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The Two Faces of Government Spending

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Scholars have known for some time that attitudes toward federal spending on welfare are shaped by racial antipathies. Are attitudes toward spending on nonwelfare social programs similarly grounded? This article explores the dimensionality of spending attitudes and the extent to which they are rooted in stereotypical beliefs about blacks. Analysis of data from the 1992, 1996, and 2000 National Election Studies demonstrates that whites' attitudes toward welfare spending and social spending are structured in two-dimensional terms and that stereotypical beliefs about the work ethic of blacks systematically constrain their welfare attitudes and do not affect attitudes toward other social programs.

Keywords: *government spending; racial stereotypes; social welfare attitudes*

The question of how much the federal government should spend on programs to help the needy represents one of the most enduring issues on the domestic policy agenda of the United States. From the earliest days of the Republic down to the present time, the answer to this question has depended in part on what Americans believe about the causes of poverty (Cook and Barrett 1992; Katz 1989). If people are seen as victims of economic forces beyond their control, then the typical citizen believes they deserve some form of public aid to help them get back on their feet. But if economic distress results from laziness or a lack of moral fiber, the typical citizen believes that such individuals are not truly needy and hence do not deserve government assistance. This naturally raises the question of what factors lead Americans to distinguish between those who deserve government assistance and those who do not.

A number of important studies center on the role racial predispositions play in shaping white opinion in this domain (Gilens 1996; Jacoby 1994; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears and Citrin 1985), but few works systematically explore the extent to which the influence of racial stereotypes is confined to opinion on welfare programs that are presumed to benefit the undeserving poor or extends more broadly to color attitudes toward all forms of social welfare spending. This article advances our understanding of public opinion on social spending by demonstrating that welfare-spending attitudes are psychologically distinct from attitudes toward other forms of social spending and that the former alone are race coded in the minds of white citizens.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I draw on several theoretical and empirical perspectives to argue that public discourse portrays welfare recipients as largely black and mostly undeserving of

public aid, whereas the beneficiaries of less controversial social programs are represented as less black and more deserving of help. In light of this, I posit that attitudes toward welfare spending and social spending are distinct phenomena because they are subject to differential degrees of stereotypical thinking in the minds of whites. Second, I use data from the 1992, 1996, and 2000 National Election Study surveys to demonstrate that white attitudes toward spending on welfare and on other safety net programs are structured in two-dimensional terms rather than one-dimensional terms.¹ Next, I show that stereotypical beliefs about the work ethic of African Americans systematically affect welfare spending opinion and fail to affect opinion on other social spending. Last, I consider the implications these findings have for understanding the nexus of race, government assistance, and American public opinion.

Overview

Public opinion on government spending has attracted scholarly attention for many years. At the aggregate level, studies reveal that large pluralities of the electorate favor spending more on virtually all social welfare programs (Bennett and Bennett 1990; Smith 1987). The only exceptions to this pattern of public largesse are food stamps and welfare, as those

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favoring spending cuts easily exceed those favoring rises. Aggregate survey results are essential for gauging where the electorate's programmatic preferences lie and how these preferences evolve over time; however, they are not as useful for drawing inferences about individual-level preference formation. For these matters, analysts must turn to individual-level data.

The question of how individuals think about government spending has been addressed from a variety of perspectives. A key question animating this line of research has been how spending attitudes are structured in long-term memory. In one approach, scholars assume implicitly that individuals hold discrete spending attitudes across the full range of social programs. That is, attitudes toward welfare spending are different from attitudes toward homeless spending, which in turn differ from child care spending, and so on (Eismeier 1982; Sanders 1988). An alternative approach maintains that individuals hold a single, general orientation toward social spending (Jacoby 1994, 2000; Stimson 2002); therefore, when someone offers her or his opinion on welfare, aid to the homeless, or child care, each response derives from the same underlying attitude. Since most citizens lack the motivation and knowledge to form preferences regarding each and every social program funded and administered by the federal government, the unidimensional conceptualization is at once theoretically plausible and empirically parsimonious.

What factors lead one person to favor spending more, and another to favor spending less, on public aid? And what implications might differences in the sources driving spending preferences have for understanding how they are structured in mass belief systems? Extant work shows that economic self-interest, party identification, liberal-conservative identification, and beliefs about equality and government power shape spending preferences. Those falling nearer the lower end of the income spectrum and holding liberal predispositions typically manifest greater support for spending than those at the upper end of the income spectrum and holding conservative orientations (e.g., Goren 2003). Probably the most interesting—and disheartening—finding to emerge from this line of work centers on the role racial predispositions play in guiding opinion on social spending. Put simply, social welfare attitudes are, to some extent, race coded. That is, whites holding negative attitudes toward African Americans oppose social spending more than those who bear no ill will toward blacks (Gilens 1996, 1999; Jacoby 1994; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears and Citrin 1985).

