Is There a Policy-Identity Representation Trade-off?*

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ABSTRACT

Are some voters willing to trade off concerns with policy and identity representation when evaluating political candidates? We conceptualize both policy and identity representation in spatial terms. We examine the utility of our conceptual framework by applying it to recent US presidential elections. In line with our theoretical expectations, we find that Black voters, and especially those who identify strongly with their racial group, not only care less about policy representation than White voters but are also more willing to trade off lower levels of policy representation for increased identity representation. Our theoretical framework has important implications for how representation scholars should model the effects of policy and identity on candidate evaluation at election time. Empirically, our analyses contribute to the growing body of evidence showing that the electoral calculus and representation priorities of Black voters in the US are different from those of White voters.

1 Introduction

Are some voters willing to trade off concerns with policy and identity representation when evaluating political candidates? Policy representation occurs when representatives implement policies in line with the preferences of those they represent. Identity representation occurs when representatives share the same identity traits such as race, sex, and class as those they represent. Research shows that voters care about both policy and identity representation (Alvarez, Bowler and Nagler, 2000; Philpot and Walton Jr., 2007; Sullivan, 2010; Goodyear-Grant and Tolley, 2019). Most studies assume that policy and identity concerns have separate, if sometimes related, effects on candidate evaluation. In contrast, we argue that policy and identity concerns can compete in certain contexts and that some voters may be willing to make a policy-identity representation trade-off.

Policy and identity representation are both inherently relational concepts. They focus on how citizens and representatives relate to each other with respect to policy and identity. To capture their relational nature, we conceptualize both policy and identity representation in a common spatial framework. Voters are assumed to exhibit more support for candidates who are closer to them in the *policy space* and the *identity space*. Our conceptual framework is quite general and can be applied to situations in which voters place different weights on different dimensions of policy and identity. Importantly, it allows us to think about how policy and identity concerns might compete to shape how voters evaluate political candidates.

We examine the utility of our conceptual framework by applying it to candidate evaluation and the demand for different types of political representation in recent US presidential elections. For data-specific reasons, our primary analysis deals with the 2012 election between the Black incumbent, Barack Obama, and the White challenger, Mitt Romney. Our appendices include additional analyses with supporting evidence from all presidential elections since 2008. We argue that Black voters, and especially those who exhibit strong group consciousness, place relatively more weight on identity representation compared to policy representation when evaluating candidates. Importantly, we also argue that Black voters are more willing to trade off lower levels of policy representation for more identity representation. Put differently, they go easier on candidates for policy incongruence when the candidate is descriptively congruent.

Scholars have recently begun to examine whether the representation priorities of Black voters are different from those of White voters (Grose, Mangum and Martin, 2007; Griffin and Flavin, 2011; Grose, 2011; Bowen and Clark, 2014; Griffin and Flavin, 2007; Harden, 2016; Dietrich and Hayes, 2023). Most have fo-

cused on identifying racial differences in the demand for different types of representation by examining how voters evaluate incumbent legislators, as well as how this, in turn, affects legislator behavior and thus the supply of representation. Some studies suggest that *legislators* face a trade-off when it comes to supplying different types of representation due to finite time and resources (Harden, 2016). There's little research, though, looking at whether *voters* make trade-offs in their demands for political representation. Indeed, Harden (2016, 139) writes "that legislators are the only ones who must make tradeoffs when it comes to representation . . . there is nothing stopping [voters] from demanding that their legislators pay maximum attention to all of the dimensions of representation." Most existing studies can't examine whether voters trade off policy and identity concerns because they don't take into account whether the incumbent is descriptively congruent and they ignore the identity and policy traits of challenger candidates. A policy-identity trade-off is only possible for voters when the competing candidates differ in terms of their identities and policies.

In line with our expectations, we find that Black voters, particularly those with high group consciousness, trade off lower levels of left-right policy representation for more identity representation when evaluating presidential candidates. In contrast, there's little compelling evidence that White voters make a similar trade-off. As predicted, our analyses also show that Black voters consistently place much less weight on left-right policy incongruence than White voters. This raises concerns about how different groups of citizens are holding their representatives accountable and the consequences that follow for inequality in the representation process. Taken together, our results suggest that policy and identity concerns can compete, at least among some groups, to shape how voters evaluate candidates.

Our analyses provide evidence that identity representation matters more for Black voters in the US than White voters, at least in highly salient racially-mixed races where a trade-off between identity and policy representation is possible. To the extent that our results generalize, they indicate that parties in these races can select Black candidates who are divergent from the ideological preferences of the Black electorate without incurring too much punishment from Black voters. Of course, this doesn't mean that Black voters will be happy about making this kind of policy-identity representation trade-off (Hutchings, 2009; Harris, 2012; Price, 2016; Stephens-Dougan, 2020). Overall, our analyses contribute further evidence to the growing body of literature showing that the electoral calculus of Black voters is different from that of White voters (Walton, 1985; Dawson, 1994, 2001; Tate, 2004; White and Laird, 2020; Barker et al., 2024).

2 A Spatial Framework

The spatial model of voting has long been foundational for understanding voter behavior. The spatial component has traditionally been conceptualized in terms of policy. Voters and candidates are assumed to have 'ideal points' in the policy space. Voters engage in *proximity voting* and give their support to the candidate located closest to them. The spatial model underpins studies of policy congruence and responsiveness. Candidates provide 'good' policy representation when they're located close to voters in the policy space and when they move closer to voters. Data limitations often mean that empirical studies evaluate policy representation on a single left-right policy dimension. Theoretically, though, the spatial model easily applies to a multi-dimensional space where voters may place different weight on each policy dimension.[1] One way to model the utility that voter i obtains from candidate j is as the negative of a weighted generalization of a multi-dimensional Euclidean distance,

$$U_{ij} = -\underbrace{\sqrt{\sum_{x=1}^{N} w_{ix} \left(P_{ix} - P_{jx}\right)^2}}_{Policy\ Distance}, \tag{1}$$

where there are N policy dimensions, P_{ix} and P_{jx} refer to the positions of voter i and candidate j on dimension x, and w_{ix} refers to the weight that voter i places on dimension x, where $0 \leq w_{ix} \leq 1$ and $\sum_{x=1}^{N} w_{ix} = 1$. The greater the policy distance between the voter and the candidate, the lower the voter's utility. Voters care about policy representation and therefore impose a penalty when candidates are distant from them in the policy space. This is the mechanism by which voters hold their representatives accountable and incentivize them to supply policy congruence and responsiveness.

