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Americans Fill Out President Obama's Census Form: What is His Race?*

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Objective. We use nationally representative survey experiments to assess public opinion about how President Obama should have identified himself racially on the 2010 Census. *Methods.* Respondents were randomly assigned to three conditions—a control, a treatment that described the president's biracial ancestry, and a treatment that combined the biracial ancestry information with a statement that Obama had in fact classified himself as black only. All respondents were then asked how they felt Obama should have filled out his Census form. *Results.* A clear majority of Americans in all experimental conditions said that Obama should have identified himself as both black and white. *Conclusion.* There appears to be suggesting robust acceptance of official multiracial identification despite the cultural and legal legacy of the “one drop of blood” rule in official U.S. race categorization. A subsequent survey experiment found that a convenience sample of Americans support multiracial identification for mixed-race individuals generally and not only for the president.

When President Obama classified himself on the 2010 Census as “black” rather than biracial the *New York Times* proclaimed: “It’s Official: Barack Obama Is the Nation’s First Black President” (Roberts and Baker, 2010). Supporters of the president’s decision argued that it reflected Americans’ routine treatment of mixed-race people as black. An NAACP official quipped: “Put a hoodie on [Obama] and have him walk down an alley, and see how biracial he is then” (Washington, 2010). Yet Obama had also famously described himself as “the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas [with] brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles, and cousins of every race and hue.”¹ Critics of his Census choice contended that he had passed up “an opportunity to articulate a more nuanced racial vision for the increasingly diverse country he heads” (Rodriguez, 2011), or even that he had “disowned his white mother . . . and chosen to stick with older and cruder single-race classifications, a holdover from racially ugly times” (Thernstrom, 2010).

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¹For a transcript of the speech, see <http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-250_162-3947908.html>.

The Census has always been a political document. Historically, single-race categorization was used to sustain an ethnic hierarchy that kept blacks at the bottom. With the civil rights movement's successes in the 1960s things changed, and racial and ethnic categories were used to help allocate benefits to minority groups (Prewitt, 2004, 2013). The introduction of multiracial identification as an option in the 2000 Census only passed political muster with an agreement that individuals who classified themselves as black *and* another race would be counted as black for purposes of such allocations (Prewitt, 2004). More generally, official rules regarding racial categorization both reflect and shape people's racial identifications (Omi, 1997).

Given the political salience of Census categories, there is surprisingly little research on public opinion about what these should be and how people should use them. This article uses President Obama's choice to explore Americans' beliefs about how mixed-race individuals should categorize themselves, a topic no other research has explored. Does the hegemony of the "one drop of blood" rule still prevail? Or, in an era of increasingly fluid ethnic categories and rising rates of interracial marriages (Hollinger, 2006; Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch 2012), do Americans accept or even endorse multiracial identification on the Census?

For evidence, we rely on two national Internet surveys that ask Americans how President Obama should have filled out his Census form and test experimentally whether raising the accessibility of Obama's biracial parentage or informing respondents that the president in fact identified in single-race terms influences these judgments. A third survey experiment on a convenience sample examines whether the inferences drawn from the two main studies focused on Obama generalize to generic biracial individuals.

Theory and Ambiguous Predictions

Existing research furnishes no clear expectations about the aggregate level of public support for official multiracial identification. The studies most closely related to our topic paint conflicting portraits of how Americans perceive multiracial people. For example, a Pew survey (2009) results revealed that a majority of whites claimed to "mostly think" of Obama as mixed race while most blacks said they thought of him as "black only [or mostly black]."² But Ho et al.'s (2011) experiment on college students and members of the surrounding community found a bias toward categorizing images of mixed-race people as black rather than white, a finding that similar studies have subsequently corroborated (Krosch et al., 2013). Similarly, white Americans tend to express positive affect toward mixed-race people, but there is evidence of widespread

²Block (2011) uses endorsement of the statement "Barack Obama isn't White or Black; he's a little of both" as one of eight measures of "comfort" with Obama's race. The index of these measures is positively associated with intention to vote for Obama. But neither the marginals for the item nor its individual association with vote choice is reported.

discrimination against multiracial individuals by both whites and blacks (see, e.g., Campbell and Herman, 2010). More critically, how Americans believe mixed-race people *should* identify themselves and their attitudes toward the *official* categorization of mixed-race people may differ from how they habitually or routinely view mixed-race people in their daily lives.

