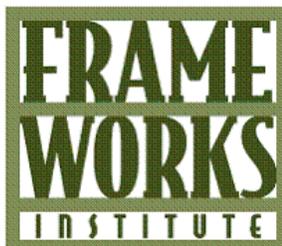


# Effects of Explicitness in the Framing of Race



## A FrameWorks Research Report

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## Introduction

It has been clear for some time now that it is difficult to have a productive public conversation about race. The tone is often rhetorical and sheds little insight on how the country can effectively address stark racial inequality in such areas as education, jobs, health, employment, and wealth. While the candidacy of Barack Obama has raised several important questions about racial discourse in the post-civil rights era, the jury is still out on whether or not his presidential campaign will fundamentally transform how Americans think and talk about race. Thus, in most corners of American life racial conversation remains stilted. People are unsure of what to say, motives are misunderstood and mistrusted, and the policy debates quickly break down along racial, partisan, and ideological lines. Perhaps the most telling part is that people have racially segregated lives. They rarely live together, go to school together, or worship together. To be sure, things have changed in many important ways, and one should not minimize such changes. Nonetheless, the race question remains an “American dilemma”.

Over the last few years the FrameWorks Institute has been engaged in a broad based study of how American thinking about race - and the resultant public discourse - influences public policy. This work has been generously supported by the JEHT Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and the California Endowment. The research grew out of an underlying sense that matters of race were embedded in many of the issue areas in which both the funders and the FrameWorks Institute worked. Whether it was health care reform, early child development, immigration reform or our rural project, racial considerations played a significant and often troubling role in how people came to important policy judgments. Our examination of racial thinking has spanned time, space, and research methodology. We have talked to people in different parts of the country; we have relied on both qualitative and quantitative approaches; and we have studied the role of the media.

Our earlier research reveals several critical findings. The first is that there is a three part dominant frame when it comes to race. Americans – white people in particular -believe that the country has made tremendous progress on the race question. This progress is attributed to the effective enforcement of anti-discrimination laws by the United States government. To the extent that racism exists at all, it is personal; in the other words it resides in hearts of minds of “bad” people (and bad people come in all colors). The second element of the dominant frame is that racial inequality across social and economic indicators is the result of the failure of minority groups – African Americans in particular – to live up to the core value of self-makingness. After all, government intervention has leveled the playing field. And the impressionistic evidence is pretty clear to people; there are many prominent black Americans (e.g., Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Michael Jordan).

The final element is the sense that whites and nonwhites – and blacks and whites in particular – have separate fates. That is, their life chances are determined by fundamentally different factors. Whites’ fate is seen as under the control of their own volition while minorities’ destiny is out of their control. Many observers point to perceived racial differences in response to the advance of Hurricane Katrina as evidence of this point. According to many media accounts, whites were depicted as controlling their fate (i.e., the largest peacetime evacuation in American history) as

they drove, flew, and rode to safe destinations. Blacks, on the other hand, were often depicted as the victims of luck and circumstance (i.e., the Super Dome debacle); unable or unwilling to flee even though everyone knew the hurricane was coming. In other words, black did not control their own destiny. To the extent that there were public discussions about systemic failures, they tended to focus on the incompetence of particular politicians or administrations. Little of the mainstream discourse, to the contrary, called attention to long-standing institutional inequities; the contrite essays about America's first real look at poverty notwithstanding.

In all, the dominant frame is at odds with the social analysis offered by social justice advocates because it conceals specifications of structural or systemic matters as explanations of racial inequality.

The first phase of our research suggests that when it comes to race, the dominant frame available to most (white) Americans conceals systemic thinking about remedies for racial inequality. Not surprisingly, there has been little support in recent years for a race-based policy agenda. The next phase of our research concerns how to redirect the public conversation about race such that it produces greater support for a race-based public policy agenda.

### **Reframing Race**

There has been a great deal of discussion lately in the social science literature about the impact of racial cues in communications on mass attitudes and policy preferences (for a review see, Mendelberg, 2008). The basic notion is that exposure to racial cues in communications – whether political or otherwise – has a measurable influence on people's political and policy preferences. Racial cues can be conceptualized in many ways. The prevailing framework in the social science literature is the so called "IE model" of racialized communications. The IE or implicit/explicit model of racial cues was developed by Tali Mendelberg in her book *The Race Card* (2001) to explain the public's reaction to race-based electoral strategies such as the well-known Willie Horton advertisements utilized in the 1988 presidential elections. In her book Mendelberg defines explicit racial cues as using "...racial nouns or adjectives to endorse white prerogatives, to express anti-black sentiment, to represent racial stereotypes or to portray a threat by African Americans". Implicit racial cues feature a much more subtle and indirect referencing of racial matters, often leaving out specific words like "black" or "race".

Much of the controversy surrounding the IE model focuses on the extent to which exposure to racial cues in communications "primes" existing racial predispositions making them more important to one's reasoning about political and policy considerations (for a review see, Huber and Lapinsky, 2006; 2008). This is an important question, and one to which we shall return to later in the report. What has been underdeveloped, we maintain, is a full accounting of the definition of explicit cues. We argue that the literature's treatment of explicit racial cues is incomplete. Our reconstruction of the concept has to do with a different calculus of the attribution of responsibility.

The common equation is to feature negative depictions of African Americans - black criminals or welfare cheats for example - as measures of explicit racial cues thus making the black actor the central causal agent in the communications. Clearly this is one form of racialized

communications. There are, however, other ways to conceptualize explicit cues that take into account other kinds of racialized communications. Specifically, there is a large body of research in law, communication studies, sociology, and critical studies that hypothesizes that discussions of race in America must come to terms with the institutional and systemic racial barriers inherent in the society (e.g., Armour, 1997; Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Feagin, 2006; Knowles and Pruitt, 1969; Marable, 1984; Massey and Denton, 1993; Omi and Winant, 1986). On this line of reasoning, a truly productive conversation about race must include explicit acknowledgment of the ways in which racism is embedded – both historically and contemporarily – in American institutions such as the courts, legislative bodies, and the criminal justice system. Thus the central element in the content of explicitly racialized communications is the extent to which the racial cue attributes responsibility for racial inequality to discriminatory institutional practices in the society.

This type of explicit racial communication has been historically given voice by a wide range of social justice advocacy groups. The rhetoric of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, for instance, is consistent with this narrative. Perhaps the most notable recent public example was revealed in the current presidential campaign. In several sermons the Reverend Jeremiah Wright (presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama's long time pastor) asserted that racial inequality was the direct result of a history of discriminatory practices by the American government and society. The firestorm of controversy surrounding the revelation of his remarks foreshadows the predicted impact of explicitly communicating race on mainstream public opinion. White pundits, politicians, and many segments of the white population were outraged by the remarks and called for candidate Obama to immediately renounce his association with Wright.

The point here is that explicit racial cues are more than simply negative portrayals of minority groups and their members. The pertinent question is whether or not explicitly attributing responsibility for racial inequality to institutional bias is perceived by mainstream America to be a threat to or a necessary step on the path to racial reconciliation. This is important because the basic finding of the very influential Mendelberg study is that exposure to explicit racial cues does not inhibit support for race-based public policies. In her version of the IE model, explicit cues do not prime racial sentiments because people do not want to be perceived as racist (social desirability effects) and hence reject race-based appeals. Rather, more subtle racial cues, often working subconsciously, are likely to prime the racial predispositions that influence political choices and policy preferences.

