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Countering Implicit Appeals: Which Strategies Work?

MATTHEW TOKESHI and TALI MENDELBERG

Some contemporary politicians try to mobilize racial attitudes by conveying implicit racial messages against their opponents—messages in which the racial reference is subtle but recognizable and which attack the opponent for alleged misdeeds. Although targeted politicians have tried a number of different strategies to respond to implicit racial appeals, little is known about the effectiveness of these strategies. Using two survey experiments, we answer the following question: Does calling the appeal "racial" work? That is, does it neutralize the negative effects on the attacked candidate? We find mixed evidence that it does. However, offering a credible justification for the attacked behavior works more consistently. We also test whether effects vary by candidate race. The results suggest that Black candidates' rhetorical strategies are more constrained than identical White candidates', but that White Americans are more open to credible arguments and justifications than the previous literature implies.

Keywords   race, opinion

Introduction

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama's critics made a number of subtle negative allusions to his race. One example was an ad run by Freedom's Defense Fund, a conservative political action committee, that linked Obama to the African-American former Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, who pleaded guilty to two counts of obstruction of justice and resigned in early September 2008.[1] In this ad, a voice-over of Obama praising Kilpatrick provided the audio background for images of Kilpatrick's mug shot and of Obama and Kilpatrick posing for pictures together (before the mayor's downfall).

When confronted with such negative references to race, Obama pursued several different strategies over the course of the campaign. Often, he tried to *distract* attention by counter-attacking John McCain on nonracial issues more favorable to him, like the economy. On one occasion, however, Obama chose to directly *engage* the attack by calling attention to its racial overtones, as he did in response to a John McCain ad that juxtaposed Obama's image and irrelevant images of the blonde female celebrities Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. Obama said that the intent of the ad was to scare voters by suggesting he "doesn't look like all those other presidents on the dollar bills."[2]

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This article examines the effectiveness of candidate responses to an implicit racial appeal, defined by Mendelberg (2001) as "one that contains a recognizable—if subtle—racial reference, most easily through visual references" (p. 11). We focus on these appeals because, as we elaborate later, (a) they are common in U.S. elections (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2011); (b) they are effective at decreasing support for the target (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1996); and (c) they may be especially difficult for candidates to rebut because many White voters may not view them as racial (Mendelberg, 2001).

Does calling the appeal a racial one work? The prevailing answer in the racial priming literature suggests that the answer is yes. However, this hypothesis has not been tested directly. This study provides such a test, separately for Black and White candidates. We find that White candidates can use this rebuttal more effectively than Black candidates. This has theoretical and practical implications. On the theoretical side, this suggests that the conventional wisdom in the racial priming literature does not fully account for the fact that messages are received differently depending on who is speaking. The results thus build on important but rare studies of the race of the messenger (e.g., Kuklinski & Hurley, 1995; Nelson, Sanbonmatsu, & McClerking, 2007). The practical implication of this finding is that Black candidates are constrained in the range of strategies available to them to defuse racially charged attacks.

In addition, our experiments yield a novel finding that challenges the racial priming literature— rebuttals to implicit appeals that offer credible justifications for the attacked candidate's behavior work at least as well as calling the appeal racial, in most situations. It is a finding with broader implications: Perhaps voters are more responsive to democratically desirable communication than previously thought, and hence they are more reason-oriented and competent than expected. Campaigns may serve a valuable function by offering voters credible justifications and not merely simplistic or distorted attacks (McGraw, 1991). As Glaser argues, racially resentful or threatened White voters can respond in reasonable and anti-racist ways to campaigns that provide the opportunity to do so (Glaser, 2002; Glaser & Ryan, 2013).

In sum, this study offers several contributions. First, it takes the racial priming literature one step beyond the question of how effective racial appeals are, by asking how candidates can respond effectively. In more general terms, it examines the effect of political messages by looking at the effect of counter-messages. It follows Chong and Druckman (2007) and Sniderman and Theriault (2004) in studying elite communication within this more realistic iterative framework. Second, the study expands the types of rhetorical response strategies well beyond *engage* and *distract*. We conceptually distinguish between four types of the *engage* strategy: *engage-racial, engage-nonracial, engage-justify*, and *engage-justify + racial*. We also test a control condition in which the candidate ignores the attack altogether (*ignore*). Third, we compare messages by African-American and White candidates who are targeted by implicit racial appeals, a rare but informative approach to studying racial politics. The results show that, when it comes to White voters, Black candidates are more rhetorically constrained than White candidates, but can nevertheless succeed with the right strategy. The results further imply that White voters' responsiveness to racial messages is not determined by negative racial campaigns but rather open to revision by rebuttals to those negative messages, and that voters are more open to credible argumentation than studies of political behavior tend to find.

Which Strategies Work?

As suggested by the opening anecdote about the anti-Obama Kwame Kilpatrick ad, implicit appeals still exist in the current period. Recent studies document the use of

racially tinged ads in the 2006 U.S. Senate race in Tennessee between Republican Bob Corker and African-American Democrat Harold Ford (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2011) as well as the 2008 presidential campaign (Erigha & Charles, 2012). McIlwain and Caliendo's (2011) analysis of television ads in U.S. House and Senate races from 1970 to 2006 shows that racial messages in campaign ads remained common in the 2000s. These appeals may include a very subtle racial cue, but many studies find that subtle racial cues do work, leading to more racially biased or resentful evaluations by White voters (Banks, 2013; Banks & Bell, 2013; Berinsky, Hutchings, Mendelberg, Shaker, & Valentino, 2010; DeSante, 2013; Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; Jackman & Vavreck, 2011; Kinder & Dale-Riddle, 2012; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001; Tesler & Sears, 2010; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002; White, 2007).

For all the studies that have been done on the ubiquity and effectiveness of implicit cues or messages, not much work has been done on rebuttals to these appeals. The existing work documents the existence of several different responses but does not evaluate their effect. For example, some studies found that White Democratic candidates in the 1970s and 1980s were mostly silent in response to Republicans' implicit appeals against them, deploying *distract* or *ignore* (Edsall & Edsall, 1991; Glaser, 1996). Studies of African-American candidates in the 1980s found that they often avoided explicit reference to race (see Perry, 1991, on "deracialization"). But those strategies may not be effective. Mendelberg (2001), for example, argues that "silence in the face of implicit racial appeals is a losing strategy" and that instead, calling out the attack and drawing attention to its racial intent—the *engage-racial* strategy—is the most effective way to counter implicit appeals (p. 103). In support of this claim, Mendelberg examines the effect of such an *engage-racial* rebuttal in her analysis of the effect of the implicitly racial Willie Horton appeal in 1988 on the relative evaluations of Michael Dukakis and George Bush. She used the date of interview in the 1988 National Election Studies as a measure of exposure to distinct phases of the campaign. She finds that the last phase, in which the Horton appeal was challenged as racial, was the least racialized period for evaluations of the candidates, with Dukakis reversing his slide in the polls. Although that analysis suggests that this *engage-racial* response effectively countered the implicit appeal, it is open to alternative explanations. For example, during the same period when *engage-racial* became salient in the campaign, the news coverage of the original implicit Horton appeal turned from implicit (showing but not mentioning Horton's race) to explicit (showing and mentioning Horton's race). It may well be this change and not the racial rebuttal that neutralized the implicitly racial Horton attack. One of the weaknesses of relying on survey data for estimating the impact of campaign messages is that the investigator does not have control over the content or degree of exposure to a particular message. If one has only a general measure of campaign exposure, it is difficult to know what aspect of which message is causing candidate evaluations to change. Experiments offer control over message content, levels of exposure, and presence (or absence) of other messages that observational analysis cannot. Thus, this article revisits the question of which strategies are most effective at countering implicit appeals, but with the strengths offered by controlled experimentation.

Rebuttal Strategies

Mendelberg (2009) describes several strategies candidates use when they are targeted by an implicit racial appeal: *engage, distract, ignore*, and *mimic*. We investigate all these strategies except *mimic*.[3] We go a step further and distinguish between subtypes of the

engage strategy: *engage-racial, engage-nonracial, engage-justify,* and a combination of *engage-justify* and *engage-racial* that we call *engage-justify + racial*. Thus, we test six strategies:

1. *engage-racial*;
2. *engage-nonracial*;
3. *engage-justify*;
4. *engage-justify + racial*;
5. *distract*; and
6. *ignore*.

