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**The “Southwestern Strategy:”
Immigration and Race in GOP
Discourse**

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The “Southwestern Strategy:” Immigration and Race in GOP Discourse

Abstract

This analysis explores the use of “racially divisive appeals” (RDAs) in Republican presidential debate discourse over the last two election cycles. While the use of racial division in American political appeals has tended to be associated with the Civil-Rights era “Southern Strategy” wherein Republican politicians wooed southern white voters by exploiting anti-black animosities, this analysis finds that contemporary RDAs have evolved to focus more on mobilizing nativist resentments of immigrants. RDAs which mobilize threats to majority group resources and those which mobilize threats to majority group safety are explored: of particular focus are appeals which frame undocumented immigrants as “welfare abusers” and those which paint them as “criminals” or “terrorists.” Reasons for the shift from the use of black/white tensions to the use of native-born/migrant or legal/undocumented divisions to appeal to backlash voters are also explored. These include changing population demographics and the increasing visibility and salience of some immigrant populations due to patterns of resettlement in the formerly white enclaves of city suburbs.

Introduction

Although it represents a decidedly shameful chapter in American democracy, many candidates, campaign strategists, and political parties have discovered that appealing to the racial, religious, or nativist prejudices of voters can be an effective means of winning elections. For those willing to pursue it, the decision to exploit ethnic discord may be driven by the candidate’s own deeply held anti-egalitarian beliefs, or it could simply be the result of calculated strategy. In either case, however, this tactic usually begins with what is colloquially known as “race-baiting,” and what, in this analysis, will be known as “racially divisive appeals” (RDAs): a discursive strategy wherein the speaker denigrates a particular minority group, frames that group as a threat to the target audience, advocates for special punishments or restrictions against that group, or reassures the audience of their rightfully privileged position vis a vis the problematized minority. These appeals can be quite overt, or, as is more likely in the post-Civil Rights era, they may take the form of “coded” or covert language instead (Gilens 2000; Lowndes 2008).

Racially divisive appeals are generally aimed at “backlash voters:” individuals whose political behavior is motivated by fear or resentment of minority advancement or encroachment (Mayer 2002). These voters may, in turn, be associated with two broadly defined audiences. The first is the “majority group:” the group which occupies a position of demographic and/or political, cultural, or economic dominance within a divided electorate. Alternately, RDAs may be used to organize political support by fomenting animosity between rival minority groups.¹

Although RDAs have been mobilized by actors from across the political spectrum, this analysis will focus on their strategic use by the modern-day Republican party. First I will provide an overview of historical and contemporary uses of both nativist appeals, and those, like the

¹ Political actors may also curry support by mobilizing minority group frustration toward the dominant or majority population. These kinds of appeals are not the subject of this analysis, however, insofar as this type of organizing could also be classified as pro-egalitarian, and is, in any case, a necessary precursor to civil rights advocacy.

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“Southern Strategy,” which helped the GOP gain political dominance in the south through the exploitation of black-white tensions (Carter 2000, Lowndes 2008). Next I will examine whether Republican Presidential candidates in the last two election cycles continue to use RDAs, despite a 2005 apology from the Republican National Committee (RNC) and a promise to move away from this tactic. If so, I will determine whether these appeals exploit black-white tensions or whether they have switched focus to “new” minority populations made especially salient by demographic trends that are challenging both the majority status of Caucasian whites and the homogeneity of their residential areas (Census 2012; Singer 2003).

Politics and Prejudice: an overview

Nativism

America’s heterogeneous population and receiving nation status has always created tensions that have, in turn, been mobilized by certain political actors. Insofar as it was a period of historically high immigration, drawing heavily from sending regions in Ireland, South/Eastern Europe and Asia, the nineteenth and early 20th centuries saw a surge in popular nativism; the strategic exploitation of which helped a diverse group of individuals gain and maintain power. These ranged from politicians associated with the anti-Catholic “Know-Nothing” party, to bipartisan supporters of federal legislation which, like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, either barred “undesirable” migrants or, as with the Immigration Act of 1925, imposed strict quotas on them. (Gyory 1998; Higham 2002). In the present era, another in which immigration has reached a high-water mark (Census 2012), nativist sentiment has crystallized around a twin focus: resentment over what has been framed as an “invasion” of undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans through the southern border, and post-9/11 fears that Muslim migration poses a risk of terrorism.

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Most contemporary anti-immigrant discourse presumes an undocumented, specifically *Latino* subject (Dietrich 2011). This is partially a function of population share: Latin America is the largest overall migrant sending region and the largest source of unauthorized migration (Census 2012). The continued Hispanic influx, combined with their relatively high fertility rate, has combined to make Latinos, at 17.1% of the population, the U.S.’s largest minority group, and one projected to make up as many as one in three Americans by 2060 (Census 2012). Moreover, although post-WWII patterns of suburban “white flight” have allowed for the persistence of black “hypersegregation” in inner cities (Massey and Denton 1988; Wilkes and Iceland 2004). Hispanics and other non-black minority groups have resisted residential exclusion to this degree (Wilkes and Iceland 2004). More than half of U.S. Hispanics now live in suburban communities (Singer 2003) and Hispanic children account for 20% of students in suburban public schools (compared to only 11% in 1994--Fry 2009).

For backlash voters, some of whom have the tendency to elide the categories “Latino” and “illegal,” the growth and increasing salience of the U.S. Hispanic community is taken as evidence that American “sovereignty” and “security” are under threat (Chebel d’Appollonia 2012), along with the political and cultural hegemony of “Caucasian white” or English-speaking Americans (Fetzer 2000). Corresponding policy responses have included a proliferation of state-level “attrition through enforcement” laws, designed to make the lives of undocumented individuals so untenable they flee states “voluntarily” and, at the federal level, a dramatic increase in deportations, a switch to incarceration pending removal, and the militarization of the southern border (d’Appollonia 2012). Attempts to decrease the size of the undocumented population have also been coupled with attempts to mitigate the cultural impact of Latino

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communities, including proposed “English Only” policies and bans on the teaching of Hispanic-American and other “multicultural” subjects in border states like Arizona.

