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White Support for Racial Referenda in the Deep South

BYRON D'ANDRA OREY
Jackson State University

MARVIN OVERBY
University of Missouri

PETE HATEMI
Pennsylvania State University

BAODONG LIU
University of Utah

This research examines two referenda in the Deep South, both of which can be categorized as antiblack. Specifically, we analyze a 2001 Mississippi flag referendum (in which the electorate rejected a new flag and retained the old state flag containing a Confederate insignia) and a 2004 referendum in Alabama (in which citizens voted to retain unenforceable constitutional language requiring separate educational facilities for black and white students, and a poll tax on voting). Using state election returns and Census data, we employ weighted least squares regression to analyze voting patterns. The results reveal that across both states, white voters displayed significantly greater "antiblack" voting behavior in those areas with larger black populations and more urbanized environments. Our findings pose a direct challenge to both those who insist that the "racial threat" perceived by whites is diminishing and those who hold that urbanization will ultimately be corrosive of racist attitudes and behavior.

Keywords: Parties, Elections, Voting, Race, Ethnicity.

Esta investigación examina dos referendos en el sur de Estados Unidos, cada uno de ellos puede ser categorizado como anti afroamericano. Específicamente, se analizó el referendo en 2001 a la bandera de Mississippi (en el que el electorado rechazó una nueva bandera y decidieron conservar la bandera anterior que contenía una insignia del ejército confederado) y un referendo en 2004 en Alabama (en el que los ciudadanos votaron para conservar un lenguaje constitucional imposible de aplicar que requería separar las instalaciones educativas para

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blancos y afroamericanos, y un impuesto al voto). Usando los resultados de las elecciones estatales e información estadística, empleamos un modelo de regresión de cuadrados mínimos comunes para analizar patrones electorales. Los resultados revelan que a través de ambos estados los votantes blancos mostraron un comportamiento electoral "anti afroamericano" significativamente mayor en áreas con una gran población afroamericana y entornos más urbanizados. Nuestros hallazgos plantean un desafío directo a quienes insisten que la "amenaza racial" percibida por la población blanca está disminuyendo, y aquellos que afirman que la urbanización eliminará actitudes y comportamiento racista.

In recent years, the results of a number of referenda and initiatives have suggested the continued presence of significant levels of racism in the American public, especially in the South. As Bell (1978, 15) put it,

> "[i]ronically, because it enables the voters' racial beliefs and fears to be recorded and tabulated in their pure form, the referendum has been a most effective facilitator of that bias, discrimination, and prejudice which has marred American democracy from its earliest day." (see also Gamble 1997; Scchrag 1998; Tolbert and Hero 1996)

In this article, we examine two such recent referenda, both of them in Deep Southern states that have historically been the locus of the most racially polarized politics in the United States. Our analysis will afford us the opportunity to examine and update two related areas of marked controversy in the literature: (1) whether or not interracial contact has an ameliorative effect on the voting behavior of white citizens and (2) whether or not urbanization is particularly helpful in reducing white animosity toward policies and symbols that are salient in the black community.

We focus our attention on two statewide referenda: a 2001 vote on the Mississippi flag and a 2003 referendum to repeal unenforceable language in the Alabama constitution requiring segregated public schools. The findings here yield consistent evidence that across the Deep South, white voters displayed voting behavior supportive of a contemporary interpretation of the racial threat hypothesis. These results pose a direct challenge to research insisting that the "racial threat" perceived by whites is diminishing and to those who hold that urbanization will ultimately be corrosive of racist attitudes and behavior.

Revisiting Old Hypotheses

In his seminal 1949 work on *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, V. O. Key (1984, 5) wrote that "in its grand outlines the politics of the South