We elaborate on each next.

Engage-Racial

As noted earlier, Mendelberg (2001) predicts that explicitly drawing attention to the racial nature of an implicit message is the most successful response strategy. According to that argument, implicit appeals operate via an automatic psychological process. When presented with a stimulus that is not explicitly about race but contains a racial cue, many Whites allow negative anti-Black stereotypes to influence their political judgments. However, almost all White Americans today are committed to a norm of equality such that explicitly anti-Black messages are rejected. The reason why revealing the racial intent behind an implicit appeal is believed to be effective is because it brings the racial content of the message into conscious awareness, triggering the normative rejection of the message and canceling the message's effect. The attacked candidate can thus do best overall with this strategy.

However, *engage-racial* is vulnerable to the counter-strategy in which the attacking candidate in turn accuses the rebutting candidate of crying racism. This is in fact what happened after Obama's response to the "dollar bill" ad in 2008. Following Obama's *engage-racial* rebuttal, McCain campaign spokesman Rick Davis said, "Barack Obama has played the race card, and he played it from the bottom of the deck. It's negative, divisive, shameful, and wrong."[4] Thus, denouncing racism may not be the most effective rebuttal to a racial appeal.

Engage-Nonracial

The major conceptual distinction between *engage-racial* and *engage-nonracial* is that *engage-racial* unambiguously labels the attack as racial, while *engage-nonracial* condemns the attack in nonracial terms such as "negative." For an illustration of this distinction, compare Jesse Jackson's racial denunciation of the Horton ads in October 1988 with Obama's nonracial comments after releasing his long-form birth certificate in April 2011. About the Horton ads, Jackson said, "There have been a number of rather ugly *race-conscious* signals sent from [Bush's] campaign" (emphasis added).[5] In contrast to Jackson's explicitly racial response, Obama responded to questions about his birthplace by saying he is "speaking to the vast majority of the American people as well as to the press—we do not have time for this kind of *silliness*" (emphasis added).[6] Mendelberg's logic predicts that this response will not be effective since it does not call attention to the racial aspect of the attack.[7]

Engage-Justify

A possible rebuttal unexamined in the literature on racial priming is to provide a credible account, argument, or justification. An example of this would be Dukakis' initial attempt to

respond to the Horton appeal. Dukakis noted that comparable incidents of convicted murderers committing heinous crimes while released on furlough had occurred in the federal furlough program and the California program when Ronald Reagan was the governor of the state, and that as governor of Massachusetts he ended rather than started the furlough program that had released Horton.[8] We conceptualize *engage-justify* as a credible account of the attacked action—a package of relevant facts woven into a reason-based narrative and backed by objective sources or authoritative actors.

Evidence consistent with the notion that such accounts may be persuasive is found in studies that find that relevant, credible information about issues such as foreign aid (Gilens, 2001) and school spending (Howell & West, 2009) changes respondents' opinions.[9] More importantly, we draw on McGraw (1991), who demonstrated the effective use of politicians' reason- and fact-based justifications for their controversial or scandalous action, distinguishing them from less credible excuses which attempt to deny taking the action at all. McGraw (1991) found that politicians can effectively manage public evaluations of them by offering justifications of actions which proved controversial or scandalous. In sum, the credible accounts framework would predict that *engage-justify* moves opinion in support of the attacked candidate.

Engage-Justify + Racial

This response combines the credible rebuttal of an attack while also labeling the attack as racial. Both Mendelberg's logic about engagement and McGraw's theory of credible accounts would predict that *engage-justify + racial* will be an effective strategy, moving opinion toward the attacked candidate.

Distract

This is when a candidate does not engage the attack and instead responds by counter-attacking on a nonracial issue more favorable to him, as Obama did with the economy in 2008 (discussed earlier). Pivoting to one's strongest issue may be an effective strategy (Vavreck, 2009), but little has been written about the effect of relying on it as the response to a racial attack. Mendelberg (2009) argues that this strategy will likely be ineffective. The implication from McGraw's framework is also that failing to offer a credible account will render *distract* ineffective.

Ignore

In this strategy, the attacked candidate does not engage the attack and offers no response of any kind. Dukakis was critized for letting long parts of the 1988 campaign devolve into this type of non-response (Vavreck, 2009). Mendelberg (2009) and the credible accounts framework each predict that this is likely to be an ineffective strategy.

In sum, we test the claim that *engage-racial* will be an effective strategy, a claim that is the most prominent rebuttal hypothesis in the racial priming literature. We also develop and test two new hypotheses—that *engage-justify* and *engage-justify + racial* are also effective. Finally, we test three other strategies that appear common but are predicted by all the frameworks just reviewed to be ineffective: *engage-nonracial, distract*, and *ignore*. Following the credible accounts framework, we operationalize effectiveness as Whites' post-rebuttal movement toward the attacked candidate and away from the attacker.

Bias Against Black Candidates?

Our experimental design allows us to answer an additional question: Are rebuttals offered by Black candidates less effective than identical rebuttals offered by White candidates?

Black candidates may be penalized in particular for using *engage-racial* or *engage-justify + racial* (i.e., for calling attention to the racial overtones of the message against them). This may happen because African-Americans are viewed as too ready to label actions as racially motivated. Consistent with this logic, Nelson and colleagues (2007) find that White respondents are more likely to perceive the shooting of a Black male by a White police officer as racist when the charge of racism comes from a White politician than a Black politician. Accordingly, Black candidates may have less success than White candidates in using any rhetoric accusing the opponent of racism, in this case, *engage-racial* or *engage-justify + racial*.

Black candidates may also enjoy less success than a comparable White candidate with any strategy. If White voters are racially biased, then any claim by a Black candidate may be taken less seriously than the same claim by a White candidate. There is conflicting evidence on the general question of whether Black candidates are penalized by voters because of their race. One set of findings suggests that they are in fact penalized. Experimental studies from the 1990s found that White voters rate Black candidates lower than identical White candidates (McDermott, 1998; Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, & Nitz, 1995; Terkildsen, 1993). More recent experiments have also uncovered some forms of racial bias. Weaver (2012) finds that conservatives and men are biased against dark-skinned candidates. Studies of opposition to Barack Obama find that racial resentment or stereotypes depressed support for his candidacy and/or continue to play an important role in shaping opinions of his presidency (Banks, 2013; Berinsky et al., 2010; Goldman & Mutz, 2014; Jackman & Vavreck, 2011; Kinder & Dale-Riddle, 2012; Piston, 2010; Tesler & Sears, 2010). However, other studies suggest that Black candidates are no longer at a disadvantage. Some studies suggest that racially polarized voting is declining (Abrajano, Nagler, & Alvarez, 2005; Highton, 2004). White voters are positively affected by counter-stereotypical media portrayals, as in the case of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign (Goldman & Mutz, 2014). Weaver's (2012) experimental study finds no effect of candidate race on average. Hajnal (2007) finds that White voting for Black candidates rises substantially after the electorate experiences a Black candidate serving in office. Given that evidence of racial bias toward Black candidates is mixed, further testing is needed.

We provide one such test, examining whether Black candidates' rebuttals are less effective than identical White candidates' rebuttals. The existing literature does not have much to say about the effect of *rebuttals* in particular, yet rebuttals are potentially quite important since they could be the "last word" in an iterative exchange launched by the initial attack. Thus, we test two competing hypotheses about Black candidates' rebuttals: That they work as effectively, or, alternatively, less effectively, than the same rebuttal offered by a White candidate.

Method

Overview

We conducted two survey experiments to test how well different responses counter an implicit racial appeal. The main study, which took place from March 2013 to July 2013,

was carried out in two stages. First, respondents read a news story about the use of an ad against a candidate in a fictitious U.S. Senate primary race matched to the respondent's party identification. Both the attacker and target were identified as members of the respondent's party, to isolate the effect of race and avoid creating complex interaction effects with candidate party which would greatly erode statistical power.[10] Then, respondents provided their assessments of the candidates and answered a battery of demographic questions (but none about race so that responses to the remaining questions are not primed by race).[11] Thus our first round of candidate evaluations occurs after the attack and before the rebuttal.