While the spatial model has traditionally been conceptualized in terms of policy, it can also be conceptualized in terms of identity. Doing so allows us to think about identity representation in spatial terms, and thus provides us with a common framework for discussing policy and identity representation. Voters and candidates have 'positions' in a multi-dimensional identity space, where each dimension refers to a different identity trait such as race, sex, and class. Voters may place different weight on each identity dimension. Voters who prioritize identity representation engage in *identity proximity voting* where they give their support to

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[1]Some scholars examine multiple policy dimensions in their empirical analyses. However, they almost always treat each policy dimension separately and assume they have equal weight. One significant constraint on empirical studies of policy representation is the lack of comparable data on voter and candidate positions across multiple policy dimensions and on the weights that voters give to these different dimensions.

the candidate located closest to them in the weighted identity space; that is, the candidate whose identity is most congruent to their own in terms of salient identity traits. The utility that voter i obtains from candidate j can be modeled as the negative of a weighted generalization of a multi-dimensional Euclidean distance,

$$U_{ij} = - \underbrace{\sqrt{\sum_{y=1}^{K} w_{iy} \left(I_{iy} - I_{jy}\right)^2}}_{\text{Identity Distance}}, \tag{2}$$

where there are K identity dimensions, I_{iy} and I_{jy} refer to the position of voter i and candidate j on dimension y, and w_{iy} refers to the weight the voter places on dimension y, where $0 \leq w_{iy} \leq 1$ and $\sum_{y=1}^{K} w_{iy} = 1$. Voters care about identity representation and thus impose a penalty when evaluating candidates who differ from them in terms of their identity.

There are at least two reasons why identity congruence might matter in the political arena. First, there are potential psychological pay-offs from having "one of your own" in office (Browning, Marshall and Tabb, 1984; Bobo and Gilliam, 1990; Philpot and Walton Jr., 2007). These payoffs are likely to be high when there's mistrust between groups or a history of discrimination. Second, identity congruence may act as a pathway for achieving other forms of political representation (Tate, 2004; Grose, Mangum and Martin, 2007; Grose, 2011; Bowen and Clark, 2014; Harden, 2016; Hayes and Hibbing, 2017; Dietrich and Hayes, 2023). This is because representatives with similar identity characteristics are likely to have shared experiences that generate a common set of perspectives, goals, and interests.

Voters are likely to care about both policy and identity when evaluating candidates. Rather than simply assume that policy and identity have separate additive effects on how voters evaluate candidates, we argue that some voters may trade off their demands for policy and identity representation.[2] Some voters may impose a smaller penalty on a candidate who's ideologically distant from them when the candidate shares their identity. Or they may overlook the fact that a candidate is descriptively dissimilar when the candidate shares their policy position.

That the effect of policy concerns might depend on identity concerns and vice versa implies that they have a multiplicative impact on candidate evaluation. To capture the possibility of a trade-off in the demand

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[2]Jenke and Huettel (2016, 2020) also suggest that voter behavior is shaped by a competition between policy and identity concerns. However, their framework draws on the cognitive science literature rather than the political representation literature. They don't conceptualize identity concerns spatially or in terms of descriptive representation. More importantly, their theoretical model of voter utility is purely additive and therefore doesn't allow for a trade-off between policy and identity concerns. Their competition between policy and identity comes from an implicitly-assumed 'budget constraint', where any additional weight placed on policy (identity) must necessarily reduce the weight placed on identity (policy); it's unclear where this budget constraint comes from.

for policy and identity representation, we can model the utility that voter i obtains from candidate j as:

$$U_{ij} = \beta_{1i} \underbrace{\sqrt{\sum_{x=1}^{N} w_{ix} \left(P_{ix} - P_{jx}\right)^2}}_{\text{Policy Distance}} + \beta_{2i} \underbrace{\sqrt{\sum_{y=1}^{K} w_{iy} \left(I_{iy} - I_{jy}\right)^2}}_{\text{Identity Distance}}$$

$$+ \beta_{3i} \underbrace{\sqrt{\sum_{x=1}^{N} w_{ix} \left(P_{ix} - P_{jx}\right)^2}}_{\text{Policy Distance}} \times \underbrace{\sqrt{\sum_{y=1}^{K} w_{iy} \left(I_{iy} - I_{jy}\right)^2}}_{\text{Identity Distance}}. \quad (3)$$

β_{1i} indicates the effect of policy distance when identity distance is 0 and β_{2i} indicates the effect of identity distance when policy distance is 0. As such, they should both be negative. The inclusion of the interaction term allows for the possibility of a trade-off between policy and identity concerns.[3] The interaction term coefficient indicates both how increased identity distance modifies the effect of policy distance and how increased policy distance modifies the effect of identity distance. In other words, it captures how identity concerns modify the weight that voters place on policy representation when evaluating candidates and how policy concerns modify the weight they place on identity representation.

The existing literature has largely ignored the possibility that voters might trade off their demands for policy and identity representation when evaluating political candidates. Scholars in the policy congruence and responsiveness literature typically overlook voter concerns with identity representation. While descriptive representation scholars often show interest in policy concerns, they tend to focus their attention on examining whether identity representation improves policy representation (Dawson, 1994; Tate, 1994; Young, 2002; Grose, Mangum and Martin, 2007; Bowen and Clark, 2014) rather than on how policy and identity concerns compete with each other to influence candidate evaluations.[4] A few studies investigate how policy distance influences candidate evaluations and how the magnitude of this effect varies across racial groups (Griffin and Flavin, 2007; Dun and Jessee, 2020). While these studies identify racial differences in how much voters demand policy representation, they don't examine voter demand for identity representation and

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[3]While we've discussed things in terms of a potential trade-off between policy and identity concerns, the inclusion of the interaction term also allows for the possibility that policy and identity concerns might reinforce one another. For example, it's not unreasonable to think that voters might impose a larger penalty on candidates who are ideologically distant from them when the candidates share their identity. In effect, they might hold candidates who look like them to a higher standard. Our point here is that the interactive framework is quite flexible.

[4]Some scholars in this line of research reference a different type of policy-identity trade-off than the one we address. They argue, for example, that the creation of majority-minority districts in the US has increased the number of elected minority representatives but reduced the number of elected Democrats, which has, in turn, weakened the policy representation of minority interests (Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran, 1996; Lublin, 1997).

the effect of identity incongruence on candidate evaluations. As a result, they never address the possibility of a policy-identity trade-off where voters treat policy incongruent candidates from the same racial group differently from those from a different racial group. Other scholars examine how policy proximity voting is moderated by ethnic group endorsements or racial animus but not by identity representation concerns (Boudreau, Elmendorf and MacKenzie, 2019; Algara and Hale, 2019).

3 Hypotheses

The weight that particular voters place on policy and identity representation will vary across different contexts. The same is true for their willingness to trade off policy and identity concerns. As an initial demonstration of the utility of our conceptual framework, we apply it to candidate evaluations in the context of recent US presidential elections. Given the nature of American politics, race is an important dimension of identity. We focus on identity representation as it relates to Black and White voters.[5]

Social identity theory implies that all voters value identity representation because people tend to think more favorably about ingroup members. In addition, all voters care about policy representation. There are good reasons, though, to expect Black voters to place less weight on policy concerns relative to identity concerns than White voters.

