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Why are African American Governors and U.S. Senators so Rare? Exploring White Voters' Responses to African American Statewide Candidates

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Abstract

Despite making notable gains at the local level, very few African Americans have been elected to the high-profile statewide offices of governor or U.S. senator. Previous research offers little systematic evidence on the role of racial prejudice in the campaigns of African Americans trying to reach these offices for the first time. In this paper, I introduce a new data set designed to test whether African American candidates for these offices are penalized due to their race. Comparing all 24 African American challengers (non-incumbents) from 2000 to 2014 to white challengers from the same party running in the same state for the same office around the same time, I find that white challengers are about three times more likely to win and receive about 13 percentage points more support among white voters. These estimates hold when controlling for a number of potential confounding factors and when employing several statistical matching estimators. The results conflict with earlier studies that focus on a single gubernatorial contest or elections at the U.S. House level.

Keywords Race and elections · White voters · African American candidates · Statewide candidates

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When the Voting Rights Act became law in 1965, African Americans had almost no representation in elected office at any level of government. Fifty years later, the number of African American elected officials has increased substantially. By 2015, African Americans made up 10% of the U.S. House and 8.5% of state legislatures, approaching their 13% share of the 2012 presidential electorate (Brown-Dean et al. 2015). Likewise, gains occurred at the mayoral level, as each of the nation's five largest cities has elected an African American mayor. And most notably, Barack Obama broke the presidential color barrier in 2008.

Obama's success, however, is not indicative of success among African Americans running for the most powerful and consequential elected offices one step below the presidency: the high-profile statewide offices of governor and U.S. senator. Only eight African Americans have ever been elected governor or U.S. senator since Reconstruction.[1] Following the 2016 elections, only three out of 100 U.S. senators and zero out of fifty governors were African American. Forty-four out of fifty states have never elected an African American governor or U.S. senator.

The lack of successful African American candidacies for these offices raises the question of whether candidate race influences electoral outcomes. The literature on how white voters evaluate black candidates does not offer a clear answer on whether black candidates suffer a racial penalty. Two prominent observational studies say that they do not. Citrin et al. (1990) find that while racial attitudes were associated with white opposition to California gubernatorial candidate Tom Bradley in 1982, they were not more associated with opposition to Bradley than they were with opposition to white Democratic candidates for other offices during that election cycle. Highton's (2004, p. 17) examination of exit poll data from 1996 and 1998 U.S. House elections finds no evidence of racial bias among white voters in these elections, concluding that "the barrier presented by white voters in general elections does not appear especially daunting, especially in relation to the barrier it is often perceived to be." However, experimental studies in the literature generally find evidence of racially biased evaluation of black candidates on the part of white voters (Moskowitz and Stroh 1994; Reeves 1997; Terkildsen 1993; but see Sigelman et al. 1995).

The case of African American gubernatorial and U.S. Senate candidacies provides an opportunity to clarify the mixed findings in the existing literature. One limitation of the observational literature is that much of it focuses on the congressional or mayoral level (Hajnal 2007; Highton 2004). The dynamics of a high-profile statewide election are different in a number of ways that are likely to make prejudice more of a factor (Jeffries and Jones 2006; Sonenshein 1990). For example, white voters may be less likely to support black candidates for offices that are perceived as more powerful (Williams 1990). Thus, a study such as this one that focuses on the more powerful and prestigious offices of governor and U.S. Senator may be able to detect a racial penalty that previous observational studies have missed.

[1] Of those eight winners, only five defeated white opponents in the general election. Barack Obama (D-IL), Tim Scott (R-SC), and Kamala Harris (D-CA) defeated non-white opponents to win their respective U.S. Senate elections.

Another limitation of previous observational work is that much of it focuses on only one or two elections (Citrin et al. 1990). Contextual factors unique to individual cases may not apply to a wider range of cases. For example, Citrin et al. (1990) admit that Tom Bradley's background in law enforcement, moderate reputation on racial matters, and fiscally conservative campaign message reduced the influence of race on his candidacy in ways that may not be generalizable to all African American candidates. To get a better overall picture of how whites evaluate statewide African American candidates, it is critical to examine a wider range of cases.

Finally, experimental studies conducted in fictional campaign environments usually do not account for factors such as partisanship or economic conditions that compete with racial considerations in shaping vote choice in real elections. This could result in overestimating race's effect on a black candidate's electoral prospects. For example, Tesler and Sears (2010) find that Obama won in 2008 by successfully priming non-racial considerations such as Democratic partisanship and disapproval of the incumbent Bush administration. Thus, conclusions drawn from experimental studies need to be verified in real campaign environments.

In order to address these shortcomings, this paper introduces a new data set designed to test whether black candidates for governor and U.S. senator earn less support among white voters and the electorate as a whole than they would if they were white. I test this hypothesis by examining the electoral performance of all 24 African American candidates for these offices from 2000 to 2014 and a comparison set of white candidates who are similar on several key characteristics. I find that black candidates are about three times less likely to win and receive about 13 percentage points less support among white voters than comparable white candidates. Furthermore, I test and rule out a host of alternative explanations to race. The racial penalty suffered by black candidates holds when controlling for possible confounding factors (such as candidate quality, running for an open seat, ideology, and national and state economic conditions) and when employing several statistical matching estimators.

