

## White Residents, Black Incumbents, and a Declining Racial Divide

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*Despite the hopes of the civil rights movement, researchers have found that the election of African Americans to office has not greatly improved the well-being of the black community. This study focuses on the white community, however, and finds that black leadership can have a profound effect. Under black mayors there is positive change in the white vote and in the racial sentiments expressed by members of the white electorate. Although white Republicans seem largely immune to the effects of black incumbency, for Democrats and independents an experience with a black mayoralty tends to decrease racial tension, increase racial sympathy, and increase support of black leadership.*

Two questions have commanded much attention from scholars interested in black political representation in the United States. The first is whether white Americans will vote for black candidates (and why or why not). The second is whether African Americans, once elected, can improve the economic standing of blacks. Answers to both questions have generally been discouraging. Given the choice, the vast majority of white Americans will vote for a white candidate, even if it means switching parties.<sup>1</sup> Despite the success of a number of highly visible black candidates, such as former governor Douglas Wilder, former mayor Tom Bradley, and Congressman J.C. Watts, and despite the increasingly popular belief that race no longer plays a major role in the voting booth (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Swain 1995; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997) 70% to 90% of white voters will choose the white candidate in a typical biracial contest (Henry 1987; Lieske and Hillard 1984; Loewen 1990; McCrary 1990). Race still matters when white voters are faced with a black office-seeker.

Even when blacks are elected, their leadership does not greatly improve the economic well-being of African Americans at the city, regional, or state level. Studies suggest that black incumbents can modestly change local hiring policies and spending priorities (Eisinger 1982; Mladenka 1989), but these and other changes are not dramatic. The overall substantive effect on most members of the black community is negligible (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1990; Reed 1988; Singh 1998). According to Manning Marable, the election of African Americans “can be viewed as a psychological triumph, but they represent no qualitative resolution to

the crises of black poverty, educational inequality, crime, and unemployment” (quoted in Perry 1996, 6).

Some scholars interpret these results as proof of the ineffectiveness of black leaders (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1997; Reed 1988; Smith 1996). This conclusion, however, ignores the potentially positive effect of black representation on the white community in terms of racial attitudes, tolerance, and future voting behavior.<sup>2</sup> That is the focus of this study. The election of blacks to public office may not improve conditions for African Americans to the degree many may wish, but it may have less visible but equally consequential effects on white voters: educating them about black leaders, reducing white fears regarding the types of policies these leaders will enact, and improving race relations as a result. Does experience with black leadership change the racial attitudes, policy preferences, and voting behavior of white Americans?<sup>3</sup>

### THREE HYPOTHESES ABOUT WHITE POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

#### The Information Hypothesis

I argue that black political representation should significantly improve white attitudes toward African Americans and increase the likelihood that whites will vote for the black incumbent in the next election (even if s/he runs against a white challenger) because they have learned critical information regarding the degree to which black leadership will affect their economic well-being. When a black challenger runs for office, many whites fear that s/he will favor the black community over the white by redistributing income, encouraging integration, and generally channeling resources toward African Americans. As research shows, this does not happen. For the vast majority of whites, their world under black leadership is almost identical to

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<sup>1</sup> Although the vast majority of whites say in surveys that they will vote for a qualified black candidate (Schuman et al. 1997), experimental studies suggest that a candidate's race can and does affect the white vote in subtle and important ways (Reeves 1997; Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993).

<sup>2</sup> It also ignores the symbolic significance of black representation for the black community (Bobo and Gilliam 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Few systematic empirical studies directly address these questions. The most common view, based largely on the end of black leadership in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, is that whites continue to respond negatively to black incumbents (Abney and Hutcheson 1981; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1997; Sleeper 1993; see also Gay 1999 on congressional incumbents). Accounts from a few cities, however, contradict this negative view (Eisinger 1980; Pettigrew 1976; Watson 1984).

their world under white leadership. Once blacks have the opportunity to prove that their election does not harm white interests, white fear should decline, opposition to black candidates should diminish, and white attitudes toward blacks and black leadership should improve. Black representation, therefore, serves an enormously important although difficult to observe informational role. The greater the number of African Americans elected to positions of power, the more whites will learn about the effects of their leadership, the less they will fear it, and the more likely they will be to vote for black candidates in the future. Thus, the limited effect of black representation on the economic well-being of the black and the white community should have a profound influence on white racial attitudes and behavior toward black incumbents.

Why do white Americans fear black leadership? I argue that there are two reasons: limited first-hand experience with African Americans in positions of authority and a long history of racial conflict. Normally, voters have less information about a challenger than an incumbent, but when the challenger is black, information is even more sparse (Popkin 1995). Most whites have little first-hand experience with black representation and do not know what the consequences are likely to be. In short, uncertainty is a central feature of black challenger elections.

Because white voters have little or no personal experience with black leadership, they often rely on racial stereotypes for information about how African Americans are likely to behave once elected (Conover and Feldman 1989). This inevitably hurts black candidates' chances for white support. When whites know little about a candidate other than race, they rate blacks worse than whites on nineteen out of twenty leadership and personality characteristics; they view a black candidate as less trustworthy, less able to get things done, and even less intelligent (Williams 1990).

These stereotypes and the fears they produce are manifested in the white vote. When blacks first run for an office, the election tends to be more competitive than usual, turnout often exceeds normal levels, and partisan identification is often ignored (Lublin and Tate 1995; Watson 1984). The result is that most black challengers face a white population that votes in almost overwhelming numbers against them.

Once an African American is elected, however, whites obtain important information about the effect of black representation on their lives. They can now base their assessments on an incumbent's record rather than on stereotypes, exaggerated fears, or the incendiary predictions of white opponents. When whites do not lose their jobs, when blacks do not move into white neighborhoods in large numbers, and when black crime does not proliferate, voters learn their fears were groundless. A white resident of Los Angeles put it this way: "A lot of people were very suspicious and fearful before Bradley got in. But they never say anything now. I am sure they have changed their opinions" (U.S. News and World Report 1975).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In some cases the black incumbent may confirm white fears.

The election of an African American is especially important in the minds of white voters because it marks one of the first times that blacks have authority or control over the white community. When blacks have (or are perceived to have) the power to inflict harm on whites and choose not to do so, whites learn that black control does not mean their downfall. In many cases, the contrast between their fears and the reality is so stark that whites are forced to reevaluate blacks and black leadership. As a result, whites may vote for black incumbents even if they did not support them in the first election.