Notwithstanding uncertainty about aggregate support for official multiracial identification or how mixed-race people should reply to the Census, some predictions regarding differences by race and racial prejudice can be ventured: (1) blacks might be more likely than whites to say that Obama should have chosen to identify as monoracially black because they believed that this is how whites actually see and treat mixed-race blacks or because they want the president to embrace and celebrate this part of his racial heritage; and (2) reflecting the centrality of the one-drop rule in American history and its purpose of elevating the status of whites, racially prejudiced whites might be expected to resist the blurring of racial boundaries and to prefer that mixed-race blacks, including President Obama, be categorized as black only.

In this regard, we should note that “modern” or “symbolic racism,” the measure of prejudice used in our survey, does not refer to the genetic inferiority of blacks that undergirded the one-drop rule (Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Sears and Henry, 2003). Still the symbolic racism construct is argued to emphasize antiblack affect, and it seems reasonable that this factor would push prejudiced whites to be less favorable to multiracial categorization, perhaps to achieve social distance from a putatively inferior group.

In testing how race and racial prejudice influence judgments about multiracial identification, it is important to account for the potentially confounding role of political information. Lower accessibility of information about Obama's family background among blacks and racially prejudiced whites, for example, rather than true differences in judgments regarding racial classification, might produce the hypothesized differences by race and level of racial prejudice without establishing that these differences actually reflect distinctive normative stances on racial classification. Differential accessibility of information about Obama's actual self-identification might also create variation in respondents' judgments if supporters aware of his choice feel pressure to conform their views to those of an admired source. Leveling the accessibility of information about Obama's biracial background and own choice of racial classification isolates variation in public opinion that is not based on differential awareness of what Obama did. Observing the extent of attitude change in this condition also helps gauge the flexibility of opinions about Obama's racial classification (Festinger, 1957; Judd and Krosnick, 1989).

We added an exploratory study to compare Americans' judgments about how the president should have categorized himself with views regarding the appropriate self-classifications of generic mixed-race individuals. One could argue for differences in judgment on two grounds. Common references to

Obama as “the first black president” might induce some Americans to categorize him as black only even if they would have identified a generic mixed-race individual as both black and white. Alternatively, the public may commonly regard mixed-race individuals as black only but feel that political leaders who represent diverse constituencies should acknowledge both sides of their racial heritage.

Research Design

Our evidence comes from two nationally representative Internet surveys, the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES; $N = 684$) administered before and after the midterm elections, and a YouGov module ($N = 1,000$) administered in July 2011. AAPOR Response Rate 3 was 42 percent for the CCES and 35 percent for the YouGov survey. With respect to race, education, age, and party affiliation, the distribution of respondents in the Internet surveys is not significantly different from those in the 2010 American National Election Study and American Community Survey (for details, see the online appendix), and no statistically significant differences on these covariates existed across experimental conditions. Since response distributions were quite similar in the two surveys across treatment conditions and most demographic and attitudinal subgroups, we present pooled results and note in the text the very few instances where results differ (for separate CCES and YouGov results, see the online appendix). We take the consistency of results across surveys taken months apart as reassurance that the relationships we identify are reasonably stable over time.

Respondents were assigned at random to three conditions. In the baseline, or control, condition, respondents were told “The 2010 U.S. Census asks people to identify their race. People can identify themselves as belonging to one racial group or to more than one racial group” and then asked “How do you think President Obama should have filled out his race on his Census form?” Response options were “He should have identified himself as only White,” “He should have identified himself as only Black,” “He should have identified himself as both Black and White,” and “Not sure.” In each of the treatment conditions, subjects were asked the same question regarding how Obama should have identified himself, after first being provided additional information. In the “family background” condition, subjects were told: “As you may know, President Barack Obama’s mother was a White woman from Kansas and his father was a Black man from Kenya. He was brought up largely in Hawaii by his White grandparents.” In the “full information” condition, subjects received this background information *and* then were told: “When President Obama filled out his census form he identified himself only as Black, rather than identifying himself as both Black and White.”

