African Americans, Ideology, and Consequences for the Two-Party System

We seldom study the condition of the Negro to-day honestly and carefully. It is so much easier to assume that we know it all. Or perhaps, having already reached conclusions in our own minds, we are loth to have them disturbed by facts.

– W.E.B. DuBois

One of the basic tenets of representative democracy rests on the premise that citizens are presented with choices when selecting political leaders. As Ranney explains, “popular control over government which is the essence of democracy can best be established by the popular choice between and control over alternate responsible parties; for only such parties can provide coherent, unified sets of rulers who will assume collective responsibility to the people for the manner in which government is carried on” (Ranney 1962, 12). In the United States, voters are usually offered a dichotomous choice between the Democratic and Republican Parties. Although some scholars and political elites argue that the two-party system in which we function is less than democratic (e.g., Guinier 1994), few would disagree that some choice is better than none at all.

Yet, throughout history, African Americans have essentially operated in a one-party system (Gurin et al., 1989; Walton and Smith 2003; Frymer 1999).

A review of the history of party politics from the perspectives of black leaders and the black electorate finds that parties have always treated blacks as pawns in their bids for electoral power. As such, blacks have been used tactically, and their interests often were sacrificed. Indeed, even their status as pawns has been tenuous. At any time, only one party … has come even close to representing their interests, and that party often shunned them. More often than not, the opposing
party attempted to remove blacks from the game completely, through disenfran-
chisement. Black leaders have persistently searched for strategies to use in their
attempts to gain greater influence in party politics; they have worried about
dependency on a single party; and they have advocated independence when they
believed it would enhance the group’s political effectiveness (Gurin et al., 1989, 4).

Early in the dawn of our republic, African-Americans’ political loyal-
ties rested exclusively with the Republican Party, while the Democratic
Party was the party of White supremacy, disenfranchisement, and forced
segregation (Walton and Smith 2014). For a brief period between
1936 and 1964, Blacks operated in a two-party system. At the national
level, Blacks voted for Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt and
became part of his New Deal Coalition. Black partisanship, however,
lagged behind Black presidential voting behavior as many Blacks split
their ticket by voting for Roosevelt in the 1936 election but voted for
Republican mayoral, senatorial, and gubernatorial candidates between
1937 and 1939 (Weiss 1983). African Americans would then suspended
support for Democratic presidential candidates when they voted for
Dwight Eisenhower, who along with a Republican-led Supreme Court,
ensured school desegregation (Philpot 2007). Nevertheless, by 1964 the
New Deal Coalition would collapse as southern segregationists left the
Democratic Party in support of Republican presidential candidate Barry
Goldwater’s advocacy of states’ rights – a thinly veiled euphemism for
continued segregation (Aistrup 1996). With the Republican Party no
longer a realistic alternative as a result of these shifts in alliances, Blacks
have all but exclusively backed the Democratic Party and its candidates
(see Chapter 1 for empirical evidence to support this claim).

Blacks’ confinement to a one-party system becomes even more prob-
lematic once their ideological self-identification is taken into account. As
was illustrated in the introduction to this book, a growing number of
African Americans have been self-identifying as conservative. Furth-
more, the correlation between Blacks’ party identification and ideological
self-identification is lower than that of other racial groups. This is par-
ticularly noteworthy in a time when the overall American electorate’s
party identification and ideology has become increasingly more aligned.
This suggests that at least part of the Black electorate is captured by a
party that is not representative of their ideological ideals.

Blacks constitute a significant and distinctive subgroup of the Ameri-
can electorate, in terms of both size and behavior. No other group in
the United States votes as cohesively during presidential elections as
African Americans. Yet, the variance in Blacks’ education levels, income,
geographic location, and political attitudes continues to increase. Why does a group facing greater heterogeneity along a number of dimensions still vote as a Democratic bloc when their socioeconomic characteristics suggest that a larger proportion of them should be voting Republican? I believe the answer to this question lies in the complexity and distinctiveness in Black opinion that are often concealed, particularly since on Election Day public opinion effectively gets reduced to a series of dichotomous choices. The basis of these choices is rarely dissected. When we take a closer look at Black ideology, however, we find considerable variance. Kilson argues that “while conservatism has made major in-roads among White ethnic voter blocs since the 1972 presidential election – Italians, Jews, Poles – its success among Black American voters has been distinctly limited” (Kilson 1993, 4). I respectfully disagree with Kilson’s argument. While the number of Black conservatives as we traditionally think of them remains limited, conservative thinking permeates multiple domains of Black ideology. The difference is that conservatism among Blacks does not necessarily translate into Republican identification.

Because of the lack of variance in African-American partisanship, American politics scholars have largely ignored the heterogeneity in the policy attitudes or ideological preferences of African Americans. Models of Black partisanship and voting behavior assume race is all that is needed to explain Blacks’ attachment to political parties. Rarely considered is whether there is congruence between Blacks’ partisanship and their ideological ideals. Consequently, the extent to which Blacks are truly underrepresented in the American political system is underestimated.