### **The Racial Prejudice Hypothesis: Enduring Racial Stereotypes**

It can be argued that black representation, no matter how positive its effect on the white community, will have no influence on white attitudes toward African Americans or white behavior toward black incumbents. If racial prejudice is the primary factor behind white opposition to black empowerment, as many suggest, then there is little reason to suspect that white views or behavior will change (Adorno et al. 1950; Allport 1954; Hurwitz and Peffley 1998). Racial stereotypes are simply too deeply ingrained (Devine 1989; Fazio et al. 1995) and too stable (Fiske 1998; Rothbart and John 1993) to be swayed by a single black politician who wins public office. Even if the words and actions of black incumbents do not fit racial stereotypes, whites can use an array of tactics to try to maintain their stereotypes and create cognitive consistency (Hamilton 1981; Macrae, Hewstone, and Griffith 1993). They can ignore events that disconfirm their current views or discount contradictory evidence as an exception to the rule (Macrae, Hewstone, and Griffith 1993; Weber and Crocker 1983). Given the intractability of racial stereotypes and the enduring nature of racial prejudice, it is possible that a single black politician cannot change the way whites think about race or the way they vote in black incumbent elections.

### **The Racial Threat Hypothesis: White Backlash**

Black leadership may have another and more alarming effect on white attitudes and behavior. If, as researchers from Blumer (1958) to Bobo (1983) have suggested, white Americans identify as a group and feel threatened whenever blacks are in a position to endanger the wealth and political power of the white community, then whites are likely to respond negatively to black incumbency. Black electoral victories can be seen as a direct threat, disrupting the traditional balance of racial power. The election of African Americans to important leadership positions should, in this case,

Marion Barry's tenure as mayor of Washington, DC, probably did not improve white views of black leadership. As long as the black incumbent does significantly better than whites fear, however, views of black leadership should improve.

heighten racial tension and result in widespread white backlash.

This prediction is supported by an array of white responses to black empowerment in the past. An increasing black presence in the local community has been linked to greater levels of racial conservatism (Glaser 1994), an increased sense of threat among whites (Fossett and Kiecolt 1989; Giles and Evans 1986), and increased white-on-black violence (Alt 1994). Similarly, challenges to white power and authority are associated with higher white voter turnout, widespread defection of whites from the Democratic Party (Lublin and Tate 1995; Watson 1984), and greater Republican Party identification among white voters (Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989).<sup>5</sup> Given this frequent pattern of black empowerment and white backlash, one might expect black representation to increase white racial intolerance and opposition to black incumbents.

## DATA AND MEASURES

To determine which of these hypotheses is accurate, I look at changes in white racial attitudes and policy preferences and white voting behavior before and after the transition from a white to a black mayoralty. Although each hypothesis should apply to any level of political leadership, I focus on the mayoralty for several reasons. First, the information hypothesis is most likely to be true at the mayoral level because most people know who their mayor is (Cole 1976), which is a necessary condition for it to hold. Furthermore, mayors often act unilaterally, whereas legislators must obtain majority support, which means that citizens can track a mayor's performance more directly. If the streets are cleaned, the mayor has done her job. If garbage piles up, the mayor can be blamed.<sup>6</sup> A black mayor, therefore, provides more information to white residents than would a black legislator and should have a greater effect on white attitudes. Second, tests of these hypotheses require a sufficient number of cases of black and white mayors in cities with different racial makeups to allow for empirical analysis. I chose the mayoralty level because of the large number of black mayors across the country. In 1992 there were 338, 37 of whom served in cities with a population of more than 50,000 (Joint Center for Political Studies 1994).

### Data

To assess changes in the racial attitudes and policy preferences of whites under black mayors, I use data from a pooled sample of the American National Election Study (ANES) from 1984 to 1992. The ANES contains an array of questions gauging white racial

attitudes and political orientation. By pooling samples from 1984 to 1992, I obtained an ample number of white responses from a wide variety of cities with a black or white mayor.<sup>7</sup> Details on the sampling, survey instruments, and other methods can be found in Miller and NES (1994). Data on the race of mayors and council members are from *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster* (Joint Center for Political Studies 1983–94). Other data on city characteristics, such as racial demographics and median income, are from the relevant Census publications (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990, 1964, 1994).

I also present data on the outcome of every black incumbent reelection bid in every city larger than 50,000 for 1965 to 1999, which I compiled from *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster* (Joint Center for Political Studies 1965–97) and local newspaper reports.

## Measures of White Racial Attitudes

I look for change in white views in three broad arenas of race relations: (1) perceptions of change in the status of blacks, (2) general feelings toward blacks, and (3) perceptions of racial group conflict. I chose these three because each addresses a critical aspect of the information hypothesis.

**Status of Blacks.** For the information hypothesis to be accurate, white residents must perceive the limited negative effect of black incumbents. Whites have to learn that racial change under a black mayor is not significantly faster or more threatening than racial change under previous white mayors. To measure the variable *Status of Blacks*, I examined white responses to the following question: "How much real change do you think there has been in the position of black people in the past few years?" (1 = a lot, .5 = some, 0 = not much at all.) The more whites feel that blacks are doing better or gaining on whites, the higher they should score on this measure.

**General Feelings.** If whites are not discounting the words and actions of black incumbents as isolated or anomalous events but are instead generalizing about the larger black community from their experiences, then this should be reflected in their overall views of the black community. When whites perceive that African Americans do not want to harm the white community, their feelings toward blacks should improve. In order to measure general feelings toward blacks, I examined white responses to all ANES questions that tapped views about the black community but did not relate to specific policy debates or ask directly about black-white conflict. There were five items: a feeling thermometer and four other statements.

The most general measure was a feeling thermome-

<sup>5</sup> For exceptions to this pattern, see Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998 and Kinder and Mendelberg 1995.

<sup>6</sup> A poll assessing views of mayoral power found that even in Washington, DC, a city with limited local autonomy, a large majority of residents believe the mayor "can control" or "exact influence" on almost every issue of concern to the city (*Washington Post*, June 11, 1978, A1).

<sup>7</sup> From this pooled sample I drew only respondents from cities or primary areas larger than 25,000. Among this subsample, 1,605 white respondents lived in 18 cities with black mayors. The racial composition of these 18 cities ranges from 10% to 76% black. Across the whole pooled sample, 6,543 respondents from 70 cities are represented.



ter, that is, how warmly or favorably whites felt toward blacks as a group, on a scale from 0 to 100. I reversed the scale to get a measure of *Antiblack Affect*. Since different respondents can assign very different meaning to the same value on a scale, I controlled for each respondent's feelings toward whites on a similar reversed feeling thermometer.<sup>8</sup> The result is a measure of how negatively respondents felt toward blacks as a group, relative to their feelings toward whites.<sup>9</sup>

There were four other general race questions in the surveys from which the pooled sample was drawn.

"It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites."

"Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcome prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors."

"Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve."

"Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class."

In each case, respondents were asked their degree of agreement with the statement (disagree strongly, disagree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, agree somewhat, and agree strongly).

