Wesley Hussey and John Zaller study the relationship between political parties and representation to determine whether parties are more responsive to their own agendas or to the policy preferences of their constituents. Their results are mixed in that political parties seem to take into account both public opinion and party goals. Before 1940, political parties were more responsive to the party agenda than to their constituents’ policy demands. In the modern era, legislators have better balanced voter concerns with party goals, though the authors argue that, in total, political parties tend to pursue their own agenda. In conclusion, this volume makes an important contribution to understanding who gets what from government and the politics of income inequality in America.

Reference


doi:10.1093/poq/nfs068
Advance Access publication 7 February 2013


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Many commentators were quick to anoint Barack Obama’s presidency as the onset of post-racial America. But does the election of the country’s first black president really mean the End of Race? The answer, according to Donald Kinder and Allison Dale-Riddle’s outstanding account of contemporary racial politics in America, is a resounding NO. Instead, the authors show that Obama’s race simultaneously activated both white opposition rooted in racial resentment and black support rooted in racial solidarity.

This book is not just an account of the 2008 election or even of racial politics in modern American society, though. Kinder and Dale-Riddle, in fact, begin The End of Race by putting forth a general framework for understanding group-based politics—one that extends to social cleavages other than race and to times and places other than the contemporary United States. Their self-described “Theory of Voting with Social Group in Mind” puts forth two key propositions: “First, social groups enter the voter’s decision either through identification with the in-group or through attitude toward out-groups. Second, the aspects of group identity and group attitude that become important in
voters’ choices—which aspects are activated—depend on political circumstances” (p. 8). Kinder and Dale-Riddle’s lucid theory, informed by decades of social science research, provides an especially useful framework for understanding the results yielded from their empirical studies of the political impact of race, gender, and religion.

The first of those studies examines the influence of race and gender in the historic contest for the 2008 Democratic nomination. Neither Hillary Clinton nor Barack Obama did much to highlight their quests to become the first female and the first black presidential nominee of a major political party, respectively. Obama and Clinton even tried to neutralize the respective influences of race and gender. Nevertheless, both candidates’ “embodiment” of underrepresented minority group status could have easily activated in-group solidarity and out-group antagonisms in response to their candidacies. The authors, however, convincingly show that race rather than gender was the primary cleavage in the primaries. Indeed, they found that Obama’s campaign elicited a huge racial divide, whereas Clinton’s candidacy produced only a modest gender gap. Moreover, racial solidarity was much more powerful in building black support for Obama than gender solidarity was in Clinton’s coalition. Finally, racial resentment was the dominant predictor of white opposition to Obama’s candidacy, whereas gender traditionalism did little to erode support for Clinton. Kinder and Dale-Riddle go on to make a persuasive case in their concluding chapter that race trumped gender in the 2008 Democratic nominating contest because the “political role of gender is softened, as the political role of race is not—by intimacy, by commonality of interest, and by diminishing inequality” (p. 162).

The End of Race begins its examination into the influence of social group membership on general election voting with an informative analysis of Catholicism in the 1960 election. The authors make it clear in this section that Kennedy’s religion—and the profound media attention to his campaign to become the first Roman Catholic president—activated a huge religious divide in Americans’ voting behavior. Not only was the Catholic-Protestant divide in 1960 presidential voting much larger than at any time before or since, but the authors show that this Catholic-Protestant voting schism was most pronounced between Catholics who identified strongly with their religion and Protestants who distrusted Catholic groups.

Much like Kennedy’s influence on the Protestant-Catholic religious divide in 1960, the authors argue that Obama’s embodiment of race activated an unprecedented gulf in presidential support between black and white Americans. Also like the religious divide sparked by JFK’s candidacy, the 2008 racial divide was particularly strong between blacks who scored high in in-group solidarity and whites harboring out-group resentment. Moreover, Kinder and Dale-Riddle show that the impact of racial resentment on white opposition to Barack Obama was considerably stronger than it had been in any other presidential election on record. This unusually strong race-based opposition to Obama
would have cost him the election, according to the authors, had the election-year fundamentals not so decisively favored his candidacy. Obama’s electoral “race-penalty” was so powerful, they claim, that his vote share should have been roughly seven percentage points higher, even after accounting for the estimated 2.2-point bump in his aggregate vote tally due to unusual black support and unprecedented African American turnout.

