Political Science 146 – Public Opinion and Mass Media: Organization of Political Attitudes

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October 25, 2017
Race and Public Opinion

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- Over time, theories behind OFR were discredited by scientific research; thus, these days, citizens less likely to express OFR racial attitudes.
- Today, 90% of Americans oppose laws against racial intermarriage; whereas only 40% opposed such laws in 1964.
Measuring Old-Fashioned Racism

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“On the whole, do you think that white people are smarter than black people (1), black people smarter than white people (0), or that they are about the same (.5)?”
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Race and Public Opinion: Racial Resentment

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- Thus, instead of blaming biological/genetic factors for black inferiority, racial resentment blames lack of work ethic for continued inequality between blacks and whites in society
- White citizens with more racial resentment more opposed to race-targeted policies (i.e., racial reparations)
Race and Public Opinion: Symbolic Racism

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- Like racial resentment, publicly displayed racist attitudes are no longer acceptable, thus prejudice has gone underground.
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- Relative to whites, blacks have been getting more than they deserve
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Views on Healthcare Reform

Figure 4: Support for Health Care Proposals by Presidential Sponsor and Respondents’ Race

Clinton’s Health Care Plan (1993-1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poll</th>
<th>African-Americans</th>
<th>White Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallup</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times Mirror</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Times</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN/Time</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>40</td>
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Obama’s Health Care Plan (2009-2010)

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- Linked Fate: Dawson’s reference that people’s life chances are tied to the fate of their group. Dawson argues that blacks use info. about how their race is doing to understand their position in society
- This is called the black utility heuristic: As long as race remains dominant in determining the lives of individuals blacks, it is ‘rational’ for blacks to follow group cues.
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- Lower level of linked fate among Asian Americans that blacks and Latinos (2008 data). Asian-Americans have significantly lower levels of party identification than other groups.
Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion

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- Five factors might influence attitudes: Personality, self-interest, values, historical events, and group attitudes (Kinder).
- More positive view of the mass public: citizens capable of holding reasoned, complex opinions derived from meaningful political factors such as group identity and values.
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Best way to measure is to ask about child-rearing values
**Table: Authoritarian vs. Libertarian child-rearing measurement**

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  ▶ Rich liberal elites often support a strong safety net
  
  ▶ Poor rural voters often support limited taxation
  
  ▶ So for some issues, racial prejudice might trump self-interest, or something else
  
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- Moral traditionalism: Underlying predispositions on traditional family and social organization (mother does X, father does Y)