American Muslims have also become a target of backlash, although, insofar as they make up only about 0.6% of the U.S. population (Pew 2013), this is less likely a function of this community’s size as it is of its “war on terror”-era salience. As with Latinos, however, policy and political rhetoric have prescribed similar “solutions” to ostensible threats posed by this group. The first involves asserting greater control over the border, specifically the U.S.-Mexico border, which, as this research shows, is framed as the primary entry point for potential “Islamic terrorists” as well as Hispanic labor migrants (see also d’Appollonia 2012). The second, responding to anxieties that Muslim Americans are attempting a covert subversion of American laws or cultural values, has aimed to mitigate the group’s potential impact on receiving communities. This has taken the form of (largely symbolic) “Sharia bans,” which prohibit the implementation of Islamic law in American courts, and measures limiting mosque construction (ACLU 2014).

Exploiting Black-White Divisions: The “Southern Strategy”

While the impact of nativism on American politics has perhaps been better studied, arguably the most enduringly successful example of the exploitation of racial division can be seen in the Republican Party’s “Southern Strategy:” a decades-long campaign that played off white anxieties over the civil rights gains of blacks and, as a consequence, effected a tectonic electoral realignment. Following the Civil War, Southern whites initially retained their allegiance to the pro-secession Democratic Party. Because of this same stance, newly enfranchised black voters almost uniformly supported the GOP. Racialized party loyalty began the shift toward its

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current form with the enactment of the “New Deal” (1933-1938), which was widely popular with low-income voters of all racial and ethnic groups (despite the exclusion of black citizens from full participation in many of its anti-poverty programs--Piven and Cloward 1993). New Deal taxation and regulations were significantly less popular with the Republican Party’s business constituency, and thus tended to be opposed by conservative politicians. Together these factors spurred an exodus of working class voters from the GOP and strengthened a general re-alignment along both class and racial lines (Mayer 2002; Lowndes 2008).

Republican strategists understood that the party could not hope to survive if it only drew votes from economic elites. Therefore, many began to look for ways to win back less class-privileged voters. Political challenges to local-level segregation regimes, combined with slow progress at the national level (beginning with Roosevelt’s tentative integration of federal jobs in the 1930s and culminating in the major civil rights laws of the 1960s) presented a key moment of opportunity (Lowndes 2008). National Republican political operatives, most notably those aligned with the Goldwater and Nixon campaigns, turned their focus to shifting the ingrained democratic loyalties of the so-called “Solid South” (Mayer 2002; Lowndes 2008).² Long-standing racial animosities would provide the key to unlocking those alliances.

Early attempts to win the political loyalties of backlash voters were marked by the use of openly white supremacist language. They were also as likely to come from traditional “state’s rights” Democrats, or members of pro-segregation splinter groups like the “Dixiecrat” party, as they were from the new breed of Southern Strategy Republicans (Carter 2000; Lowndes 2008). However, successful moves by liberal democrats to strengthen the party’s civil rights

² These states include South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana. Each went to the Democratic (or alternately or “Dixiecratic”—a pro-segregationist splinter faction of the Democratic party) in every election between 1880 and 1952. This block of the “Solid South” was usually, though less exclusively, joined by neighboring former slave states including Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia.

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commitment at the national level led to a defection of most of its racial conservatives (Carter 2000). At the same time, Civil Rights Movement gains began to make open racism less politically tenable. In a confidential 1981 interview (released in full only after his death), Lee Atwater, who served as campaign manager and aide to Presidents Reagan and Bush Sr., and later assumed Chairmanship of the Republican National Committee (RNC), explained both his party’s use of racially divisive appeals, and the evolution of those appeals over time:

Atwater: You start out in 1954 by saying, “Nigger, nigger, nigger.” By 1968 you can’t say “nigger”—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, “forced busing,” “states’ rights,” and all that stuff, and you’re getting so abstract. Now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites... but I’m saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, uh, that we’re doing away with the racial problem one way or the other, uh, you follow me?...So any way you look at it, race is coming on the back burner.” (Perlstein 2012)³

Therefore, in campaigns, including those run by Atwater himself, candidates and speechwriters began looking for more subtle ways to bring race in “on the back burner.” These mobilized what came to be known as “racial dog whistles” or “rhetorical winks” (Guinier 1993): terms or language that triggered associations with race but were also vague enough to allow the speaker some room for deniability if challenged. Such appeals could be just as effective at reaching backlash whites but were less likely to alienate moderates (Mayer 2002; Lowndes 2008). As Linwood Holton, former Republican governor of Virginia, critically observed:

“With Nixon strategists leading the charge, these few (but prominent) Republicans opted for the so-called Southern Strategy to lure white racists into a coalition with the party’s traditional business constituency. The tactic was simple: lace your speeches with coded appeals to racists in Southern states, dressing the policies up in the language of fiscal conservatism. When challenged about the racial nature of the rhetoric, the Southern Strategist would defend himself by claiming ignorance: ‘I didn’t mean that, of course.’ The intended target of the message -- the racist voter -- understood completely, while leaving the politician ‘plausible deniability’ with non-racist voters.” (Holton 2002)

³ Atwater originally asked Lamas not to identify him as the source of this quote. Although Lamas used the quote in later publications, attributing it to an anonymous source, he kept the source confidential until after Atwater’s death in 1991.

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Plausible Deniability: Contemporary RDAs

Although appeals which use bluntly racist language or openly disparage particular minority populations are still used, as this research will illustrate, these are more likely to be aimed at relatively new, small, or disempowered minority populations: those without a tangible history of civil rights victories or established advocacy networks in the United States. RDA’s which target established minority populations, like blacks and, increasingly, Latinos, often never use overtly raced language. Instead, speakers may use ostensibly neutral words that have, over time, been saturated with racial significance. For example, discussions about “poverty,” “welfare,” or “crime” may already evoke images of black or minority subjects among the most strongly prejudiced voters (Gilens 2000; Eberhardt et al. 2004). However, these terms take on additional racialized meanings when paired with euphemisms like “urban,” “inner-city” and “ghetto,” which, due to the high representation of minorities in cities (Wilkes and Iceland 2004; Massey and Denton 1988), are often understood to connote non-white subjects (Gilens 2000).⁴ Therefore campaign rhetoric about the need to address “urban crime” or crack down on “inner-city welfare abuse” could clearly communicate images of dangerously undisciplined black and minority subjects while still maintaining a façade of race-neutrality. For example, President Ronald Reagan, who made Lee Atwater a chief advisor and cutting welfare a cornerstone of his economic policy, used campaign speeches to tell stories about New York city “slum dwellers” who lived in taxpayer-subsidized luxury apartments, and a “welfare queen” from Chicago’s (predominantly black) South Side who cheated the government out of enough money to buy “three new cars” and a “full length mink coat” (Anon 1976). Once in office, he continued to talk about the role “welfare dependency” played in both discouraging work and encouraging absentee

⁴ Alternately, the term “rural” in the context of discussions about poverty or crime is often understood to be an ostensibly race-neutral way of talking about underclass white populations.