One curious point about this body of work that has not been widely noted is that racialized thinking seems to be more prevalent for welfare than for social programs defined more broadly. Some studies find that perceptions of blacks systematically affect whites' attitudes toward welfare and food stamps; however, when attention shifts to other social programs, evidence that white thinking is race dependent disappears (Goren 2003; Winter 2006). Other studies find that racial predispositions significantly affect attitudes toward programs that benefit sympathetic subsets of the poor; nevertheless, the racialization of these attitudes appears less powerful than for welfare (Gilens 1995; Kinder and Mendelberg 2001; Kinder and Sanders 1996).

In sum, the sources of attitudes toward federal spending on social programs may differ in one crucial respect: racial animosity conceivably weighs more heavily on welfare preferences than on preferences regarding less divisive social welfare programs. Unfortunately, since most prior work combines all spending items into a single scale, covers only one or two years of data, or does not include the full array of known predictors in statistical models of spending attitudes, such studies can be no more than suggestive. And since their substantive concerns lie elsewhere, most of these works do not dwell on why this anomaly exists. The next section of the article takes up this question and considers the implications the answer has for understanding how spending attitudes are structured in long-term memory.

Theoretical Framework and Expectations

Why might racial considerations be more easily evoked in the minds of citizens when they think about spending on welfare versus spending on other social programs? One plausible explanation centers on the content of public discourse on government assistance. Public discourse about welfare recipients and the programs on which they depend is grounded in a common frame of reference that revolves around race; in contrast, this racial frame is much less evident in discourse on programs that aid more sympathetic subsets of the populace. Chong (1993, 1996) defined a common frame of reference as a widely shared interpretation of what an issue is about at the most basic level that is arrived at after extended elite debate (cf. Gamson and Modigliani 1987). During the early stages of the issue's life cycle, several competing interpretations regarding its definition are contested;

however, as time passes, the process of competitive debate among opinion leaders in government and the news media subordinates most interpretations until a dominant theme emerges.

This process has obvious implications for understanding public opinion on any given issue. As Chong (1993, 890) put it, "A person gradually learns, through exposure to public discussion on the issue, to base his or her opinion on certain pertinent aspects of the issue and, at the same time, learns not to pay attention to other features of the issue deemed to be irrelevant." Hence, citizens learn to conceptualize an issue in terms of how it has been defined by opinion leaders, news organizations, and other elites (cf. Zaller 1992). Citizens may not be consciously aware of this, but that would not inhibit them from thinking about the issue along the lines implied by a common frame.

Such a process appears to have played out with respect to federal spending on public aid, a point demonstrated most forcefully in the work of Gilens (1999), who along with Clawson and Trice (2003), showed that news media coverage of welfare is dominated by a common frame of reference that centers unfairly on the image of lazy blacks. Furthermore, this racial frame of reference is not as readily apparent in stories about the deserving poor. The authors reviewed hundreds of pictures of the poor appearing in stories on poverty in the leading U.S. weekly news magazines and on the major network evening news broadcasts from 1988 to 1998.² They coded the race of the subjects and assessed whether they were shown in a positive or negative light. Gilens (1999, 129) found that "pictures of African Americans are disproportionately used to illustrate the most negative aspects of poverty and the least sympathetic subgroups of the poor" such as the urban underclass and welfare recipients. In contrast, there is little evidence that this stereotype-reinforcing frame dominates stories on the deserving poor. As Gilens (1999, 132) noted, "black faces are unlikely to be found in media stories on the most sympathetic subgroups of the poor." Clawson and Trice (2003, 62) concurred, noting that "Blacks were especially overrepresented in negative stories on poverty and those instances when the poor were presented with stereotypical traits. In addition, the 'deserving' poor were underrepresented in the magazines."

The news media represent one major source of the content of public debate on political issues. Politicians represent the other major input. Given that public officials sometimes employ race-coded rhetoric and symbols in pursuit of their policy and electoral goals, they

contribute to, and thereby reinforce, the racial frame of reference surrounding welfare. When politicians attack "welfare queens" or "midnight basketball" in political debate, on the campaign trail, or in campaign advertisements, they imply that African Americans and seemingly intractable problems like inner-city poverty and violent crime go hand in hand and thus that blacks are largely to blame for their predicaments (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001). In contrast, although politicians occasionally attempt to link race to the welfare state writ large, they are far less likely to employ racial codes to attack popular social programs. In short, politicians, like the news media, are more likely to adopt communication strategies linking blacks to welfare than to programs that assist other economically vulnerable citizens.

The constant repetition of these dual messages, that welfare recipients are unmotivated and irresponsible blacks who deserve little in the way of government support, while other needy populations are less black, less blameworthy, and more deserving of assistance, helps ensure that whites learn to think about welfare spending alone in terms of race (Gilens 1999). Insofar as welfare attitudes are a function of racial stereotypes and other spending attitudes are not, citizens may develop separate attitudes toward each class of spending. They may believe that programs for the more deserving and less black poor are one thing, while welfare for undeserving blacks is an altogether different matter. This line of reasoning leads to a pair of expectations. First, I hypothesize that citizens will hold one set of attitudes toward welfare spending and another set of attitudes toward social spending, broadly conceived. Second, I predict that racial stereotypes will significantly affect attitudes toward welfare spending and will not affect attitudes toward spending on safety net-type programs.