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revolves around the position of the Negro." As he noted, "those whites who live in counties with populations 40, 50, 60, and even 80 percent Negro share a common attitude toward the Negro," with such "black-belt whites" tending to be the most racially reactionary whites in the region (Key 1984, 5; see also Blalock 1956, 1957; Matthews and Prothro 1963). Key's racial threat theory has been a mainstay of Southern—and, indeed, American—political analysis for decades. As Huckfeldt and Sprague (1993, 284) observed, "white racial hostility is a common feature of American political life, and it frequently varies as a direct function of blacks' presence in the population" (see also Taylor 1998). Using data from both individual and aggregate levels, Wright (1977) confirmed Key's thesis in an analysis of the white vote for George Wallace in the 1968 presidential election. Even while arguing that the racial dimension in Southern politics has declined in recent decades, Giles and Buckner (1993, 1995) observed a strong "black-belt" effect in white Louisianans' support for the Senate and gubernatorial campaigns of David Duke, arguably the most blatantly racist candidate for major office since George Wallace.[1] These findings fit into a "power model" view of politics, which stresses the likelihood of group conflict over the possibility of group cooperation. Campbell (1965), for instance, observed that whites tend to be threatened by prospects of black power, seeing it as an infringement on their social, political, and economic hegemony (see also Kinder and Sears 1981). Similarly, Giles and Evans (1986, 470) argued that the nature of the political universe implies that "racial and ethnic groups . . . [are likely to be] participants in ongoing competition for control of economic, political, and social structures . . . [with] inter-group hostility and antagonism . . . natural products of that competition."

Although considerable empirical evidence has been gathered in support of the racial threat theory (for a recent overview, see Baybeck 2006), the perspective is not without its critics. Many of these critiques derive from the social contact orientation, an equally venerable viewpoint that argues that interaction among members of various groups tends to lessen intergroup hostility. Studies dating back to the 1940s showed very promising impacts of racial integration on the attitudes of whites (see, e.g., Allport 1954). For instance, Stouffer and others (1949) reported that contact with blacks contributed to greater support for desegregation among white members of the American armed services, while Deutch and Collins (1951) found that whites living in integrated public housing facilities had more tolerant racial attitudes than those living in segregated housing. While subsequent studies in political psychology have suggested that numerous supportive conditions are often necessary for contact to have ameliorative effects (see Devine 1995 for a cogent

[1] For similar findings focusing on Hispanics, see Tolbert and Hero (1996, 2001), and Tolbert and Grummel (2003). For an analysis focusing on gender, see South and others (1982).

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overview of this literature), social contact has been shown to have a significant positive impact in at least some circumstances.[2]

For our purposes, the most interesting of these studies are those that have explored the intersection between minority population density and urbanization, and their interactive effect on white attitudes and behavior. Key (1984) himself speculated that the march of urbanization in the South would work to undermine racist attitudes and behaviors among whites, especially since urban environments provide opportunities for liberating forms of interaction, including fruitful class-based alliances between working-class blacks and whites.[3] Carsey (1995) has provided some empirical evidence of this, albeit in non-Southern environments. His analysis of data from the 1989 New York City mayoral election confirmed that white voters were more likely to support David Dinkins if they lived in precincts with higher African-American population densities. While some Southern studies (see, e.g., Giles and Buckner 1993) have challenged the generalizability of findings such as Carsey's, others have supported them. In a study directly challenging Giles and Buckner's (1993) findings, Voss (1996) reported that in parishes that are at least 75 percent urban, demographic proximity to blacks significantly decreased the likelihood of whites voting for David Duke. In a separate analysis, Voss concludes that results from a 1996 desegregation referendum in the border-South state of Kentucky actually provide evidence of a significant "reverse backlash" among white voters (Voss and Miller 2001).[4] That is, the strongest support for antiblack candidates and policies comes not from whites who live in close urban proximity to blacks but from suburban whites who live in more racially segregated areas. In sum, Voss (2000, 298) argues that "the 'white backlash' or 'racial threat' model of race relations no longer applies even in the Southern region from which scholars first derived it (let alone in the rest of the country, where it never amounted to much)."

We enter this empirical and theoretical fray to examine recent referenda in two Deep South states. Doing so permits us to extend the literature in this area in several important ways. First, we update relevant studies by Giles and Buckner (1993) and Voss (1996, 2000; Voss and Miller 2001) with data that are both more recent and more extensive. While Giles and Buckner disagree with Voss about many matters (see Giles and Buckner 1996), they all agree that racist

[2] For related findings on the effect of contact with homosexuals, see Herek and Capitanio (1996) and Overby and Barth (2002).

