

Sex and Race: Are Black Candidates More Likely to be Disadvantaged by Sex Scandals?

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Abstract A growing body of work suggests that exposure to subtle racial cues prompts white voters to penalize black candidates, and that the effects of these cues may influence outcomes indirectly via perceptions of candidate ideology. We test hypotheses related to these ideas using two experiments based on national samples. In one experiment, we manipulated the race of a candidate (Barack Obama vs. John Edwards) accused of sexual impropriety. We found that while both candidates suffered from the accusation, the scandal led respondents to view Obama as more liberal than Edwards, especially among resentful and engaged whites. Second, overall evaluations of Obama declined more sharply than for Edwards. In the other experiment, we manipulated the explicitness of the scandal, and found that implicit cues were more damaging for Obama than explicit ones.

Keywords Race · Voting behavior · Stereotypes

Barack Obama's convincing win over John McCain in the 2008 presidential election has renewed interest in a scholarly literature that examines the extent of discrimination against African-American candidates and the ways in which white voters rely on racial stereotypes or sentiments. In this paper we examine a particular form of racial bias—the ease with which a seemingly nonracial negative message

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damages black candidates more than comparable white candidates. We find that the same scandal affects perceptions and evaluations of a black candidate more than those of a similar white candidate. Thus, we conclude that racial bias continues to operate in subtle ways.

While some evidence indicates that African-American candidates are disadvantaged simply because of their race, other work suggests that white voters' bias is manifested indirectly through ideological inferences about black candidates. We are interested in testing the latter hypothesis and investigating its moderating processes. We therefore investigate whether a scandal with racial undertones—even one that on its face has no ideological content and only implicit racial meaning—induces racially biased perceptions of candidate ideology. Specifically, we ask whether Barack Obama, as an African-American candidate, is more vulnerable to a sexual scandal than a comparable white candidate, John Edwards.

We choose to focus on sexual scandal in particular because racial stereotypes and sentiments have long had a dimension emphasizing blacks' sexuality (Mendelberg 2001). We test the hypothesis that white voters' racial predispositions may lead them to form politically damaging perceptions of black candidates as more ideologically extreme (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005). We also test the proposition that the message must be implicit rather than explicit in order to evoke racial bias.

Using experiments run with a national sample of whites during the pre-primary phase of the 2008 Presidential campaign, we find support for our hypotheses. While Obama does not suffer a greater overall decrease in approval from accusations of sexual scandal than Edwards in the sample as a whole, such accusations do produce significantly larger effects on his image as a “liberal.” These effects are especially large among citizens who are interested enough in politics to understand and apply the “liberal” label and therefore to make the connection between race and ideology. Among these more interested citizens, Obama does suffer a greater overall decrease in approval from the scandal. This racial disadvantage is present even though the scandal itself was not explicitly racialized. In fact, the effect disappears when the scandal is explicitly racialized. We draw implications for the 2008 election campaign, African-American candidates, and the “race card” more generally.

Do White Voters Penalize Minority Candidates Because of Their Race?

Are minority candidates hurt by racially biased voting? The evidence is divided on this key question. Abrajano et al. (2005) argue that racially polarized voting may be in decline. They find that voters are sensitive to the candidates' positions on issues and their ideology, not only to the candidates' race. Highton's (2004) analysis of 1996 and 1998 exit poll data provides support for this position, finding that white voters are not reluctant to vote for black House candidates. Similarly, while some studies (Berinsky 1999; Reeves 1997) have found evidence of a “Bradley effect”—the tendency for polls to over-report actual voting for black candidates—recent findings suggest this effect has diminished considerably or disappeared entirely (Hopkins 2009). In the 2008 election, there seemed to be no consistent over-reporting

of intent to vote for Obama, suggesting either that white voters did not feel motivated to hide race-based opposition to his candidacy, or that they did not have such opposition to hide (Keeter and Samaranayake 2007; Hopkins 2009; but see Stout and Kline 2008 for the opposite conclusion). Obama may therefore resemble Colin Powell, a politician who “transcended race” and was popular even among racially prejudiced whites (Kinder and McConaughy 2006; although see Hutchings 2009 for an alternative view).

However, other findings suggest that black candidates do suffer a racial bias. In an experiment Sigelman et al. (1995) found that Arizona whites evaluating black or Hispanic candidates perceived these candidates to be more concerned with disadvantaged groups and less competent than identical white candidates. Additionally, Terkildsen (1993) found that among whites in the early 1990s, black candidates faced a liability on account of their race as well as their skin color.

This mix of findings suggests that the effect of a candidate’s race may be subtle. Of particular interest to us, the Abrajano et al. (2005) finding that voters use race to make inferences about candidates’ ideology may indicate that perceived candidate ideology is related to group-based stereotypes. Berinsky and Mendelberg (2005) found evidence of this process in an experimental study: a negative story about a Jewish candidate boosted the inference that the candidate was liberal, and this perception in turn depressed positive evaluations of the candidate. This pattern did not hold for an otherwise identical non-Jewish candidate. McDermott (1998) obtained a similar finding in her analysis of evaluations of African-American candidates. She concluded that “... black candidates are stereotyped as more liberal than the average white male ... [and] are seen as more concerned with minority rights than whites... As a result, voters choose candidates for office based on how much they agree or disagree with the ideological and issue positions they attribute, through stereotyping, to candidates” (p. 1).

One possible explanation for the inconsistent findings regarding the impact of candidate race involves the information environment. According to Fiske and Neuberg (1990), for example, impressions form along a continuum, with category-based evaluations at one end and individual characteristics at the other end. The context of the situation is critical in determining how stereotypic the judgment will be. Consistent with this notion, Hajnal (2001) finds that black mayoral candidates initially encounter suspicion from white voters because those voters lack information about the candidates. However, as these candidates serve in office, information about their capabilities and non-threatening political agendas comes to reassure white voters. Additionally, Reeves (1997) found that whites bring their racial attitudes to bear on evaluations of black candidates only when race-relevant issues were raised in the campaign.

Cues in news and advertising can either boost or deflate the impact of white voters’ racial predispositions (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000). The media may therefore shape the availability of negative messages that prompt racialized reactions from white voters. Jeffries (2002) found that newspaper coverage of Doug Wilder’s statewide campaigns in Virginia made negative references to his race and was more negative than the coverage of his opponents. Terkildsen and Damore’s (1999) content analysis of newspaper coverage of the congressional elections of 1990 and

1992 found that media coverage highlighted the race of black candidates in these contests. These patterns are consistent with Hopkins' (2009) argument that a Bradley effect existed in the early and mid-1990s when race was salient in political discourse and diminished later on as the discourse became much less so.