 Conservative but Not Republican has sought to fill this void by examining the factors that influence both the predictors of Black ideology and the applicability of ideology to Blacks’ partisan evaluations. The central argument guiding this endeavor is that the correlation between Black party identification and Black ideology is a function of two phenomena. First, Blacks have developed a multidimensional and hierarchical conceptualization of the liberal–conservative continuum, which has grown out of their distinct position in American society. Blacks’ conceptualization of the liberal–conservative continuum does not neatly overlap with that of the general electorate, causing a weaker correlation between Blacks’ party identification and ideological self-identification than observed among other racial groups. Second, the expression of Blacks’ ideology is conditional on their level of group consciousness – the lower Blacks’ levels of group consciousness, the more likely they are to deviate from their Democratic Party identification.
Conservative but Not Republican explores the ways citizens make sense of ideological labels. I argue that we cannot fully understand the relationship between Blacks’ ideology and party identification unless we take into account the mix of considerations – including Blacks’ attitudes about religious, social welfare, racial, military, and moral issues – used to determine whether African Americans will ultimately label themselves as liberal or conservative. Furthermore, we must also consider how racial considerations can often supplant the expression Blacks’ ideology when it comes to choosing with which political party to identify. Recognizing the unique conceptualization and conditional applicability of the liberal–conservative continuum offers a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and function of ideology in American public opinion.

A highlight of this book has been its use of a bevy of different data sources to test its thesis. The evidence presented in Conservative but Not Republican came from quantitative analysis of the American National Election Studies, as well as two original surveys – the 2010 Post-Midterm Election Study (PMES) and the 2012 Religious Worldview Study (RWS). Both the PMES and the RWS featured sizable representative national samples of both Blacks and Whites, which allowed for interracial comparisons when necessary. To augment the quantitative analyses, this book also featured original qualitative data collected from over 80 semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were designed to provide a more detailed illustration of the nature of individuals’ descriptions of ideological labels. Finally, a content analysis was conducted of 1,600 New York Times articles over a 150-year period and 679 New York Amsterdam News articles over an 80-year period in order to examine how ideological labels have been used in elite discourse.

These data have revealed a number of key empirical findings consistent with the book’s thesis. First, the use of ideological labels has become more specialized over time, with the use of the terms liberal and conservative in elite discourse growing increasingly more policy-specific. In addition to using ideological labels to describe the general nature of government and politics, these labels are often being used to describe politics in particular issue areas. Blacks are especially likely to associate ideological labels with social welfare, religious, and moral issues.

Second, by operationalizing these policy-specific ideological domains, we can see that Blacks are not uniformly liberal. While Blacks are significantly more liberal than Whites when it comes to racial, social welfare, and military issues, there are no meaningful differences (statistically or substantively) between the two racial groups on moral issues.
Furthermore, Blacks’ mean placement on military and moral issues indicated that they are fairly moderate in these areas. Finally, Blacks were significantly more conservative than Whites on religious issues.

Another key finding revealed by this investigative inquiry is that not all policy-specific ideological domains are applicable to Blacks’ conceptualization of their ideological self-identification. Salient to Blacks’ ideological self-identification are the religious and social welfare issue areas. As Blacks become more conservative on religious and social welfare issues, they become more likely to self-identify as conservative. To a lesser extent, the military dimension was also a predictor of Black ideological self-identification. As Blacks become more conservative on military issues, however, they become less likely to identify as conservative, a finding seemingly counterintuitive unless one considers the historic relationship between Blacks and the military (see Chapter 2). Note two important follow-up points to these findings. First, accounting for political sophistication does not alter the results. That is, political sophisticates use mostly the same constructs as non-political sophisticates when determining their ideological self-identification. Second, a parallel analysis of Whites indicates that Blacks have a unique conceptualization of their ideological self-identification which is not explained by levels of political sophistication and may account for the idiosyncratic relationship between Black ideology and party identification.

Adding to the observed idiosyncratic relationship between Blacks’ ideology and party identification is the role group consciousness plays in mitigating the expression of ideological self-identification. When group consciousness is high, Blacks’ identification with the Democratic Party is nearly unanimous, regardless of ideological self-identification. Blacks with low group consciousness are more likely to show less support for the Democratic Party and are more likely to identify as Independent. Support for the Republican Party remains tenuous, even among Black conservatives with low group consciousness.

By building upon extant theories spanning across several fields – including political psychology, public opinion, and voting behavior – in order to develop a theoretical framework for understanding why and to what extent African Americans conceptualize the liberal–conservative continuum differently, Conservative but Not Republican has implications

The one exception is that political sophisticates are significantly more likely to use the moral dimension in determining their ideological self-identification.
that extend beyond Black Politics. Indeed, the debate over whether individuals have enough information to adequately participate in politics is on-going (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Jackson and Marcus 1975; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990; Hayes and Guardino 2011; Kam 2005; Berelson 1952). And at the heart of this debate lies the question of how widespread is the capacity to think along ideological lines (Federico and Hunt 2013; Converse 1964; Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1978; Ansolabehere et al., 2008).

As the behavioral revolution in political science ushered in new ways of understanding the relationship between citizens and the political environment, the democratic competency of the American voter was almost immediately called into question. In particular, it was argued that ideological constraint demonstrated one’s capacity for understanding political phenomena.

The proper functioning of a democratic system presupposes that members of the polity can act in a rational self-interested manner. For this reason, the concept of ideological constraint can play an important part in most theories on democratic behavior. Here, the concept of ideological constraint refers to the existence of psychological and logical pressures upon an individual to react consistently to political decision-making situations responding to political stimuli in a way consistent with his perceived interest (Jackson and Marcus 1975, 93).