In addition to standard political attitudes questions, respondents were asked two of the strongly disagree–strongly agree questions that make up

the widely used racial resentment scale (Kinder and Sanders, 1996): (1) “The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.” (2) “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.” We rescaled the two items, correlated among whites at -0.55 in the CCES and -0.67 in the YouGov survey, to run from lowest to highest racial resentment and created an additive index centered at zero and running from negative four to positive four.³

A supplemental survey conducted between September 13 and September 27, 2012 on a sample recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, randomly assigned 2,400 subjects to four treatment conditions. All respondents were informed of the possibility of identifying as multiracial on the 2010 Census and asked the core query in the same words used in the CCES and YouGov modules. Two conditions were similar to the “family background” treatment condition described above. The first read “Please consider a person whose mother was a white woman and whose father was a black man,” and the second replaced “a person whose” with “President Obama, whose.” The other two conditions mimicked the “full information” treatments from the CCES and YouGov surveys. In one condition, in addition to the family background prime, respondents were told: “When this person filled out his Census form, he identified himself only as Black, rather than identifying as both Black and White.” A final condition replaced “this person” with “President Obama.”

As is common in research conducted using Mechanical Turk (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz, 2012), the sample is whiter (blacks and Latinos combined to only 10 percent of the sample), more Democratic and less Republican (63–19 percent), younger (mean age slightly under 30), and more educated (47 percent with a college degree) than the American public. Subgroup analyses by age, education, and party identification help ensure that the results are not an artifact of the nonrepresentative sample.

Results

Table 1 provides the distribution of responses for our full sample of CCES and YouGov survey respondents in each experimental condition. By a striking margin, in all treatment conditions Americans say that President Obama should have identified on his Census form as both black and white, rather

³These measures are not without critics, who allege, among other things, that they are conceptually too close to the policy judgments they are held to predict, judgments rooted primarily in ideology rather than pervasive antiblack sentiment (Sniderman et al., 1991; Sniderman and Carmines, 1997). In the CCES, the racial resentment questions were asked in the postelection survey. In the YouGov survey, the racial resentment questions appeared considerably after the survey experiment, and distributions of racial resentment did not differ between experimental conditions. Thus contamination is unlikely.

TABLE 1

Full Sample Results (How Do You Think Obama Should Have Filled Out His Race on His Census Form?)

Experimental Condition	Percentage of Black Only	Percentage of Both	Percentage of Not Sure	N
<i>Baseline</i> (control)	21.4	57.5	21.1	342
<i>Family background</i> (Obama's mother was a white woman from Kansas and his father was a black man from Kenya. He was brought up largely in Hawaii by his white grandparents).	13.3	64.8	21.9	649
<i>Full information</i> (family background + when President Obama filled out his Census form, he identified as black only rather than as both black and white).	21.1	53.9	25.1	626

NOTES: Due to the layered structure of the treatments, relevant comparisons are between *baseline* and *family background* and *family background* and *full information*. *Black only* and *both black and white* response proportions differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) between the *baseline* and *family background* conditions and between the *family background* and the *full information* conditions. No other differences are statistically significant. Statistical significance is based on difference of proportions tests that treat each response option as a dichotomous variable.

than as black only. In the “control” group, where people were simply asked what President Obama should have done, 21 percent of all subjects said he should have identified as black only (27 percent of those with a definite opinion), while 58 percent of all subjects said he should have identified as both black and white (73 percent of those with a definite opinion) and 21 percent said they were not sure.

There is clear evidence that the family background condition makes people more likely to opt for the *both black and white* response and that information about how Obama filled out his form had the opposite effect. However, these shifts do not alter the main finding of the dominance of the *both black and white* response. In the *family background* condition, 65 percent said Obama should have identified biracially while only 13 percent said he should have identified as belonging to a single race. And in the *full information* condition a majority (54 percent) disagreed with the president's own choice to identify as black only while 21 percent agreed with his decision. This firm statement of public preferences, and its robustness to a strong and opposite elite cue, raises questions about the one-drop rule's dominance in Americans' explicit

judgments about official racial classification and suggests widespread support for multiracial identification.