In sum, existing work finds that white voters do appear to evaluate black candidates based on racial considerations under some conditions. This is consistent with findings that negative racial cues, even subtle or indirect ones, can activate white voters' racial stereotypes, fears or resentments in evaluations of white candidates who appear pro-black (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001, 2008a, b; Valentino 1999; Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002). Of particular relevance for our study, these racial stereotypes have long included a dimension of sexuality and political cues to race have referenced this dimension (McConaughy and White 2009; Mendelberg 2001; Jamieson 1992; Williams 1956; Giddings 1984). We extrapolate from these studies of evaluations of white candidates to evaluations of black candidates. When campaigns are deracialized, most white voters will ignore candidates' race. However, when campaigns provide racial cues to stereotypes or fears—particularly cues that are too subtle to trigger an egalitarian counter-reaction—many white voters may show evidence of racial bias.

In the remainder of this paper, we explore whether racial bias may be expressed in greater penalties for black candidates than for white candidates facing accusations of sexual scandal. Previous work has shown that sex scandals can hurt candidates for office (Stoker 1993). But here, we find that the same scandal can have different effects for white and black candidates. We also explore a possible mechanism for this effect: negative cues work by shaping more extreme ideological perceptions of black candidates. On their face, social and political stereotypes of groups bear no relationship to each other. However, studies have found that the two dimensions are related in voters' minds (e.g., Virtanen and Huddy 1998). For example, a Jewish candidate accused of "shady business practices," or in this study, an African-American candidate accused of sexual indiscretions, can evoke the political stereotype that the group is liberal. The reason is that the two traits—"shady businessperson" and "liberal" for Jews; "sexually promiscuous" and "liberal" for African-Americans—are linked in memory through the stereotype (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005).

We expect several moderators for the effect of subtle racial cues. First, we suspect that the perception of the candidate as liberal changes more among those who pay the most attention to politics, since this group should be more aware of the implications of ideological labels. It is a mainstay of the public opinion literature that many voters are "ideologically innocent"—they neither recall nor recognize the meaning of the terms "liberal" or "conservative" (Kinder 1983). But, as Converse (1964) demonstrated, this innocence does not extend to the entire population; some citizens are highly conversant in ideological terms. As we are interested in perceptions of targeted candidates as "liberal," we examine the extent to which voters use this label depending on their level of political sophistication.

Second, in line with the racial cue studies reviewed above, we expect that these cues will affect those who view blacks negatively to begin with most strongly because they will activate existing racial predispositions. Those who do not hold

negative attitudes about African-Americans should exhibit weaker effects since the linkage between race and the ideological label is likely to be weaker.

Finally, we expect that the racial cue works only as long as it appears to be nonracial. Mendelberg (2001) has shown that exposure to “explicit” racial messages—racial imagery accompanied by racial nouns—will produce a significantly weaker priming effect than exposure to “implicit” racial messages, that is, the identical racial images without racial nouns. The dichotomy between “implicit” and “explicit” is probably more of a continuum, with some visual cues too subtle to notice while others so loud they trigger the norm of equality even without racialized text (Valentino 2001). Our intent in the second study reported here will be to compare the effects of two points on this continuum; one low and one high.

Method

We explore the interaction between sex scandals and race with two real-time experiments embedded within national samples.¹ We contracted with YouGov-Polimetrix, Inc. to draw and interview the samples used in these studies. The key feature of our design is that it varies the racial candidate cue in the 2008 Democratic presidential nominating campaign and allows us to observe the response. The following analyses rely only on white respondents since the purpose is to measure racial bias against a black candidate.²

Respondents to both studies answered questions about their racial predispositions in a pre-test questionnaire. Four weeks later, they completed the second wave of the study, which contained the experimental treatment and the post-treatment questionnaire. Each of our experiments ran independently of other studies YouGovPolimetrix was performing at the time, and so there is little chance these results are “contaminated” by exposure to other stimuli from other studies.³ All subjects were thoroughly debriefed after completion of the studies so that they understood the stories they read were fictitious and that no presidential candidate had, at that time, been accused of sexual impropriety in the mainstream press (see footnote 8 for complete description of the debriefing procedure). Institutional Review Boards at three universities thoroughly considered the ethical implications of our study and gave their approval.

¹ YouGovPolimetrix uses sample matching. In this technique, a random national sample is drawn and serves as the “target” sample. Members of a large opt-in pool of participants who already have Internet access are then individually matched to elements (individuals) in the target sample. The opt-in respondents were matched to the target sample on gender, age, race, education, party identification and ideology. The key attitudinal indicators in our study matched other representative sample estimates very well. For example, the Racial Resentment mean in our study is .70 and in the 2008 ANES its mean is .62 (Tesler and Sears 2009). Since our goal is to measure the impact of a manipulation, and not to make precise point estimates of population opinion, we believe the Polimetrix approach is suitable. Random assignment to treatment and control groups means we can make strong, internally valid estimates of the effects of scandal.

² We do not have enough cases for an analysis of African-Americans and other non-whites.

³ We confirmed this fact with Vice President of Projects Samantha Luks. Our study was run as its own module. Thus any prior exposure to an experimental manipulation was not recent.

We first report on Study 1 ($N = 525$). (We will report on the particular design features and results of Study 2 in the subsequent section of the paper.) Study 1 randomly assigned respondents to one of three conditions (See Appendix for stimuli). Two conditions consisted of a fictitious news story about a sexual scandal involving allegations of infidelity implicating the targeted candidate. These two conditions were identical except that one referred to Barack Obama and showed him in a photo, and the other referred to John Edwards and replaced Obama's face in the photo with Edwards' face. Our study was conceived and run before (true) allegations of sexual impropriety were raised about Edwards. The control condition had a story about the Democratic contest that played up the drama of the campaign but did not mention any candidates by name. It was designed to elicit a level of interest to match the two treatment conditions but not introduce any information about specific candidates or about race.

We chose Edwards as our paired white candidate in order to hold constant as many extraneous factors as possible in the comparison of Obama and a white candidate. Edwards resembled Obama in age, marital and parental status, professional occupation as a lawyer, political experience, charisma, and ideology.⁴ In addition, even though Edwards was the Democratic party's Vice-Presidential candidate in 2004, he was about as well known to the public as Obama: in August 2007, a Gallup poll found that 19 percent of the public had no opinion or had never heard of Obama, compared to 17 percent for Edwards.⁵ The two candidates had similar levels of support: a Pew (2007) survey and a CNN/ORC (2007) poll conducted at the time of our study found similar support for Obama and Edwards, and very similar percentages of respondents indicated that each candidate had the "right experience to be President" (11 and 13%). Indeed, the respondents randomly assigned to our study's control condition viewed the candidates as nearly identical; in the control condition, the two candidates' ideology ratings are within 4 percentage points of each other, their feeling thermometer ratings are identical (51 out of 100 points on the 0–100 scale), and ratings of their leadership traits, including trustworthiness, are statistically indistinguishable (see Appendix for question wording).