This paper contributes to and advances the longstanding debate about the extent of racial prejudice in American politics. Obama's election as the first African American president led to speculation among pundits, scholars, and citizens that racism was no longer a significant barrier for African American candidates (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2008). A slightly wider look, however, at the highest rungs of power in American politics reveals that African Americans still experience difficulty reaching these positions. The results presented here point to prejudice as being one of the reasons. This is in line with other examinations of the extent of prejudice during the Obama presidency (Stephens-Davidowitz 2014; Tesler and Sears 2010). However, the examination of gubernatorial and U.S. Senate candidates is a better, or at least complementary, test of the effect of prejudice because these offices represent a broader set of cases. In any event, it is a novel test, as no prior study of African American high-profile statewide candidates compiles the entire set of relevant cases.

Previous Literature

Although most research on white voters' evaluations of African American candidates focuses on the mayoral, congressional, and presidential levels, a few studies have examined African American gubernatorial and U.S. Senate candidacies. The existing research can broadly be put into three categories. The first group of studies examine a few elections and try to identify the features of successful black candidacies (Frederick and Jeffries 2009; Jeffries and Jones 2006; Sonenshein 1990). The second group are case studies that focus on a single campaign, describing campaign events in detail and highlighting similarities and differences between the black candidate being examined and other black candidates (Franklin 2010; Lewis 2009; McIlwain and Caliendo 2011; Orey 2009). The third group are case studies that use survey data to determine whether the black candidate elicited negative responses from white voters in a particular election (Becker and Heaton 1967; Citrin et al. 1990).

While these studies provide rich detail and insight into individual African American candidacies, there has not been a comprehensive and systematic investigation of African American high-profile statewide candidates that estimates the racial penalty charged to the average African American candidate in the contemporary era. One shortcoming of the case study approach is that it is hard to know whether a given case is representative of other cases. Another limitation is that some of the case studies do not measure white voting rates, making it impossible to know how much white support an African American candidate received. To be fair, past researchers have relied on case studies perhaps because there have not been enough candidacies to perform a meaningful systematic investigation. While the number of candidacies remains low, there are now enough to conduct an initial test of whether black candidates face a racial penalty.

The literature on African American campaigns at other levels offers another possible source of insight, but as discussed earlier, this line of research does not reach a consensus on the question of whether white voters demonstrate racial bias (Browning et al. 1997; Bullock 2000; Bullock and Dunn 1999; Hajnal 2007; Kinder and Sears 1981; Reeves 1997; Voss and Lublin 2001). Some studies that examine the role of race in one campaign (Citrin et al. 1990) or one or two election cycles (Highton 2004) find that white voters do not evaluate black candidates according to different criteria than they evaluate white candidates. Others go further and argue that racial prejudice plays little to no role in contemporary U.S. politics in general (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Another set of studies argues that the role of racial prejudice in the evaluation of black candidates is not fixed, but instead varies depending on the circumstances surrounding a given campaign. These studies find that white prejudice against black candidates declines in response to positive information about blacks, such as citizens' positive experiences under black political leadership (Hajnal 2007) or counter-stereotypical portrayals of black candidates in the media (Goldman and Mutz 2014).

On the other hand, many scholars maintain that white voters penalize black candidates because of their race. Experimental studies have shown that voters evaluate black candidates more negatively than identical white candidates

(Berinsky et al. 2010; McDermott 1998; Terkildsen 1993; Tokeshi and Mendelberg 2015; but see Sigelman et al. 1995). Several studies conducted following Obama's first presidential campaign in 2008 find that racial attitudes and stereotypes were stronger determinants of vote choice in 2008 than in previous all-white U.S. presidential contests and played a major role in shaping attitudes about his presidency (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Piston 2010; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010). A few studies have estimated the net effect of Obama's race in 2008 and find that Obama received less support than he would have if he was white (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Lewis-Beck et al. 2010; Stephens-Davidowitz 2014; but see Mas and Moretti 2009).

The inconsistency of the findings reflects the wide range of cases and methods used to examine the role of prejudice when black candidates are on the ballot. This paper attempts to advance this literature by addressing the limitations related to case selection and methodology. One limitation of focusing mostly on mayoral and congressional elections is that prejudice is likely to play more of a role in campaigns for more visible and important offices like governor or U.S. senator. Studies documenting racial bias during Obama's 2008 presidential campaign are consistent with the notion that racism is more likely to influence statewide contests. In addition to whites feeling threatened by the prospect of African American leadership in high-profile positions (Williams 1990), another possible cause of the increased role of prejudice is the frequency of racialized attacks in statewide campaigns. McIlwain and Caliendo's (2011) analysis of television ads in U.S. Senate and House races from 1970 to 2006 finds that the size of the white electorate in a given geographic area is the strongest predictor of whether ads contain negative racial stereotypes and imagery. While whites are often not the majority of the electorate in cities and legislative districts that elect African American candidates, whites were the majority of the electorate in 48 states and at least 2/3 of the electorate in 41 states in 2016.[2] Thus, statewide elections are more likely to feature attacks that previous research has found diminishes white support for the attacked candidate (Banks 2013; Banks and Bell 2013; Berinsky et al. 2010; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001; Tesler 2012; Valentino et al. 2002; White 2007).