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fatherhood and out-of-wedlock births amongst “inner city” residents (Reagan 1986); trends that Americans had already been primed to think of as “black issues” since the publication of the Moynihan Report (Moynihan 1965).

In addition to using race-coded language, the discourses of the new Southern Strategy also adopt elements of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva termed the “linguistics of color-blind racism.” In interviews with white subjects, Bonilla-Silva found that individuals who spoke critically of nonwhites as a group tended to engage in certain semantic moves to insulate themselves from charges of racism: these included prefacing statements with disclaimers like “I’m not a racist, but...” or coupling negative comments about minorities with assertions that the speaker admired minorities, was “concerned about them,” or simply had many “close friends” who were not white (2006). Subjects may also engage in criticism of one minority group while simultaneously singling out another “model minority” population for praise (Espiritu 2007) or may claim their own symbolic “victim” status: asserting that personal or familial experiences with prejudice (as the grandchildren of immigrants, for example) make it impossible for them to be racist (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Such tactics allow for more complex use of race as a wedge issue by enabling speakers to simultaneously court backlash whites while reaching out to certain minorities.

For the purpose of this analysis, racially divisive appeals can be understood to carry three different kinds of rhetorical “content:” the first group of appeals frame minority group members as threats to dominant group resources, the second frame them as threats to dominant group safety, and the third present them as a threat to the dominant group’s political or social hegemony. Messages which mobilize resource threats include arguments that nonwhites “take jobs” from majority group members, or assertions that they disproportionately use government

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assistance programs and thus are “robbing” voters of tax revenue. Threats to safety frame minorities as criminals or, as is increasingly the case after 9/11, terrorists. Finally, messages which position minorities as threats to white dominance include those that play on white fears of nonwhite encroachment into white neighborhoods or schools, or those which present minorities as poised to assume “majority status” themselves by wresting demographic, legislative, or cultural dominance away from whites.

Such appeals are not exclusive to Republican candidates, either historically or in contemporary political discourse. Nevertheless, this analysis is limited to the use of racialized appeals in Republican discourses for two specific reasons. First, the voter base of the contemporary Democratic Party is far more racially diverse than that of the GOP. White voters are more likely to identify as Republican (35%) than Democrat (26%), whereas only 5% of blacks, 13% of Latinos, and 17% of Asians identify as Republican (Newport 2013). Therefore, racially divisive appeals stand to cost Democratic candidates more potential votes than they do GOP candidates and are thus less likely to be used. Second, in 2005 Republican National Committee (RNC) Chair Ken Mehlman formally acknowledged, and apologized for, the Southern Strategy in a speech before the Milwaukee branch of the NAACP:

"By the '70s and into the '80s and '90s the Democratic Party solidified its gains in the African American community, and we Republicans did not effectively reach out...Some Republicans gave up on winning the African American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican Chairman to tell you we were wrong." (Allen, 2005)

Mehlman’s apology, part of a general outreach effort to minority (specifically black) voters on behalf of the GOP, was meant to signal a move away from campaign tactics aimed at exploiting racial division. Therefore, it was the aim of this analysis to see if contemporary GOP discourse

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really has abandoned the use of RDAs: either those targeting blacks or those which mobilize resentment toward “new” minority or immigrant populations.

Method

The sample for this analysis is comprised of primary and general election debate transcripts from the last two presidential campaigns: the 2007-2008 cycle and the 2011-2012 cycle. This sample is limited to Republican debate discourse for reasons of party demographics explained above. Focus is on the last two election cycles because these follow the RNC’s official apology for race baiting. Units of analysis are candidate statements, usually prompted by audience or moderator questions, taken from video or written debate transcripts. Excerpts were subjected to “statement level analysis” (Dietrich 2011) which is to say that each was treated as a unique utterance (even in cases where the same appeal is repeated on different dates). Each was also analyzed separately from all other statements made by that candidate (for example, contradictory statements made by the same candidate do not “cancel each other out”).

Although they are the subject of this investigation, debates are certainly not the only form of campaign discourse. Candidates may also communicate with potential voters through paid advertisements, “stump speeches,” and contact with media outlets. This sample is limited to debates because these represent a more open discursive field: the opportunity to participate, and thus disseminate one’s message, is not supposed to be a function of how much money the candidate has to spend, in contrast to paid campaign ads or speeches made during travel. In addition to direct statements, candidates may also communicate indirectly through surrogates. These indirect messages comprise a large percentage of political speech and range from official, public statements issued by campaign staffers, to more “back channel” forms of communication where the relationship between the message and the candidate him/herself is (often by design)

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somewhat unclear. These “back channel” communications have actually become a preferred means of disseminating racially divisive appeals because distance from the candidate allows for greater deniability. However, direct candidate statements have been chosen for this analysis because of the difficulty of proving authorship of back channel appeals.

For this analysis, a racially divisive appeal (RDA) is defined as any statement that appeals to, or stokes, racial resentment among backlash voters, justifies discriminatory or punitive treatment toward a minority group, or presents members of that group in a stereotyped or demeaning fashion. These appeals may be overt or implicit/coded. Overt RDAs are statements where the speaker’s intention to play to racial discord is fairly obvious. Implicit or “dog whistle” references, on the other hand, present more of a challenge from a research perspective because they are vague by design. Generally, it is the case that, while the contents of a statement can be analyzed, the intent behind it can’t be—and therefore the aim of this research is to code political language rather than the feelings or thoughts that motivate it. However, insofar as the “Southern Strategy” describes the use of racial scapegoating to win voters, intent is not entirely irrelevant and there are certain things that provide clues to it. First, if a candidate is criticized for race-baiting for a statement and continues to repeat it, that can be an indication that the statement is an intentional appeal to racial resentment. Likewise, a statement that both spurs racial animus *and* is specifically false or misleading, especially if it is frequently repeated, is likely also not evidence of a factual error but rather something aimed at fueling voter anger. When available, these clues to speaker intent are included in the text. In all cases, however, covert statements themselves are provided so that the reader may draw his/her own conclusions.

