

5 *Seeing Is Believing?*

Reactions to the 2000 Republican National Convention

THE THEORETICAL MODEL of party image change depicted in figure 2 illustrates that reshaping partisan stereotypes is a function in part of individuals' predispositions and the media's framing of the party. The results presented in chapter 3 suggest that individuals vary in their perceptions of political parties: African Americans' pictures of the two parties' images along racial lines are more crystallized than those of whites. Furthermore, blacks' threshold for what constitutes change is also set higher than that of whites. Thus, the Republican Party's ability to reshape its image with respect to race should prove more difficult among blacks than whites. Likewise, reshaping the Republican Party's racial symbolism should also be harder when individuals encounter media messages that highlight aspects of the party that have not changed or contain no discussion of the elements of the party that have been altered. The data presented in chapter 4 show that citizens might have stumbled onto several alternative versions of the 2000 Republican National Convention. People could have read a basic account of the convention that included a description of the black attendees, media coverage that completely omitted mention of blacks at the convention, or an account that juxtaposed the attendance of many black speakers and entertainers with the fact that the party did not change its traditional conservative platform. Therefore, the media had the potential to serve as an obstacle to the Republican Party's attempt to modify its image with respect to race.

Chapter 5 seeks empirically to test these relationships. First, using survey data, I gauge general reactions to the 2000 Republican National Convention as well as the reactions of whites and blacks separately.

The data used in these analyses come from the Post-GOP Convention Poll, which was conducted by the Gallup organization shortly after the close of the convention. This poll seemed particularly well suited to test the correlation between convention exposure and perceptions of the Republican Party. First, the Post-GOP Convention Poll over-sampled African Americans, allowing me to examine black/white differences in reactions to the convention. Second, the Gallup poll was conducted almost immediately after the convention, minimizing the possibility that exogenous events could explain changes in perceived Republican Party images. Third, any other events that occurred between the convention and the survey would have muted rather than amplified the effect. Finally, there was no reason to believe that convention watchers and non-convention watchers would be affected differently by some intervening occurrence.

Still, using survey data rather than experimental data poses a potential measurement problem. In the real world, people self-select themselves into watching the convention. As a result, other unmeasured motivating factors may influence both convention watching and evaluations of the Republican Party. To overcome this problem inherent to using survey data, I conducted the 2002–2003 Party Image Study, which incorporated an experiment into its design. In an experiment, the researcher can control who is exposed to the treatment—in this case the convention—and who is not. Further, an experiment allows the researcher to control what type of information people receive about the convention. The 2002–2003 Party Image Study was, of course, conducted a few years after the convention, and numerous events occurred in the interim, including the contested 2000 election and the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. Consequently, convention events should be displaced in citizens' minds by other more recent salient activities of the Republican Party. Therefore, the ability to observe an effect of the experimental manipulations should be more difficult. Nevertheless, I used data from the 2002–2003 Party Image Study to establish the causal link between convention exposure and perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race. Moreover, I utilized these data to determine how subtle changes in the media's interpretation of the convention might have moderated individuals' reactions to the convention.

To do so, I replicated some of the frames used by the news media when describing the convention. In the experiment, subjects were

exposed to one of four scenarios: (1) a control with no mention of the Republican convention; (2) a race-neutral description of the Republican convention with no references to the presence of African American attendees; (3) a description of the many African American speakers and entertainers at the convention; or (4) a description of the many African American speakers and entertainers present at the convention supporting the Republican Party's traditional platform. (See the appendix for a more detailed description of the survey and experimental design.)

Tuning In

According to the Post-GOP Convention Poll, approximately 21.2 percent of the electorate watched none of the convention, 24.4 percent watched very little of it, 35.5 percent watched some of the convention, and 19 percent watched a great deal of the convention.

Table 8 presents a breakdown of the rate at which different demographic groups watched the convention.¹ Fifty-eight percent of whites and 48 percent of African Americans watched at least some of the convention. A comparison-of-means test indicates that this difference is statistically significant. A substantively large and statistically significant difference occurred in the average rate of convention watching between Democrats (47 percent) and Republicans (70 percent). Also significant (both substantively and statistically) was the difference between the college-educated (64 percent of whom watched at least some of the convention) and those without college degrees (50 percent). Finally, using analysis of variance, I examined differences in convention watching among a range of age categories. Compared to those respondents over the age of 65, 18–29 year olds, 30–49 year olds, and 50–64 year olds watched significantly less of the 2000 Republican convention.

Convention Exposure and Racial Symbolism

What impact did tuning in have on perceptions and evaluations of the Republican Party? Given the GOP's existing reputation with respect to race, I hypothesized that the use of racial images during the convention should be inconsistent with extant party images. Therefore, con-

1. For this part of the analysis, the watching the convention variable was dichotomized and coded 1 if the respondent watched at least some of the convention and 0 if the respondent watched none or very little of the convention.

vention exposure should incite a modification of the racial symbolism associated with the Republican Party. Investigating the validity of this claim required identifying a measure of the Republican Party's racial symbolism. Such an item would require respondents to make a summary judgment of the GOP with respect to race that was not tied to a particular candidate or policy stance. I used responses to the following question: "Would you say the Republican Party is generally doing a good job or a bad job these days of reaching out to blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities?" Because this question did not reference George W. Bush or any of the Republican Party's positions on racial issues, respondents were free to make an assessment of the GOP using whatever criteria they deemed applicable (either consciously or subconsciously) without any prompt from the interviewer. Responses to this question ranged from 0 to 1, where 0 indicated that the Republican Party did a bad job reaching out to blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities, .5 meant that the party did neither a good nor a bad job, and 1 indicated that the GOP did a good job.