Our formulation of the IE model, on the other hand, leads to a different set of conclusions about the impact of exposure to implicit and explicit racial cues in communications. It is quite possible, we surmise, that attributing responsibility for racial inequality to institutional racism will be perceived as a threat by mainstream Americans. This hypothesis is based on the concept of racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). The primary assumption of this research is that whites' rejection of race-based public policy is a function of their resentment over what they perceive to be unfair advantages that the government (or system) has bestowed upon minorities (blacks in particular) in violation of basic American values such as individual responsibility or self-makingness. In turn, resentful whites are unwilling to support a wide range of public policies thought to benefit racial minorities (see also, Sears et al., 2000). To the extent that this

is correct, we would expect that the more the cues attribute responsibility for inequality to the system, the less support for policies perceived to benefit minorities.

The remainder of this report details the research design, measurement issues, and the results from a set of experimental studies. The basic research question is can you be explicit about institutionalized racism and move public will in support of public policies that benefit minority communities?

### **Methodology: Sampling, Research Design and Measurement**

This study, part of a larger research program, examines the impact of racial cues in communication on public attitudes and policy preferences. Respondents were recruited to participate in an on-line experimental study. Two key issues are raised by our approach. The first has to do with experimentation. It is widely known that the comparative advantage of experiments is in the capacity to generate persuasive evidence of causation; particularly compared to the inability of public opinion surveys to secure communications-related effects. On the other hand, experiments general suffer from limited generalizability because of their reliance on convenience samples.

This leads to the second issue – web-based experiments. To get around the problem of generalizability but retain the causal power of experimentation, communications researchers have turned to a new generation of on-line samples. In our case, we have collaborated with the Political Communications Laboratory (under the direction of Dr. Shanto Iyengar) and Polimetrix at Stanford University (under the direction of Dr. Douglas Rivers) to sample from national research panels.

The samples are built on two million panelists required to participate in weekly studies in exchange for free Internet access. A two-stage sampling procedure is utilized to create a “matched” sample. First, a conventional random sample is drawn utilizing a RDD sampling frame. At the second stage Polimetrix mirrors the conventional sample by selecting panelists who most closely resemble each member of the random sample. In this way, then, we are able to leverage the explanatory power of experiments with the more robust sampling procedures of a national survey.

One concern about web-based research revolves around digital divide issues. To be sure, many underserved populations have limited access to the Internet. People in remote rural areas, poor people, and people who are transient are less likely to have access and connectivity. Many of these folks, however, are also hard to reach by telephone. As far the question of race vis-à-vis the digital divide, there are two things to bear in mind. The first is that the gap is closing. Not fast enough perhaps, but it is closing. The second is that the on-line community is certainly no less diverse than samples drawn from research campuses. Indeed, one could make the case that the on-line community is actually more diverse. Finally, we should note that the populations we are most interested in are the politically and civically engaged. To the extent that it is safe to assume that elected officials and policymakers pay attention to the politically engaged, our focus on these populations is appropriate.

### *Sampling*

Utilizing this methodology we built two discrete samples. The first was a national panel consisting of four hundred and fourteen civically engaged citizens. The second was a special California sample designed to over-sample African Americans and Hispanics. This produced a total number of six hundred and twenty-two cases. The demographic and political characteristics of the samples are displayed in Table 1. Not surprisingly, California is a bit different from the

Table 1  
Sample Characteristics

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>California</b>
White	80%	42%
Black	12	24
Hispanic	2	25
Other	6	9
College Graduate	36	40
Over \$50K Family Income	55	65
Women	55	51
Married	57	52
Frequent Church Attendance	31	22
<b>Party Identification</b>		
Republican	30	24
Independent	25	23
Democrat	36	45
<b>Ideology</b>		
Conservative	39	29
Moderate	32	32
Liberal	24%	35%
<b>N</b>	414	622

rest of the country. For example, our California respondents are more educated, affluent, Democratic and liberal; the national sample is more devout, female, and likely to be married. The racial composition of the two samples varies widely, of course, because of the oversampling of African Americans and Hispanics in California. In all, however, the differences between the two samples are just what we would expect given the well-known uniqueness of the Golden State.

Respondents logged online to participate in a study of their opinions about “issues in the news these days”. Study participants were assigned to a randomized treatment condition in which they received one of three versions of a paragraph corresponding to either an implicit racial cue, a mixed racial cue, or an explicit racial cue. The treatment condition was placed immediately following an initial set of questions probing their level of concern about a range of issues. The results of the pre-test are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2  
 Most Important Issue  
 % Extremely/Somewhat Concerned  
 August - September 2007

	<b>National</b>	<b>California</b>
Education and Schools	92%	94%
Well-Being of Children	89	91
Health Care	89	88
Crime and Law Enforcement	90	88
Economy	88	88
War in Iraq	91	93
Terrorism	84	78
Global Warming	63%	71%
N	414	622

Not too surprisingly, respondents in both samples reported being extremely concerned about the war in Iraq (67% in California; 64% in the national sample). To the extent that there were differences, Californians were considerably more likely to be extremely concerned about global warming (again, not to surprising given the strength of the environmental movement in the state) and respondents in the national sample were more likely than Californians to be extremely concerned about terrorism. Otherwise, respondents in both samples expressed a great deal of concern about the well-being of children, the state of education, and healthcare. While concern about the economy ranked lower than one might expect, remember that the poll was taken in the summer of 2007 thus well before the most severe stages of economic woes in the United States.

### *Research Design*

The crux of the analysis turns on exposure to racial cues in the experimental treatments. The most difficult task was constructing treatments that followed the same basic structure but allowed room for making the conditions different enough to be a fair (but tough) test of the core hypotheses. Recall from our earlier discussion that the key conceptual distinction between the standard IE model and our revised version is the extent to which the communications makes explicit institutional responsibility for racial inequality in the society. In other words, the communications must make clear that systemic racism is responsible for racial differences across social, economic, and political variables. Words like discrimination, racism, and fairness characterize this mode of communication. Implicit cues, on the other hand, do not focus on the root causes of inequality; rather this mode of communications calls attention to society's ability to fix social problems.

The box below lays out the three experimental treatments to which subjects were exposed. As is readily apparent, the manipulation is subtle in the sense that it relies on a relatively small number of words to convey the different versions of our IE model. That is, the structure is exactly the same across the treatments and the only difference between them is the manipulation of a few sentences related to implicit v. explicit racial cues. In the implicit condition, for instance, there is no overt reference to discrimination or fairness; instead the text focuses on the existence of

“effective programs and policies” and the need to bring them to scale. While the treatment by necessity mentions minority communities, it does not lay the blame for racial inequality at the doorstep of institutional racism.

### **Treatments**

#### *1. Implicit Racial Cues*

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that we as a society are not devoting enough attention to effective policies and programs that benefit minority communities. They maintain that effective solutions do exist and that progress can be made if programs are routinely evaluated and the good ones brought to scale. According to this view, smart states have significantly improved conditions in some minority communities by raising teacher quality, creating fairer lending policies for buying homes, and increasing the number of health professionals. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to creating better solutions to problems affecting minority communities.

#### *2. Mixed Racial Cues*

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that minority communities still face many barriers to opportunity (e.g., declining school budgets, restrictive lending practices and a scarcity of health professionals). The American Dream, however, has always relied on creating an environment where everyone has an opportunity to achieve. According to this view, we need to devote more attention to ensure that every community – including minority communities - provides an opportunity to succeed for all its residents resulting in a better quality of life and future prosperity for the nation as a whole. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to improve conditions in minority communities.

#### *3. Explicit Racial Cues*

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that problems in minority communities are the result of discriminatory practices that continue to unfairly target minorities. Whether overtly or more subtly, minorities are treated differently when it comes to such things as getting ahead in the classroom, applying for a home loan, and being able to see a doctor. According to this view, we need to renew our commitment to a just society by devoting more resources to policies that recognize and address fairness in our society. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to in a manner that is fairer to minority communities.