Data and Measurement

The data used to measure the variables and test the hypotheses are drawn from the 1992, 1996, and 2000 National Election Studies surveys. Since my interest lies in exploring the racialization of white opinion, the samples are restricted to nonblack respondents.³ Spending preferences are tapped via a series of items that ask whether federal spending on a wide array of social programs should be increased, decreased, or kept about the same. Welfare spending opinion is gauged using the "welfare programs" and "food stamps" items, which are available in all three studies. Social spending opinion is measured using a series of

items that differ somewhat from year to year. The questions ask about spending on “poor people,” “child care,” “Social Security” (available all years), the “homeless” (1992 and 1996), and “government assistance to unemployed” as well as “aid to the big cities” (1992).⁴

I justify these selections for the following reasons. When people encounter the terms “welfare” and “food stamps,” it seems likely that images of underserving blacks mired in poverty come to mind, presumably because of the common racial frame of reference that surrounds public discourse on welfare. In contrast, political communications about poor people, the homeless, the elderly, and so on seem unlikely to elicit such images because the racial frame of reference is not as prevalent in public discourse about programs for such groups. Instead of evoking negative stereotypes of blacks, it seems more likely that public rhetoric regarding such individuals will evoke positive images (Winter 2006).⁵

It is important to recognize that many of the items I use to tap social spending preferences are somewhat crude. For instance, the stimulus “poor people” seems somewhat ambiguous in terms of deservingness compared to “welfare” or “food stamps.” Despite this problem, these questions make for a fairly difficult test of my hypotheses. Since the National Election Studies items are not as clear with respect to recipient deservingness as they could be, it should prove harder to establish that spending attitudes are structured in two-dimensional terms and, subsequently, that racial stereotypes shape welfare spending preferences more deeply than they shape other spending preferences. Thus, if the statistical evidence supports my expectations despite these measurement limitations, the theory will have passed a difficult test.

The first set of empirical analyses reported below centers on the dimensionality of spending attitudes. The analysis then turns to the racialization question. The key issue at this point is how racial predispositions should be measured. Students of race and public opinion have disagreed a lot over the years (see Sears et al. 2001 for a comprehensive history of these debates); however, there does appear to be fairly widespread agreement that stereotypical beliefs about the work ethic of blacks are of paramount importance in structuring social welfare opinion (Gilens 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). In light of this, I use an item in which respondents rate the work ethic of blacks on a scale from 1 to 7. The endpoints are labeled *hard-working* and *lazy*, with higher scores reflecting more

negative perceptions. Operationally, I predict that the work ethic stereotype will be negatively and significantly related to welfare spending opinion, that it will not significantly affect social spending attitudes, and that its impact on welfare attitudes will be significantly larger than its impact on social spending attitudes.

In addition to racial factors, prior work indicates that a number of other demographic and psychological factors correlated with racial predispositions may influence spending attitudes and therefore must be included as controls in statistical models of such attitudes. On the demographic side, I will control for female gender (1 = *female*, 0 = *male*), age (measured in years), Southern resident (1 = *Southerner*, 0 = *non-Southerner*), and income (measured in quartiles). For the psychological variables, I include controls for party identification and ideological identification (seven-point scales ranging from 1 = *strong Democrat/extreme liberal* to 7 = *strong Republican/extreme conservative*), equal opportunity (a three-item scale ranging from 1 to 13, with higher scores denoting stronger egalitarianism), and limited government (a three-item, seven-point scale in 1992 and a three-item, four-point scale in 1996 and 2000, where 1 = *support for strong government* and 7/4 = *support for limited government*).⁶ My expectations are that the female, age, and equal opportunity variables will be positively associated with spending support and Southerner, income, party, ideology, and limited government will be inversely related to these preferences. In the next section, I take up the dimensionality of spending attitudes, to be followed by an analysis of how racialized they are.

Statistical Analyses and Results

The Structure of Spending Attitudes

My theoretical framework maintains that attitudes toward welfare and social spending should prove to be distinct psychological entities in light of their differential bases in racial predispositions. This claim can be tested using confirmatory factor analysis techniques to model the dimensionality of spending attitudes. Operationally, I expect that individual responses to the welfare and food stamps items will load on one factor while responses to the remaining items will load on a second distinct, although correlated, factor.

I assess this expectation by estimating a two-factor model and comparing it to an alternative one-factor model in which all items are constrained to load on a single factor.⁷ The models are evaluated as follows. First, I report the correlation between each item and its corresponding latent factor, which indicates how

valid each item is as a measure of the germane latent spending attitude. Second, I gauge global model fit using the Yuan-Bentler arbitrary distribution generalized least squares χ^2 , which tests the null hypothesis that the population covariance matrix for the observed variables equals the covariance matrix generated by the measurement model. The null maintains that the matrix generated by the posited model will not differ significantly from the observed matrix; therefore, a statistically insignificant test result is desirable. However, given the limits of the χ^2 test (Bollen 1989), I emphasize three descriptive measures of fit. These include the χ^2 ratio (i.e., the χ^2 divided by the degrees of freedom), in which values of 5 or less denote acceptable fit and 3 or less suggest good fit; the comparative fit index (CFI), where values of .90 or more reflect good fit; and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) with values of .08 or less denoting good fit. Finally, I report the Akaike information criterion (AIC), which modifies the χ^2 by incorporating a penalty for more complex models. The AIC facilitates comparisons of global fit between nonnested models; the model with the lower value is preferred (Hu and Bentler 1999; Kline 1998; Wheaton et al. 1977). Insofar as model fit for the two-factor solution is acceptable in absolute terms and superior to that of the one-factor model, the first hypothesis will be supported.