Second, respondents were exposed to one of six responses to the ad by the targeted candidate (including the non-rebuttal *ignore*). Then respondents rated their approval of the target's rebuttal and again answered the candidate evaluation questions. Respondents were then asked an open-ended question to guess what the study is about based on what they have read so far: a battery about the content of the two news articles; a question about whether they thought the attacker's ad had racial overtones; the standard four-question racial resentment battery (Kinder & Sanders, 1996); manipulation check questions on whether they correctly recalled the race of the target and criminal; a question about their own race; a question asking whether the respondent had participated in a candidate rating study before; and an open-ended question asking if they had other thoughts and comments about the study.

The main dependent variable is the post-rebuttal change in the feeling thermometer difference score between target and the attacker. We use the difference between the two candidates' feeling thermometers in order to account for the possibility that the attacking candidate might be hurt by deploying an implicit appeal.[12] Other dependent variables include intended vote choice in the race and whether respondents say they would turn out to vote in this election.

The other study was run in December 2011 and February 2012 as a preliminary version of the main study. The four features of the experimental design that are different in the preliminary study are as follows: (a) There was no *engage-justify + racial* rebuttal; (b) no party label was attached to either the attacker or the target; (c) the Senate race was a general election, not a primary election; and (d) the faces embedded in the fictional news stories were less realistic, created using FaceGen Modeler 3.2, a 3-D face-generating software program that allows users to create a face called an "identity" which one can imbue with "European" or "African" coloring and features.[13] The purpose of running the main study afterward was to improve upon these weaknesses in the earlier study. In spite of these differences, the main results of the preliminary study and the main study are similar.

First Stage: The Implicit Appeal

We follow Mendelberg's (2001) definition of an implicit racial appeal as one that "contains a recognizable—if subtle—racial reference, most easily through visual references" (p. 11). One important consideration is to select an appeal that is representative of ones that take place in the real world. Although there is some variation, linking candidates to symbols of Black criminality has been a theme in salient campaign ads (Mendelberg, 2001). This was the theme of the Willie Horton ad in 1988 and more recently of the anti-Obama Kwame Kilpatrick ad in 2008. The scenario examined in both studies is intended to be reminiscent of the Kilpatrick ad.

In the first stage, all subjects are shown a manufactured news article about a fictitious Senate race. The story explains that the candidate, Michael Wells (the "target"), is attacked

by a rival candidate, Peter Moore (the "attacker") for pardoning David Jones (the "criminal"), a former U.S. Representative convicted of a number of serious crimes.[14] Jones' crimes are loosely modeled on Kilpatrick's: eight felony convictions, most notably assault of a police officer that left the officer hospitalized due to head injuries.[15]

A side-by-side photo of each man was embedded in the news article (see Figure 1). The target is wearing a suit and the criminal is depicted in a mug shot. The photo caption explains that the photo is a screenshot from an ad released by the attacker. This detail is important because it communicates to the reader that the photo is an artifact of the the attacker's campaign, and that the decision to depict the criminal in prison clothes is a strategic attack, not an editorial decision made by the newspaper.

The race of the target and criminal was manipulated to be either Black or White, creating four combinations. Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of the four resulting versions of the article.[16] This race manipulation is the only part of the article that varies. We use the White target/White criminal condition as a nonracial baseline condition for comparison.

Figure 2 shows the basic design of the main study.[17] The reason why the manipulation of the criminal's race is important to the design of the study is that it allows us to create an implicit message and a control (nonracial) version of the same message. This makes it possible to test whether the implicit appeal "worked" in the sense that a racial cue (either a Black criminal or Black candidate) should increase the effect of racial attitudes on evaluation of the target relative to a White target/White criminal pair. It is hard to know what a racial response does to an attack that is not racial, so we must be able to show that the attack worked.

White and Black versions of the candidate and criminal must be as close to identical as possible so that differences in ratings of candidates between conditions can be attributed to the racial appearance of the target/criminal pair and not some other aspect of

Figure 1. Two versions of the attack news story, with Black target/White criminal on the left and White target/Black criminal on the right (main study). Larger images of the attack news story can be seen in Section 9.7 in the Supplemental Material.
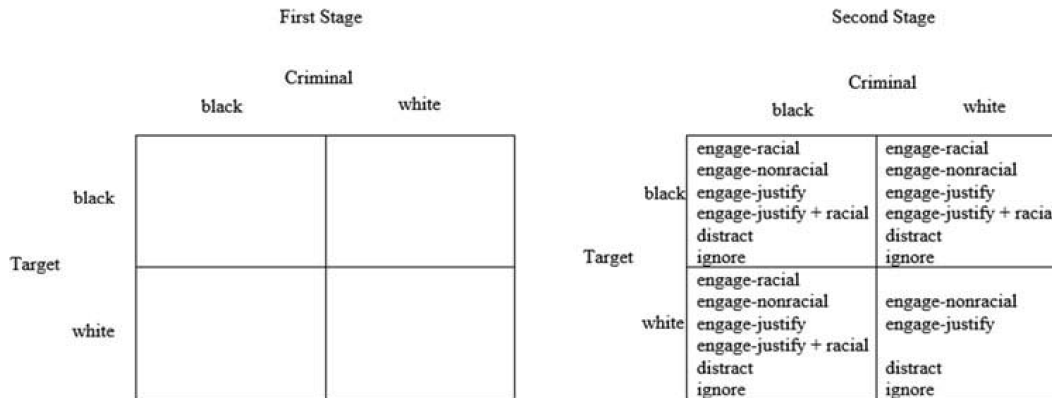
Figure 2. Experimental design (main study).

their appearance. In order to do this, we use a morphing procedure used in recent political science research (Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, & Collins, 2008; Weaver, 2012). The procedure allows for realistic variation in skin tone and facial features between Black and White faces while controlling for as many extraneous (nonracial) sources of variation as possible.

The Black and White targets created by this method can be seen in Figure 2 in the Supplemental Material. We picked one White face and held it constant (the "baseline" face) and morphed it with a different White face (the "mixing" face) to create the White target. The faces were combined in a ratio of 40% to 60% mixing-to-baseline. To create the new Black target, we "painted" the White baseline face Black so that its mixture with a Black mixing face would result in a realistic Black face.[18] Since the Black faces were also combined in a 40% to 60% mixing-to-baseline ratio, the new Black and White faces share 60% of the same face. The Black criminal and White criminal created using this same procedure can be seen in Figure 3 in the Supplemental Material.

We ran pilot studies to verify that people rate the faces equally along six of Oosterhof and Todorov's (2008) nine trait dimensions: likable, threatening, dominance, competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.[19] There were no differences at the 0.05 level in mean rating along each dimension for either the Black and White versions of the target or the Black and White versions of the criminal (scores for each face are shown in Table 1 of the Supplemental Material).

