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# Whose Empowering Who: Exploring the Causal Relationship Between Descriptive Representation and Black Empowerment

**Shane A. Gleason[1] and Christopher T. Stout[2]**

## Abstract

Previous studies of descriptive representation have not been able to overcome the classic endogeniety problem. For example, do Black elected officials cause Blacks to be more empowered? Or are Black politicians only elected in contexts where Blacks are already empowered? We address this shortcoming by utilizing genetic matching and the 1996 National Black Election Study. Genetic matching creates a pseudo-experimental environment where Blacks in districts with Black elected officials are matched with similarly situated Blacks in districts without Black representation. This research design allows us to better assess the causality of descriptive representation and changes in political attitudes. This study provides strong evidence that higher levels of efficacy are a result of descriptive representation, rather than the cause of it. Thus, our study demonstrates Black office-holding at the congressional level empowers the Black electorate.

## Keywords

descriptive representation, efficacy, majority-minority districts, elections, genetic matching

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Several social scientists and political pundits argue that Barack Obama's election to the White House transformed Blacks' political, social, and economic attitudes (Little, 2012). On several recent polls and surveys, African Americans display a more upbeat outlook on everything from government responsiveness, their opportunities to succeed in the United States, race relations, and even their own abilities to achieve the American Dream (Harris, 2012; Pew Charitable Trust, 2010; Stout & Le, 2012). Obama's positive influence on Black political attitudes exemplifies the importance of Black office-holding for African Americans. It may also indicate that descriptive representation[1] has the ability to *change* levels of political empowerment[2] in the Black community.

While the relationship between descriptive representation and Black political empowerment is well documented based on a comprehensive literature review (Abney & Hutcheson, 1981; Banducci, Donovan, & Karp, 2004; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Gay, 2001, 2002; Leighley, 2001; Lublin & Tate, 1995; Preston, 1983; Tate, 1991, 2003; Washington, 2006), no study empirically assesses the causal direction between descriptive representation and Black political efficacy.[3] Based on previous research, it is difficult to determine whether Blacks are elected in areas where Black voters are already efficacious or if Black elected officials transform Black political attitudes. The dearth of studies exploring the causal direction of this relationship may be attributed to the lack of panel data and, more importantly, the difficulty of creating an experiment that would simulate the empowerment effect of descriptive representation.

In recent years, political scientists have embraced experimental methods as a way to assess causal relationships (Druckman, Green, Kuklinski, & Lupia, 2006). While it is difficult to create an adequate experimental setting to assess the link between descriptive representation and Black political empowerment, recent methodological advances in matching techniques allow researchers to use real world conditions to create quasi-experiments. These quasi-experiments allow social scientists to better assess the causal mechanisms between different relationships not amendable to traditional experimental settings. For our purposes, matching methods allow us to create a pseudo-experiment that assesses whether Blacks in districts with Black congressional representatives have significantly different political outlooks than their similarly situated counterparts who are represented by White elected officials. As a result, matching techniques provide the opportunity to better examine the causal direction of the relationship between descriptive representation and Black empowerment.

Using genetic matching, a newly developed matching method (see Diamond & Sekhon, 2005), this article examines whether descriptive representation is the causal mechanism behind changes in Blacks' feelings of both internal and external political efficacy. To examine this relationship, we begin by defining and discussing the origins of internal and external political

efficacy. We follow this review by outlining why descriptive representation should lead to higher levels of political empowerment for Blacks. We then utilize the 1996 National Black Election Study (NBES; Tate, 1996), which was specifically created to study Black congressional representation, and genetic matching to determine whether Blacks in congressional districts with Black U.S. House representatives have higher levels of internal or external political efficacy than their Black counterparts represented by White elected officials in similar districts with similar backgrounds. Overall, the results indicate that Black congressional representatives substantially increase Black empowerment in terms of external, but not internal, efficacy. Our findings highlight the important role Black elected officials at the congressional level have played and continue to play in Black political incorporation.

## Political Efficacy and Descriptive Representation

Political efficacy can be operationalized in two ways, internal and external efficacy. Internal efficacy is an individual's belief that she or he can understand government and shape governmental outcomes. Those with higher levels of internal efficacy are more confident in their ability to influence politics and policies. Conversely, external efficacy measures perceptions about government responsiveness to constituents. Those with higher levels of external efficacy are more likely to believe that the government is receptive to public demands (Balch, 1974; Converse, 1972). Recently, scholars have identified the importance of social and political context in shaping political efficacy (Banducci & Karp, 2003; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Michelson, 2000). Voters represented by someone who shares their racial or ethnic background generally feel more empowered. Bobo and Gilliam (1990) find Blacks in cities with Black mayors are more likely to feel local government is responsive to individuals such as themselves. Additionally, Michelson (2000) finds Latinos descriptively represented on the Chicago City Council have higher levels of efficacy than other Latinos represented by a non-Latino. These, and other research on the topic, suggest descriptive representation may play an important role in erasing several political disparities between Blacks and Whites (Abney & Hutcheson, 1981; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Gay, 2002; Howell, 2000; Lublin, 1997; Tate, 2003). However, the literature does not address causal direction.