[3] The "growth of cities contains the seeds of political change . . . [W]hites . . . appear to be less bound by Reconstruction tradition and free to vote without the same regard for the maintenance of the racial system that governs the whites of the rural counties with high proportions of Negro population" (673).

[4] The Kentucky referendum, which passed with more than 67 percent of the vote, called for voters to endorse a constitutional amendment that would have stripped unenforceable, segregation-era language from the state constitution that required segregated schools for black and white children, and permitted the use of poll taxes.

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political behavior among Southern whites has decreased in recent decades.[5] In contrast, we believe that recent white Southern support for Confederate symbols may suggest that there are limits to the norm of racial equality and that racism may be more prevalent in the South than previously believed.[6] Focusing on Deep Southern states permits us to return to the context where Key originally proposed the "black-belt effect" and the region where white racism has historically been most problematic.

Second, our focus on referenda that involve essentially symbolic questions permits us to examine behavior that lies at the heart of current racial disputes in the United States. While Giles and Evans (1993) may be correct that explicitly racist candidate appeals are doomed to failure (indeed, as they note, David Duke failed in each of his campaigns for office) because they are ultimately counterproductive, conflicts over what Merelman (1994) calls "cultural capital" may be different. Since they involve issues related to "heritage" and black demands that many whites view as illegitimate (even as they view themselves as genuinely committed to racial equality) (see Mendelberg 2001), disputes over Southern historical symbols may trigger feelings of racial resentment that are more pernicious and long lasting than the actual conditions of conflict and competition that undergirded traditional articulations of the racial threat thesis.

Third, statewide data on referenda voting preferences allow us to update and reassess the dispute between Giles and Buckner (1993, 1996) and Voss (1996) on the conditioning effect of urbanization. If the interactive effect of the black population and urbanization continues to be significant and associated with white support for racially conservative referenda in the South, such findings would pose a challenge to Voss' conclusions that interracial contact in urban contexts works to ameliorate racial conflict.

Direct Democracy in the South

Before proceeding to our empirics, we will overview briefly the two statewide referenda we analyze later.

Mississippi Flag

On April 21, 2001, the state of Mississippi held a referendum to choose a state flag. Voters were given the option of either retaining the state's 107-year-old flag that included a Confederate insignia of 13 white stars on a blue "x" in a red field in the upper inside corner or endorsing a new flag featuring a blue

[5] As Giles and Buckner (1996, 1179) put it, "while operative, racial threat [is] no longer a defining characteristic of Southern politics."

[6] One reason to be skeptical of the conventional wisdom is that much of the evidence pointing to the ineffectiveness of explicitly racial appeals has come from experiments conducted in the Midwest or Northeast (see, e.g., Mendelberg 1997, 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). Studies focusing on Southern participants have posited much stronger racial effects (see Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin 2010).

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field with concentric circles of 19 white stars surrounding a larger central white star, symbolizing Mississippi's position as the 20th state admitted to the union and based on the so-called "Bonnie Blue flag" of 1810. Voters opted to retain the old flag by a lopsided 65-35 percent margin.

The Mississippi flag was adopted in 1894 at the height of the Redeemer movement in the state and during one of the nadirs of racial relations. Due to a legislative oversight, the authorizing legislation for the 1894 flag was repealed in 1906. This was discovered in the course of a 1993 lawsuit brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which claimed that the flag represented "a vestige of slavery" that denied black citizens of constitutionally protected rights. While the state Supreme Court ultimately rejected the claim, the finding of the 1906 action left the legal status of the flag in a state of limbo. In the aftermath of the NAACP suit and facing national pressure to deal with a flag many felt offensive, then Democratic governor Ronnie Musgrove appointed a bipartisan commission charged with recommending a new state flag. As noted earlier, despite endorsements of the new flag from a number of prominent Mississippians and warnings from business leaders about the possible economic consequences, state voters soundly rejected the commission's recommendation in favor of the existing 1894 flag, retaining the Confederate symbol in the state's official banner.[7]

Alabama Constitutional Amendment on Education

In the early years of the 21st century, the state of Alabama undertook efforts to revise and update its 1901 state constitution, removing inoperative and unenforceable passages left over from the days of *de jure* segregation. In 2000, voters approved repealing portions of the constitution that prohibited interracial marriages, although roughly 50 percent of whites voted to retain the official ban. In 2003, the state legislature approved a measure to send to the voters a proposed amendment that would have rid the constitution of language requiring separate educational facilities for black and white students and that endorsed a tax on voting.[8]

Following the advice of a commission created by Governor Bob Riley, the state legislature helped to create a ballot that would repeal anachronistic provisions of the constitution. One of the provisions would have deleted Section 259: "All poll taxes collected in this state shall be applied to the support of the public schools in the respective counties where collected." The amendment also

[7] For research on white racial attitudes toward the Mississippi flag, see Orey (2004).

