implicit association measures (e.g., Crisp & Hewstone, 2001; Mitchell, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003). Here, we varied the extent to which perceivers' attention was drawn to specific identities by capitalizing on the fact that performance on a widely used measure of implicit associations, the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), is partially driven by the labels used in the task (Fazio & Olson, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2003). For example, Mitchell et al. compared the relative evaluations of targets that varied simultaneously in terms of race and occupation (White politicians vs. Black athletes). When the IAT required categorizing the targets based on race, White politicians were evaluated more positively than Black athletes, but when targets were classified according to their occupation, Black athletes elicited a more positive evaluation than White politicians. Using the same logic, we examined the extent to which the concept American was linked to well-known politicians as a function of whether they were categorized based on race (Black vs. White) or other identities. Given participants were required to categorize the targets along a well-defined dimension, it should lead participants to construe the targets along that dimension and limit the relevance of other features or dimensions. We predicted that the attribute American would be less strongly associated with the Black target than with the White target and this effect would be reduced when the task focused participants on other identities. By manipulating the frame of reference used to process the *same* targets, we should successfully increase or decrease perceivers' focus of attention on dimensions such as the targets' personal, racial, gender, age, or political identities. In line with previous research (Devos & Ma, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2003), this paradigm should reveal the impact of highlighting vs. downplaying racial distinctions. In doing so, we should be able to document that the extent to which the American identity is psychologically ascribed to targets is partially a function of them being construed as members of racial categories. In other words, changing the frame of reference should shift performances on the IAT such that when political candidates are categorized along racial lines, it becomes harder to link the concept American to a Black person than to

a White person (compared to versions of the tasks that would require focusing on criterion that is more likely to produce effects in the opposite direction).

Regarding the second goal of the current studies, we sought to establish that perceptions of national identity relate to the willingness to support political candidates. Although early research investigating the predictive utility of implicit associations focused largely on predicting nonverbal, difficult to control behaviors (e.g., Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; McConnell & Leibold, 2001), a growing body of research finds that implicit associations can also predict more deliberative behaviors and judgments (Friese, Hofmann, & Schmitt, 2008; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009; Perugini, Richetin, & Zogmaister, 2010). Recently, for example, researchers have shown that automatic evaluations of political candidates or parties predicted voting behavior, which is widely assumed to be a highly deliberative process (e.g., Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister, & Amadori, 2008; Friese, Bluemke, & Wänke, 2007; Galdi, Arcuri, & Gawronski, 2008). Data collected during the 2008 U.S. presidential election found that greater implicit and explicit pro-White attitudes predicted intention to vote for McCain rather than for Obama (Greenwald, Smith, Sriram, Bar-Anan, & Nosek, 2009; Payne et al., 2010).

Contrasting previous research that examines the predictive utility of *implicit attitudes* in the political domain, we tested the role of *implicit national identity*. Recent research shows that implicit stereotypes about who is authentically American predicted discriminatory behavior against a qualified Asian American when loyalty to American interests was pertinent (e.g., national security job; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010). Without a doubt, electing someone to the nation's highest office makes the issue of national identity relevant. We hypothesized that the less participants perceived Obama (relative to another candidate) as American, the less they would be willing to vote for and actively support him (relative to another candidate). Subscribing to an additive model of predictive validity (Perugini, 2005), our goal was to establish the incremental validity of implicit and explicit national identity on behavioral intentions, controlling for two pertinent predictors, namely self-reported racial prejudice and political orientation.

Study 1. Obama vs. Blair

First, we examined the extent to which the American identity was associated with Barack Obama when he was compared to Tony Blair, the United Kingdom's Prime Minister at the time of data collection. Contrasting a Black American to a White foreigner offered the potential to test the robustness of the American = White linkage when explicit knowledge contradicts this association. To manipulate targets' construal, we compared the ease or difficulty to associate the American

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[1]Obama identifies as a Black man with mixed racial heritage. Research on multiracial perception suggests that lay persons are most likely to categorize him as Black (Malahy, Sedlins, Plaks, & Shoda, 2010; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008).

identity when they were categorized based on race (Black vs. White) or personal identity (Barack Obama vs. Tony Blair). This manipulation maps onto a common distinction between intergroup and interpersonal categorizations (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). We predicted that the difficulty associating the concept American (relative to foreign) with Obama would be more pronounced when targets were construed as representatives of distinct racial groups rather than as individuals. Moreover, we expected implicit and explicit national identity to have a unique contribution to voting intention.

Method

Participants

Participants included 238 undergraduates at San Diego State University (SDSU) (158 women, 233 U.S. citizens, median age = 19). The sample included 119 (50.0%) White/European Americans, 31 (13.0%) Latino/as, 42 (17.6%) Asian Americans, 8 (3.4%) Black/African Americans, 22 (9.2%) individuals of multiethnic backgrounds, 11 (4.6%) individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, and 5 (2.1%) individuals who did not report their ethnicity. Based on two items assessing political orientation (see Procedure section), we could determine that the sample was ideologically more liberal than conservative ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.43$, $t(237) = -5.37$, $p < .001$, $d = .35$) and more Democrat than Republican ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.46$, $t(237) = -4.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.28$). To capture the proportions of individuals who displayed a clear leaning toward one side of the political spectrum or the other and those who displayed a more moderate or neutral political orientation, we regrouped the participants who selected the two most extreme response options (1 or 2 on the liberal/Democrat side and 6 or 7 on the conservative/Republican side) and contrasted these two groups to participants who selected more moderate response options (3, 4, or 5). Based on this coding scheme, the sample included 68 (28.6%) liberal, 147 (61.8%) moderate, and 23 (9.7%) conservative individuals. In terms of political affiliation, it included 67 (28.2%) Democrat, 142 (59.1%) moderate, and 29 (12.2%) Republican individuals. Data were collected between March and May 2007.