Another limitation related to case selection is that previous studies focus on one or two campaigns, making it impossible to know whether the effects found for that campaign are generalizable. Citrin et al.'s (1990) null finding of a racial penalty for Tom Bradley may have been the result of Bradley's specific background and message that allowed him to neutralize racial considerations. Other black candidates running in less favorable conditions may not be able to do the same. On the other hand, studies of Obama's 2008 campaign that find evidence of racial bias may overstate the threat of prejudice hurting other African American candidates. Running as the first viable African American presidential candidate is likely to evoke more profound racial anxieties than African American candidates running for lesser offices (or the presidency in the future). Other studies suggest that Obama's campaign was

[2] U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of 2016." Data available at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html, Table 4b.

unique in ways that may have somewhat reduced the role of prejudice. For one, he benefitted from running against a deeply unpopular incumbent party in the middle of an economic crisis, which elevated the salience of nonracial considerations such as economic retrospection or presidential approval (Tesler and Sears 2010). Also, his biracial heritage and light skin color may have bolstered his appeal (Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012). Either way, the examination of the full range of relevant cases at the statewide level provided in this paper yields findings that are more broadly generalizable (at least at the statewide level) than much of the existing literature.

On the methodological side, observational studies suffer from the difficulty of isolating race as the reason for differences in the evaluation of black and white candidates. Real-world candidates differ on countless dimensions other than race, making it difficult to confidently identify prejudice as the reason why black candidates fare worse than white candidates. While any study such as this one that examines real-world candidates can never completely rule out alternative explanations, I argue that the methodology used in this paper does more to test and rule out possible confounding factors than other observational studies in the literature. Experimental studies can more confidently isolate the causal effect of racial prejudice. However, these studies are limited by external validity concerns.

Data and Methods

To test whether black statewide candidates face a racial penalty, I start by collecting data on voters' evaluations of all black candidates for governor or U.S. senator from 2000 to 2014. The reason for considering candidates only going back to 2000 is that I am interested in measuring the effect of black candidates in the current political context. Including cases from the 1960s through the 1990s may increase the chances of finding racial bias against black candidates.[3] Limiting the time frame from 2000 to 2014 provides a hard test of the racial bias hypothesis, meaning that it is less likely that results will confirm the hypothesis if racial prejudice has been declining over time. Also, omitting cases prior to 2000 makes the results more relevant to future elections. The analysis is limited to elections in which an African American is the challenger rather than the incumbent. The historic scarcity of black officeholders justifies the focus on candidates trying to win election to those offices for the first time.[4] Also, I omit the two cases of black candidates facing a black opponent because white support for black candidates is 100% in those contests, which tells us little about white support for black candidates.[5] In all, the entire universe of 24 black

[3] Evidence consistent with the notion that some forms of racial animus have declined since the 1960s comes from many sources, including national surveys showing an increasing number of whites who say they would support a qualified black presidential candidate and social arrangements such as interracial marriage, integrated schools, and integrated neighborhoods (Schuman et al. 1997).

[4] Looking exclusively at challengers only narrows the set of black candidacies by two since only Deval Patrick (D-MA) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) ran as an incumbents between 2000 and 2014.

[5] The omitted cases are Barack Obama's 2004 U.S. Senate campaign (against African American Republican Alan Keyes) and Tim Scott's 2014 U.S. Senate campaign (against African American Democrat Joyce Dickerson).

challengers who faced white opponents from 2000 to 2014 is included in the data set.

In order to assess the performance of black candidates, I need comparable white candidates to serve as a comparison group. My strategy is to take each black candidate and find three white candidates of the same party who ran as challengers against a white opponent for the same office in the same state around the same time. To fulfill the last criterion of running around the same time, I select the three white candidates whose election took place most recently to the black candidate's election. For example, Deval Patrick's white comparison set consists of the three white Democratic challengers who ran for governor of Massachusetts in the years closest to 2006, the year when Patrick ran. Those three candidates were Martha Coakley in 2014, Shannon O'Brien in 2002, and Scott Harshbarger in 1998. As this example illustrates, white comparison candidates' elections can take place either before (as it did for Harshbarger and O'Brien) or after the black candidate's election (as it did for Coakley). Repeating this procedure for each black candidate yields a comparison group of 75 white candidates.[6] The complete list of black candidates and white candidates in the data set is shown in Online Appendix Table 1.

