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Peer reviewed

# **Whitewashing: How Obama Used Implicit Racial Cues as a Defense Against Political Rumors**

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<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/polbehavior>.

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the United States elected its first president of African descent. At least initially, many interpreted Barack Obama’s historic victory as a sign that the country had finally overcome the long-standing racial divisions of its troubled past. Subsequent analyses concluded that this reaction was overstated. While Obama received 43% of the White vote during the 2008 general election, he would have done much better had a substantial number of White voters, including Democrats, not penalized him because of his race (Hutchings 2009; Piston 2010). In addition, Obama was plagued by persistent rumors questioning the legitimacy of his presidency. Specifically, some critics – known as “birthers” – argued that Obama was not a natural-born American citizen and thus ineligible to serve as president. Another rumor suggested that Obama was secretly a Muslim (Hollander 2010), undermining his support among a large fraction of the American public (Tesler 2016). Still, in spite of the ongoing rumors about his citizenship status and religion, he was successfully elected and reelected to the presidency. How did Obama’s campaigning strategies reduce, although not eliminate, his vulnerability on issues of race, citizenship, and religion? In this article, we provide an answer to this question.

Researchers have demonstrated that rumors designed to undermine the legitimacy of President Obama are inextricably linked to the racial divide in this country (Maxwell, Dowe, and Shields 2012). But if racial appeals helped to exacerbate these rumors, then they could also be utilized to neutralize them. We maintain that as then-candidate Obama was being introduced to a national audience his campaign reminded voters of his White mother and White grandparents to reassure White voters that he would not pose a racial threat (Price 2016), and to mitigate concerns that he would be too focused on race-specific

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4 policies advantaging people of color (Gillion 2016). Thus, we argue that the Obama  
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6 campaign pursued a two-pronged “Whitewashing strategy:” prioritizing appeals to, and  
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8 associations with, White constituents while minimizing visual associations with Blacks.  
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10 As evidence for this argument, we present the results of a content analysis of  
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12 advertisements sponsored by Obama and McCain in 2008. This comparison allows us to  
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14 test whether Obama’s use of the Whitewashing strategy was routine. We demonstrate the  
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16 effectiveness of the Whitewashing strategy with an original survey experiment on a small  
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18 convenience sample, and analyses of two nationally representative datasets, which  
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20 illustrate the power of the rumors that continued to plague Obama in 2012. Whites who  
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22 perceived Obama as mixed-race, as opposed to Black, had more favorable perceptions of  
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24 him, were more inclined to believe that he did *not* share common interests with African  
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26 Americans, and were less inclined to believe false rumors about his religion and foreign  
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28 origins.  
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36 Although other studies have explored how Obama’s political opponents appealed  
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38 to racial divisions in order to undermine his candidacy, we believe that this is the first to  
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40 examine how the Obama campaign leveraged those same divisions on behalf of his  
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42 campaign. We argue that when the Obama campaign drew attention to his White family  
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44 members and White supporters, he bolstered his status as a racial “insider” (i.e., closer in  
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46 proximity to Whiteness and “Americanness” (see Layman, Kalkan and Green 2014)) and  
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48 thereby undermined the false rumors. Our findings reveal that this strategy was most  
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50 effective among Republican or conservative voters, but Democrats were also influenced  
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52 by Obama’s visual associations with his White family and White supporters.  
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4 We do not believe Whitewashing is unique to Obama's 2008 candidacy and his  
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6 2012 reelection campaign; in the concluding section, we discuss how other multi-racial  
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8 candidates are incentivized to leverage a Whitewashing strategy. We also delineate how  
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10 this Whitewashing strategy diverges from and may be more successful than deracializing  
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12 strategies that simply deemphasize associations with African Americans.  
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### 19 Obama's Race and Political Legitimacy in the 2008 and 2012 Presidential Elections

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21 Barack Hussein Obama II officially announced his candidacy for President of the  
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23 United States on February 10, 2007 at the same site where President Lincoln gave his  
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25 famous "House Divided" speech in 1858. The location invoked a symbolic attempt to  
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27 bridge the partisan, ideological, and racial divides in the country. This would not be easy,  
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29 especially in the case of the racial divide. African Americans, who make up about 13% of  
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31 the U.S. population, and non-Hispanic Whites, who represent slightly less than two-thirds  
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33 of the population, differ markedly on partisan identification and candidate preferences as  
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35 well as on many racial and non-racial public policy matters (Abramson, Aldrich, and  
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37 Rohde 2009; Tesler 2016).  
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43 Given his name and racial background, the presidential hopeful faced a number of  
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45 electoral challenges. For example, many Americans believed that Obama was not a  
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47 native-born U.S. citizen, (Crawford and Bhatia 2012). Similarly, a significant fraction of  
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49 Americans erroneously believed him to be a Muslim despite repeated denials from the  
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51 Obama campaign (Maxwell, Dowe, and Shields 2012). Additionally, Devos and Ma  
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53 (2013) report that compared to Hilary Clinton, John McCain and British Prime Minister  
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55 Tony Blair, then-Senator Obama was implicitly viewed as less American. The authors  
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4 report, “[our results show] the relative difficulty people had seeing Obama as an American  
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6 was *a function of the extent to which he was construed as a Black person*” (pg. 221; italics  
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8 added). In short, the literature suggests that Obama’s racial background likely fueled the  
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10 false rumors about his country of origin and religion.  
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14 Because of the link between racial cues and these persistent rumors, the literature  
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16 suggests that Obama would be incentivized to downplay race – in a fashion consistent  
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18 with the deracialization strategy (Hamilton 1977; McCormick and Jones 1993; Orey and  
19  
20 Ricks 2007). According to this theory, Black candidates should avoid discussions of race  
21  
22 in majority-White jurisdictions in order to diminish the influence of negative stereotypes  
23  
24 that typically characterize them (Jones 2014; Williams 2003). However, Obama was not a  
25  
26 traditional Black candidate. As detailed in his memoir *Dreams From My Father*, Obama is  
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28 the child of a Kenyan foreign exchange student to the U.S. and a White woman from  
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30 Kansas (Obama 2004). He was born and raised in Hawaii, spent some of his formative  
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32 years abroad in Indonesia, and inherited his father’s African and Arabic names. These  
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34 traits may have heightened the extent to which some Americans viewed him as “foreign”  
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36 – making it more difficult to downplay racial fears by ignoring race.  
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43 Obama’s unique background may have also provided him with an opportunity  
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45 unavailable to a traditional Black candidate. Most notably, Obama’s mother and maternal  
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47 grandparents are White. Indeed, there is evidence that Obama’s biracial ancestry and  
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49 ensuing lighter skin tone may have mitigated some of the standard obstacles encountered  
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51 by Black political candidates. Researchers have shown that lighter-skinned African  
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53 Americans are evaluated more positively than comparable dark-skinned candidates  
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55 (Strickland and Whicker 1992), especially among political conservatives (Weaver 2012).  
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Moreover, Caruso and his colleagues (2009) report that study participants who were predisposed to agree with Obama were significantly more likely to view artificially lightened photos of the candidate as “representative” of his true appearance; conversely, participants who disagreed with Obama were far more likely to view the artificially darkened photograph as most representative. Finally, Sinyangwe’s (2012) analysis of Pew survey data finds that Whites who perceived Obama as mixed-race, as opposed to Black, had more favorable perceptions of him and were more inclined to believe that he did *not* share common interests with African Americans.

### Race, Partisanship and Ideology

We argue that White Republicans and conservatives should be most receptive to the Whitewashing strategy of a bi-racial candidate. This expectation flows in part from the work of Carmines and Stimson (1989), who argue that following the 1964 presidential contest the two major political parties became defined primarily on the basis of their stance on racial liberalism (see also Schickler 2016, who argues that this realignment occurred earlier). This literature suggests that White Republicans and conservatives are most concerned about threats to the racial status quo, and therefore should be most sympathetic to the Whitewashing strategy.