Figure 7 presents the results of the survey analyses.² First, within the

TABLE 8. Who Was Tuning In?

	Watched at Least Some of the Convention (%)	N
Blacks	47	369
Whites	57	887
Republicans	70	371
Democrats	47	532
Strong partisans	56	903
Weak partisans	51	395
Without college degree	50	856
With college degree	64	469
Male	52	739
Female	57	595
Age 18–29	46	258
Age 30–49	50	526
Age 50–64	59	316
Age 65+	65	217
Entire sample	55	1,370

Source: Post-GOP Convention Poll.

2. These figures are based on the regression analyses in table A2. All of the predicted values in this figure were calculated by holding gender and black (when applicable) at their modes and all other variables constant at their means.

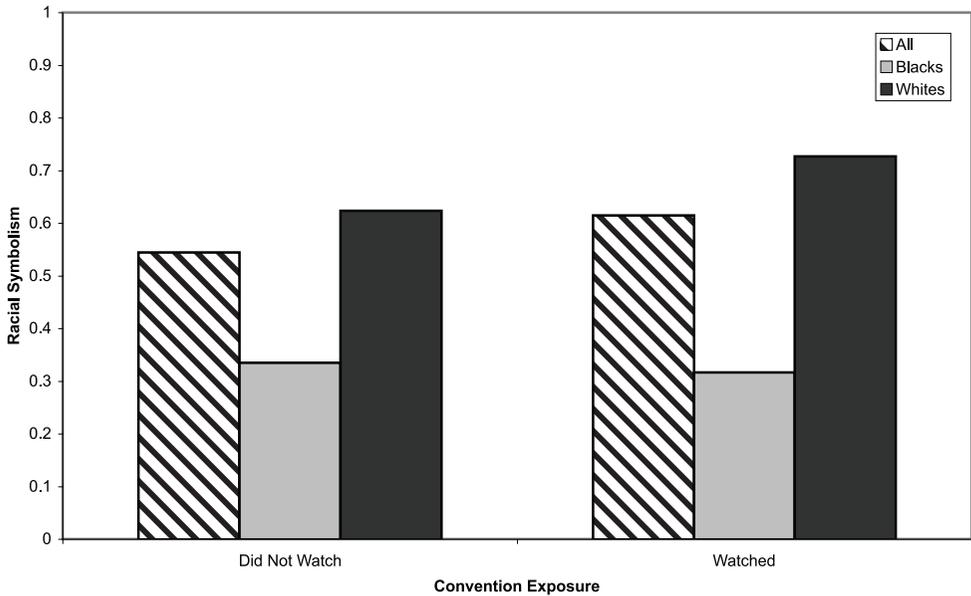


Fig. 7. Perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism based on convention exposure. (Data from Post-GOP Convention Poll.)

entire sample, convention exposure led to a change in party images. Those respondents who watched none or little of the convention gave the Republican Party a racial symbolism score of .54, which essentially represents a neutral position. The GOP's racial symbolism placement increased to .61 among those who watched a great deal of the convention. On average, perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race were positive among those exposed to the convention.

I speculated that the effect of watching the convention on perceptions of the Republican Party's image would be contingent on race. Specifically, I expected African Americans to be more resistant to the recent Republican campaign. To test for a race effect, I estimated the impact of convention watching on perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism separately for African Americans and whites. As figure 7 indicates, whites' image of the Republican Party became more positive when they watched a great deal of the convention. When exposed to little or none of the convention, the mean placement of the Republican Party along the racial symbolism dimension was .62. Among those whites who watched a great deal of the convention, the GOP's placement increased by .11, to .73.

The Republican Party's perceived racial symbolism did not receive the same boost among African Americans. Blacks who did not watch a great deal of the convention placed the Republican Party at .33 on the racial symbolism dimension. Watching a great deal of the convention, however, resulted in a slight and statistically insignificant decrease among blacks. In other words, blacks who watched the convention and those who did not exhibited no difference in perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race. Furthermore, the difference in reactions between blacks and whites was statistically significant at $p < .05$ (one-tailed test).

In general, the use of race at the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia left citizens with the impression that the Republican Party had become more inclusive. Nevertheless, the convention's impact was contingent on race. Not only did African Americans place the Republican Party significantly lower on the racial symbolism dimension, indicating that they did not believe that the GOP did a good job reaching out to minorities, but these perceptions did not improve after watching the convention.

Tweaking the Frames

Given the overall impact of convention exposure, I now turn to examining how the different framing of the convention influenced perceptions of the Republican Party. As stated earlier, these analyses seek to discern the intervening effect of the media's assessment of the convention and in so doing demonstrate the ways in which media outlets serve as barriers between a party projecting a new image of itself and the public's incorporation of this new version into its partisan stereotype.