On the surface, each question addresses a different issue (e.g., whether blacks work hard, whether blacks are distinct from other minorities), but all focus on a central element of race relations: the extent to which blacks face barriers in American society. The four questions are linked not only conceptually but also empirically. Because answers are highly correlated, with interitem correlation ranging from a low of .39 to a high of .59, I was able to create a *Racial Resentment* scale.<sup>10</sup> Responses to each question were ordered from least (5) to most (1) sympathetic to blacks.<sup>11</sup> Individual responses were then added together, and the scale was normalized to a 0–1 range.<sup>12</sup> The reliability of the scale

<sup>8</sup> Some respondents tend to be high raters and others low raters, so I also standardized responses by controlling for each respondent's mean score across an array of six feeling thermometer measures. The following results are almost identical with or without feelings toward whites controlled and with or without standardizing by the mean. The scale has a mean response of .55 (std. dev. = .10).

<sup>9</sup> This scale can also be viewed as a measure of prejudice (Allport 1954; Hurwitz and Peffley 1998). The more whites prefer whites as a group over blacks as a group, the more they can be seen as prejudiced.

<sup>10</sup> It is almost identical to a racial resentment scale developed by Kinder and Sanders (1996).

<sup>11</sup> Respondents who agreed with the last two statements were coded as racially sympathetic. Respondents who agreed with the first two statements were coded as unsympathetic.

<sup>12</sup> I tried two alternate tests to ensure the robustness of results. First, I repeated the following analysis with each individual question rather than the whole scale. Although statistical significance usually declined, there were few substantive changes to the results. Second, I used maximum likelihood estimation confirmatory factor analysis to develop a latent factor representing the main theme of these four questions. When I substituted the latent factor into the following analysis, the results were almost identical. Black leadership improves white views of the black community, no matter how those views are measured.

is high, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77.<sup>13</sup> If black leadership does change white views about African Americans as a group, then this should be reflected on both the antiblack affect and the racial resentment scale.

**Racial Conflict.** I also looked for change in perceptions of *Racial Group Conflict*. If black incumbents do not target the white community but instead serve the interests of many whites, then it is likely that white perceptions of racial conflict will decline. As a measure of this variable, I examined responses to the following question:

Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven't pushed fast enough. How about you: Do you think that civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving about the right speed? (1 = too fast, .5 = about the right speed, 0 = too slowly.)<sup>14</sup>

## The Model

To determine which of the three hypotheses of white political behavior (information, racial prejudice, or racial threat) is most accurate, I compare the attitudes of a representative sample of white respondents in cities with a white mayor to the attitudes of a similar sample of white respondents during the tenure of a black mayor, and I also look at the effect of the number of years during which black mayors served.

To ensure that any differences between black-run and white-run cities are a function of black leadership, I control for demographic and socioeconomic factors that are known or suspected to affect white racial attitudes. The model has the following control variables: personal socioeconomic characteristics: age, education, income, gender, employment status, home ownership, and the number of years the respondent has lived in the city. The contextual variables are: percentage of the city population that is black, level of urbanism, year of the interview, and residence in the South. All independent variables are coded 0 to 1 for ease of interpretation. I also include in each model a dummy variable for cities that are within twelve months after the transition to the first black mayor. I do so for two reasons. First, because there is usually heightened racial tension during the transition year, white respondents are likely to be less rather than more racially tolerant in the period surrounding the election. Second, whites have had little time to learn about the consequences of black leadership.

A possible confounding factor is white flight after the election of a black mayor. The rapid outmigration of a large number of whites could clearly affect the remaining mix of white racial attitudes under black incum-

<sup>13</sup> The scale is centered on a value of .60, which indicates that most white respondents were slightly more resentful than sympathetic on these questions. Scores are distributed normally. Standard deviation is .24.

<sup>14</sup> Although a broader array of questions might be preferred, this single item has real advantages. Bobo (1983) argues that this question is a key indicator of the state of racial conflict and shows that responses are significantly, if weakly, correlated with recent or imminent changes in local racial policymaking.

bents. Several factors suggest that this is not a significant problem. First, the rapid outmigration of whites was largely stemmed by the time these surveys were taken (Massey and Hajnal 1995). Between 1980 and 1990 in the cities included in this survey, the proportion of blacks increased only 2.3% in cities with black mayors and a relatively similar rate of 1.4% in cities without black mayors. Thus, attitude changes between 1982 and 1992 are not likely to be due primarily to white flight from black-run cities. Second, studies suggest that because of high moving costs, whites who leave cities tend to be younger and better educated (South and Deane 1993). The poor, older, and less educated whites who remain are more likely to be racially intolerant (Bobo 1983; Rieder 1985). Third, although race is often very important for interneighborhood moves, it is less relevant for moves into and out of metropolitan areas (Long 1988). Fourth, I

(Hajnal 1998) show that increases in aggregate white support for incumbent black mayors in 23 cities are not correlated with changes in the racial demographics of the area. Finally, as the tables below indicate, length of residence in the community is generally not significantly related to respondents' racial attitudes.

## RESULTS

Black officeholders do matter. As demonstrated by Table 1, on two different measures, whites who live in cities governed by black mayors have significantly more positive racial attitudes than whites who live under white mayors. First, under black mayoral leadership, both antiblack affect and racial resentment are lower ( $p < .01$ ). Second, as predicted by the information hypothesis, white perceptions of racial group conflict

**TABLE 1. The Effect of a Black Mayor on White Racial Attitudes**

	Status of Blacks (Ordered Logit)	Antiblack Affect (OLS)	Racial Resentment (OLS)	Racial Group Conflict (Ordered Logit)
Black Mayor (1 = yes, 0 = no)	.04 (.12)	-.02 (.01)**	-.04 (.01)**	-.21 (.12)
Education	-1.1 (.14)***	-.05 (.01)***	-.21 (.02)***	-1.5 (.16)***
Income	.05 (.16)	-.00 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	.04 (.17)
Age	1.7 (.20)***	.04 (.01)***	-.01 (.02)	1.2 (.21)
Gender (1 = male)	.03 (.08)	.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)**	.23 (.08)**
Ideology (1 = liberal)	-1.0 (.20)***	-.06 (.01)***	-.27 (.02)***	-2.1 (.21)***
Party ID (1 = Democrat)	-.30 (.13)*	.01 (.01)	-.02 (.01)	-.55 (.14)***
Employment status (1 = unemployed)	.04 (.22)	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.62 (.23)**
Years living in city	.23 (.12)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)*	.11 (.13)
Percentage black in city	.31 (.26)	.04 (.01)**	.13 (.03)***	.66 (.28)*
Level of urbanism	-.20 (.15)	.01 (.01)	-.07 (.02)***	.05 (.16)
South (1 = yes)	.55 (.10)***	.01 (.00)**	.03 (.01)*	.30 (.10)*
1986	-.23 (.14)			-.24 (.15)
1988	-.62 (.13)***	.02 (.01)***	.04 (.01)**	-.30 (.14)*
1990	-.84 (.15)***		-.04 (.01)**	-.24 (.16)
1992	-.84 (.12)***	-.02 (.01)***	.01 (.01)	-.38 (.13)**
First year of black mayorality (1 = yes)	.14 (.18)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.13 (.19)
Constant		.59 (.01)***	.88 (.02)***	
Intercept 1	-3.0 (.23)***			-4.1 (.25)***
Intercept 2	-.56 (.22)*			-.64 (.23)**
adj. $R^2$ /pseudo $R^2$	.14	.09	.21	.15
$\chi^2$	349			424
$N$	2,655	2,914	2,461	2,597