Rebuttal Conditions

Table 1 describes the key features of the six rebuttal conditions.[20] The first paragraph in each is identical: It explains that the target responded to the attack. The second and third paragraphs are where the responses diverge. In *engage-racial*, the target says, "This ad is an attempt to stir up *racial fears*" (emphasis added). He continues by saying, "Charges like this breed division in our country and our state. They divide us—*race against race*—so we blame each other instead of work together" (emphasis added). This response is patterned after then-Governor Bill Clinton's speech announcing his candidacy for president in 1991 when he said, "For twelve years, Republicans have tried to divide us—race against race—so we get mad at each other and not at them" (quoted from Mendelberg, 2001, p. 104). *Engage-nonracial* is identical to *engage-racial* except it omits the two references to race ("racial fears" and "divide us—race against race") that define the *engage-racial* response, and instead uses "fears" and "divide us." In *engage-justify*, the target says the following:

Table 1

Description of rebuttal stories (main study)

Rebuttal	Engage-racial	Engage-nonracial	Engage-justify	Engage-justify + racial	Distract	Ignore
Headline	Wells claims ad had racial intent	Wells claims ad is a negative attack	Wells claims ad is unfair attack	Wells claims ad is unfair, racial attack	Wells attacks Moore on economy	YouTube takes on television
First paragraph	"Wells fires back against ad . . ."	Identical across conditions	Identical across conditions	Identical across conditions	Identical across conditions	
Second paragraph	". . . ad is an attempt to stir up racial fears . . ."	". . . ad is an attempt to stir up fears . . ."	". . . ad is a distortion of the truth . . ."	". . . ad is a distortion of the truth . . ."	"My opponent's economic plan will spell disaster . . ."	
Third paragraph	"Charges like this . . . divide us—race against race . . ."	"Charges like this . . . divide us . . ."	Wells explains reason for pardon: Unanimous vote of bipartisan pardon review board	Wells explains reason for pardon, plus: "Charges like this . . . divide us—race against race . . ."	"I fought and delivered on behalf of all working families . . ."	
Photos	Candidate and convict, race of each varying	Identical across conditions	Identical across conditions	Identical across conditions	Identical across conditions	

> This ad is a distortion of the truth. . . . I have already explained my decision in
> this case. The judge in the case, the trial judge, recommended the commutation.
> Jones got a 5-0 vote from the bipartisan parole board, which has three members
> that were appointed by governors from the opposing party. I do not condone
> what Jones did, but I have faith in the good judgments of these experts. I believe
> that these are the relevant facts.

This response is patterned after former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee's explanation for why he pardoned Maurice Clemmons, an Arkansas convict who murdered four Washington State Police officers nine years after he was pardoned by Huckabee. In response to his critics, Huckabee cited the recommendation of the trial judge and the unanimous vote of the parole board as the reasons for his decision.[21] The *engage-justify + racial* response combines the target's justification with the claim that the charges divide us, "race against race." In the *distract* condition, the target shifts attention from the attacker's ad to the attacker's economic policies and goes on to talk about the attacker's weakness in handling the state economy. Since the target does not offer a response to the attack in the *ignore* condition, an irrelevant story about YouTube that has a similar format and length to the other response stories is used.

Sample

We used Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to recruit 766 White subjects for the main study and 670 White subjects for the preliminary study.[22] MTurk is a Web-based platform that allows users to recruit subjects to perform various tasks. The primary advantage of using MTurk as a subject recruitment platform is that it allows data to be collected quickly and inexpensively. One potential drawback of using MTurk is that the external validity of findings may be compromised because MTurk's users are not representative of the U.S. population (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). However, research shows that MTurk users are more representative and diverse than student and convenience samples that are usually used in political science controlled experiments (Berinsky et al., 2012). Furthermore, Berinsky and colleagues (2012) show that MTurk samples replicate the results of experimental studies conducted with nationally representative samples, suggesting that MTurk participants do not behave dramatically differently from subjects in other published research. See Table 2 in the Supplemental Material for a demographic profile of the sample. In order to improve the representativeness of the sample, the results reported here use post-stratification weights to adjust the sample to match the national White registered voter population on age, gender, and educational attainment according to the November 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS).

Results

Before presenting the effect of the rebuttals, we verify that the attack news story functioned as a racial attack. That is, the criminal cue, or the Black candidate, should increase the effect of racial attitudes on evaluation of the target relative to a White candidate with a White criminal (following studies reviewed earlier which demonstrate a racial reaction to racial cues). We tested this by estimating the impact of racial resentment on the target-minus-attacker feeling thermometer difference score (measured after the attack but before the rebuttal). The dependent variable ranges from -100 to 100, recoded to run from -1 to 1 with

higher scores indicating greater support for the target. This score was regressed on racial resentment, dummy variables for each target/criminal race pair (with White target/White criminal as the reference category), the interaction between racial resentment and each dummy variable, and a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent came from the main study or the preliminary study in order to control for any differences across the two samples. Since we expect racial resentment to be primed whenever race is made salient by the candidate or criminal's race, we expect the interactions between racial resentment and each dummy variable to be negative (anti-target). Table 2 confirms that racial resentment has a negative effect among those who saw a Black target and/or Black criminal. In sum, it appears that the news stories that included a racial cue functioned as negative racial messages.[23]

Table 2
Did the attack prime racial resentment? Predicting target-minus-attacker difference score (post-attack, pre-rebuttal, both studies pooled)

	Coefficient (*SE*)
(Intercept)	−0.27***
	(0.04)
Black target/Black criminal	0.35***
	(0.06)
White target/Black criminal	0.25***
	(0.05)
Black target/White criminal	0.35***
	(0.05)
Racial resentment	0.17**
	(0.07)
Sample group (0 = preliminary, 1 = main)	−0.04**
	(0.02)
Black target/Black criminal ×Racial resentment	−0.60***
	(0.10)
White target/Black criminal ×Racial resentment	−0.38***
	(0.09)
Black target/White criminal ×Racial resentment	−0.53***
	(0.09)
N	1424
Adjusted R^2	0.07

Notes. Entries are ordinary least-squares regression coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. Analysis pools both main and preliminary studies. The dependent variable is a −1 to 1 scale ranging from strong opposition to the target to strong support of the target. Significance tests are two-tailed. We reestimated the model by including party identification and interactions between party identification and each race pair along with racial resentment and its interactions with each race pair and the coefficients did not change in any significant way. Party identification was measured on a 7-point scale collapsed to the 0–1 interval.
**$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$.

Next, we turn to the post-rebuttal change in the feeling thermometer difference score between the target and attacker.[24] We test the effect of rebuttals in six ways. The first two ways simply test for a null effect against two different standards:

1. For each target/criminal pair, is the rebuttal effect positive and significantly different from zero?
2. For each pair, is the rebuttal positive and significantly different from *ignore*, which represents offering no response?
   The third, fourth, and fifth ways test rebuttal effects across race within a rebuttal:
3. Does candidate or criminal race matter? That is, when the attack cues race through the visual presence of a Black candidate or criminal, is each rebuttal as effective as the same rebuttal offered by a White target/White criminal pair (which is the baseline scenario in which race is not salient in the campaign)?[25]
4. Is a Black candidate's rebuttal as effective as the same rebuttal used by a White candidate paired with a Black criminal, or do Black candidates experience more resistance than White candidates? This test matters especially for *engage-racial*, but Black candidates may suffer a racial disadvantage for any rebuttal. This criterion entails comparing Black/Black and Black/White against White/Black.[26] Although Black/White differs from White/Black in lacking a Black criminal, Black/White's situation is racialized by the candidate's race and the stereotypical crime, making a test of racial disadvantage against White/Black relevant.
5. Does a Black candidate experience a racial disadvantage from being linked with a Black versus a White criminal? This entails testing Black/White against Black/Black.

Finally, in the next section we will test criterion 6, the relative effect of rebuttals within a pair, to see which are the most effective for each pair and thus conduct an additional test of racial difference. These six criteria jointly cover all the possible paired comparisons across race pair within a rebuttal and across rebuttals within a race pair. Criteria 1 and 2 entail a one-tailed test, while the others call for two-tailed tests. The results are displayed in figures, as we elaborate later, and then summarized in Table 3.