Only a tiny fraction of Americans, however, met the qualifications needed to be characterized as ideologues. Moreover, citizens’ reliance on alternative constructs (e.g., group interests, nature of the times, etc.) to make political decisions were thought to somehow undermine democracy and, therefore, thought to be cause for concern (Converse 1964).

Since this initial bleak outlook on America’s democratic prospects, scholars have reevaluated the extent to which citizens are prepared to make political decisions, concluding that the fate of U.S. democracy was not nearly as grim. For one thing, there is evidence to suggest that levels of ideological constraint are not as low as originally thought. For instance, Nie and Anderson (1974) argue that Converse’s findings, which relied on data from the 1950s, were time-bound because the political upheavals of the 1960s and 70s changed the way Americans fundamentally interpreted politics. Looking at a number of domestic and foreign policy issues featured repeatedly on surveys between 1956 and 1972, they confirmed the lack of internal attitudinal consistency in 1956 but also demonstrated an increase in issue constraint in the 16 years following. Likewise, in an examination of candidate preference, Radcliff (1993) found that a sizable majority of respondents in the 1972 to 1984 American National
Election Studies structured their presidential candidate preferences along a left-right ideological dimension.

Aside from exploring whether citizens possessed the necessary levels of ideological constraint required to adequately participate in politics, scholars have also questioned whether being an ideologue was even essential for properly functioning in democracy:

To appreciate the tenuous linkage between adroit decisionmaking and democratic survival, imagine the worst-case election scenario. That is, hapless voters tossed coins, sold their votes, or otherwise decided in ways contravening any known reasonableness criteria. The upshot might then be such “calamities” as popular referenda being accidentally defeated, out-of-touch candidates put in office, and, assuredly, postelection bewilderment among TV network commentators. These inept choices resulted in inferior, disliked policies. But, and this is absolutely critical, would these elections be inherently undemocratic? Assuredly not. In fact, if postelection survey probes into voter skill were never executed, this ineptitude would pass entirely unnoticed. Surely we cannot stipulate that poll’s postmortem necessarily certifies “democracy.” Would these elections be more democratic if everyone voted brilliantly but, as is commonplace elsewhere, violence marred the balloting and disgruntled losers pursued armed insurrection instead (Weissberg 2001, 264)?

In an examination of public support for ballot referenda, Lupia (1994) finds evidence to support this argument. Specifically, Lupia found that relatively uninformed voters were able to glean enough information from information shortcuts to emulate the political decisions of their more informed counterparts. In thinking about ideological constraint, Lupia’s study suggests that – even in the absence of the ability to articulate issue constraint–people are still able to make decisions that serve in their best interest.

Conservative but Not Republican offers additional considerations for the discussion of citizens’ readiness to function in democracy. First, this book argues for an expanded notion of what is meant by “ideological constraint.” By the strictest definition, ideological constraint denotes an individual’s ability to exhibit internal consistency across all issue positions, which ultimately signifies an underlying belief system (Converse 1964). Since the advent of micro-level studies of ideology, the ideal nature, structure, and content of belief systems have been informed by the dominant culture and superimposed by the researcher. Not only has there been little room for the possibility of belief structures that have developed organically out of subcultures in American society (Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004), left unexplored has been how the content of mainstream belief structures, such as the liberal–conservative continuum, varies across systematically across subcultures.
The current project speaks to the latter omission. As discussed in Chapter 2, the prevailing assumption is that a small group of elites have pre-packaged various issues and disseminated them to the masses as a cohesive belief system. As researchers, we often examine the extent to which public opinion reflects these pre-packaged ideas. In the absence of cohesive elements, as so determined by this small group of elites, researchers conclude that public opinion lacks a cohesive belief system.

What this project demonstrates, however, is that there exists alternative packaging of these elements. Whether the packaging comes from indigenous elites or grassroots discussions, there are subgroups among the American populace that otherwise arrange these constructs into alternative constrained ideologies that are historically relevant to that group. From the dominant gaze, individuals belonging to these subgroups lack the cohesion exemplified by the general electorate. To be sure, without a grounded understanding of the relationship between these groups and the political system, unconventional patterns of ideological constraint among subgroups are unobservable. Alternatively, Conservative but Not Republican has examined how racial groups can have nuanced understandings of the liberal–conservative continuum, which serve as the basis of their belief systems. These nuanced interpretations of liberal and conservative are entirely predictable given the interaction between that racial group and the U.S. government. Further, these intricacies have been overlooked by research that does not examine minority groups separately or that omits minority groups altogether.

Second, the observation that ideological self-identification does not correlate across the board with self-placement on political issues has led social scientists to conclude that citizens are either politically unsophisticated, less ideologically constrained, or just plain confused about the meaning of liberal and conservative. As a result, it has been questioned whether the average man or woman is competent enough to make decisions regarding the governance of this country (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). Conservative but Not Republican presents another possibility — ideology is not just a summary judgment, but a rank ordering of all ideological referents. From this standpoint, people understand the liberal-conservative continuum and aptly identify themselves based on which dimensions are most important to them. Conceptualizing ideology as both multidimensional and hierarchical helps to explain some of the apparent internal inconsistency in the political ideology of the American electorate.