Turning to an examination of the correlates of public opinion on this topic, a series of multinomial logistic regressions displayed in Table 2 suggests, as expected, that blacks have a higher propensity than whites to say *black only*. By contrast, the positive bivariate relationship between *black-only* response rate and racial resentment is not quite robust to the full set of statistical controls. Introducing the demographic controls into the model one at a time (not shown) confirms that it is the control for education (correlated among whites at -0.31 with racial resentment) that explains away the relationship of racial resentment to *black-only* response propensity. Those with some college or a college degree endorse biracial identification considerably more often than those with a high school diploma or less. Acceptance (or awareness of society's acceptance) of multiracial identification may be less prevalent among less-educated subjects, who also tend to be higher in racial resentment. Alternatively, President Obama's biracial family background may be more accessible to respondents with more education. In either case, even among blacks and whites at the highest level of racial resentment, support for single-race identification was in the minority (31 percent among blacks, $N = 42$; 21 percent among whites scoring in the top third of the racial resentment scale, $N = 131$).

Table 2 also calls into question several seemingly straightforward predictions. Counterintuitively, given the strong and recent legacy of the one-drop rule, segregation, and antimiscegenation laws in southern states' legal codes (Murray, 1996) and higher levels of racial prejudice there (Sniderman and Carmines, 1997; Valentino and Sears, 2005), *black-only* response rates are similar among southerners and nonsoutherners.⁴ Despite young people's likely greater exposure to multiracial norms and advocacy, age is not predictive. Nor is party affiliation or ideology, seemingly refuting the notion that white Republicans would attempt to distance themselves from the president by placing him exclusively in a separate racial group.

The Accessibility of Obama's Family Background

Cuing Obama's mixed-race parentage and upbringing helps determine to what extent baseline *black-only* responses are due to genuine conviction that Obama should identify himself as black and to what extent they are a function of the low accessibility of Obama's background among some respondents. That Obama's biracial family background is evidently widely accessible to Americans even without the family background treatment limits the latitude

⁴White southerners are, however, significantly less likely to choose the *not sure* option in the model (see bottom panel of Table 2) and in a bivariate difference in proportions test (not shown).

TABLE 2
Multinomial Logit – Baseline Condition (DV = How Obama Should Have Identified)

	Full Sample 1	Full Sample 2	Full Sample 3	Whites 1	Whites 2	Whites 3
Black Versus Both Black and White						
Racial resentment	0.16** (0.07)	0.17** (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)	0.18** (0.09)	0.19* (0.10)	0.14 (0.11)
Black	1.32*** (0.45)	1.54*** (0.50)	1.40*** (0.52)			
Latino	1.22*** (0.42)	1.01** (0.45)	1.00** (0.49)			
Other race	-0.88 (0.76)	-0.74 (0.77)	-0.61 (0.78)			
Party ID		-0.04 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.11)		0.06 (0.15)	0.13 (0.15)
Ideology		0.10 (0.18)	0.08 (0.20)		-0.12 (0.24)	-0.21 (0.26)
Age			-0.01 (0.01)			-0.01 (0.01)
Female			-0.53 (0.34)			-0.27 (0.40)
South			-0.24 (0.35)			0.03 (0.42)
Some college			-1.00*** (0.38)			-1.38*** (0.51)
College degree			-1.44*** (0.46)			-1.48*** (0.51)
Constant	-1.56*** (0.23)	-1.67*** (0.25)	-0.17 (0.69)	-1.59*** (0.25)	-1.68*** (0.27)	-0.17 (0.81)