[8] The Alabama referendum closely resembled similar efforts in Kentucky in 1996 (see Voss and Miller 2001). The amendment read as follows: "Shall the following Amendment be adopted to the Constitution of Alabama? Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, to repeal portions of Section 256 and Amendment 111 relating to separation of schools by race and repeal portions of Amendment 111 concerning constitutional construction against the right to education, and to repeal Section 259, Amendment 90, and Amendment 109 relating to the poll tax."

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would have deleted language allowing soldiers who had obtained honorable discharges, as well as deaf and blind citizens, to be exempted from the poll tax. The deletion of such language would have rid the Alabama constitution from all mentions of the poll tax. In addition, the amendment would also have deleted a portion of Section 256, which reads: "[s]eparate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race." Legislators unanimously passed the proposed language in a larger proposal known as Amendment 2, which was then put to a vote by the Alabama electorate.

Opponents of the amendment rallied around the language regarding the "right to education," arguing that approval would establish a new state-recognized right to public education and trigger major tax increases.[9] In the final weeks of the campaign, prominent opponents, such as former state chief justice Roy Moore, who is famous for refusing to remove a copy of the ten commandments from his court building, and the Christian Coalition, which argued that the amendment could lead to higher taxes and grant the state autonomy over the public school system, raised the importance of the issue, even as supporters warned that the defeat of the amendment would tar Alabama as "still one of the most racist states in the nation" (Berkhalter 2004, 9). In the end, the proposed amendment failed by a slim 1 percent margin, and the Alabama constitution retained its segregationist language.

Data and Methods

Our analysis employs data collected from the relevant Secretary of State Offices and the U.S. Census Bureau. First, we use precinct-level results to estimate the white vote for each referendum, which we then aggregate by county. The *dependent variables* are white support for the Confederate flag and white opposition to changing language in the Alabama constitution requiring segregated facilities for black and white students. In multivariate analyses, we regress these aggregated estimates on a variety of independent variables that are based on county-level census data.

Our reliance on aggregated data confronts us with the possibility of committing the "ecological fallacy" of drawing false inferences regarding individuals based on collective data. To reduce, if not eliminate, this aggregation bias, we use King's (1997) ecological inference (EI) method, which

[9] Alabama has one of the lowest tax rates in the nation and its citizens are sensitive to any proposal threatening to raise them. In addition, the constitution specifically earmarks over 89 percent of revenue for specific purposes and prohibits the state courts from requiring state or local officials to spend more money on education without the express approval of voters (see Gewertz 2004).

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Table 1. The Ecological Inference Problem

Race	Vote Choice Referendum A	Referendum B	Voting Age Population
Black	λ_i^b	$1-\lambda_i^b$	X_i
White	λ_i^w	$1-\lambda_i^w$	$1 - X_i$
	T_i		$1 - T_i$

Note: In each precinct, noted as i, both X_i (fraction of the voting age population who are black) and T_i (fraction of the voting age population who voted in the referendum) along with N_i not shown here (the number of voting age people, not included in the table) are observed. λ_i^b (fraction of voting age blacks who vote) and λ_i^w (fraction of voting age whites who voted) are unobserved and are inferred from the aforementioned aggregate variables.

makes minimal assumptions about the data[10] and has been shown to be useful in previous analyses (see, e.g., Gay 2001, 2002).

