

7 *The Second Time Around*

Race and the 2004 Republican National Convention

The 2004 Republican National Convention will celebrate the president's record of improving the quality of life for all Americans. Under the leadership of President Bush, the Republican Party celebrates diversity and is strengthening its ties to ethnic communities throughout the nation.

—Republican National Committee, 2004

WHILE POLITICAL PARTIES FACE several obstacles when attempting to reinvent themselves in the minds of the public, there is at least one way in which a party can smooth the road ahead of it—repeat the effort. Continuing to project its new image through an additional election cycle demonstrates a certain level of sincerity and commitment to voters. Whereas a party projecting an inconsistent version of itself undermines its ability to convey change, sustaining the new image increases a party's credibility and bolsters its ability to alter its image. Thus, by repeating the effort, political parties are better able to modify existing partisan stereotypes.

The Republican Party's ability to reshape its racial symbolism depends on its willingness to repeat the message of inclusion and diversity featured during the 2000 election cycle. And in fact, the GOP did just that in 2004. As in 2000, the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City featured a number of African American speakers and entertainers.

In this chapter, I examine whether a political party has more success when voters realize that its attempt to reshape its image is part of an ongoing endeavor. To do so, I once again rely on experimental data. Specifically, I use the 2005 Party Image Study to examine whether highlighting the fact that the Republican Party's outreach to black voters was a repeated effort succeeded in reshaping the party's image. As part of the 2005 Party Image Study, subjects were exposed to four dif-

ferent versions of a question wording experiment. In the control condition, subjects were just required to answer the following question: “How much do you think the Republican Party has changed over the last few years?” Before answering this question in the other experimental treatment groups, subjects were asked to read one of three brief scenarios about the 2004 Republican National Convention—one that was race-neutral, one that described the GOP once again reaching out to black voters, and one that described the Republican Party’s outreach efforts in conjunction with its unchanged platform. (See the appendix for exact question wording.) In all three versions, subjects read, “This outreach effort is an ongoing strategy that began at the 2000 Republican National Convention.” After answering the experimental question, subjects were asked how well they thought the Republican Party did in reaching out to blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities. Responses to this question, which is the same item used in both the Post-GOP Convention Poll and the 2002–2003 Party Image Study, were coded 1 if subjects believed that the Republican Party did a good job, 0 if the party did a bad job, and .5 if the GOP did neither a good nor bad job.

I examine the differences in subjects’ mean placement of the Republican Party on the racial symbolism dimension based on experimental condition. I argue that two campaigns are better than one—that is, that political parties’ attempts to modify their images are more persuasive when they are replicated. By picking up where they left off, political parties are in a better position to meet the threshold for what constitutes change in voters’ minds. Therefore, I hypothesized that the Republican Party would have more success in reshaping its image in 2004 than was the case in 2000.

Pulling out the Stops

The presence of African Americans at the 2004 Republican National Convention met and in some instances exceeded the levels experienced in 2000. As table 11 illustrates, the number of black delegates increased from 85 (4.1 percent) in 2000 to 167 (6.7 percent) in 2004. The number of black alternates also increased, from 76 in 2000 to 124 in 2004. The convention featured notable African American celebrities such as 2003 Miss America Erika Harold and NFL Hall of Famer Lynn Swann. Musical guests included the Harlem Boys Choir and gospel recording artist Donnie McClurkin.

The Republican Party clearly was quite proud of its delegate diver-

sity. According to the official Web site for the 2004 convention, “[W]hen the Republican Party hosts its first-ever national convention in New York City next month, it will welcome the most diverse group of delegates in party history.”¹ The Web site spotlighted the minority delegates, profiling several black, Latino, and Asian American attendees.

In addition, the party provided background information on how it had increased its minority support and had done so at a rate that exceeded that of the Democratic Party. According to the Republican National Committee, the “Republican Party is celebrating a milestone achievement in [the] party’s connection with America’s minorities.”² The GOP also took pride in the fact that during his first term in office, Republican president George W. Bush had appointed one of the most diverse cabinets in history. Finally, the Republican Party detailed how the Bush administration’s record on education, home ownership, and unemployment had greatly benefited minorities.

After the convention, the Republican Party’s outreach efforts continued. In subsequent weeks, the GOP expended substantial resources on targeting minority voters. From September 7 to November 2, the Bush-Cheney campaign spent just under \$2 million on media targeting minority voters; in contrast, the Kerry-Edwards campaign spent slightly more than \$600,000 on minority media during the same period. As a proportion of cumulative media expenditures, the Republican Party spent about 2 percent on minority media buys, while the Democratic Party spent 1.5 percent (Shaw 2006). These figures suggest that in 2004, the Republican Party engaged in a number of activities aimed at attracting traditional Democratic-leaning voters.