Since we are interested in testing for subtle racial bias, the racial cue in our treatment is implicit according the definition developed by Mendelberg (2001). Implicit cues use words that are only indirectly linked to racial considerations (such as the phrase "inner city") or use visual images (Hurwitz and Peffley 2005; Mendelberg 2001; White 2007). In this study, the negative message about scandal is

⁴ While media coverage did not comment much on his personality in 2007, reports in 2004 emphasized Edwards' ability to connect well with the public and his photogenic appearance, much as it did for Obama in 2007–2008.

⁵ By contrast, only four percent of respondents had never heard of Clinton or had no opinion of her. The January wave of the 2008–2009 Panel Study, conducted by the American National Election Study, found that if anything Obama was more well-known than Edwards. In that survey 26 percent of respondents failed to express a preference about Obama, compared to 38 percent of the sample who neither liked nor disliked Edwards. When the experiment was conducted, Hillary Clinton was widely seen as the Democratic favorite, with Obama and Edwards competing as underdogs. The Pew Center for People and the Press conducted a series of trail heats from March 2007 through November 2007. In every one of these polls, both Obama and Edwards ran well behind Clinton.

racialized by including a photo of Obama—whose father was African—flanked by two white women (See Appendix).⁶ This visual image of a black man with white women is the racialized cue to the sexual scandal. In addition, the narrative of sexual indiscretion acts as an implicit racial cue when it implicates a black man. As we noted earlier, sexuality is a long-standing theme in white Americans' racial views. Our treatment story is consonant with the stereotype of African-Americans as sexually promiscuous, a statement that 42% of our white respondents endorsed as applying either “quite well” or “extremely well” while only 26% of respondents felt this way about white Americans.⁷ Note that though our implicit stimulus conforms to the standard definition, it is still quite strong. There is no confusing the fact that Obama, a black man, is with two young white women. The “volume” of this racial cue is such that we may run the risk of conscious recognition, and rejection of, the message as a result of viewers' sensitivity to racial norms. We agree this is a possibility, but if true this would dampen the effect of the news account. According to Mendelberg (2001) there should be no effect of the cue if it is recognized and rejected as explicit and “racist.”

Immediately after viewing the story in the second wave of the study respondents answered questions about Obama's and Edwards' ideology and they provided their overall candidate evaluation. (See Appendix for wording.) Respondents were fully debriefed at the conclusion of the experiment.⁸

Results

We first check that the manipulation worked as intended by seeing whether ratings of the candidate as “sexually promiscuous” were higher in the scandal story condition relative to the control condition (see the Appendix for question wording).⁹ The results were as expected. Mean ratings increase .10 and .13 respectively for

⁶ We refer to Obama as black or African-American throughout this paper as he has indicated that he perceives himself to be a black man (Obama 2004).

⁷ The phrasing of this item is: blacks (whites) tend to be sexually promiscuous, meaning they have sexual relations with a number of partners on a casual basis. Would you say this statement describes blacks (whites) extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all? Using a similar measure, McConaughy and White (2009) also found that about 40% of white respondents agreed with this view.

⁸ Specifically, respondents were shown a screen that read, “The articles you read at the beginning of this survey were written by University of Michigan researchers who wanted to test how people respond to news stories. These stories are completely fictitious and were created only for research purposes. The presidential candidates have not been rumored to engage in extra-marital affairs and the women described in the stories are completely fictitious. The researchers constructed these stories, including any photos that may have been included, in order to learn how people might react when different candidates are associated with sexual scandals. We wish to stress that the personal biographies of Senators Obama and Edwards were not accurately described in the story you may have read and there are no allegations that either candidate has been unfaithful to their spouse. Please do not, therefore, base your own evaluations of these candidates on the material you viewed in this study. Thank you for being a part of this university-sponsored study. Your participation and responses are completely confidential.”

⁹ To check that no campaign events confounded the experimental results, we checked trends over time. There is no systematic change with date of interview in the candidate feeling thermometer ratings in any of the conditions.

Obama and Edwards relative to their ratings in the control condition (each sig. $< .01$, scaled on the 0–1 interval, 1 = promiscuous).¹⁰

Ratings of Candidate Ideology

Our first substantive question is whether the scandal cue alters the ideological rating of the candidates. As we mentioned above, we believe evaluations of the ideological leanings of candidates may constitute the mechanism by which scandal cues will have their effect. If so, we would expect to see a negative relationship, overall, between “liberal” ratings and overall feeling thermometers. Indeed, in our sample as a whole, the correlation between Obama’s “liberal” rating and his overall feeling thermometer is $-.33$ ($p < .001$) and the corresponding relationship for Edwards is $-.39$ ($p < .001$). This suggests that if scandal cues move a candidate’s ideological ratings toward the liberal end of the spectrum, it will also depress his overall evaluations.

Our analysis follows a logic that is dictated by our experimental setup. We are interested in comparing and contrasting two effects: (1) the effect of the Obama scandal treatment on evaluations of Obama, contrasted against (2) the effect of the Edwards scandal treatment on evaluations of Edwards. Because we have a single control group and a dependent variable—an evaluation of a specific candidate—that is different for each of these effects, we cannot run a single pooled regression or ANOVA to estimate and compare the effects of our treatments. Instead, to see if the Obama scandal has a greater effect than the Edwards scandal, we examine three different comparisons. First, we ask whether the scandal cue increases the “liberal” rating of Obama in the Obama scandal condition relative to the “liberal” rating of Obama in the no-scandal control condition. This difference of means is the *scandal effect* between treatment and control. Its statistical significance is assessed with a t test. Second, we test the difference of means between the Obama scandal condition and the Edwards scandal condition, which we call the *race effect*. The significance of this too, is assessed with a t test. Third, we calculate a *race \times scandal effect* testing whether scandal–control for Obama is bigger than scandal–control for Edwards. This compares the effect of the scandal treatment for Obama (the mean “liberal” rating of Obama in the Obama scandal condition minus the mean “liberal” rating of Obama in the control) to the effect of the scandal treatment for Edwards (the mean “liberal” rating of Edwards in the Edwards scandal condition minus the mean “liberal” rating of Edwards in the control condition). To test the significance of the *race \times scandal effect*, we follow Cohen et al. (2002) and calculate a simple z -score based on the standard error of the difference between regression coefficients for the dummy variable of each treatment condition compared to the control group. Specifically, the z -score is calculated by dividing the difference in the two relevant

¹⁰ Randomization checks showed that the pre-treatment variables are equally distributed at $p \geq .10$ except for political interest. An F -test on level of interest is significant at $p = .004$ when interest is coded as high versus other, and is significant at $p = .015$ when interest is coded as low versus other. The ideology ratings are not affected by level of interest. We display results for the full whites sample and for those with higher interest only; we do so for theoretical reasons and because this guards against the confounding effect of interest.