Source: American National Election Study, Cumulative Data File, 1984-92.  
Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors shown in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

also appear to be lower under black mayors (although the change is not quite significant). In short, white residents appear to learn something positive through their experiences with black leadership. The only area in which there is no apparent difference is in white perceptions of the pace of racial change, but that is exactly what one would expect from the information hypothesis. Whites should recognize that racial change under a black mayor is not significantly greater than under previous white mayors. Overall, the results in Table 1 strongly support the information hypothesis and largely contradict the racial stereotype and white backlash hypotheses.

### Alternate Specifications

Table 1 overlooks an important issue. Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, it is possible that the causal arrow is reversed. Cities with more tolerant white residents may be more likely to elect a black mayor. Although the available evidence seems to suggest that the presence of a black mayor depends much more on the size and resources of the black community than on the characteristics of the white community (Karnig and Welch 1980), I undertook several different tests to assess the link between a black mayoralty and white views. In each case, the results were the same: A black mayoralty results in less negative views of blacks and black leadership. The first test is a two-stage least-squares model, described in detail in Appendix A, which uses instrumental variables to address the question of causality. The overwhelming conclusion from this alternate test is that white views on race are significantly more positive under a black mayor than under a white mayor, even after considering the possibility of reverse causality.

As an additional check, I reanalyzed the data with a different sample of respondents. I included only whites from cities that have had a black mayor at any point in their history. Since all cities in this new subsample elect black mayors, any positive change in white attitudes under black leadership is less likely to result from intercity differences in racial attitudes and is more likely to be directly related to experience with an incumbent black mayor. This analysis reconfirms the results from Table 1. Using this more select group of cities, the analysis reveals once again that under black mayors antiblack affect declines, racial resentment wanes, and whites perceive less racial group conflict (analysis available from the author).

One last confirmation is to look at changes over time during the course of a black mayoralty in a city. On the one hand, if learning is the result of experience with black leadership, then white racial attitudes should not change overnight; instead, they should improve over time under a black mayor. On the other hand, if blacks are elected simply because whites in some cities are more racially tolerant than whites in other cities, then there is no reason to expect a positive change in white racial attitudes as the years under black leadership go by. The analysis of change over time is presented in the next section.

### When Do White Attitudes Change?

The results so far strongly support the information hypothesis. Black leadership appears to have a positive influence on the way whites view the black community. Yet, all the previous specifications compared respondents living in either black mayoral cities or white mayoral cities. If the information hypothesis is correct about experience with black leadership, then as years pass under a black mayor, whites should feel less and less threatened and should express increasingly positive racial attitudes.

I test this proposition by looking at the effect of a black mayoralty over time. The dependent variables are the same: the status of blacks, antiblack affect, the racial resentment scale, and perceptions of group conflict. The independent variable of interest in this case is the length of time a city has experienced a black mayoralty. In order to ensure that the results are not skewed by racially tolerant respondents from one or two cities with decades of black mayoral leadership, I normalize the years of black leadership in each city. Thus, in each city the length of time under black leadership is measured on a scale from 0 to 1; 0 is the first year a black mayor was elected, and 1 is the last year the city had a black mayor.<sup>15</sup> This allows me to compare respondents who have experienced varying numbers of years under of black leadership.<sup>16</sup>

As can be seen in Table 2, the results offer further support for the information hypothesis. First, white attitudes toward the black community improve over time under a black mayoralty. As the number of years under a black mayor increases, both antiblack affect and racial resentment decline significantly ( $p < .01$ ). Second, there appears to be some change in white views of the pace of racial change. While the change is not quite significant, whites in cities that have more experience with a black mayoralty tend to think black status is changing more slowly. In other words, white residents slowly realize that black mayoral leadership has not had a dramatic, negative effect on the well-being of the white community.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> To create the scale, I added up the number of years the city has had a black mayor (excluding any interim years in which a white mayor held office). I then calculated for each respondent the number of years the city has had a black mayor at the time of the survey. I then divide the latter number by the former. Thus, a respondent from Los Angeles who was surveyed in 1984 would receive a value of .55 (the 11th year of 20 total years of black leadership in Los Angeles). A Los Angeles resident surveyed in 1992 would receive a value of .95 (the 19th of 20 years of black leadership).

<sup>16</sup> As a secondary test, I repeated the analysis with a nonnormalized scale (the number of years under black leadership). The results were almost identical, but the level of significance of the effects of black leadership on white racial attitudes declined in some cases.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, white views closely mirror events surrounding the mayoral transition. White respondents who live in cities experiencing the transition from a white mayor to the city's first black mayor believe that African Americans have made significant gains. Over time, as the real effect of a black mayoralty becomes clear, whites come to realize that black gains have not been very significant. By the end of black leadership in a city, whites believe that the status of blacks is improving more slowly than it was before the onset of black mayoral leadership (not shown in Table 2).

**TABLE 2. How Time under Black Leadership Affects White Racial Views**

	Status of Blacks (Ordered Logit)	Antiblack Affect (OLS)	Racial Resentment (OLS)	Racial Group Conflict (Ordered Logit)
Years under a black mayoralty (1 = last year, 0 = first year)	-.88 (.48)	-.05 (0.2)**	-.15 (.04)**	.75 (.52)
Education	-1.3 (.29)***	-.05 (.01)***	-.22 (0.3)***	-1.8 (.33)***
Income	-.48 (.36)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (0.3)	-.05 (.39)
Age	2.2 (.44)***	.04 (.02)*	-.00 (.04)	1.4 (.48)**
Gender (1 = male)	.14 (.15)	.00 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.16 (.17)
Ideology (1 = liberal)	-.89 (.41)*	-.06 (.02)***	-.28 (.04)***	-2.5 (.47)***
Party ID (1 = Democrat)	-1.0 (.54)	.01 (.01)	-.02 (.03)	-.61 (.30)*
Employment status (1 = unemployed)	.09 (.54)	-.00 (.02)	.02 (.04)	.05 (.59)
Years living in city	-.07 (.27)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)	-.03 (.31)
Percentage black in city	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.08 (.04)*	.77 (.52)
Level of urbanism	.19 (.35)	-.01 (.01)	-.07 (.03)*	.38 (.40)
South (1 = yes)	.34 (.19)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)	.39 (.22)
1986	.04 (.36)			-.34 (.39)
1988	-.28 (.34)	-.02 (.01)*	.05 (.02)*	-.73 (.38)
1990	-.33 (.39)		-.02 (.02)	-.94 (.44)*
1992	-.35 (.42)	-.01 (.01)	.08 (.03)**	-1.6 (.47)***
Constant		.62 (.02)***	.96 (.04)***	
Intercept 1	-3.5 (.59)***			-4.3 (.65)***
Intercept 2	-1.2 (.57)*			-.61 (.61)
Adj. $R^2$ /pseudo $R^2$	.14	.08	.21	.20
$\chi^2$	101			138
$N$	669	800	800	622