Finally, the theoretical framework presented in this book not only provides a template for predicting which constructs citizens will utilize
when defining the liberal–conservative continuum, but also how race moderates the use of the liberal–conservative continuum for Blacks. Race continues to play an important role in the political calculus of Black Americans because of persistent political, social, and economic inequalities. Therefore, as the results presented in this book demonstrate, in addition to racial considerations by themselves affecting support for political parties, racial considerations also operate in conjunction with other factors such as ideology. As a consequence, Blacks vote for the Democratic Party, even when their ideology suggests that they would do otherwise.

By exploring the relationship between ideology and Black group consciousness in determining party identification, we gain a better understanding of why there are not more ideologues in the American electorate. For decades, scholars have commented on the use of group-centered considerations rather than ideological ones in the political expressions of the American public (Lane 1962; Converse 1964; Campbell et al. 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948; Berelson et al. 1954). These scholars concluded that this demonstrated a deficit in the political understanding of citizens, which undermined representative democracy. While studies have explored the use of group-based considerations at the expense of ideological considerations (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), none have explored the interaction between the two. Failure to do so, I believe, has minimized the observable role of ideology in political evaluations. This project reveals that individuals are able to think along ideological lines but that group considerations restrict the expression of ideology when making political decisions. Further, the use of group-based considerations is no less rational or beneficial than the use of ideological ones given societal distinctions that continue to endure.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY BLACK POLITICS**

**Voter Suppression in the Twenty-First Century**

In a five-to-four decision, the Supreme Court ruled in *Shelby County v. Holder (2013)* that Section 4 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) was unconstitutional. Section 4 of the VRA established the formula for “pre-clearance” requirements detailed in Section 5, which requires states with a history of racial discrimination to “apply to the U.S. Justice Department or
the U.S. District Court in Washington before making any change in their election laws or procedures” (Walton and Smith 2014, 208). Under Section 4, (1) states that had previously used tests or devices as a condition of registering or voting or (2) states with low voter registration and turnout (less than 50 percent) were subject to preclearance. The majority opinion was that this formula was unconstitutional since it was based on practices that had been eradicated decades ago. In her dissenting opinion, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg wrote that while the preclearance southern states “accounted for only 25 percent of the population, since 1982 56 percent of the successful race discrimination cases in voting (under Section 2 of the VRA) were from the South, nearly four times more than noncovered northern states” (Walton and Smith 2014, 264). In other words, while based on eradicated practices, this formula was still a strong predictor of where acts of voting discrimination were more likely to occur.

In the wake of Shelby County v. Holder, many southern states once restricted by Section 5 of the VRA began changing their voting laws almost immediately. For instance, within 24 hours of the Supreme Court’s decision, five states that had previously been under preclearance – South Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, Virginia, and Alabama – moved forward with their voter identification laws, which had previously passed in their respective Republican-led state legislatures. Prior to the Supreme Court’s decision, these laws were unenforceable because the states were awaiting federal approval or the laws had been blocked in federal court (Childress 2013). Texas’s voter ID law, in particular, had previously been blocked by a federal court because it disproportionately affected minority voters (Cooper 2013). Since the Shelby County v. Holder decision, however, 41 states have introduced restrictive voting legislation, with 18 of those bills passed into law (Childress 2013).

Advocacy groups, particularly minority organizations, likened the states’ actions to modern-day vote suppression.\(^2\) The Advancement Project, which challenged North Carolina’s voting restrictions on behalf of the North Carolina NAACP State Conference, issued a 2013 press release in which they stated that North Carolina’s law was reminiscent of the state’s “sordid Jim Crow past” (Farmer 2013). The president and director-counsel of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund, John Payton, believed that the states’ voting restriction laws were “a carefully targeted

\(^2\) Three Republican leaders have admitted on record that voter ID laws were targeted attempts to prevent Blacks from casting ballots (Tobin 2012; Farmer 2013).
response to the remarkable growth of the minority electorate, and threaten[ed] to disproportionally diminish the voting strength of African-Americans and Latinos” (Nichols 2013). In 2011, when South Carolina initially passed its voter ID law, NAACP president Benjamin Todd Jealous referred to the law as “little more than a 21st Century poll tax … While some may quibble over the intent, there is no doubt the effect of this law would disproportionately block Black South Carolinians from voting” (Lowe 2011).

In addition to the changes in voting laws being framed as attempts to suppress the Black vote, Black elites also made sure that Black voters understood that the proposed changes were directives of the Republican Party. In an article titled, “How Voter Suppression Backfired on the GOP,” featured in The Grio (a news website primarily targeted towards African Americans), Reverend Al Sharpton — talk show host and president of the National Action Network – stated the following with respect to voter turnout in the 2012 election: “From the tours we did in 22 states, it became clear to us that many Blacks that were apathetic and indifferent became outraged and energized when they realized that [Republicans] were changing the rules in the middle of the game, in terms of voter ID laws, ending ‘souls to the polls’ … So what was just another election, even though it dealt with the re-election of the first Black president, took on a new dimension when they realized that [Republicans] were implementing the disenfranchisement of Black voters” (Reid 2012). Representative John Lewis (D-GA), who has become a heroic symbol in the struggle for Black voting rights, penned an essay in 2015 entitled “The Unfinished Work of Selma.” In it, he wrote, “in 2013, the Supreme Court gutted key aspects of the law. In the weeks that followed, Republicans in statehouses across the country quickly passed laws making it harder to vote … Couched in language about ‘protecting the ballot box’, Republicans have pushed voter ID laws that disproportionately impact certain blocks of voters – African-Americans, women, Latinos, the poor and young people – who tend to vote against them” (Lewis 2015). Indeed, the messaging was clear: the efforts to curtail Black voting were led by Republican-controlled state legislatures in states more likely than not ran by a Republican governor.