Additional work reinforces our view that partisanship and ideology moderate racialized views of Obama. For example, in a study conducted on a student sample during the 2008 general election, Nevid and McClelland (2010) found that negative implicit evaluations of Obama increased among conservatives, but not liberals, when the candidate’s image was artificially darkened (also see Caruso et al. 2009; Weaver 2012). In his examination of the factors that are associated with perceptions of Obama as mixed-



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4 race, Sinyangwe (2012) reports that the single greatest indicator among White  
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6 Republicans, but not White Democrats, is whether they believe that Obama shares the  
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8 values and interests of Blacks as a group. The more Obama is viewed as sharing this  
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10 perspective, the less likely he will be viewed as mixed-race (also see Wilton et al. 2017).  
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14 Lastly, numerous surveys have shown that conservatives and Republicans are much more  
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16 likely than liberals or Democrats to mischaracterize Obama's country of origin and his  
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18 religion (Layman et al. 2014; Maxwell et al. 2012; Sargent 2010).  
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21 While we expect the Whitewashing strategy to be most effective among White  
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23 Republicans and conservatives, we do not expect White Democrats and liberals to be  
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25 immune. For example, Hutchings (2009) finds that both liberals and conservatives exhibit  
26  
27 some form of anti-Black prejudice in their vote choice and racial policy preferences. Also,  
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29 Layman et al. (2014) report that exposure to subtle cues linking Obama to Islam led low-  
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31 information Republicans and Democrats to endorse the rumor about Obama's religion.  
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36 In summary, we argue that Obama was able to diminish, though not eliminate, the  
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38 power of the racially-tinged rumors associated with his candidacy by highlighting his  
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40 White family and by symbolically linking himself with the values and interests of Whites  
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42 as a group, while avoiding comparable associations with African Americans. This effort  
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44 did not go unnoticed by Democrats, but we argue that it was most effective among White  
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46 Republicans and conservatives — those for whom the effects of political rumors about  
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48 Obama were most pronounced. Of course, Republicans and conservatives are unlikely to  
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50 vote for a Democratic presidential candidate even if he or she had a more traditional  
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52 background. Thus, the political impact (i.e., effect on vote choice) of defusing the rumors  
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54 may have been greater on Democrats even as they were less likely than Republicans to  
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4 embrace them. Nevertheless, Obama garnered a non-trivial amount of electoral support  
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6 from Republicans and conservatives in both 2008 and 2012. According to the ANES, 8%  
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8 of White Republicans (including “leaners”) voted for Obama in both 2008 and 2012.  
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10 Among White conservatives, Obama received 17% of the vote in 2008 and 13% in 2012.<sup>1</sup>  
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12 We maintain that the prospect of acquiring the support of White Republicans and  
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14 conservatives likely encouraged the use of the Whitewashing strategy.  
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### 19 Data and Methodology

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21 We rely upon four separate datasets to investigate the scope and influence of the  
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23 Whitewashing strategy on Whites’ perceptions of Barack Obama. First, in order to assess  
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25 how broadly this strategy was employed, we engaged in a content analysis of a sample of  
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27 the televised campaign advertisements aired by Democratic presidential nominee, Barack  
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29 Obama, in comparison to his Republican counterpart, John McCain. Specifically, in May  
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31 of 2013, two undergraduate research assistants coded the racial imagery contained in forty  
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33 campaign ads – twenty each for Obama and McCain – run during the general election  
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35 phase of the 2008 presidential contest. The twenty ads were randomly selected from a  
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37 larger database available online at a website maintained by the Political Communication  
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39 Lab at Stanford University.<sup>2</sup> The database contained eighty-six ads from McCain and  
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41 seventy-six ads from Obama (see online appendix for additional details on the coding  
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49 <sup>1</sup> Although small, these figures represent a potentially pivotal fraction of the electorate.  
50 For example, in 2008 exit polls indicated that Whites made up 74% of the electorate, and  
51 (according to the ANES) about 60% of these voters identified as conservative. Thus,  
52 about 44% of the electorate was composed of White conservatives. If 17% of these voters  
53 supported Obama then this represents about 7% of the entire electorate – larger than the  
54 share of Latinos voting for Obama in this election.  
55

56 <sup>2</sup> The ads are available at <http://pcl.stanford.edu/campaigns/2008>. The director of the lab,  
57 Shanto Iyengar, indicates that they endeavor to compile all available ads sponsored by the  
58 major party candidates. He acknowledges, however, that there may be a bias in favor of  
59 ads that generate news coverage (personal communications, July 22, 2014).  
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4 scheme). Our goal was not to document all the ads run on behalf of the presidential  
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6 nominees but rather to gauge whether the racial imagery displayed in a random subset of  
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8 the Obama-sponsored ads were consistent with the Whitewashing strategy. If so, then at  
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10 minimum the Obama ads should contain few African American images and a  
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12 disproportionately large percentage of Whites relative to a comparable set of ads  
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14 sponsored by McCain.  
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19 Second, in order to assess the effect of the Whitewashing strategy on White voters'  
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21 perceptions of Obama, we rely on three data sets: a randomized experiment on the 2008  
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23 Obama "Country I Love" campaign ad fielded on a small convenience sample of non-  
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25 Hispanic Whites (N=122), and two representative national surveys – one administered on  
26  
27 the Internet and another involving an in-person interview. Our Internet-based survey  
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29 experiment was conducted using subjects drawn from Amazon's Mechanical Turk  
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31 (MTurk). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the  
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33 study. Subjects were restricted to U.S. residents and were paid a nominal fee for their  
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35 participation. We conducted our survey experiment on MTurk from August 3<sup>rd</sup> through  
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37 August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011.<sup>3</sup> As is often the case with MTurk workers, Democrats dominate the  
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39 sample (50%). Republicans represent 21% of our sample. The remaining 29% of subjects  
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41 identify as Independents or expressed no party preference.  
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50 First, subjects in the experiment were asked to answer a series of pre-treatment  
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52 questions concerning their demographic characteristics, partisanship, and racial attitudes.  
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57 <sup>3</sup> Our study was conducted over two years after President Obama had been inaugurated.  
58 The fact that he had been in office this long likely undermined the credibility of the  
59 disqualifying "birther" rumor in particular. As a result, we view this experiment as a  
60 conservative test of our central hypothesis.  
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4 Several distractor questions were also included to minimize the possibility that racial  
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6 attitudes were primed during the pre-treatment phase of the questionnaire. Next,  
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8 respondents were randomly assigned to view one of two campaign advertisements, with  
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10 the goal of isolating the impact of racial imagery on Whites' beliefs about rumors  
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12 surrounding Obama's birthplace and religion. The first official Obama campaign ad  
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14 during the general election phase of the campaign, entitled "Country I Love," serves as the  
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16 foundation of the experiment.<sup>4</sup> The "Country I Love" ad is the embodiment of the  
17  
18 Whitewashing strategy. It consists almost exclusively of Barack Obama, his White family,  
19  
20 and his White supporters.<sup>5</sup> Thus, we refer to it as the *Whitewashing* ad.  
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26 We refer to the baseline version (omitted condition) of the ad as the *Race-Neutral*  
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28 ad. In the Race-Neutral ad, we remove all images of Obama's White family and White  
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30 supporters. The only racially identifiable individual in the ad is Barack Obama at various  
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32 stages of his life (e.g., as a child, college student, and presidential candidate). In place of  
33  
34 the images we removed, we inserted images of suburban streets, industrial plants, the  
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36 capitol dome in Washington D.C., and soldiers in full military gear with their racial  
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38 characteristics entirely obscured. The Race-Neutral ad was designed to reflect a plausible  
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40 Obama appeal that does not rely on images of Obama's White family and White  
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42 supporters.  
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53 <sup>4</sup> This sixty-one second ad was first released on June 19, 2008 in 18 states, where it aired  
54 approximately 15,759 times (See  
55 [http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/advertising/ads/6477960--barack-obama-the-](http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/advertising/ads/6477960--barack-obama-the-country-i-love-60)  
56 [country-i-love-60](http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/advertising/ads/6477960--barack-obama-the-country-i-love-60)).  
57

58 <sup>5</sup> In one brief still image, Obama is shown addressing a group of individuals during his  
59 time as a community organizer in Chicago. The black-and-white image is fleeting, but the  
60 crowd appears to include a racially diverse group of people.  
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Each ad includes the original narration without modification, as shown in Table 1. So even in the Race-Neutral ad, where we remove White imagery, there are still verbal references to Obama's mother and maternal grandparents. The images accompanying the original ad are listed as the Whitewashing condition in the second column of Table 1, and the images for the modified ad (or control condition) are listed in the last column. Again, the expectation here is that emphasizing the candidate's White ancestry and White supporters will significantly reduce, relative to the Race-Neutral ad, the propensity to view Obama as a Muslim and as a non-U.S. born citizen.