## Descriptive Representation and Black Political Empowerment

Much like political efficacy, representation can be conceptualized in two distinct ways. Substantive representation measures how well representatives advance the policy interests of their constituents. Descriptive representation,

in contrast, assesses whether the representative mirrors some phenotypical characteristic of the people he or she represents. The most common examples of descriptive representation are women or racially underrepresented groups elected officials representing a constituency of the same gender or race/ethnicity. Some, including Pitkin (1967), argue descriptive representation has little value as it does not guarantee better substantive representation. Along these lines, there is some research that finds that Black representatives do not better represent the policy preferences of co-racial constituents than non-Black legislators. Swain's (1993) seminal work on this topic demonstrates that, based on congressional voting scores, White Democrats in many ways represent Black political interest as well as Black Democratic elected officials. Others argue that the creation of majority-minority districts, which elect the vast majority of Black elected officials, may actually worsen Blacks' substantive representation (Cameron, Epstein, & O'Halloran, 1996; Canon, 1999; Lublin, 1997). These authors argue that the maximization of Blacks in a congressional district opens up opportunities for more Republicans to be elected in surrounding districts (but see Grose, 2011, and Washington, 2011, who argue this is not the case). If efficacy is driven in part by perceptions of the quality of representation, then we should expect descriptive representation will have little influence improving Black public opinion.

However, other research shows descriptive representation in many ways improves substantive representation for Blacks. While there are certainly instances in which non-descriptive representatives better mirror Black constituents' interest, there are also a number of systematic studies that demonstrate a strong link between descriptive and substantive representation. Grose (2011) and Minta (2011) both demonstrate that not only do Black elected officials provide more grants for their co-racial constituents than similarly situated White elected officials, but they also put forth more effort to keep in touch with their Black constituents. Recent experimental studies conducted by Butler and Broockman (2011) and Broockman (2013) confirm these findings. These studies show that Black elected officials are more likely to help co-racial constituents in and outside of their districts gain access to the ballot more than White elected officials. Finally, Bratton and Haynie (1999), Grose (2005), and Haynie (2001) demonstrate that Black state legislatures are more likely to introduce Black interest legislation than non-Black legislators.

If, as several authors show, Black representation improves substantive representation, it follows that Blacks should be more empowered by the presence of descriptive representatives. Blacks represented by other African Americans should see the extra effort that co-racial representatives on average make to improve the position of Blacks, and this should enhance perceptions of an individual's significance in American politics. Moreover, this

improvement in substantive representation should increase perceptions that government is more responsive.

In addition to substantive representation working to improve Blacks' feelings of internal and external efficacy, there are other aspects of descriptive representation that may shape Blacks' feelings of empowerment. First, research shows that Blacks feel more positive about a political system in which there is someone of the same race in elected office (Mansbridge, 1999; Scherer & Curry, 2010; Tate, 2003). Descriptively represented Blacks may feel more connected to the political system, and this may increase their sense that they can shape policies and that government will be more responsive to individuals like them. Second, Black elected officials are often perceived as more empathetic with African Americans than non-Black legislators (McDermott, 1998; Williams, 1990). As a result, Blacks who are represented by other African Americans may feel that government officials care more about them and this in turn should increase levels of external efficacy. In a similar vein, Blacks may believe that a person who shares their race has gone through similar experiences and is in a better position to address their problems. Both may lead Blacks to feel better represented in government and increase their feelings of efficacy. Given this research, it would not be surprising to find that Black candidates are associated with higher levels of internal and external efficacy.

Other research shows that the partisan composition of government can have a transformative effect on political efficacy. Banducci and Karp (2003) find individuals who are ideologically closer to the ruling party are more likely to believe government is responsive. Additionally, individuals have higher levels of efficacy when their preferred candidate succeeds in an election (Banducci & Karp, 2003). Taken together, this research suggests voters' levels of efficacy change when their preferred candidate or party is in office. While Black voters prefer the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, several studies show Blacks have strong preferences for Black representatives (Reeves, 1997; Tate, 2003). As a result, Black voters may derive psychological benefits when they are represented by another African American.

Other studies show voters who participate more in politics have higher levels of political efficacy (Finkel, 1985). When there is a Black candidate on the ballot, Black churches and other organizations increase their mobilization efforts, which are tied to higher levels of Black political participation (Leighley, 2001; Preston, 1983; Tate, 1991; Washington, 2006). Moreover, research suggests Black voters participate more in elections with a Black candidate on the ballot (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Preston, 1983; Washington, 2006). Most recently, Black political participation rose to historic levels when Blacks had the opportunity to elect the first Black president (Philpot,

Shaw, & McGowen, 2009). Increased levels of political participation in areas where Blacks are, or have the opportunity to be, descriptively represented should increase political activity that could create a sense of political empowerment for Blacks. Overall, while it is certainly possible higher levels of efficacy precede descriptive representation, there are good reasons to believe descriptive representation *increases* political efficacy for African Americans.