Stimuli

Six close-cropped pictures of Obama and Blair were selected. Photos were in neutral backgrounds and match paired for facial expression, eye gaze, and body posture. Landmarks and icons representing the concepts American (i.e., Capitol building, Statue of Liberty, Golden Gate Bridge, U.S. flag, Bald Eagle, and map of United States) and foreign (i.e., Eiffel Tower, Leaning Tower of Pisa, Sphinx, flag of Djibouti, Flemish lion, and map of Luxembourg) were borrowed from previous research (Devos et al., 2010).

Procedure

The study was presented as examining psychological processes involved in the perception of individuals and members of social groups. Participants were told that this specific version of the study focused on how Barack Obama and Tony Blair were perceived. To ensure that there was little ambiguity regarding the national identity of the targets, participants were reminded that Barack Obama was a candidate to the upcoming presidential election and that Tony Blair was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Participants completed two IATs (for a review, see Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007), each was comprised of two 60-trial critical blocks. The IAT is a widely used measure of implicit social cognition (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011). It is based on the assumption that the direction and strength of associations between two pairs of concepts can be inferred based on the ease (or speed) with which they can be combined. The IAT does not require introspective access and minimizes the role of conscious control or intention (Nosek, Greenwald, et al., 2007). In contrast to self-report measures, it has been established that the controllability of responses on this task is minimal when participants have limited experience with the technique and are not provided with specific instructions on how to modify their IAT score (Cvencek, Greenwald, Brown, Gray, & Snowden, 2010). On each trial, a picture appeared at the center of the screen and participants were instructed to categorize it, as quickly and accurately as possible, according to labels that appeared on the top of the screen. Participants made their categorization by pressing a keyboard key designated to the left or right. Response times were recorded from the stimulus onset to its correct classification. The order of the two IATs and the order of the critical blocks were counterbalanced across participants.

In the *Personal Identity IAT*, one critical block opposed the label pairings "Barack Obama" + "American" and "Tony Blair" + "Foreign." Participants categorized pictures of Obama and American symbols on one side and pictures of Blair and foreign symbols on the other side. In another critical block, the labels were switched, such that "Tony Blair" + "American" appeared on one side and "Barack Obama" + "Foreign" on the other.

The *Race Identity IAT* was identical to the *Personal Identity IAT*, except participants categorized Blair and Obama by race. In one critical block, the label pairings "Black" + "American" and "White" + "Foreign" were opposed. In the other critical block, the label pairings "White" + "American" and "Black" + "Foreign" were contrasted.

Before or after the IATs, participants made an explicit relative judgment comparing how American Obama and Blair are on a 9-point scale (-4 = *I strongly consider Barack Obama to be more American than Tony Blair*, 0 = *Both are equally American*, 4 = *I strongly consider Tony Blair to be more*

American than Barack Obama). The comparative nature of this single-item measure parallels the format of the IAT. Indeed, at both levels of responding, the measure captures the *relative* propensity to associate the American identity to the two targets under consideration, thereby increasing the comparability of the implicit and explicit assessments. After completing implicit and explicit American identity measures, participants indicated their willingness to vote for Obama and Blair if they were candidates in a presidential election (1 = *not at all willing*, 7 = *very willing*). To assess explicit racial prejudice, participants completed the Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale (ATB; Brigham, 1993). Two items assessed political orientation (1 = *strongly liberal*, 7 = *strongly conservative* and 1 = *strongly Democrat*, 7 = *strongly Republican*, 4 = *neutral in both cases*). Demographic information was also obtained.

Results and discussion

Explicit American identity

On the explicit relative judgment of Americanness, a one-sample t test revealed that the mean was below the midpoint of the scale (coded as 0), suggesting that participants considered Obama to be more American than Blair, $t(237) = 13.79$, $p < .001$, $d = .90$ ($M = -1.89$, $SD = 2.12$).

Implicit American identity

IAT D scores were computed for both IATs in accordance with the algorithm set forth by Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003). Here, the IAT D represents the extent to which the two targets were differentiated in terms of their association with the concept American (relative to foreign). Negative values indicated that the concept American (relative to foreign) was more strongly associated with Barack Obama (or a Black person) than with Tony Blair (or a White person), whereas positive values indicated that the concept American (relative to foreign) was more strongly linked to Tony Blair (or a White person) than to Barack Obama (or a Black person). A paired-samples t test showed a significant difference in IAT D as a function of the dimension used to categorize the targets, $t(237) = 3.68$, $p < .001$, $d = .34$ (see Table 1). As predicted, the concept American was more strongly linked to Blair than to Obama when participants categorized the targets based on race than personal identity.