Table 1 The impact of sexual scandal on perceptions of candidate liberalism

Condition	White respondents	Politically interested white respondents
Obama scandal	71% ($N = 98$)	74% ($N = 84$) ^a
Control	44% ($N = 126$)	48% ($N = 93$)
<i>Obama scandal effect</i>	27% (sig. = .001) ^b	26% (sig. = .001) ^c
Edwards scandal	64% ($N = 133$)	64% ($N = 105$) ^a
Control	48% ($N = 122$)	49% ($N = 95$)
<i>Edwards scandal effect</i>	16% (sig. = .005) ^b	15% (sig. = .02) ^c

Entries are the percent of each condition that consider the candidate to be liberal. Excludes “skipped” on candidate ideology. Sig. values one-tailed. To calculate the *race* × *scandal effect*, we compare the size of the effect of scandal (scandal minus control) for each candidate. We follow Cohen et al. (2002) and calculate a *z*-score based on the standard error of the difference between regression coefficients for the dummy variable of each treatment condition compared to the control group

^a The difference between the Obama and Edwards scandal conditions (*race effect*) is marginally significant among politically interested white respondents ($p = .08$)

^b The scandal effect for Obama is significantly different from the scandal effect for Edwards (*race* × *scandal effect*) among all white respondents ($p = .002$)

^c The scandal effect for Obama is significantly different from the scandal effect for Edwards among (*race* × *scandal effect*) politically interested white respondents ($p = .01$)

coefficients by the standard error of this difference. All significance values reported in this paper—be they derived from *t* or *z* values—are one-tailed. We make this choice both because our sample size is relatively small and because we pose exclusively directional hypotheses: Scandal cues should depress (not boost) evaluations of the candidates and we predict the effect will be larger for Obama than for Edwards.

To see whether the scandal message works particularly well on those who express some interest in politics and who are therefore more likely to draw implications about a candidate’s ideology, we present results for the whole white sample and then just among those white respondents who are “somewhat” or “very much” interested in politics.

Table 1 shows that the *scandal effect* is significant for both the entire white sample and for politically interested whites. The *race effect* (the difference between the scandal conditions) is not significant for the whole white sample but is marginally significant for the most interested whites, for whom the two scandal-tarred candidates differ by 10 percentage points ($t = 1.45, p = .08$). For both the entire sample and among the most interested, the *race* × *scandal effect* indicates an 11 percentage point gap in the effect of the treatment across the two candidates. This *race* × *scandal effect* is statistically significant ($z = 2.81, p = .002$ for all whites; $z = 2.31, p = .01$ for the most interested whites). Furthermore, as elaborated in footnote 14, no single partisan or ideological group is responsible for these effects. Thus, Obama is rated as more liberal with the scandal than without it by the whole sample and by the more interested; is rated marginally more liberal than Edwards among interested respondents exposed to the scandal story; and is rated more liberal than Edwards with versus without scandal by the whole sample and by the interested.

We also expected ratings of ideology to vary by respondents' racial predispositions, which we measure with the standard racial resentment scale. Racial resentment has been validated as a measure of anti-black predispositions (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Tarman and Sears 2005; Sears and Henry 2003, 2005) and has proved to be a powerful predictor of opposition to policy positions and candidates viewed as pro-black (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001; Sears et al. 2000; Valentino et al. 2002). Since the debate about the validity of racial resentment persists (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Feldman and Huddy 2005), we ran the analyses that follow using a racial stereotypes battery as a robustness check. The results across the two sets of analyses were very similar.¹¹

If the scandal cue does in fact play out in a racialized way, then white voters who hold negative attitudes toward blacks should respond more strongly to that scandal. In other words, a racialized cue should work more strongly among people receptive to it in the first place.

Table 2 provides the ideological ratings by low versus high level of racial resentment, where low is below and high is at or above the median of the racial resentment scale (see Appendix for wording and coding). The results are shown for (1) all whites and (2) whites who are most politically interested.¹² First, we see that for both high and low resentment respondents and across levels of interest, there is a statistically significant *scandal effect* for Obama ratings compared to the control. There is a moderately sized *race effect* among racially resentful respondents but not those who score below the median, for both the whole sample and the interested—Obama is rated more liberal than Edwards among those exposed to scandal ($t = 1.58$ and 1.32 , $p = .06$ and $.10$, respectively). Finally, the *race × scandal* effect shows that Obama ratings are more affected by the scandal than are Edwards ratings, among both the whole sample and the most interested—but only among the resentful ($z = 3.02$ and 2.04 , $p = .001$ and $.016$). That is, the effect of the scandal condition is larger for Obama than for Edwards only among those high in racial resentment. The magnitude of this effect is large for both the whole sample and for the interested. A much larger proportion of interested, resentful whites view Obama as liberal when exposed to the scandal (83%) than when in the control condition (54%)—a difference of 29%. In contrast, the equivalent effect for Edwards is only 15%: 72% of interested, resentful respondents see Edwards as liberal when he is the target of the scandal and 57% of them see him as liberal in the control condition. This overall pattern is consistent with our general expectations. The more racially resentful respondents are the ones most receptive to the scandal cue, and they judge

¹¹ Racial stereotypes have similar moderating effects as the racial resentment scale (see Appendix Table 6). As with our racial resentment analysis, respondents react more negatively to the scandal when it implicates Obama than they do when Edwards is invoked. Additionally, respondents in the high stereotype group react more negatively to the scandal than those in the low stereotype group. The stereotype measure is constructed by taking the averaged difference in agreement scores with “lazy” and “untrustworthy” stereotypes for items that ask separately about whites and blacks (see Appendix for question wording and details about scale construction).

¹² There is virtually no correlation between resentment and interest. The two scales are correlated at .02, which is insignificant in both a statistical and a substantive sense.