## Genetic Matching

Matching is the ideal approach for this study. It allows us to address the "chicken and the egg" problem that, until now, has been a persistent feature of the descriptive representation literature. To best assess a causal relationship in an experimental setting, researchers would ideally be able to measure the dependent variable on the same individual when they received the treatment and in an alternate universe where they did not receive the treatment (Druckman et al., 2006; King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). For our example, we would be able to measure levels of political efficacy for an individual who lived in a congressional district with a Black U.S. House representative and measure efficacy for the counterfactual where the *same* individual is represented by a White elected official in Congress at the same time. We could then properly assess the treatment effect, by subtracting efficacy levels for individuals who did not receive the treatment (i.e., being represented by a White representative in Congress) from the same individual who did receive the treatment (i.e., being represented by an African American in Congress).

This ideal research design is an example of what King et al. (1994) call the fundamental problem of causal inference and is impossible in the real world because an individual cannot be represented by two different U.S. House representatives *at the same time*. However, by using matching methods we can simulate a situation using observational data where two individuals, one in the treatment group and one in the control group, are so statistically similar on a number of different measures that we can approximate the aforementioned ideal research design.

While matching algorithms have been in use since the 1980s (e.g., LaLonde, 1986), they are relative newcomers to political science. However, matching has already made a significant impact on the discipline (see Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Boyd, Epstein, & Martin, 2010; Henderson & Chatfield, 2011; Highton, 2009; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Mayer, 2011). Until recently, propensity score matching has been the dominant approach. Propensity score matching uses a probit or logit regression to estimate the likelihood of being in the treatment group. From this process, each observation attains a propensity score that is

defined by Guo and Fraser (2010) as the conditional probability of a study participant being in the treatment group given the observed covariates. Once the score has been created, the next step is to match individuals based on these scores so that both the treatment and control groups are statistically similar in every way, save for the treatment variable. Genetic matching improves on propensity score matching by using an iterative algorithm to find the optimal matches between the control and the treatment groups (Diamond & Sekhon, 2005) and is a superior estimator to the older propensity score matching method that requires user specification (Henderson & Chatfield, 2011; Mayer, 2011; Sekhon, 2009).[4] When the covariates between the treatment and the control group are balanced well,[5] we can create a pseudo-experimental setting where descriptively represented Blacks are matched with their statistically similar counterparts represented by a White member of Congress. Thus, genetic matching allows us to better assess whether the race of the elected official *changes* levels of Black political efficacy.

## Data

Like several scholars before us, we utilize the 1996 NBES to analyze the link between descriptive representation and Black political empowerment (Griffin & Keane, 2006; Tate, 2003; Wielhouwer, 2000). The 1996 NBES is one of the few data sets with a large enough number of Black respondents for us to examine variation in political attitudes across different contexts. Moreover, the 1996 NBES is specifically designed for the study of Blacks in different congressional districts. The data set also includes information about each respondent's demographic characteristics and their political and racial attitudes. Moreover, the 1996 NBES includes two measures of efficacy that we use as dependent variables in this analysis. The first measures internal political efficacy and comes from a question that asks, "How much do you agree with the following statement: People like me have no say in what government does." The second measures external political efficacy and is derived from a question that asks, "How much do you agree with the following statement: Public officials don't care what people like me think." Both questions are measured on a recoded 5-point Likert-type scale, which ranges from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Our treatment variable comes from the congressional district markers in the 1996 NBES, based on the race of a respondent's representative. Those in the treatment are represented by African Americans in Congress, whereas those in the control group do not have a Black representative.

To best assess causality, the matching covariates cannot exist before the treatment variable appears. In our study, many variables such as income,

education, age, region, and length of residence are probably not significantly affected by the race of the representative and are not post-treatment factors. However, to err on the side of caution, we estimate two models to examine the link between descriptive representation in Congress and Black internal and external political efficacy. The first model, the pre-treatment model, matches individuals on variables that should not be significantly affected by the treatment. Given that variables such as age, income, levels of religiosity, and residence should be largely unaffected by the race of an individual's U.S. House representative, we can match on these pre-treatment variables to make claims about the causal relationship between descriptive representation and efficacy. In order to better assess the relationship between the treatment groups, we also run the post-treatment model by including additional variables that may theoretically be affected by the treatment, such as interest in politics, approval of Congress, and several political participation variables. While the post-treatment model does not preclude matching (Greiner & Rubin, 2011), it does limit the causal claims we can make based on our analysis. In spite of this disadvantage, the post-treatment model allows us to assess the robustness of our results from the pre-treatment model. Table 1 presents the full list of the variables used in each model.

We match on a number of variables to better isolate the effect descriptive representation has on Black political empowerment. We match on demographic characteristics including age, income, education, gender, employment status, homeownership status, and length of residence. We also match individuals on their political orientation (ideology and partisanship), their interest in politics, and their approval of Congress. Additionally, we consider the respondent's levels of political participation, particularly whether the respondent voted in 1996 and whether they did any extra political activities during the 1996 presidential election (e.g., attended a political rally, volunteered for a campaign, and/or gave money to a campaign). We also matched based on whether the respondent believes that his or her fate is linked to other Blacks. Finally, we account for contextual factors such as whether the respondent resided in the South and the partisanship of the respondent's congressional representative.[6]