Consider first voter demand for identity representation. From a psychological perspective, members of politically underrepresented groups who've been subject to historical discrimination such as Black voters should place a high value on identity representation. Having representatives who look like them signals a politics of recognition and acceptance, enhances a sense of fairness and legitimacy, and encourages a feeling of political empowerment and participation (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990; Gay, 2001; Keele et al., 2017). From a political resource perspective, candidates of all racial backgrounds have incentives to be responsive to White voters because they represent a racial plurality and are geographically dispersed. In contrast, candidates don't need to be as responsive to Black voters because they rarely comprise a large enough voting block, given the majoritarian electoral system, to be politically pivotal (Bowen and Clark, 2014). If Black candidates are (perceived to be) more responsive to Black voters than White candidates, which is consistent with previous research (Lublin, 1997; Canon, 1999; Grose, 2011; Broockman, 2013; Harden, 2016), then identity representation concerns will be especially salient to Black voters. Previous studies have

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[5]We incorporate a discussion of sex, as well as the possible intersectional effects of race and sex, when we examine the 2016 and 2024 presidential elections in Online Appendices F and G.

highlighted the importance of identity representation for Black voters (Stout, Baker and Baker, 2021; Bowen and Clark, 2014; Clark, 2019), especially during the Obama administration (Block Jr., 2011; Stout, 2015; Parker, 2016). The literature on group consciousness reminds us, though, that not everyone who belongs to a particular group feels close to that group (Miller et al., 1981; McClain et al., 2009). It follows that the relative importance of identity representation should be higher among those who feel a strong sense of affinity with their identity group.

Consider now voter demand for policy representation. While Black voters should care relatively more about identity representation than White voters, they should care relatively less about policy representation. A consequence of their relative lack of political power is that Black voters don't expect candidates to provide them with much policy representation (Griffin and Newman, 2008; Bowen and Clark, 2014). This leads them to be less motivated to learn about candidate policy positions and participate politically (Hutchings, 2003), which further erodes candidate incentives to provide them with policy responsiveness. In addition to being politically disadvantaged, Black voters are also less affluent and more reliant on government programs. As a result, they tend to be attracted to candidates who focus on more short term distributive politics and the provision of small private goods rather than abstract policy positions and programmatic politics. Research, for example, shows that Black voters value policy responsiveness less than other forms of legislator responsiveness (Eulau and Karps, 1977) such as the allocation of federal government spending to their districts and constituency service (Tate, 2004; Grose, Mangum and Martin, 2007; Griffin and Flavin, 2011; Harden, 2016). This reasoning is consistent with studies finding racial differences in how policy concerns affect candidate evaluations (Griffin and Flavin, 2007; Boudreau, Elmendorf and MacKenzie, 2019; Dun and Jessee, 2020). Several studies find that legislators are aware of these racial differences in the demand for different types of representation and respond strategically when supplying political representation (Griffin and Flavin, 2011; Harden, 2016; Dietrich and Hayes, 2023).

Our argument has implications for the conditional effect of *policy concerns* on candidate evaluation. First, Black voters will punish candidates who are policy incongruent but less so than White voters. Second, Black voters will punish policy incongruent candidates less if those candidates are Black and provide identity representation. In effect, Black voters are expected to trade off policy representation for increased identity representation. Given that identity representation is less salient for White voters, the punishment imposed by White voters for policy incongruence won't change much with the race of the candidate. To the extent that there is any change, we'd expect White voters to impose a smaller punishment on a policy incongruent White

candidate than a policy incongruent Black candidate. Third, the modifying effect of 'identity' on the impact of policy distance will be stronger among those who exhibit high levels of racial group consciousness. In other words, voters who exhibit high levels of racial group consciousness will be more willing to trade off policy representation for increased identity representation. We capture these implications in the following three hypotheses:

> *Policy Distance (General) Hypothesis:* An increase in the policy distance to a candidate reduces an individual's support for that candidate. The magnitude of this negative effect is smaller for Black voters.

> *Policy Distance (Identity) Hypothesis:* The negative effect of policy distance on an individual's support for a candidate is larger if the candidate comes from a different racial group. The negative modifying effect of evaluating a candidate from a different racial group is larger for Black people.

> *Policy Distance (Group Consciousness) Hypothesis:* The negative modifying effect of evaluating a candidate from a different racial group on the effect of policy distance is larger for those who exhibit strong group consciousness.

Our argument also has implications for the conditional effect of *identity concerns* on candidate evaluation. First, all voters will impose a punishment on candidates who are distant from them in the identity space. However, the magnitude of this punishment will be larger for Black voters. This is because identity representation is more salient to Black voters. Second, the punishment imposed on identity incongruent candidates will increase with the policy incongruence of those candidates. The extent to which this happens, though, will be lower for Black voters. This is because Black voters care relatively less about policy representation as opposed to identity representation than White voters. Third, the effect of increased 'identity distance' between the voter and a candidate will be larger among those who exhibit high group consciousness. This is especially the case for Black voters for whom identity representation is particularly salient. These implications are captured in the following three hypotheses:

> *Identity Distance (General) Hypothesis:* An increase in the identity distance to a candidate reduces an individual's support for that candidate. The magnitude of this negative effect is larger for Black voters.

> *Identity Distance (Policy Distance) Hypothesis:* The negative effect of identity distance on an individual's support for a candidate grows with the policy distance of the candidate. The negative modifying effect of candidate policy distance is smaller for Black voters.

Identity Distance (Group Consciousness) Hypothesis: The negative effect of identity distance on an individual's support for a candidate grows with their level of group consciousness. The negative modifying effect of group consciousness is larger for Black voters.

4 Empirical Analysis

To test our hypotheses regarding the possibility of a policy-identity representation trade-off, we need elections in which the candidates differ in terms of their race (and policy). Three recent US presidential elections (2008, 2012, 2024) meet this condition. We focus in the main text on the 2012 election between America's first Black president, Barack Obama, and the White challenger, Mitt Romney. We concentrate on this election because the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES, 2014), which we use as our data source, has two unusual characteristics that are beneficial for us. First, it includes an oversampling of African Americans, making it more feasible for us to evaluate the conditional nature of our hypotheses. Second, it includes information on group consciousness for both Black *and* White voters. This is critical for testing our claims about how the modifying effects of group consciousness vary by race.[6] To a large extent, studies of the US presidency have historically advanced independently of research on race and politics. The relative dearth of minority presidential candidates has meant that most studies of race and politics have tended to focus on mayoral and legislative elections. By focusing on presidential elections, we contribute to a relatively new 'Obama-era' literature that applies the latest research on race and politics to the relatively understudied level of the US presidency (Block Jr., 2011; Stout, 2015; Stout and Le, 2017; Algara and Hale, 2019; Dun and Jessee, 2020).

4.1 Data, Model Specification, and Predictions

Our two dependent variables capture the electoral appeal of Obama and Romney. They're based on 'feeling thermometer' questions in which respondents indicate how they feel about the candidates on a $0 - 100$ scale, where 0 is a very negative feeling, 50 is neutral, and 100 is a very positive feeling. Feeling thermometers are commonly used as a measure of overall electoral attractiveness and provide us with a direct measure of the utilities that individuals get from supporting a particular candidate. As such, they correspond more closely to our theoretical setup than vote choice, which is affected by strategic concerns like electoral viability. The

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[6]We provide equivalent detailed analyses of candidate evaluations in the 2008 and 2024 presidential elections in Online Appendices E and G. Although we lack an oversampling of African Americans and information on the racial group consciousness of voters for these elections, the results are consistent with our theoretical story and are in line with what we see in the 2012 election.

discrete nature of vote choice also means that it's a rather "blunt instrument" that throws away important variation in the level of candidate support related to "the intensity of voters' preferences" (Griffin and Flavin, 2007, 227). Although most Black voters voted for Obama in 2012, they weren't all equally enamored with him. This variation in the Black level of support for Obama, which is relevant for our hypotheses, is lost if we use vote choice as the dependent variable. All that said, we show that our inferences are robust to using vote choice as the dependent variable in Online Appendix B.