Table 2 The impact of sexual scandal on perceptions of candidate liberalism, by respondent’s level of racial resentment

Experimental condition	White respondents		Politically interested white respondents	
	Low resentment	High resentment	Low resentment	High resentment
Obama scandal	55% (<i>N</i> = 38)	82% (<i>N</i> = 60) ^a	59% (<i>N</i> = 34)	83% (<i>N</i> = 51) ^b
Control	37% (<i>N</i> = 52)	49% (<i>N</i> = 74)	39% (<i>N</i> = 38)	54% (<i>N</i> = 55)
<i>Obama scandal effect</i>	18% (sig. = .03)	33% (sig. = .01) ^c	20% (sig. = .05)	29% (sig. = .01) ^d
Edwards scandal	58% (<i>N</i> = 60)	69% (<i>N</i> = 72) ^a	56% (<i>N</i> = 55)	72% (<i>N</i> = 50) ^b
Control	34% (<i>N</i> = 50)	58% (<i>N</i> = 72)	39% (<i>N</i> = 39)	57% (<i>N</i> = 56)
<i>Edwards scandal effect</i>	24% (sig. = .01)	11% (sig. = .08) ^c	17% (sig. = .06)	15% (sig. = .05) ^d

Entries are the percent of each condition that consider the candidate to be liberal. Resentment = low if below median, high if at or above median of .67. Excludes “skipped” on candidate ideology. Sig. values are one-tailed

- ^a The difference between the Obama and Edwards scandal conditions (*race effect*) is marginally significant among all white respondents (*p* = .06)
- ^b The difference between the Obama and Edwards scandal conditions (*race effect*) is marginally significant among politically interested white respondents (*p* = .10)
- ^c The scandal effect for Obama is significantly different from the scandal effect for Edwards (*race × scandal effect*) among all white respondents (*p* = .001)
- ^d The scandal effect for Obama is significantly different from the scandal effect for Edwards (*race × scandal effect*) among politically interested white respondents (*p* = .016)

Obama to be more liberal as a result of exposure to it. Respondents below the median on resentment react similarly to the two candidates.

Candidate Thermometer Ratings

Next we examine feeling thermometer ratings of the two candidates. Table 3 shows that Obama suffered a larger penalty than Edwards for involvement in the same scandal. First, feeling thermometer ratings of Obama in the scandal condition are lower than they are in the control condition and this *scandal effect* is statistically significant for all whites and for the interested samples. The *race effect* between the scandalized candidates in the entire sample of whites is small and not statistically significant, but for the interested it is moderately sized (6 percentage points) and marginally significant (*t* = 1.35, *p* = .09). The *race × scandal effect* for the whole sample is only 2 percentage points and not statistically significant, but it is larger among respondents who pay at least minimal attention to politics: The effect of the Obama treatment is larger than the corresponding effect of the Edwards treatment by 7 percentage points (−8 for Obama compared to −1 for Edwards; *z* = 1.60, *p* = .06).¹³ These results provide support for our hypothesis that black candidates may suffer disproportionately for involvement in sexual scandals.

¹³ The treatment effect is not mediated by rating the candidate as liberal. The effects of the scandal are not significantly diminished for those who do not rate Obama as liberal. However, rating Obama as liberal does influence his overall feeling thermometer evaluation (mean rating if liberal = 40, mean rating if rated not liberal = 62, *t* = 6.05, *p* = .001) among white, interested respondents.

Table 3 The impact of scandal on overall candidate evaluations

Experimental condition	White respondents		Politically interested white respondents
Obama scandal	44 (<i>N</i> = 98)		45 (<i>N</i> = 86) ^a
Control	51 (<i>N</i> = 123)		53 (<i>N</i> = 91)
<i>Obama scandal effect</i>	-7 (sig. = .05)		-8 (sig. = .03) ^b
Edwards scandal	46 (<i>N</i> = 130)		51 (<i>N</i> = 103) ^a
Control	51 (<i>N</i> = 121)		52 (<i>N</i> = 92)
<i>Edwards scandal effect</i>	-5 (ns)		-1 (ns) ^b

Entries are mean candidate feeling thermometer ratings (from 0 to 100). Excludes “Skipped” on feeling thermometer. Sig. values are one-tailed

^a The difference between the Obama and Edwards scandal conditions (*race effect*) is marginally significant among politically interested white respondents (*p* = .09)

^b The difference between the scandal effect for Obama and the scandal effect for Edwards (*race × scandal effect*) is marginally significant among politically interested white respondents (*p* = .06)

Our next test is for the moderating impact of racial attitudes. Table 4 shows that the negative effect of the scandal is only statistically significant among white respondents who are at or above the median level of racial resentment. In the high racial resentment group, the *scandal effect* is moderately sized and statistically significant. The score on the feeling thermometer evaluating Obama for the whole sample and for interested white respondents is, respectively, eight or nine points lower for those in the treatment than those in the control group (*t* = 1.67 for all whites and *t* = 1.64 for interested whites, *p* = .05 for both samples). The gap among respondents with lower racial resentment scores is smaller and is not statistically significant. The *race effect* is in the expected direction though not significant. The *race × scandal* tests for both the low and high racial resentment groups also fall short of standard levels of significance (*z* = .74, *p* = .23 and *z* = 1.2, *p* = .12, respectively). In other words, among politically interested, resentful whites there is some hint that the scandal suppressed Obama’s feeling

Table 4 The impact of scandal on overall candidate evaluations by respondent’s level of racial resentment

Experimental condition	White respondents		Politically interested white respondents	
	Low resentment	High resentment	low resentment	High resentment
Obama scandal	59 (<i>N</i> = 39)	35 (<i>N</i> = 60)	59 (<i>N</i> = 35)	35 (<i>N</i> = 51)
Control	61 (<i>N</i> = 53)	43 (<i>N</i> = 70)	65 (<i>N</i> = 39)	44 (<i>N</i> = 52)
<i>Obama scandal effect</i>	-2 (ns)	-8 (sig. = .05)	-6 (ns)	-9 (sig. = .05)
Edwards scandal	57 (<i>N</i> = 58)	38 (<i>N</i> = 71)	60 (<i>N</i> = 52)	41 (<i>N</i> = 51)
Control	59 (<i>N</i> = 49)	45 (<i>N</i> = 71)	62 (<i>N</i> = 38)	44 (<i>N</i> = 54)
<i>Edwards scandal effect</i>	-2 (ns)	-7 (sig. = .09)	-2 (ns)	-3 (ns)

Entries are mean candidate feeling thermometer ratings (from 0 to 100). Resentment = low if below median, high if at or above median of .67. Sig. values are one-tailed

thermometer scores more than Edwards', but the difference in these effects was not significant.¹⁴ These results provide mixed support for our hypothesis about the moderating effects of racial resentment.