Table 1 contains the confirmatory factor analysis estimates for the two-factor models.⁸ I begin with the 1992 estimates in the second column. First, we can see that the correlations between the welfare and food stamps items and latent welfare attitudes equal .88 and .84, respectively. The correlations between latent social spending attitudes and the poor people, homeless, child care, Social Security, unemployed, and aid to cities items equal .86, .69, .64, .40, and .75, respectively. Each item-factor correlation is reasonably strong with the exceptions of the Social Security and big cities items. Generally speaking, the questions appear to measure the latent spending dimensions they are supposed to measure. Second, an inspection of the three descriptive fit indices reveals that the two-factor model fits the data somewhat well. Although the χ^2 ratio of 5.83 falls short of its threshold for good fit, the CFI value of .92 and the SRMR value of .04 are very good. Third, note that attitudes toward welfare and social spending are highly correlated at .67, which indicates that pro-spending sentiments are positively related.

The 1992 estimates show that the two-factor model fits the data to some extent, but they provide

Table 1
Two-Factor Confirmatory Factor Analysis
Models of Welfare (ξ_1) and Social (ξ_2) Spending
Attitudes, 1992 to 2000

	1992		1996		2000	
	ξ_1	ξ_2	ξ_1	ξ_2	ξ_1	ξ_2
Factor loading						
λ_1 Welfare programs	.88		.87		.87	
λ_2 Food stamps	.84		.79		.77	
λ_3 Poor people		.86		.85		.91
λ_4 Homeless		.69		.75		
λ_5 Child care		.64		.66		.54
λ_6 Social security		.40		.53		.44
λ_7 Assistance to unemployed		.75				
λ_8 Aid to big cities		.50				
Factor correlation		.67		.67		.67
Model fit						
Yuan-Bentler AGLS χ^2	110.68		23.93		15.72	
Degrees of freedom	19		8		4	
AGLS χ^2 /degrees of freedom	5.83		2.99		3.93	
AGLS-corrected CFI	.92		.98		.98	
SRMR	.05		.03		.03	
Model AIC	79.64		8.34		7.89	
<i>n</i>	1,869		1,427		1,442	

Source: 1992, 1996, and 2000 National Election Studies surveys. Note: African American respondents were excluded from the sample. Arbitrary distribution theory estimates are reported. Standardized factor loadings are reported. All parameter estimates are significant at $p < .01$. AGLS = arbitrary distribution generalized least squares; CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean squared residual; AIC = Akaike information criterion. Polychoric correlations were used.

no evidence on whether a one-factor model fits the data as well or better. The proposition that a single spend-save dimension structures responses to the spending items is, of course, entirely plausible in light of prior research (Jacoby 1994, 2000; Stimson 2002) and the robust .67 correlation between the factors reported in Table 1. I therefore estimate a model that constrains all eight items to load on one factor, the results of which appear in the second column of Table 2.

When the solutions are compared, we can see that seven of the eight item-factor correlations are higher in the two-factor model, which suggests that the items are more valid indicators of separate welfare and social spending factors than they are of a single spend-save factor. For example, the welfare loading equals .88 in the two-factor model and .80 in the one-factor solution. Second, the χ^2 ratio of 5.83 for the two-factor model is less than half the magnitude of the 13.37 ratio for the one-factor model. A comparison of

Table 2
One-Factor Confirmatory Factor Analysis
Models of Spending Attitudes, 1992 to 2000

	1992 ξ_1	1996 ξ_1	2000 ξ_1
Factor loading			
λ_1 Welfare programs	.80	.80	.83
λ_2 Food stamps	.80	.76	.77
λ_3 Poor people	.84	.81	.75
λ_4 Homeless	.67	.72	
λ_5 Child care	.63	.65	.46
λ_6 Social security	.36	.51	.36
λ_7 Assistance to unemployed	.73		
λ_8 Aid to big cities	.53		
Model fit			
Yuan-Bentler AGLS χ^2	267.43	119.16	79.43
Degrees of freedom	20	9	5
AGLS χ^2 /degrees of freedom	13.37	13.24	15.89
AGLS-corrected CFI	.78	.86	.87
SRMR	.10	.10	.08
Model AIC	272.86	112.02	89.06
<i>n</i>	1,869	1,427	1,442

Source: 1992, 1996, and 2000 National Election Studies surveys. Note: African American respondents were excluded from the sample. Arbitrary distribution theory estimates are reported. Standardized factor loadings are reported. All parameter estimates are significant at $p < .01$. AGLS = arbitrary distribution generalized least squares; CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean squared residual; AIC = Akaike information criterion. Polychoric correlations were used.

the CFI and SRMR values also favors the two-factor model. Third, when the AIC values are compared, it is evident that the two-factor model fits the data far better than the one-factor model. In short, across multiple measures of component and global model fit, the data reveal that the two-dimensional solution fits the data much better than the one-dimensional solution. Put simply, the evidence from 1992 implies that welfare spending and social spending attitudes are stored in separate locations in long-term memory.