Willingness to vote for candidates

A mean-level effect indicated participants would be more willing to vote for Obama ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.66$) than for Blair ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(237) = 5.76$, $p < .001$, $d = .37$. To test whether explicit and implicit associations with the American identity predicted voting intention, we regressed the relative willingness to vote for the candidates (subtracting the willingness to vote for Obama from the willingness to vote for Blair) on political orientation, explicit prejudice (as measured by the ATB), relative explicit American identity, and relative implicit American identity (averaging the

Table 1 Reliabilities, Means (IAT Effect in ms and IAT D), Standard Deviations, Effect Sizes (Cohen's d), One-Sample T Tests, and Correlations With the Relative Willingness to Support the Candidates for IATs, Studies 1–4

IAT study	α	IAT effect	IAT D	SD	d	t	r
Study 1 (Blair–Obama)							
Race identity IAT	.65	38	.07	.38	.19	2.85*	.31*
Personal identity IAT	.72	−5	−.02	.40	.06	−.86	.51*
Study 2 (Clinton–Obama)							
Race identity IAT	.58	90	.22	.33	.68	8.55*	.16*
Personal identity IAT	.58	42	.14	.33	.44	5.48*	.26*
Gender identity IAT	.48	44	.12	.31	.40	5.00*	.22*
Study 3 (McCain–Obama)							
Race identity IAT	.60	51	.10	.35	.29	3.91*	.35*
Personal identity IAT	.66	25	.07	.35	.19	2.58*	.51*
Political identity IAT	.60	13	.02	.36	.06	.78	.45*
Study 4 (McCain–Obama)							
Race identity IAT	.64	56	.16	.34	.46	5.85*	.40*
Personal identity IAT	.60	17	.06	.35	.17	2.11*	.42*
Age identity IAT	.69	−24	−.04	.36	.11	−1.39	.29*

Note. df were 237, 158, 180, and 162 for Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Cohen's *d*s reflect the difference from zero (no association) in standard deviation units. Reliabilities were computed as follows: Each block of trials was divided into three parcels (trials 1–20, 21–40, 41–60). IAT Ds were computed for each parcel and were used as items to calculate Cronbach's α values. Internal consistency estimates were somewhat lower than those reported for other IATs (Nosek, Smyth, et al., 2007), but were relatively satisfactory for implicit measures. IAT = Implicit Association Test. *$p < .05$.

Table 2 Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables and Standardized Regression Coefficients (β) Between Predictors and the Relative Willingness to Support the Candidates, Studies 1–4

Study predictors	Explicit Prejudice	Explicit American identity	Implicit American identity	Willingness to support	β
Study 1 (Blair–Obama)					
Political orientation	.32*	.19*	.20*	.27*	.15*
Explicit prejudice (ATB)		.18*	.17*	.25*	.12*
Explicit American identity			.36*	.34*	.19*
Implicit American identity				.36*	.24*
Study 2 (Clinton–Obama)					
Political orientation	.34*	.07	.04	.02	−.07
Explicit prejudice (ATB)		.27*	.11	.24*	.17*
Explicit American identity			.29*	.34*	.25*
Implicit American identity				.30*	.21*
Study 3 (McCain–Obama)					
Political orientation	.12	.36*	.49*	.68*	.49*
Explicit prejudice (ATB)		.21*	.19*	.20*	.05
Explicit American identity			.37*	.56*	.22*
Implicit American identity				.56*	.23*
Study 4 (McCain–Obama)					
Political orientation	.25*	.50*	.46*	.76*	.57*
Explicit prejudice (ATB)		.24*	.13	.30*	.09
Explicit American identity			.31*	.58*	.22*
Implicit American identity				.48*	.15*

Note. ATB = Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale; IAT = Implicit Association Test. *$p < .05$.

two IAT Ds, $r = .51$, $p < .001$.[2] These variables extracted a significant portion of variance, $R^2 = .22$, $F(4, 233) = 16.58$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2).[3] More conservative ($p = .02$) and more prejudiced ($p = .05$) participants were less likely to support Obama (relative to Blair). Over and above these effects, the explicit and implicit ascriptions of the American identity to the politicians accounted for voting intention. As predicted, the more participants had a relative difficulty associating the American identity with Obama, both explicitly ($p = .002$) and implicitly ($p < .001$), the less they were willing to vote for him (compared to Blair).

Study 2. Obama vs. Clinton

Study 1 provided initial support for our hypotheses, but two limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the comparison between Obama and Blair was artificial, as the two were unlikely to challenge each other in a real election. Second, the measure of behavioral intention consisted of only one item. Study 2 addressed these shortcomings. A more realistic test of our hypotheses was carried out by comparing Barack Obama to Hillary Clinton as they competed in the Democratic primary. A more stable estimate of behavioral intentions was

obtained by including more self-report items tapping the willingness to support candidates.