Implicit and Explicit Messages

So far we have looked only at a scandal with implicit racial cues. Previous work has shown that racial cues are often more powerful when they are subtle enough to avoid the perception that they are racist (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino et al. 2002; although see Hutchings and Valentino 2003 for an alternative view). In order to see if the particular effect on Obama is weaker in response to explicit cues, we examine data from a second experiment, which ran shortly before the first experiment we have just reported.¹⁵ Study 2 ($N = 1,000$) had the same control condition and the same anti-Obama scandal condition as Study 1. But Study 2 included a third condition—a racially explicit version of the anti-Obama scandal message.

The picture in the explicit version of the anti-Obama treatment is identical to the implicit version carried over from Study 1. However, the text of the treatment was different. The implicit version does not mention race textually and characterizes the woman implicated in the scandal as “Sally Smith, one of the women.” The explicit version, on the other hand, describes the woman as “Sally Smith, a white woman.” In addition, the explicit version adds to the commentary of an independent political consultant the following phrase: “I don’t know about this case, but I’ve seen situations in which black candidates engage in sexual indiscretions with young women. It isn’t pretty” (see Appendix). The words “white” and “black” render this message explicit in Mendelberg’s (2001) terms. The critical distinction between the two conditions is that in the implicit version the central message of the story is about infidelity and not race. However, in the explicit condition, race is emphasized

¹⁴ Consistent with the notion that racial resentment is measuring a racial predisposition is the fact that its moderating effects are not replicated by nonracial predispositions including partisanship or ideology. Also, there is no distinguishable difference between partisan groups. Respondent ideology moderates the effects but these are inconsistent and run in opposite directions for the two dependent variables in the paper (liberal rating and feeling thermometer). The scandal effect (Obama—control) on Obama ideology rating is very similar for conservatives (21 points, $p = .001$) and liberals (23 points, $p = .03$). The race effect (Obama scandal—Edwards scandal) is larger for conservatives ($91-77 = 14$ points, $p = .03$) than for liberals ($50-51 = -1$ point, not significant). On feeling thermometer ratings the scandal effect on Obama (scandal—control) is the same for liberals (-5 points, not significant) and conservatives (-5 points, not significant). The race effect (Obama scandal—Edwards scandal) approaches significance among liberals ($67-73 = -6$ points, $p = .09$) and but not among conservatives ($30-27 = 3$ points, not significant). Liberals and conservatives have statistically indistinguishable race \times scandal effects. We would like to address recent work suggesting that liberals are more susceptible to the effects of racial resentment (Feldman and Huddy 2005), but our sample size is too small.

¹⁵ This study ran in August of 2007 and used the same sampling procedures as Study 1. Randomization checks showed that the pre-treatment variables are equally distributed at $p \geq .10$. As in the first study, a manipulation check found that evaluations of Edwards and Obama as sexually promiscuous were significantly higher ($p < .01$) in both implicit and explicit scandal conditions than in the control condition.

unambiguously thereby forcing the reader to confront the *racial* implications of the scandal. Thus, while the visual cue is the same in the explicit and implicit versions, the textual invocation of the racial cue is different.

As Table 5 shows, we find that the Obama penalty on feeling thermometer ratings induced by the implicit message does not materialize for the explicit version. The ratings in the implicit condition are significantly lower than the ratings in the explicit condition, for both the whole sample and for the interested ($t = 1.83$ and 2.12 , $p = .04$ and $.02$). The effect of the implicit cue relative to the control condition is significantly larger than the effect of the explicit cue relative to the control condition, both for all white subjects ($z = 1.97$, $p = .02$) and for interested white subjects ($z = 1.70$, $p = .044$). In essence, the explicit message neutralizes the racial aspect of the scandal.¹⁶ These results confirm our expectations about the power of somewhat subtle, rather than highly overt, racial cues.

Conclusion

Do African-American candidates suffer a racial disadvantage with white voters? Using a simulated negative message administered in the pre primaries phase of the 2008 presidential campaign, we find that an identical scandal influences attitudes about Obama more than Edwards. The scandal causes Obama to be perceived as liberal more than it does with Edwards, particularly among the more politically interested and racially resentful respondents. It also produces a higher penalty for Obama in overall evaluations of the candidate, especially among whites who have at least some interest in politics. A negative story involving rumors of a sexual infidelity scandal hurts Obama more than it hurts Edwards in both a direct and immediate sense—on his overall favorability rating—as well as indirectly and potentially—through perceptions of his liberal ideology. The results are not limited to a particular partisan or ideological group. In these ways black candidates do seem to suffer a racial disadvantage with white voters.

The implication of our finding that a sexual scandal accusation against a black candidate causes him to appear more liberal is that it sets the stage for possible future attacks that he is “too” liberal. One way in which this could play out is that it could create an added vulnerability for him on issues on which he is to the left of the public. In Obama’s case, one such issue may have been health care reform in 2009 and 2010. Another such issue may have been the war in Iraq; in the 2008 campaign, Obama was criticized as too liberal for his early decision to oppose the invasion of Iraq. Relatedly, when terrorism is a salient issue, being perceived as liberal could be a liability for a leader in that it prepares the public to accept criticism of him as too

¹⁶ The *scandal effect* of the implicit anti-Obama scandal on feeling thermometer ratings in Study 2 replicates the *scandal effect* of the identical message in Study 1. We find a nearly identical *scandal effect* of -6 for the implicit condition relative to the no-scandal control condition (marginally statistically significant at $p = .09$, $t = 1.35$). On ratings of Obama’s ideology the scandal effect of the implicit anti-Obama scandal in Study 2 is 4 (ns) for the whole sample and 12 for the interested ($t = 1.29$, $p = .10$). Since we do not have the identical Edwards scandal condition in Study 2, we cannot compare Obama and Edwards in Study 2.