## Results

Figure 1 displays the percent of respondents, before matching, from the 1996 NBES who strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly agree with the statement "People like me have no say in what government does," which is our measure of internal efficacy. The results are disaggregated by Blacks in districts with Black congressional representatives

**Table 1.** List of Variables Used for Genetic Matching Across Two Models.

| Pre-treatment | Post-treatment |
|---|---|
| Age | Age |
| Income | Income |
| Education | Education |
| Male | Male |
| Married | Married |
| Employed | Employed |
| Homeowner | Homeowner |
| Renter | Renter |
| Length of residence | Length of residence |
| Republican | Republican |
| Democrat | Democrat |
| Political ideology | Political ideology |
| Union membership | Union membership |
| Importance of religion | Importance of religion |
| Church attendance | Church attendance |
| South | South |
| Represented by a Democrat | Represented by a Democrat |
| | Interested in campaigns |
| | Attends rally |
| | Gave money to a political cause |
| | Linked fate |
| | Trust in government |
| | Congressional approval |
| | Voted |

and Blacks in districts with White representatives. The results suggest that Blacks have higher than expected levels of internal efficacy. More than 50% of Blacks in both types of congressional districts believe that they have some say in what government does. Fewer than 20% of Black voters strongly agree that individuals such as themselves have no say in what government does. However, Blacks in districts with Black representatives have higher levels of internal efficacy than Blacks who reside in districts with White elected officials. Blacks who are descriptively represented in Congress are about 8% more likely than those represented by White elected officials to disagree or strongly disagree that they have no say in what government does. These preliminary results indicate Blacks who are represented by Black elected officials feel that they can influence public policy more than their counterparts who are not descriptively represented.

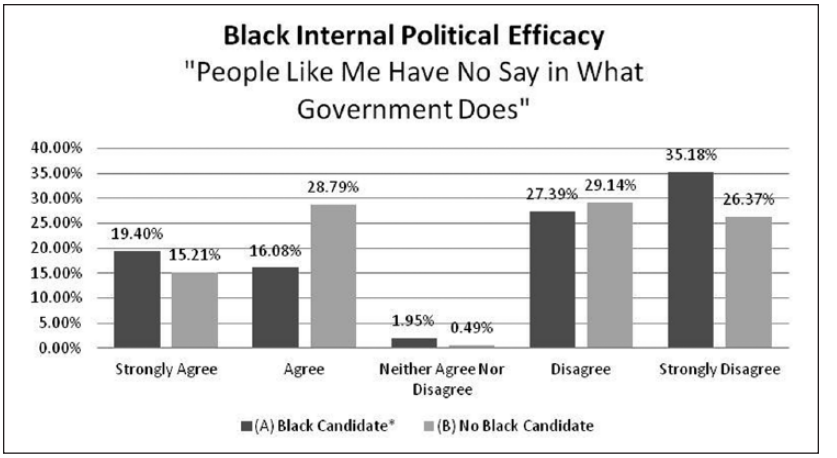


**Figure 1.** Black internal efficacy for Blacks who are descriptively represented and for Blacks who are not.

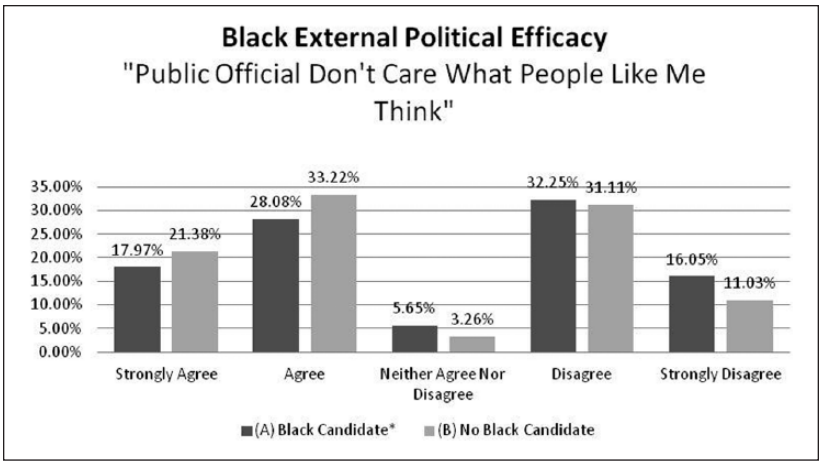


**Figure 2.** Black external efficacy for Blacks who are descriptively represented and for Blacks who are not.

Blacks in districts with Black elected officials also appear to believe that government is more responsive than Blacks who are represented by White congressional representatives. Figure 2 displays five ordinal responses to the statement "Public officials don't care what people like me think," which is

our measure of external efficacy. While a majority of Black respondents believe public officials are not responsive to individuals such as themselves, Blacks who are descriptively represented are 6% more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement "Public officials don't care what people like me think" than those who are represented by White elected officials. Blacks who are descriptively represented appear to be more efficacious than their counterparts who are represented by White congressional representatives. While this indicates that descriptive representation is associated with Black political empowerment, more work needs to be done to ensure that descriptive representation actually leads to changes in Black political empowerment. Moreover, further analysis is necessary to isolate the effect that descriptive representation has on Black political empowerment. To do this, we now turn to genetic matching.