The second treatment presents “mixed” racial cues. In this instance the text does reference barriers but focuses the majority of attention on the role of opportunity in the society. In this case the attribution of responsibility is tied to something like “blocked opportunities” as opposed to racial discrimination per se. The third treatment represents explicit racial cues in communications. Here the attribution of responsibility is clearly tied to discriminatory practices at the systems level. It indicates that there is both overt and covert racism at the core of racial inequality in America.

In all, the experimental manipulations offer a very difficult test of the IE model. The only substantive difference between the treatments is an alteration in the attribution of responsibility for racial inequity represented as subtle changes in the text to which respondents are exposed.

If there is one criticism of our approach it lies in the fact that the text references the situation of racial minorities in the society. To a degree, then, it is plausible that we do not have a pure test of the implicit v. explicit hypothesis because we do not have a treatment that presents racial differences in a benign fashion. On the other hand, the fact that the characterization of American minorities is constant across all three treatment conditions and that we have a control condition

in which participants were not exposed to a treatment at all renders concern about bias less persuasive.

### *Measurement*

The central question of our research is to what extent exposure to racial cues in communication has an impact on the kinds of public policies people support or oppose. In particular, we are interested in the impact of racial cues on a policy agenda that is, in the main, about extending or retracting benefits to racial minorities in America. The box below lists the operationalization of the race policy agenda. Several features bear comments. The first thing to note is that each of

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## Dependent Variables

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### Social Welfare

#### *Class:*

EITC for low-wage workers  
Low cost home loans for all  
Welfare to work

#### *Race:*

EITC for low-wage minority workers  
Low cost home loans for minorities  
Welfare to work for minorities

### Affirmative Action

#### *Preferential hiring and promotion:*

Asians/Blacks/Hispanics

#### *Special openings in colleges:*

Asians/Blacks/Hispanics

### Access to Health Care for Minorities

Harder for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics

### Social Determinants of Health in Minority Communities

Limit harmful products/services  
Limit alcohol/tobacco ads  
Promote safe products/services

### Community Development Policies in Minority Communities

Space set asides in developments  
Improve park facilities  
Improve park facilities  
Increased

### Crime Remedies

Prison education and job training  
Death Penalty  
'Three strikes' legislation  
Try juvenile felony as adult  
Violent juvenile felon in adult facility

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the categories represents a scale which incorporates multiple items. Thus for each set of measures we have created summative scales out of multiple questions. Each scale was factor analyzed and tested for inter-item reliability. The Cronbach's alpha measure of reliability reached the acceptable level of .75 for all of the scales and ranged from a low of .78 for Community Development Policies to a high of .92 for Crime Remedies. The second thing to note is that all scales range from zero to one and were recoded (where necessary) such that a positive or high score reflects opposition to a race policy agenda and a negative or low score reflects support of a race policy agenda. We chose this approach because our central hypothesis is that exposure to explicit cues attributing racial inequality to institutionalized discrimination will increase opposition to a race policy agenda among whites. The third distinguishing factor of our measurement scheme is that we standardized each measure utilizing a technique somewhat akin to a z-score. This allows us to compare and contrast effects across measures.

The last thing to note regards both measurement and design. Because respondents are often reluctant to express their true sentiments on matters of race, social desirability effects oftentimes mar studies that have a survey or polling component. Even though our basic experimental design masks the true intent of our work, we do indeed worry about the validity of participants' responses on the dependent measures. To overcome this deficiency we designed an "experiment within an experiment" to more assuredly test the impact of racialized communications. Returning to the box above, you will note that there are two versions of the social welfare policy items. Following Bobo and Kluegel (198x), we developed a split-sample design that varies the target recipient of social welfare benefits. Half the sample answered the social welfare questions with low wage workers as the target recipient; the other half of the sample responded to the social welfare question where minorities were the target beneficiaries. Our expectation is that the effect of exposure to racially explicit cues will be significantly more pronounced for those who answered the race version of the social welfare question. In other words, communications with explicit racial cues should diminish support for social welfare policies when the target recipients of the benefits are described as minorities.

## Results

### *Study 1: The National Sample*

Recall that our core hypothesis is that exposure to explicit racial cues in communication will lead people – white Americans in particular – to oppose a policy agenda that ostensibly benefits racial minorities. Table 3 reports on the initial test of the hypothesis by looking at the impact of racial cues on mean policy preference scores for whites in the national sample.

**Table 3**  
**The Impact of Racial Cues**  
**on Public Policy Preferences**  
**National Sample (Whites)**  
**Mean Scores**

	Control	Implicit Racial Cues	Mixed Racial Cues	Explicit Racial Cues	Sample Size
<b>Punitive Crime Remedies</b>	0.28	0.34	0.32	0.27	313
<b>Oppose Community Development Policy</b>	0.16	0.20	0.21	0.22	320
<b>Not Limiting Harmful Products in Community</b>	0.21	0.29	0.30	0.30	255
<b>Easier for Minorities to Get Health Care</b>	0.63	0.72	0.72	0.72	255
<b>Oppose Social Welfare Policy (Race)</b>	0.33	0.29	0.36	0.39**	166
<b>Oppose Social Welfare Policy (Class)</b>	0.30	0.29	0.25	0.28	157
<b>Oppose Affirmative Action</b>	0.64	0.65	0.64	0.66	305

\*\*p < .05

Generally speaking, the results suggest that the more explicit the racial cue, the more likely whites are to oppose a race policy agenda. The one exception is for the punitive crime remedies battery. We will comment on this shortly but there are several noteworthy findings in this table. First, the preponderance of effects is in the anticipated direction. In all most every instance, being exposed to explicit racial cues produces the most resistance to policies presumably supported minority interests. Second, the fact that the effects are modest as is we would expect given the minimal exposure respondent's had to the manipulation. Third, perhaps the most telling finding is for the word experiment within the treatments. Whites who are exposed to the explicit race version of the manipulation are significantly more affected when the target population for social welfare benefits is described as minorities than when the target is described as low wage workers. In other words, the explicitness of the race cue only matters when whites believe that beneficiaries of the policies are minorities. Exposure to racial cues has no impact on whites' support of social welfare policy targeted to low wage workers. The last comment to make is the pattern for the crime battery. It is interesting that exposure to the explicit race cue actually reduces opposition to punitive measures compared to exposure to the implicit and mixed versions of the treatment. Could it be possible that advocacy around racial profiling and discriminatory drug sentencing charges has had an impact on whites' views about the criminal justice system?

These mean scores, of course, do not account for the impact of a wide range of political and demographic variables. And though randomization in experimentation usually accounts for individual differences across treatment conditions, it is still useful to examine the data using multivariate methods.

Table 4 presents the results from a multivariate regression analysis in which we have controlled for demographic (education, income, gender, age, religion, region) and political factors (partisan identification, ideology). The main finding is that six out of seven of the effects are in the right direction and five of them reach statistical significance. Because the coefficients represent a one unit change along the treatment variable, the effects should be read in the following way: for example, the effect size for the dependent measure of limiting harmful products indicates a 12 point difference between the control condition and exposure to the explicit version of the manipulation.

Again we see the powerful effect of the wording experiment; exposure to the explicit race cue has a large effect on opposition to social welfare policies aimed at minorities and no effect on opposition of benefits for low wage workers.