Results

Analysis of 42 Republican primary and eight Presidential and Vice Presidential debates during the 2008 and 2012 election cycles yielded 1231 coded excerpts (although not all of these were race or immigration codes, as will be explained in greater detail below). Of the 1231 total excerpts, 430 dealt with immigration and 111 dealt with race or ethnicity, either directly or obliquely. These are primarily analyzed with respect to two different categories of racially divisive appeals: those that present blacks and immigrants as threats to the economic resources of backlash voters (most commonly by portraying them as abusers of government benefits, but in some cases by portraying them as competition for jobs) and those that present them as criminals and thus threats to voter safety. The third category of RDAs, those that present minorities as threats to majority group political or social hegemony, is less of a focus in this particular analysis, but will also be discussed.

Welfare and Work

That “welfare” (a term generally designating any government-funded program providing means-tested transfers of cash, goods, or services) would come to be raced, and specifically “blackened,” in US political discourse was far from a fore-drawn conclusion. Early anti-poverty programs, such as the housing and job placement efforts of the New Deal, gave states wide leeway to exclude minority applicants from participation, while later programs often constructed complex legal notions of “deservingness” and “moral fitness” to allow administrators to block non-white women and their children from receiving benefits (Piven and Cloward 1993; Quadagno 1994). Even in the contemporary era race continues to function as a form of benefits disenfranchisement among the poor. Case-workers are more likely to deny benefits to non-white

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recipients, and the extent to which state governments restrict welfare eligibility is correlated with the proportion of non-whites on their welfare rolls (Soss et al. 2001; Schram et al. 2009).

However, despite these exclusions from social rights, and the fact that it is non-Hispanic whites who have historically constituted both the majority of the poor and the majority of those receiving means-tested benefits, decades of political rhetoric about urban “welfare queens” and media overrepresentation of minorities in stories about welfare (Gilens 2000; Dyck and Hussey 2008) have encouraged the association of government aid with minorities. Majorities of white survey respondents believe that most welfare recipients are black (Gilens 2000) and white respondents’ belief that blacks were “lazy” or “lacked a strong work ethic” were stronger predictors of their support for welfare programs than were factors such as economic self-interest (Gilens 2000; Dyck and Hussey 2008).

In the 1990s, Ronald Reagan’s “welfare queens” were joined by a new group of “undeserving poor:” immigrants, both documented and undocumented, who were believed to be drawn to the U.S. by the “magnet” of public assistance (Calavita 1996; Yoo 2008). In 1994, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 187, which, had it not been overturned, would have barred undocumented migrants from enrolling in public school or accessing non-emergency medical care (Calavita 1996). Two years later, federal lawmakers included measures blocking most legal immigrants from accessing means-tested benefits in the omnibus 1996 welfare reforms (Yoo 2008). Currently, undocumented immigrants are barred from receiving means-tested support, although they may enroll in public schools, seek care from publically funded hospitals, and can qualify for certain other kinds of non-cash aid (such as emergency disaster assistance--Broder and Blazer 2011). Legal immigrants may still qualify for some means-tested benefits, although this varies widely by state. American-born children, regardless

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of their parents’ immigration status, qualify for the same benefits as any other citizens (Broder and Blazer 2011).

Despite these restrictions, polling data indicate that the real or perceived use of publically funded services by immigrants, and specifically undocumented immigrants, is a major concern among native-born Americans. When asked to cite their “biggest concern” about the impact of illegal immigration, more survey respondents listed “overburdening government programs and services” (44%) than any other option, including “taking jobs” (9%), “increasing crime” (6%), “terrorism” (6%) or “changing the culture” (3%) (Fox News/Opinion Dynamics 2010). In a USA Today/Gallup Poll, 61% of respondents said they were “very concerned” about illegal immigrants putting an “unfair burden on U.S. schools, hospitals and other government services” compared to 53% who cited the same concern about wage depression (2010). Finally, although 62% of respondents believed that illegal immigrants only took “jobs Americans don’t want,” a majority (57%) still felt illegal immigrants were “mostly a drain on American society” (Associated Press/GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media 2010). This suggests that benefit use has replaced more traditional concerns, such as job competition, as the major driver of native-born resentment toward undocumented migrants.

The purpose of this section is to analyze the extent to which terms like “welfare” and a corollary category, “benefit use,” still function as race codes in GOP discourse. Analysis will focus first on appeals linking blacks to welfare use and will then examine appeals which link immigrants to the use of public benefits. When “welfare” is used without a racial signifier that doesn’t mean that the reference isn’t decoded as raced by the listener (Gilens 2000, Dyck and Hussey 2008), however that does mean that the speaker doesn’t explicitly *encourage* this

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interpretation by specifying non-white recipients. Therefore, stand-alone references to “welfare” are not coded as RDAs, but those which include overt or implied racial modifiers are.

Welfare and blacks

To gauge the extent to which “welfare” remains raced in GOP discourse, the use of related terms was coded: these included “welfare,” “government dependency,” “handouts” and the names of specific means-tested programs like Medicaid or “Food Stamps.” Together these resulted in 114 separate references. Mentions of entitlement programs like Social Security or Medicare were *not* coded as welfare references because, while these also function as anti-poverty programs, they are perceived as “earned” and are not generally associated with the American underclass (Quadagno 1994). Indeed, while all candidates spoke of the need to cut “welfare,” they were more divided on entitlement programs like Social Security with front-runner candidates making frequent pledges to protect it.