Outcome Measures

The main outcome measures I collected for both black and white candidates are:

(1) *Election result* (did the candidate win or lose?)
(2) *Margin of victory among white voters* This was obtained from three sources. Whenever available, I used exit polls. When exit polls were not available, I averaged surveys conducted no more than one month before Election Day. In the rare event that more than three surveys were conducted in the last month of the election, I averaged the three that were conducted closest to Election Day.[7] Finally, when neither exit polls nor survey data were available, I estimated the margin of victory among whites using the ecological inference (EI) procedure described in King (1997). This procedure uses actual vote returns at the county level and Census data on county-level racial demographics to estimate the vote

[6] In cases where there was a tie for the third most recent white candidate, both candidates were included, resulting in some black candidates having four (instead of three) white comparison observations. This explains why the number of white comparison candidates is 75 (instead of 72). The median number of years separating a white comparison election from the black candidate election is 6, with 68% of white comparison elections taking place within 6 years and 83% of white comparison elections taking place within 10 years of the black candidate election.

[7] The surveys had an average error of 4.7% points when compared to the actual result of the election. For comparison, a FiveThirtyEight analysis of more than 8500 polls from 1998 to 2018 conducted within the final three weeks of a campaign found an average error of 5.9 percentage points. See Nate Silver, "The Polls Are All Right." May 30, 2018. URL: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-polls-are-all-right/. Additional analyses conducted using only exit polls and/or ecological inference are described in footnote 14 and reported in Appendix Online Tables 13, 14 and 15.

by race based on the actual outcome across all counties in the state.[8] Exit polls were used to estimate the white margin of victory for 70% of the 99 candidacies examined, while surveys and ecological regression were used for 21% and 9%, respectively.

(3) *Margin of victory among all voters*. This is simply the election result and is not estimated using polls of any kind.[9]

Of these three outcomes, I consider the margin of victory among white voters to be the best measure of white support for black candidates for a straightforward reason: it is the one outcome that only takes into account the opinion and behavior of white voters. However, I also measure the election result and the margin of victory among all voters for two reasons: (1) these outcomes are likely to be measured with less error because they do not rely on the various sampling and statistical techniques used to estimate the margin of victory among whites, and (2) these outcomes are consequential in their own right, particularly the outcome of the election itself. At minimum, these outcomes provide additional tests of the effect of candidate race.

Potential Confounders

In addition to these measures, I also need measures of confounding factors that might account for differences between black and white candidates found on the outcome measures. One factor is candidate quality, which is a predictor of election outcomes at all levels of U.S. politics (Jacobson and Kernell 1981). The data set contains two measures of candidate quality: political experience and campaign fundraising. For the political experience measure, I borrow from Krasno and Green (1988) and other prior research and code candidate quality on a three-point scale: 3 = candidates who have held statewide office (such as state attorney general, U.S. senator, or governor) or federal office (such as U.S. Congress); 2 = candidates who have held local elected office such as state representative or mayor; 1 = candidates who have held local appointed office or are otherwise well-known; 0 = candidates with no elected or appointed experience. For the fundraising totals of U.S. Senate candidates, I use data from Federal Election Commission (FEC) reports. Fundraising totals for

[8] Although its reliability has been criticized (Freedman 1999), EI is commonly used to measure the voting behavior of groups when survey data is unavailable or unreliable. Perhaps the most prominent example of EI's use is in voting rights court cases, which often turn on whether plaintiffs can demonstrate patterns of racially polarized voting. Other recent applications of EI to estimate vote choice for subgroups of the population include King et al. (2008) attempt to estimate support for Adolf Hitler by occupation in Weimar Germany; Barreto's (2007) analysis of Latino support for co-ethnic candidates in U.S. mayoral elections; and Barreto et al. (2017) analysis of Latino support for Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

[9] To address concerns that differences in turnout between black versus white and white versus white contests render margin of victory comparisons inconclusive, no significant differences in turnout were found between the two types of contests. Black versus white contests had an average turnout of 45.46% of eligible voters, while turnout for white versus white contests averaged 46.13% ($p = 0.39$, two-tailed test).

gubernatorial candidates are obtained from the National Institute on Money in State Politics (NIMSP), a non-partisan organization that collects data from the disclosure agencies with which gubernatorial candidates must file their campaign finance reports. In the 16% of cases (16 out of 99) where FEC and NIMSP data was not available, I used newspaper reports.

A second factor is whether the challenger is running for an open seat or trying to unseat an incumbent. It is well-established that incumbents dominate elections at all levels, and so challengers stand a much better chance in open seat races (Jacobson 2012).

A third factor is candidate ideology. A candidate who is ideologically extreme may find it more difficult to win a statewide general election than a moderate candidate. In the case of African Americans, it may be that statewide candidates are more liberal than typical white candidates, which is a reasonable assumption given that black members of the U.S. House are more liberal than white members on average (Gerber 1996). I measure ideological extremity using campaign finance (CF) scores developed by Bonica (2016) based on a candidate's financial contributors. Bonica's data set contains ideology estimates for most candidates for state and federal office from 1980 to 2014, which allows me to estimate the ideology of 92 out of the 99 candidates in my data set.[10] The main benefit of using CF scores instead of other measures of ideology that rely on legislators' roll call behavior such as DW-NOMINATE (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) or NPAT (Shor and McCarty 2011) is that CF scores allow me to estimate the ideology of losing candidates, which make up a majority (80 out of 99) of the observations. CF scores take on negative values for liberals and positive values for conservatives, with magnitudes representing the extremity of the candidate's ideology. Since I am interested in measuring ideological extremity, I use the absolute value of the candidate's CF score.