Table 1 describes our ecological problem at the precinct level. EI capitalizes on the observable data available (those data in the marginal cells) and permits analysts to work their way backward to estimate unobserved values within the body of the table. In Table 1, X_i represents the fraction of the voting-age population that is black and T_i represents the proportion of the voting age population that voted for the respective referendum in the precinct. Typically, the unobserved quantities of interest would be λ_i^b (the proportion of blacks who voted for the referendum) and λ_i^w (the proportion of whites who voted in favor of the referendum). In this case, however, we are interested only in λ_i^w (and its associated standard errors), which we calculate using the most current version of King'sEI shareware.[11]

Independent Variables

The principal independent variable in our analysis is the interaction between the black population variable and the urbanization variable. The black population variable is measured as the percentage of black residents in a county. The urbanization variable is a continuous variable, recoded to range between 0 and 1, reflecting the percentage of a county that is urban based on "urban clusters" as defined by the 2000 Census. An "urban cluster" (which is defined as

[10] King (1997, chapter 9) outlines three key assumptions: (1) that each precinct's black and white voting percentages are drawn from a process that resembles a bivariate normal distribution where neither can rise above 100 percent or fall below 0 percent; (2) in each precinct the estimated black vote and estimated white votes are mean independent of racial density, aside from any covariates used to account for aggregation bias; and (3) after conditioning for precinct racial composition, voting is independent among precincts. Voss (2000) has argued that only the first assumption is truly critical.

[11] Available at http://gking.harvard.edu. See Liu (2007) for a recent discussion of the EI methods that have been used by scholars of voting behavior and by federal courts in voting rights cases.

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a densely settled region with between 2,500 and 49,999 residents, typically containing at least 1,000 people per square mile) is smaller than an "urban area" (which the census defines as containing at least 50,000 residents). We opt to use "clusters" in large part because of the dearth of "urban areas" in the state of Mississippi.[12] The interactive term is the product of the urbanization and percent-black-residents variables. Additionally, since there were high levels of correlation between our black × urbanization interactive terms and their component parts, we "centered" the component variables around their means prior to calculating the products (Cronbach 1987; Jaccard, Wan, and Turrisi 1990), which reduces associated standard errors without affecting the magnitude of the interactive coefficient or the calculated slopes of the components.

To specify the model more fully, we also include a number of control variables measured at the county level on the right-hand side of our equations.[13] First, we employ the 2000 vote for George W. Bush as a proxy measure of Republicanism (see Tolbert and Hero 2001). Contra Voss (2000), we suspect that partisan context matters, even in votes such as these referenda that do not involve candidates or, explicitly at least, partisan positions. Second, consistent with Giles and Buckner's (1993) assumption that whites socialized outside of the South will be less likely to support state-level Confederate-era symbols, we include a variable measuring white interregion immigration. Third, to test for possible class differences (perhaps based on greater competition among working-class whites with blacks for jobs), we include two class-based measures: mean per capita white income and percentage of white unemployment.

Fourth, following much previous work (see, e.g., Giles and Evans 1985; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000; Tolbert and Grummel 2003), we expect education to have a mediating effect on white voting behavior and thus control for the percentage of those who possess less than a high school degree (see also Sidanius

[12] The Census recognizes only five urbanized areas in Mississippi but 72 urban clusters. Voss (2000) contends that it is possible for blacks and whites to live in proximity to each other without ever making physical contact, i.e., to be "close without touching." We think that is unlikely in "urban clusters." Even in small towns, blacks and whites are likely to come into contact with one another because most possess a central business district, where blacks and whites interact on a regular basis. Even if blacks and whites are segregated residentially, for example by literal or figurative train tracks or other geographical barriers, they will encounter one another at some point. Such citizens work together and shop together even if they do not live together. In his classic 1949 treatment of Southern politics, Key (1984, 673) sets the threshold for urbanism at 50,000, although he offers no rationale for this choice. Others who have addressed the importance of urbanism toward racial attitudes and behavior (see, e.g., Combs, Welch, and Hibbing 1984; Whitby 1985, 1986, 1987) usually do not offer any definition of what counts as urban, even when they include explicit variables in their models. In an era of increased suburbanization, enhanced mobility, spread of national chains, improved communications, and the like, we think it wise to define urban in a broader sense because we believe that many "urban dynamics" are likely to be seen in smaller cities today in ways that were not true in earlier eras.

[13] We follow Glaser (1994), Voss (2000), and others in focusing on counties as the most important geopolitical unit in the South.