Figure 8 presents the comparison of whites' and blacks' reactions to the different framing of the 2000 Republican National Convention.³ Among whites, the media's framing of the convention had a direct impact on perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism. As might be expected, when citizens read the article about the convention that omitted any discussion of the presence of blacks, their perceptions of the GOP's image with respect to race remained the same. In the control condition, subjects gave the Republican Party an average score

3. These figures are based on the regression analyses in table A3. All of the predicted values in this figure were calculated by holding gender at its mode and all other variables constant at their means.

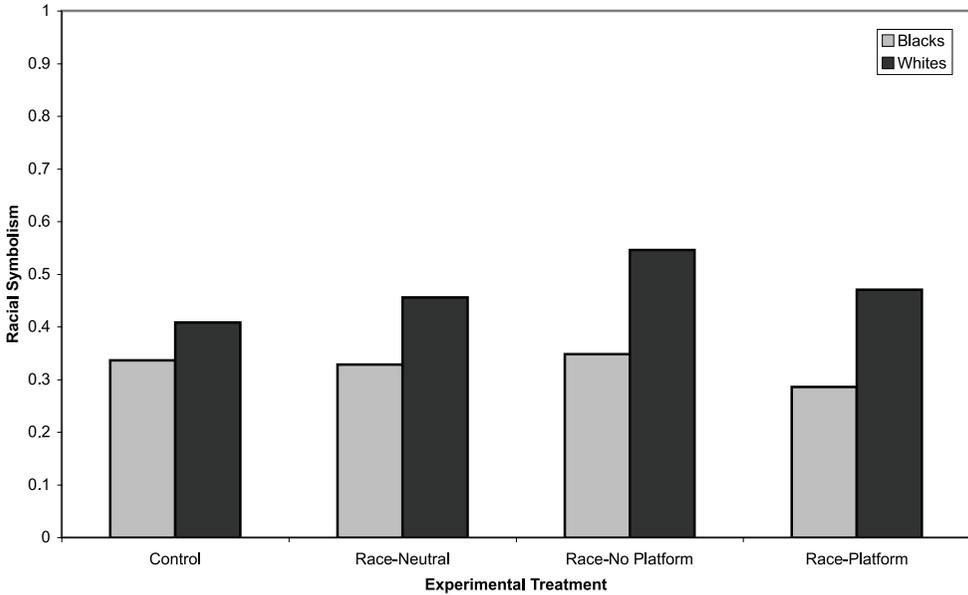


Fig. 8. The impact of convention frames on perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism. (Data from 2002–2003 Party Image Study.)

of .41 on the racial symbolism item. In the race-neutral condition, the mean placement of the GOP was .46, an increase that is both substantively small and statistically indistinguishable from 0. When whites read about African American attendees, the Republican Party received a .55 score, a .14 increase in its perceived racial symbolism. This difference was statistically significant. Finally, the results suggest that when the media highlighted aspects of the party that did not change, they foiled the Republican Party's ability to alter perceptions of its image with respect to race. When white subjects read a version of the convention coverage that highlighted both blacks' presence and the fact that the GOP had maintained its traditional conservative platform, images of the Republican Party increased only by .01 to .47, a difference that was not statistically significant.

Much as was the case in their response to the convention in general, blacks' perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race remained intact regardless of which version of the convention they read about. In general, figure 8 indicates that African Americans placed

the Republican Party much lower on the racial symbolism dimension than did whites. Whereas whites' placement of the GOP hovered around the neutral to slightly positive side of the scale, blacks' perceptions of the party never surpassed .5, even when blacks read about the GOP's outreach efforts during the convention. In the control condition, African Americans' mean assessment of the Republican Party's racial symbolism was .34, which translates into negative perceptions of the GOP's image with respect to race. When blacks read a version of the convention coverage that highlighted the diversity of the convention program, they placed the Republican Party at .35, a small and not statistically significant increase. Similarly, when black subjects read about the convention in the race-platform condition, the Republican Party's placement on the racial symbolism dimension experienced a small and statistically insignificant decrease, to .29.

In summary, the survey and experimental results suggest that the ability to reshape party images largely depended not only on the individual's race but also on what information the individual received. The survey results show that convention exposure correlated positively with perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race. Those who watched a great deal of the convention perceived the GOP as much better at reaching out to blacks and other minorities than did those who did not watch the convention. Further, the findings indicate that the Republican Party had greater success at modifying its image among whites. Regardless of the amount of convention exposure, blacks' Republican Party images remained intact. Moreover, although whites' party images altered as a result of convention exposure, the nature of information about the convention they received mattered. By excluding a discussion of the diversity of the Republican Party in 2000 or by juxtaposing the presence of blacks at the convention with a statement about the party's unchanged policy positions, the media made it difficult for the GOP to meet the threshold for what constitutes change.

Exploring the Alternatives

In the previous section, I demonstrated that the effect of watching the convention was contingent on the race of the individual. But was this really a race effect, or do alternative explanations account for why blacks and whites responded differently? This section answers this question.

Political Knowledge

Levels of political knowledge have long been associated with susceptibility to political communication and persuasion (see, e.g., Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992; Miller and Krosnick 1999, 2000). But would varying levels of political knowledge account for differences between blacks and whites? To answer this question, I composed an index of political knowledge using questions featured on the 2002–2003 Party Image Study.⁴ The index comprised five measures, each representing the responses to questions about contemporary U.S. national politics.