Figure 3 displays forest plots of the standardized differences of the means of each variable before and after matching. Figure 3 presents the covariate balances for both the pre-treatment model and the post-treatment model. Hollow symbols in each figure indicate that there is a statistically significant difference ($p < .10$) between the control and the treatment groups based on the bootstrapped Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.[7] The closer the symbol is to zero, the less difference there is between the control and the treatment groups. Before matching, there are significant differences in three of the variables (age, length of residence, and homeowner) in the pre-treatment model and nine of the variables in the post-treatment model (age, length of residence, homeowner, renter, income, union membership, R's interest in campaigns, R attended a rally, R gave money). Following the genetic matching procedure, there are no significant differences between the treatment and the control groups in either the pre-treatment or the post-treatment models. Moreover, genetic matching reduced the difference between the treatment and control groups in all but three variables in the pre-treatment model. In the post-treatment model, genetic matching improved balance in 20 of the 24 covariates. The lack of statistically significant differences between the two treatment groups after matching indicates that we have achieved full balance on a number of covariates (see Henderson & Chatfield, 2011). This provides us with the opportunity to isolate the effect that descriptive representation has on political efficacy and better understand the causal link between these two variables.

Table 2 presents the Average Treatment of the Treated (ATT) effect that notes how likely a respondent is to have the outcome of interest, inclusive of all observations, of descriptive representation on internal and external political efficacy (Guo & Fraser, 2010; Young, 2008).[8] The two sets of rows display differences in internal and external efficacy for the treatment and control

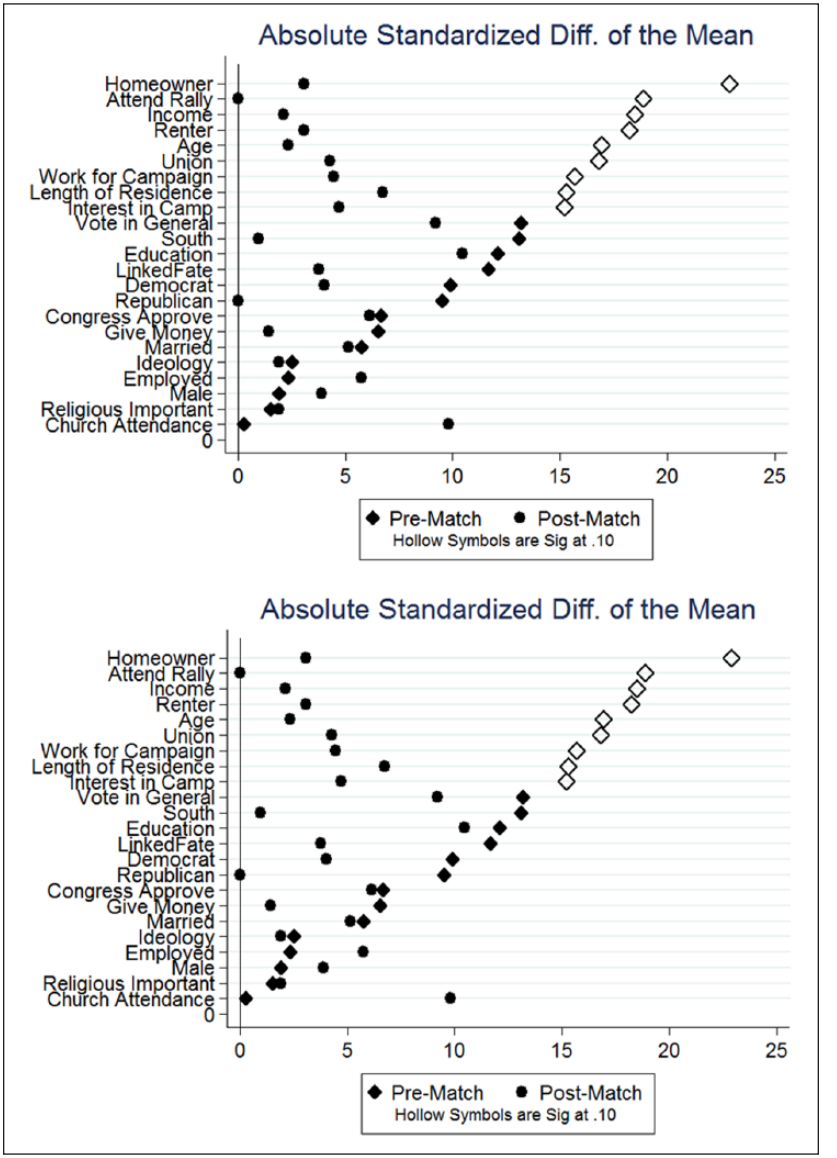


**Figure 3.** Absolute standardized difference of means before and after matching for both the (a) pre- and (b) post-treatment models.