The timing of the Republican-led voting reforms could not be more deleterious for the relationship between the GOP and Black voters. In 2015, the United States celebrated the 50th anniversary of the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Part of the celebration included commemorating the 50th anniversary of “Bloody Sunday” – the day when over
African-American demonstrators were met with violence from local police officials while trying to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge on their way from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Attending the commemoration of “Bloody Sunday” were President Obama, Attorney General Eric Holder, and Representative John Lewis, who had been severely beaten during the demonstration 50 years ago (Basu, Shelbayah, and Brumfield 2015). The weekend of events, which included a series of speeches from notable Black leaders (including President Obama) and a recreation of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, served as a reminder to African Americans that the franchise was (and still is) the cornerstone of the struggle for Black civil rights.

Also heightening the salience of the Black struggle for voting rights was the release of Ava DuVernay’s (2015) Selma, a critically acclaimed cinematic chronicling of the march from Selma to Montgomery. In order to widen Selma’s audience, a movement known as “Selma for Students” provided over 275,000 free tickets to middle school-aged children to view the film in cities across the U.S. (Tuttle 2015). This effort allowed future generations of Black voters to connect with the past (albeit a Hollywood version) and gain an understanding of the importance of voting and the struggle that went with attaining suffrage rights.

The GOP-proposed franchise restrictions juxtaposed against the commemoration of the 1965 VRA likely distanced Black voters further from the Republican Party. The results presented in this book suggest that the Republican Party is most likely to attract Black conservatives for whom race is less salient. Currently, the GOP has a difficult time appealing to Black voters because there are very few for whom race is not salient. That is not to say that race is chronically salient for Blacks (see White 2007), but the Republican Party certainly does itself no favors by attacking what is arguably the greatest symbol of equality and citizenship for African Americans. In the current political climate, voting rights and race are intimately intertwined. The Republican Party’s pursuit of voting restriction laws will: (1) result in Blacks associating the Party with disenfranchisement and (2) heighten the salience of race among Blacks. As a consequence, African Americans who would otherwise support the Republican Party due to shared ideological ideals will be more concerned with maintaining their fundamental right to participate in the political system. Therefore, when they are making political decisions, it is unlikely that the liberal–conservative continuum will supersede racial considerations, particularly when evaluating political parties.
Run, Ben, Run!: The GOP’s Hope for the Future?

On May 4, 2015, Ben Carson announced the launching of his presidential bid in front of a cheering audience at the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts in Detroit, Michigan. As a retired neurosurgeon, he is a Washington outsider who campaigned on an anti-politician platform. With the campaign slogan, “Heal Inspire Revive,” Dr. Carson delivered a message in Detroit that was rooted in individualism and small government. He proposed reforming government to more closely mirror that envisioned by the framers of the Constitution. At the same time, Dr. Carson announced the convening of an exploratory committee that would transform government into “something that looks more like a well-run business than a behemoth of inefficiency” (Carson 2015).

While he was never the top contender for the Republican nomination, poll results from around the time he formally announced his candidacy placed Dr. Carson among the top tier of Republican candidates, averaging roughly 10 percent support among national samples of voters (Booker 2014; Jackson 2015). Furthermore, the National Draft Ben Carson Committee, a super PAC formed by John Philip Sousa IV to support Dr. Carson’s candidacy, raised $13.5 million in 2014. As a point of comparison, a similar super PAC formed for Hillary Clinton’s campaign raised $12.9 million in 2014 (Newman 2015). Thus, during the pre-primary season, Ben Carson was considered to be as viable of a candidate as anyone else in the race.

As the only African-American GOP presidential primary candidate, Ben Carson’s nomination would have uniquely positioned him as potentially the only Republican candidate that could have competed with Hillary Clinton for the Black vote. Ben Carson has been described as the “embodiment of Black achievement,” rising from an impoverished single-mother household in Detroit to become the youngest and first Black director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital (Samuels 2015). Dr. Carson’s 1990 autobiography, Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story, has become required reading in the Black community, particularly among Black religious leaders and educators, who use the book to teach about spirituality, social mobility, and achievement (Samuels 2015). He is not only well respected in the Black community for his accomplishments, but also for his philanthropy – distributing close to $700,000 in scholarships and raising money to refurbish nearly 150 school libraries in low-income areas (Samuels 2015). And while it is unrealistic that his candidacy would be enough to draw the majority of
Black voters to the Republican Party, it is estimated that garnering just 17 percent of the Black vote would prevent any Democratic presidential candidate from winning the general election (Moody 2014).