Of these 114 references, only twelve (12) statements paired welfare codes with either an explicit (6) or implicit (6) reference to black recipients. Most of these came in response to direct questions about racial inequality. For example, when asked to discuss ways the GOP could reach out to black communities, New York Mayor Rudy Guiliani responded “So there are many, many issues on which we can reach out. I found one of the best was moving people off welfare. I moved 640,000 people off of welfare, most of them to jobs.¹” (11/28/2007). In response to a question about any regrets he might have from the way his administration handled race issues, Guiliani mentioned none but again cited working “very, very hard to move hundreds of thousands of people off welfare” as positive contributions his administration had made to the city’s black community (5/3/2007). While blacks do face disproportionate risks of poverty and unemployment, using “mov(ing) people off welfare” as your administration or party’s primary

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service to black communities reinforces white viewers’ raced perceptions of welfare. It may also function as a form of “counterscheduling” (Brummett 1994), wherein the speaker risks offending the immediate audience, potential black voters, to send an appeal to a broader one: whites who respond favorably to pledges to get “tough” on (black) welfare abuse.

The most explicit appeals linking blacks and welfare use were attributed to Representative Tom Tancredo (Colorado) and happened during a 2007 debate that focused heavily on race issues. Tancredo answered a question about racial disparities in unemployment by blaming welfare, along with and labor migration, for destroying black families:

Tancredo: “Two things have happened to—I believe—to devastate the black community when it comes to economic opportunity. One, the welfare state, it began to pay people to not be in the home. And when that happened what we saw was a decline in wage rates. And two, of course, is the importation of millions upon millions of low-income workers that depress the wage rates for the lowest income among us.” (9/27/2007)

Tancredo’s response to this question again reinforces the idea of blacks as the primary beneficiaries of welfare, since these programs are not blamed family breakdown among *whites*. The assertion that welfare “pays people not to be in the home” in African American households also evokes the image of the dysfunctional, matriarchal black family (Moynihan 1965): missing both the financial support and the guidance rightfully provided by a husband and father.

Of these same 12 references, six (6) paired a specific welfare reference with an implicit reference to black recipients. All of these were attributed to former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (Georgia), with the first four due to his repeatedly labeling Barack Obama the “Food Stamp President:” once each during debates on 9/5/2011 and 11/5/2011 and twice in a debate devoted to race issues held on the Martin Luther King Jr. memorial holiday (1/16/2012). An additional two coded references came from Gingrich’s proposal that low-income kids in places like “New York” replace paid school janitors so they could “learn how to work” (12/11/2011;

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1/16/2012). Among potential race codes in the 2012 campaign, Gingrich’s decision to use “Food Stamp President” to describe America’s first black Head of State, and his assertions that urban youth needed to develop better work ethics, received some of the most critical press attention as “racial dog whistles” (Fallows 2012), nevertheless Gingrich continued to repeat them.

Welfare and immigrants

While statements tying blacks to welfare use received the most press attention, these were not the most frequent racialized welfare codes in this sample; references to benefit abuse by immigrants, specifically undocumented immigrants, were far more common. To analyze these framings, I coded all references to immigration (n=430) for mentions of government benefit use by immigrants, resulting in a total of 70 references. The “benefit use” subcategory was more broadly defined than the “welfare” category above because undocumented (and most legal immigrants) are prevented from receiving means-tested aid. Of all codes which framed immigrants as problematic, “benefit use” was the second most common after crime (it is dealt with first in this analysis due to the breadth of “crime frames,” which will be discussed in the next section).

While none of the services that undocumented immigrants can access, such as public schooling or emergency room care, are typically understood as “welfare” when they are used by Americans, some candidates engaged in a kind of “frame extension” (Benford and Snow 2000) by redefining this already racially charged word to mean *any* kind of publically-funded service *so long as it was being used by an undocumented person*. For example Representative Ron Paul of Texas repeatedly used the term “welfare” to talk about these services in both his 2008 (n=2) and 2012 (n=5) presidential runs, arguing:

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Paul: *I see the immigration problem as a consequence of our welfare state. Welfare because we encourage people not to get work here, but the welfare we offer the people that come—they get free medical care, they get free education, they bankrupt our hospitals, our hospitals are closing. And it shouldn't be rewarded.” (9/27/2007).*

When asked how the GOP could attract Latino voters, eventual 2012 nominee Mitt Romney engaged in a similar kind of frame extension by substituting “welfare” for an even more negatively charged word, “handouts,” when describing states (like those of his opponent, Texas Governor Rick Perry) that allow undocumented residents to qualify for in-state tuition rates at public universities. His answer also mirrored Guiliani’s counterscheduled (Brummet 1994) “tough on welfare” appeal by pledging to remind Latino benefit users that they did not come to America “for a handout:”

Romney: *“The question began by saying how do we attract Latino voters. And the answer is by telling them what they know in their heart, which is they or their ancestors did not come here for a handout. If they came here for a handout, they'd be voting for democrats.” (9/12/2011)*

In addition to labeling any undocumented person a “welfare abuser” so long as he or she enrolls in school, visits an ER, or takes advantage of less expensive “in-state” tuition at the local university, this kind of frame extension has the benefit of legitimizing neo-liberal opposition to programs, like tax-funded public schools, that are generally popular with all but the most staunch opponents of government spending. However, using “welfare” to describe such a broad range of services has a third effect insofar as it may cause confusion as to what kinds of benefits undocumented immigrants *can* and *do* receive. Repeating the claim that illegal immigrants “qualify for welfare,” as Ron Paul does, can legitimize false accounts of rampant means-tested benefit abuse by undocumented migrants. Similarly misleading statements included Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann’s assertion that the DREAM Act would “offer taxpayer-subsidized benefits to illegal aliens” (11/22/2011) and Tom Tancredo’s claim that federal

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lawmakers were developing a “plan to give Social Security benefits to illegal aliens” (10/21/2007).⁵

In addition to framing undocumented migrants as “welfare abusers,” five candidates (Paul, Romney, Bachmann, Santorum, and Thompson) made repeated claims (total n=27) that undocumented people come to the U.S. for the *specific* or *primary purpose* of accessing government benefits for themselves or their children. The argument was most often made by Ron Paul during both his 2008 (n=5) and 2012 (n=6) Presidential runs:

Paul: There is something said in economics that, if you subsidize something, you get more of it. This is what we do, we encourage it by giving free medical care, free education, and the promise of amnesty. No wonder more will come. (1/10/2008)

This claim is not born out by evidence. Research suggests that the primary motivators of unauthorized immigration are jobs and family reunification, with access to better schooling playing only a minimal effect on the decision to migrate and access to other benefits playing none at all (Massey and Espinosa 1997). Nonetheless the charge was commonly repeated.