So much for 1992; what about the other years? To begin with, Table 1 shows that in 1996, each spending item correlates rather strongly with its hypothesized factor: the welfare item-factor correlations vary from .79 to .87, and the social spending item-factor correlations vary from .53 to .87. In the one-factor solution in Table 2, the item-factor correlations are once again lower, suggesting that they are less valid measures of a single spending attitude than they are of the two separate attitudes. Next, the two-factor model fits the data fairly well on the first fit measure (χ^2 ratio = 2.99) and

remarkably well on the remaining two (CFI = .98, SRMR = .03). In contrast, the estimates for the one-factor model in Table 2 furnish no evidence of superior fit on any measure. Finally, a comparison of the AIC values demonstrates that the two-factor model does a better job of fitting the data than the one-factor model. Nothing changes significantly when we turn to the 2000 estimates. The item-factor correlations are considerably higher in the posited model (two-factor $\bar{r} = .71$ vs. one-factor $\bar{r} = .63$); the global fit statistics are much better in the two-factor model; and the AIC difference once again favors the two-factor model.

When we take a step back and consider the evidence in total, it is clear that the hypothesis of two-dimensional structure rests on a stronger empirical foundation. Regardless of the data used or the specific measure of component or global model fit under consideration, the two-factor model does a much better job of accounting for the observed covariances than the one-factor model. In substantive terms, we can conclude that attitudes toward spending on welfare and safety net programs are bifurcated.

To reiterate, the statistical results of the two-factor solution are clearly superior to those of the one-factor solution. Nevertheless, other researchers have applied alternative methods to these same data and found that a one-dimensional solution is sufficient to account for the observed response patterns (Jacoby 1994; Stimson 2002). Therefore, one may ask what is gained by moving from the more parsimonious one-factor model to the less parsimonious two-factor model. Insofar as the two-factor solution yields no new theoretical insights into the nature of public opinion on government spending, the findings reported above may not qualify as substantively significant. The next section of the article demonstrates that a two-dimensional representation of spending attitudes furnishes insights that cannot be detected via a one-dimensional representation.

The Impact of Racial Stereotypes on Spending Attitudes

My second hypothesis predicts that attitudes toward welfare spending will be grounded more deeply in racial stereotypes than attitudes toward social spending. I use ordinary least squares regression to model the relationships between the explanatory variables and spending preferences.⁹ The welfare spending and social spending variables have been recoded to lie on a 0 to 4 scale, with higher scores denoting pro-spending sentiment. Operationally, I expect that the

stereotype variable will be negatively and significantly related to welfare preferences, that stereotypes will not significantly affect nonwelfare spending preferences, and that these differential stereotype effects will be statistically distinguishable. For each model, I report the estimated coefficient and its standard error and p value, along with the model evaluation statistics.

To begin with the 1992 estimates in Table 3, we can see that many of the control variables affect spending preferences as one would expect. First, those committed to equal opportunity take a more positive view of federal spending than those less committed to equality. Next, higher-income respondents, Republicans, conservatives, and those favoring limited government take a dimmer view of spending than lower-income respondents, Democrats, liberals, and those favoring strong government, respectively. Hence, the origins of spending attitudes are broad and deep.

Most importantly for my purposes, Table 3 shows that the coefficient for the work ethic stereotype is correctly signed and highly significant in the welfare spending model ($\hat{\beta}_9 = -.10$, $p < .001$)¹⁰ and is much weaker ($\hat{\beta}_9 = -.02$) and more uncertain ($p = .10$) in the social spending model. In the welfare model, the negative coefficient means that those who believe blacks are lazy oppose welfare spending more vigorously than those who believe blacks work hard. Movement from the hard-working to lazy endpoints on the stereotype variable is associated with a 15 percent decline in support for welfare spending, *ceteris paribus*. For the social spending model, comparable movement across the stereotype variable leads to a 3 percent drop in support for social spending.