Study 1 showed that when targets were construed by race, the American identity was more strongly associated with the White person than with the Black person. The targets were no longer reliably differentiated when they were categorized based on their personal identity. To rule out the possibility that this difference simply reflects a distinction between intergroup vs. interpersonal categorizations (Park & Judd, 2005), another relevant intergroup categorization was included in Study 2. We also examined implicit associations obtained when targets were categorized based on gender (man vs. woman). Given past research showing that men are viewed as more prototypical of their nationality than women (Eagly & Kite, 1987), the two targets could potentially be differentiated in opposite direction whether race or gender came to the forefront. Thus, we predicted that the *relative* difficulty in associating the concept American with Obama would be more pronounced when the targets were appraised based on their respective race than based on their personal identity or gender.

Method

Participants

Participants included 159 SDSU undergraduates (110 women, 151 U.S. citizens, median age = 18). The sample included 72 (45.3%) White/European Americans, 21 (13.2%) Latino/as,

[2]A principle of aggregation (Ajzen & Cote, 2008) was followed because we had no *a priori* reason to expect that IATs would differentially predict behavioral intentions. For each study, bivariate correlations between each IAT D and the relative willingness to support the candidates are reported in Table 1.

[3]For each study, the matrix of correlations among measures introduced in regression analyses is provided in Table 2.

30 (18.9%) Asian Americans, 5 (3.1%) Black/African Americans, 15 (9.4%) individuals of multiethnic backgrounds, 9 (5.7%) individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, and 7 (4.4%) individuals who did not report their ethnicity. The sample was more liberal than conservative ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.46$, $t(158) = -4.45$, $p < .001$, $d = .35$) and more Democrat than Republican ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.41$, $t(158) = -4.32$, $p < .001$, $d = .24$). The sample was comprised of 52 (32.7%) liberal, 89 (56.0%) moderate, and 18 (11.3%) conservative individuals. In terms of political affiliation, it included 47 (29.6%) Democrat, 98 (61.6%) moderate, and 14 (8.8%) Republican individuals. Data were collected during the Democratic primary between September and October 2007.

Procedure

The procedure was similar to Study 1 with two critical additions. First, we added a *Gender Identity IAT*. This IAT required that participants categorize the targets based on gender using the labels "Man" and "Woman." Second, we augmented the self-report items tapping willingness to support the candidates. These items were administered separately for Obama and Clinton and asked whether participants would be willing to (a) join a student group at school for; (b) donate money to; (c) try to convince my friends and family members to vote for; (d) put a bumper sticker on my car supporting; (e) make phone calls for; (f) go door to door canvassing for; (g) openly state support for; (h) attend a rally in support of; and (i) vote for each candidate (1 = *not at all willing*, 7 = *very willing*).

Results and discussion

Explicit American identity

A one-sample *t* test revealed that participants perceived Clinton to be more American than Obama, $t(158) = 5.51$, $p < .001$, $d = .44$ ($M = .62$, $SD = 1.43$).

Implicit American identity

For each IAT, IAT D scores were computed so that negative values indicated that the concept American (relative to foreign) was more strongly associated with Obama than with Clinton, whereas positive values indicated that the concept American (relative to foreign) was more strongly linked to Clinton than to Obama. A one-way within-subjects analysis of variance (with planned orthogonal contrasts) of IAT Ds was conducted to test whether emphasizing race increased the tendency to see Clinton as more American than Obama compared to other dimensions. As predicted, the IAT D was significantly larger when race was stressed than the average effect of the other two IATs, $t(158) = 3.29$, $p = .001$, $d = .37$ (see Table 1). The residual contrast between the *Personal*

Identity and *Gender Identity IATs* was not significant, $t(158) = .72$, $p = .48$, $d = .08$.

Willingness to support candidates

Overall, participants were more willing to support Obama ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.24$) than Clinton ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(159) = 4.14$, $p < .001$, $d = .33$. The relative willingness to support the candidates was regressed on political orientation, explicit prejudice, explicit ascription of American identity, and implicit ascription of American identity (averaging the three IAT Ds, $rs > .20$, $ps < .05$), $R^2 = .19$, $F(4, 154) = 9.03$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). Political orientation did not account for a significant amount of unique variance ($p = .40$), likely because both candidates were affiliated with the same political party. More prejudiced participants were less likely to support Obama in favor of Clinton ($p = .03$). Finally, the extent to which participants explicitly ($p = .002$) and implicitly ($p = .007$) differentiated the candidates in terms of their association with the American identity also predicted the relative support for them.

These findings replicated Study 1. The relative difficulty to link the American identity with Obama was magnified when race was accentuated, but weaker when attention was drawn to personal identity or gender. There was no direct support for the idea that a man is seen as more prototypical of the national identity than a woman, but making gender (rather than race) salient yielded a different pattern of associations. Again, the more individuals explicitly and implicitly denied the American identity to Obama, the less they were willing to support him over Clinton.

Study 3. Obama vs. McCain (political identity)

Two additional studies focusing on Barack Obama and John McCain were conducted during the final stages of the 2008 presidential campaign. An obvious distinction between these candidates is that they were representing opposite poles of the political spectrum, making political identity ("Democrat" vs. "Republican") a clear point of comparison to race. If anything, given our relatively liberal population, categorizing targets based on political identity should produce an effect in the opposite direction of that obtained when race is highlighted. Thus, we expected that it would be harder to associate the American identity with Obama when he is construed as a Black person rather than as a Democrat or an individual.