[Table 1 about here]

There are two points worth emphasizing about the information contained in Table 1. First, the manipulations are subtle. Since the narration is constant, the only difference between treatment and control group is the substitution of a few innocuous images for equivalent pictures. Second, the narration itself is full of implicit racial cues, as a number of political commentators noted at the time of the ad's release. Throughout the ad, Obama utilizes language that was arguably designed to disassociate him from common stereotypes historically linked to African Americans. For example, the candidate very deliberately provides examples of his work ethic, Midwestern values, love of country, as well as references to his White family members, specifically his single mother and grandparents. In fact, he credits his grandparents and their Kansas roots for the values he holds, including but not limited to "accountability and self-reliance, love of country, [and] working hard without making excuses." Price (2016) finds that these references to Obama's White grandparents trigger thoughts about the "greatest generation," effectively reminding people of his proximity to Whiteness.

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Aside from providing viewers with biographical information, patriotism and responsibility are two reoccurring themes in the advertisement. *Washington Post* reporter Chris Cilizza (2008) described the ad as an attempt to shield Obama from rumors about his patriotism, background, faith and values. Another political reporter, Ben Smith at *Politico*, opined that “at the center of [the ad] is the Americanness of his life, and a tacit combat against the notion — *perhaps the central challenge to his campaign* — that he's ‘other’” (Smith 2008, italics added). As Cilizza (2008) noted, the ad attempts to assure voters of one simple message: “Barack Obama is just like you. He knows what it's like to start with little and work your way up, he loves his country, he loves his family.” Thus, given the subtlety of the manipulation and exposure across conditions to the same implicit racial messages in the narration, we believe this experiment represents a difficult test of the Whitewashing hypothesis – all the more so since this experiment was conducted two years into Obama’s administration, and after releasing copies of his birth certificate (Crawford and Bhatia 2012).

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If we are correct that Obama minimized his vulnerability with respect to rumors about his birthplace and religion by changing perceptions of his racial heritage and loyalties, we should see evidence of this not just in an experimental setting but also in the public at large. Specifically, those Whites who perceive Obama’s heritage to be mixed-race (rather than Black) and perceive him as resisting racial favoritism (rather than favoring Blacks at the expense of Whites) should be less likely to believe that Obama is Muslim or born outside the United States; moreover, this pattern of findings should be concentrated among White Republicans and White conservatives. In order to subject these expectations to empirical scrutiny, we analyze two nationally representative datasets: the

American National Election Studies' (ANES) Evaluations of Government and Society Study (EGSS) 4 and the 2012 Time Series Study.<sup>6</sup> All data were weighted for national representativeness and we focus only on self-identified non-Hispanic White respondents (N=1,038 and 918, respectively).

## Results

### *Campaign Ads, 2008*

In order to assess how broadly candidate Obama employed the Whitewashing strategy we conducted a content analysis of presidential ads aired during the general election phase of 2008 campaign. We hypothesized that Obama would systematically over-represent Whites in his ads and that African Americans would be rarely depicted, even relative to his Republican opponent, John McCain. These results are presented in Figures 1A and 1B. In six of our twenty ads, we found that no people were shown other than the candidates. We therefore present our results in two ways: excluding these six cases from the denominator or with all twenty ads included in the denominator. Consistent with our expectations, we find that the Obama campaign routinely overemphasized Whites in his presidential advertisements. Figure 1A shows that almost all, or 92%, of the discernible faces in Obama ads were White – at least when excluding ads with no individuals other than the presidential or vice-presidential candidates. This figure far

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<sup>6</sup> The former is a nationally representative sample survey conducted over the Internet between February 18 and February 23 of 2012. Although the questionnaire was administered over the Internet, respondents were recruited through traditional address-based sampling and random-digit dial telephone procedures. Additionally, respondents who did not already have an Internet connection were provided with a free notebook and Internet service. The face-to-face 2012 ANES Time Series is a representative sample of voting-eligible Americans conducted in the period immediately prior to and following the 2012 presidential election. For information about response rates and sampling procedures, see <http://www.electionstudies.org>.

exceeds the share of the population (approximately 65%) or the general electorate (74%) that was composed of non-Hispanic Whites in 2008 (Abramson et al. 2009). In contrast, the percentage of detectable (non-candidate) White people in John McCain's ads was only 70%. The difference between these two figures (i.e., 92% and 70%) is statistically significant. Both figures drop somewhat when the entire sample of ads is analyzed, but in both cases, Obama has a larger percentage of Whites in his ads compared to McCain. Relatedly, as shown in Figure 1B, the Obama campaign ads in our study included a disproportionately low percentage of African Americans. This figure was also significantly lower ( $p \leq .07$ ;  $p \leq .09$ ) than the comparable, and more representative, percentage of Blacks depicted in McCain ads. In short, we find a general pattern of Obama's ads overemphasizing the presence of Whites – relative to their share of the population and their depiction in McCain's ads – and underemphasizing the presence of Blacks. Thus, at a minimum, the patterns we explore in the "Country I Love" appear to be generally consistent with our argument about the Whitewashing strategy adopted by the Obama campaign in 2008.

[Figures 1A and 1B about here]

#### *Whitewashing Appeals and Perceptions of Obama*

After viewing one of the two versions of the "Country I Love" advertisements described in Table 1, respondents were asked two questions regarding their perceptions about Obama's birthplace and religious beliefs (see online appendix for details on question wording). Given the Democratic bias in our MTurk sample, it is not surprising that we find few respondents who subscribe to either notion. Only 13% indicate that



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4 Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born outside the U.S. and only about 13% indicate  
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6 that he is a Muslim. However, among Republicans these views are considerably more  
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8 popular with 27% endorsing the view that the president was “probably” or “definitely”  
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10 born outside the U.S. and 19% describing him as a Muslim.<sup>7</sup>  
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14 We hypothesize that support for each rumor will decline, particularly among White  
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16 Republicans, when Obama deploys the Whitewashing strategy. We test this hypothesis in  
17  
18 Table 2. The model specification in this table depends on the coding of the dependent  
19  
20 variable. The birthplace variable has four response options, so we estimate an ordered  
21  
22 logit model. The belief that Obama is Muslim has only two categories, so we employ a  
23  
24 binomial logistic regression for the analysis of that variable. In both cases, higher values  
25  
26 indicate greater propensity to believe the rumor. Additionally, we examine each dependent  
27  
28 variable in one of two ways – with Independents coded at the midpoint (0.5), as in Models  
29  
30 1 and 3, or with Independents combined with Republicans and coded as zero, as in Models  
31  
32 2 and 4. Our aim here is simply to show the robustness of our results across different  
33  
34 model specifications. The independent variables of interest are the treatment dummies  
35  
36 described in Table 1, partisanship (coded in one of two ways), and their interactions.<sup>8</sup> All  
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47  
48 <sup>7</sup> We also find that the “birther” rumor is somewhat more popular than the Muslim rumor  
49 in the 2012 ANES time series. We find that 40% of White Republicans indicate that  
50 Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born outside the U.S., but only about 33% indicate  
51 that he is a Muslim. The “birther” rumor likely posed the greater threat to the Obama  
52 campaign, which may explain why the “Country I Love” ad focused more squarely on  
53 rebutting this misconception.  
54

55 <sup>8</sup> To address concerns about the number of respondents per cell, our analyses are based on  
56 a 3-category partisanship variable where strong, moderate, and leaning partisans on each  
57 end of the spectrum are collapsed. The three-category variable is coded from 0 to 1 with  
58 Democrats being 1. Our results hold with either a 5-category or 7-category partisan  
59 variable.  
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models also include control variables for gender, age, education, income, and the difference between perceptions of laziness among Whites and Blacks.<sup>9</sup>

[Table 2 about here]

Interpreting coefficients with interaction terms can be difficult; it is especially important to remember that the coefficients on constituent terms do not represent “main effects” (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). For example, in the “birther” Model 1 (Table 2, column 1), the coefficients for the Whitewashing ad represent the association between assignment to the treatment, but *only when the partisanship variable takes on the value of zero* – in other words, only for Republicans. This coefficient is negative, indicating that relative to the Race-Neutral version, showcasing the candidate’s White supporters and family in the advertisement effectively reduces the belief that Obama was not born in the U.S., as predicted. The positive interaction term indicates that this effect only holds for Republicans. We find equivalent results in Model 2, where Republicans and Independents are collapsed together. In short, as expected, either Republicans alone or Republicans along with Independents are less inclined to embrace the “birther” rumor if they are randomly assigned to view the Whitewashing ad.