Leaving group consciousness to one side for a moment, our key independent variables relate to race and policy. In terms of race, *Black* is a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if an individual is Black and 0 if White. In terms of policy, we focus on the left-right policy space.[7] *Policy Distance* is measured on a $0 - 6$ scale and captures the absolute distance between the respondent's self-placement on the left-right policy dimension and the respondent's placement of Obama or Romney. Respondents place themselves and the candidates on a $1 - 7$ scale, where 1 indicates they're extremely liberal and 7 indicates they're extremely conservative. *Policy Distance* is the absolute distance between these two placements.

Some scholars criticize the use of respondent candidate placement because respondents sometimes place candidates to whom they feel close near themselves in the policy space or argue that voters might use identity-based characteristics of candidates as heuristics to infer their policy position (O'Brien, 2019). These issues aren't a problem here, though, as we're not interested in the candidates' *objective* positions. Instead, we want to know whether respondents trade off policy and identity concerns *based on their own perceptions of candidate positions*, regardless of how those perceptions are formed. That said, in Online Appendix D we show that our inferences are robust to measuring the candidates' objective positions in terms of both the average candidate position across all respondents and across the most educated respondents. Other scholars raise the issue of possible differential item functioning with respect to the left-right dimension by Black and White voters (Jefferson, 2024; Yeung and Quek, 2025). This isn't a particular concern here, though, because our primary interest is in evaluating whether Black or White voters ever make a policy-identity *trade-off*. This requires making comparisons *within* racial groups. We want to know, for example, whether Black voters impose a different penalty for policy incongruence on the Black candidate as opposed to on the White candidate. As a result, differential item functioning issues aren't relevant. We recognize that some

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[7]While our general conceptual framework can be applied to a multi-dimensional policy space, the 2012 ANES survey, like most other surveys, doesn't provide the necessary information about different policy areas for us to take this into account. For example, the 2012 ANES survey doesn't provide comparable information on the relative weight that respondents give to different policy areas. This does mean, though, that our results are more comparable to previous studies that have almost uniformly also focused on a single left-right dimension.

of our secondary claims regarding voters' policy concerns involve comparisons across racial groups. Even here, though, it's important to recognize that our claims relate to the self-perceived *policy distance* between voters and candidates and not simply the candidates' policy positions.

We include a number of control variables that are common in existing studies. To capture an individual's partisan identity, we employ several dichotomous variables, *Democrat*, *Republican*, and *Independent*. *Age* captures an individual's age in years. *Female* is a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if an individual is female and 0 if male. *Above Median Income* is a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if an individual's family income is above the median in the US in 2011. To capture an individual's education, we employ several dichotomous variables, *High School*, *Undergraduate*, *Graduate*, and *No High School* that equal 1 if this is the highest level of education and 0 otherwise.

As an initial examination of our hypotheses, we start with the following two model specifications,

$$
\begin{aligned}
\textit{Feeling Thermometer Obama} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \textit{Policy Distance (Obama)} + \beta_2 \textit{Black} \\
&\quad + \beta_3 \textit{Policy Distance (Obama)} \times \textit{Black} + \beta \textit{Controls} + \epsilon. \quad (4)
\end{aligned}
$$

$$
\begin{aligned}
\textit{Feeling Thermometer Romney} &= \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \textit{Policy Distance (Romney)} + \gamma_2 \textit{Black} \\
&\quad + \gamma_3 \textit{Policy Distance (Romney)} \times \textit{Black} + \gamma \textit{Controls} + \varepsilon. \quad (5)
\end{aligned}
$$

Given the continuous nature of our dependent variables, we employ least squares regression. Rather than estimate the two models separately, though, we estimate them together using feasible generalized least squares in a seemingly unrelated regression setup. This allows for the possibility that the error terms may be correlated across the two regression equations.[8]

Our hypotheses speak to the effect of policy distance and race on support for Obama and Romney. The marginal effect of policy distance is

$$
\frac{\partial \textit{Feeling Thermometer Obama}}{\partial \textit{Policy Distance}} = \beta_1 + \beta_3 \textit{Black} \quad (6)
$$

for Obama, and

$$
\frac{\partial \textit{Feeling Thermometer Romney}}{\partial \textit{Policy Distance}} = \gamma_1 + \gamma_3 \textit{Black} \quad (7)
$$

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[8]In Online Appendix A, we show that our inferences remain robust if we estimate the two models separately.

for Romney. β_1 and γ_1 indicate the effects of policy distance on support for Obama and Romney among White voters, while $\beta_1 + \beta_3$ and $\gamma_1 + \gamma_3$ indicate the effects of policy distance on support for these candidates among Black voters. According to the *Policy Distance (General) Hypothesis*, voters will punish candidates who are policy incongruent. As a result, all four effects (β_1, γ_1, $\beta_1 + \beta_3$, $\gamma_1 + \gamma_3$) should be negative. Since the negative effect of candidate policy distance is expected to be smaller for Black voters, it follows that β_3 and γ_3 should both be positive. Putting these two sets of predictions together, it should also be the case that $|\beta_3| < |\beta_1|$ and $|\gamma_3| < |\gamma_1|$. According to the *Policy Distance (Identity) Hypothesis*, the negative effect of candidate policy distance will be stronger when the candidate belongs to a different racial group from the voter. As a result, we expect $\beta_1 < \gamma_1$ (White voters) and $\gamma_1 + \gamma_3 < \beta_1 + \beta_3$ (Black voters). For these two predictions to be true and given our previous predictions, it must be the case that $\beta_3 > \gamma_3$. Since the negative modifying effect of evaluating a candidate from a different racial group is expected to be larger for Black voters than White voters, it follows that $(\beta_1 + \beta_3) - (\gamma_1 + \gamma_3) > \gamma_1 - \beta_1$.