Method

Participants

Participants were 181 SDSU undergraduates (150 women, 173 U.S. citizens, median age = 18). The sample included 84

(46.4%) White/European Americans, 32 (17.7%) Latino/as, 34 (18.8%) Asian Americans, 6 (3.3%) Black/African Americans, 15 (8.3%) individuals of multiethnic backgrounds, 3 (1.7%) individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, and 7 (3.9%) individuals who did not report their ethnicity. The sample was more liberal than conservative ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.35$, $t(180) = -5.29$, $p < .001$, $d = .39$) and more Democrat than Republican ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.41$, $t(180) = -5.11$, $p < .001$, $d = .38$). The sample was comprised of 51 (28.2%) liberal, 113 (62.4%) moderate, and 17 (9.4%) conservative individuals. In terms of political affiliation, it included 57 (31.5%) Democrat, 104 (57.5%) moderate, and 20 (11.0%) Republican individuals. Data were collected on September 2008 during which Obama and McCain were frontrunners in the presidential election.

Procedure

The procedure was similar to the previous studies. In addition to the *Race Identity* and *Personal Identity IATs*, we administered a *Political Identity IAT* that asked participants to classify the candidates based on their political affiliation ("Democrat" vs. "Republican").

Results and discussion

Explicit American identity

Participants did not reliably differentiate Obama and McCain on the self-report measure, $t(180) = .48$, $p = .64$, $d = .07$ ($M = .06$, $SD = 1.57$).

Implicit American identity

IAT D scores were computed so that negative values indicated that the concept American (relative to foreign) was more strongly associated with Obama than with McCain, whereas positive values indicated that the concept American (relative to foreign) was more strongly linked to McCain than to Obama. Planned contrasts revealed that focusing on race increased the tendency to see McCain as more American than Obama compared to the other IATs, $t(180) = 2.35$, $p = .02$, $d = .25$ (see Table 1). There was no reliable difference comparing the *Personal Identity* and *Political Identity IATs*, $t(180) = 1.63$, $p = .11$, $d = .17$.

Willingness to support candidates

On average, participants supported Obama ($\alpha = .96$, $M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.70$) more than McCain ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(180) = 7.94$, $p < .001$, $d = .59$. A regression predicting relative support from political orientation, explicit prejudice, relative explicit ascription of American identity, and relative implicit ascription of American identity (averaging the three IAT Ds, $rs > .39$, $ps < .001$) accounted for a

significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .58$, $F(4, 176) = 60.64$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). Not surprisingly, political conservatism was positively associated with willingness to support McCain relative to Obama ($p < .001$). Explicit prejudice was not predictive of relative support ($p = .33$) when other predictors were factored in. Critical to our research purposes, relative explicit ($p < .001$) and implicit ($p < .001$) associations between the candidates and the American identity uniquely accounted for variance in relative willingness to support them. Participants with stronger explicit and implicit associations linking American and McCain were more likely to support him over Obama.

Again, the findings stressed the incremental validity of implicit and explicit associations to predict behavioral intentions in an election context. Additionally, highlighting different aspects of targets altered the extent to which they were implicitly associated with the national identity. When targets were construed through racial lenses, the American identity was more strongly associated to a White than a Black person. The *same* targets were no longer reliably differentiated when they were categorized based on political identity.

Study 4. Obama vs. McCain (age identity)

The aims and design of Study 4 were identical to those of Study 3, except we examined implicit associations obtained when age was highlighted. Obama was a relatively young candidate compared to McCain, a more senior political figure. Given the age group of participants, categorizing the targets based on age ("Young" vs. "Old") should produce an effect in the opposite direction of that obtained when race is salient. Thus, the difficulty to associate the American identity with Obama should be more pronounced when perceivers focus on race rather than on age or personal identity.

Method

Participants

Participants included 163 SDSU undergraduates (133 women, 159 U.S. citizens, median age = 18). The sample included 64 (39.3%) White/European Americans, 34 (20.9%) Latino/as, 42 (25.8%) Asian Americans, 3 (1.8%) Black/African Americans, 11 (6.7%) individuals of multiethnic backgrounds, 5 (3.1%) individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, and 4 (2.5%) individuals who did not report their ethnicity. The sample was more liberal than conservative ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.51$, $t(162) = -3.31$, $p = .001$, $d = .26$) and more Democrat than Republican ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.57$, $t(162) = -3.25$, $p = .001$, $d = .26$). The sample was comprised of 45 (27.6%) liberal, 95 (58.3%) moderate, and 23 (14.1%) conservative individuals. In terms of political affiliation, it

included 49 (30.1%) Democrat, 91 (55.8%) moderate, and 23 (14.1%) Republican individuals. Data were collected from September to October 2008.

Procedure

The procedure was the same as in Study 3, except we replaced the *Political Identity IAT* with an *Age Identity IAT*. Here, participants sorted the candidates using the labels "Young" (for Obama) and "Old" (for McCain).

Results and discussion

Explicit American identity

Participants perceived Obama as less American than McCain, $t(162) = 3.32, p < .001, d = .26 (M = .47, SD = 1.79)$.