Collectively, these results imply that racial stereotypes exert more powerful effects on welfare preferences than on social spending preferences. However, to this point, I have simply scanned the difference between the coefficients and drawn a speculative inference unsubstantiated by formal statistical evidence. I address this problem by using multivariate regression techniques to test the null hypothesis that the regression coefficient for the work ethic stereotype is equal across the two spending equations.¹¹ Is the observed difference between the coefficients ($-.08$) likely to have occurred by chance? The answer is no: the hypothesis of equal slope coefficients can be rejected at $p = .001$. In sum, the first cut at the data suggests that attitudes toward government spending on welfare are race coded to a much greater degree than attitudes toward other types of social spending.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton pledged to "end welfare as we know it." Presumably, such

Table 3
Impact of Racial Stereotypes on 1992 Spending Attitudes, Ordinary Least Squares Estimates

	Welfare Spending			Social Spending		
	$\hat{\beta}_k$	$s_{\hat{\beta}_k}$	p	$\hat{\beta}_k$	$s_{\hat{\beta}_k}$	p
Coefficient estimate						
Constant	2.53	.25	.00	2.93	.15	.00
Female	.04	.06	.27	.13	.04	.00
Age	.00	.00	.23	-.00	.00	.17
Southerner	-.05	.06	.23	-.02	.03	.31
Income	-.12	.03	.00	-.09	.02	.00
Party identification	-.04	.02	.01	-.07	.01	.00
Ideological identification	-.14	.02	.00	-.05	.01	.00
Equal opportunity	.06	.01	.00	.07	.01	.00
Limited government	-.06	.01	.00	-.09	.01	.00
Work ethic stereotype	-.10	.03	.00	-.02	.02	.10
Model evaluation						
\bar{R}^2		.15		.34		
Root mean squared error		1.13		0.67		
F test		30.71		83.67		
F test p value		.00		.00		
n		1,533		1,474		

Source: 1992 National Election Study.

Note: African American respondents were excluded from the sample. p values are for one-tailed tests. Multivariate regression test of equality of coefficient for work ethic stereotype across equations was rejected at $p = .001$.

rhetoric primed those paying attention to the campaign to think about welfare more than social programs that were discussed less frequently. This obviously raises the question of whether the results reported in Table 3 are an aberration tied to a specific presidential campaign rather than an indication of how citizens typically think about social spending. If the theoretical arguments developed above are not wide of the mark, we should find the results from 1996 and 2000 look like those already reported.

The 1996 estimates appear in Table 4. To deal with the preliminaries, note that income, partisan and ideological sentiments, and beliefs about equal opportunity and limited government shape spending preferences across both equations. Next, we can see that racial stereotypes systematically affect welfare preferences ($\hat{\beta}_9 = -.08$, $p < .001$) beyond the influence of the control variables. In contrast, evidence that negative perceptions about blacks depresses support for spending on more popular social programs is not as compelling, as indicated by the weaker magnitude of the effect and the greater uncertainty surrounding it ($\hat{\beta}_9 = -.03$, $p = .07$). In substantive terms, the impact of stereotypes on welfare opinion is again moderately strong: movement across the range of the stereotype

variable is associated with a 12 percent decline in support for welfare spending; the comparable effect on social spending preferences is about 5 percent. Finally, a formal test of the hypothesis that the stereotype variable affects spending opinions equally can be rejected at $p = .03$.

When attention turns to the 2000 estimates in Table 5, the case for the theory is further strengthened. First, the estimates reveal that income, ideological identities, equal opportunity, and limited government significantly influence attitudes toward welfare and other social programs in the predicted directions. Next, the stereotype variable is negatively related to welfare support and unrelated to support for spending on more popular components of the welfare state ($\hat{\beta}_9 = -.11, p < .001$ in the welfare equation and $\hat{\beta}_9 = -.01, p = .24$ in the social programs equation). In substantive terms, those who endorse the stereotype without equivocation are nearly 17 percent more opposed to welfare spending than those who completely reject it. Last, a formal test of the null hypothesis that the stereotype coefficient is of comparable magnitude across the spending equations can be rejected at $p = .001$. Once again, the results support the conclusion that the racialization of spending opinion is confined to welfare.

Overall, the statistical and substantive results are consistent with theoretical expectations. First, the stereotype variable strongly and consistently shapes individual opinions on welfare spending. This result holds in the presence of many significant demographic and psychological control variables, across multiple years and electoral contexts, and for multiple estimators.¹² Second, there is no compelling evidence that the stereotype shapes opinion on spending for other social programs. Of course, this does not mean that such opinions are devoid of racial influence. Other analysts using alternative measures or data might conceivably turn up evidence that safety net attitudes are tainted by race to some extent. Nonetheless, on the basis of the evidence presented here, it seems unlikely that such links will be found. Third, the formal test of the hypothesis that the stereotype variable is equal across the spending equations can be safely rejected across all years. In short, the most reasonable conclusion to draw from the empirical analysis is that attitudes toward welfare spending are race coded and attitudes toward spending on other elements of the welfare state are not.

Conclusions and Implications

In the United States, a subtle yet unmistakable racial frame of reference permeates public discourse

Table 4
Impact of Racial Stereotypes on 1996 Spending Attitudes, Ordinary Least Squares Estimates

	Welfare Spending			Social Spending		
	$\hat{\beta}_k$	$s_{\hat{\beta}_k}$	p	$\hat{\beta}_k$	$s_{\hat{\beta}_k}$	p
Coefficient estimate						
Constant	2.31	.24	.00	3.19	.19	.00
Female	-.08	.06	.08	.10	.05	.02
Age	.00	.00	.33	-.00	.00	.00
Southerner	-.01	.06	.44	.00	.05	.49
Income	-.10	.03	.00	-.06	.02	.00
Party identification	-.04	.02	.03	-.06	.01	.00
Ideological identification	-.13	.03	.00	-.06	.02	.00
Equal opportunity	.06	.01	.00	.10	.01	.00
Limited government	-.18	.03	.00	-.19	.02	.00
Work ethic stereotype	-.08	.03	.00	-.03	.02	.07
Model evaluation						
\bar{R}^2		.21		.35		
Root mean squared error		0.99		0.78		
F test		34.87		68.02		
F test p value		.00		.00		
n		1,135		1,124		

Source: 1996 National Election Study.