1. What job or political office does Clarence Thomas hold?
2. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
3. Who is the U.S. secretary of state?
4. Whose responsibility is it to decide if a law is constitutional or not? Is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?
5. What job or political office does Joe Lieberman hold?⁵

Using this scale, I compared the levels of political knowledge of blacks and whites. Although whites scored moderately higher than African Americans (.46 compared to .40), this difference was not statistically significant. While I do not argue that levels of political sophistication did not affect individuals' receptiveness to the Republican race strategy (see Philpot 2004), differences in political knowledge could not have accounted for the differences in blacks' and whites' susceptibility.

Alternatively, susceptibility might be contingent on issue-specific knowledge rather than on more general political knowledge. To explore whether this claim could be substantiated, I examined subjects' ability to answer the political knowledge questions that asked about African Americans. Specifically, I examined question 1, which asked about Clarence Thomas, and question 3, which asked about Colin Powell.⁶

4. Similar items were not available on the Post–GOP Convention Poll.

5. For each question, responses were coded 1 if the respondent answered the question correctly and 0 if the respondent did not. The scores for each question were then added together and scaled from 0 to 1. The interitem correlation between these measures ranged from .02 to .42. The Chronbach's alpha for these five items was .64. Overall, the mean score on this dimension was .42.

6. Again, responses were coded 1 if the respondent answered the question correctly and 0 if the respondent did not. The scores for each question were then added together and scaled from 0 to 1. The interitem correlation between these measures was .31. The Chronbach's alpha for these two items was .48, and the mean score on this dimension was .54.

As with general political knowledge, the variation between blacks' and whites' levels of issue-specific knowledge could not have accounted for the differences in levels of receptiveness to the Republican race strategy. African Americans' mean score was .53, while for whites that number was .56, a difference that was not statistically significant.

Party Identification

Finally, I examined whether party identification explains differences between blacks' and whites' susceptibility to convention exposure. Much like the national samples, 73 percent of the African Americans in the experimental sample identified as Democrats. Of the remainder, 7 percent identified as Republicans and 20 percent identified as independents. In contrast, 38 percent of the whites in the experimental sample identified as Democrats, an equal percentage identified as Republicans, and 25 percent identified as independents.⁷ Thus, it is quite possible that the overwhelming number of Democrats in the black sample could be responsible for the differences between blacks and whites. Studies have shown that reactions to campaigns are very much contingent on the perceiver's party identification. Support for the importance of party identification dates back to early voting studies (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; A. Campbell et al. 1960). Specifically, strong identifiers tend to resist campaign communication of the other party. If such is the case, blacks' party identification could be driving the differences found between blacks and whites. In other words, the disproportionate number of Democrats in the African American electorate may cause the race effect. Moreover, if blacks and whites with similar partisanship are compared, the race difference should disappear.

To explore whether party identification could account for the differences found between blacks and whites, I once again compared blacks' and whites' placement of the Republican Party on the racial symbolism dimension. This time, however, I restricted my comparisons to strong Democrats. As stated earlier, African Americans may resist the Republican Party's message of inclusion because they tend to be strong Democrats. As such, they should not be receptive to the Republican Party's campaign communication because of their partisanship rather than their race. If such is the case, partisanship should

7. Total exceeds 100 percent as a consequence of rounding.

also explain whites' receptivity to the Republican convention. In other words, strong Democrats, regardless of race, should be less affected by convention exposure.

Figure 9, which uses the Post-GOP Convention Poll data, shows that both blacks and whites who did not watch the convention perceived the Republican Party as having a negative racial symbolism.⁸ Strong Democrats, regardless of race, apparently believed that the Republican Party did not do a good job reaching out to minorities. Although strong Democrats who were African American placed the Republican Party lower than strong Democrats who were white, this difference is not statistically significant and might be expected since, absent exposure to the convention, strong Democrats would not necessarily be primed to think about race when evaluating the Republican Party. Thus, no polarization should exist between blacks and whites. When strong Democrats watched the convention, whites placed the Republican Party .08 points higher on the racial symbolism dimension. In contrast, blacks lowered their placement of the GOP by .02, from .19 to .17. Moreover, the differences between black and white strong Democrats were statistically significant. When strong Democrats were exposed to the images of black supporters of the Republican Party at the convention, black and white perceptions of the GOP's racial symbolism diverged. However, neither group placed the Republican Party above .5 on the racial symbolism dimension.

As figure 10 indicates, a similar pattern emerges in the 2002–2003 Party Image Study.⁹ Again, both black and white strong Democrats in all experimental treatment groups on average gave the Republican Party negative racial symbolism scores. In the control condition, blacks who were strong Democrats gave the Republican Party a mean racial symbolism score of .32. Whites with the same party identification placed the Republican Party at .05, a statistically significant difference. In the race-neutral condition, the difference between whites and blacks dissipated. Although blacks placed the GOP at .34 and whites gave the Republican Party an average racial symbolism score of .25, this differ-

8. This figure is based on the regression analyses in table A4. All of the predicted values in this figure were calculated by holding gender at its mode and all other variables constant at their means.