We uncover similar results in the final two columns, which focus on the rumor that Obama is a Muslim. As expected, we find that acceptance of this rumor declines significantly when exposed to visual information about Obama’s White family and supporters, but again only for Republicans (or, in Model 2, Republicans and Independents).

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<sup>9</sup> Control variables are included because although exposure to the treatments is randomly assigned partisanship is not. Nevertheless, all of the significant results remain when the controls are removed from the analyses.

To ease interpretation of the results, we have converted the coefficients in Table 2 into predicted probabilities (Models 1 and 3 only). These results are presented in Figures 2A and 2B. In Figure 2A, we examine the predicted probabilities of the belief that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born outside the U.S. for Democrats and Republicans across two treatments, holding all other variables constant at their mean. In the pared-down version of the ad (the *Race-Neutral* ad), we find that Republicans are much more likely than Democrats (by almost 50 points) to indicate that they believe that the president was not born in the U.S. However, among those subjects who viewed the Whitewashing ad – the version that candidate Obama actually ran in 2008 – this partisan divide almost completely evaporates, declining to less than 10 points. It is striking that merely stripping away Obama’s White family and White supporters from an advertisement could have this large of an effect on beliefs about Obama’s birthplace, three years after he was elected president.

[Figure 2A and 2B about here]

Furthermore, we observe similar patterns in Figure 2B when plotting predicted probabilities of the belief that Obama is Muslim. Again, we find that in the absence of any information about the racial characteristics of Obama’s family or supporters, a non-trivial fraction of Republicans (about 33%) are inclined to erroneously view the president as a Muslim. However, when Obama’s bi-racial background is visually emphasized *and* his supporters are depicted as almost invariably White, almost all Republicans and Democrats reject this view.

*Whitewashing in the 2012 Election*

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4 Our results thus far have generally been consistent with the argument that the  
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6 Whitewashing strategy succeeded in limiting the damage of pervasive rumors about  
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8 Obama's religion and nationality. One objection that might justifiably be raised, however,  
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10 concerns the representativeness of our experiment due to the relatively small size (N=122  
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12 across two conditions). Since this study is based on a small convenience sample, it is  
13  
14 possible that our results are simply coincidental and, in any case, we cannot make strong  
15  
16 claims regarding external validity. In order to address these concerns, we sought to  
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18 buttress the experimental design with a broader and more representative dataset. In  
19  
20 particular, we focus on survey questions assessing perceptions of Obama's racial  
21  
22 background and the racial characteristics of the constituency he is most responsive to, as  
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24 these were the two elements of Whitewashing featured in our experiment. If the  
25  
26 Whitewashing strategy inoculated Obama against negative rumors by changing  
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28 perceptions of his racial heritage and the racial background of his supporters, we would  
29  
30 expect those who believe him to be mixed race (rather than Black) and those who believe  
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32 him to be racially unbiased (rather than biased towards Blacks) would also be less likely to  
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34 believe the rumors. And, we expect these results to be particularly strong among White  
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36 Republicans and/or conservatives.  
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45 [Table 3 about here]  
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48 We turn first to an examination of the relationship between perceptions about  
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50 Obama's racial background and the belief that he is a Muslim. Both questions are included  
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52 in the 2012 EGSS and the results of our multivariate analysis are presented in Table 3.<sup>10</sup>  
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57 <sup>10</sup> This survey did not include a question asking whether the president was born in the U.S.  
58 or directly assessing perceptions of racial favoritism in the Obama administration.  
59 Fortunately, both questions were asked in the 2012 ANES Time Series; see Table 4.  
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We focus separately on non-Hispanic White Republicans and Democrats, as well as conservatives and liberals, in these analyses. We also include controls for gender, age, education, income, home ownership, region, political information, racial resentment, and political ideology (see online appendix for question wording of attitudinal variables). The primary independent variable is the perception of Obama's race, coded such that "1" indicates that the respondent selected "Black" as at least one of the president's racial backgrounds and "0" if they did not select this as an option. As it turns out, only a minority (32%) of White respondents selected Black as a description of the president's race. The overwhelming majority of Whites (70%) indicated that the president is mixed-race, with less than 3% selecting any of the other options (i.e., "White," "Hispanic," "Asian," or "Other race").<sup>11</sup> The first column focuses on self-identified Republicans. The positive and statistically significant coefficient indicates that, among White Republicans, perceiving Obama as Black is associated with endorsing the notion that he is a Muslim. Republicans who believe Obama is Black have a .44 probability of identifying him as a Muslim compared to a probability of .33 among Republicans who do not perceive Obama as Black. Among ideological conservatives, as shown in column 2, the corresponding probabilities are .40 and .26. Also, we find that perceptions of Obama's race are unrelated to misperceptions that he is a Muslim among Democrats and liberals (see columns 3 and 4). Thus, the observational results in Table 3 are consistent with our experimental results;

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<sup>11</sup> There were relatively few Black respondents in the 2012 EGSS (N=94). Nevertheless, African Americans were far more likely than Whites to select "Black" as at least one of the descriptions of Obama's race (54% versus 31% for Whites). Similarly, Black respondents were far less likely than Whites to describe Obama as "mixed" (55% versus 70%)."

drawing attention to his multiracial background may have partially inoculated him against the rumor that he is a Muslim, at least among White Republicans and conservatives.

Our next set of analyses focus on the 2012 ANES Time Series, as shown in Table 4. This survey, in which respondents were interviewed in face-to-face mode prior to and then immediately following the 2012 presidential election, included questions about the president's religion as well as his country of origin. Similar to our previous analyses, we are interested in whether the perception that Obama favors Blacks over Whites contributes to the belief that he is a Muslim or that he was not born in the United States. In order to assess these views, respondents were asked the following question: "Do the policies of the Obama administration favor whites over blacks, favor blacks over whites, or do they treat both groups the same?" The vast majority of respondents indicated that the president treated both racial groups the same, but these views were heavily skewed by partisanship. Whereas only 5% of Democrats adopted the view that Obama favored Blacks over Whites, over a quarter (28%) of Republicans endorsed this position.

[Table 4 about here]

The associations between perceptions of racial favoritism and support for negative rumors about President Obama are presented in Table 4. The first two columns examine, separately for Republicans and Democrats, the belief that the president was not born in the U.S. while the last two columns focus on beliefs regarding whether Obama is a Muslim.<sup>12</sup> In addition to our main independent variable – racial favoritism – we also include the

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<sup>12</sup> We also examined the effects of racial favoritism on the endorsement of rumors among ideological conservatives and liberals. The substantive and statistical significance levels are generally comparable to the effects for the different partisan groups as shown in Table 4. For example, the relevant coefficient on racial favoritism for White conservatives is 1.23 (p=.04) for the "birther" rumor, and 1.51 (p=.08) for misperceptions that Obama is a Muslim.