Note: African American respondents were excluded from the sample. p values are for one-tailed tests. Multivariate regression test of equality of coefficient for work ethic stereotype across equations was rejected at $p = .03$.

on welfare to a far greater extent than discourse on more popular social programs. When public officials and the news media discuss poverty and the government's role in combating it, they often utilize racial codes and symbols that can affect how citizens think about the welfare poor (Gilens 1999; Mendelberg 2001). If citizens respond to what they see and hear, then we would expect them to learn to think about welfare in terms of race more so than they would for other types of public aid (Chong 1993, 1996).

My analysis of data from several recent National Election Studies surveys supports this perspective on two scores. First, the results of an extensive set of measurement analyses imply that the typical citizen maintains distinct attitudes toward welfare spending and other forms of social spending. Second, stereotypical beliefs about the work ethic of blacks systematically affect welfare opinion and fail to influence nonwelfare spending opinion, a conclusion that holds on both statistical and substantive grounds. Insofar as public discourse on poverty implies that government assistance for people on welfare is racially different than assistance for other needy citizens, it appears that citizens have internalized these notions.

Table 5
Impact of Racial Stereotypes on 2000 Spending Attitudes, Ordinary Least Squares Estimates

	Welfare Spending			Social Spending		
	$\hat{\beta}_k$	$s_{\hat{\beta}_k}$	p	$\hat{\beta}_k$	$s_{\hat{\beta}_k}$	p
Coefficient estimate						
Constant	2.71	.27	.00	3.37	.19	.00
Female	-.07	.07	.16	.16	.05	.00
Age	-.00	.00	.49	-.00	.00	.04
Southerner	-.02	.08	.38	.11	.05	.02
Income	-.09	.03	.00	-.04	.02	.06
Party identification	.01	.02	.38	-.03	.01	.03
Ideological identification	-.14	.03	.00	-.07	.02	.00
Equal opportunity	.06	.01	.00	.07	.01	.00
Limited government	-.17	.04	.00	-.18	.03	.00
Work ethic stereotype	-.11	.03	.00	-.01	.02	.24
Model evaluation						
\bar{R}^2		.15		.23		
Root mean squared error		1.11		0.80		
F test		21.25		33.80		
F test p value		.00		.00		
n		1,008		997		

Source: 2000 National Election Study.

Note: African American respondents were excluded from the sample. p values are for one-tailed tests. Multivariate regression test of equality of coefficient for work ethic stereotype across equations was rejected at $p = .001$.

These findings have several implications for the study of race and public opinion. First, and most obviously, the results contribute to our understanding of the racialization of public opinion on government assistance. Consistent with prior work, I found that welfare attitudes depend heavily on racial considerations (Gilens 1996, 1999). This is not a new finding. What is new is the finding that attitudes toward social spending conceived more broadly lie beyond the influence of racial antipathies. Hence, while it is disheartening to know that welfare attitudes are contaminated by racial animosities, it is reassuring to discover that attitudes toward other federal efforts to help the needy lie beyond the baleful influence of racial bigotry.

Second, the results add to the literature on how citizens think about federal spending on social programs. While many works furnish evidence consistent with a unidimensional conceptualization of spending attitudes (Jacoby 1994; Stimson 2002), the possibility of multidimensional structure has been pursued less frequently. By showing that a two-factor model accounts for spending attitudes better than a one-factor model (at least in the context of the

confirmatory factor analysis techniques employed here), this article suggests that the two-dimensional conceptualization provides a reasonable representation of how people often think about social spending. This is not to say that the two-dimensional approach is necessarily preferable to the unidimensional approach.¹³ The measurement strategy one adopts depends on the research question one asks. For instance, someone interested in exploring how attitudes toward the welfare state, broadly conceived, affect political behavior or move in response to political dialogue might craft one scale comprising all available social spending items (e.g., Schneider and Jacoby 2005; Stimson 2002).

When would it make sense to utilize separate measures of spending preferences? Two possibilities come to mind. First, one might wish to determine whether welfare attitudes weigh more heavily on voter choice than attitudes toward safety net spending or vice versa. If citizens rely more heavily on attitudes toward welfare programs, which constitute a tiny fraction of the federal budget, than on attitudes toward other programs like Social Security or Medicare, which constitute the far greater share, we learn something important about voters, about the type of information that captures their attention, and about the Republican Party's success in racializing the politics of social welfare. Alternatively, the impact of each set of attitudes on the vote may vary in response to developments in the political world or across different campaign contexts. This leads to a second justification for utilizing separate measures: one could analyze whether voters responded to the passage of welfare-reform legislation signed into law by President Clinton in the summer of 1996. If voters relied on welfare attitudes in elections preceding and following welfare reform, then the possibility that the voter is aware of policy change in the domestic political arena and adjusts her or his voting behavior dims. But if voters systematically relied on welfare attitudes prior to welfare reform and then subsequently purged them from their decision-making calculi in the postreform era, the case for the responsive voter is strengthened. With a little imagination, then, it is easy to see how the results reported here can be applied to the study of mass political behavior.