Table 5 Impact of Obama scandal with implicit versus explicit racial cues on overall evaluation of Obama

Experimental condition	White respondents	Politically interested white respondents
Scandal, race implicit	39 ($N = 71$) ^a	37 ($N = 48$) ^b
Control	45 ($N = 82$)	49 ($N = 58$)
<i>Scandal, race implicit effect</i>	-6 (sig. = .09) ^c	-12 (sig. = .02) ^d
Scandal, race explicit	47 ($N = 89$) ^a	48 ($N = 63$) ^b
Control	45 ($N = 82$)	49 ($N = 58$)
<i>Scandal, race explicit effect</i>	2 (ns) ^c	-1 (ns) ^d

Note: For the *implicit versus explicit* race cue comparison, we compare the size of the effect of scandal (compared to the control) for each type of cue. We follow Cohen et al. (2002) and calculate a simple z -score based on the standard error of the difference between regression coefficients for the dummy variable of each treatment condition compared to the control group. Entries are mean Obama feeling thermometer ratings (from 0 to 100). Excludes “skipped” on feeling thermometer. Sig. values are one-tailed

^a The *scandal, race implicit* and *scandal, race explicit* conditions are significantly different from each other among all white respondents ($p = .04$)

^b The *scandal, race implicit* and *scandal, race explicit* conditions are significantly different from each other among interested white respondents ($p = .02$)

^c The size of the scandal effects (implicit vs. explicit) among all white respondents is significantly different ($p = .02$)

^d The size of the scandal effects (implicit vs. explicit) among politically interested white respondents across candidates is significantly different ($p = .04$)

weak in fighting foreign threats (Gadarian 2008). Another way in which being perceived as liberal could hurt a black candidate indirectly is that the opposition campaign could portray him as generally out of step with the public, as John McCain’s campaign did in the closing days of the general election campaign by linking Obama’s position on the issue of taxes to a negative overall assessment of Obama. It is possible that appeals that characterize a black candidate as “too” liberal may resonate more than they would if the black candidate were white. That is, our results suggest that many whites are predisposed to view black politicians as liberal, and given the relative unpopularity of the label, this characterization may undermine their support.

Another implication of our results is that African-American candidates who manage to win elective office must contend with a more volatile white electorate. Thus, when confronting the inevitable challenges that all politicians face, black officials must be doubly careful to avoid perceptions of their actions that are consistent with negative anti-black stereotypes and racial fears and resentments. The stereotyped traits historically attributed to blacks that may damage black officials more powerfully include incompetence, corruption, and sexual promiscuity (Mendelberg 2001; Sigelman et al. 1995).¹⁷

¹⁷ We note as a caveat that our effects cannot distinguish between two types of racial effects, one due to stereotype of promiscuity, the other due to negative reactions to sexual relationships between black men and white women. Nevertheless, in either case our analysis rules out a nonracial explanation for the effects.

While we found effects on perceptions of Obama as “liberal,” and we found that such perceptions hurt Obama’s overall evaluation, it is possible that racial predispositions may damage black candidates and officials without affecting perceptions of their ideology. In our study, the effect of scandal on overall evaluations of the candidate does not require a shift in perceptions of his liberal ideology. Along these lines, other studies find that the stereotyped association between black candidates and incompetence, for example, holds for conservative as well as liberal black candidates (Sigelman et al. 1995). Thus it is possible that subtle cues may undermine support for black candidates more than for comparable white candidates even when the black candidate is not perceived as liberal.¹⁸

There are, however, limits to racial appeals. For example, an explicitly racial message against Obama produced no evidence of a racialized evaluation by whites. Previous studies show that voters are highly sensitive to the type of negative racial message about a black candidate. The results reported here suggest that, under at least some circumstances, implicit appeals are more effective than explicit racial attacks in their ability to racialize white voters’ responses to candidates.

Our study relied on exposure to a single news story shown once, and the negative information about the candidate was framed as a rumor rather than substantiated fact. In an actual presidential campaign, however, voters are exposed to many messages, and messages tend to be confirmed by the media or by trustworthy sources. We know that the larger the volume of messages the more effective they are (Johnston et al. 2004), and that the credibility of the source matters (Ladd 2005). It is likely that more stories would amplify the effects obtained here, that a real campaign would provide more than a single exposure, and that a message that is characterized as more than mere “rumor” would be viewed with more credibility. Still, the fact that we obtained a response using our single-shot, “rumor”-based design suggests that we may have located effects worth further research.

While Obama’s campaign seems to have succeeded in muting race as a factor in the election, it did so in an environment in which the opposition party was disadvantaged greatly by the severe economic crisis, the low approval of the incumbent president, and a substantial fund-raising edge. His winning margin under-performed some forecasts (Lewis-Beck et al. 2010). Our results suggest that notwithstanding electoral conditions unusually favorable to a candidate, some white voters continue to be responsive to racial cues. The political ground remains fertile for racialized messages, particularly if they are subtle.

Acknowledgments We thank Oleg Bespalov and John Lovett for valuable research assistance and Spencer Piston for helpful comments. Berinsky thanks the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences for research support.

Appendix

See Table 6.

¹⁸ All studies to date, including ours, have failed to examine black female candidates, and the application to their case remains uncertain given that stereotypes are gendered (McConaughy and White 2009).

Table 6 Impact of scandal on perceived liberalism and overall evaluation of candidates by respondent’s racial stereotyping (white interested respondents only)

Condition	% Liberal		Feeling thermometer (0–100)	
	Low stereotype	High stereotype	Low stereotype	High stereotype
Obama scandal	61 (<i>N</i> = 47)	90 (<i>N</i> = 38) ^a	52 (<i>N</i> = 46)	36 (<i>N</i> = 40)
Control	45 (<i>N</i> = 46)	52 (<i>N</i> = 46)	58 (<i>N</i> = 47)	48 (<i>N</i> = 45)
Obama scandal effect	16 (sig. = .07)	38 (sig. = .01) ^b	–6 (ns) ^c	–12 (sig. = .04)
Edwards scandal	64 (<i>N</i> = 61)	63 (<i>N</i> = 43) ^a	56 (<i>N</i> = 59)	43 (<i>N</i> = 44)
Control	54 (<i>N</i> = 46)	45 (<i>N</i> = 49)	49 (<i>N</i> = 46)	54 (<i>N</i> = 46)
<i>Edwards scandal effect</i>	10 (ns)	18 (sig. = .04) ^b	7 (ns) ^c	–11 (sig. = .05)

Stereotype = low if white respondents rated whites as less or equally trustworthy and diligent as blacks, high if white respondents rated blacks as less trustworthy and diligent than whites. Sig. values are one-tailed

^a The Obama and Edwards scandal conditions (*race effect*) are significantly different from each other for the % Liberal comparison (*p* = .01)

^b The difference between the scandal effect for Obama and the scandal effect for Edwards (*race × scandal effect*) is marginally significant among politically interested white respondents (*p* = .09)

^c The difference between the scandal effect for Obama and the scandal effect for Edwards (*race × scandal effect*) is marginally significant among politically interested white respondents (*p* = .08)

In Wave 1 (Pre-experimental)

Political Interest

Politically interested respondents are those who were “somewhat” or “very much” interested. Respondents who answered “Don’t Know” were excluded from analyses.