The problem is that, in recent years, Ben Carson has taken a sharp turn to the right. To be sure, conservative ideals were present in Dr. Carson’s earlier writings and speeches. Raised a Seventh-day Adventist, he is deeply religious. He is also a proponent of hard work and self-reliance. *Gifted Hands*, for instance, has religious undertones and an emphasis on individualism. But Dr. Carson garnered significant media attention in the months leading up to his run for the Republican presidential nomination for his far-right and controversial views on homosexuality and for being a vocal critic of President Obama’s policies, particularly on health care and immigration (Rutenberg 2015). For example, during his speech at the Voter Values Summit in 2013, Dr. Carson criticized Obamacare for being “the worst thing that has happened in this nation since slavery” (Sullivan 2013). In a 2014 interview with conservative news outlet Breitbart, he went as far as to compare the Obama Administration to Nazi Germany in response to the Internal Revenue Service’s scrutiny of conservative political organizations (Bobic 2014). Dr. Carson has been critical of the U.S. welfare system and has proposed paring it back, although not eliminating it entirely. He also indicated, in an interview on CNN, that he believed that homosexuality was a choice because some people “go into prison straight – and when they come out, they’re gay” (Rutenberg 2015).

While Dr. Carson’s religious and moral views have him ideologically aligned with most Blacks, he is an outlier with respect to his views on social welfare issues (see Chapter 3). Had he been the Republican presidential nominee, this could have potentially served as an obstacle to him winning Black votes, since the social welfare policy dimension is more salient in determining Blacks’ ideological self-identification than the other two dimensions. In other words, despite the overlap between Dr. Carson and Black voters on religious and moral issues, there is considerable distance between them on the issues that matter most to Black political decision-making.

Furthermore, Ben Carson’s attacks on President Obama have undermined his authenticity as a Black leader. As discussed in Chapter 6, President Obama has become the best-known symbolic representation of African-American success. His presidential approval among Blacks is relatively high, even among Black conservatives with low group consciousness. Thus, an attack on President Obama during his time as president is arguably the equivalent of attacking Blackness itself.
Moreover, Dr. Carson’s attacks on President Obama likely activated Black voters’ group consciousness, creating a “rally-around-the-brother” effect towards President Obama. At the same time, Dr. Carson became vilified for these criticisms among African Americans. As evidence, those who had previously idolized him, have expressed a lack of trust in him and have now labeled Dr. Carson a “sellout” (Timm 2015). Some Black clergy have stopped recommending *Gifted Hands* to their congregants and members of minority medical organizations have described Dr. Carson as an “embarrassment” (Samuels 2015). All of this suggests that Ben Carson would probably fall short of the 17 percent of the Black vote needed to defeat a Democratic opponent in a general presidential election, should he ever become the Republican nominee.

**Federalism and the Protection of Civil Rights**

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the racial policy dimension was less salient among Blacks than other constructs, such as social welfare and religion. It was speculated that since the passage of the 1960s civil rights legislation, securing basic civil rights has been less of a concern among African Americans. Instead, Blacks’ policy priorities have shifted to issues such as unemployment, education, and health care. While not race-specific, these areas still experience large racial disparities. Recently, however, the salience of race among Blacks has significantly increased. In December 2014, the Gallup Organization reported that 13 percent of Americans indicated that race relations and racism were the most important problems facing the country today. Not since the Los Angeles riots in 1992 that resulted from the acquittal of three of the policemen captured on videotape violently assaulting Rodney King have Americans viewed race to be this big of a problem (Berman 2014). More telling are the importance of race relations and racism by the race of respondent – 31 percent of Blacks, compared to just 8 percent of Whites believed race relations and racism to be the most important problem facing the nation (Gallup).

The heightened importance of race comes, in part, as a consequence of a series of unpunished violent killings of African Americans. Among these were the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, two unarmed Black men who each died at the hands of the police. In Eric Garner’s case, a bystander captured on video Garner being put in a chokehold (which has been banned by the New York Police Department for over two decades)
and wrestled to the ground by the police. The video depicts Garner uttering the words “I can’t breathe” eleven times, as several police officers piled on top of him and held him down (Baker, Goodman, and Mueller 2015). Garner died as a result of that encounter, with the medical examiner ruling his death a homicide due to neck and chest compressions (Calabresi 2014). Garner’s death, by itself, was enough to cause outrage; his alleged crime was selling untaxed cigarettes – a crime not fitting his punishment. Protests erupted across the country, however, when a New York grand jury decided not to indict the police officer who held Garner in a chokehold, thereby causing his death. A week earlier, a grand jury in Missouri had also failed to indict the police officer who fatally shot Michael Brown, which also spurred protests. But the video of Eric Garner’s violent demise was viewed by millions of people around the world. Yet it proved to be insufficient evidence. For many African Americans, this was not only a miscarriage of justice, but a signal that there was no system of justice at all for Blacks in the United States (see e.g., Love 2014). In a poll taken shortly after the New York grand jury’s decision, only 10 percent of Blacks (compared to about half of Whites) believed that African Americans and other minorities are treated equally by the criminal justice system. Similarly, 20 percent of Blacks and 60 percent of Whites were confident that police treat Blacks and Whites equally, regardless of whether they commit a crime (Balz and Clement 2014).