The role of social group membership need not be as powerful as it was for Kennedy and religion in 1960 or for Obama and race in 2008, though. After all, an essential premise of Kinder and Dale-Riddle’s theoretical framework is that the extent of group-based voting depends on political circumstances. The authors, for instance, argue that Colin Powell’s military background and counter-stereotypical behavior (e.g., Republican identification) effectively neutralized the influence of race—both black solidarity and white resentment—in Americans’ evaluations of him in the mid-1990s. Similarly, John Kerry’s Catholic faith failed to activate a significant Protestant-Catholic religious divide in 2004 presidential voting in an era where intra-religious conflicts tend to be more politically relevant than inter-religious ones. These cases help tell a more comprehensive story of when and why attitudes toward, and identification with, social groups come to influence political evaluations.

Of course, no book is perfect. More specifically, I am skeptical of the authors’ aforementioned race penalty estimate—an estimate that suggests Obama would have performed ten points better among whites had he been a typical (white) Democrat. Kinder and Dale-Riddle’s predicted vote model arrived at this estimate by replacing the logistic regression coefficient for racial resentment on the white vote in the 2008 American National Election Study (–3.79) with the resentment coefficient on Democratic presidential vote in ANES surveys conducted from 1988 to 2004 (–1.89). That model, however, fails to account for the fact that the y-intercept is dramatically higher for Democratic support in 2008 (logistic regression coefficient = 1.09) than it was in the all-white presidential contests between 1988 and 2004 (–2.39 averaged across years). This is problematic because any boost in support Obama received above and beyond the typical Democrat from racially sympathetic white voters—a boost the authors themselves expect occurred—would be reflected in that intercept shift. To be sure, the 2008 intercept could have also been affected by election-year fundamentals that favored the Democrats, such as the state of the economy. Yet the 2008 intercept presented in table 4.1 was still significantly more favorable to Obama in 2008 than it was to Bill Clinton in the pro-Democratic years of 1992 and 1996. And since even small decreases in the intercept from its 2008 levels would substantially alter Obama’s model-predicted white vote share, I am uncertain how much stock should be put into The End of Race’s provocative seven-point race penalty estimate.

Regardless of exactly how much race hurt Obama, though, the authors present a mountain of evidence showing that Obama polarized presidential vote choice by racial attitudes and race in 2008 more powerfully than any
other presidential election on record—a racialized polarization of the electorate that they show now extends into evaluations of Obama’s presidency. This evidence, especially when combined with the important theoretical insights of their “Theory of Voting with Social Group in Mind” and their nuanced applications of it to other politicians’ races, religions, and genders, marks a big advancement in understanding the importance of social groups in political behavior. This book is an absolute must-read, then, for anyone interested in the nature of group-based politics in general, and of contemporary racial politics in particular.

doi:10.1093/poq/nfs069
Advance Access publication 2 March 2013


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John Stuart Mill said: “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist” (Considerations on Representative Government, 1861). His adage appears more relevant today than ever before. Increasing rates of immigration are leading pundits, politicians, and scholars to claim that precisely such “fellow-feeling” is necessary for a free, secure, and prosperous society. Students of public opinion likewise attempt to identify the nature and character of Mill’s “fellow-feeling” and determine whether it is in fact essential for attaining such goods. The contribution that Schildkraut’s book, Americanism in the Twenty-First Century: Public Opinion in the Age of Immigration, makes to this question manifests itself on two primary levels. First, it examines whether the diversity engendered by immigration undermines the sense of “fellow-feeling” among the majority as well as the immigrants themselves. This issue is relevant not only to the United States but also to other traditional immigrant-destination countries, as well as to those in which the phenomenon is relatively new. Second, it focuses attention on the meaning of “Americanism” in a country that contravenes Mill’s contention that “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities.”

Schildkraut’s book comprises one of the most successful attempts to date to empirically address these two issues. Although numerous public-opinion studies have been conducted into the meaning of Americanism and attitudes