Table 4  
The Impact of Racial Cues  
on Public Policy Preferences  
National Sample (Whites)

Best-Fit Regression Analysis (unstandardized coefficients)

	<b>b</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Punitive Crime Remedies</b>	-.03 (.02)	-1.6*	312
<b>Oppose Community Development Policy</b>	.02 (.01)	1.8**	319
<b>Not Limiting Harmful Products in Community</b>	.03 (.01)	2.2**	297
<b>Easier for Minorities to Get Health Care</b>	-.03 (.02)	-1.7*	254
<b>Oppose Social Welfare Policy (Race)</b>	.04 (.02)	2.7**	165
<b>Oppose Social Welfare Policy (Class )</b>	.00 (.01)	-0.3	156
<b>Oppose Affirmative Action</b>	.01 (.01)	1.2	304

\*p < .10 \*\*p < .05; standard errors in parentheses

A particularly significant finding is that not unexpected impact of ideology on support for a race policy agenda. The spread between liberals and conservatives reach 40 points in some instances. That our minimal effects experiment had any impact is impressive in the face of the towering ideological differences between study participants. Put differently, the effects reported above hold above and beyond the dominating ideological divide.

### *The Case of California*

One of the unique features of this project is the special attention we play to California. With specific support from the California Endowment we have been able to construct a sample that contains a rare commodity – oversamples of African American and Hispanic respondents. This provides us the opportunity to make cross group comparisons in terms of the impact of racial cues in communication. Indeed, we expect that blacks in particular will react differently to racially explicit cues in communication. The starting line for these expectations is the widely documented fact of interracial differences in perception about racial progress in the U.S. Whites and blacks disagree about the rate of progress as well as the root cause of racial inequality. For blacks, it is a common (but somewhat changing?) trope to perceive systemic bias as a cause of inter-group differences in life chances. Priming this perception then should lead to greater support for and less opposition to a race policy agenda.

The wild card in the mix is Hispanics. It is unclear exactly what impact exposure to racialized cues will have on them. Will they be more like blacks? That is, more likely to see institutionalized discrimination as core cause of inequality and thus be more willing to support a race policy agenda when exposed to explicit racial cues in communication. Or, will they be more like whites and become more oppositional to a policy agenda that

benefits minorities? Another possibility is that they will behave like neither and be unaffected by exposure to race cues. This would conform to a view that places Hispanic public opinion as a combination of dominant views held in the white and black communities. If so, we would expect to find that exposure to racial cues will have no impact on their policy preferences.

Table 5 reports on the impact of the manipulation on whites' policy preferences. As we can see, the basic pattern of effects mimics the national trend. The general tendency is that the more explicit the cue, the more opposition to policies that benefit minorities. Like the national sample, the effect is most pronounced on the wording experiment social welfare item targeting benefits to minorities (+13%). Interestingly, there is a statistically significant effect of the manipulation on white Californians' views about affirmative action in jobs and educations for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics that does not exist in the national sample. Respondents in the mixed (+11% and explicit conditions (9%) are notably more opposed to affirmative action policies than in the control group.

Table 5  
The Impact of Racial Cues  
on Public Policy Preferences  
California Sample (Whites)  
Mean Scores

	Control	Implicit Racial Cues	Mixed Racial Cues	Explicit Racial Cues	N
<b>Punitive Crime Remedies</b>	0.44	0.42	0.40	0.43	257
<b>Oppose Community Development Policy</b>	0.17	0.25	0.20	0.23	256
<b>Not Limiting Harmful Products in Community</b>	0.24	0.30	0.32	0.28	248
<b>Easier for Minorities to Get Health Care</b>	0.64	0.66	0.67	0.70	204
<b>Oppose Social Welfare Policy (Race)</b>	0.25	0.33	0.33	0.38**	142
<b>Oppose Social Welfare Policy (Class )</b>	0.21	0.29	0.24	0.24	120
<b>Oppose Affirmative Action</b>	0.53	0.59	0.64**	0.62**	249

\*\* p < .05

Table 6 presents the same analysis for blacks in the California sample. Our expectations are mostly confirmed. In six of seven instances exposure to racially explicit cues leads black Californians to become more supportive of a race policy agenda. This stands in stark contrast to what we found for whites nationally and in California. Although the smaller cell sizes and larger standard errors make the levels of statistical significance a bit less stable, it is impressive that the manipulation has the opposite impact on blacks. What is even more interesting is the difference between the control condition and the treatment conditions. It appears that opposition to a race-based policy agenda quickly fades at any mention of actions to reduce racial inequality; but the interesting point is that it keeps on fading as the communications becomes even more explicitly racial.

Table 6  
The Impact of Racial Cues  
on Public Policy Preferences  
California Sample (Blacks)

	Control	Implicit Racial Cues	Mixed Racial Cues	Explicit Racial Cues	N
<b>Punitive Crime Remedies</b>	0.41	0.54	0.51	0.50	137
<b>Oppose Community Development Policy</b>	0.25	0.14	0.17	0.14	143
<b>Not Limiting Harmful Products in Community</b>	0.29	0.13	0.19	0.18	137
<b>Easier for Minorities to Get Health Care</b>	0.44	0.68	0.61	0.60	112
<b>Social Welfare Policy (Race)</b>	0.29	0.13	0.16	0.17*	85
<b>Social Welfare Policy (Class)</b>	0.41	0.15	0.16	0.11*	62
<b>Opposition to Affirmative Action</b>	0.52	0.37	0.36	0.37*	129

\*p < .10

Another interesting finding is the race/class wording experiment. While exposure to explicitly race cues reduces opposition to social welfare benefits targeting for minorities, the effect is even larger when black respondents are asked their views about supporting low wage workers. It is possible, of course, that this is caused by a “basement” effect for views about social welfare benefits aimed at minorities – blacks support social welfare policies aimed at minorities at a 70% level in the control condition. In other words, there is only so much room for the manipulation to have an effect. The higher starting mean in the control condition of the class version of the split sample means that there is much more variance to account for by the manipulation.

Table 7 reports out the effects on the manipulation on Hispanics’ policy preferences. The basic pattern is consistent with our speculative hypothesis. The impact of the treatment is decidedly mixed. For instance, Hispanics are influenced in the same way that blacks are when it comes to the access to healthcare and in the race split-sample of the social welfare policy battery; that is, the more explicit the message, the less opposition to these policies. For community development policy and affirmative action, however, there is essentially no effect of the manipulation on preferences. On the other hand, Hispanics exhibit a pattern more like whites with regards to limited harmful products in the community and in the class version of the split-sample on social welfare policy; in other words, the more explicit the racial cue, the greater the opposition to these policies.

There is no clear interpretation of these results in terms of predicting when the effect of the treatment will result in Hispanic preferences resembling blacks or whites. This pattern is consistent, however with the notion that Hispanics are pulled in two opposing directions. In one instance they are “people of color”, in the other they are the “new Americans”. Given this it is understandable why the results have schizophrenic tendencies.

Table 7  
The Impact of Racial Cues  
on Public Policy Preferences  
California Sample (Hispanics)  
Mean Scores

	Control	Implicit Racial Cues	Mixed Racial Cues	Explicit Racial Cues	N
<b>Punitive Crime Remedies</b>	0.37	0.40	0.35	0.34	146
<b>Oppose Community Development Policy</b>	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.17	150
<b>Not Limiting Harmful Products in Community</b>	0.25	0.21	0.17	0.29 <sup>*</sup>	146
<b>Easier for Minorities to Get Health Care</b>	0.37	0.51	0.49	0.44	119
<b>Social Welfare Policy (Race)</b>	0.36	0.16	0.23	0.25 <sup>*</sup>	70
<b>Social Welfare Policy (Class )</b>	0.16	0.22	0.26	0.20	85
<b>Opposition to Affirmative Action</b>	0.50	0.52	0.50	0.51	136

<sup>\*</sup>p < .10

As with the national sample, a more rigorous test of these suggestive California findings is to construct multivariate models that take into account individual differences in demographic and political factors. Table 8 displays unstandardized regression coefficients from best-fit multiple regression models for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics.