*Note.* Hollow symbols indicate a significant difference between the treatment and the control groups at $p < .10$ using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

**Table 2.** Average Treatment Effect of the Treated Before and After Genetic Matching.

| Dependent variable | Coefficient | *SE* |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-treatment model | | |
| External efficacy | 0.33* | 0.17 |
| Internal efficacy | 0.28 | 0.19 |
| Post-treatment model | | |
| External efficacy | 0.43 | 0.19 |
| Internal efficacy | 0.33 | 0.21 |

*Note.* *SE* = standard error. The results are based on a difference of means test between the treatment and control groups.
Significance levels: *10%.

groups based on two sets of genetic matching models (i.e., pre- and post-treatment models). The models also display significance levels based on a test of means between the treatment and control groups. Positive results indicate higher levels of efficacy based on the treatment.

The results indicate descriptive representation has a powerful impact on Blacks' feelings of external political efficacy. Black respondents who are descriptively represented have a third of point greater score on a 5-point scale of efficacy than their counterparts who are represented by White elected officials in the pre-treatment model. In the post-treatment model, this effect increases to almost half of a point on the 5-point scale. Not only is this effect significant, but it is substantial in magnitude. The results for internal efficacy are less encouraging; the differences in internal efficacy between the treatment and control groups are insignificant in both the pre- and post-treatment models. This may indicate that descriptive representation increases Blacks' belief that government is responsive to them, but it does not change their feelings about their ability to affect the political system. While the ATT effect for internal efficacy is insignificant, it is positive and relatively substantial in magnitude. Overall, the results indicate that Black candidates have a strong effect on Blacks' perceptions of external political efficacy and a modest but insignificant impact on Blacks' feelings of internal political efficacy.

## Discussion

By utilizing genetic matching, which creates a pseudo-experimental setting, we are able to not only better isolate the effect of descriptive

representation on Black political empowerment, but we also are able to provide support for the claim that descriptive representation *causally influences* Black external efficacy. We, thus, are able to show that descriptive representation has a transformative effect on Black political empowerment. Our findings highlight the importance of Black office-holding in altering Black public opinion. Moreover, this study makes an important contribution to the descriptive representation literature that has long been able to show an associational relationship between Black representation and differences in political attitudes, but not a causal relationship. This study provides strong evidence that higher levels of efficacy are a result of descriptive representation rather than the cause of it. The results of this study indicate that Black elected officials do not have to be Barack Obama to inspire higher levels of Black empowerment; even Black U.S. House representatives lead Blacks to feel that government is more responsive to individuals like themselves.

This is not to say that our results are without their shortcomings. First, our study could be improved with more recent data. However, given that few available data sets have both a significant number of Black respondents in different congressional districts and ask questions about political efficacy, this is a difficult task.[9] We hope that future studies will revisit our findings with more recent data. Second, future research should examine the link between descriptive representation and changes in political behavior for other underrepresented groups such as Latinos, Asian Americans, and women. Finally, we hope that future studies will revisit our examination of descriptive representation and Black political empowerment, by examining different political attitudes and behaviors using this causal framework. In spite of these limitations, our study provides a vital first step in demonstrating that Black voters respond positively to Black office-holding.

In addition to examining the influence of Black elected officials on Black political empowerment, future research should reassess our results by exploring how within-group differences among Black politicians may influence their ability to empower voters. The data set that we draw from only has Blacks in districts with Black Democratic House Representatives. However, with the election of more Black Republicans, some of whom distance themselves from the Black establishment in Congress, more work should be done to determine whether *all* Black candidates empower Black voters equally (see also Henry, 2013).

Beyond partisanship, there are a growing number of African American politicians and elected officials who are campaigning and governing using a race-neutral strategy in hopes of attaining higher office (see Gillespie,

2012; Strickland & Whicker, 1992; Wright, 1995). While such a strategy may improve Black candidates' ability to hold elected office outside of majority-minority districts, it is possible that these candidates' lack of focus on race could diminish their empowerment effect on Black voters (Gilliam & Kaufmann, 1998; Orey, 2006). In addition to examining the influence of descriptive representation on Black political empowerment, future research should explore the conditional or even interactive effects that descriptive and substantive representation have on improving Blacks' levels of internal and external efficacy. For example, do Black politicians only empower Black voters because they substantively represent them on average better than White elected officials? Or does only the symbol of co-racial representation matter in empowering Blacks? Future research that combines quantitative measures of representation (i.e., congressional voting records, interest group congressional scores) and/or qualitative data (i.e., content analysis of floor speeches or bills proposed) should re-address the questions raised in this study.[10]

While controversies surrounding the creation of majority-minority districts have received less notoriety in recent years than they have in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of recent court cases (e.g., *Georgia v. Ashcroft*, 2003; *Perry v. Perez*, 2012) demonstrate the question of majority-minority districts is far from resolved. One of the most recent cases, *Woullard v. Mississippi* (2006), involves a court challenge in federal district court to stop the dismantling of a majority-minority district in Mississippi. In this case, the court ruled for the state and allowed the district to be dismantled; presumably, the level of Black efficacy in that district decreased.

While Blacks may not in all cases prefer an African American candidate to a non-Black politician (for example, majority Black city Detroit recently elected White mayor Mike Duggan), more should be done to ensure that racially under-represented groups have the opportunity to select their preferred representative. Not only do Black politicians generally represent Black constituents in Congress better than White representatives in a number of ways (Grose, 2011; Tate, 2003; Washington, 2011), but they also empower Black voters. Simply creating districts for Black representatives increases Black external political efficacy, which could have a number of positive implications for Black politics and American politics overall.