9. This figure is based on the regression analyses in table A5. As with the other figures, the predicted values in figure 10 were calculated by holding gender at its mode and all other variables constant at their means.

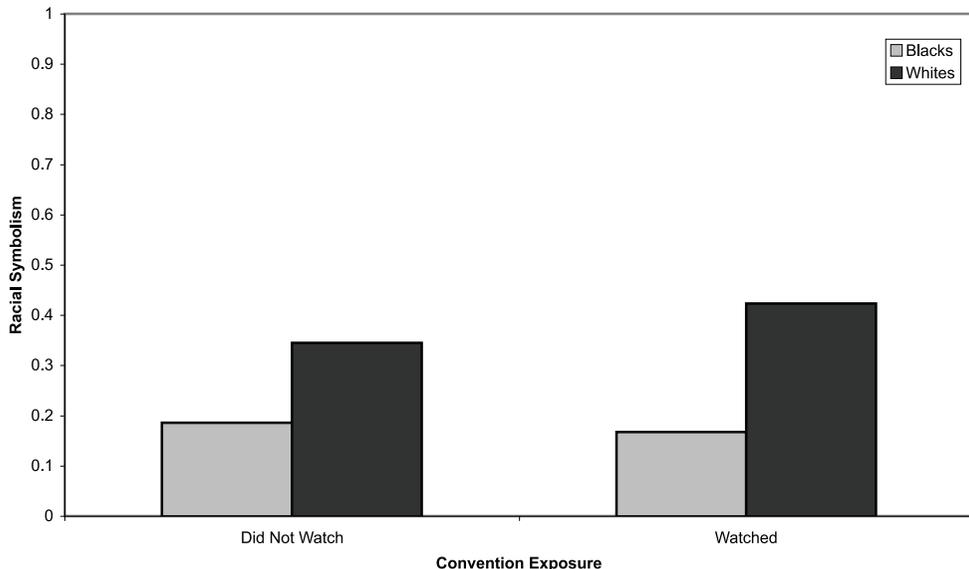


Fig. 9. Perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism based on convention exposure among strong Democrats. (Data from Post-GOP Convention Poll.)

ence was statistically indistinguishable from 0. When strong Democrats read about the diversity featured at the 2000 Republican National Convention, whites in the race-no platform condition placed the Republican Party .11 points higher on the racial symbolism dimension than did whites in the control condition. Conversely, blacks in the race-no platform condition lowered their placement of the party by .02. Further, the difference between blacks' and whites' reactions in this condition was statistically significant. Finally, in the race-platform condition, where subjects read about the black convention attendees and read that the GOP had not changed its platform, the difference between black and white partisans once again disappeared. Although a statistically significant difference existed between blacks and whites in general, no additional difference occurred between black and white partisans in this particular condition. Taken together, these results suggest that being strong Democrats cannot entirely explain why blacks were more resistant to the Republican appeal.

In summary, political knowledge (either issue specific or more general) and party identification fail to explain the differences found

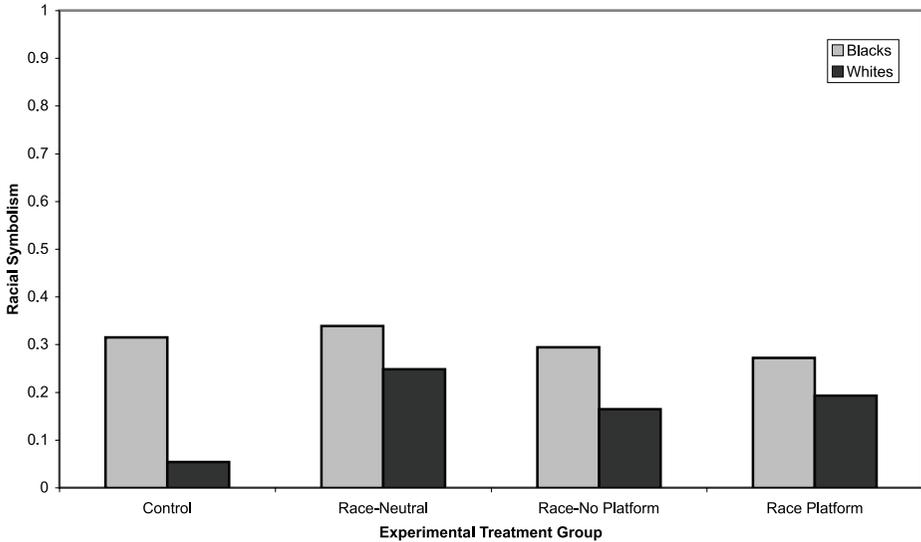


Fig. 10. The impact of convention frames on perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism among strong Democrats. (Data from 2002–2003 Party Image Study.)

between blacks and whites. For the most part, blacks remained fairly constant, regardless of what type of information they received about the convention, in their perceptions of the Republican Party. In contrast, whites of both parties modified (to varying degrees) their Republican Party images with respect to race when exposed to the diversity featured at the 2000 Republican National Convention. Party identification unquestionably matters. Nevertheless, susceptibility to the Republican campaign was also contingent on race.