Interestingly, while most past research has explored the extent to which legal migrants (who have historically had more access to state support) are demonized as “benefit abusers” (see Yoo 2008), within this sample it was only *undocumented* immigrants who were so framed. Of 70 statements which framed immigrants as benefit abusers, 55 (80%) stressed that it was undocumented migrants who were the problem. Within these appeals, candidates made frequent attempts to divide migrant populations into good or “model minority” (Espiritu 2007) legal immigrant populations and bad or unworthy “illegal” ones. Rick Santorum, for example,

⁵ The DREAM Act is proposed legislation that would grant a pathway to citizenship for undocumented children brought to the U.S. by parents. Although she did not specify which benefits these would be, Bachmann may have been referring to the fact that students attending college under the DREAM Act would not be barred from participation in federal student loan and work study programs (they would be disqualified from receiving other benefits like PELL grants, however.) Tancredo’s claim is just untrue.

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engaged in this strategy while simultaneously claiming his own “minority status:” positioning himself and his family as members of the disadvantaged (but still laudable) legal immigrant community:

Santorum: *“Look, I’m the son of an Italian immigrant. I think immigration is one of the great things that has made this country the dynamic country that it continues to be...but we want them to come here like my grandfather and my father came here. They made sacrifices. They came in the 1920s. There were no promises. There were no government benefits. They came because they wanted to be free and they wanted to be good law-abiding citizens...” (9/7/11)*

Jobs

While the claim that immigrants (both legal and undocumented) “take jobs” from citizens has historically been one of most effective drivers of American nativism (Higham 2002), such claims were among the least common RDAs in this sample. Out of 430 total immigration references, only 20 utilized this kind of frame: making claims that migrants “abuse benefits” three and a half times more common than claims that they “take jobs.” This tracks with recent polls showing that respondents cited “overburdening government programs and services” over “taking jobs” as their biggest immigration-related concern at a rate of more than four to one (FOX News/Opinion dynamics, 2010)

Interestingly, 20% of “take jobs” codes (n=5) were mobilized as appeals to *other* minority populations. Former Ambassador Alan Keyes, one of two black politicians in this sample (the other was Businessman Herman Cain), argued that blacks should support the Republican Party due to its tougher immigration stance:

Keyes: *“Do you want to know who’s first hurt by (the) cheapened price of labor? Black folks are first hurt, as they’ve been hurt in the rebuilding of New Orleans, in the rebuilding of other parts of the United States that were affected by those Hurricanes. It’s time we stopped fooling around with this issue. I think people, including a lot of black liberals, are more worried about what we do with illegal immigrants than they’ve ever been...” (9/27/07)*

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Eventual 2012 Republican nominee Mitt Romney made a similar appeal to members of the legal immigrant community:

Romney: *Our problem is 11 million people getting jobs that Americans (and) legal immigrants would like to have. It’s school kids that districts are having a hard time paying for. It’s people getting free health care because we are required under the law to provide that health care. And the real concern is (for) the people who want to come here legally. Let’s let legal immigrants come here. Let’s stop illegal immigration.” (1/26/12)*

By couching these statements as attempts to defend and promote the welfare of competing, but “worthier” minority populations, candidates may insulate themselves from charges of racism, while simultaneously mobilizing RDAs that can appeal both to backlash voters and to potential new minority constituencies as well.

It appears that, insofar as RDAs frame minorities as threats to majority group resources, immigrants, specifically undocumented immigrants, have replaced blacks as the primary targets. Furthermore, this evidence suggests that “benefit abuse,” has replaced either “job competition” or “wage depression” as the primary way of portraying immigrants as resource threats. The switch from “job stealer” to “welfare abuser” might seem like a minor difference, as both are negative framings, but I would argue that painting immigrants as welfare cheats is, in fact far more damaging. Within populist or conservative discourses, being a “worker,” or better yet, “a hard worker” is an inherently honorable status—even if that worker’s job is thought to properly “belong” to someone else. This new portrayal of undocumented immigrants as “welfare cheats” denies them even this dignity.

Moreover, the “benefit use” RDA may also effectively threaten white political hegemony in a way that “job loss” does not. If politicians communicate the message that undocumented immigrants are using welfare to enable high fertility rates, as Michele Bachmann implied when she argued that migrants come “illegally across the border, specifically for the

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purpose of utilizing American resources for having a baby here” and then take advantage of “all of the welfare benefits that attach to that baby” (10/18/11), this raises additional fears in the minds of backlash voters. Such appeals parallel existing anti-welfare rhetorics in which poor women are assumed to calculatingly maximize childbearing so as to collect more state money (Quadagno 1994). Moreover, the idea that waves of undocumented immigrants are crossing the border to use taxpayer resources to fuel the production of large families primes backlash voters to think of immigrants as opponents (and potential victors) in a struggle for population dominance. For such individuals, a future in which they have become the minority in the United States may be as frightening as the prospect of economic hardship.

Crime

Addressing voter fears about crime is another tactic with wide political appeal and, as with welfare, “crime” is a topic that has become saturated with racial meaning. Although whites constitute the majority of arrestees for all offenses, and individuals are most likely to be victimized by someone of their own racial group (Cooper and Smith 2011, NCIC 2012), both survey and experimental evidence show white subjects’ persistent tendency to associate blacks with criminality (Eberhardt et al. 2004; Quillian and Pager 2010), to overestimate their own risk of falling victim to intra-racial crime (Quillian and Pager 2010), and to support harsher punitive measures when primed with information about black, versus white, lawbreakers (Hetey and Eberhardt 2014). Such attitudes may be partially shaped by news and entertainment media, which over-represent black criminality and white victimhood (Dixon and Linz 2000; Mastro and Greenberg 2000), but political discourse also legitimizes and exploits these fears.

Up to and through the middle decades of the 20th century, white elites mobilized the trope of the black (male) criminal to justify both segregation and the use of extra-judicial violence

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against black communities (Mayer 2002; Lowndes 2008). As racially saturated appeals became more covert, so to did attempts to “blacken” crime as a campaign tactic. In 1988, George Bush Senior used a particularly brutal assault case to paint opponent Michael Dukakis as “weak on crime.” Under the direction of campaign manager Lee Atwater, the Bush campaign released a series of ads publicizing the case of a black murderer, Willie Horton, who, after being released from a Massachusetts prison during Dukakis’ term as governor, repeatedly raped a white woman after beating and stabbing her fiancé (Mayer 2002). Horton was not an invention of the Bush campaign, in the way that at least some of Reagan’s welfare cheats were, but the racially charged nature of the crime, the use of subtle graphic techniques to emphasize Horton’s race, and the fact that the ads were created by self-avowed Southern Strategist Lee Atwater all combined to create a campaign generally understood to be an exemplar of the modern coded RDA (Meyer 2002).