A fourth and fifth factor is the performance of the national and state economies. A significant body of research finds that national and state economic conditions shape gubernatorial and U.S. Senate election outcomes (Adams and Kenny 1989; Bennett and Wiseman 1991; Chubb 1988; Hibbing and Alford 1982; Levernier 1992; Niemi et al. 1995; Peltzman 1987). It is important to account for economic performance as a confounding factor because of the possibility of a "glass cliff" effect, which refers to the possibility that minority candidates tend to run during economic hard times when the position may be less attractive to white candidates (Kulich et al. 2014). I measure national economic performance by calculating the change in per capita income growth from the year before to the year of the election. State economic performance is calculated the same way within each state. National and state per capita income data is obtained from the Bureau of Economic Affairs.

A sixth factor is the state's partisanship. Candidates are likely to get more votes in states where they represent the party favored by that state's voters (Jacobson 2012). State partisanship is measured by taking the share of the two-party presidential vote won by the Democratic presidential candidate above or below the share

[10] The seven candidates (one black and six white) who did not receive a CF score were noncompetitive candidates who raised little money.

Table 1 Comparison of black and white candidates on outcome measures

	Black candidates (n = 24)	White candidates (n = 75)	p value (one-tailed)
Victory rate	8.33% (2 out of 24)	22.67% (17 out of 75)	0.03
Margin of defeat among white voters	40.71	27.65	0.03
Margin of defeat among all voters (actual election result)	21.46	12.28	0.01

of the two-party presidential vote won by the Democratic presidential candidate nationwide in the most recently completed presidential election. Following Hopkins (2009), this measure of state partisanship accounts for swings in the national vote.

In addition to these six factors, I also collected data on the black population in the state, the candidate's sex, the year of the election, party, and office sought (governor or U.S. Senate). These measures serve as additional controls in the multivariate analysis. The data for the black population in each state comes from the American Community Survey (ACS) for all years after 2005. For all years before 2005, data is interpolated using the relevant decennial U.S. Census years.[11]

Results

I start by showing the comparison between black and white challengers on the three outcome measures (Table 1). On all three measures, white candidates enjoy greater levels of success. Their victory rate is almost three times higher (22.67% vs. 8.33%). On average, their margin of defeat is 13.06 percentage points less than their black counterparts among white voters and 9.18 percentage points among all voters. To address concerns that these effects are driven mostly by white candidacies that happened much earlier or later than the black candidacy, I repeat this comparison using only the white candidacies that are closest in time to the black candidacy (for example, only including Shannon O'Brien as Deval Patrick's comparison since O'Brien's candidacy happened 4 years before Patrick's compared to 8 years before for Harshbarger and 8 years after for Coakley). When only considering the most recent white candidacies, the differences remain: 8.33% victory rate for blacks compared to 20.69% for whites ($p = 0.1$, one-tailed); 40.71% margin of defeat among white voters for blacks compared to 23.17% for whites ($p = 0.02$, one-tailed); and 21.46% margin of defeat among all voters for blacks compared to 10.90% for whites ($p = 0.02$, one-tailed).

While interesting, the results in Table 1 could be driven more by confounding factors than by candidate race. For example, it could be that the average black

[11] For example, the estimate of the black population for Mississippi in 1995 is the linear interpolation of the black population estimates provided by the 1990 and 2000 Census.

Table 2 Comparison of black and white candidates on covariates (entries are mean values)

	Black candidates (n = 24)	White candidates (n = 75)	p value (two-tailed)
Quality—previous experience (0–3 scale)	1.83	1.72	0.68
Quality—fundraising total (in millions)	$5.69	$5.69	1
Open seat	46%	44%	0.88
Ideological extremity (absolute value of CF score)	0.72	0.73	0.88
National economic performance (per capita personal income growth from year before to year of election)	3.9%	3.7%	0.77
State economic performance	3.4%	4.0%	0.31
Party advantage	−9.1%	−8.5%	0.87
Black population in state	20%	20%	0.96
Male	88%	85%	0.79
Year	2007	2004	0.03
Republican	25%	25%	0.97
Running for U.S. Senate	67%	68%	0.91

candidate is of lower quality than the average white candidate, in which case it could not be ruled out that candidate quality rather than race is the explanation for the weaker performance of black candidates.

In Table 2, I show a comparison of the black and white candidates on all of the confounding factors for which I have measures for each candidate. The two groups are indistinguishable from each other on all but one factor, lending some reassurance that the comparisons in Table 1 are not completely off-base. White candidates are not of higher quality on either quality measure (previous experience and fundraising); they are not running for open seats at a higher rate; they are not closer to the center ideologically; they are not running more often during times of strong national or state economic performance; and they are not more likely to be men. Since I constructed the white data set to match the black data set on party, state, and office sought, it is no surprise that the two groups do not differ on party advantage, black population in state, party, and office sought.[12] The only factor on which the two groups differ is year: the average white candidate ran in 2004 while the average black candidate ran in 2007. Although there is a statistically significant difference for year, the substantive significance between 2007 and 2004 is not clear. In any case, differences related to the year of the election will be controlled for in the multivariate analysis.