Racial Symbolism and Candidate Evaluation

As discussed in chapter 1, the ultimate goal of reshaping party images is electoral success. Consequently, I now examine the impact of convention exposure and improving party images on candidate evaluations. I speculated earlier that the same stimulus—in this case, the 2000 Republican National Convention—that altered party images with respect to race should also prime the use of this construct in subsequent candidate evaluations. Given that watching the convention affected whites' but not blacks' perceptions of the GOP's outreach efforts, I examined whether watching the convention primed the use of

these perceptions when individuals were required to evaluate political candidates and whether the differences between blacks and whites persisted. If a priming effect occurred, the perception of the Republican Party's effort to reach out to minorities would be expected to be contingent on watching a great deal of the convention. I expected to find that convention exposure would increase the weight of the Republican Party's racial symbolism in subsequent evaluations of Republican candidates.

Figure 11 confirms my expectations. Using the results of a logistic regression (see table A5 in the appendix), I calculated the predicted probability of voting for George W. Bush in 2000 based on convention exposure.¹⁰ Figure 11 presents the increase in the probability of voting for Bush when images of the Republican Party move from negative racial symbolism to positive racial symbolism. In other words, I subtracted the probability of voting for Bush among those with negative perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race from the probability of voting for Bush among those with a positive perception. For African Americans, the difference between having negative and positive perceptions of the GOP's racial symbolism among non-convention watchers was only .17. Absent convention watching, if the Republican Party improved its image on race among blacks, it could expect only a modest increase in the probability of voting for its presidential candidate. Although the probability of voting for Bush increased by .34 among those who watched the convention, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. Stated another way, improving party images among blacks yielded the same boost in the probability of voting for Bush regardless of convention exposure.

Watching the convention increased the weight of the Republican Party's racial symbolism on white respondents' candidate evaluations. Specifically, improving the Republican Party's image with respect to race among those who did not watch the convention led to a .12 increase in the probability of voting for Bush. By improving party images among those whites who watched the convention, however, the Republican Party increased the probability of voting for Bush by .62, a statistically significant difference.

10. These analyses rely on the Post-GOP Convention Poll. Predicted probabilities were calculated by holding gender at its mode and all other variables constant at their means.

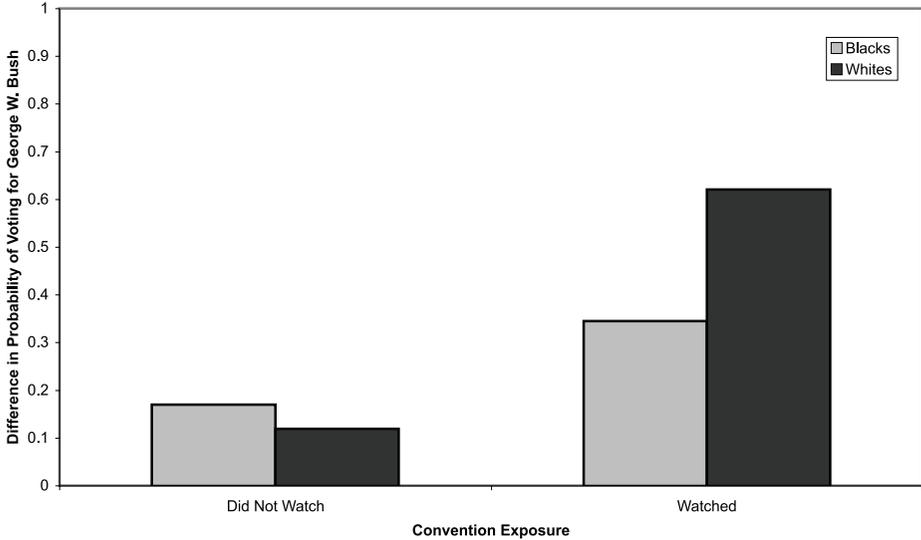


Fig. 11. The impact of improving the Republican Party's racial symbolism on the probability of voting for George W. Bush. (Data from Post-GOP Convention Poll.)

I conducted similar analyses using the 2002–2003 Party Image Study. Figure 12 presents the difference in Bush's feeling thermometer scores when the Republican Party improved its image in the different treatment groups.¹¹ In both the control and race-neutral conditions, improving party images led to a small and statistically insignificant decrease in Bush's mean feeling thermometer scores among both blacks and whites. Essentially, in these two conditions where subjects were not exposed to an account of the diversity of the 2000 Republican National Convention's program, the GOP's image with respect to race had no bearing on evaluations of Bush.

Conversely, improving party images among subjects in the race-no platform and race-platform conditions resulted in a substantial and statistically significant increase in Bush's feeling thermometer scores. Among blacks in the race-no platform condition, improving the

11. This figure is based on the regression analyses in table A7. The mean thermometer scores were calculated by holding gender at its mode and holding all other variables at their means.