Although evidence suggests that the foreign-born are less likely to engage in crime (Wang 2012), and even that immigration itself has a “crime reducing” effect on receiving communities (Lee and Martinez 2009; Reid et al. 2005), immigrants are nonetheless often perceived as criminal threats by the native-born (Wang 2012). This is especially true for undocumented migrants, who, although no more likely to engage in non-immigration related crime than other groups (Hickman and Suttorp 2008; Lee and Martinez 2009) are nonetheless perceived as particularly crime-prone segments of the population (Wang 2012). This is partially due to the fact that “illegal immigrants” are assigned to a criminalized master status by definition, and partially due to restrictionist movements which portray undocumented migrants as threats to public safety (Dietrich 2011).

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Crime and blacks

As with welfare, codes linking blacks and crime (n=15) in this sample were less frequent than those linking crime to immigration status. Moreover, many of these were in response to direct questions on race issues. For example, ten of the 15 statements occurred during the September 27, 2007 PBS debate moderated by journalists of color which focused on race topics like bias in the justice system, drug and crime epidemics in low-income neighborhoods, and discrepancies in income and education. Thus, even though candidates’ answers made specific reference to minority populations, most can’t be construed as RDAs.

Nevertheless, some answers did contain language congruent with other racially divisive appeals. When Tom Tancredo was asked a question about racially disproportionate convictions and sentencing, he again framed his answer in terms of the corrosive effects of welfare:

Tancredo: “*When you talk about crime rate, so much of this is connected to another huge problem--the family. What is happening to the Black family today, and what has been happening for the last forty years, is a disgrace. It is, because, of course, as I said earlier, the welfare state has helped create this, but you know what? The welfare state cannot be the—it can be the breadwinner, but it cannot...give you morals or values or discipline.*” (9/27/2007)

Tancredo’s answer folds crime into other established stereotypes about blacks: again they are framed as a population defined by familial dysfunction, government dependency, and a lack of “morals or values or discipline.” Moreover, he fails to answer the question itself, opting not to talk about well-established patterns of structural racism within the criminal justice system (see Hetey and Eberhardt 2014), but instead reverting to a frame which places the blame for disparate outcomes squarely on blacks (or possibly on a mistakenly “soft-hearted” legislative approach to tackling poverty.) Therefore, while RDAs linking blacks and crime were relatively rare in this sample, they could be quite virulent.

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Crime and Immigrants

Although some appeals framed blacks in terms of criminality, most crime codes in this sample again focused on immigrants--specifically undocumented immigrants. Crime was the most common negative coding of immigrants in this research, however this category was quite broadly defined insofar as some of this framing occurred semantically. In recent years, the use of terms like “illegal immigrants,” or “illegal aliens” to describe unauthorized migrants has increasingly come under fire by activists who argue that such language promotes intolerance. As a result of efforts by immigration advocates, mainstream media outlets such as the *Associated Press*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* have either banned “illegal” or begun encouraging writers to find alternate labels (Guskin 2013). Democratic politicians have increasingly begun switching to the term “undocumented” as well, whereas there is some evidence that Republican elites have begun a conscious push in the other direction. A “talking points” memo issued by Republican strategist Frank Luntz reminded candidates to consistently use the term “illegal immigrants” when referring to unauthorized migrants (although it advised against the dehumanizing term “illegals”) as a means of stressing that undocumented migration was detrimental both to national security and the “rule of law” (Luntz Maslansky Strategic Research 2005). Thus, although it, at most, qualifies as a fairly covert code, it does appear that the choice between the neutral “undocumented” and the criminalized “illegal” has become a kind of political shorthand.

Within this sample, the terms “illegal immigration,” “illegal immigrants, or simply “illegals” were used a total of 384 times in both cycles. By contrast, “undocumented” was only used twice by GOP candidates. When “undocumented” was introduced into debate transcripts, it was more likely to have been used by moderators, or by Democratic candidate Barack Obama.

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For example, during the October 16, 2012 Presidential debate, Obama used the term “illegal” twice and “undocumented” twice. Mitt Romney, in contrast, used some variation of “illegal” 13 times.

Aside from semantic framings, candidates in this sample did mobilize more substantive crime appeals. Out of 430 statements on immigration, 181 (42%) framed immigrants as sources of non-immigration related crime (crimes unrelated to unauthorized entry or visa overstay). Of these, the largest number, 125 (or 69%) framed them as potential terrorists. Although general statements in this sample tended to collapse the categories of “undocumented immigrant” and “Hispanic” (see also Dietrich 2011), statements which linked undocumented immigration with the threat of terrorism usually presumed a Muslim or Middle-Eastern subject instead.

Of all appeals in this research, those targeting Muslims were the least likely to use the “rhetorical wink” methods of modern RDAs. Instead, candidates talked openly and frequently about the need to combat “radical Islam” or “Islamic terrorism.” Out of 125 excerpts dealing with immigration and terrorism, 104 (83%) openly labeled Muslim migrants as the sole or primary source of danger.⁶ These statements, like this one provided by Fred Thompson, also contained the most amplified threat language:

Thompson: *Islamic terrorism has declared war on us and Western civilization. They would like nothing better than to kill millions of people as they bring us down. They would like to be able to advertise around the world that ‘you, too, could help bring down the United States of America.’ (11/28/2007)*

Thompson’s assertions that Muslim terrorists would “like nothing better than to kill millions of people” in their quest to destroy America and “Western civilization” elevate the threat of violence far beyond the usual levels of criminality ascribed to minority populations. Given this,

⁶ Discussions of generalized “Islamic terror attacks” within US borders, or discussions of the 9/11 hijackers, Fort Hood shooters, or other specific acts of terrorism on US soil by Muslim non-nationals were also coded as “immigration” codes for the purpose of this sample. The rationale for this is that most such attacks have been attributed to foreign-born individuals.