Implicit American identity

Planned contrasts revealed that IAT D was significantly larger when race was made focal relative to the other IATs, $t(162) = 5.43, p < .001, d = .60$ (see Table 1). IAT D was also larger when participants focused on personal identity rather than age, $t(162) = 3.22, p = .002, d = .35$.

Willingness to support candidates

Once again, participants supported Obama ($\alpha = .96$, $M = 3.10, SD = 1.78$) more than McCain ($\alpha = .95, M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(162) = 5.17, p < .001$. As before, explicit prejudice, relative explicit ascription of American identity, and relative implicit ascription of American identity (averaging the three IAT Ds, $rs > .27, ps < .001$) extracted a significant proportion of variance in relative support, $R^2 = .65, F(4, 162) = 73.16, p < .001$ (see Table 2). Again, political conservatism was positively associated with supporting McCain ($p < .001$). The unique contribution of explicit prejudice was marginal ($p = .08$). Finally, controlling for other predictors, the relative explicit ($p < .001$) and implicit ($p = .007$) Americanness of the candidates both uniquely predicted the relative willingness to support them.[4]

[4]Participants' race and gender did not reliably moderate the effects reported in this paper. We also systematically examined the potential moderating effect of order variables (i.e., order of measures, order of IATs, and order of critical blocks within the IATs) on IAT Ds. Only two reliable ($p < .05$) interaction effects emerged. In both cases, the order of IATs interacted with the dimension used to categorize the targets and the patterns were consistent with carryover effects such that completing first the Race Identity IAT produced an effect in the same direction on the Personal Identity IAT (Study 1), or completing first the Personal or Political Identity IAT was accompanied by a weaker effect on the Race Identity IAT (Study 3). Given that these interaction effects were not consistent across Studies 1–4 and were not of particular theoretical interest to the current studies, we will not discuss them further. In the regression analyses, controlling for order variables had no impact on the relationships between the independent variables and willingness to support the candidates in Studies 1–4.

General discussion

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama contended with exclusion from the American identity. The present studies underscore two distinct facets of this phenomenon. First, the relative difficulty people had seeing Obama as an American was a function of the extent to which he was construed as a Black person. Indeed, Obama was implicitly viewed as less American than McCain, Clinton, or even Blair when race was stressed. This effect was attenuated, although not always completely eliminated, when politicians were categorized based on personal identity or social identities defined along gender, age, or political lines. Notably, Obama's perceived foreignness cannot be reduced to his unusual first and last names, to the Kenyan origin of his father, or to his connections with Indonesia. Although these elements may have played a role in our findings and would be consistent with research showing automatic preferences for typical American names over foreign names (Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Monteith, 2001), race contributed to the difficulty of granting the American identity to Obama over and above other characteristics.

One may wonder to what extent responses on the Race Identity IAT are merely tapping associations about the categories "Black" vs. "White" or are capturing associations about the specific targets when they are seen through racial lenses (e.g., "Obama construed as a Black person"). In other words, does comparing performances on the Personal Identity IAT and the Race Identity IAT amount to comparing how targets are construed or to comparing associations about individuals versus racial categories? Some insight on this question can be gained by comparing performances on the Race Identity IAT across the four studies. Although the studies were carried over the course of the primaries and the presidential campaign, the designs, samples, and measures were extremely similar. In addition, Obama was always represented using the same set of pictures. Thus, differences across studies are likely to stem from whom Obama was compared to (Blair, Clinton, or McCain). If the Race Identity IAT is only picking up associations about racial categories, the specific targets involved in the tasks should not be sources of reliable variations. In contrast, if the effect is more pronounced in some cases than in others, it would suggest that performances on the Race Identity IAT cannot be reduced to associations about racial categories. In line with the second alternative, we found reliable differences across studies on the Race Identity IAT. More precisely, the effect was reliably stronger when Obama was contrasted to Clinton than to Blair, $t(395) = 4.15$, $p < .001, d = .43$, or to McCain, $t(501) = 2.96, p = .003$, $d = .28$. The comparison between Obama and McCain also yielded a marginally stronger effect than the comparison between Obama and Blair, $t(580) = 1.88, p = .06, d = .16$. Thus, performances on the Race Identity IAT do not merely

reflect associations about racial categories (or labels); they are also a function of the specific political candidates contrasted.

These findings are consistent with other studies showing that the targets or stimuli included in the IAT are sources of variations and that the labels used to categorize the stimuli do not wipe out effects stemming from the characteristics of these targets or stimuli (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Ma, 2008; Govan & Williams, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2003). Varying the labels on the IATs is one way of investigating the impact of target construals. Replicating the present findings with alternative construal manipulations and measures would increase their generalizability. A study conducted during the 2008 election season documented the impact of manipulating Obama's skin color on implicit associations (Nevid & McClelland, 2010). Darkening Obama's image in the photographs used in the implicit task elicited a stronger implicit negative evaluation among conservative students, but not among their liberal counterparts. Extrapolating from these findings, one would expect that the extent to which Obama is perceived along a Black–White continuum may affect the ease or difficulty with which the American identity is linked to him.