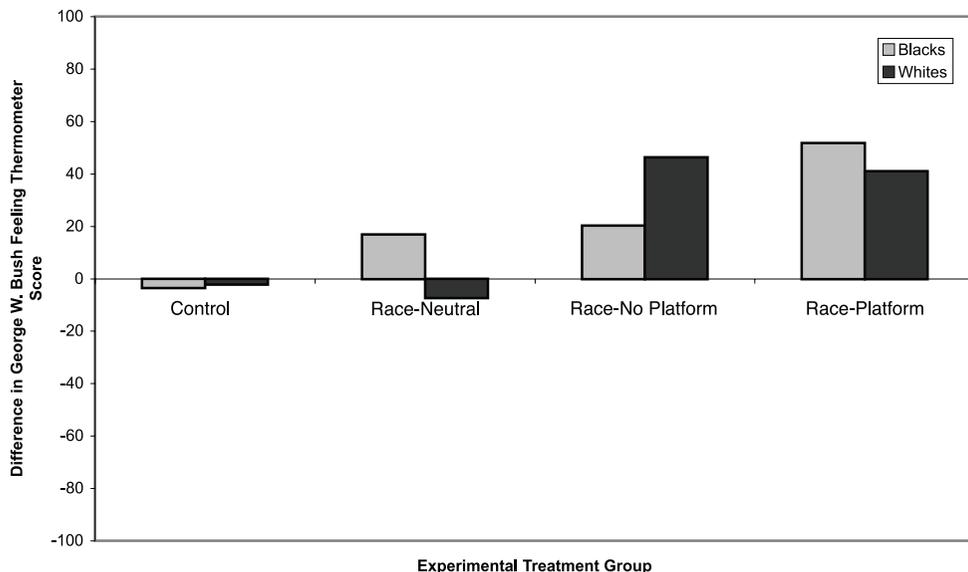


Fig. 12. The impact of improving the Republican Party's racial symbolism on George W. Bush's feeling thermometer. (Data from 2002–2003 Party Image Study.)

Republican Party's racial symbolism yielded a 20-point increase in Bush's feeling thermometer. This increase reached 52 points among blacks in the race-platform condition. When whites read about the African Americans present at the 2000 convention in the race-no platform condition and improved their images of the Republican Party's racial symbolism, Bush's feeling thermometer increased by 46 points. Likewise, Bush's feeling thermometer increased by 41 points when subjects modified their party images in a positive direction in the race-platform condition.

In sum, exposing people to information about the Republican Party's diversity efforts during the 2000 national convention primed the use of the party's racial symbolism in subsequent candidate evaluation. Bush received more positive evaluations from individuals whose party images were modified as a result of convention exposure; however, party images did not improve in all cases. On average, blacks, regardless of convention exposure, had negative perceptions of the GOP's racial symbolism. Hence, evaluations of Bush remained quite low. Moreover, evaluations of Bush became more negative when

blacks were primed to think about the Republican Party's racial symbolism. In the control condition, blacks with negative perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race gave Bush a mean score of 42 on the feeling thermometer. Blacks who believed that the Republican Party did a bad job reaching out to minorities in the race—no Platform and race-platform conditions gave Bush average feeling thermometer scores of 23 and 16, respectively. In addition, whites' party images did not improve in the race-platform condition. Whites with negative perceptions of the Republican Party in the control condition gave Bush a mean thermometer score of 68. In the race-platform condition, whites with negative perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism gave Bush a score of 38. Consequently, priming the section of the Republican Party's image that relates to race in candidate evaluations could adversely affect candidate evaluations among those who did not believe that the Republican Party did a good job reaching out to minorities.

Maintaining the Republican Party's Southern Base

Finally, I examined the impact of watching the convention on southern whites.¹² In chapter 1, I posited that to succeed, the 2000 Republican race strategy had to attract new voters without alienating its current electoral base. The results presented in this chapter suggest that exposure to the 2000 Republican National Convention significantly increased the likelihood of voting for Bush among both white and black voters provided that the convention convinced them that the Republican Party did a good job of reaching out to blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities. But how did southern whites react to the convention? To answer this question, I replicated the analyses among southern whites in the Gallup survey.¹³

Figure 13 presents the results.¹⁴ On average, whites in the South placed the Republican Party at .67 on the racial symbolism dimension.

12. The South is defined as the eleven states of the Confederacy—South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Texas.

13. Analyses in this section are confined to the Post-GOP Convention Poll because subjects were not asked the state in which they resided in the 2002–2003 Party Image Survey, so there were no means of distinguishing between southerners and nonsoutherners.

14. Figures 13 and 14 are based on the analyses presented in table A8. As with the other figures in this chapter, the predicted values were calculated by holding gender at its mode and the rest of the variables constant at their means.