[12] "Party advantage" is the state partisanship variable recoded so that Democratic partisanship is coded positive for Democratic candidates and Republican partisanship is coded positive for Republican candidates. In other words, the negative values in the table for both black and white candidates indicate that on average, they run in states whose partisanship favors the opposing party (Democrats running in Republican-dominated states and vice versa).

Table 3 (OLS) Impact of African American candidates on three key outcome measures

	% chance of victory (OLS)	Margin of victory among white voters (OLS)	Margin of victory among all voters (OLS)
Black (0 = white, 1 = black)	−19.70**	−14.01***	−10.54***
	(10.55)	(4.03)	(3.40)
Quality—previous experience (0 = least, 3 = most)	−1.74	1.33	0.48
	(5.22)	(1.99)	(1.69)
Quality—fundraising total (in millions)	−0.20	0.35*	0.22
	(0.63)	(0.24)	(0.20)
Open seat (0 = no, 1 = yes)	20.89**	12.81***	13.70***
	(11.52)	(4.39)	(3.72)
Ideological extremity (absolute value of CF score)	−38.56**	0.85	−7.86
	(21.85)	(8.33)	(7.05)
State economic performance	3.21	−0.77	0.83
	(3.34)	(1.27)	(1.08)
Party advantage (%; neg = favors opp party, pos = favors own party)	−0.34	0.88**	0.49*
	(1.01)	(0.38)	(0.33)
Black population in state (%)	8.54	−2.25	1.51
	(8.44)	(3.22)	(2.72)
Male (0 = female, 1 = male)	36.39***	7.26*	6.32*
	(13.50)	(5.15)	(4.35)
Running for U.S. Senate (0 = running for governor, 1 = running for U.S. Senate)	−115.80*	61.06**	7.51
	(71.01)	(27.08)	(22.91)
(Intercept)	−33.60	−53.94	−66.75
	(220.73)	(84.19)	(71.21)
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	92	92	92
Adjusted R-squared	0.47	0.83	0.67

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01, one-tailed tests

Next, I estimate the effect of black candidates on the three outcome measures using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. I include controls for both quality measures (previous experience and fundraising), open seat, ideological extremity, state economic performance, party advantage, black population in state, male, and office sought.[13] I also include state and party-year fixed effects to account for factors specific to each state and the fact that some years might be better for one of the political parties across the country. The confounders listed in Table 2 that are

[13] I also estimate models using an alternative measure of a state's partisanship known as the Major Party Index (MPI), which takes into account the results of presidential, gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and state legislative elections. For calculation details, see Ceaser and Saldin (2005). The results for all models using MPI are presented in Appendix Online Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8. Separate models substituting the state's non-white population in place of the state's black population are reported in Online Appendix Tables 9, 10, 11 and 12. Results of these alternate models do not substantively alter the main conclusions drawn from Tables 3 and 4.

Table 4 Impact of African American candidates on three outcome measures across specifications

	Bivariate	Multivariate (OLS)	Preprocessed with matching					
			Exact on party, state, office, and open seat; nearest neighbor on other covariates		Exact on party, state, and office; nearest neighbor on other covariates		Nearest neighbor on all covariates	
			Bivariate	Multivariate (OLS)	Bivariate	Multivariate (OLS)	Bivariate	Multivariate (OLS)
% chance of victory	−14.33**	−19.70**	−23.53*	−28.07**	−21.74**	−21.80**	−26.09**	−16.70*
	(7.54)	(10.55)	(14.41)	(14.51)	(11.50)	(9.63)	(11.80)	(10.62)
Margin of victory among white voters (%)	−13.06**	−14.01***	−16.12*	−18.91***	−14.26*	−14.80***	−18.57**	−10.63**
	(6.66)	(4.03)	(9.54)	(3.23)	(8.47)	(4.70)	(8.07)	(4.43)
Margin of victory among all voters (%)	−9.18***	−10.54***	−8.47*	−11.61***	−9.83**	−10.58***	−15.91***	−10.38***
	(4.01)	(3.40)	(5.65)	(4.58)	(5.26)	(3.48)	(4.97)	(3.46)
State and party-year fixed effects?	–	Yes	–	No	–	No	–	No
N black/N white	24/75	23/69	17/17	17/17	23/23	23/23	23/23	23/23

This table shows that African American candidates are less likely to win and suffer a larger margin of defeat among white voters and all voters than comparable white candidates, an effect that holds when controlling for the factors listed in Table 3 and across a number of matching specifications. Bivariate estimates are simple comparisons between African American and white candidates for the three outcome measures. Multivariate OLS estimates use the outcome measure as the dependent variable, candidate race (1 = black, 0 = white) as the key independent variable, and the variables listed in Table 3 as controls. State and party-year fixed effects are accounted for in column 2, but not columns 4, 6, and 8. Full results of the OLS regressions used to generate the entries in columns 4, 6, and 8 are shown in Online Appendix Tables 2, 3 and 4