We account for multiple comparisons with the False Discovery Rate (FDR) method (Benjamini & Yekutieli, 2001). This method is well-suited to our design in accounting for dependent tests where we do not expect each and every null hypothesis to be rejected. In fact, some hypotheses are expected to be null. This adjustment errs on the side of failing to reject the null and is thus more conservative.[27] In practical terms, implementing the FDR correction means adjusting the alpha level based on the number of tests conducted. The more tests conducted, the smaller the alpha level. For the main study, we use an FDR-adjusted alpha level of 0.01 instead of the usual 0.05.[28]

Figure 3 shows the mean change in the difference score and its 98% confidence interval relative to a null hypothesis of zero change, testing criterion 1, for each rebuttal, by target/criminal pair, for the main study.[29] Positive values indicate that the rebuttal helped the target while negative values mean that the rebuttal backfired.[30] In addition, Figure 4 in the Supplemental Material shows the effect of each rebuttal, using *ignore* as the baseline in place of the zero null. This answers the following question, which tests criterion 2: Is this rebuttal more effective than saying nothing at all? The results of Figure 4 in the Supplemental Material show that *ignore* has the same consequence as zero—a rebuttal's effect is seldom more positive relative to *ignore* than it is relative to zero.[31] Rebuttals that are effective in absolute terms are also more effective than saying nothing. We thus focus on the results of Figure 3 in the remainder of this section.
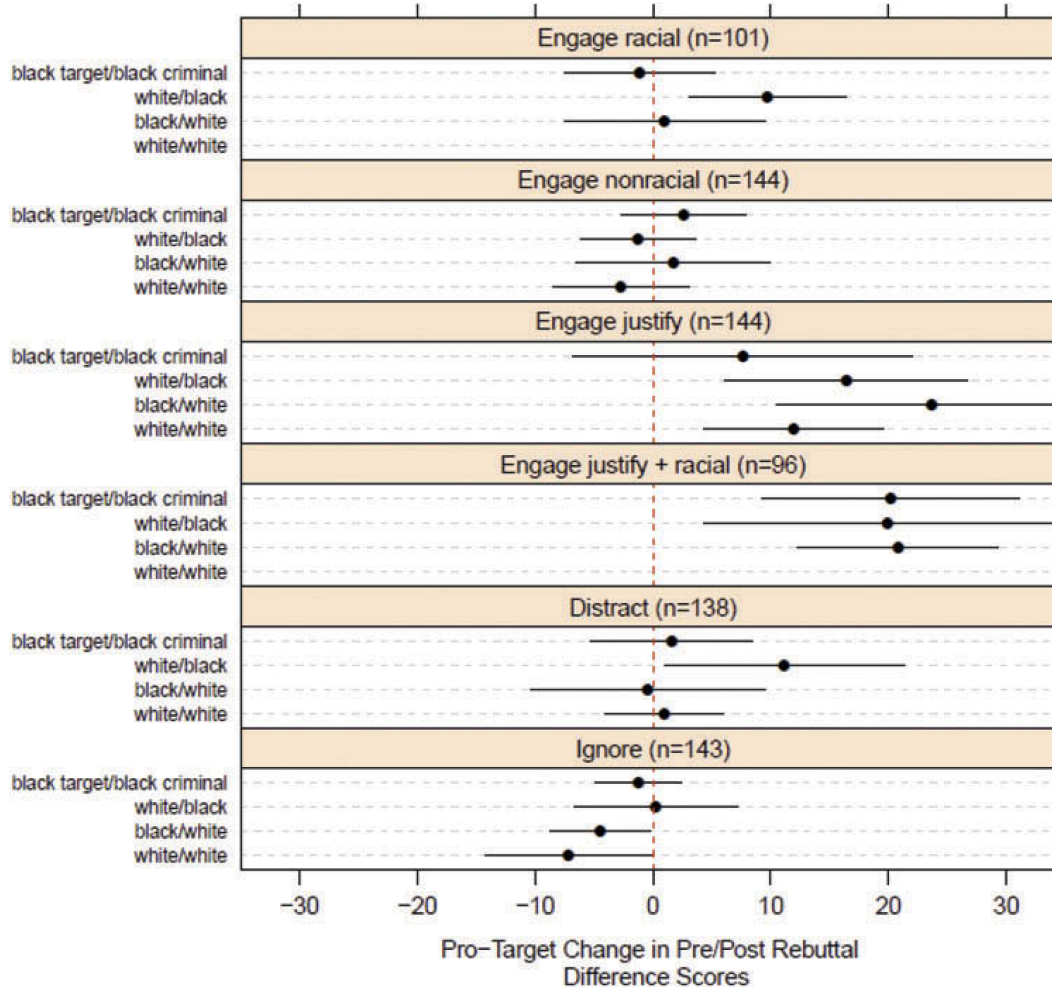
Figure 3. Effect of rebuttals, by rebuttal type (main study). *Note.* Black lines represent 98% confidence intervals.

We start with Mendelberg's hypothesis that *engage-racial* works. "Works" simply means that the attacked candidate experiences a rise in support. Figure 3 shows that *engage-racial* does help a White target tied to a Black criminal. This finding supports Mendelberg's (2001) claim that calling out the racial appeal is an effective strategy, but the null effect for the remaining two pairs shows that the prediction only applies to the "classic" implicit appeal scenario—a White target tied to a Black criminal. The same rebuttal does not help a Black target regardless of the race of the criminal. To confirm this difference we turn to criterion 4 and find that *engage-racial*'s effect for a White target/Black criminal pair is significantly greater when compared to the Black target/Black criminal pair ($p < 0.01$) and is marginally greater when compared to the Black target/White criminal pair ($p = 0.05$).[32] Finally, a test of criterion 5 shows that a Black candidate is not disadvantaged when paired with a Black criminal versus a White criminal ($p = 0.63$). In sum, calling out the appeal as racial benefits a White target, but does not benefit an identical Black target, implying a racial disadvantage to both types of Black candidate in the use of this rebuttal.

Figure 3 also shows that *engage-nonracial* does not improve difference scores above zero for any of the pairs. This supports both Mendelberg's and the credible accounts

predictions. In addition, tests of criteria 3, 4, and 5 show that the race of the target and the race of the criminal do not significantly influence the rebuttal's effect.[33] While the lack of difference indicates the absence of racial disadvantage, the result is inconclusive on that point given that the rebuttal does not succeed for a White candidate and so cannot serve for testing bias. In all, then, this rebuttal does not work.

Engage-justify improves the target's difference score for three out of the four pairs: White/Black, Black/White, and White/White. For the Black/Black pair, the effect is also positive though not significant ($p = 0.1$, one-tailed). Applying criterion 3, no race pair differs from White/White. A racial cue does not detract from the effectiveness of credible accounts.[34] Turning to criterion 4, the White target paired with a Black criminal does not enjoy any advantage over a Black target paired with a Black criminal ($p = 0.22$) or a White criminal ($p = 0.29$). Thus, Black candidates are not disadvantaged relative to a racialized White candidate. However, a test of criterion 5 shows some evidence of racial disadvantage: a Black target suffers a marginally significant penalty for being tied to a Black criminal versus a White criminal ($p = 0.05$). In sum, *engage-justify* is clearly effective for all pairs except the Black candidate with the Black criminal, for whom it does not pass the significance threshold and who may be disadvantaged by his link with a Black rather than a White criminal. These findings support the credible accounts predictions but with some uncertainty for the most racialized candidate.

With *engage-justify + racial*, the effect for all three pairs clear zero, indicating that this rebuttal is effective for all three. When each of the three pairs is compared to the other two by criteria 4 and 5, none of the effects are distinguishable from one another.[35] This supports both the Mendelberg and credible accounts predictions and conflicts with the racial disadvantage prediction.

Distract improves the difference score by criterion 1 only for a White target tied to a Black criminal. Turning to criterion 3, this pair is no different from White/White by the FDR standard, and neither is any other pair.[36] Criterion 4 shows marginally greater effects for a White/Black pair compared to Black/Black ($p = 0.06$) and Black/White ($p = 0.05$), offering only suggestive evidence of racial disadvantage to Black candidates relative to a racialized White candidate. A test of criterion 5 shows that the two Black targets do not differ from each other ($p = 0.67$). Thus, *distract* is effective for the "classic" case, contrary to Mendelberg (2009). The finding that it is only effective for a White target paired with a Black criminal is consistent with the racial disadvantage prediction, though the magnitude of the disadvantage is small and statistically uncertain.

Finally, *ignore* is never effective relative to zero, and in fact, almost backfires in the Black/White and baseline White/White scenarios ($p = 0.02$ for both, two-tailed).[37] *Ignore* shows no significant differences across pairs in direct tests (criteria 3, 4, and 5).[38]

In sum, in line with the credible accounts prediction, the most consistently successful rebuttal strategies are *engage-justify* (except for a Black target paired with a Black criminal, supporting the racial disadvantage hypothesis) and *engage-justify + racial*. *Engage-nonracial* and *ignore* are unsuccessful, as predicted by both Mendelberg and the credible accounts framework. Finally, *engage-racial* and *distract* are effective, respectively supporting and disconfirming Mendelberg's predictions, but only in the "classic" racial appeal situation of a White target with a Black criminal, in line with racial disadvantage.[39]

So far we have tested the differences that the race pair makes to the rebuttal's effect, according to criteria 3, 4, and 5. Now we examine 6: the difference the rebuttal makes to a given race pair. We have already seen suggestive evidence that rebuttals may have different effects depending on the race of the target and the criminal, supporting the racial disadvantage hypothesis. A follow-up question from this finding is the following: For each

target/criminal pair, which strategies are most effective? We answer this question by taking all of the rebuttals that are effective (relative to zero and *ignore*) for each target/criminal pair and testing them against each of the other rebuttals.