Some people don’t pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested or not much interested in the campaigns for the Democratic presidential nomination so far this year?

- Very Much Interested; Somewhat Interested; Not Much Interested; Don’t Know

Racial Resentment

A continuous scale averaging two items, with “Generations” reverse coded, coded 1 for most resentful, 0 for least resentful. The scale was used to create a median split to demarcate groups that were high (at or above .67) and low (below .67) in racial resentment. Approximately 50 subjects clustered at the median and added to the high-resentment group since the median was above the halfway point of the scale. Consequently, the high-resentment group was somewhat larger than the low-resentment group.

Now please tell me for each statement below whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly:

The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors (strongly agree/somewhat agree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree).

Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class. (strongly agree/somewhat agree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree).

Racial Stereotyping

A continuous scale averaging the difference between blacks/whites for both items, coded from -1 for most negative about blacks to 1 for most negative about whites with 0 as a neutral point. Two groups were created by categorizing those below 0 as high in racial stereotyping and those at or above 0 as low in racial stereotyping.

Where would you rate blacks (whites) on a scale of 1 to 7 , Where 1 indicates hard working, 7 means lazy, and 4 indicates most blacks (whites) are not closer to one end or the other. (Item recoded to $0-1$ with 1 being lazy.)

Where would you rate blacks (whites) on a scale of 1 to 7 , Where 1 indicates trustworthy, 7 means untrustworthy, and 4 indicates most blacks (whites) are not closer to one end or the other. (Item recoded to $0-1$ with 1 being untrustworthy.)

In Wave 2 (Post-Experimental)

Candidate Ideology

Now let me ask you a question about (Barack Obama / John Edwards): “Do you think he is a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

- Liberal; Moderate; Conservative; Don’t know

Candidate Feeling Thermometer

Now, I’d like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I’ll read the name of a person and I’d like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorable toward the person and that you don’t care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don’t feel particularly warm or cold toward the person [randomize names].

- Barack Obama
- John Edwards

Candidate Traits

Think about Barack Obama (John Edwards). In your opinion, does the phrase “he is trustworthy” describe Barack Obama (John Edwards) extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?

Does the phrase “he is hardworking” describe Barack Obama (John Edwards) extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?

Does the phrase “sexually promiscuous” (meaning he has sexual relations with a number of partners on a casual basis) describe Barack Obama (John Edwards) extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?

Stimuli

CONTROL CONDITION (Study 1 and Study 2)

POLL:NGPOINT



National News

NEWS ANALYSIS

Campaign Analysis: The Democratic Contest

By Jonathan G. Pratt, Times Staff Writer
August 10, 2007

WASHINGTON — The election for the Democratic presidential nomination is heating up faster than the weather in most of the early primary states this summer. With several months left until the first major primaries in January and February, Democratic Party voters have plenty to think about. The candidates are competing with each other for campaign contributions, and early fund raising may be more important than usual during this campaign, making things all the more dramatic.

Fund raising efforts are shaping up to be a big part of the election in both party primaries. Republican and Democratic candidates have been busy holding fundraising events. Most candidates have developed websites designed to solicit contributions. Many political consultants now believe that fundraising efforts may be decisive in the upcoming election. Democratic and Republican frontrunners have been reviewing and updating their strategies regularly throughout the spring to keep up with other candidates, and no candidate has been able to keep ahead of the others for long, suggesting that this might become a key part of the campaign. Regardless of how these efforts play out, Americans could be in for quite a political ride.

OBAMA SCANDAL CONDITION (Study 1) OBAMA IMPLICITLY RACIAL SCANDAL CONDITION (Study 2)

National News

NEWS ANALYSIS

Campaign Analysis: The Democratic Contest Gets Personal

By Jonathan G. Pratt, Times Staff Writer
August 10, 2007

WASHINGTON — The election for the Democratic presidential nomination is heating up faster than the weather in most of the early primary states this summer. With several months left until the first major primaries in January and February, Democratic Party voters have plenty to think about. A recent series of rumors on the Internet have made the campaign all the more dramatic.

Several popular Internet politics blogs have begun to circulate a story about various extra-marital affairs by Senator Barack Obama, one of the front runners for the Democratic nomination. The story, though unconfirmed, has led several pundits to begin to discuss the possible impact on the election if some of the women come forward. One of the women, Sally Smith, was a staffer for Mr. Obama during his most recent Senate race. To make matters worse for the candidate, he was spotted last year at a party at the Playboy mansion in the company of Ms. Smith. Though the party was a charity fundraiser, his attendance only increases suspicions.



Above, Obama with Sally Smith (right) and an unidentified woman (left) at a recent fundraiser

Sources close to the woman have suggested Ms. Smith will be holding a press conference in the coming days in order to explain her side of the story. Mark Gregory, an independent political consultant, commented "Depending on what this woman has to say, we could be looking at a situation in which allegations of sexual promiscuity are occupying the public and the news for several months during the campaign."

Other candidates have not commented about the allegations. Behind the scenes, Democratic Party leaders are reportedly hoping that this story goes away before the spring — one way or another. Family values are shaping up to be a big part of the election, however, in both party primaries. Republican as well as Democratic candidates have been trading barbs in debates and public speeches about the importance of traditional family morals. In this long campaign season, it is possible that other candidates may turn out to be vulnerable to charges of infidelity. Many political consultants now believe that morality may be decisive in the upcoming election. Regardless of how this particular rumor plays itself out, Americans could be in for quite a political ride.

EDWARDS SCANDAL CONDITION (Study 1)

National News

NEWS ANALYSIS

Campaign Analysis: The Democratic Contest Gets Personal

By Jonathan G. Pratt, Times Staff Writer
August 10, 2007

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Above, Edwards with Sally Smith (right) and an unidentified woman (left) at a recent fundraiser

OBAMA EXPLICITLY RACIAL SCANDAL CONDITION (Study 2)

National News

NEWS ANALYSIS

Campaign Analysis: The Democratic Contest Gets Personal

By Jonathan G. Pratt, Times Staff Writer
August 10, 2007

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Other candidates have not commented about the allegations. Behind the scenes, Democratic Party leaders are reportedly hoping that this story goes away before the spring — one way or another. Family values are shaping up to be a big part of the election, however, in both party primaries. Republican as well as Democratic candidates have been trading barbs in debates and public speeches about the importance of traditional family morals. In this long campaign season, it is possible that other candidates may turn out to be vulnerable to charges of infidelity. Many political consultants now believe that morality may be decisive in the upcoming election. Regardless of how this particular rumor plays itself out, Americans could be in for quite a political ride.

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