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et al. 2000). Fifth, it seems plausible that different age cohorts will have experienced different socialization experiences, with those who came of age during the Old South era more likely to support Old South symbols. To tap this, we construct a variable based on the percentage of each county's white population aged 65 or older, which should provide a rough measure of the size of the white population that came of voting age prior to the beginning of the Civil Rights era. Finally, we also use King's EI technique to estimate a measure of white turnout, which we include. Our battery of independent variables compares favorably with those used in other recent analyses (see Voss 2000).

We employ weighted least squares to examine white support for antiblack referenda, using the standard errors of the point estimates for the white vote by county to assign weight (see, e.g., King 1997, Table 2, 290).[14] Lastly, as is indicated by Table 2, all of the variables employed in this analysis are recoded from 0 to 1, save for income, which is measured as average white per capita income and the centered variables that are allowed to range from −1 to 1.

Findings

We summarize our descriptive findings in Table 2. Beginning with the data from Mississippi, the story here is the near unanimous support among whites for the Confederate flag at about 87 percent. White support ranged from a low of 31 percent in rural Jefferson County to approximately 98 percent in rural Covington County. As it relates to turnout, almost half of white Mississippians turned out to vote, at roughly 48 percent. White turnout ranged from a low of approximately 23 percent in Leflore County to roughly 84 percent in Claiborne County. On average, over half of each county supported George W. Bush for president in 2000. The average unemployment rate among whites was approximately 5 percent, with a high of 10 percent and a low of nearly 2 percent.

Turning to the case of Alabama, according to Table 2, approximately 62 percent of whites rejected the referendum to change the language in the constitution. The vote ranged from a low of 26 percent in rural Sumter County, where the black population was approximately 74 percent, to approximately 84 percent in Hale County, another rural county where blacks made up roughly 59 percent of the total population. The turnout among whites was somewhat low at about 36 percent. The lowest white turnout was in rural Randolph County, where the black population was roughly 22 percent. The highest white turnout was in rural Lowndes County, where the black population was approximately 74 percent. The mean vote for George W. Bush was 61 percent. The lowest

[14] Here we caution against the potential violation of heteroskedasticity that might be associated with the significant variation in white population size across counties. These weights are also applied because the values employed for the dependent variable are themselves estimates (see King 1997). We use the analytic weight procedure in Stata to accomplish this task.

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mississippi					Alabama			
Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
White vote	.87	.11	.31	.98	White vote	.62	.12	.26	.84
Centered Urban	–.002	.24	–.28	.59	Centered Urban	.001	.26	–.3	.59
Centered Black population	–.001	.20	–.37	.47	Centered Black population	.004	.22	–.27	.57
Centered urban × Centered black	–.007	.05	–.13	.13	Centered urban × Centered black	–.003	.0	–.16	.12
In migration	.02	.01	.01	.07	In migration	.02	.01	.01	.06
White turnout	.48	.11	.23	.84	White turnout	.36	.13	.12	.77
Whites 65 over	.16	.03	.09	.24	Whites 65 over	.14	.02	.08	.18
Whites H.S.	.56	.10	.21	.71	Whites H.S.	.59	.10	.35	.74
Income	18,103	2,824	13,555	30,823	Income	18,811	3,446	14,489	32,923
Unemployment	.05	.02	.02	.1	Unemployment	.06	.02	.03	.12
Bush vote	.55	.13	.18	.8	Bush vote	.61	.15	.17	.81

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support for Bush was in Macon, roughly 50 percent rural and 85 percent black. The highest support for Bush came from rural Blount County, consisting of only 1 percent blacks.

Turning to the regression analyses, we first apply the Giles and Buckner model, whereby we do not control for an interaction between urban and black. Based on the results reported in Table 3, Model 1, for the Mississippi data, the percent-black coefficient is in the posited direction and achieves marginal significance at the .10 level, whereas the urban coefficient fails to reach statistical significance. Conversely, Model 1 for the Alabama data reveals that the black population variable fails to achieve significance, and the urban coefficient is marginally significant.