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it is perhaps not surprising that such statements were also most likely to advocate direct forms of *de jure* discrimination, in much the same way that early Southern Strategy appeals did. For example, during the 6/13/2011 debate Herman Cain stated that he wouldn’t be “comfortable” appointing a Muslim to his Cabinet and Newt Gingrich argued that Muslim candidates for public office should undergo security screenings like those once applied to suspected “Nazis” or “Communists.” Later in that same cycle, Senator Rick Santorum argued in favor of the racial profiling of Muslims:

Wolf Blitzer (moderator): *Senator Santorum, under certain circumstances in the past, you’ve supported profiling, is that correct?*

Santorum: *I have.*

Blitzer: *What do you have in mind?*

Santorum: *Well, the folks who are most likely to be committing these crimes. If you look at—I mean obviously it was—obviously Muslims would be—would be someone you’d look at, absolutely. Those are folks who are—the radical Muslims are the people who are committing these crimes... (11/22/2011)*

That such appeals were so overt and common in this sample indicates that, as well as appealing to staunch nativists, anti-Muslim RDAs have not (yet) crossed the line into the kind of disrespectability that would, in Atwater’s words, “backfire” with mainstream voters.

While Middle-Eastern migrants were the most common target of terrorism accusations, they were sometimes lumped together with other migrant groups in bridging discourses (Benford and Snow 2000) that both broadened the “foreign terrorist” frame and heightened the overall sense of danger surrounding it. For example, during the 2012 election cycle, Senator Rick Santorum (11/22/2011; 12/15/2011; 10/18/2012), Texas Governor Rick Perry (10/18/2011; 11/22/2011; 12/15/2011), and eventual nominee Mitt Romney (11/22/2011) made repeated charges that “jihadists” were working in conjunction with “drug cartels” or Central American governments to infiltrate the United States through the southern border:

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Santorum: *“And this is something I’ve been saying now for many years, which is we need to pay much more attention to what is going on in our own hemisphere...there are training camps, jihadist training camps in Central and South America. They’re working with the drug cartels. And they are planning assaults on the United States.” (12/15/11)*

Aside from those statements that dealt with the threat of terrorism, most non-immigration specific crime frames coupled a stated or implied Hispanic subject with stereotype-congruent types of criminality like drug smuggling, human trafficking, and gang or “Cartel” violence, as Santorum does above. These kinds of crime codes were the second most common in this subsample (n=23 of a total of 181) constituting about 13 percent of all crime references. For example:

Hunter: *“I built the border fence in San Diego. When I built that fence, we had massive illegal immigration across the border. We built the border fence, we reduced illegal immigration and the smuggling of narcotics by more than 90 percent. And the crime rate in the city of San Diego fell by 50 percent.” (5/15/2007)*

One final type of criminality that only rarely appeared in this sample (n=2), but deserves mention due to its recent political salience was the threat of voter fraud. Representative Duncan Hunter of California, for example, gave credence to a popular rumor which held that undocumented immigrants were casting fraudulent votes for Democratic candidates:

Hunter: *“We have right now a real danger of people that are illegally in the country being rounded up, herded into the polls—we’ve seen that in California—voting illegally. That disenfranchises everybody in that community” (9/27/2007).*

While this was not a common frame, the threat of foreign-born voter fraud is note-worthy. By implying that undocumented migrants are part of a campaign to undermine the electoral process and install candidates more friendly to their interests, this RDA suggests the possibility of a loss of citizen control over the U.S. government. In this respect it mobilizes both threats to majority security and threats to majority dominance, in the same way that “welfare abuse” frames mobilized threats to both hegemony and prosperity.

Conclusion

Far from moving away from the use of RDAs in the last two election cycles, this analysis suggest that some GOP presidential candidates are still mobilizing voter support by appealing to racial anxieties, animosities and tensions. However, it also appears that, within this rhetoric, immigrants have largely replaced blacks as the focus of these rhetorics. Undocumented immigrants, usually understood to be Latino, have become the primary face of the demonized welfare abuser. They, along with Muslim migrants, are also framed as sources of crime: with Latinos being blamed for drug or gang crime and Muslims for religiously motivated violence. Therefore, the anti-black Southern Strategy can be said to have evolved into a “Southwestern Strategy” wherein backlash voters are more likely to be wooed through negative portrayals of immigrants, and the U.S.-Mexico border (either in a literal sense or in a symbolic one), has supplanted the Deep South as the major area of political focus.

There are several possible explanations for what may have driven this shift. Decades of Civil Rights mobilizations, combined with the GOP’s public acknowledgment and apology for black race baiting, may have made even coded attacks on blacks too politically dangerous for most candidates (with some exceptions like Tom Tancredo and Newt Gingrich). Alternately connections between blacks and words like “welfare” and “crime” may be so established in the minds of backlash whites that the need for more obvious racial signifiers are negated, whereas frame-extension work (Benford and Snow 2000) may still be necessary to create cognitive links between categories like “welfare,” “criminal” or “terrorist,” and “immigrant.” Similarly, at least during the 2012 election, attacks on Barack Obama may have come function as convenient “stand-ins” for generalized criticism of blacks as a category, with Gingrich’s repeated “food stamp President” slur serving as an example of this.

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Alternately, blacks may simply have become less salient or threatening as a minority group in recent years. The United States is currently in the midst of one of its largest immigrant receiving periods in history. Latinos have outstripped blacks as the largest non-Caucasian population in the United States, while migrants from majority-Muslim sending regions are among the fastest growing (Census 2012). Minority women of all foreign-born ethnicities also have higher fertility rates than do native-born populations (Census 2012), a fact that may be particularly frightening to backlash voters concerned about maintaining white hegemony in the coming decades.

One additional factor that may increase the visibility of the foreign-born is that, instead of being relegated to the blighted cities that came to be so closely associated with poor blacks that even terms like “urban” and “inner city” have become polite shorthands for discussing them, Latinos and other migrants have challenged racial segregation by moving into the city suburbs. Insofar as they are not tucked “out of sight and out of mind” in rotting city centers, the foreign-born may present backlash voters with a more visible reminder of the continually changing demographics of the American electorate and thus may have become a more convenient target for politicians willing to use racial division as a tool to win political power.

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