For the Black target paired with a Black criminal, as we saw, only *engage-justify + racial* is effective. Now we find that it is more effective than every other strategy, marginally so compared to *engage-justify* ($p = 0.09$) and significantly so compared to each of the other strategies ($p < 0.01$ for all comparisons). As we saw earlier, for a Black target tied to a Black criminal, calling out the racial appeal is not an effective strategy, and even a credible account on its own is not enough. It now appears that a credible account in combination with a racial rebuttal is the only strategy that works.

For the White target paired with a Black criminal, the four effective rebuttals (*engage-racial, engage-justify, engage-justify + racial,* and *distract*) are statistically indistinguishable from one another.[40] Furthermore, all four are significantly more effective than *engage-nonracial* ($p < 0.01$ for all comparisons).[41] We conclude that there is a clear set of four effective strategies: *engage-racial* (confirming the Mendelberg prediction); *engage-justify* (confirming the credible accounts prediction); *engage-justify + racial* (confirming both frameworks); and *distract* (contrary to both frameworks).

For the Black target tied to a White criminal, the two effective rebuttals (*engage-justify* and *engage-justify + racial*) are not distinguishable from each other ($p = 0.66$). Furthermore, each is significantly more effective than each of the other four rebuttals ($p < 0.01$ for all comparisons). The distinction between effective and ineffective strategies is clear: offering credible information (with or without mentioning race) works, while anything else does not.

Finally, for a White target tied to a White criminal, which is simply a nonracial pardon scenario, the only effective strategy (*engage-justify*) is the best strategy. It is significantly more effective than each of the others ($p < 0.01$ for each comparison). Thus, for the White target facing a nonracialized pardon scandal, *engage-justify* is significantly more effective than every other rebuttal strategy tested.

To summarize our findings, we use Table 3. Black targets paired with a Black criminal are best off with a credible explanation in combination with calling out race. White targets paired with a Black criminal should either offer a credible explanation, call out race, offer a combination of those two strategies, or distract. Black targets paired with a White criminal should offer a credible explanation, either alone or in combination with calling out race. Finally, White targets paired with a White criminal should offer a credible explanation. Again, we see that the most consistently effective strategies are offering a

Table 3
Summary of rebuttal effects (main study)

Pair (target/criminal)	Engage-racial	Engage-nonracial	Engage-justify	Engage-justify + racial	Distract	Ignore
Black/Black				*†		
White/Black	*†		*†	*†	*	
Black/White			*†	*†		
White/White	N/A		*†	N/A		

Note. * indicates significant difference from zero at $p = 0.01$ level;
†indicates significant difference from *ignore* at $p = 0.01$ level.

credible explanation, either alone or in combination with a racial rebuttal. The other strategies, including the purely racial strategy, are effective only for a White candidate. Also, Black targets have a smaller available range of strategies compared to a racialized White target. Specifically, for the White/Black pair, four out of the six strategies work. For either of the Black target pairs, only one or two out of the six are effective.

To verify these results, we also examined the effects on intended vote choice. Figure 11 in the Supplemental Material shows the intended vote choice estimates and their 94% confidence intervals plotted on the same –1 to 1 scale and side-by-side with the feeling thermometer variable.[42] The x-axis represents the post-rebuttal difference in the proportion of votes for the target candidate. Positive values indicate that the rebuttal benefited the attacker. As indicated by the overlap for each pair, there are no differences between vote choice and feeling thermometer effects. The effects on intended vote choice are measured with less precision, as shown by the wider confidence intervals for the vote choice estimates, but the pattern is similar.

For another robustness check of our results, we turn to the results of the preliminary study. As noted, this study has weaknesses not present in the main study. Nevertheless, it replicates the main results. For this study, we also use an adjusted alpha level of 0.01.[43] Figure 4 shows that *engage-racial* does not work well, but *engage-justify* does.[44] The major exceptions are *engage-racial* for White/Black is no more effective than zero (Figure 4) or than the other pairs ($p = 0.38$ compared to Black/Black and $p = 0.68$ compared to Black/White); and *engage-justify* for Black/Black is more effective than zero ($p < 0.01$, one-tailed), thus making that rebuttal effective across all pairs. As a result of these findings, some of the racial disadvantages that we observe in the main study are not replicated in the preliminary study.[45] Nonetheless, the main results of the main study—the effective use of credible accounts, the relative weakness of a racial rebuttal, and the ineffectiveness of *ignore*—are replicated by a study conducted on a separate sample with major variations on the same design.

Conclusion

To return to the main hypotheses we set out to test, we find evidence that credible accounts, either alone or in combination with a racial rebuttal, are the most consistently effective. Overall, this confirms the hypothesis that credible accounts are at least as effective as ones that emphasize race. We also find some evidence that calling attention to the racial nature of an attack is effective for a White target paired with a Black criminal, confirming the original Mendelberg (2001) prediction. Finally, there is some evidence that *distract* is effective, contrary to both frameworks, but this strategy is limited to one type of candidate (White/Black).

One result in need of explanation is the null effect of the purely racial rebuttal when offered by a Black candidate. This adds an important amendment to the Mendelberg (2001) hypothesis that calling attention to the racial nature of an implicit appeal is the most effective way to counter its negative effect. While such rebuttals may help White candidates, Black candidates are not afforded that benefit. The question remains why. The rationale behind calling out a racial appeal, according to the existing literature, is that doing so will bring racial considerations into conscious awareness, which will in turn lead most Whites to deemphasize racial considerations in their political evaluations. However, it is possible that calling out a racial appeal does more than just bring racial considerations into consciousness. It may also send signals about a candidate's traits. Perhaps Black candidates who use the purely racial rebuttal are perceived as less competent than White candidates who offer
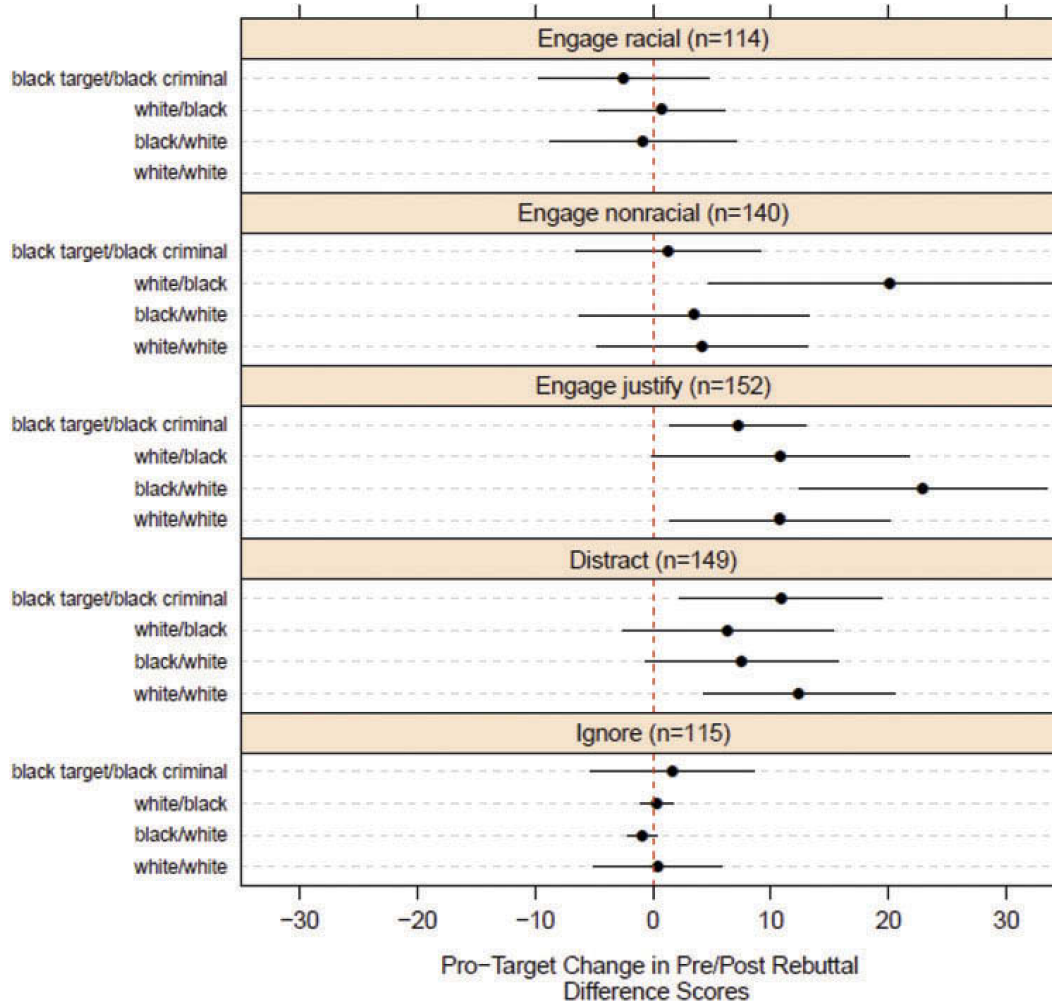
Figure 4. Effect of rebuttals, by rebuttal type (preliminary study). *Note*. Black lines represent 98% confidence intervals.