The results of the regression analyses with the interactions included are summarized in Table 3, Model 2. These results provide support for the racial threat hypothesis, even in urban areas. Indeed, in both Mississippi and Alabama, the combination of larger black communities and more urbanized environments contributed to stronger, not weaker, support among white voters for the measures considered here. Contrary to the notion that urbanization would ameliorate racial animosity among whites, we find no evidence of such improvement and, in fact, observe that at least under certain conditions, urbanization may exacerbate white support for racial symbols and perhaps policies.

In the case of Mississippi, the interaction term's effect seems to be driven largely by black population size. Using the coefficients in Model 2, we can create hypothetical scenarios. For example, when the black population variable is set at its minimum value, the effect of the urban population decreases by approximately 16 points. On the contrary, when the black population is set at its maximum value, the effect of the urban population on support for the flag increases by 21 points.

In the case of Alabama, somewhat different mechanisms seem to be at work, with the interactive term being driven more by its urbanism component. For example, when the percent black population takes on its lowest value, the urban effect is .06. Conversely, when the percent black is at its highest value, the urban effect decreases by −.12. In comparison with Mississippi, this makes intuitive sense, since while largely symbolic, as noted earlier, the public discourse about the Alabama referendum took on something of an antitax cast toward the end of the campaign, with leading opponents raising the specter of massive tax hikes that could follow passage of the measure. Our findings are consistent with a view that fiscal fears among white voters "in urban counties with relatively large tax bases and relatively high local tax efforts" drove some of the opposition to the measure, as more highly taxed white voters in more urban areas reacted negatively to language that at least raised the potential of higher taxes to fund better education for minority students in rural areas with historically underassessed property values (Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama 1997).

Table 3. White Support for Racial Referenda in Mississippi and Alabama

	Mississippi		Alabama	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Urban	.09 (.06)	–.02 (.08)	.23* (.12)	.06 (.13)
Black	.25* (.15)	.15 (.15)	–.24 (.26)	–.22 (.25)
Urban × black	—	.59** (.26)	—	1.11*** (.40)
Support for Bush	.93 (.21)***	.74*** (.22)	–.12 (.38)	.003 (.36)
White high school	1.34*** (.19)	1.13*** (.19)	–1.11* (.63)	–1.16* (.60)
White unemployment	2.53*** (.61)	1.83*** (.65)	.02 (.02)	3.55** (.02)
White income	3.06e-05 (6.14e-06)	2.41e-06 (6.601e-06)	-4.70e-06 (6.21e-06)	5.06e-06 (6.86e-06)
In migration	1.02 (1.09)	2.39** (1.10)	.64 (2.11)	2.06 (2.06)
White turnout	.35*** (.08)	.35*** (.07)	.34** (.17)	.38** (.16)
White age (>65)	–.19 (.48)	–.10 (.46)	–.29 (1.16)	–.92 (1.12)
Constant	–1.38*** (.26)	–.92*** (.27)	1.31*** (.52)	1.04** (.49)
N	82		66	
Adjusted R^2	.70	.72	.12	.21

Note: *** $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .05$; * $p \leq .10$.

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The effects of some of our control variables differ somewhat across models too. Not surprisingly, white unemployment and white turnout are both associated with higher levels of support for the referenda in both states. However, partisan affiliation (as measured by support for President Bush) is significant in Mississippi but not in Alabama, perhaps signifying that the flag controversy was the type of symbolic issue that overlaps with partisanship, while the complications surrounding the education language rendered it less likely to map onto partisan identification. Education levels in the white community were significant in both models but carried opposite signs. In the case of the Mississippi flag, whites who possess lower than a high school degree were associated with greater support for the referendum, while in Alabama, education had the opposite effect.[15] Perhaps the most interesting effect among the control variables concerns regional immigration, which is statistically insignificant in Alabama (although positively signed) but is significant and positively signed in the Mississippi model. While we expected larger populations of whites who came from other parts of the country to be associated with less support for racial referenda, at least in Mississippi, those raised outside the South were generally more supportive of Confederate symbols, suggesting that white migrants to the region may be attracted, in part at least, by a "Southern heritage" appeal.[16]

Conclusion

The findings reported here should give pause to those scholars who dismiss the racial threat argument as a fading anachronism of a byegone era. Our data, drawn from referenda involving a Confederate symbol and segregation-era rhetorical language in two Deep South states, reveal consistent and significant effects on white behavior based on racial context. The analysis shows that the racial threat phenomenon has its conditional effect. Most importantly given recent debates, we show not only the absence of an ameliorative urbanization effect interacting with race but that urbanization actually heightens racial voting among Southern whites in "urban clusters" with larger black populations. Ever since Key (1984), generations of observers of Southern politics have pinned great hopes on urbanization as a slow but inexorable force for racial moderation even in the Deep South and have expected Southern whites, like whites in other regions (see Carsey 1995; Voss 2000), to display less racially polarized behavior

[15] We suspect that the interstate discrepancy could be driven by the fact that the Alabama referendum dealt explicitly with educational issues.