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4 same set of controls as listed in Table 3. As anticipated, we find that respondents who  
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6 believe that Obama favors Blacks over Whites are also significantly more likely to support  
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8 the “birther” rumor, among both Republicans *and* Democrats.<sup>13</sup> Converting the logistic  
9  
10 regression coefficients into predicted probabilities shows that, all else equal, about 44% of  
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12 Republicans who believe the Obama administration engages in pro-Black favoritism also  
13  
14 believe that he was born outside of the U.S. (combining “definitely” and “probably”  
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16 responses). The corresponding figure among Republicans who do not believe that the  
17  
18 Obama administration favors Blacks over Whites is 29%. The equivalent results among  
19  
20 Democrats are 17% and 3%, respectively. In the case of false beliefs about the president’s  
21  
22 religion, we find that only among Republicans are perceptions of racial favoritism  
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24 associated with a belief that the president is a Muslim. Converting the results into  
25  
26 predicted probabilities, we find that for a Republican at the mean or median on all other  
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28 variables in the model, the predicted probability of describing President Obama as a  
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30 Muslim is about .36 if the administration is also perceived as biased towards African  
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32 Americans. However, if the Obama administration is viewed as racially even-handed this  
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34 figure declines to .21.

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38 In our final set of analyses, we examine the impact of each rumor on vote choice in  
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40 2012. We contend that the Obama campaign went to such efforts to defuse these rumors  
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42 precisely because their electoral impact could be consequential. If so then the impact of  
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44 these rumors, net of the usual determinants of the vote choice such as partisanship,  
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46 ideology, racial resentment, and standard demographic variables, should have influenced  
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58 <sup>13</sup> Of course, it is worth reiterating that only about 5% of White Democrats, compared to  
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60 about 28% of White Republicans, believe that Obama favors Blacks over Whites.  
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4 presidential candidate preferences. If, on the other hand, these rumors were really little  
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6 more than reflections of more fundamental partisan and racial objections to Obama then  
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8 controlling for such considerations should render these rumors politically ineffective. We  
9  
10 rely on the 2012 ANES face-to-face time series to address this question in Table 5.  
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14 [Table 5 about here]  
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16 The first two columns of Table 5 present the results for the impact of the  
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18 birtherism rumor on the vote choice of White Republicans and Democrats in 2012. The  
19  
20 results are statistically significant and in the anticipated direction for both partisan groups.  
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22 Converting the results into predicted probabilities we find that among Republicans who  
23  
24 believed that Obama was “definitely” born in the U.S. the probability of voting for the  
25  
26 president, all else equal, was .21. This figure drops to .002 for Republicans who believed  
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28 that Obama was “definitely” not born in the U.S. The corresponding figures for Democrats  
29  
30 are .94 and .21. Thus, in the case of vote choice, the impact of endorsing the “birther”  
31  
32 rumor is much greater for Democrats than for Republicans.<sup>14</sup> Still, it is worth bearing in  
33  
34 mind that Democrats (11%) were much less likely than Republicans (38%) to indicate that  
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36 Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born outside of the U.S. The results for the Muslim  
37  
38 rumor only approach conventional levels of significance for Republicans. Here we find  
39  
40 that the average White Republican had a .08 probability of supporting Obama if they  
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42 rejected the rumor that he is a Muslim. However, Republicans who endorsed this rumor  
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44 had an estimated probability of voting for the president at a probability of only .02.  
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55 <sup>14</sup> The results are also statistically significant and more comparable in magnitude when  
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57 focusing on ideological groups. The estimated probability of support for Obama for an  
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59 average White conservative who was certain Obama was born in the U.S. was .28,  
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61 versus .0 (difference = .28) if they were certain that he was *not* born in the U.S. The  
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63 comparable figures for White liberals are .91 and .56 (difference = .35).  
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## Conclusion

A plethora of studies have shown that in the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama was penalized due to false rumors about his citizenship and religion. But we argue that these rumors could have been even more widespread had it not been for Obama's two-pronged Whitewashing strategy: (a) highlighting the White people in his family, and (b) associating himself disproportionately with White supporters. The first strategy was designed to highlight his racial similarities with the White electorate, and the second strategy conveyed the message that Obama was appropriately sympathetic to White interests. We provide support for this argument by relying upon multiple datasets. Our content analysis of campaign ads from the 2008 presidential contest shows that Obama emphasized the inclusion of White faces in his ads at much higher levels than his Republican opponent and out of proportion to Whites' percentage in the overall population or electorate. In our experiment, we show that a plausible, yet hypothetical, Obama ad shorn of White visual imagery was significantly less effective than an authentic Obama ad at dispelling rumors about the president's religion and country of origin, but only among Republicans and Independents. This particular component of our study is, however, based on a small unrepresentative experimental sample so the reader should interpret this result with some caution. Finally, we show that identifying Obama as "Black" and indicating that his administration favors Blacks over Whites is significantly associated in national survey data with support for these persistent rumors especially among Republicans and conservatives.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Given the observational nature of the ANES data, we cannot rule out the possibility that instead of perceptions of Obama's race and his racial group sympathies driving support for negative rumors about him, the direction of causality may be reversed.

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4           There are several important implications of these results. First, our findings  
5  
6 provide additional evidence for the link between racial considerations and longstanding  
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8 rumors about President Obama’s religion and citizenship status. Other scholars have also  
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10 shown such a linkage, but to our knowledge this is the first study to show that support for  
11  
12 these rumors are not simply correlated with racial resentment but are also a direct  
13  
14 consequence of perceptions of racial (dis)similarity and White anxieties about racial  
15  
16 favoritism. Second, we believe our results are also consistent with the argument that  
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18 contemporary partisan divisions in this country are heavily influenced by concerns about  
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20 race (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Frymer 1999; Schickler 2016). This conclusion is  
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22 derived from the fact that the subtle racial manipulations embedded in our experiment  
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24 were mostly ineffective among Democrats – although among Whites who believed the  
25  
26 “birther” rumor, the impact on vote choice was much greater among Democrats (see  
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28 Piston 2010 for a similar result). Third, while scholars have shown how contemporary  
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30 Republican politicians have employed implicit race-based appeals to cultivate an electoral  
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32 advantage (Mendelberg 2001), what has been neglected is the various ways in which  
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34 Democratic politicians engage in similar efforts in order to diminish their association with  
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36 racial and ethnic minorities (for some exceptions, see Frymer 1999; O’Reilly 1995;  
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38 Williams 2003).

39  
40           The theory of Whitewashing that we develop in this article owes much to the  
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42 theory of deracialization introduced initially by Charles Hamilton several decades ago  
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44 (Hamilton 1977; also see Gillespie (2010) for a discussion of how newer Black candidates  
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46 employ this strategy). As with deracialization theory, we also recognize the electoral risks  
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48 that Democrats in general and Black Democrats in particular face for being perceived as  
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4 too “pro-minority.” Nevertheless, our theory of Whitewashing differs from the  
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6 deracialization theory in some important ways.<sup>16</sup> First, although the deracialization  
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8 argument merely suggests that Democratic candidates limit their association with minority  
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10 supporters as well as policies associated with minorities, the Whitewashing theory argues  
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12 that candidates have an incentive to draw attention to their association with Whites.  
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14  
15 Indeed, it may be that avoiding an association with Black supporters is less consequential  
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18 than highlighting the candidate’s commonality with Whites (also see Strickland and  
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20  
21 Whicker 1992).

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24         Second, unlike with the deracialization theory, which generally makes no  
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26 distinction between Black and White Democratic candidates, we maintain that there are  
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28 also incentives for mixed-race minority candidates to use the White people in their  
29  
30 families as another cue to signal their racial loyalties. As Hochschild and Weaver (2007)  
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32 observe, lighter-skinned politicians have been over-represented among Black elected  
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34 officials since Reconstruction. For example, of the eight African Americans who have to  
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36 date been elected to the U.S. Senate or governor’s office – Edward Brooke, Douglas  
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38 Wilder, Carol Moseley Braun, Deval Patrick, Cory Booker, Barack Obama, Tim Scott,  
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40  
41 and Kamala Harris – all but Scott and Moseley Braun can be characterized as light-  
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44 skinned and most also have substantial European ancestry. Strickland and Whicker (1992;  
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47 pg. 209) in their “crossover model,” a variant of the deracialization thesis, go so far as to  
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53 <sup>16</sup> Our argument also differs from Perry’s (2011) theory of universalizing Black interests  
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55 (UBI). The UBI thesis holds that Black candidates running in majority-White jurisdictions  
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57 often strategically frame policies that might disproportionately aid minorities as having  
58  
59 universal appeal. The Whitewashing argument, on the other hand is more about a group-  
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61 oriented appeal rather than a policy-oriented appeal. That is, candidates employing the  
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63 Whitewashing strategy focus less on specific policies and more on their association to  
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65 Whites and their sympathy for White racial group interests.