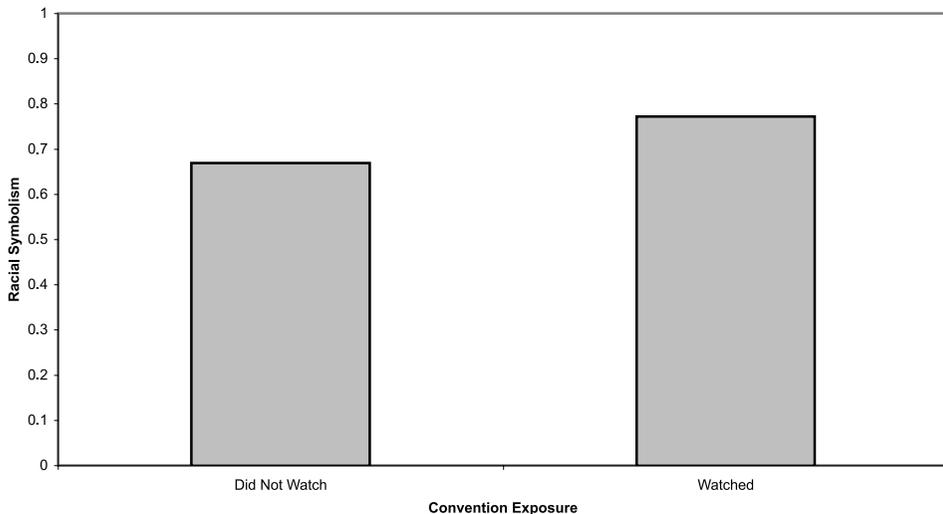


Fig. 13. Perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism based on convention exposure among southern whites. (Data from Post-GOP Convention Poll).

Like whites in general, southern whites' significantly improved their party images, improving their placement of the Republican Party on the racial symbolism item by .10, to .77, when exposed to the convention.

Figure 14 indicates that watching the convention also primed the use of the Republican Party's racial symbolism in southern white vote preferences. For example, among southern whites who watched the convention, improving the Republican Party's image with respect to race increased the likelihood of voting for George W. Bush by 77 percentage points (from .21 to .98). Among southern whites who did not watch the convention, this increase amounted to only 3 percentage points. The probability of voting for Bush among southern whites with negative perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism not exposed to the convention was .84. When this group had positive perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race, the probability of voting for Bush was .87. Even though the Republican Party's image with respect to race did not play a significant role in the likelihood of voting for Bush among those who did not watch the convention, the probability of voting for Bush remained quite high. These

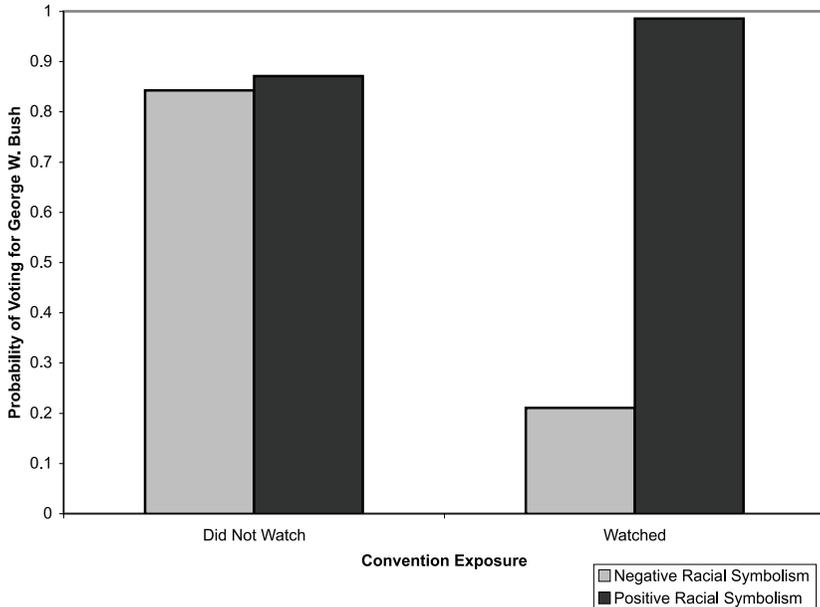


Fig. 14. The impact of improving the Republican Party's racial symbolism on the probability of voting for George W. Bush among southern whites. (Data from Post-GOP Convention Poll).

findings suggest that the Republican Party succeeded on both fronts—it increased its number of supporters and did not disrupt its current electoral base.

Conclusion

Convention watching apparently affected people's perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism. Not everyone who watched the convention was affected in the same way, however. Susceptibility to convention exposure was contingent on an individual's race. As posited earlier, watching the 2000 Republican convention generally had no effect on African Americans' perceptions of the GOP, perhaps because African Americans' preexisting party images were so strongly rooted that the Republican Party's recent attempt to appear racially inclusive could not override the numerous other incidences of racial conservatism. For blacks, increasing the visibility of blacks in the party was not enough to change the Republican Party's image with respect to race because the party had not altered the policy positions that

directly affected blacks. By failing to address the substantive components of their party images—the information these individuals used to make their interpretations—the Republican Party failed to address the objects that give meaning to the party.

Modifying party images also was largely contingent on what information individuals received about the convention. Convention exposure had only minimal effects on subjects exposed to mediated versions of the Republican Party's convention activities that deviated (even slightly) from the party's projected image. By spinning what transpired during the convention, the media created obstacles that impeded the process of party image change.

These findings also suggest that priming the Republican Party's racial symbolism in candidate evaluations proved to be a double-edged sword. Watching a great deal of the convention increased the weight of the GOP's racial symbolism on candidate evaluations. The ability to translate this phenomenon into electoral success, however, depended on the party's ability to improve its image. In cases where the Republican Party's image with respect to race remained negative, priming the use of this construct resulted in more negative evaluations of the Republican presidential candidate.

The results presented in this chapter suggest that when parties attempt to reshape their images along a particular dimension, they must do two things simultaneously—improve their party images with respect to that dimension and make that dimension relevant to candidate evaluations. Without accomplishing these two things concurrently, the process of altering party images might have unintended consequences.