such statements. We do not find evidence for this. After respondents read the racial rebuttal, we asked them to rate the target's competence on a 4-point scale (1 = low competence, 4 = high competence).[46] The mean competence ratings of the target for respondents who were assigned to the racial rebuttal were 2.29 for Black/Black, 2.40 for White/Black, and 2.34 for Black/White, none of which are significantly different from one another.

Alternatively, given that successful recent African-American candidates like Obama or Cory Booker mostly try to "deracialize," a candidate who deviates from that strategy may be perceived as less viable. We do not have measures of viability, so this possibility awaits future research.

Another possibility is that the racial rebuttal may signal something about a candidate's ideology. Respondents may infer that Black candidates who employ such rhetoric are more liberal than White candidates who do the same. We do not find support for this. We asked respondents to rate the target's ideology on a 7-point scale (1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative) after the rebuttal.[47] The mean rating of the target's ideology after using the racial rebuttal was 2.85 for Black/Black, 2.83 for White/Black, and 3.16 for Black/White, none of which are significantly different from one another.[48]

The finding of *engage-racial*'s unequal effect adds to a number of recent studies mentioned in the literature review that show continuing bias in the evaluation of Black candidates. The findings reported here show that mentioning racism as a motive for an opponent's attack can be a profitable rebuttal strategy for a White candidate, but not for a Black candidate who hopes to win the support of White voters. Thus, Black candidates must navigate a campaign with one less tool at their disposal for defending themselves against attacks that they are likely to encounter when attempting to reach the highest offices in America.

However, the effect of a credible account for Black and White candidates alike points to a more optimistic appraisal of the public. The positive effects of *engage-justify* and *engage-justify + racial* are consistent with more optimistic assessments of the positive changes in Whites' evaluations of Black candidates (Goldman & Mutz, 2014; Hajnal, 2007). This study contributes to this line of research by suggesting that credible argumentation may help Black candidates, just as counter-stereotypical media coverage of the president or voters' experience with a Black mayor do. Consistent with Hajnal (2007), our results suggest that White voters are receptive to reasonable information.

Another contribution of this study is that it illustrates the importance of studying public opinion in a more interactive context. Although racial priming studies have contributed much to the study of campaigns, most of the findings come from experiments where respondents are exposed to only one elite message. There is an important reality of campaigns that receives little attention in these studies: Campaigns are two-sided battles of elite influence. Until now, no experimental study has examined how the racializing effects of an implicit appeal hold up when the opposing side makes other considerations salient. The findings presented here suggest that the power of racial appeals to influence voter attitudes may be smaller in a real campaign setting than they appear in the lab depending on the counter-message offered by the opposing side.

Finally, we consider the limitations of the results. First, the experimental design only tests a single-shot attack-response episode. The dynamics of further iterations are not investigated here. Second, although we weighted the data to match the national White registered voter population on age, gender, and educational attainment, it would be desirable to verify our results with a nationally representative sample, especially since our MTurk sample had a high number of educated young people—not the intended audience for an implicit appeal. It is also possible that educated respondents are more likely to be convinced by credible rebuttals. Also, such a sample is less likely to show anti-Black bias. Perhaps a nationally representative sample would demonstrate more bias against Black candidates' rebuttals. Third, this study is limited to campaigns in a primary setting and cannot draw conclusions about general election contests with opposing parties. Although our preliminary study replicated several of the key results for a general election, it suffered weaknesses that require discounting it. Further study is needed to test the generalizability to general election campaigns. Fourth, this study does not examine the effects of rebuttals offered by a candidate's surrogates. One example from the 2012 presidential campaign was Bill Clinton's denunciation of Mitt Romney's welfare ad claiming that Obama wanted to drop work requirements from welfare. Clinton responded by calling Romney's claims "misleading" before offering a factual-sounding rebuttal.[49] Surrogate rebuttals may matter particularly for Black candidates, who rely on surrogates (often White) when campaigning for White votes (Kinder & Dale-Riddle, 2012, p. 86). Finally, validation with actual candidates in a real campaign would be a useful next step.

In sum, the experiments presented in this article partially confirm, but also complicate, the conventional wisdom in the racial priming literature that calling out the racial nature of

an attack is an effective strategy for countering implicit racial appeals. Doing so may work for White candidates targeted by implicit appeals, but Black candidates must find another way to respond. The results suggest that a direct and convincing explanation of the facts of the case works for Black and White candidates alike.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher's Web site at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.969463

Notes

1. OkieCampaigns's channel (2008, September 5). *Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick / Obama ad* [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNyZ-cbPdoM

2. Mooney, M. (2008, August 1). Obama aide concedes "dollar bill" remark referred to his race. *ABC News.* Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Politics/story?id=5495348&page=2

3. *Mimic* is the strategy of signaling to voters that one is no less sympathetic to White voters' views than the other party, as Bill Clinton did when he condemned the musician Sister Souljah for her statements about the Los Angeles riots during the 1992 campaign. We set it aside because *mimic* is used less as a way of defending oneself against attack (which is the scenario explored here) and more as a way of going on the offensive (as Clinton did in his Sister Souljah comments).

4. Gewargis, N. (2008, July 31). McCain camp: Obama "playing the race card from the bottom of the deck" [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2008/07/mccain-camp-oba/

5. Rosenthal, A. (1988, October 24). Foes accuse Bush campaign of inflaming racial tension. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/24/us/foes-accuse-bush-campaign-of-inflaming-racial-tension.html? pagewanted=all&src=pm

6. Shear, M. S. (2011, April 27). Obama releases long-form birth certificate [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/obamas-long-form-birth-certificate-released/

7. We do not label the *engage-nonracial* as an implicitly racial rebuttal because in a White-White contest, it acts as a nonracial rebuttal.

8. Toner, R. (1988, October 20). Dukakis makes strong response to G.O.P.'s ads. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/20/us/dukakis-makes-strong-response-to-gop-s-ads.html

9. To be sure, other studies find that factual information produces little opinion change and in some cases leads to a backlash effect. The topics of such studies include the Iraq War and its rationales (Berinsky, 2007; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010) and immigration policy (Sides & Citrin, 2007). The null effects of factual information usually involve issues that the public already has firm (albeit uninformed) opinions about. In contrast, the significant effect of factual information occurs with lesser-known issues such as foreign aid and school spending. We expect that the campaign setting in this study more closely resembles a lesser-known issue: most voters know very little about state-level elected officials (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Therefore, credible information may influence opinion about politicians that voters know little about.