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01, one-tailed tests

not explicitly controlled for—national economic performance, year, and party—are captured by the party-year fixed effects. Results are shown in Table 3. Each column represents a separate OLS regression equation predicting a given outcome measure as a function of the key independent variable (a dummy variable for candidate race coded 1 if black and 0 if white) and the controls.[14]

Entries in the first row of Table 3 indicate that the bivariate relationship between candidate race and outcomes shown in Table 1 persists after the inclusion of controls. The regression models estimate that being black reduces the chance of victory by almost 20% points, reduces the share of the white vote by about 14% points, and reduces the share of the total vote by about 10.5% points. These estimates are similar in magnitude to the bivariate estimates shown in Table 1. With respect to the other variables in Table 3, *open seat* and *male* are the other factors that consistently predict all three outcomes. Not surprisingly, running for an open seat and being male increase the chances of victory and the vote share among white voters and the electorate as a whole. The size of the effect for *open seat* is comparable to the negative effect of being black. The positive effect of being male is almost twice as large as the negative effect of being black on the chance of victory, but the negative effect of being black is stronger for the vote share among whites and all voters.

In addition to controlling for differences parametrically, I also estimate the effect of candidate race by employing a number of matching techniques (Ho et al. 2007). The basic idea of matching is to create a "treatment" and a "control" group that look as similar as possible to each other based on their observed covariates so that a treatment effect can be estimated by comparing the difference in the outcome measure between the two groups. In this case, I am looking to match each black candidate with the white candidate who shares the greatest similarity on observed covariates.

First, I match black candidates with white candidates who are exactly the same on state, party, office sought, and open seat.[15] For black candidates who have multiple white matches on these covariates, the white match with the closest distance measure on the other covariates is selected. I then estimate the difference in the outcome measures between black and white candidates for this subset of the data. The bivariate results, which are the simple comparisons between black and white candidates for each outcome measure, are shown in column 3 of Table 4. In column 4, I show estimates of the same effect of candidate race for the same subset, but this time using OLS regression to control for all of the variables listed in Table 3 except state and party-year fixed effects (full results for column 4 shown in Online Appendix

[14] The margin of victory among white voters is measured using exit polls, pre-election surveys, and ecological inference, which raises a question about whether results hold when this important indicator is measured in different ways. I address this issue in three ways. First, only observations that used exit polls are included. Second, the full sample is included, using ecological inference when exit polls were not available. Third, ecological inference is used for all observations. The results are robust to these specifications and are reported in Appendix Online Tables 13, 14 and 15.

[15] I implement all variations of matching described in the rest of the paper using the MatchIt package in R (Ho et al. 2011).

Table 2).[16] For comparison, I show results from the earlier analyses in the first two columns of Table 3. In column 1, I show the simple comparison between black and white candidates on the outcome measures displayed in Table 1. In column 2, I show the estimated effect of black candidates that was produced by the OLS models shown in Table 3.

All but one of the estimates in columns 3 and 4 are at least as large in magnitude as its analogous estimate in columns 1 and 2. One notable difference, though, is that the bivariate matching estimates shown in column 3 only achieve marginal statistical significance. This might be due to the small size of the subset. There are only 17 black candidates in the "treatment" group because one did not have an ideology measure and six did not have an exact white match on open seat.[17] Although I can be certain that the black and white units are exactly the same on this key covariate, insisting on this match requires that I throw away a quarter of the black observations.

In the next matching specification, I relax the open seat requirement and match exactly on state, party, and office sought while breaking ties using the closest distance measure on the other covariates. All 23 black candidates who had an ideology measure are matched with a white candidate using this specification. The estimates are shown in columns 5 (bivariate) and 6 (multivariate) of Table 4 (full results for column 6 are shown in Online Appendix Table 3). All of the estimates in these columns are substantively large and statistically significant. The magnitudes are in line with those shown in columns 1–4.

In the first two trials, I matched exactly on state, party, and office sought. While this has the virtue of guaranteeing matches on these important dimensions, there are some black candidates who do not have a good white match among those who share the same state, party, and office sought. For example, Deval Patrick's match in the first two trials was fellow Massachusetts Democratic gubernatorial candidate Scott Harshbarger. While Harshbarger may be a closer match to Patrick than the other two Massachusetts Democratic gubernatorial candidates in the white data set (Martha Coakley and Shannon O'Brien), perhaps there is another white candidate from another state who would serve as a closer match to Patrick. To explore this possibility, I relaxed all of the exact matching requirements and instead matched based on the closest distance measure on all covariates (including state, party, and office sought).

The estimates for this specification are shown in column 7 (bivariate) and column 8 (multivariate) of Table 4 (full results for column 8 are shown in Online Appendix Table 4). The results from this model do not differ much from previous specifications. The race effects shown in columns 7 and 8 are all substantively large and statistically significant.