To the extent that any justice has been served, it has been through federal government intervention. The federal government’s ability to investigate cases of racial injustice committed by state actors is authorized by Section 1983 of Title 42 of the United States Code, which is the codification of a section of the Civil Rights Act of 1871 (also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act) (Shapot 1965). Passed during Reconstruction, the Ku Klux Klan Act brings crimes such as murder, arson, and assault (crimes typically tried on the state and local level) under federal jurisdiction when two or more people are racially motivated to conspire to deprive anyone “equal protection of the laws” or “equal privileges and immunities under the laws” (Smith 2003, 130). With respect to those acting under the “color of the law,” Section 1983 stipulates:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceedings for redress, except that in any
action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer’s judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia (Nahmod 2013, 1020).

For most of its lifespan, Section 1983 laid mostly dormant. In 1961, however, the Supreme Court ruled in Monroe v. Pape that the federal government could “override certain state laws and to provide a remedy where state laws were inadequate” (Nahmod 2013, 1055). Further, the Supreme Court ruled that the federal government could “provide a remedy where state law remedies were unavailable in practice, even if not in theory” (Nahmod 2013, 1055). As a consequence of the Monroe v. Pape decision, individuals could seek remedy in federal court for any violation of their Constitutional rights at the hands of state actors, regardless of whether redress had been previously sought at the state level (Friedman and Delaney 2011).

Using this statute, federal investigations were launched to examine the deaths of both Michael Brown and Eric Garner. With respect to Michael Brown, the U.S. Department of Justice launched two investigations, which ran concurrently with St. Louis County’s investigation. One investigation examined the general practices of the Ferguson Police Department; the second investigation specifically examined whether Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson’s shooting of Michael Brown violated his civil rights. Similar to the St. Louis County grand jury, the Justice Department did not find sufficient evidence to support bringing federal civil rights charges against Officer Wilson. The Justice Department did, however, find that the Ferguson Police Department engaged in “a pattern or practice of conduct that violates the First, Fourth, and Fourteen

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3 It is not clear why the Civil Rights Act of 1871 had gone underused. Gressman (1952) suggests that parts of the Civil Rights Act of 1871 had either been repealed by the Democrats who had subsequently taken control of Congress and the Presidency or struck down by the Supreme Court by the end of Reconstruction (but see Weinberg 1991).

4 In 1958, 13 Chicago police officers broke into the family home of James Monroe and ordered him and his wife to stand naked in the living room as they searched every room, without a search or an arrest warrant. The Monroe’s young children were present as the officers leveled racial epithets at the couple. Mr. Monroe was detained and interrogated for 10 hours. He was not allowed to contact his family or an attorney and he was never taken before a magistrate. Mr. Monroe was eventually released and no charges were brought against him (Nahmod 2013).
Amendments of the Constitution” (DOJ 2015). While the Department of Justice’s investigation did little to bring closure to Michael Brown’s family, it did highlight the pattern of police brutality and abuse of authority that had plagued the Ferguson community – a (very) small victory that otherwise would not have been won without federal intervention.

Amidst the racial upheavals that have sprung up throughout the U.S., the Republican Party has remained noticeably silent. None of the Party’s leadership or those who sought the Party’s presidential nomination in 2016 made statements regarding the pattern of unjustifiable force used by police in cities across the nation. While Representative Justin Amash (R-MI) and Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), who both are libertarian-leaning Republicans, have commented on the militarization of the nation’s police forces, there has been little discussion of the racial implications of the use of excessive force by the police (Sullivan 2014).

Thus, the increased saliency of the racial policy dimension will likely mean that Blacks will continue to support the Democratic Party. African Americans are significantly more liberal than Whites on this dimension. To be sure, Blacks are much more likely to favor government intervention in ensuring civil rights than their White counterparts. Over the past five decades, Blacks have perceived the Democratic Party to be the stronger of the two major parties on race (Philpot 2007). Further, President Obama (a Democrat) and his administration have been responsible for interjecting when the states and localities have failed to bring about a just solution to civil rights infractions. Since the Republican Party has not sought a bipartisan or even an alternative solution to the systemic racism experienced by African Americans, Black party identification will likely remain solidly Democratic.

BEYOND BLACK POLITICS: A GUIDE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Conservative but Not Republican has presented a general theoretical framework for understanding how groups can develop individualized conceptualizations of the liberal–conservative continuum that is based

5 The Department of Justice came to similar conclusions upon completing its investigation of the Cleveland Police Department. Most recently, the Cleveland Police Department has come under scrutiny when an officer fatally shot Tamir Race, a 12-year-old African-American boy who was playing with a toy gun in a neighborhood park (Liebelson and Reilly 2014).
on that group’s interaction with the political world. To test this theory, this book has juxtaposed Blacks’ historic relationship with government and politics with Blacks’ contemporary posture towards various policy domains. Using multiple policy domains allowed us to discern whether definitions of ideological self-identification varied systematically by group. The evidence presented in earlier chapters suggested that Blacks’ definition of ideological self-identification was predictable given the political environment in which they have had to maneuver in order to attain their political goals.

The natural extension of the current study is to examine how this theoretical framework applies to other groups, particularly other racial and ethnic groups. Certainly, one of the most important lessons of the 2012 Presidential Election was the growing significance of minority voting blocs. Thus, it is a worthwhile enterprise to compare how other minority groups in American politics make sense of the liberal-conservative continuum and how these conceptualizations affect their partisanship and voting behavior.