Source: American National Election Study, Cumulative Data File, 1984-92.  
Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients with their standard errors shown in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

There is one area in which white perceptions do not change. As Table 2 shows, there is no alteration in white perceptions of racial group conflict. It may be that despite positive improvements in white racial attitudes, racial divisions remain quite large outside the arena of mayoral politics. Just how much or how little the racial divide over policy alters under black mayors is discussed later.

Overall, these results closely match anecdotal evidence about the transition in many of these cities. Maynard Jackson's mayoral victory in Atlanta, for example, was followed by a period of bitter racial confrontation. Only after the mayor played a pivotal role in breaking a strike of low-paid, mostly black garbage workers did he begin to receive more support from the white community. According to one advisor, this action helped make whites "less paranoid" (Scott 1977). Similarly, survey data in Birmingham suggest that racial tension increased immediately after the election of Richard Arrington as mayor (Russakof

1983). By the time he ran for reelection, however, Arrington and other local politicians were complaining that the national news media no longer covered the campaign because the city's mayoral politics lacked the racial animosity of old (Russakof 1983). In short, experience with black leadership matters.

### A Broader Effect: The White Vote

The onset of black leadership appears to signal the beginning of a real transformation in white racial views. This change is important in and of itself, but it begs a second question. Does the information that whites get from black incumbency translate into concrete changes in their behavior? If experience with black mayors teaches whites to be less fearful of blacks and black leadership, this should be reflected in the white vote. The heated white opposition that black challengers typically face should diminish after they become incumbents.



Several studies indirectly address this question at the local level. Each points to the same conclusion: White opposition to black challengers is much more pronounced than white opposition to black incumbents (Bullock 1984; Hajnal 1998; Vanderleeuw 1989; Watson 1984). An analysis of mayoral elections in 23 cities found that, on average, white support for the same black candidate increased by 25% when s/he became an incumbent (Hajnal 1998). Bullock's (1984) study of 52 elections in the Atlanta area found that black incumbents received more than twice as many white votes as black challengers. Watson's (1984) study of the transition from a white to a black mayoralty in eight major cities found the same pattern: Whites intensely opposed black challengers but supported black incumbents in large numbers. Based on 42 local elections in New Orleans, Vanderleeuw (1991) concluded that racially polarized voting in black incumbent elections was substantially lower than in black challenger elections. In short, it appears that many white voters do change their mind about black leadership.<sup>18</sup>

The reelection rate of black incumbents also can tell us a fair amount about how widespread is white acceptance of black leadership. The data displayed in Table 3 break down these contests by both the race of opponents and the racial demographics of the city. The table clearly indicates two important facts about incumbent black mayors. First, they are generally very successful in retaining office—78% win their reelection bid.<sup>19</sup> Second, and more important, even when white voters can control the election outcome and have the option of choosing a white challenger, black incumbents still do extremely well. In majority white cities against white opponents, they win reelection 74% of the time.<sup>20</sup> If white voters did not support black incumbents in large numbers, the figures in Table 3 would be very different.<sup>21</sup> More research on white

**TABLE 3. Incumbent Black Mayor  
Reelection Rates, 1965–98**

	All Opponents (n)	White Opponents (n)
All cities with incumbent black	78% (126)	83% (58)
Majority white cities	71% (46)	74% (27)
Minority white cities	83% (80)	90% (28)

Sources: National Roster of Black Elected Officials, local newspapers. The data include all cities with a population over 50,000.

voting patterns needs to be done, but the evidence presented here supports the conclusion that black mayoral leadership makes a difference in the views and actions of white voters.

### An Even Broader Effect: Racial Policy Preferences of Whites

The information hypothesis does not predict whether experience with black leadership will change white policy preferences. It simply claims that black control of the political process should allay white fears and improve white views of blacks and black leadership. The implication for policy preferences is unclear. Whites may feel less threatened by black leadership and be quite willing to vote for a black incumbent, but this may not affect how they feel about affirmative action programs that could cost them a job.<sup>22</sup>

Despite this ambiguity, it is important to look at white policy preferences. The well-being of the black community is, in many ways, tied to the policy preferences of whites, and the greater willingness of whites to support special assistance could have a dramatic effect on the status of blacks.<sup>23</sup>

To see whether white policy positions change under black mayoral leadership, I looked at three questions on racially explicit policy matters included in the survey for the ANES pooled sample. (1) Do you think the government in Washington should see to it that white and black children go to the same schools? (2) Should the government in Washington see to it that black people get fair treatment in jobs? (3) Should the government in Washington make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks?<sup>24</sup> The wording of the entire questions and descriptive statistics are given in Appendix B.

more white support than they received as challengers (Bullock and Dunn 1997; Swain 1995).

<sup>22</sup> If whites oppose race-based policies because of the costs and benefits involved, then black representation should have little influence on white preferences since it does nothing to alter the costs and benefits. If white policy preferences are driven by racial antagonism, then black representation may have an influence.

<sup>23</sup> An examination of policy preferences is a demanding test of just how much white views change under black leadership. Over the past few decades, surveys have shown tremendous progress in terms of white support for the principle of racial equality but a minimal increase in the willingness to support special programs to assist blacks (Schuman et al. 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Because these questions explicitly mention federal action, it is

<sup>18</sup> More descriptive studies reveal an equally dramatic and equally telling change in the tone of these elections as well (Eisinger 1980; Pettigrew 1976). Black challenger elections are often characterized as ugly, racialized affairs in which the choice is literally black versus white. Phrases such as "racist tactics," "race dominated," "highly polarized," and "race conscious" are common. In contrast, when black incumbents run, the election is more likely to be about their records, their styles, and the issue preferences of voters. Bids by black incumbents tend to be described as "surprisingly uneventful" races, with "ho-hum voters," "low-key amity among the candidates," and "almost dignified politicking" (quotations from newspaper accounts of elections in Flint, Michigan (1983), Memphis, Tennessee (1991), Los Angeles, California (1969), Chicago, Illinois (1983), and Atlantic City, New Jersey (1984).