continued

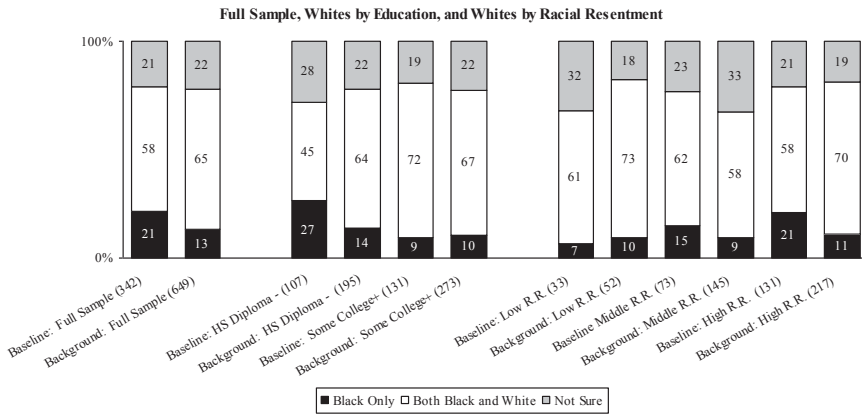
TABLE 2—continued

	Full Sample 1	Full Sample 2	Full Sample 3	Whites 1	Whites 2	Whites 3
Not Sure Versus Both Black and White						
Racial resentment	-0.10* (0.06)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.10)
Black	0.25 (0.45)	0.28 (0.55)	0.39 (0.54)			
Latino	-0.55 (0.59)	-0.36 (0.59)	-0.26 (0.63)			
Other race	-1.17 (0.76)	-14.65*** (0.30)	-15.30*** (0.36)			
Party ID		0.03 (0.12)	0.02 (0.12)		-0.04 (0.13)	-0.01 (0.13)
Ideology		-0.17 (0.21)	-0.14 (0.24)		-0.18 (0.24)	-0.24 (0.26)
Age			-0.02 (0.01)			-0.01 (0.01)
Female			-0.42 (0.31)			-0.50 (0.36)
South			-0.71* (0.38)			-1.24* (0.53)
Some college			-0.77* (0.41)			-1.15** (0.49)
College degree			-0.75* (0.42)			-0.58 (0.44)
Constant	-0.83*** (0.17)	-0.98*** (0.19)	0.59 (0.59)	-0.84*** (0.18)	-1.06*** (0.20)	0.61 (0.67)
N	346	309	309	248	226	226
Pseudo-R ²	0.05	0.07	0.11	0.02	0.03	0.10

Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

FIGURE 1

Baseline Versus Family Background Condition



NOTES: *Black only* and *both black and white* response percentages differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) between *baseline* and *family background* conditions in the full sample, among whites with a high school diploma or less, and among high racial resentment whites. *Not sure* response percentages differ significantly among low and middle racial resentment whites. Statistical significance is based on difference of proportions tests that treat each response option as a dichotomous variable.

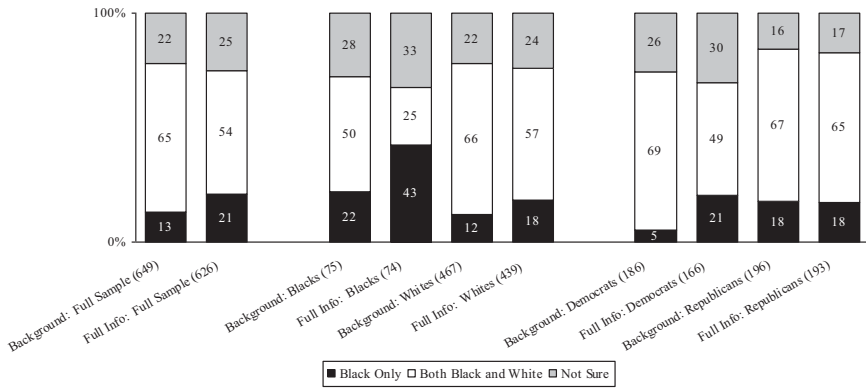
for the additional diminution of *black-only* responses. A greater potential for such change should exist among groups whose familiarity with Obama's background is initially lower.