10. In other words, we assign Democratic respondents to a Democratic primary and Republican respondents to a Republican primary. Independent respondents are randomly assigned to either primary.

11. Questions appear in the order that they are described here. Complete question wording and ordering is included in the Question Wording section of the Supplemental Material.

12. This may be why John McCain did not make more use of the tactic in 2008 (Tesler & Sears, 2010, p. 55).

13. The faces used in the preliminary study are shown in Figure 1 of the Supplemental Material.

14. Wells is the sitting governor of the state, which explains how he could have issued a pardon.

15. Although Kilpatrick was arrested for assaulting a police officer, we added the detail about the officer requiring hospitalization. Our aim was to make the assault seem severe enough to capture respondents' attention in an Internet interview mode where that attention is scarce.

16. Since the target and criminal are manipulated to be either Black or White, the four possible combinations are Black target/Black criminal, White target/Black criminal, Black target/White criminal, and White target/White criminal.

17. Notice that no *engage-racial* or *engage-justify + racial* rebuttal is given in the White target/White criminal scenario because it would not make sense for a White target to offer a racial rebuttal when tied to a White criminal.

18. If we did not paint the White baseline face, morphing the White baseline face with the Black mixing face would yield a racially ambiguous face. It is important that the faces are clearly recognizable as Black or White in the experiment.

19. According to Oosterhof and Todorov (2008), dominance and trustworthiness account for 80% of social judgments, so there is little utility in measuring all nine dimensions.

20. See Supplemental Material section 9.8 for full text of each rebuttal condition.

21. Sterling, A. (2009, December 1). Huckabee calls criticisms over clemency "disgusting." *CBS News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-5854298-503544.html

22. Twenty-eight (3.7%) of the 766 subjects in the main study were not recruited from MTurk, but instead were recruited from the Princeton Survey Research Center's Mercer County (NJ) panel.

23. As a further check that the message functioned as a negative racial message, we examined and found a racial effect among subjects who answered all manipulation check questions correctly and whose resentment score fell in the top third of the sample (above 0.625).

24. Covariates are similar across the rebuttal conditions, verifying that the groups are equivalent before the treatment, thus meeting the ignorability assumption (Table 3 in the Supplemental Material).

25. For the contrast with White target/White criminal, each rebuttal is considered except those without a White target/White criminal condition, namely, *engage-racial* and *engage-justify + racial*, which are not realistic rebuttals for a White target paired with a White criminal.

26. Target/criminal pairs will be described using the target's race first and the criminal's race second. For example, "White/Black" refers to a White target associated with a Black criminal.

27. Put differently, the FDR adjustment controls for "the number of false discoveries as a proportion of the number of true discoveries" (Newson, n.d., p. 10).

28. The adjusted alpha level accounts for the 103 tests we conducted (22 comparisons to 0; 30 within-rebuttal comparisons [e.g., Black/Black *engage-racial* versus White/Black *engage-racial*]; and 51 within-pair comparisons [e.g., Black/Black *engage-racial* versus Black/Black *engage-nonracial*). For calculation details, see Appendix B of Larson-Hall (2009).

29. Confidence intervals are set at 98% (instead of 99%) for tests relative to 0 or to *ignore*, because predictions are directional (i.e., rebuttal effects are positive) and thus significance tests are one-tailed. We expect positive (and thus unidirectional) effects only relative to 0 and *ignore* (criteria 1 and 2), but not for within-rebuttal or within-pair comparisons (criteria 3, 4, 5, and 6).

30. As a simple illustration, imagine a respondent who dislikes the target and likes the attacker following the attack, but approves of the target's rebuttal and adjusts his post-rebuttal evaluation of the target upward and the attacker downward. If the respondent gave pre-rebuttal scores of 30 to the target and 50 to the attacker and post-rebuttal scores of 40 to the target and 35 to the attacker, the post-pre change in the difference score for that respondent would be 40 - 35 (which is the post-rebuttal difference) minus 30 - 50 (the pre-rebuttal difference) = 25—a strong endorsement of the target's rebuttal.

31. The only exception is White/Black *distract*, which is significantly more effective than 0 ($p < 0.01$, one-tailed), but is not significantly more effective compared to *ignore* ($p = 0.02$, one-tailed).

32. A test of each pair to the White target/White criminal pair (criterion 3) is not possible because we did not consider *engage-racial* or *engage justify + racial* to be a realistic strategy for

a White target tied to a White criminal. Also, significance tests are two-tailed since we do not have strong expectations that a White target's rebuttal will be more effective than a Black target's rebuttal.

33. The smallest *p*-values for any of these tests was 0.1 when comparing Black/Black versus White/White.

34. The smallest *p*-value for criterion 3 tests (White/White versus the other three pairs) was 0.06 for White/White versus Black/White.

35. The smallest *p*-value is 0.89 for White/Black versus Black/White comparison.

36. It is marginally more effective for the White/Black pair compared to White/White ($p = 0.03$). Black/Black and Black/White are no less effective compared to White/White ($p = 0.85$ and $p = 0.76$, respectively).

37. Two-tailed tests are used for *ignore* since it is a non-rebuttal and therefore is not expected to improve evaluation of the target.

38. *Ignore* is marginally less effective for White/White compared to Black/Black and to White/Black ($p = 0.07$ for each comparison, two-tailed test), indicating that when paired with a Black criminal, a target of any race may find it more beneficial to stay silent than he would if race was not a factor in the campaign. However, the marginal significance and lack of strong theory prevents us from drawing clear conclusions on this.

39. Figure 5 in the Supplemental Material shows the effect of the rebuttals on the pre-/post-rebuttal change in the target's feeling thermometer score. These results are similar to the feeling thermometer difference score analysis shown in Figure 3, which takes into account feeling thermometer ratings of the attacker. There are no significant differences at the 0.05 level between the difference score estimates and the target feeling thermometer estimates. Also in the Supplemental Material are Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9, which show the effects of the rebuttals on approval of the rebuttal and ratings of the target's trustworthiness, competence, and ideology. The results for these ratings look similar to the difference score estimates though they are weaker. Figure 10 in the Supplemental Material shows the effect of the rebuttals on voter turnout intention. None of the rebuttals appear to have a mobilizing effect.

40. The smallest *p*-value is 0.14 when comparing *engage-racial* to *engage-factual + racial*.

41. As noted earlier, all but *distract* are more effective than *ignore* (see Figure 4 in the Supplemental Material).

42. We use 94% confidence intervals because they correspond with a two-tailed test with alpha = 0.01 when examining overlap of their confidence intervals (MacGregor-Fors & Payton, 2013).

43. The adjusted alpha level accounts for the 82 tests we conducted (19 comparisons to 0; 27 within-rebuttal comparisons; and 36 within-race-pair comparisons).

44. Figure 12 in the Supplemental Material shows the effect of rebuttals compared to *ignore* for the preliminary study.

45. One key difference between the two studies that may explain this is the improved realism of the faces used in the main study (see Figures 2 and 3 in the Supplemental Material) compared to those used in the preliminary study (Figure 1 in the Supplemental Material).

46. The exact wording of the question was, "Think about Michael Wells, the governor who pardoned Jones. In your opinion, does the phrase, 'he is competent' describe Michael Wells extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?" The answer choices were 1 = extremely well, 2 = quite well, 3 = not too well, and 4 = not well at all. We reverse coded the answer choices so that 1 corresponds to low competence and 4 to high competence.

47. The exact question wording was, "Do you think of Michael Wells, the governor who pardoned Jones, as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, or extremely conservative?" The answer choices were 1 = extremely liberal, 2 = liberal, 3 = slightly liberal, 4 = moderate/middle of the road, 5 = slightly conservative, 6 = conservative, 7 = extremely conservative.

48. When we look only at those who are "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in politics and public affairs, the results do not change. This takes into account that some degree of political sophistication is necessary to understand the implications of ideological labels such as liberal or conservative.

49. Haberman, M. (2012, August 7). Bill Clinton slams Romney "misleading" welfare ad [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/2012/08/bill-clinton-slams-romney-misleading-welfare-ad-131405.html

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