TABLE 11. African American Presence at the 2004 Republican National Convention

Delegates	167 (6.7%)
Speakers	12 (12.8%)
Musical entertainers	3 (16.7%)

Source: Republican National Committee.

1. www.gopconvention.com.

2. www.gopconvention.com.

Even the Republican Party's 2004 platform received a bit of a facelift. Although the party did not change its position on racial issues, it made the discussion of racism and diversity slightly more prominent. Whereas in 2000 the GOP devoted only one paragraph to addressing racism and three paragraphs to minority interests, four years later the platform contained two paragraphs about racism and seven paragraphs about minorities. The 2004 Republican platform vowed to focus on America's most needy students, especially minority students, and denounced bigotry and prejudice and celebrated the nation's diversity. Still, with respect to affirmative action, the Republican Party's platform "reject[ed] preferences, quotas, and set-asides based on skin color, ethnicity, or gender, which perpetuate divisions and can lead people to question the accomplishments of successful minorities and women" (Republican National Convention 2004). As in previous years, the Republican Party did not support affirmative action. Nevertheless, diversity and inclusion clearly numbered among the Republicans' themes throughout the 2004 election cycle.

The Second Time Is the Charm

How did these activities resonate among voters? Figure 18 indicates that repeating the diversity effort improved the Republican Party's racial symbolism. In the control condition, where subjects received no information about the 2004 convention, the mean racial symbolism was .29. The GOP's racial symbolism improved in all three experimental conditions. When subjects were informed that the Republican Party was reaching out to Democratic-leaning voters or that the party was specifically trying to court African American voters, the mean placement of the GOP along the racial symbolism item increased a statistically significant .10, to .39.³ In the experimental condition where subjects read that the Republican Party had reached out to blacks but that the party had not changed its platform, the racial symbolism increased to .36, but this increase was not statistically significant.

The results presented in figure 18 suggest that repeating the effort may have convinced some of those who were less swayed by the 2000 effort. In the control condition, blacks on average gave the Republican Party a racial symbolism score of .23. When blacks read that the Republican Party was trying to attract African American voters as part of an ongoing effort that began in 2000, the GOP's racial symbolism

3. This difference is statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level (one-tailed test).

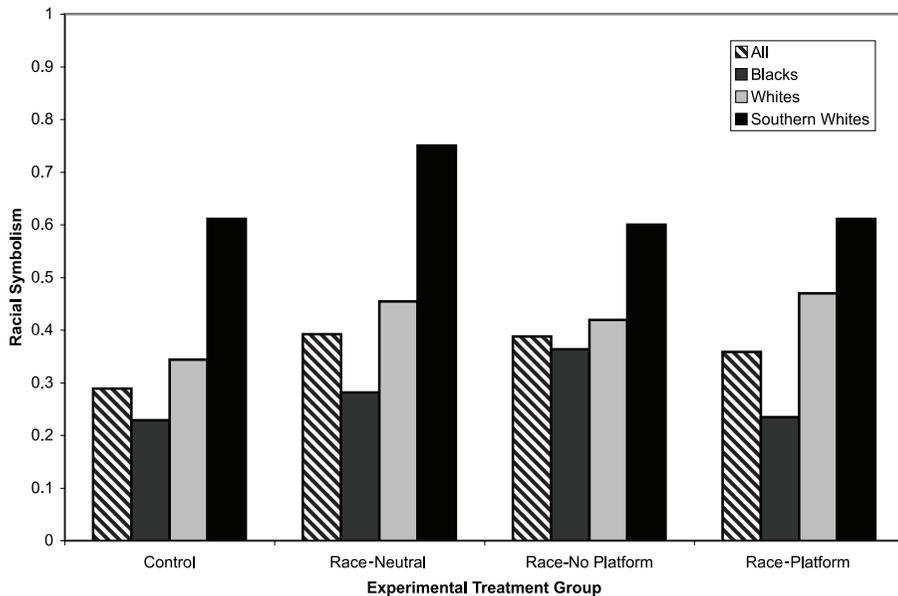


Fig. 18. Perceptions of the Republican Party's racial symbolism.
(Data from 2005 Party Image Study.)

increased to .36. The difference between the control and the race–no platform condition was statistically significant. The Republican Party also received a modest boost in the other two conditions, but those differences were not statistically significant.⁴