While the creation of more majority-minority districts should increase Black representation, there are a number of scholars who point out that in some ways this may be limiting. This is evidenced by the fact that following the large growth in Black representation in Congress following the creation of a number of majority-minority districts in 1992, Black representation in

Congress has largely stalled. Thus, to empower the large percentage of Blacks who reside outside of majority-minority districts, Black politicians have to build coalitions with other racial/ethnic groups in order to succeed. With the growing numbers of Latinos and Asian Americans in the United States and Blacks' growing levels of political participation, it is possible that the coalition of liberal Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans that Obama used to propel himself to victory in 2012 can be replicated by other Black elected officials.

Moreover, Hajnal (2007) argued that Whites become more accepting of Black politicians after becoming familiar with their governing style. As a result, it is possible that Obama's election to the White House may open the door for future Black politicians to succeed outside of majority-minority districts. However, this is probably more likely to occur among liberal and Democratic Whites than it is among conservative and Republican Whites who tend to have lower evaluations of Obama than previous Democratic presidents (Abrajano & Burnett, 2012). While Blacks still disproportionately campaign in areas that are majority Black (see Shah, 2014), it is possible that future researchers will be able to examine the impact of Black representation for a greater number of Blacks both within and outside of majority-minority districts as attitudes toward African American candidates change and the racial/ethnic make-up of the electorate grows friendlier to candidates from underrepresented groups (Lee, Boeckelman, & Day, 2013).

Decades of research have highlighted the integral role political efficacy plays in the success of any group. Political efficacy is associated with higher levels of political trust, several forms of political participation, and higher levels of approval for the government (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Finkel, 1985, 1987; Shingles, 1981). By changing levels of Black political efficacy, these elected officials may drastically alter many aspects of Black politics. African Americans who were previously disengaged from the political system or doubted their abilities to influence government may become more involved. The increase in Black efficacy that came from the creation of several majority-minority districts in the 1980s and 1990s may partially explain the significant growth in the number of Black U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates and elected officials in recent years, Blacks' growing importance in federal offices, and even may have laid the groundwork for the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama. Moreover, if we continue to see an increase in Black political activity rooted in changes in Black political efficacy, then we will also see more resources being allocated to a previously marginalized Black community.

# Appendix

**Table A1.** Ordered Logit Regression Predicting Efficacy Using Coarsened Exact Matching Weights Based on the Percent Black of the Population and the *R*'s Representative's Leadership Council For Civil Rights (LCCR) Scores.

| Variables | External efficacy | Internal efficacy |
|---|---|---|
| Black House Representation | 0.95** | −0.26 |
| | (0.42) | (0.42) |
| Age | 0.00 | −0.03* |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Income | 0.00 | −0.01 |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Education | 0.03 | −0.02 |
| | (0.08) | (0.08) |
| Male | 0.09 | −0.06 |
| | (0.31) | (0.32) |
| Married | 0.48** | −0.14 |
| | (0.20) | (0.19) |
| Unemployed | −0.78 | −0.90 |
| | (0.62) | (0.64) |
| Renter | 2.14 | 2.05 |
| | (1.38) | (1.32) |
| Homeowner | 2.44* | 3.02** |
| | (1.37) | (1.33) |
| Length of residence | −0.00 | −0.00 |
| | (0.00) | (0.01) |
| Republican | 2.90** | 15.09 |
| | (1.36) | (548.02) |
| Democrat | 0.13 | 0.20 |
| | (0.37) | (0.38) |
| Ideology | −0.19 | 0.17 |
| | (0.19) | (0.19) |
| Member of a union | −0.44 | −0.96*** |
| | (0.33) | (0.34) |
| Religious importance | −0.35 | 0.39 |
| | (0.24) | (0.24) |
| Church attendance | 0.11 | 0.24* |
| | (0.14) | (0.14) |
| South | 0.30 | −0.29 |
| | (0.34) | (0.34) |

*(continued)*

**Table A1. (continued)**

| Variables | External efficacy | Internal efficacy |
|---|---|---|
| Campaign interest | −0.29 | −0.10 |
| | (0.22) | (0.23) |
| Attended a rally | −0.15 | −0.04 |
| | (0.46) | (0.47) |
| Donate to a political campaign | 0.26 | 1.23** |
| | (0.52) | (0.53) |
| Linked fate | 0.36 | −0.83* |
| | (0.42) | (0.44) |
| Trust government | 0.62* | 0.64* |
| | (0.33) | (0.33) |
| Voted in 94 | −0.04 | 0.57* |
| | (0.32) | (0.34) |
| Cut 1 | 2.39 | 0.43 |
| | (1.98) | (1.94) |
| Cut 2 | 3.94** | 1.43 |
| | (2.00) | (1.94) |
| Cut 3 | 4.29** | 1.50 |
| | (2.00) | (1.94) |
| Cut 4 | 6.12*** | 2.74 |
| | (2.02) | (1.95) |
| Observations | 204 | 206 |