[16] This is consonant with the conclusions of a number of careful observers of the South and Southern culture, including John Shelton Reed, who noted, for instance, that "some [Northerners] even move south to be among people who think the way they think we think" (Reed 1993, 127), and Tony Horwitz, who, in his account of Civil War re-enactors, found Northerners more eager to take Confederate than union roles (Horwitz 1999, 135-137).

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in urban settings. Our findings suggest that such hopes are at least exaggerated or premature, if not entirely misplaced.

To be sure, each of the interactions for both cases was significant and in the hypothesized direction. It is clear, however, that voters in the state of Mississippi possessed stronger allegiance to the state flag than Alabama voters did with respect to Jim Crow language in their state constitution. As the results indicate, Mississippi voters provided overwhelming support for the Confederate flag, whereas the Alabama referendum failed by less than 1 percent. In the case of Alabama, it appears that the framing of the vote within the context of higher taxes may have impacted the outcome of the referendum.

For more than 50 years, the black threat hypothesis has been a mainstay of American political analysis. Returning to the Deep South region that first prompted the development of this theory, our data indicate that even in the 21st century, racial context still exercises a profound effect on the behavior of Southern whites. In recent years, battles over competing interpretations of the region's historical symbols, whether they reflect "heritage" or "hate," have been central to the region's politics. In these regional "culture wars," white attitudes and behavior continue to be profoundly influenced by the environments in which they reside, with closer residential proximity to large black populations associated with greater manifestations of racial intolerance, or at least insensitivity.

While it might be tempting to dismiss these results as related only to ultimately rather insignificant symbolic matters and to take greater comfort in the findings of others (particularly Voss 1996) that racial context has less effect on more meaningful votes for elected office, we believe that would be unwise. Our findings point to the continuing virulence of racial attitudes and behavior in a part of the country that has historically struggled mightily with the legacy of slavery. As such, they caution against the comforting notion that racism has either faded from political relevance or will inevitably fade with the relentless march of urbanization and modernity. At least in the states of the Deep South, the "American dilemma" (Myrdal 1944) of racial polarization remains unresolved.

About the Authors

Pete Hatemi is an associate professor of political science, microbiology and biochemistry at the Pennsylvania State University. He is also a research fellow at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney and a scientist in the Department of Genetic Epidemiology at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. He received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Nebraska and continued his postdoctoral study in human genetics and psychiatry at the Virginia Institute for Psychiatric and Behavioral Genetics. His publications have appeared in such journals as the *American Journal of Political*

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Science, *Behavior Genetics*, *Demography*, *Journal of Politics*, *Science*, *Political Psychology*, and *Social Forces* among other venues.

Baodong Liu is an associate professor of political science at the University of Utah. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of New Orleans and has also served on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and Stephens College. His main research interest includes racial politics, election and voting, and political methodology. He is the author of *The Election of Barack Obama: How He Won* and a co-author of *Race Rules: The Electoral Politics in New Orleans, 1965-2006*.

Byron D'Andra Orey is professor and chair of political science at Jackson State University, where his research focus is race and politics. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of New Orleans and has held positions at the University of Mississippi and the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. His publications have appeared in such journals as the *American Politics Research*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, *and the National Political Science Review*.

Marvin Overby is a professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Missouri. He earned his Ph.D. from the Carl Albert Center at the University of Oklahoma and has held posts at Loyola University Chicago and the University of Mississippi as well as visiting positions at the John Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies and the University of Szeged (Hungary). His research on various aspects of American politics has appeared in such journals as the *American Political Science Review*, *the American Journal of Political Science*, *the Journal of Politics*, *and Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

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