The second contribution of our research is the finding that the extent to which the American identity is implicitly linked to politicians predicted the willingness to support them. Across four studies, participants who had difficulty seeing Obama as American were less likely to support him relative to other politicians. This contribution is distinct from the previous point. The design of the studies, the analytic strategy, and the data do *not* allow us to determine whether perceptions of Americanness differentially predict support for White vs. Black political candidates. The scope of our contribution is more limited in the sense that we document the role that the relative ascription of the national identity may have played in a specific political contest. The present findings add to a growing body of work showing that implicit associations account for behavioral intentions or judgments often assumed to reflect relatively deliberative processes. Behavioral intentions do not necessarily align perfectly with actual behaviors. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the present studies prevents us from establishing a clear causal pathway between perceived Americanness and behavioral intentions. Using a cross-lagged design (e.g., Galdi et al., 2008), it would be important to document that the ease or difficulty to grant the American identity to political candidates accounts for actual political behaviors.

There is no doubt that many factors contribute to perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in the political arena. As implied before, the interconnections among ascription of the American identity, attitude, and voting behavior or intention are complex, allowing for multiple causal pathways. Potentially, the difficulty seeing a political candidate as American might shape attitudinal and behavioral responses toward this person. At the same time, perceptions of Americanness might contribute to justify or rationalize affective or behavioral reactions. The present findings may raise questions regarding the extent to which associations to the American identity predict the relative willingness to support candidates over and above more evaluative responses. The present data do not allow us to draw conclusions regarding the relative contribution of perceptions of Americanness and attitudes (implicit or explicit). Although we cannot tackle the issue of incremental validity, we can make a number of important points regarding the interconnections between perception of Americanness and more evaluative responses.

First, these two levels are likely to overlap. U.S. citizens typically display a positive attitude toward the concept American including at the implicit level (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2001; Devos & Banaji, 2005). If the national identity is imbued with positive affect, the extent to which it is associated with a target is likely to reflect, at least partially, an attitudinal response toward this target. This proposition would be consistent with a well-established principle of affective–cognitive consistencies (Cvencek, Greenwald, & Meltzoff, 2012; Greenwald et al., 2002). In addition, valence (positive or negative) has been shown to be a criterion for inclusion in the national identity. More precisely, the inclusion of African Americans into the category American was a function of the extent to which they were depicted positively (Rydell, Hamilton, & Devos, 2010). In other words, associations to the American identity are linked, at least to some extent, to more evaluative responses. At the same time, prior research revealed that ethnic-American associations cannot be reduced to interethnic attitudes given that patterns of associations to the national identity differed in terms of magnitude or direction from evaluative associations (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

The second point concerns the link between American vs. evaluative associations and behavioral intentions more directly. It is likely that attitudes (liking or disliking) toward the candidates are more potent or direct sources of influence on behavioral responses than their perceived Americanness. If we limit our discussion to the realm of implicit political cognition, there is compelling evidence that implicit attitudes toward political candidates or parties predict voting intentions and behaviors (Arcuri et al., 2008; Friese et al., 2007; Galdi et al., 2008). Studies documenting reliable relations between implicit prejudice and voting intentions or behaviors in the context of the 2008 presidential election also point to the predictive validity of implicit attitudes (Greenwald, Poehlman, et al., 2009; Greenwald, Smith, et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2010). In contrast, there is far less evidence for a link between perceived Americanness and behavioral outcomes with the exception of research documenting a link to discriminatory behavior in hiring decisions (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010). It is precisely the paucity of research on correlates of perceived Americanness that prompted us to

examine this issue in the context of the presidential election. The difficulty viewing members of ethnic minorities (including a candidate to the country's highest office) as fully American captures an important phenomenon. Even if these associations overlap with more evaluative responses or could be conceptualized as covert expressions or rationalizations of evaluative responses, it is not trivial to show that they are reliable predictors of behavioral intentions. Examining the relative predictive power of associations to the American identity versus more purely evaluative associations and determining the potential mediating pathways among these constructs require further research. In the present context and given that participants were already asked to complete multiple IATs, the emphasis was put on the more novel aspect, namely the perceived Americanness of political candidates.

It is also worth stressing that explicit prejudice (assessed using the ATB; Brigham, 1993) is reliably correlated with the extent to which the candidates are explicitly associated with the American identity and are likely to be actively supported. Not surprisingly, the more participants express prejudicial racial attitudes, the more they are inclined to ascribe the American identity to a White candidate rather than to a Black candidate and to report a greater willingness to actively support the former rather than the latter. The link between explicit prejudice and implicit responses is in a similar direction, but it is more tenuous and does not always reach the conventional statistical significance level ($p < .05$). More importantly, reliable relations between perceived (explicit and implicit) Americanness and behavioral intentions emerge even after controlling for explicit prejudice and political orientation. In other words, the findings go beyond well-documented relations between self-reported racial prejudice and political attitudes or behaviors by putting the emphasis on the role of national identity in political contests.