The effect of being Black on support for the two candidates is

$$\frac{\partial Feeling\ Thermometer\ Obama}{\partial Black} = \beta_2 + \beta_3 Policy\ Distance \tag{8}$$

for Obama, and

$$\frac{\partial Feeling\ Thermometer\ Romney}{\partial Black} = \gamma_2 + \gamma_3 Policy\ Distance \tag{9}$$

for Romney. We see that β_2 and γ_2 indicate the difference in candidate support between Black and White voters who are policy congruent with Obama and Romney (*Policy Distance* $= 0$). According to the *Identity Distance (General) Hypothesis*, voters are expected to punish candidates who are distant from them in the identity space. As a result, we'd expect there to be more support among Black voters than White voters for Obama ($\beta_2 > 0$) and less support among Black voters than White voters for Romney ($\gamma_2 < 0$). Our theory is insufficiently strong to tell us whether the difference in candidate support between Black and White voters when *Policy Distance* $= 0$ will be larger when Romney is the candidate or when Obama is the candidate. According to the logic underpinning the *Identity Distance (Policy Distance) Hypothesis*, Black voters care relatively less about policy representation than White voters. As a result, we expect the positive difference in support for Obama between Black and White voters to grow as Obama becomes more policy

incongruent, $\beta_3 > 0$. In effect, support for Obama is expected to drop less among Black voters when he becomes more policy incongruent than it does among White voters, leading to an increase in the size of the positive difference in support for Obama between these two groups. It follows that $\beta_2 + \beta_3 Policy\ Distance$ will be positive for all values of *Policy Distance*. For the same reason, we expect the negative difference in support for Romney between Black and White voters to shrink ($\gamma_3 > 0$) and possibly even disappear or reverse direction when Romney becomes more policy incongruent. Essentially, support for Romney is expected to drop less among Black voters when he becomes more policy incongruent than among White voters, thereby reducing the size, and possibly reversing the direction, of the gap between Black and White voters that initially saw White voters favor Romney more than Black voters.

4.2 Results and Interpretation

The results of our initial analysis are shown in Table 1. Rather than interpret the coefficients directly, we start by using them to calculate the effect of *Policy Distance* for different scenarios (Clark and Golder, 2023). The shaded cells in Figure 1 indicate the marginal effect of *Policy Distance* for a White voter and a Black voter on their support for Obama and Romney. The small numbers in the corner of each cell indicate the mean level of support for the candidates among White people and Black people. The "Difference (Interaction Effect)" row indicates the differences in the effect of increased policy distance for Black as opposed to White voters for each presidential candidate; they're equivalent to the interaction term coefficients in Table 1. The "Difference" column indicates the differences in the effect of policy distance when the presidential candidate is Romney rather than Obama for White and Black individuals.

As predicted, White voters care about policy representation and thus impose a penalty on candidates who are policy incongruent. This is indicated by the negative and statistically significant effects in the top row of Figure 1. Also as predicted, this penalty is larger for Black candidates than White candidates. To be specific, each unit increase in the policy distance between a White voter and the candidate is associated with a reduction of 8.83 units of support when the candidate is Obama and 8.07 units of support when the candidate is Romney. These values equate to an 18.93% reduction in the average level of White support for Obama (46.68) and a 15.75% reduction in the average level of White support for Romney (51.23). The penalty imposed by White voters on the White candidate for being policy distant is only slightly smaller (0.76 units, 8.65%) than the penalty they imposed on the Black candidate. This within-group difference,

Table 1: Policy, Race, and Support for Obama and Romney in the 2012 US Presidential Elections

Dependent Variable: *Feeling Thermometer*, $0 - 100$

	Obama	Romney
Policy Distance	-8.83^{***}	-8.07^{***}
	(0.25)	(0.29)
Black	10.24^{***}	-20.09^{***}
	(1.22)	(1.81)
Policy Distance$\times$Black	7.46^{***}	5.33^{***}
	(0.62)	(0.56)
Controls		
Democrat	18.02^{***}	-13.29^{***}
	(0.85)	(0.92)
Republican	-11.41^{***}	18.62^{***}
	(0.94)	(0.92)
Age	-0.01	0.15^{***}
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Female	1.57^{**}	0.11
	(0.66)	(0.68)
Above Median Income	0.32	0.03
	(0.72)	(0.74)
High School	-0.14	1.72
	(1.32)	(1.37)
Undergraduate	1.92	3.16^{**}
	(1.47)	(1.53)
Graduate	5.16^{***}	1.72
	(1.56)	(1.63)
Constant	65.72^{***}	54.08^{***}
	(1.85)	(1.94)
Observations	$3,611$	$3,611$
R^2	0.69	0.58

Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.10$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

while statistically significant, is substantively small and suggests that White voters are generally unwilling to trade off lower levels of policy representation for increased identity representation.

As predicted, Black voters also care about policy representation and thus impose a penalty on policy incongruent candidates. This is indicated by the negative and statistically significant effects in the bottom row of Figure 1. As expected, this punishment is larger for White candidates. To be specific, each unit increase in the policy distance between a Black voter and the candidate is associated with a reduction of 1.37 units of support when the candidate is Obama and 2.74 units of support when the candidate is Romney.

Figure 1: The Conditional Effect of *Policy Distance*

Presidential Candidate

	Obama (Black)	Romney (White)	Difference
White	−8.83*** (−9.32, −8.35) 46.68	−8.07*** (−8.63, −7.51) 51.23	0.76** (0.04, 1.49)
Black	−1.37** (−2.52, −0.23) 89.39	−2.74*** (−3.72, −1.75) 26.85	−1.36* (−2.84, 0.12)
Difference (Interaction Effect)	7.46*** (6.23, 8.68)	5.33*** (4.23, 6.44)	

Race of Voter

The magnitude of the electoral punishment on Obama is substantively very small. It equates to only a 1.54% reduction in the average level of Black support for Obama (89.39). In contrast, the magnitude of the punishment is more meaningful for Romney. Here, the penalty equates to a 10.19% reduction in the average level of Black support for Romney (26.85). In other words, the penalty imposed by Black voters on candidates for being policy incongruent is 1.36 units or 98.99% larger when the candidate is White than when the candidate is Black. This within-group difference is substantively large and suggests that Black voters are willing to trade off lower levels of policy representation for increased identity representation.

The multi-racial nature of the 2008 and 2024 presidential elections provides additional opportunities to evaluate our claims regarding a policy-identity trade-off. In Online Appendix E, we show that the support for our claims is even stronger in the 2008 election. Specifically, we find that there's no statistically significant or substantively meaningful difference in how White voters evaluated Barack Obama and John McCain with respect to their policy incongruence. As predicted, though, Black voters evaluated them very differently. Indeed, the penalty for policy incongruence that Black voters imposed on McCain was 2.61 times larger than the one they imposed on Obama. In effect, Black voters were willing to trade off lower levels of policy representation for increased identity representation. The 2024 election is complicated by

the fact that the candidates, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, differed in terms of the race *and* sex. This requires an intersectional analysis (Block Jr., Golder and Golder, 2023). In Online Appendix G, we show, consistent with the 2012 election, that White men and women both imposed a slightly smaller penalty on Trump than Harris. Cross-pressured by race and sex, there was no statistically significant difference in how Black men evaluated the policy incongruence of the two candidates. As expected, though, the results are very different for Black women. Specifically, we find that the penalty for policy incongruence that Black women imposed on the White male candidate is 2.75 times larger than the one they imposed on the Black female candidate. Indeed, they didn't impose a statistically significant penalty for policy incongruence on the Black female candidate at all. These results provide strong evidence that Black women were willing to trade off lower levels of policy representation for increased identity representation.