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4 argue that, "...successful black candidates in statewide elections may need to 'look  
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6 white.'" In short, our findings are reinforced by evidence from the historical record that  
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8 mixed-racial ancestry provides an electoral advantage for minority candidates even in  
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10 contemporary society.  
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14 Admittedly, some of the distinctions between the deracialization and  
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16 Whitewashing theories are subtle and not all were tested in this article. Invariably, we  
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18 found the original ad to be more effective at diminishing support for rumors about Obama  
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20 among White Republicans. Thus, if one aims to appeal to racially moderate-to-  
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22 conservative White voters it may not be enough to avoid reinforcing racial stereotypes –  
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24 Black candidates must also actively dispel them by engaging in various counter-  
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26 stereotypic behaviors. There are normative implications to adopting such a strategy. As  
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28 Orey and Ricks (2007) demonstrate, deemphasizing minority concerns as a campaign  
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30 tactic is often associated with lower levels of support for minority issues in office.  
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32 Consistent with this view, Gillion (2016) reports that in his first term Obama spoke out on  
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34 issues of race less frequently than any Democratic president since the Kennedy  
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36 administration.  
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43 While the analyses presented in this paper are limited to Barack Obama, the tactic  
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45 of exploiting one's racially mixed ancestry in order to gain an electoral advantage is not  
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47 unique to him. Harold Ford, Jr. adopted this strategy during the 2006 Tennessee U.S.  
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49 Senate race. In this contest Ford, a light-skinned African American Democrat, surprised  
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51 many observers including members of his family by asserting that his paternal  
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53 grandmother – who is described on her death certificate as Black – was in fact White  
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55 (Thomas 2006). The revelation was interpreted by many as an effort to court the support  
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4 of the mostly conservative White electorate in Tennessee. In the 2020 election cycle,  
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6 Senators Cory Booker and Kamala Harris – both of whom have recent non-African  
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8 ancestry – briefly sought the Democratic presidential nomination. However, neither  
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10 candidate survived into the general election where the Whitewashing strategy would be  
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12 most effective. As intermarriage rates continue to climb it seems likely that additional  
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14 candidates will employ this strategy.  
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19         Lastly, many have discussed the implications of Obama’s successful presidential  
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21 campaigns for contemporary race relations. Our findings cast this discussion in a new  
22  
23 light. Obama is the product of a marriage between a White American woman and a  
24  
25 Kenyan man; we find that more Americans consider him to be mixed-race than Black.  
26  
27 Some have argued that a primary goal of the Obama campaign was to reassure White  
28  
29 voters that he would not challenge the racial hierarchy in the United States (Cohen 2010;  
30  
31 Ford, Johnson, and Maxwell 2010), and at least some analysts conclude that his  
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33 administration’s record proved consistent with that implicit promise (Harris 2012; Kantor  
34  
35 2012). If Obama was America’s “first Black president” – a debatable proposition in light  
36  
37 of our findings – it is possible that his candidacy was successful at least in part because he  
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39 drew attention to his White ancestry and highlighted his White support in order to signal  
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41 that he was not beholden to Black interests. Therefore, to the extent that Obama was able  
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43 to inoculate himself against rumors related to his birthplace and religion, this may be  
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45 reflective not of racial progress but rather Obama’s success at accommodating the  
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47 country’s enduring racial hierarchy.  
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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical Approval:** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and /or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor approved the experimental study on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

**Informed Consent:** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in each of the studies in this article.

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**Table 1. Transcript and Imagery of Whitewashing and Race-Neutral Ads**

	<u>Whitewashing Ad</u> (Original Visuals)	<u>Race-Neutral Ad</u> (Modified Visuals)
<b>Narrative</b>		
<i>I'm Barack Obama. America is a country of strong families and strong values. My life's been blessed by both.</i>	Obama, alone in a home speaking directly into the camera.	Obama, alone in a home speaking directly into the camera.
<i>I was raised by a single-mother and my grandparents. We didn't have much money.</i>	Obama (child) with mother, Obama seated between maternal grandparents.	<b>Obama (child), alone.</b>
<i>They taught me values straight from the Kansas heartland where they grew up.</i>	Obama (child) with maternal grandfather.	<b>Obama (child), alone on a tricycle.</b>
<i>Accountability and self-reliance. Love of country. Working hard without making excuses.</i>	Obama, alone in a home speaking into camera.	Obama, alone in a home speaking into camera.
<i>Treating your neighbor as you'd like to be treated.</i>	Obama with White supporters, talking to older woman.	<b>Tree-lined, middle-class street (no people visible).</b>
<i>It's what guided me as I worked my way up, taking jobs and loans to make it through college.</i>	Obama, alone in college.	Obama, alone in college.
<i>It's what led me to pass up Wall Street jobs and go to Chicago instead, helping neighborhoods devastated when steel plants closed.</i>	Black & white image of Obama speaking at local community event, racially diverse audience.	<b>Black &amp; white photo of industrial plant (no people visible). Video of working-class neighborhood (no people visible).</b>
<i>That's why I passed laws moving people from welfare to work, cut taxes for working families, extended health care for wounded troops who've been neglected.</i>	Obama, speaking to older White male. Obama, at dinner table with four White adults. Obama, talking to White soldiers.	<b>Obama, speaking at a podium. Capitol dome in DC. U.S. soldiers in combat gear (racial characteristics obscured).</b>
<i>I approve this message because I'll never forget those values, and if I have the honor to take the oath of office as President, it will be with a deep and abiding faith in the country I love.</i>	Obama, alone in a home speaking directly into the camera.	Obama, alone in a home speaking directly into the camera.

*Note:* Modified images in bold.

**Table 2. The Impact of Whitewashing Ad on Rumors about Obama's Citizenship and Religion by Partisanship (2011)**

	<u>Born Outside U.S.</u> (Model 1)	<u>Born Outside U.S.</u> (Model 2)	<u>Obama is Muslim</u> (Model 3)	<u>Obama is Muslim</u> (Model 4)
Whitewashing Ad	-2.52*** (.78)	-2.41*** (.65)	-2.78* (1.47)	-1.54* (.90)
Party ID (Democrats =1)	-4.40*** (.88)	-4.20*** (.87)	-2.06* (1.06)	-1.06 (.87)
Party ID * Whitewashing Ad	3.06** (1.15)	3.41** (1.07)	2.97 (1.96)	1.25 (1.35)
Cut 1	-2.68 (.97)	-1.79 (.89)	-----	-----
Cut 2	-.66 (.94)	.16 (.87)	-----	-----
Cut 3	1.71 (1.01)	2.44 (.99)	-----	-----
Intercept	-----	-----	-1.25 (1.38)	-1.09 (1.35)
Log likelihood	-82.78	-83.27	-32.57	-33.94
N	122	122	122	122

*Notes:* \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  for one-tailed test. In Models 1 and 3, Republicans are coded "0," Independents are coded "0.5," and Democrats are coded "1." In Models 2 and 4, both Republicans and Independents are coded "0." Data Source: "Country I Love" Experiment on Amazon MTurk in 2011. All models also include controls for gender, age, education, income, and the difference between perceptions of laziness among Whites and Blacks. All variables coded 0-1, except age; higher values of partisanship indicate the Democratic end of the scale.