*Note.* Standard errors in parenthesis. The above results are derived from a regression that uses coarsened exact matching weights. Black respondents in districts with Black U.S. House Representatives (i.e., treatment) were matched with Blacks without these representatives (i.e., control) based on the differences in the percent of Blacks in the respondent's districts and the respondent's representatives LCCR score. After matching on these variables and utilizing these matching weights, there were no significant differences ($p < .05$) in treatment and control groups in the percent Black in district (Percent $Black_{Treatment} = .57$, Percent $Black_{control} = .56$) or LCCR scores ($LCCR_{Treatment} = 95$, $LCCR_{control} = 93.5$).
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

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## Notes

1. Pitkin (1967) coined the term *descriptive representation* in her seminal book "The Concept of Representation." Pitkin defines descriptive representation as the act of a representative sharing some feature (i.e., race, gender, occupation, etc. . . . ) with their constituents. For example, when Blacks are represented by other Blacks, they are descriptively represented.
2. We use internal and external efficacies as measures of political empowerment in this study.
3. Hayes and McKee (2011) examine the causal relationship between descriptive representation and turnout. Scherer and Curry (2010) explore the causal relationship between descriptive representation and views of institutional legitimacy.
4. Propensity score matching is sensitive to specification, both in terms of variables and mathematical specification. Accordingly, the choices researchers make matter a great deal for the results that come out of matching equations. Fortunately, genetic matching addresses the latter problem by using an iterative process to identify the specification that minimizes differences between the control and the treatment groups (Diamond & Sekhon, 2005).
5. Data are balanced when there are no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups on the covariates specified by the researcher (Diamond & Sekhon, 2005; Guo & Fraser, 2010).
6. Unfortunately, the inclusion of a percent Black variable and Leadership Council for Civil Rights (LCCR) score variable would not provide balanced results between our treatment and control groups. To ensure that these two key variables were not driving our findings, we used coarsened exact matching (CEM; see Iacus, King, & Porro, 2011) and matched Blacks in districts with Black congressional representatives (i.e., treatment group) to Blacks in districts without Black representatives (i.e., control groups) based only on the percent Black in the district and the respondents' representatives' LCCR score. Including both these variables and the individual level variables in Figure 3 results in no statistical matches using CEM and unbalanced data using genetic matching. Following the CEM matching procedure for only district characteristics, we account for additional imbalances using regression. While the lack of exact matches for even these two variables, which is required for coarsened exact matching, diminished our sample size, we did achieve covariate balance on the percent Black in district and LCCR measures. Following matching, we estimated an ordered logit regression model controlling for several factors listed in Figure 3. The models presented in Appendix Table A1 show that the presence of a co-racial house representative increased Black external efficacy even after Blacks are matched so that the respondent's district's racial make-up and his or her representative's LCCR scores are not statistically different.
7. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to measure the extent of balance between two distributions. In this test, the null hypothesis is that the two distributions

are not significantly different. While there are other tests for balance, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov is ideal, because it works well even if the distribution is not entirely continuous (Diamond & Sekhon, 2005), as is the case for several of our variables.

8. Alternative specifications include Average Treatment Effect (ATE) that notes the probability of the outcome of interest occurring given that an observation has received the treatment. Which one is used is largely guided by theory. While both specifications produce substantially the same results, our theory fits best with Average Treatment of the Treated (ATT), and thus, that is the one we employ. We ran the model using ATE and matching the treatment to two and three respondents from the control group, instead of one (this is typically known as 2:1 and 3:1 matching). The results of these specifications do not alter our results, but provide worse balance than the models presented in Table 2.
9. While the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES) has an oversample of Black respondents, fewer than 350 Black respondents answered all items included in our pre-treatment model. Moreover, fewer than 90 of these respondents are represented by an African American in Congress. Matching becomes more difficult when there is a small sample size, and an even smaller number of matches. In these instances, the standard errors increase and the possibility of a Type I error where the researcher accepts a covariate as balanced when it truly is not, increases (Ho, Imai, King, & Stuart, 2007, Imai, King, & Stuart, 2008). In spite of these problems, we attempted to rerun the analysis presented in Figure 3 and Table 2 using the 2008 ANES. While the results demonstrated that Blacks represented by Blacks had higher levels of external efficacy, the relationship was far from significant ($p > .3$). The differing result may be attributed to the small remaining sample size in the 2008 ANES when other variables are accounted for. It may also be a result of the 2008 Election in which Obama's election to the White House may have empowered all Black voters regardless of their residence. We eagerly await future data that will have a sufficient sample of Blacks in a non-historic election, which will allow us to test the robustness of our findings.
10. Such a question is difficult to address with the data that we have at our disposal. Using Leadership Council for Civil Rights scores as a proxy for Black representation, we find that Black congressional representatives generally have significantly higher levels of Leadership Coucil for Civil Rights (LCCR) scores than even their White Democratic counterparts. However, there is not enough variation in the LCCR measures to examine internal differences between Black representatives. Only 5 of the 36 Black candidates in the data set have LCCR scores (measured on a 100-point scale) below 90. Nonetheless, we estimated an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression using an interaction of each respondent's representative's LCCR score and whether the respondent was descriptively represented and found no evidence that Black candidates with higher LCCR scores inspired higher levels of internal or external efficacies.

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