Returning to the 2012 election, the evidence in Figure 1 is also consistent with our prediction that Black voters don't care as much about policy representation as White voters. This is because the penalty imposed by Black voters on policy incongruent candidates is always much smaller than that imposed by White voters. To be specific, the penalty is 7.46 units or 84.44% smaller when the candidate is Black, and it's 5.33 units or 66.10% smaller when the candidate is White. That the modifying effect of being Black on the effect of *Policy Distance* is smaller (28.49%) when the candidate is White than when the candidate is Black is also consistent with our expectations. In Online Appendix H, we show that Black voters imposed a smaller penalty for policy incongruence than White voters in all five of the most recent presidential elections. These particular results are consistent with previous research that highlights racial differences in how policy concerns affect candidate evaluations (Griffin and Flavin, 2007; Harden, 2016; Boudreau, Elmendorf and MacKenzie, 2019; Dun and Jessee, 2020). The strong consistency of results across different types of studies and measurement strategies suggests that the type of racial differences we've found with respect to policy concerns are not simply the result of possible differential item functioning with respect to the left-right policy dimension across Black and White voters. Taken together, this cumulative set of results raises concerns that Black voters aren't holding their representatives, especially those that are incongruent with them in terms of race, as accountable as White voters when it comes to policy responsiveness.

Importantly, the additional analyses in Online Appendix H suggest that Black voters only go easier on policy distant candidates when they're Black and not just when they're Democrats. For example, we find that Black voters go easier on the Black Democratic candidate in 2008 and 2012 but not on the White Democratic candidates in 2016 and 2020. These results are consistent with our claim that Black voters

are trading off policy and racial identity concerns. This isn't a partisan trade-off story. Putting all these results together, we have strong support for our *Policy Distance (General)* and *Policy Distance (Identity) Hypotheses*.

We can further evaluate the support for our theoretical framework by examining the conditional effect of race and hence identity representation on candidate support. In Figure 2, we show the effect of being Black instead of White on support for Obama and Romney across the observed range of left-right policy distance between the respondent and the candidate. Positive values indicate that Black voters support the identified candidate more than White voters and negative values indicate the opposite. The two histograms in each panel show the percentage of Black (dark) and White (light) respondents at different values of left-right policy distance to the presidential candidates.

As predicted, Black voters always exhibit more support for Obama. This is indicated by the fact that the effect line in panel (a) is always positive. Given that we control for the policy distance to Obama, this suggests that Black voters care about identity representation. That the effect line in panel (a) slopes upward is consistent with our claim that the positive difference in support for Obama between Black and White voters grows with policy distance to Obama. To be specific, while Black voters exhibit 10.24 units more support for Obama than White voters when they're policy congruent with Obama, they exhibit fully 55.00 units more support when they are six units away from Obama's policy position. The fact that the difference in support for Obama between Black and White voters increases so much with the policy distance to Obama

Figure 2: The Conditional Effect of *Black*
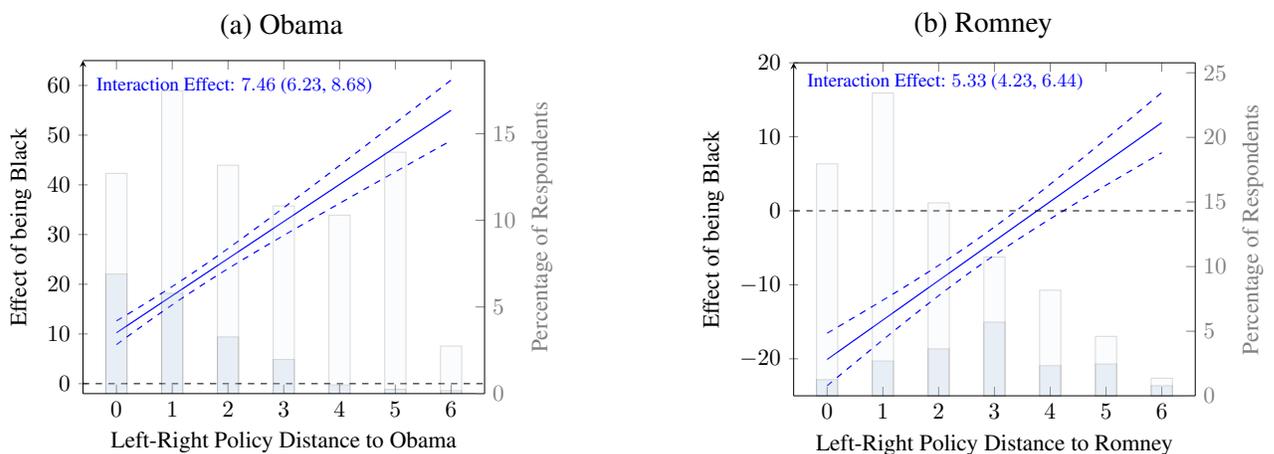
(a) Obama

(b) Romney

is consistent with our claim that Black voters care relatively less about policy representation compared to identity representation than White voters. The evidence suggests that Black voters retain their support for the Black candidate even when they disagree strongly with his policy position. In contrast, White voters increasingly reduce their support for Obama the more they disagree with his policy position.

As predicted, Black voters exhibit less support for Romney than White voters when they hold the same policy position as Romney. This is indicated by the fact that the effect line in panel (b) is negative and statistically significant when *Policy Distance* is 0. As expected, the effect line slopes upward, indicating that the negative difference in support for Romney between Black and White voters declines in magnitude as respondents become more policy incongruent with Romney. The difference in support for Romney between Black and White voters remains negative and statistically significant as long as the policy distance to Romney is less than 3.39. The difference in support for Romney between Black and White voters not only becomes zero as policy distance to Romney increases but, in fact, changes direction. When the distance to Romney is greater than 4.23, Black people exhibit more support for Romney than White people with similar policy positions. These results again indicate that White voters care relatively more about policy representation as opposed to identity representation than Black voters. Essentially, White voters are willing to give the White candidate less support than Black voters if he's too policy distant.

4.2.1 Group Consciousness

Do Black voters who strongly identify with their racial group place even greater weight on identity representation? What about White voters who identify strongly with their racial group? To examine these issues, we measure a respondent's strength of racial group consciousness in terms of linked fate (McClain et al., 2009). *Linked Fate* is a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if a respondent exhibits linked fate and 0 otherwise. Someone exhibits linked fate if they agree that their life is affected by what happens to other members of their racial group. 70.11% of Black respondents and 66.83% of White respondents exhibit linked fate. The results of our new analysis are shown in Table 2. In Figure 3, we show the marginal effect of *Policy Distance* for different scenarios.

We focus first on Black voters. As predicted, Black voters always care about policy representation and thus impose a penalty when evaluating candidates who are policy incongruent. This is indicated by the fact that the effect of *Policy Distance* is negative and statistically significant in all four cells of Figure 3a.