Contrary to the national findings, the results for California are much more tepid. There are fewer statistically significant coefficients regardless of race. Nonetheless, to the extent that there are significant effects they are in the predicted direction. All of the action in the table is in the six bottom left cells. Here we see that the impact of exposure to racial cues in communication has markedly different effects for blacks and whites.

Table 8  
The Impact of Racial Cues  
on Public Attitudes and Policy Preferences  
California Sample  
Best-Fit Regression Analysis

	White	Black	Hispanic
<b>Punitive Crime Remedies</b>	.00 <sup>1</sup> (256)	.00 (136)	.01 (145)
<b>Oppose Community Development Policy</b>	.00 (255)	.00 (142)	-.01 (149)
<b>Not Limiting Harmful Products in Community</b>	.01 (247)	.00 (136)	.01 (145)
<b>Easier for Minorities to Get Health Care</b>	.01 (205)	.00 (111)	.01 (118)
<b>Social Welfare Policy (Race)</b>	.03 <sup>**</sup> (141)	-.01 (84)	-.01 (69)
<b>Social Welfare Policy (Class )</b>	.00 (119)	-.04 <sup>**</sup> (61)	.01 (84)
<b>Opposition to Affirmative Action</b>	.02 <sup>**</sup> (248)	-.02 <sup>**</sup> (128)	-.01 (135)

<sup>\*\*</sup>p < .05

<sup>1</sup> Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients

<sup>2</sup> Number of cases in parentheses

Exposure to explicit cues drives up white opposition to affirmative action policies and for respondents in the race version of the split-sample social welfare policy indicator. For instance, whites exposed to explicit cues are 12% more likely to oppose race-targeted social welfare policies and 8% more likely to oppose affirmative action policies than whites in the control condition. Exposure to explicit racial cues drives down black opposition to affirmative action by 8% compared to the control condition. Additionally, the large impact of explicit cues in the class version of the split-sample survey found in the bivariate analysis stays intact; blacks in the explicit cue condition are 16% less likely to oppose class targeted social welfare policies than blacks in the control condition. The final finding of note is the fact that controlling for demographic and political factors washes away all statistically significant effects of the treatment for Hispanics. This is in large part due to the disproportionate influence of ideology for Hispanics (.11) compared to blacks (.04) and whites (.07).

### Summary

We began this analysis with the observation that racial dialogue in contemporary America is in flux. While great progress has been made, substantial inter-racial differences exist across almost every key measure of well-being. Whether in terms of educational attainment, wealth, or health, the chasm between whites and non-whites generally, and whites and blacks in particular, remains wide. How Americans understand and talk about these dynamics has been a topic of focus in academic, governmental and non-profit circles. On the one hand, some believe that the only way to effectively address racial differences is to acknowledge America's sordid history with race. Specifically, adherents call for the explicit recognition of the role that institutional racism and discrimination play in determining minorities' life chances. This view has long been associated with the discourse of the civil rights movement and its legacy of leadership.

A different take on racial discourse maintains that rehashing the past does nothing more than stir up resentment and apathy - especially among white Americans. This perspective asserts that it is time for the country to move past its difficult past to a new, post-racial America in which the society looks toward finding effective solutions to lingering problems without assigning blame to the system. Indeed, this position encourages minorities to take an active role in finding appropriate solutions and discourages focusing on perceived discriminatory actions.

Our work sheds important new light on this debate. The basic pattern of our findings is that whites are less likely to oppose policies aimed at improving conditions in minority communities when the discussion is framed in implicit terms; that is, where the attribution of responsibility for racial inequality is not assigned to systemic discrimination. African Americans, on the other hand, are more likely to support policies designed to improve minority communities when the issue is framed in explicitly racial terms. Terms that make clear the role of institutional racism as a clear cause of racial differences in life chances. This pattern is more robust for the national sample than for the California sample. Nonetheless, the same basic pattern holds in California. One

notable addition from the California data is that Hispanics appear to be relatively unaffected by exposure to racial cues in communication – whether explicit or implicit.

These findings have important implications for the practice of communications. For one thing, they suggest that advocates may have to develop somewhat different starting points for their discussions with different racial groups. Thus how one calls blacks to action, for example, may be quite different for how one calls whites to action. Another implication of our work is that it is possible to gain support for policies that benefit minority communities. It is our view that one can talk about race when advocating for particular public policies. It is more a matter of *how* one talks about race to *whom*, however, that will likely determine one's level of success in garnering support for specific measures.

In all, there are some very positive signs that come out of our research. Americans can have a productive conversation about race; the public will support policies directly benefiting minority communities; and it is possible to see our way through the public quagmire that is race in America.

We end our report with a special section on a topic of great concern for many Americans: immigration. We are afforded this opportunity by the unique nature of our data set. We were able to include several items about immigration on our California study as well as being able to oversample blacks and Hispanics.

### **Selected Topic: Attitudes towards Immigration and Values Frames**

The massive influx of immigrants into the United States since the early 1980s has dramatically changed the calculus of racial discourse in America. No longer is the dominant paradigm simply a matter of black and white. Large scale immigration from Central and Latin American, Asia, and Africa has brought significant numbers of new entrants into American society. Moreover, non-trivial undocumented immigration has had a polarizing effect on the public. This is manifest in people's attitudes towards immigration as well as their policy preferences.

This election year has brought the immigration issue front and center as the candidates seek to find the optimal position on the electoral scale. How does one communicate on the immigration issue? Are there some frames that are more effective than others? Does the racial composition of the audience matter for frame selection and application? We are in the fortunate position to be able to address these questions. The California study with its oversample of African Americans and Hispanics provides us with a unique opportunity. In particular, it allows us to respond to questions about the influence of values-based frames on attitudes about immigration.

Although our experimental manipulations were primarily designed to test notions about implicit and explicit racial cues in communications, they also included and imbedded test

of values-based frames. In this section of the report we examine two of the most talked about frames in the immigration debate – opportunity and fairness. Some advocates believe the way to reframe the immigration debate is to appeal to Americans’ core belief in the concept of equality of opportunity for all. The basic idea here is that immigration to American represents one of the fundamental tenets of the society; namely, America is the land of opportunity where anyone can pursue the American Dream. As if often pointed out, we are a country of immigrants.