**Table 3. The Impact of Selecting “Black” as Obama’s Race by Partisanship and Ideology on the Misperception that the President is a Muslim (2012)**

	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Conservatives</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Liberals</u>
Obama Race (Black)	.48* (.25)	.65* (.29)	-.01 (.41)	-.17 (.71)
Female	.11 (.24)	-.18 (.28)	-.26 (.36)	-.50 (.51)
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.02)
Education	-.94** (.43)	-.89* (.46)	.00 (.63)	-.67 (.99)
Income	.29 (.66)	1.45* (.73)	.15 (.87)	.30 (1.21)
Home Ownership	.20 (.36)	.10 (.41)	.08 (.47)	-.34 (.63)
Residence in South	.12 (.27)	.29 (.29)	.74* (.39)	1.09* (.52)
Political Information	-1.78*** (.45)	-2.01*** (.51)	-3.29*** (.68)	-3.66*** (.83)
Racial Resentment	2.23*** (.67)	2.19** (.76)	1.93* (.97)	.60 (1.26)
Ideology	.17 (.56)	-----	-.11 (.85)	-----
Partisanship	-----	-1.20* (.52)	-----	-1.55 (.94)
Intercept	-.66 (.85)	-1.12 (1.00)	-1.24 (1.10)	-1.41 (1.84)
Log pseudolikelihood	-283.08	-211.87	-141.08	-72.58
N	527	424	421	265

Notes: \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  for two-tailed test. Data Source: 2012 ANES-EGSS. All variables coded 0-1, except age; higher values of partisanship indicate the Democratic end of the scale.

**Table 4. The Impact of Indicating that Obama Favors Blacks Over Whites on Perceptions that the President was Born Outside the U.S. or is a Muslim by Partisanship (2012)**

	<u>Born Outside U.S.</u> (Republican)	<u>Born Outside U.S.</u> (Democrat)	<u>Muslim</u> (Republican)	<u>Muslim</u> (Democrat)
Obama Favors Blacks	1.29* (.63)	3.74*** (1.08)	1.50* (.70)	-.66 (2.89)
Female	-.48 (.26)	-.08 (.32)	-.21 (.31)	-.29 (.45)
Age	.03** (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.02* (.01)	.02 (.01)
Education	-1.27* (.53)	-.90 (.67)	-1.38* (.59)	1.20 (.73)
Income	-.93 (.51)	.54 (.57)	-1.75** (.67)	.04 (1.03)
Home Ownership	.54 (.40)	.40 (.36)	.18 (.45)	.78 (.58)
Southern Residence	-.03 (.30)	.11 (.44)	.33 (.33)	.70 (.54)
Political Information	-1.57** (.58)	-3.97*** (1.10)	-.86 (.70)	-4.50** (1.54)
Racial Resentment	1.86* (.79)	.71 (.83)	3.37*** (.91)	1.30 (1.04)
Ideology	-.44 (.79)	-1.54 (.95)	-.65 (.86)	-2.18 (1.27)
Cut 1	.40 (.79)	.59 (1.36)	-3.14*** (.95)	-2.20 (1.89)
Cut 2	2.38 (.81)	2.96 (1.41)	-----	-----
Cut 3	4.44 (.79)	4.60 (1.44)	-----	-----
F-statistic	8.58***	6.33***	5.35***	2.41**
N	304	295	329	306

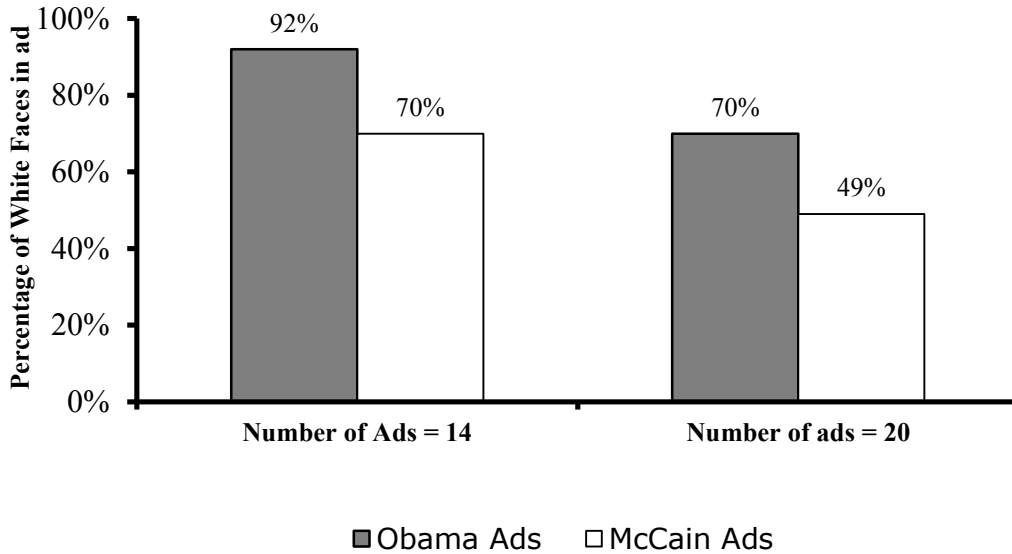
Notes: \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  for two-tailed test. Data Source: 2012 ANES face-to-face interviews. All variables coded 0-1 except age; higher values of partisanship indicate the Democratic end of the scale.

**Table 5. The Impact of Belief that Obama was Born Outside the U.S. or is a Muslim on Whites' Presidential Vote Choice by Partisanship (2012)**

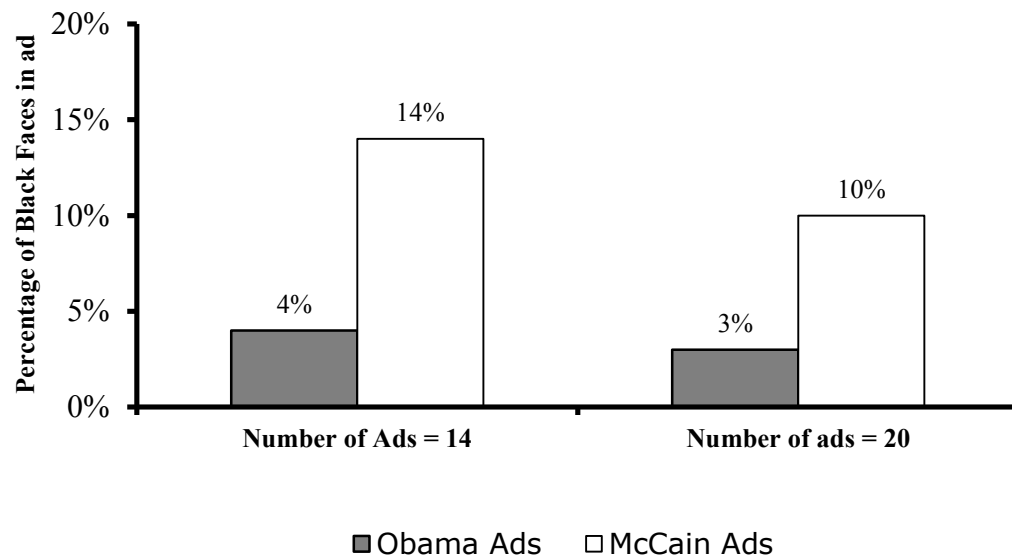
	<u>Republicans</u> (Obama Not Born in U.S.)	<u>Democrats</u> (Obama Not Born in the U.S.)	<u>Republicans</u> (Obama is a Muslim)	<u>Democrats</u> (Obama is a Muslim)
Obama Not Born in U.S.	-4.65** (1.58)	-4.12** (1.38)	-----	-----
Obama is a Muslim	-----	-----	-1.57+ (.95)	-.61 (.64)
Female	-.25 (.62)	-.53 (.54)	.34 (.53)	-.47 (.46)
Age	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)	-.00 (.01)	.00 (.02)
Education	-.51 (1.19)	.04 (1.32)	.21 (1.03)	.10 (1.15)
Income	1.14 (1.21)	-1.29 (1.40)	.71 (.95)	-.77 (1.34)
Home Ownership	-.04 (.73)	.86 (.76)	-.07 (.64)	.27 (.70)
Southern Residence	-.24 (.65)	-.24 (.77)	-.06 (.64)	-.05 (.64)
Racial Resentment	-1.97 (1.64)	-1.48 (1.02)	-2.68+ (1.57)	-2.11* (1.02)
Ideology	5.43** (2.03)	1.98 (1.56)	5.18*** (1.43)	2.80+ (1.48)
Intercept	-2.57 (1.87)	2.76 (1.86)	-2.80+ (1.49)	1.84 (1.52)
F-statistic	3.32***	2.87**	2.79**	2.52**
N	248	219	271	222

*Notes:* +  $p \leq .10$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  for two-tailed test. Data Source: 2012 ANES face-to-face interviews. All variables coded 0-1 except age; true Independents excluded from this analysis. The survey data are drawn from the 2012 ANES face-to-face interviews.