Table 2: Policy, Linked Fate, and Support for Obama and Romney among Black and White Voters

Dependent Variable: *Feeling Thermometer,* $0-100$

	Black Voters Only		White Voters Only	
	Obama	Romney	Obama	Romney
Policy Distance	-3.38^{***}	-2.40^{**}	-7.59^{***}	-7.43^{***}
	(0.72)	(0.99)	(0.42)	(0.46)
Linked Fate	-1.85	-3.87	1.14	4.19^{***}
	(1.62)	(3.85)	(1.40)	(1.26)
Policy Distance×Linked Fate	2.33^{***}	0.04	-1.05^{**}	-0.91^{*}
	(0.89)	(1.21)	(0.46)	(0.52)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	79.92^{***}	40.59^{***}	64.03^{***}	50.27^{***}
	(3.08)	(5.17)	(2.47)	(2.43)
Observations	629	629	$2,650$	$2,650$
R^2	0.24	0.17	0.62	0.59

Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.10$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Importantly, there's significant variation in the size of this penalty across our scenarios. In particular, and as predicted, Black voters who exhibit linked fate are significantly more lenient on a policy incongruent Black candidate than other Black voters. The magnitude of the penalty associated with a one unit increase in *Policy Distance* is 68.9% smaller if the Black voter exhibits linked fate (-1.05) than if they don't (-3.38). This difference, shown at the bottom of the left column, is statistically significant. The punishment imposed by Black voters who exhibit linked fate on Obama is substantively very small. It represents a reduction of just 1.2% in the average support of these voters for Obama. As expected, the penalty imposed by Black voters who exhibit linked fate is much larger if the policy incongruent candidate is White. Although this difference across the two candidates (-1.31) doesn't quite reach conventional levels of statistical significance, it's substantively large. The penalty is 2.25 times larger for the White candidate (-2.36) than for the Black candidate (-1.05). There's no equivalent increase in the size of the punishment imposed on the White candidate by Black voters who don't exhibit linked fate. In fact, the magnitude of the punishment imposed on the White candidate is slightly smaller among this group of voters, although not statistically significantly so. Together, these results suggest that it's Black voters who exhibit strong group consciousness who are most willing to trade off policy representation for identity representation.

Figure 3: The Conditional Effect of *Policy Distance* by *Linked Fate* among Black and White Voters

(a) Black Voters Only

(b) White Voters Only

Presidential Candidate

Linked Fate with Black People

	Obama (Black)	Romney (White)	Difference
No	−3.38*** (−4.78, −1.97) 88.37	−2.40** (−4.35, −0.46) 29.38	0.98 (−1.37, 3.32)
Yes	−1.05* (−2.13, 0.03) 90.01	−2.36*** (−3.79, −0.94) 25.23	−1.31 (−3.08, 0.45)
Difference	2.33*** (0.58, 4.08)	0.04 (−2.32, 2.41)	

Presidential Candidate

Linked Fate with White People

	Obama (Black)	Romney (White)	Difference
No	−7.59*** (−8.40, −6.78) 49.58	−7.43*** (−8.32, −6.53) 48.84	0.17 (−1.00, 1.33)
Yes	−8.64* (−9.27, −8.01) 45.02	−8.33*** (−9.02, −7.64) 52.56	0.31 (−0.59, 1.21)
Difference	−1.05*** (−1.95, −0.15)	−0.91* (−1.92, 0.11)	

Turning now to White voters. As predicted, White voters always care about policy representation and thus impose a penalty when evaluating policy incongruent candidates. This is indicated by the fact that the effect of *Policy Distance* is negative and statistically significant in all four cells of Figure 3b. Consistent with our previous claims, there's strong evidence that White voters care relatively more about policy representation than Black voters. This is because the absolute magnitude of the effect of *Policy Distance* shown in the equivalent cells is always larger for White voters. Indeed, the penalty imposed by White voters is $2.25 - 8.23$ times larger than that imposed by Black voters, depending on the scenario. There's some evidence that White voters who exhibit linked fate impose a slightly larger penalty on a policy incongruent Black candidate than other White voters. A one unit increase in *Policy Distance* is associated with an 8.64 unit reduction in support for Obama among White voters who exhibit linked fate and a 7.59 unit reduction among other White voters. This might suggest that White voters who exhibit strong group consciousness are willing to penalize a Black candidate for being policy incongruent more than other White voters. However, not too much should be read into this. One reason for this is that the penalty imposed on the Black candidate by White voters who exhibit linked fate is only slightly larger (13.85%) than that imposed by other White voters. More important is the fact that White voters who exhibit linked fate also impose a slightly larger penalty (12.21%) than other White voters on the White candidate. For whatever reason, White voters who show strong group consciousness care slightly more about policy representation than other White voters. Importantly, there's no statistically or substantively significant evidence that White voters impose a larger penalty for being policy incongruent on the Black candidate as opposed to the White candidate. The numbers reported in the 'Difference' column on the right aren't statistically significant and are close to 0. Overall, there's limited evidence that White voters, including those with strong group attachment, are willing to trade off policy representation for better identity representation.[9]

What about the effect of linked fate on candidate support? In Figure 4, we show the effect of linked fate on support for Obama and Romney among Black and White voters across the observed range of *Policy Distance*. Positive values indicate that voters with strong group consciousness support the identified candidate more than other voters of the same race.

We focus first on Black voters. Panel (a) shows there's no statistically significant difference in the
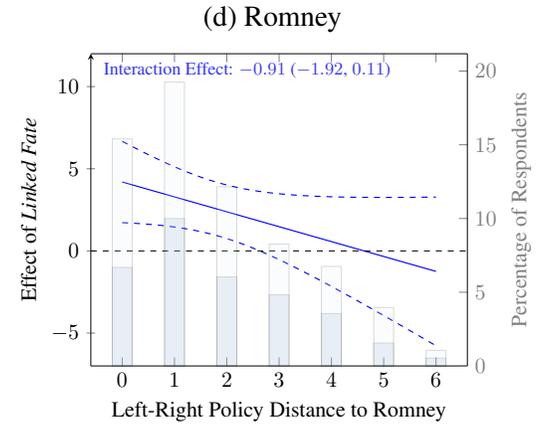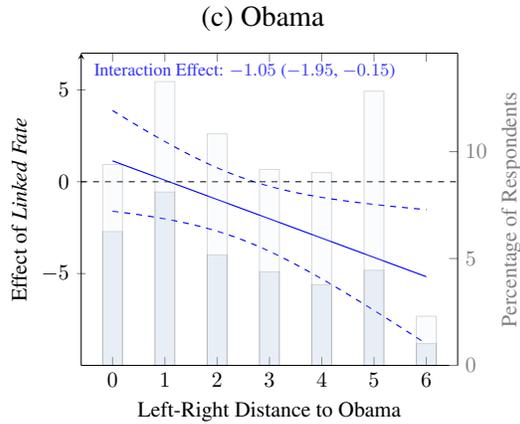
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[9]As Online Appendix C indicates, we obtain similar inferences if we operationalize group consciousness among White people in terms of racial resentment.