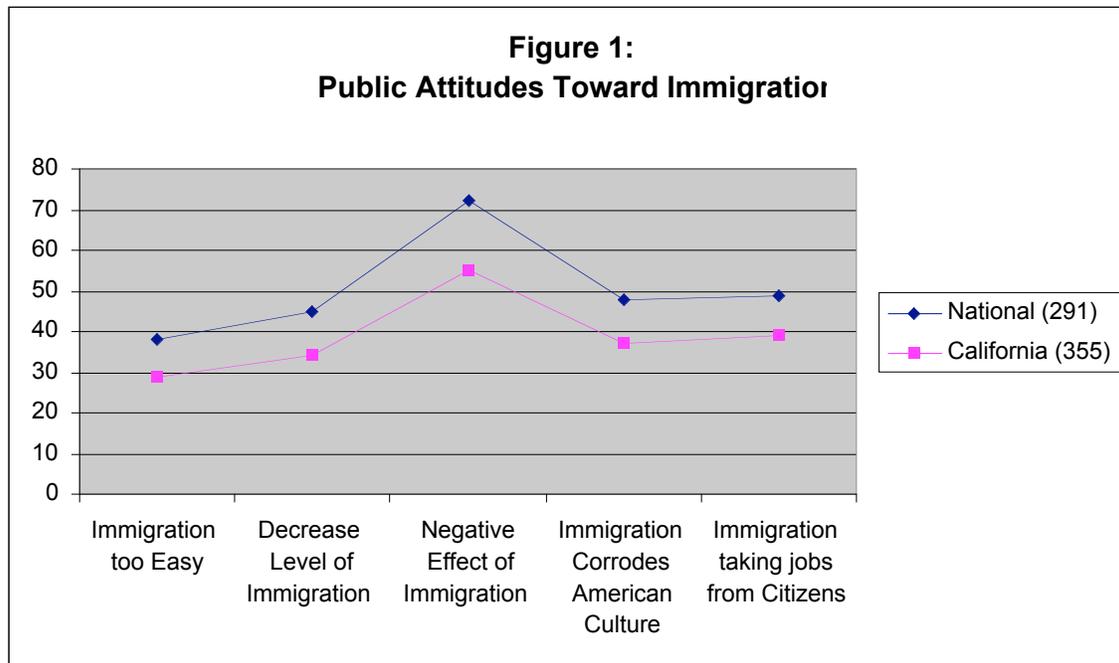
Others believe a more appropriate framing is to intone the value of another core American value - fairness. On this line of reasoning, denying fundamental rights to people living in the United States (regardless of status) is really a question of equity. This is especially true of people who pay taxes and generally contribute to the overall benefit of the society. Put differently, this view maintains that it is not fair to have people work in one’s home or factory but deny them the fundamental rights of citizenship.

In addition to embedding values frames in our treatments, our study includes a battery of attitudinal questions about immigration (see box below).<sup>1</sup> In combination these three features of our design allow us to test for the impact of values frames on beliefs about immigration among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics.

The analysis begins with a brief look at immigration attitudes in California compared to our national sample. As can be seen in Figure 1, Californians hold markedly less harsh views about immigration than people in the rest of the country. Across all five survey items people in California expressed, on average, about 10% less negative views. In both the national and California samples, negative attitudes spike around the question of a perceived negative effect of immigration on the country.

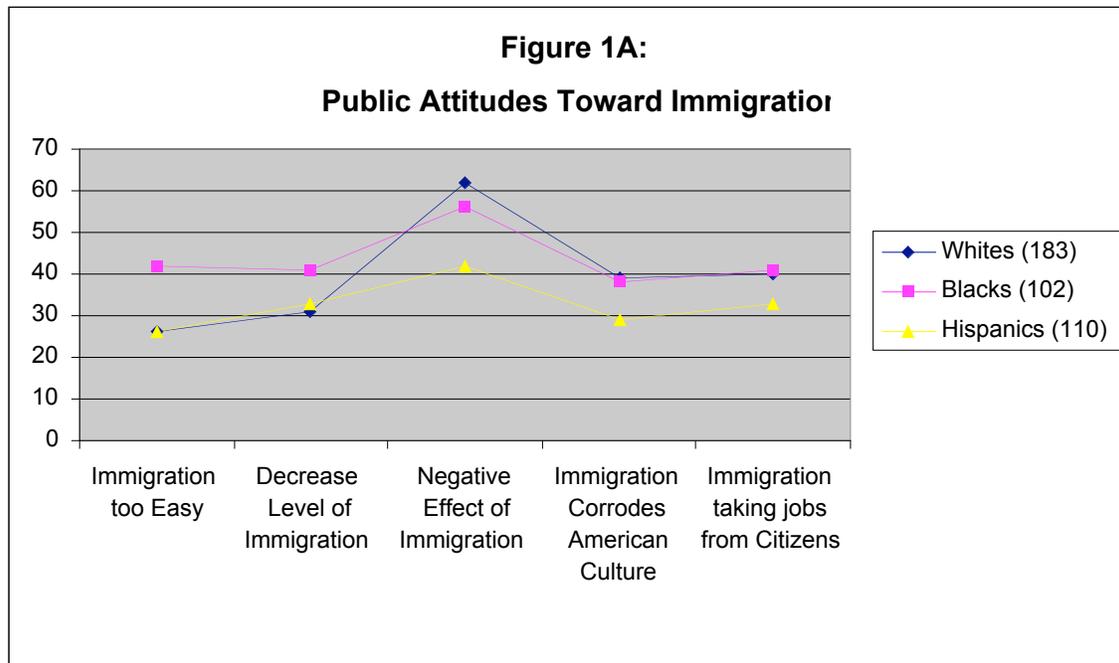
<b>Attitudes about Immigration</b>
Difficulty for immigrants to get American citizenship (%too easy)
Correct level of legal immigration into US (%decreased)
Effect of illegal immigrants to US (% unfavorable)
Likelihood of culture being enriched by immigrants (% not likely)
Illegal immigrants taking jobs away from Americans (% agree)

<sup>1</sup> Our survey also includes a battery of items related to immigration policy: Bilingual education programs; Reforming immigration law; Undocumented driver's license; Reduce legal immigrants; and Spend to prevent illegals. Interestingly but unfortunately these items are not reliable indicators for analysis. For example, they exhibit very weak inter-item correlations and Cronbach’s alpha score for scalability. In addition, they do not cohere as a singular dimensions when factor analyzed. Indeed, they are quite unstable exhibiting as many as three underlying factor structures. We attribute these results to the fact that many Americans, and Californians in particular, are ambivalent on the immigration issue. For example, the mean scores for the items too frequently hovers around the 50% mark.



This is somewhat surprising given the rancor that has historically characterized the immigration debate in California. To the contrary, it is possible that this reflects the dual nature of the reality that is immigration in America. Perhaps nowhere in the country are people more reliant upon and effected by immigration than in California. To be sure states like New York, Texas, and Florida are also on the front edge of the immigration issue; and it is possible that they, too, live with the reality that immigrants (both legal and undocumented) play a critical role in their everyday lives. As our data shows, nonetheless, California is indeed different than the rest of the country.