Among the stimuli used to represent the concept American, we included the U.S. flag. Without a doubt, national flags are highly accessible symbols and prevalent ways of representing national identities. Recent research has documented the impact of exposure to the U.S. flag on a wide range of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral responses. For example, among people who regularly follow the American political news, the nonconscious perception of American cues (such as the U.S. flag) increased the accessibility of aggressive responses (Ferguson & Hassin, 2007). In contrast, among highly nationalistic individuals, subliminal exposure to the U.S. flag led to a greater activation of egalitarian concepts and to less hostility toward Arabs and Muslims (Butz, Plant, & Doerr, 2007). Most directly relevant to the present research, a brief exposure to the U.S. flag produced a shift toward Republican beliefs, attitudes, and voting behavior among both Republican and Democrat individuals (Carter, Ferguson, & Hassin, 2011). Even though exposure to the U.S. flag was not subtle or covert in the present studies, it may have primed

participants to endorse more conservative positions, which may have led to a weaker endorsement of Obama compared to more conservative political figures such as McCain, Blair, or even Clinton. Even if we assume that this priming effect occurred, it would not account for the two key findings reported here. More precisely, a shift toward more conservative positions would not directly explain that the relative difficulty associating the concept American with Obama was more pronounced on the Race Identity IAT than on other IATs, or the link between the relative perceived Americanness of the candidates and behavioral intentions.

The limitations of studies conducted on college samples, in particular when it comes to investigations of political attitudes, have been underscored (Sears, 1986). Future research would benefit from relying on samples representative of the U.S. population. That said, the present studies document that even among relatively young and liberal voters, a relative difficulty to associate the American identity with a Black candidate (relative to a White candidate) emerged and perceptions of Americanness (implicit and explicit) accounted for the relative support deliberately expressed toward candidates. As reported, the vast majority of participants were U.S. citizens. The small proportion of non-U.S. citizens (5% or less) in each study did not give us the opportunity to examine the extent to which citizenship status might moderate the findings. This being said, analyses conducted on a large web-based datasets and focusing on the extent to which the American identity is associated with European Americans and with Asian or Native Americans suggest that the implicit American = White effect is not restricted to respondents living in the United States of America (Nosek, Smyth, et al., 2007). With a couple of notable exceptions (e.g., Native Americans being seen as equally American as European Americans by respondents living in Australia or Europe), the effect emerges in other regions (e.g., Asia) or countries (e.g., Canada). This does not preclude the fact that the propensity to implicitly associate the American identity more strongly with individuals of European descent than with members of ethnic minorities is linked to the extent to which White respondents display a strong implicit national identification (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos et al., 2010).

Despite the outcome of the 2008 presidential election, the present research emphasizes the pervasive impact of race on the perception of political candidates. There are multiple ways in which racial attitudes and identity continue to play an ubiquitous role in politics (Devos, 2011). We narrowed our focus on the role of implicit associations about race and national identity in the perception of political candidates. Recent theoretical and methodological advances in the study of implicit social cognition allow us to comprehend the ways in which stereotypical beliefs and racial categorizations contribute to important aspects of the political process (see also Nosek, Graham, & Hawkins, 2010). The election of Obama

prompted some commentators to proclaim that we have now moved to a "post-racial United States." These statements starkly contrast with the picture emerging from the present studies.

Beyond illustrating the role of race and national identity in a historic presidential election, the present work has broader, practical implications. In particular, the findings have relevance for political campaigning. If emphasizing racial identities determines the extent to which candidates are seen as embodying the national identity, and this factor accounts for the willingness to vote or support these candidates, political strategists and campaign advisors of ethnic minority candidates may be concerned that the salience of racial cues or identities would inadvertently undermine the electability of their candidates. There are many aspects of political campaigning that are likely to bring race to the forefront. For example, characteristics of the candidates themselves, their track record, or experiences may influence the extent to which they are appraised along racial lines. Whether issues debated over the course of the campaign have racial elements or undertones may also determine the likelihood that racial prejudices or stereotypes play a crucial role in the political contest. If, today, overt racism and blatant bigotry are rarely expressed in the political arena, the present work suggests that subtle contextual cues or variations shape relatively automatic or nonconscious responses toward political candidates, and although these responses may escape conscious control, they have some bearing on political behavior.

Over the course of the 2008 presidential campaign, Democrats made a concerted effort not to frame central issues in racial terms. In doing so, they ensured that Obama's positions would not be appraised through racial lenses. In retrospect, it was probably wise not to overemphasize his racial identity. This being said, it would be overly simplistic and counterproductive to argue, in light of the present findings, that to ensure their electability, minority candidates should de-emphasize racial identity at all costs. The limitations and downsides of this color-blind perspective have now been stressed (Park & Judd, 2005). For example, the tendency to minimize race and to focus on issues that reach across ethnic lines may elicit relatively negative or ambivalent responses among large segments of the electorate. Instead of providing simplistic recipe for political campaigning, the present work suggests that to gain momentum or ascendance in a political contest, strategists and advisors need to take into consideration subtle, yet pervasive responses that may affect the outcome of the election. Even in contexts characterized by values of tolerance, exclusionary responses may shape important facets of the electoral process. In summary, for ethnic minority candidates, winning an election probably requires an ability to navigate issues of race and ethnicity that are more complex and nuanced than they were a few decades ago. Racial distinctions elicit less polarized responses, but it does not signify that race is irrelevant. Instead, it points to new challenges.

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