As the fastest growing minority group, the roots of Latino ideological self-identification should be of particular interest. The majority of Latinos identify as Democrats, although not to the extent that African Americans do. A notable exception is Cubans in Florida, who mostly identify as Republican. Ideologically, Latinos are more liberal on both racial and non-racial issues than non-Latino Whites (Segura 2012). Yet, despite a general propensity to be liberal on a host of issues, there is evidence to suggest that Latinos are conservative on moral and social issues (Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada 2011). Thus, there is a complexity to Latinos’ ideology when multiple policy domains are taken into consideration.

Adding to this complexity is the significant heterogeneity within the Latino electorate, which would impact the study of Latino ideology. Among these factors are national origin, nativity and generation, religion, acculturation, and group identity (Segura 2012; Kaufmann 2003; Ellison et al. 2011). For instance, opposition to abortion is significantly higher among Protestant (compared to Catholic) Latinos (Bartkowski, Ramos-Wada, Ellison, and Acevedo 2012), who now constitute about 25 percent.

6 Latinos turned out in record numbers during the 2012 election, lifting their vote share from 6 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2012. Moreover, 71 percent of Latinos voted for President Obama, which was a 4 percentage point increase from 2008 (Preston and Santos 2012). Turnout among Asian Americans in 2012 was also higher than it had ever been. Furthermore, like Latinos, 73 percent of Asian Americans voted for President Obama in 2012 (Taylor 2012).
of the Latino population (Ellison et al. 2011). Opposition to abortion also varies by national origin; Cuban Americans are significantly more conservative on this issue than Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans (Bolks, Evans, Polinard, and Wrinkle 2000). With respect to ideological self-identification, the liberal–conservative continuum strongly correlates with Latino party identification, but the strength of this correlation varies by national origin (Hero, Garcia, Garcia, and Pachon 2000).

Therefore, exploring Latino ideology would provide rich and fertile ground upon which to test the boundaries of the theoretical framework presented in this book. But extending this research should not be a matter of simply substituting one group for another. Being able to predict how Latinos conceptualize the liberal–conservative continuum and whether and how their ideology will correlate with their party identification requires understanding the unique journey Latinos have travelled as they have struggled to achieve political equality in the United States. While both groups are racial minorities, Latinos have not had the same history with the two major parties as have Blacks. Party outreach to Latino voters is a fairly recent phenomenon (Hero et al. 2000). Furthermore, the political experiences of Latinos vary by the factors discussed earlier, including national origin, generation, etc. Thus, any attempt at exploring how the theoretical framework presented in Conservative but Not Republican applies to other groups – racial, ethnic, religious, or otherwise – must consider how that group has traversed the American political landscape.

The theoretical framework presented in this book is not restricted to racial and ethnic minorities. Public opinion scholars can extend this work to understanding any cross-pressured group that experiences dissonance between their ideological self-identification and their party identification. For instance, Hillygus and Shields (2008) found that ideology played a much larger role than party identification in the political decision making of southern voters in the 2000 election. As a result, a conservative Democrat in the South was significantly more likely to support Bush, while a conservative Democrat in the non-South was more likely to support Gore (Hillygus and Shields 2008). By extension, conceptualizing the ideological self-identification of southern voters as multidimensional and hierarchical may help explain their political distinctiveness.

Campaign scholars can also extend this research by exploring whether it is effective to tailor campaign appeals based on the saliency of an issue domain to voters’ ideological self-identification. Already scholars (Carroll 1999; Elder and Greene 2007) have examined whether microtargeting
“soccer moms” or “NASCAR dads” has been a successful campaign strategy. These studies have found that such campaign appeals have been ineffective because they are based on media-fabricated delineations of subpopulations of the electorate. Further, using these artificial distinctions leads political elites to take positions on issues that are not important to them, which undercuts elite attempts at recruiting these voters. By understanding the actual hierarchical ordering of issue preferences among voters, political elites can make better campaigning decisions and scholars can better predict when such appeals will be successful.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As the African-American electorate grows more heterogeneous, the nature of Black Politics will continue to grow more complex. Even with the growing body of knowledge on the subject, what scholars have been able to reveal about how and why African Americans interact with the political system has barely scratched the surface. This is evident as new data has become available and the breadth of methodologies used to study Black Politics continues to expand (Philpot and Walton 2014). To keep up with these changes, we must think beyond generalized theories that use race as a blanket explanation to account for all of Black decision-making. We must create more nuanced models of how Blacks think about politics (see White 2007 for strong support for this argument).

Furthermore, the lessons learned from the study of Black Politics and other marginalized groups need to be incorporated into theories of mainstream political participation and public opinion. To be sure, the seminal work on political participation neglected to account for African-American political participation (see Philpot and Walton 2014 for a review of this literature). And yet, Blacks’ fight for political incorporation has spurred significant realignments throughout the history of the Republic (Philpot 2007; Weiss 1983; Gurin et al. 1989). Given the importance of race, particularly to the two-party system, theories that have failed to include African Americans and their agency on the American political system are incomplete. In order to fully comprehend citizens’ ideological orientations and how they affect their partisan preferences, we must explain rather than omit the exceptions to the existing rules. The evidence presented in Conservative but Not Republican suggests that without doing so, we miss key features and failures of the American democratic system.