Notes

1. The data used in these analyses can be downloaded from www.electionstudies.org. The STATA and EQS program files needed to replicate this study are located at <http://www.polisci.umn.edu/~pgoren>.

2. Gilens (1999) focused on *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* and CBS, NBC, and ABC news from 1988 to 1992. Clawson and Trice (2003) analyzed the same three magazines as well as the *New York Times Magazine* and *Business Week* from 1993 to 1998.

3. The data for this study were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research and were originally collected by the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies for the National Election Studies. I am responsible for all uses and interpretations of these data.

4. Question wording is as follows: "If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which of the following programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased? Should federal spending on ____ be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?" For some programs, respondents volunteered that spending should be eliminated. These responses are treated as "decrease" preferences. Finally, "don't know" responses are treated as missing data. The percentage of don't know responses is extremely low, usually approximately 1 to 2 percent.

5. The National Election Studies includes a wider array of spending items than those listed above. My decision to use subsets rather than the full battery of items is based on two considerations. First, I sought items that deal directly with the social welfare function of the federal government. This criterion led to the elimination of items addressing other policy domains (i.e., foreign aid, science and technology, crime, the environment, immigration control, and highway repairs). Second, among the remaining items, I sought to eliminate those which appear to have virtually no potential to implicitly evoke racial considerations in the minds of whites (i.e., AIDS research, financial aid to college students, public schools, and assistance to blacks). Inclusion of such items would make it easier to substantiate my second hypothesis. Note that when the AIDS research, financial aid to college students, and public school items are included in the analyses as indicators of nonwelfare social spending, the same general pattern of results obtains. Finally, with respect to the assistance to blacks item, since my argument centers on the role racial stereotypes play in shaping preferences that do not directly reference race, it does not make sense to include an explicit racial item in the analysis.

6. The specific items used to tap the core values can be found in Goren (2005, 895). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the 1992, 1996, and 2000 scales are as follows: equal opportunity = .66, .68, and .58, and limited government = .71, .75, and .74. The 1992 limited government scale is longer than its 1996 and 2000 counterparts because respondents who volunteered a "both" answer were assigned a separate code only in 1992.

7. All models are estimated using the arbitrary distribution generalized least squares estimator, which makes no assumptions about the multivariate distribution of the observed variables, applied to polychoric correlation matrices. Comparable results obtain when robust maximum likelihood estimators are used. The factor scales are defined by constraining the unstandardized loadings for the welfare and poor people items to equal 1.00. Since the observed items are ordinal-level measures, we must interpret the confirmatory factor analysis estimates with some caution.

8. Recall that African American respondents are dropped from the samples to isolate how whites think about government spending.

9. The dependent variables are five-point scales in the welfare models and seven- to thirteen-point scales in the social spending models. Since some of these may well be ordinal-level variables, I reestimated the models using ordered logistic regression. The statistical and substantive results from these models parallel the ordinary least squares results. Note also that the conclusions do not change when the models are estimated using errors-in-variables regression (Kmenta 1986).

10. Some might wonder if the impact of racial stereotypes on welfare spending is largely a function of the "welfare" item in the scale. To check this possibility, I estimated separate ordinary least squares and ordered logistic regression models of welfare and food stamp opinion. I found that the stereotype variable consistently affected welfare and food stamp preferences to the same degree, both statistically and substantively.

11. Multivariate regression is a special case of the seemingly unrelated regression model in which the explanatory variables are identical across the system of equations (Greene 1997).

12. See note 9.

13. On the grounds of parsimony alone, a one-factor model that provides a reasonable fit to the data is preferable to a two-factor model. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that parsimony, while desirable, should not be viewed as privileged relative to other desirable properties of empirical propositions. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, 20) noted, "we do not advise researchers to seek parsimony as an essential good, since there seems little reason to adopt it unless we already know a lot about the subject. We do not even need parsimony to avoid excessively complicated theories, since it is directly implied by the maxim that the theory should be just as complicated as all our evidence suggests." Moreover, since parsimony is but one of several criteria used to evaluate propositions and it may conflict with some or all of them in a given situation, researchers must make judgments about trading parsimony to obtain another desideratum (Gerring 2001). I have essentially argued that the two-dimensional solution is preferable to the one-dimensional solution because the former raises the possibility of exploring differential levels of racialized thinking about government assistance. In short, while the two-dimensional solution is less parsimonious than the one-dimensional solution, the accuracy, theoretical utility, and innovation gained by adopting this approach more than offsets the loss in parsimony.

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