The two leftmost bars of Figure 1 show that informing (or reminding) subjects of Obama's family background reduces the prevalence of *black-only* responses, especially among those low in education and high in racial resentment, substantially weakening those variables' predictive power. In the full sample, only slightly over 13 percent of subjects (12 percent of whites and 22 percent of blacks) reminded of President Obama's parentage and upbringing believe he should have identified as black only. Our interpretation of this effect is that, their low baseline frequency notwithstanding, many of the *black-only* responses in the control condition are soft, reflecting a casual judgment that Obama should have identified exclusively as black because he looks black to some or because he is often described as "the first black president," or even because a small number did not know of his mixed parentage, rather than a distinct belief about the applicability of the one-drop rule to the president's official racial classification.⁵

⁵In the YouGov module, 22 percent of whites receiving the maximum racial resentment score (4) in the *family background* condition chose *black only*, more than double the rate for other whites and only 4 percentage points lower than in the *baseline* condition, but this relatively high rate is not corroborated in the CCES results (10 percent).

FIGURE 2

Family Background Versus Full Information Condition



NOTES: *Black only* and *both black and white* response percentages differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) between *family background* and *full information* conditions in the full sample, among blacks and whites, and among white Democrats. *Not sure* response percentages do not differ significantly within any group. Statistical significance is based on difference of proportions tests that treat each response option as a dichotomous variable.

Effects in the Full Information Condition

Would subjects already reminded of Obama's background move their opinion toward the black-only option if they were told that this is how Obama did identify himself? Cognitive consistency theory suggests that the likelihood of attitude change will depend on how favorably a subject views Obama and how central is the subject's belief about how Obama should have filled out his Census form. The leftmost two bars of Figure 2 show that knowing Obama's identification choice decreases the *both black and white* responses by 11 percentage points relative to the family background condition, with the sharpest effects among blacks and, to a modest extent, white Democrats. Yet, biracial identification remains the majority preference. Supporters of the president who did not bring their responses into line with his action may not have considered Obama's racial identification important to them, shifted their focus to aspects of his persona or job performance they found more congenial, or rationalized his decision as driven by political calculation.

Alternate Interpretations: Accuracy Motive and Social Desirability

Our treatments help gauge whether some subjects regarded the core query as a test of knowledge about Obama's background rather than a solicitation

of their judgment concerning how he should have identified on the Census. Viewing the core question as a knowledge “quiz” might have inflated *both black and white* responses. However, it would also be curious for subjects to interpret the question as a knowledge test once they had been furnished with the exact family background knowledge we would presumably have been testing and once they knew what choice Obama had made. Thus, we are not concerned that our results are an artifact of people having simply viewed our survey as a quiz.

Cuing the president’s biracial parentage and upbringing could have contributed to perceived social desirability pressure to answer *both black and white*. Even discovering that many Americans regard as socially desirable the identification choice that the president did not make would be of interest. Yet being told that the president actually identified in single-race terms, which might be expected to establish the legitimacy of this option and free self-censoring respondents to register their true opinions, left the dominance of the biracial response option intact. We are therefore confident that our results are not strongly influenced by a social desirability response set.

Is Support for Multiracial Identification Peculiar to the Case of President Obama?

A final question is whether these results obtain beyond the case of President Obama. Given the choice, a political leader in a multiracial society might be expected to identify in the broadest terms possible, even if ordinary citizens are still expected to conform to the one-drop rule. Or media attention to Obama’s mixed-race heritage may have burnished his image as biracial, whereas the lack of such individuated knowledge about most mixed-race people may leave intact the application of the narrower monoracial rule as a classificatory norm.

The M-Turk results reported in Table 3 suggest strongly that Americans’ support for official multiracial classification is not unique to Obama. Twice as many respondents in the *family background* condition classified President Obama as black only than categorized the generic individual this way. Though there are slight subgroup variations, in no instance is support for Obama’s biracial identification more than a few percentage points higher than for the generic individual’s. Moreover, only a small number of Americans defer to individuals’ choice to identify on the Census in single-race terms, and the greater deference of Democrats to Obama’s identification than to a generic individual’s seems likely to be a product of cognitive consistency pressure.