<sup>19</sup> This figure is similar to the 84% reelection rate of all white mayoral incumbents between 1970 and 1985 (Wolman, Page, and Reavley 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Even when whites make up more than 70% of the population and should totally dominate electoral outcomes, they reelect black incumbents 78% of the time (80% of the time when they face white opponents).

<sup>21</sup> The same overall pattern can be observed at the congressional level. Although black challengers rarely win election in minority black districts (only 25 different black challengers have done so), once elected, black House members are nearly invincible. In minority black districts, these 25 incumbents have won reelection 97% of the time (82 out of 85 cases). Data from majority white and mixed districts also indicate that black House members win reelection with



**TABLE 4. The Effect of a Black Mayor on White Policy Preferences**

	School Integration (Ordered Logit)	Fair Treatment in Jobs (Ordered Logit)	Government Assistance to Blacks (OLS)
Black mayor (1 = yes, 0 = no)	.26 (.15)	-.20 (.19)	.02 (.01)
Education	.49 (.19)**	.99 (.23)***	.16 (.02)***
Income	-.26 (.22)	.57 (.26)*	-.01 (.02)
Age	-.41 (.27)	-1.4 (.33)***	.08 (.02)***
Gender (1 = male)	.05 (.10)	.40 (.12)***	.01 (.01)
Ideology (1 = liberal)	.88 (.28)**	.47 (.32)	.12 (.02)***
Party ID (1 = Democrat)	.34 (.18)	.50 (.21)*	.06 (.01)***
Employment status (1 = unemployed)	.10 (.28)	.92 (.41)*	-.01 (.01)
Years living in city	.16 (.16)	-.25 (.21)	-.01 (.01)
Percentage black in city	-.75 (.34)*	.08 (.42)	-.10 (.02)***
Level of urbanism	.22 (.19)	.20 (.24)	.04 (.02)*
South (1 = yes)	-.13 (.13)	-.01 (.15)	-.02 (.01)*
First year of black mayoralty (1 = yes)	-.31 (.24)	.01 (.27)	-.02 (.02)
1986			-.01 (.01)
1988		-.05 (.16)	-.07 (.01)***
1990	.10 (.15)		-.07 (.01)***
1992	.13 (.12)	-.03 (.16)	-.07 (.01)***
Limited government scale (1 = pro-govt.)	1.4 (.30)***	2.2 (.36)***	.39 (.02)***
Constant			.08 (.03)**
Intercept 1	.99 (.30)***	1.9 (.38)***	
Intercept 2	2.4 (.31)***	2.1 (.38)***	
Adj. $R^2$ /pseudo $R^2$	.08	.13	.21
$\chi^2$	118	168	
$N$	1,414	1,242	2,912

Source: American National Election Study, Cumulative Data File, 1984-92.

Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients with their standard errors shown in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 4 suggests that learning does not extend to the arena of racial policy. Black mayoral leadership appears to have no clear influence on white policy preferences. There is no link between a black mayoralty and white views on either affirmative action in employment or general assistance to blacks. The only issue for which there is some relationship is school integration, but even that is not significant ( $p < .10$ ). Moreover, I found no positive change over time in white views on school integration. In short, under black mayors, white views of blacks may improve, and whites may feel less threatened, but there is no greater willingness to support programs specifically designed to aid the black community.

A review of the policy debate in black-run cities seems to confirm this view. Despite years and often

decades of black mayoral leadership, whites and blacks in most of these cities continue to clash over minority contract set-asides, police behavior, public schools, and downtown versus neighborhood development (Rivlin 1992; Stone 1997). Tom Bradley may have won the majority of the white vote in Los Angeles, and he may have demonstrated that black leadership does not harm white residents, but his tenure did little to change white opposition to school busing or affirmative action (Sonnenshein 1993). As the riots in Los Angeles in 1992 so vividly attest, racial conflict can be reignited quickly, with or without a black mayor. In other words, there has been real, positive change in terms of the white vote and white racial attitudes, but there is still a long way to go before whites and blacks agree on what policies to enact.

### Racial Threat

A review of tables 1 and 4 reveals another interesting finding. In line with substantial research on racial

unclear whether answers reflect racial preferences or attitudes toward government. As at least a partial correction, I included as a control variable a scale that measures attitudes toward limited government. The results were little affected. A description of the scale is given in Appendix B.

threat (e.g., Giles and Evans 1986; Glaser 1994), the size of the black population has a strong, negative effect on both white racial attitudes and white policy preferences. A higher percentage of blacks in the city means greater antiblack affect, increased racial resentment, and a greater sense of racial group conflict as well as less willingness to support school integration or special assistance to blacks. The contrast between the effects of black mayoral leadership and a large black population is striking. Whereas the actions of blacks in positions of authority seem to quell white fears, a large black presence seems to increase racial tensions. This supports the view that the nature of interracial contact matters (Jackman and Crane 1986).

### Which Whites Change Their Mind?

To say that black leadership results in a significant positive change in white racial attitudes and voting behavior does not mean that all whites change their mind about blacks and black leadership. Despite their experiences with black mayors, many whites resist black leadership.

Given the different racial agendas of the Republican and Democratic parties (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1989) and the possible link between conservatism and antiblack affect (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981), one might predict that white Republicans will be more resistant to the information that black leadership provides, whereas white Democrats may be much more receptive. If so, one would expect that most if not all positive change in racial attitudes and voting behavior that occurs under a black mayor would be confined to white Democrats.

I tested this proposition by separating out the responses of white Democrats, Republicans, and party moderates to black mayoral leadership.<sup>25</sup> The dependent variables are the same racial attitude questions examined earlier. The only change is that in Table 5 I interact the years under a black mayor variable with dummy variables for Democratic and Republican party identification. Moderates become the baseline group. The coefficient for *Years Black Mayor* indicates how white moderates respond to time under black leadership. To determine how Democrats (Republicans) respond to time under black leadership, I add the coefficient for the *Years Black Mayor-Democrat* (Republican) interaction term and the coefficient for years black mayor.

Table 5 suggests that white Democrats, white Republicans, and white moderates respond differently to black leadership. First, the more time white moderates spend under black mayoral leadership, the more positive are their racial views. As the years go by, white moderates feel less antiblack affect and are less racially resentful. Second, these changes are as positive or more positive for white Democrats. Third, Republicans respond less positively to time under a black mayoralty.

On two of the four attitudinal measures, Republican views improve significantly less than those of moderates as the years under black leadership go by. When one adds the *Years Black Mayor-Republican* interaction term to the years black mayor term, the net result is almost zero in two cases, which suggests little to no change in the level of racial resentment and antiblack affect among white Republicans. In other words, Republicans' racial views do not change nearly as much as Democrats' views under black leadership over time.