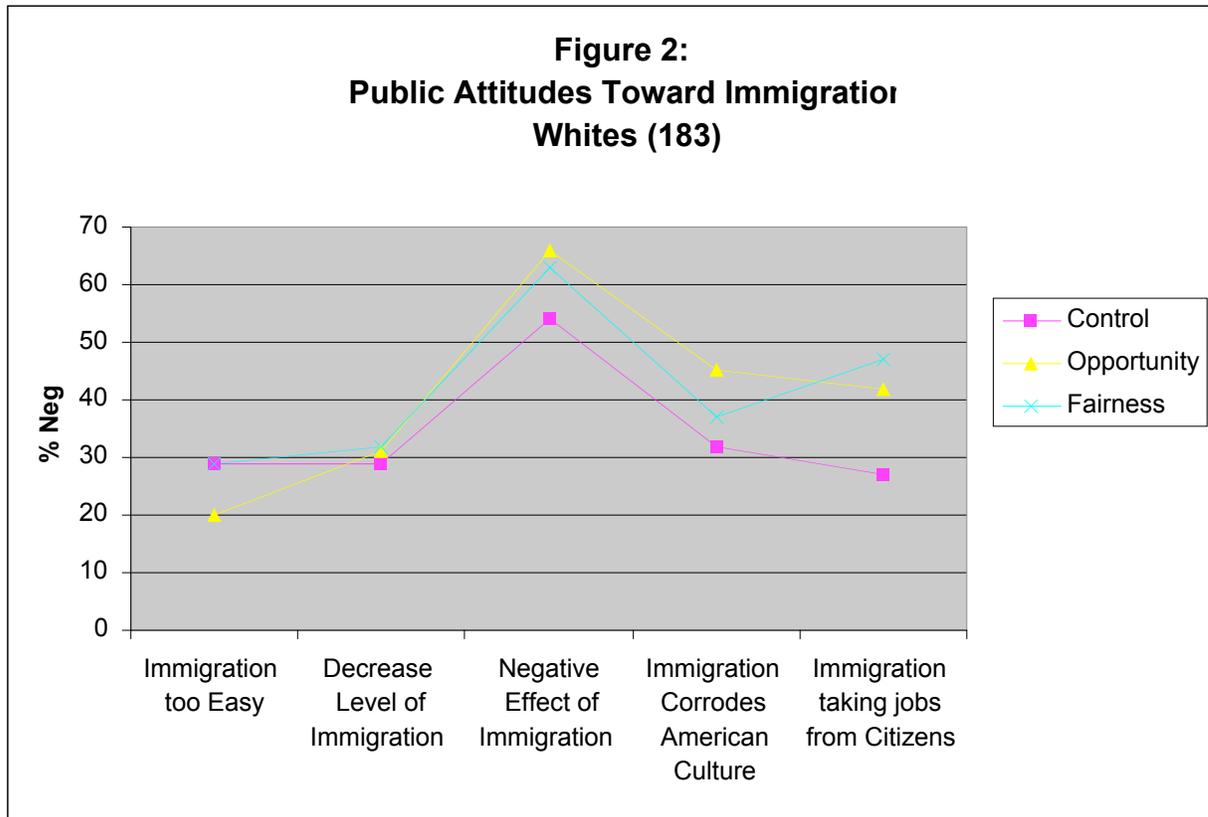
Figure 1A sheds some additional light on the subject by separate immigration attitudes in California by the race of the respondent. There are several noteworthy patterns in these data. In the first instance we see that there are significant differences in attitudes by race. In the main, blacks hold more negative views than either whites or Hispanics. For example, they hold significantly more negative attitudes on questions regarding the ease of immigration and the appropriate level of immigration. And on only one item (negative effect of immigration) are they not the most negative group and that difference is of borderline statistical significance. Another finding that bears comment is the fact that whites are no different from Hispanics when it comes to attitudes about the ease and appropriate level of immigration. One wonders if this reflects many whites' immigrant background and the standard narrative about the sacrifices their forbearers made in coming to America. On the other hand, whites and blacks hold similar views on the corrosive impact of immigration on American culture as well as the notion that immigrants are taking jobs away from citizens. Finally, it is worth making the obvious point that Hispanics are generally less negative towards immigration.



With these preliminaries out of the way we can now turn our attention to an analysis of the impact of values frames on attitudes about immigration. We have recoded the treatment variable into three conditions: the control, the opportunity frame, and the fairness frame (refer to the descriptions of the treatments in the early portion of the paper). In Figure 2 we examine the impact of the values frames on white Californians' attitudes about immigration.

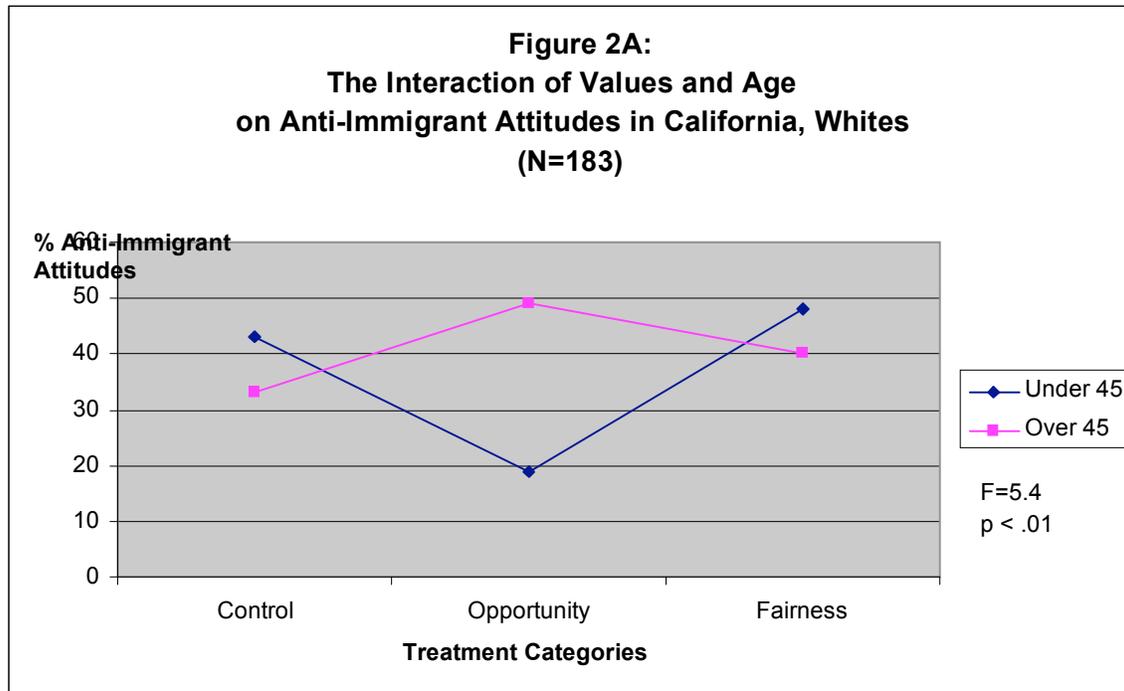
There are several interesting features of this graph. For instance, the values frames generally perform poorly in stemming negative attitudes about immigration. In three of five cases (negative effect, corrodes culture, and taking jobs) people exposed to the opportunity frame exhibit significantly more negative views about immigration than people in the control condition. And in two of the five cases (negative effect and taking jobs) people exposed to the fairness frame report *significantly more* negative attitudes about immigration compared to people in the control. Moreover, on the intergroup comparisons on attitudes about the ease appropriate level of immigration, there is only one significant difference between the treatment groups and the control – exposure to the opportunity frames actually leads to *significantly less* negative views about the ease of immigration.

Now it is possible that what we are really witnessing is whites' response to the racial cues that are also present in the frames. In other words, above and beyond values differences, it is the simple fact that the topic of race is injected into the public conversation that derails the values-based components of the frame. We are unable to address this with the current design but hope to provide a more compelling answer with future research.



In trying to decipher the relatively modest treatment effects among whites we discovered a very tantalizing result. We started by combining all five items into a single battery (we were not happy enough with the inter-item reliability to use this techniques in the full analysis but found it instructive for this purpose) and then interacting the treatment with a dummy variable for age divided into two cohorts – baby boomers and up (born pre 1966) and Gen XYZ (born post-1966). The results are found in Figure 2B.

