

Race may play significant role in presidential election, survey finds

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Voters' racial attitudes, both conscious and unconscious, may be a significant factor in this year's U.S. presidential election, particularly since whites tend to prefer people of their own race, according to research presented at the 120th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

"People may not even be aware that they have certain [racial attitudes](#) and that could be why, even with an African-American president in the White House for nearly four years, race continues to play a role in electoral politics," Anthony G. Greenwald, PhD, said in an interview. Greenwald was lead researcher on a Anthony G. Greenwald, PhD, survey of 15,000 voters.

The survey asked respondents about their [political beliefs](#), how "warmly" they felt toward black and white people, and which [presidential contender](#) they preferred. The survey was done between January and April 2012, while the Republican hopefuls included Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum. The research team also measured unconscious racial attitudes using the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which Greenwald developed more than a decade ago to measure thoughts and biases that people don't realize they have. Variations of the test measure [implicit attitudes](#) about topics such as race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

The IAT results showed a pattern labeled "automatic white preference" among a majority of eligible white voters. The finding that some

candidates are more attractive to voters with pro-white racial attitudes does not mean that those candidates are racist, Greenwald emphasized.

Previous research has shown that both blacks and whites show explicit preferences for their own race, according to Greenwald. However, when it comes to implicit, or unconscious, preferences, blacks tend not to prefer one race over another, whereas close to 70 percent of white Americans show an implicit [racial bias](#), he said.

The research team is continuing to collect data on people's attitudes about the 2012 presidential candidates as part of the Decision 2012 IAT study, with a survey modified to focus on voters' comparisons of Romney with President Obama. Summaries of the data will be posted on the site each month beginning in mid-August. Anyone can take the test at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/featuredtask.html>

More information: Presentation: "What Role Will Race Play in the 2012 Presidential Election?" Session 3356, Saturday, Aug. 4, 4-4:50 p.m., Rooms W206B and C, Orange County Convention Center

Provided by American Psychological Association

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