The same pattern emerges if one simply compares whites in cities with either a black or white mayor, as was done in Table 1. White Democrats who have a black mayor have more positive views of blacks than do white Democrats who have a white mayor (data not shown). White moderates also have marginally more positive racial views under black mayors, but white Republicans' racial views change only marginally.<sup>26</sup> The same pattern is evident in the actual vote in mayoral elections that involve black incumbents. In the few cases in which voting data are broken down by both race and party identification, the evidence suggests that the bulk of the increase in white support for black incumbents comes from Democrats (Pettigrew 1976; Sonnenshein 1993). White Republicans, in contrast, tend to vote against black candidates, whether they are challengers or incumbents.<sup>27</sup>

The information hypothesis does not apply to all white voters equally. White Democrats and moderates appear willing to incorporate the information they receive from their experience with black leadership. For these two groups, the information hypothesis seems to account for their response. In contrast, white Republicans tend to be less open to change. The results in Table 5 suggest that some either ignore or discount the words and actions of black incumbents. Thus, for some white Republicans a racial prejudice or racial stereotype hypothesis of political behavior may be more appropriate.

In sum, black leadership has a polarizing effect on the white community. Democrats become more and more racially liberal, and Republican views stay largely the same. Indeed, the racial gap between white Democrats and white Republicans more than doubles in size under black mayoral leadership. Table 6 illustrates this growing gap by presenting the difference between mean Democratic views and mean Republican views

<sup>26</sup> This pattern could be the result of "racist" white Democrats defecting from the party, but two factors make this highly unlikely. First, since most Democratic defectors became independents rather than Republicans, any negative change could be expected to occur among independents, not Republicans. Second, the gradual defection of whites from the Democratic Party over time is unlikely to account for both the changes in white views under a black mayor and the changes over time in white views under black leadership, especially since each regression model includes a control for the year of the survey.

<sup>27</sup> Since most black candidates to date have been Democrats, this is not surprising. Nevertheless, it seems ironic that racial considerations are most consequential for white Democrats (see Hurwitz and Peffley 1998 on this point). Whether they support a black candidate seems to be greatly affected by their views of blacks and black leadership. In contrast, white Republicans are likely to vote against liberal, black candidates, no matter what their racial views.

<sup>25</sup> Moderates are self-identified independents or respondents who listed no party affiliation.

**TABLE 5. How Time under Black Leadership Affects the Views of Democrats, Republicans, and Moderates**

	Status of Blacks (Ordered Logit)	Antiblack affect (OLS)	Racial Resentment (OLS)	Racial Group Conflict (Ordered Logit)
Years black mayor	-.88 (.48)	-.08 (.02)***	-.18 (.04)***	.57 (.52)
Years black mayor × Democrat	.26 (.34)	-.08 (.02)***	-.07 (.04)*	.01 (.37)
Years black mayor × Republican	-.14 (.33)	.12 (.02)***	.14 (.03)***	-.42 (.36)
Education	-1.3 (.29)***	-.06 (.01)***	-.22 (.03)***	-1.7 (.31)***
Income	-.04 (.39)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.03)	-.04 (.38)
Age	2.2 (.44)***	.04 (.02)*	.01 (.04)	1.5 (.46)***
Gender (1 = male)	.14 (.15)	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.10 (.17)
Ideology (1 = liberal)	-.89 (.41)	-.06 (.02)***	-.28 (.04)***	-2.6 (.46)
Party (1 = Democrat)	-1.0 (.54)	.15 (.02)***	.14 (.05)**	-.95 (.58)
Employment status (1 = unemployed)	.10 (.54)	-.00 (.02)	.01 (.04)	.20 (.59)
Years living in city	-.07 (.27)	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.13 (.29)
Percentage black in city	.12 (.50)	.03 (.02)	.09 (.04)*	.01 (.01)
Level of urbanism	.19 (.35)	.01 (.01)	-.05 (.03)	.41 (.39)
South (1 = yes)	.34 (.20)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)	.38 (.21)
1986	.04 (.36)			-.46 (.38)
1988	-.28 (.34)	.02 (.01)*	.05 (.02)*	-.80 (.37)*
1990	-.33 (.39)		-.02 (.02)	-.94 (.42)*
1992	-.35 (.42)	.02 (.01)	.09 (.02)***	-1.6 (.4)***
Constant		.54 (.02)***	.88 (.05)***	
Intercept 1	-3.5 (.59)***			-4.7 (.65)***
Intercept 2	-1.2 (.57)*			-.95 (.61)
Adj. $R^2$	.14	.14	.22	.21
$\chi^2$	101			154
$N$	669	800	800	658

Source: American National Election Study, Cumulative Data File, 1984–92.  
Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients with their standard errors shown in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

across the same series of racial questions. As column one reveals, the gap between white Democrats and white Republicans in cities with a white mayor seems rather small. On two of the four questions, the difference is not even statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). But the gap increases dramatically under black mayors, and it more than doubles in all but one case. Black leadership means even greater division between Democrats and Republicans.

## IMPLICATIONS

Four lessons can be drawn from this study. The first and most obvious is that black representation does matter. Many have bemoaned the fact that black political leaders have not resolved the crises of black poverty, educational inequality, crime, and unemploy-

ment, and scholars interpret this as a sign of ineffectiveness (Marable 1992; Reed 1988; Singh 1998; Smith 1996). This study shows, however, that politics as usual under black representation can have a very positive effect on whites. Officeholding by African Americans may not lead directly to racial equality or a change in white policy preferences, but it appears to result in a fundamental change in the white vote and in the racial sentiments expressed by at least part of the white electorate.

Second, this transformation suggests that racial attitudes are not fixed in the minds of many whites but are apt to change as new information emerges. This is not to say that whites do not hold inaccurate racial stereotypes, only that a significant number are capable of change.

The third lesson is the critical role information can

**TABLE 6. Black Mayorality and Polarization of the White Community**

	Difference between Mean Democratic and Mean Republican View	
	Cities without a Black Mayor <sup>a</sup>	Cities with a Black Mayor <sup>b</sup>
Status of blacks <sup>a</sup>	-.01	-.08**
Antiblack affect <sup>a</sup>	-.01	-.03**
Racial resentment <sup>a</sup>	-.04**	-.11***
Sense of black threat <sup>a</sup>	-.06***	-.11***

Source: American National Election Study, Cumulative Data File, 1984–92.

Note: The difference between the Democratic and Republican mean is significant at \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . All dependent variables coded 0–1.

<sup>a</sup>Ns for Democrats range from 744 to 962; Republicans range from 654 to 848.