Conclusion

Much has been written about the role of race in Barack Obama’s election and presidency (Tesler and Sears, 2010; Jackman and Vavreck, 2010). Yet,

TABLE 3
Mechanical Turk Experiment Results

	Percentage of Black Only	Percentage of Both	Percentage of Not Sure	<i>N</i>
Full sample				
Family background—generic	6.3	81.3	12.4 ^a	621
Family background—Obama	12.1 ^a	73.2 ^a	14.7 ^{ab}	638
Full information—generic	12.6 ^a	76.0 ^a	11.4 ^a	579
Full information—Obama	24.2	57.5	18.3 ^b	567
Democrats				
Family background—generic	5.9	81.5	12.6 ^a	389
Family background—Obama	13.6 ^a	72.0 ^a	14.4 ^{ab}	375
Full information—generic	12.0 ^a	76.5 ^a	11.5 ^a	366
Full information—Obama	26.1	54.9	19.0 ^b	368
Republicans				
Family background—generic	9.8 ^a	78.7 ^a	11.5 ^a	122
Family background—Obama	12.8 ^{ab}	71.4 ^{ab}	15.8 ^a	133
Full information—generic	17.0 ^{ab}	73.4 ^{ab}	9.6 ^a	94
Full information—Obama	20.2 ^b	66.7 ^b	13.1 ^a	99
HS diploma or less				
Family background—generic	4.6 ^a	75.6 ^{ab}	19.8 ^a	86
Family background—Obama	7.7 ^a	80.2 ^a	12.1 ^a	91
Full information—generic	22.6 ^b	64.5 ^{bc}	12.9 ^a	93
Full information—Obama	27.9 ^b	54.7 ^c	17.4 ^a	86

NOTES: Entries in a given column within each panel do *not* differ significantly from one another ($p < 0.5$) if they have the same superscript. Significance based on difference in proportions tests treating each response as a dichotomous variable.

little is known about how Americans categorize Obama's race or how they believe Obama should identify himself racially. More broadly, little is known of Americans' opinions about official multiracial identification. Our results provide an initial window into what future research may establish as a large-scale movement toward acceptance of official multiracial identification and a repudiation of the one-drop rule that dominated the law and social convention of race classification through much of American history.

The evidence from our surveys suggests that this emergent norm is both pervasive and quite robust. The experimental treatments showed that the accessibility of information about President Obama's background (or that of a generic mixed-race individual) did strengthen the belief that the multiracial classification was the right one, while information that the actual choice had been black softened the aggregate preference for the multiracial choice. But these effects of new information are quite modest. We must, of course, acknowledge that this study of current public opinion focuses on just one small facet of the complex connections between racial identification and politics, and our data do not speak to the important issue of how biracial individuals are routinely perceived and treated in public settings, even when their background is known.

Still, widespread willingness to regard the growing number of mixed-race people in a nuanced way that encompasses an overlap with one's own race may have implications for the future direction of identity politics and opinions in other racialized policy domains. In an electoral context, there might be a variety of potential political costs associated with a candidate's choice to identify as multiracial, but our results suggest that public rejection of this choice would not be one of them. Mixed-race politicians may come to perceive this public acceptance and more frequently embrace multiracial identities that could chip away at racial polarization.

In a recent op-ed, Thomas Chatterton Williams, himself the child of a white mother and a black father, alludes to President Obama's decision to identify as black only on the 2010 Census and asks: "If today we've become freer to concoct our own identities, to check the 'white' box or write in 'multiracial' on the form, the question then forces itself upon us: are there better or worse choices to be made?" (Williams, 2012). Our research is the first to characterize what Americans believe the answer to this question to be. The results call for more sustained analysis of the contemporary power of the one drop of blood rule that bedeviled our country through its history, as well as for further examination of the political consequences of modifying established official group categorizations in a society being transformed by intermarriage and immigration.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Appendix Table S1. Comparison of Survey Samples from Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), YouGov Study, and the American Community Survey and American National Election Study 2010.

Appendix Table S2. Comparison of Full-Sample Results from Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and YouGov Study.