**Figure 1A. Percentage of Whites in Selected 2008 Campaign Ads by Candidate**

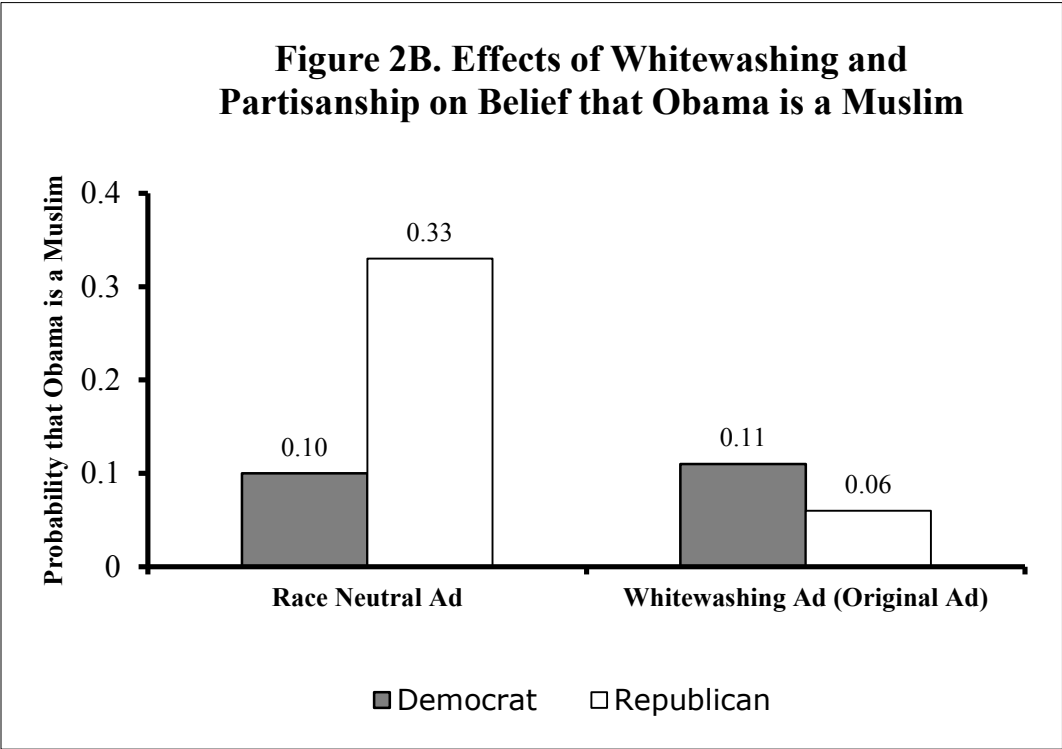
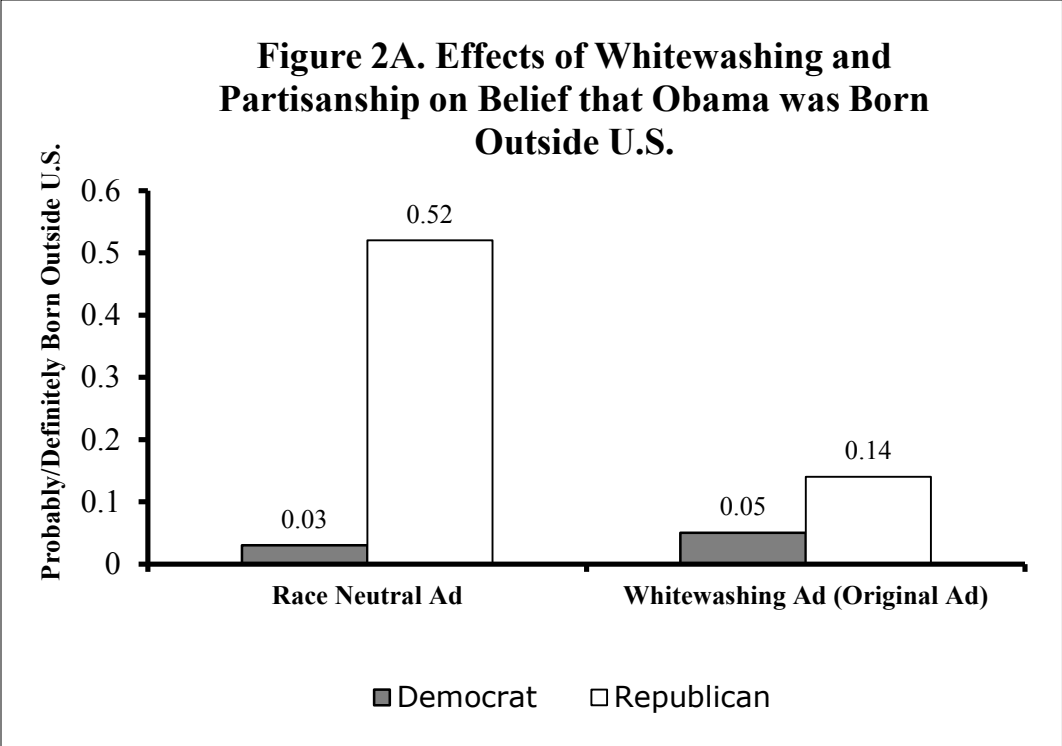


**Figure 1B. Percentage of Blacks in Selected 2008 Campaign Ads by Candidate**



*Notes:* We content analyzed 20 ads for each candidate, but six of these ads had no other people in them other than the presidential candidate with or without his vice-presidential running mate. The results on the left represent the ads with individuals other than the candidate(s). The bars on the right include all cases.

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## **Online Appendix: Additional Details on the Content Analysis and Question Wording**

During the month of May 2013, we hired two undergraduate research assistants to conduct a content analysis of the 2008 presidential general election ads. Without knowing our research design, the two coders were asked to assess the racial imagery of 20 Obama ads and 20 McCain ads. The ads were randomly chosen from the ads whose online links were readily available on Stanford University's Political Communication Lab website.

To capture the racial imagery depicted in the ads, we asked coders to provide the frequency count for White, Black, Hispanic and Arab faces in the ads. They were only asked to code individual faces, excluding the candidates, that were discernible, not those from a crowd or indistinguishable mass of people. We then added all these counts for each ad, which represented the denominator for total faces in the ads. To calculate the percentage of Whites, we divided each coder's count for White faces by the total number of faces per ad. We use the same formula to calculate the percentage of Blacks.

We relied on the number of times the two coders agreed divided by the total number of units of analysis to assess inter-coder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002). When multiplied by 100, this formula produces the inter-coder reliability statistic known as percent agreement, which is valid only for nominal (categorical) data. The percent agreement between the two coders was 83.03 percent.

### Country I Love Experiment

#### *Birther Question*

“Do you think Barack Obama was born in the United States or in another country?” Response options were “definitely born in the U.S.,” “probably born in the U.S.,” “probably born outside the U.S.,” and “definitely born outside the U.S.”

### *Obama's Religion*

“What is Barack Obama’s religion? Is he Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or not religious?” Responses were coded so that 1 equals Muslim and all else equals 0.

### 2012 American National Election Study (EGSS)

#### *Racial Resentment Scale*

We relied on the traditional 4-item scale provided by Kinder and Sanders (1996) (also see Tesler 2016; and <https://electionstudies.org/>).

#### *Political Information*

This variable is an index made up of four multiple choice questions asking respondents to identify the name of the current Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and which item in the federal budget receives the least amount of money. Correct answers were coded as 1 and incorrect answers were coded as 0. Responses were summed and divided by four.

#### *Political Ideology*

“When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself...as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?” Respondents were presented with the following response options: “Very liberal,” “Somewhat liberal,” “Closer to liberals,” “Neither liberal nor conservative,” “Closer to conservatives,” “Somewhat conservative,” and “Very conservative.”