<sup>b</sup>Ns for Democrats range from 243 to 284; Republicans range from 273 to 299.

play in the racial arena. Whites often oppose a black challenger because they have little experience with blacks in office and are uncertain about how such leadership will affect their lives. Black incumbents who allay their fears are far more likely to receive white support. This suggests that black challengers should point to the past success of black officeholders. For example, if a black challenger can clearly demonstrate to white voters that election of a black mayor in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and other cities led to economic prosperity rather than decline, it may be possible to increase greatly the number of African Americans elected across the country.

The fourth lesson is that black challengers and incumbents do not face the same racial concerns and obstacles to electoral success. Certain studies find little evidence of antiblack voting (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Swain 1995), but it is important to note that they focus on black incumbents. Others find widespread antiblack voting (Loewen 1990; McCrary 1990), and it is equally important to note that they focus on black challengers. In short, researchers must understand that white support of black candidates may depend less upon racial tolerance than on whether the candidate is an incumbent or challenger.

Much of the debate on racial politics in America is too narrowly focused. On the one hand, pessimists repeatedly claim that there has been little or no progress in reducing racial divisions. They consider race and racial prejudice as the primary factor in American politics in general and in white voting preferences in particular (Bell 1992; Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1989; McCrary 1990; Reeves 1997). Robert Starks (1991, 217), for example, insists that “race is such an overriding factor in American life that to support its elimination or diffusion as a factor in elections through deracialization is folly.” According to pessimists, racialized voting patterns and the reason so few black candidates are elected outside of majority black places can be attributed to the fact that white voters cannot

overlook race. On the other hand, optimists see tremendous progress in the arena of racial politics (Swain 1995; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). “Whites not only say they will vote for black candidates; they do so” (Thernstrom 1995, A15). If racist voting occurs, it is prevalent only in isolated contests. A black candidate loses for much the same reasons as a white candidate loses.

The changes in white racial views that occur under incumbent black mayors suggest that the debate is addressing the wrong issue. The key question is not whether but when race is central in the mind of white voters. The arguments about progress on the racial front do not, in the end, help us understand how race operates in American politics. This research shows that race is a complex factor, and we need to find out when and why both “racist” and “color-blind” voting occur.

The overarching message of this study is one of caution and hope. On the one hand, we should not overestimate the effect of black representation. Racial policy still divides white and black America, as the data on policy preferences suggest. Racial conflict does not end with the election of African Americans, as recent riots in several major cities attest. All whites do not alter their views on blacks and black leadership, as the data on white Republicans show. Above all, the effect will remain limited unless more blacks are elected, a problem that is only slowly being rectified (Joint Center for Political Studies 1994).

On the other hand, there are signs of real progress. Every new black leader provides additional information to the white community and reduces fears of black representation in general. It is no longer possible to claim, as Sam Yorty did in Los Angeles in 1969, that the city’s police force will quit en masse if a black man is elected mayor. That did not happen when Tom Bradley was elected or in numerous other cases, so this type of threat no longer rings true. The positive trend in white racial attitudes over the past few decades is clear (Schuman et al. 1997). Black representation may not be responsible for all this change, but it can account for some of it.

What does this research imply about minority relations in the future? What will happen when the first black U.S. president is elected? What effect will more female, gay, Latino, or Asian-American incumbents have on attitudes toward these groups? In the end, expanded representation is unlikely to address all our ills, but if it can foster even slightly better understanding among groups, it is a goal well worth pursuing.

## APPENDIX A

In order to perform the two-stage least-squares analysis, I first devised a treatment or first-stage equation that modeled the presence of a black mayor in the city. In the first stage, five exogenous variables served as instrumental variables (black income per capita in the city, the percentage of black adults with a college degree in the city, the percentage of the city that voted Republican in the 1988 presidential election, the median income in the city in 1989, and the percentage of adults in the city with a college degree in 1990). These



instrumental variables fit the criteria proposed by Bartels (1991). First, according to Karnig and Welch (1980), they are among the strongest predictors of a black mayoral presence (aside from percentage black, which is clearly related to white attitudes). In the present data set they explain an additional 4% of the variation in the first stage. Second, they are, at least to a certain extent, exogenous. None of the instrumental variables is highly correlated with individual white racial attitudes in the survey ( $r < .15$ ), and omitted-variable Hausman tests suggest that the instrumental variables are, with one exception, not significantly related to white racial attitudes in the second-stage equation (analysis not shown). It is also important to note that there is little theoretical reason to expect that the five instrumental variables have a direct effect on white racial attitudes. Because I control for income, education, partisanship, and political ideology at the individual level, it seems unlikely that citywide measures of income, education, and partisanship would have any additional influence on white racial attitudes. The two-stage least-squares analysis confirms the results of the OLS analysis. As predicted by the information hypothesis, under black mayors white residents do not perceive any additional change in the status of blacks. Also, under black mayors antiblack affect, racial resentment, and sense of racial conflict all decline significantly ( $p < .05$ ). The results of the overall two-stage least-squares analysis are available from the author.

## APPENDIX B: CODING AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

**Education.** Coded as a six-category variable: 0 = completed less than 9th grade, .2 = 9–12 years, .4 = high school diploma, .6 = 1–3 years college, .8 = bachelor's degree, 1.0 = graduate degree. Mean = .61, Std. Dev. = .31.

**Age.** Age in years normalized to 0–1. Mean = .34, Std. Dev. = .22.

**Gender.** Coded as 1 = male. Mean = .46, Std. Dev. = .50.

**Employment.** Coded as 1 = unemployed, 0 otherwise. Mean = .04, Std. Dev. = .19.

**Ideology.** Coded as a seven-category variable: 0 = very conservative, .17 = conservative, .33 = somewhat conservative, .50 = moderate, .67 = somewhat liberal, .83 = liberal, 1 = very liberal. Mean = .46, Std. Dev. = .22.

**Partisan Identification.** Coded as a seven-category variable: 0 = strong Republican, .17 = weak Republican, .33 = independent/Republican, .50 = independent, .67 = independent/Democrat, .83 = weak Democrat, 1.0 = strong Democrat. Mean = .51, Std. Dev. = .34.

**Years Living in City.** Years of residence in municipality normalized. Mean = .29, Std. Dev. = .31.

**Percentage Black in City.** Percentage black normalized. Mean = .26, Std. Dev. = .19.

**South.** Coded as 1 = south, 0 otherwise. Mean = .26, Std. Dev. = .44.

**Urbanism.** Coded as a three-category variable: 0 = central city of 50 largest metropolitan areas, .50 = central city of other metropolitan areas, 1.0 = suburb of metropolitan area. Mean = .61, Std. Dev. = .28.

**Limited Government Scale.** Should government in Washington provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending? Should government

in Washington see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living? Mean = 48, Std. Dev. = 21. The reliability of the scale was reasonable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .48.

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