Figure 4: The Conditional Effect of *Linked Fate* across *Policy Distance*
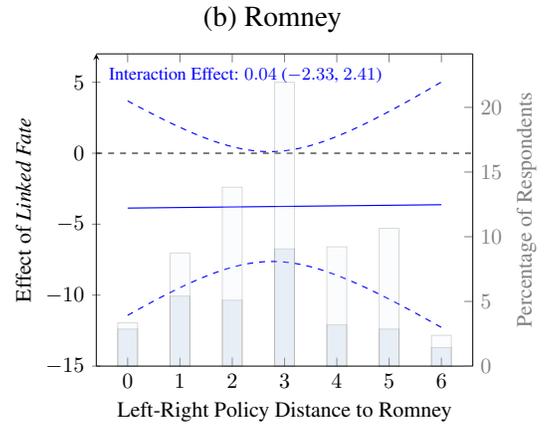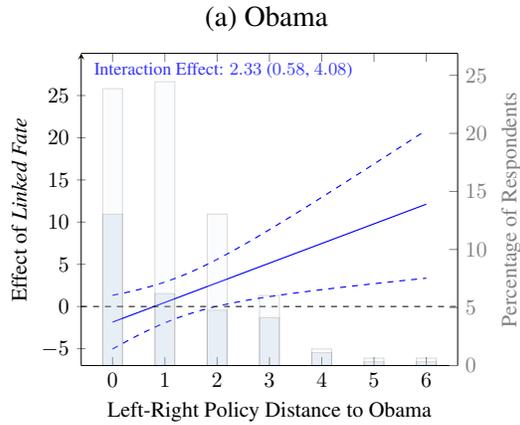
level of support given to Obama by Black voters who exhibit linked fate and Black voters who don't when Obama is policy congruent. However, support for Obama becomes significantly higher among Black voters who exhibit linked fate when the policy distance to Obama is greater than 1.98. This result is consistent with the idea that support for Obama among Black voters with strong group consciousness declines less when he becomes more policy incongruent than it does among other Black voters. In effect, Black voters with strong group consciousness weigh concerns with policy representation less than other Black voters when evaluating the Black candidate. Panel (b) indicates that Black voters who exhibit strong group consciousness always support Romney less than other Black voters. However, this difference doesn't change with their policy distance to Romney and is never statistically significant. This suggests that group consciousness among

Black voters plays a more salient role when it comes to evaluating the Black candidate.

What about White voters? Panel (c) shows there's no statistically significant difference in the support given to Obama by White voters who exhibit linked fate and White voters who don't when Obama is policy congruent. However, support for Obama becomes significantly lower among White voters who exhibit linked fate when the policy distance to Obama is greater than 2.70. This is consistent with the idea that support for Obama among White voters with strong group consciousness declines more when he becomes more policy incongruent than it does among other White voters. In effect, White voters with strong group consciousness weigh concerns with policy representation more than other White voters when evaluating a Black candidate. Panel (d) indicates that, so long as Romney isn't too policy incongruent (*Policy Distance* < 2.64), his support is significantly higher among White voters who exhibit strong group consciousness than other White voters. However, this difference disappears as the policy distance to Romney grows. This suggests that White voters with strong group consciousness value identity representation and prefer the White candidate more than other White voters, but not if this comes at too large of a cost for policy representation.

5   Conclusion

In this paper, we capture the relational aspect of policy and identity representation by conceptualizing them in a common spatial framework. We believe that adopting such a framework, especially as it relates to identity, can open up productive avenues for future research. This is because it's very flexible and is able to handle situations in which people place different weights on different dimensions of identity and policy. As such, it recognizes a key insight from the social identity and intersectionality literatures; namely, that identity is a multidimensional and nuanced concept, where people hold multiple identities at once that become more or less salient depending on contextual factors. A practical constraint on evaluating such a spatial framework at present is that we tend to lack detailed information about things such as the weights that individuals give to different dimensions of their identity and policy preferences in different contexts.

Voters care about both policy and identity when evaluating political candidates. We argue, though, that policy and identity concerns likely compete with each other in certain contexts, and this means that some voters may be willing to make a policy-identity trade-off. From a theoretical perspective, the idea of a potential trade-off is implicitly accepted in many areas of research on political representation. For example,

scholars of sub-Saharan Africa and to some extent the Middle East have long argued that people might trade off policy and identity. In fact, it's often assumed that identity supersedes policy so much that politics becomes patrimonial along some ethnic, religious, or other identity dimension. Similarly, scholars of party politics in Europe often discuss how some voters are willing to desert parties whose policies benefit them economically in favor of parties that better validate their identity. Unfortunately, the potential of a policy-identity trade-off is rarely explicitly modeled. The typical approach is to incorporate policy and identity variables separately, with the goal of determining which has the bigger influence. Such additive models can't determine whether policy and identity compete with each other and hence whether a trade-off is taking place. Evidence of a trade-off requires adopting an interactive model specification.

As an initial examination of our conceptual framework, we investigated whether there was any evidence of a policy-identity trade-off in recent US presidential elections. We argue that Black voters place more weight on identity concerns relative to policy concerns than White voters. As a result, we expect them to be willing to trade off lower levels of policy representation for more identity representation. As predicted, we find that Black voters place much less emphasis on policy differences when evaluating political candidates than White voters. Significantly, while White voters imposed a substantively similar penalty for policy incongruence on both candidates in the multi-racial elections of 2008, 2012, and 2024, Black voters (and Black women in 2024) imposed a penalty that was two to three times larger on the White candidates than the one they imposed on the Black candidates. In effect, Black voters were willing to trade off policy representation for more identity representation by 'going easier' on the Black candidate. Along similar lines, Black voters are more likely than White voters to retain their support for the Black candidate as they become more policy incongruent. In contrast, the 'extra' support that White voters give to the White candidate when they're policy congruent disappears as they become more distant in the policy space. This supports the idea that policy representation is relatively more important for White voters than identity representation. The willingness of Black voters to trade off policy representation for identity representation is especially high among those who exhibit strong group consciousness.

Taken together, our results support the idea that policy and identity concerns sometimes compete with each other, at least among some groups, to shape voter preferences. The fact that we obtained robust support for multiple different theoretical claims, each of which could have been falsified, across five distinct presidential elections is, we believe, reassuring when it comes to evaluating our theoretical framework. Our results also contribute further evidence to the growing body of literature showing that the electoral calculus

and representational priorities of Black voters are different from those of White voters, especially as they relate to how policy concerns affect candidate evaluation.

One substantive implication of our analysis is that American parties can select Black candidates who are divergent from the policy preferences of the Black electorate but who might be more ideologically appealing to other racial groups, safe in the knowledge that Black voters won't punish them too much for doing so. The fact that White voters are willing to impose a larger penalty on candidates who are policy incongruent suggests that parties can not only 'get away' with choosing these types of Black candidates but may well have an incentive to select them. This, in turn, has implications for how candidates are likely to campaign. For example, Black candidates who are distant in the policy space from the Black electorate can be expected to focus their campaign messages in ways that increase the salience of identity concerns rather than policy representation. None of this means that Black voters are necessarily happy about having to make this kind of policy-identity trade-off. For example, many Black voters who were ideologically distant from Obama may have felt like they were 'holding their noses' when voting for him, wishing they had a candidate who was more congruent with their policy preferences. There was also great frustration in many quarters that Obama didn't do as much as he could have for Black America as president. To some extent, our evidence fits with studies showing that Black voters often support the Democratic Party even though they feel that the party doesn't genuinely represent their policy interests (Frymer, 2010).

We finish by noting that our study represents just one possible plausibility test of our conceptual approach, one that focused on how the identity dimension of race competes with general left-right policy concerns when voters evaluate political candidates in the contemporary United States. As such, we are cautious about generalizing our results to other settings. It would be fruitful to examine the possible existence of a trade-off between identity and policy in other contexts and along other identity/policy dimensions.

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