In all, the effect of African American candidates for all outcomes measured remains large across a number of different approaches designed to control for confounding factors. The probability of winning goes down between 14 and 28 percentage points due to the candidate being black. White candidates enjoy an estimated

[16] Since matching requires dropping a large number of the observations, including state and party-year fixed effects is not possible due to the small number of remaining cases.

[17] Recall that the black candidates all have matches on the other three covariates (state, party, and office sought) because I constructed the data set that way.

11 to 19 percentage points of additional support from white voters and between 8 and 16 percentage points of additional support among all voters. The additional support provided to white candidates from white voters—which is the most direct indicator of how white voters evaluate black candidates—remains large and statistically significant across all specifications. I find these differences even though the sample sizes are small, particularly for the matching estimates.

Conclusion

To summarize, black challengers from 2000 to 2014 performed worse than a comparable set of white challengers on three key outcome measures. This is not due to differences in candidate quality, ideology, national or state economic performance, likelihood of running for an open seat, or other plausible alternative explanations. The results diverge from earlier studies focusing on U.S. House elections or a single gubernatorial election. However, the results are consistent with a number of studies that found bias in the evaluation of President Obama (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Lewis-Beck et al. 2010; Piston 2010; Stephens-Davidowitz 2014; Tesler and Sears 2010). Though the Obama literature is informative, the question remains whether he is representative of other African American candidates. This study advances this literature by providing a comprehensive examination of the fortunes of African American candidates one level below the presidency.

My findings are likely to underestimate the penalty faced by African Americans because I only examine the very last stage in the process of becoming a governor or U.S. Senator—the general election. There are likely to be factors that filter out African Americans long before they reach this stage of the process. In one study, Johnson et al. (2012) examine the decision of all U.S. House members to run for the U.S. Senate from 1992 to 2008 and find that black members are about half as likely to run as white members. They attribute this to a number of factors linked to race, such as state size (most of the black population lives in larger states, so black U.S. House members who represent black constituencies represent less of the state's population and therefore have lower name recognition and more competition); ideological extremity (black U.S. House members often represent liberal black constituencies, making it harder to ideologically recalibrate for a statewide campaign); and fundraising ability (black U.S. House members represent poorer districts on average, which imposes a fundraising handicap). Other possible roadblocks include less integration into established, predominantly white state- and national-level party organizations and less confidence in their ability to win. Future work is likely to find evidence for all or some combination of these factors. A better understanding of how racial disparities shape the earlier stages of the process will not only provide a more complete picture of the factors hindering African Americans from reaching high-profile statewide positions, but may also point the way to overcoming those hurdles.

One important topic that I do not consider in this paper is how African American and other non-white voters respond to African American candidacies. The reason for their exclusion is simply lack of data: in the surveys analyzed in this paper, there are not enough African American (and even fewer other non-white) voters

surveyed to obtain reliable estimates of their preferences. Since maintaining the loyalty and enthusiasm of black voters is a key strategic consideration for black candidates, future work should track how black voters evaluate black candidates. Existing research suggests that black candidates may activate in-group identification among black voters via explicitly racial campaign messages (White 2007). However, the "deracialized" style practiced by most statewide African American candidates suggest that they are reluctant to deploy such messages (Perry 1991). Thus, statewide African American candidates may have difficulty mobilizing their African American base. This is a question worthy of future research.

Returning to the main findings of this study, white voters evaluate black candidates more negatively than comparable white candidates, and non-racial factors cannot explain this disparity. The question remains, why do black candidates suffer a racial penalty? One possibility is that they experience a different campaign than the one experienced by comparable white candidates. Specifically, black candidates may face attacks on racialized topics such as crime, welfare, and sexual deviance more frequently. Recent notable examples include an advertisement showing a young white woman hinting at Harold Ford, Jr.'s promiscuous lifestyle during the 2006 Tennessee U.S. Senate election; negative advertisements accusing Deval Patrick of supporting "cop-killers" and rapists during the 2006 Massachusetts gubernatorial election; and numerous attacks linking Cory Booker to crime in his home city of Newark during the 2013 New Jersey U.S. Senate election. Previous studies show that attacks that contain cues such as these that highlight negative stereotypes of African Americans reduce support for the attacked candidate among white voters (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino et al. 2002). Though white candidates also face attacks on these topics, existing studies find that such attacks are more damaging to black candidates (Berinsky et al. 2010; Tokeshi and Mendelberg 2015). Additionally, black candidates may face more of these attacks than comparable white candidates, as their opponents may believe that racialized attacks on black candidates are likely to resonate more strongly with white voters. Existing research suggests the frequency of racialized attacks is also related to how strongly racial considerations are brought to bear on vote choice (Mendelberg 2001, p. 175). The relative frequency of racialized attacks faced by black and white candidates is unknown. Future research on this question would be informative, as would research on whether anything can be done to mitigate the harmful effects of these attacks.

Regardless of the reason, these results suggest that Obama's 2008 victory did not signal the dawn of a new era for African American politicians. Ambitious African American politicians still face formidable impediments in their attempts to reach the most prestigious and consequential offices in the United States. As long as statewide electorates continue to evaluate African American candidates differently than comparable white candidates, these obstacles are likely to remain.

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