Figure 18 illustrates whites' reactions to the experimental treatments. Whites in the control group, on average, placed the Republican Party at .34 on the racial symbolism dimension. Unlike blacks' perceptions, however, whites' perceptions of the Republican Party did not improve in the race–no platform condition. Although the Republican Party's racial symbolism increased to .45 and .42 in the race-neutral

4. Another reason why there would be an observed effect in the 2005 Party Image Study that was absent in the 2002–2003 Party Image Study was that samples were recruited from different places. As a result, the 2005 sample might have a greater propensity to support the Republican Party. A brief examination of the party identification of both samples indicates that such is not the case. Seventy-three percent of the African Americans in the 2002–2003 Party Image Study identified with the Democratic Party, compared to 82 percent in the 2005 Party Image Study. Thus, blacks in the 2005 sample should have been more resistant to a message about the Republican Party's attempt to reshape its image with respect to race (see Philpot 2004).

and the race–no platform conditions respectively, these differences were not statistically significant. Only when whites read that the GOP was reaching out to black voters and that the party had not changed its platform did they place the party .13 points higher on the racial symbolism dimension.⁵

The Republican Party was less successful at reshaping party images among southern whites, however: those in the control group gave the GOP an average racial symbolism score of .61. In the race-neutral condition, the mean placement on the racial symbolism dimension increased by .14 to .75, a difference that was not statistically significant. When respondents were exposed to the racialized versions of the convention descriptions, perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race also remained unchanged. In the race–no platform condition, the GOP's mean placement was .60. Likewise, respondents in the race-platform condition gave the Republican Party an average racial symbolism score of .61. Neither of these conditions yielded a statistically significant difference in perceptions of the Republican Party's image with respect to race. This, however, is not necessarily bad news for the party. Southern whites, regardless of experimental treatment condition, believe that the Republican Party does a good job reaching out to minorities. Thus, repeating minority outreach efforts in 2004 did not alienate the Republican Party's electoral base.

Conclusion

By repeating the message of diversity that was present during the 2000 convention, the Republican Party continued to reshape its image with respect to race. Just as the dispute over the 2000 election undermined the progress made during the 2000 Republican National Convention by providing an alternative and contradictory version of the GOP's image, the 2004 Republican National Convention illustrated some consistency by the party. Generally speaking, this repeated effort left individuals with the impression that the Republican Party did a better job than Democrats at reaching out to blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities. However, mention of the party's unchanged platform impeded this process of party image change.

The repeated diversity effort apparently also gave the Republican strategy among blacks a sense of legitimacy that had been absent in 2000. Projecting the same image in 2004 enabled the party to con-

5. This difference is statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level (one-tailed test).

vince African Americans that it had changed. While the average placement of the Republican Party on the racial symbolism dimension across all conditions remained negative, the GOP's image with respect to race substantially improved in the minds of blacks in the race–no platform condition. Making blacks aware that the inclusive message featured at the 2004 Republican National Convention was a part of an ongoing effort that began in 2000 allowed the GOP to begin chiseling away at blacks' crystallized party images with respect to race. Nevertheless, when black subjects were informed that the GOP had not changed its platform, their party images remained unmodified. Here, blacks were reminded that although the Republican Party continued to project a racially diverse image, it had not changed its position on public policy issues—the most salient components of blacks' party images.

In contrast, white subjects' Republican Party images with respect to race only improved in the race–platform condition. While the data employed in this chapter do not permit an exploration of this seemingly counterintuitive result, I speculate that the race–platform condition was the only condition that provided enough context for the GOP's 2004 outreach efforts. Building electoral coalitions is a balancing act. Moving too far in one direction might allow a party to attract a particular group of voters, but this gain might well come at the expense of another group. Informing whites that the Republican Party was initiating yet another attempt to reach out to minority voters might have left whites uncertain about the party's direction and about how far it was willing to go to include minority groups into its party base. Hence, the race–no platform condition showed an increase in the Republican Party's placement on the racial symbolism dimension, but standard errors were too large to confirm that this difference is statistically significant. In the race–platform condition, where subjects read about the Republican Party reaching out to blacks but not changing its platform, whites were convinced that the GOP has changed without changing too much.

All in all, the Republican Party came out ahead in 2004. It maintained its support among southern whites while continuing to foster a better relationship with blacks. The Republican Party certainly still has a long way to go before it convinces all Americans that it has a positive racial symbolism. But as long as the party continues to project a diverse image, it will slowly gain momentum in this process.