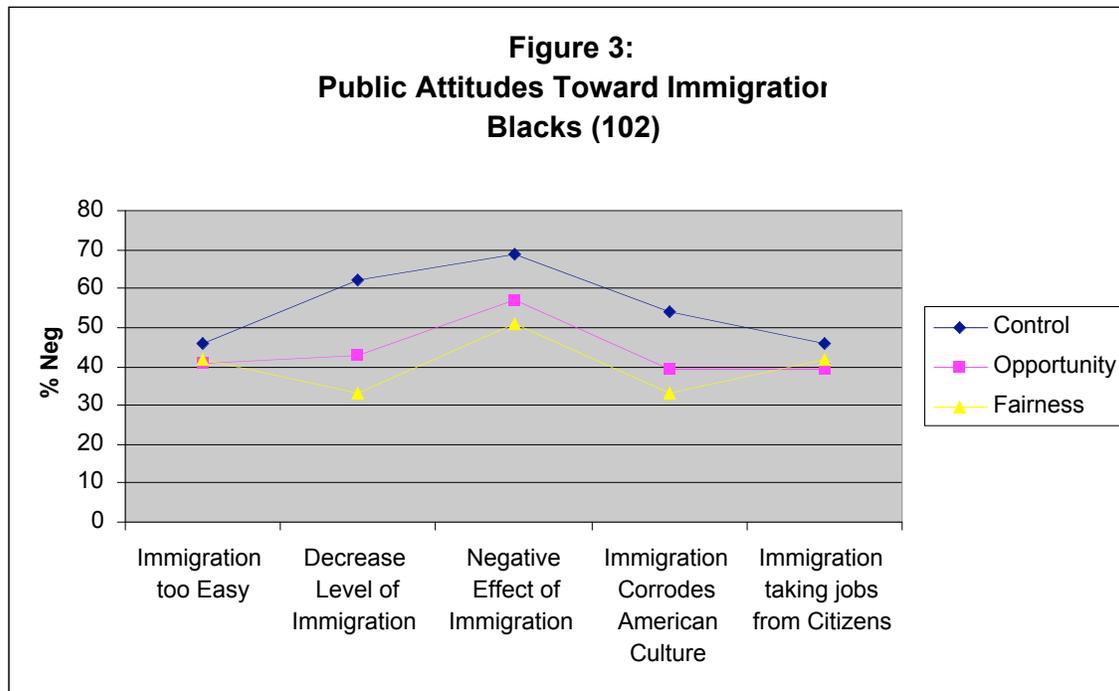
There is a statistically significant interaction between the treatment categories and age. In the control and fairness conditions the younger cohort has more negative attitudes about immigration. In the opportunity condition, however, the younger cohort has extremely less negative views than the older cohort (a whopping 30% difference). Put differently, if you are going to talk values to the younger cohort, talk opportunity and not fairness. Neither values frame has a positive impact on the older generation. One speculative interpretation is that the older cohort can't get past the racial content of the frames to be able to make mental use of the values in reasoning about immigration. The younger cohort, on the other hand, has a different take on race and ethnicity; a take that is less rigid and based on a broader range of experience with people of different races.



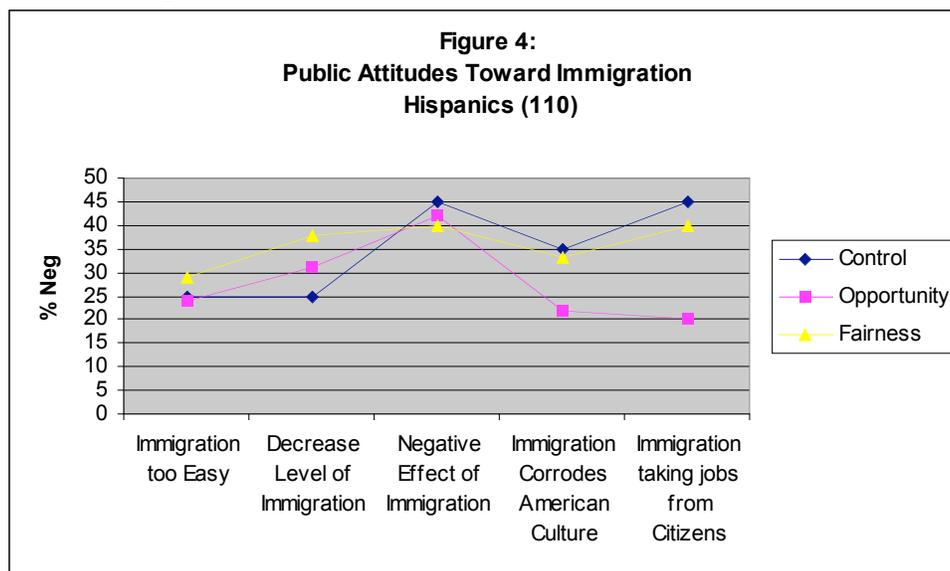
Our preliminary analysis revealed that African Americans tend, on average, to hold more negative views about immigration than either whites or Hispanics. This is hardly surprising given the inter-racial conflicts of space, jobs, and public services. For example, California cities like Los Angeles have witnessed a serious uptick in reports of black/Hispanic crime and violence. Gang battles over turf, political battles over control of public resources and rapidly changing demographics are proving to be a volatile mix.

The pertinent question for us has to do with the impact of values based frames on blacks' attitudes about immigration. Figure 3 shows the results for this analysis. More heartening for the values argument is the finding that exposure to the values frames significantly decreases black anti-immigration sentiments in four of the five comparison sets (and the effect is in the same direction for the fifth comparison). And while the differences between the values frames are somewhat less robust, it is still the case that the fairness frame is more potent in reducing black anti-immigration views.

This is somewhat consistent with the findings for blacks regarding race-based policy – any priming of race leads to higher levels of support for the policy in question. What is important here is that blacks start off with ostensibly hostile attitudes which soften upon exposure to the racialized communication. The difference here is that blacks have no self-interest at stake. Moreover, it is the social justice part of the fairness frame that seems to make the difference.



While the preceding analysis is subject to charges of confounding effects, the analysis in Figure 4 demonstrates how important values-based frames can be. Here we show the impact of the manipulation on Hispanics' attitudes about immigration. The largest effect is the impact of exposure to the opportunity frame on the items regarding the impact of immigration on American culture and the job market. In both instances the data reveal that exposure to the opportunity frame dramatically reduces negative attitudes among Hispanics with differences from 10-25%. On the other hand, exposure to the fairness frame results in about a 13% increase in support for decreasing the level of immigration compared to the control. Like the earlier analysis, Hispanics apparently occupy a distinctive middle space between blacks and whites in the American discourse on race.



## Summary

Post-1980 immigration has changed the dynamic of American racial discourse. How Americans think about the new entrants will continue to have substantial impact on the formulation of the rules of inclusion. The unique nature of our project has provided a preliminary opportunity to gain leverage on the immigration debate. Utilizing an experimental technique as well as a survey pool that includes oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics we are able to test the influence of values-based frames like opportunity and fairness on Californians' attitudes about immigration.

The basic finding from this analysis is that in communicating about immigration, one has to pay attention to the racial composition of the audience. While we generally do not advocate audience segmentation, the data call for it in this instance. Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics respond quite differently when it comes to immigration. Whites, in the main, seem to have trouble getting past the racial content of the communication to utilize values in their thinking. The exception to this is for pre-baby boom whites. We speculate that their chronological distance from the rhetoric of the civil rights movement (and its aftermath) and their proclivity to inter-racial experiences means that values-based frames are more available to them. Likewise, Hispanics – for some of the same reasons but also for different reasons – also appear to respond to the values-based frames; especially the value of opportunity. It seems that more social justice language associated with the fairness frame is not as potent when conceived of as a communications tool. Finally, blacks seem to respond the most to the racial content of the frames – exposure to both opportunity and particularly fairness soften their relatively harsh views about immigration.

### About the Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is a national nonprofit think tank devoted to framing public issues to bridge the divide between public and expert understandings. Its work is based on Strategic Frame Analysis™, a multi-method, multi-disciplinary approach to empirical research. FrameWorks designs, commissions, publishes, explains and applies communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues – the environment, government, race, children's issues and health care, among others. Its work is unique in its breadth – from qualitative, quantitative and experimental research to applied communications toolkits, advertising campaigns, workshops, FrameChecks, and Study Circles around the country. See [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org).