Race/Ethnicity in Candidate Experiments

a Meta-Analysis and the Case for Shared Identification

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Race/Ethnicity in Candidate Experiments: a Meta-Analysis and the Case for Shared Identification

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Abstract

Does race/ethnicity affect how voters assess political candidates? To address this question, we pooled data from 43 published candidate experiments from the last 10 years with a combined N of 305,632. We distinguish three different schools of thought that authors apply: unjust stereotypes, useful stereotypes and shared identification. Voters use "unjust stereotypes" and discriminate against candidates of color or use "useful stereotypes" that inform them of the policy positions they expect candidates to defend. Scholars increasingly apply a "shared identification" perspective and study the effect of congruence between voter and candidate characteristics on assessments. The results show that voters do not assess racial/ ethnic minority candidates differently than their majority (white) counterparts. This does not hold for Asian candidates in the US: voters assess them slightly more positively than majority candidates, although this effect is small (0.76 percentage points). Shared identification matters enormously: when voters share the same race/ ethnicity as a candidate they assess them 7.9 percentage points higher than that they assess majority candidates. This effect is substantively meaningful and significant for all most researched (US-based) races/ethnicities. This indicates that the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority citizens cannot be explained by voting behavior, but possibly by supply side effects.

Keywords Voting behavior · Candidate experiments · Race/ethnicity · Political representation

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Introduction

In increasingly diverse democratic societies political candidates of color struggle with competing evaluations by voters. On the one hand they face racism, on the other hand voters increasingly value diversity (Dancygier et al. 2021; Dancygier 2017). Does race/ethnicity affect how voters assess political candidates? A meta-analysis on gender demonstrates that voters assess women candidates more positively than men candidates (Schwarz and Coppock 2022). We conduct a similar meta-analysis on race/ethnicity. Drawing on all articles published in political science journals that conduct candidate experiments we re-analyze 43 studies published between 2012 and 2022. Researchers present respondents with profiles of fictional political candidates and randomize race/ethnicity. They ask respondents about their vote choice and/or to evaluate the candidate(s). We retrieved the original datasets of 81% of the studies and recoded the results in a consistent manner, of the remaining 19% we read the results from the publications.

To understand the theoretical underpinnings of the publications in our selection, we first analyze the theoretical frameworks. We identify three dominant schools of thought: unjust stereotyping, useful stereotyping and shared identification. Some studies stress the unjust nature of stereotyping and link it to bias, discrimination and prejudice. Others emphasize the utility of stereotypes in voting, and mention cues, heuristics, low-information elections and shortcuts. Shared identification refers to the dynamics of in-group voting behavior, such as (unconscious) in-group favoritism (Hogg et al. 2012; Tajfel and Turner 1979) or the expectation that descriptive representatives better represent group interests (Cutler 2002).

The selection includes over 305,632 observations. The analyses demonstrate an overall effect of racial/ethnic minority candidates of 0.235 percentage points, this effect was not statistically significant. Meta-analyses of Black and Latinx candidates reveal similar results while the meta-analysis of Asian candidates reveals voters prefer them over white candidates (0.76 percentage points, statistically significant). Shared identification has a strong impact on voters. When voter and candidate share the same race/ethnicity, they evaluate that candidate a significant 7.9 percentage points higher. As we do not find any evidence for voter discrimination against racial/ethnic minority candidates, we explain political underrepresentation by pointing towards supply-side effects (Norris and Lovenduski, 1993).

Key references and dominant theoretical schools

What are the theoretical underpinnings of the experimental research on the effect of candidate race/ethnicity on voters? We reveal three main schools of thought in the selection: (1) 'unjust stereotypes', (2) 'useful stereotypes' and (3) 'shared

Table 1 Overview included publications

Publication	Country	Dataset	Theory	Race/ethnicity
Abrajano et al. (2018)	US	Yes	Unjust	Latinx
Aguilar et al. (2015)	Brazil	Yes	Shared	Black
Armendariz et al. (2020)	US	No	Unjust	Black, Latinx
Atkeson and Hamel (2020)	US	Yes	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Badas and Stauffer (2018)	US	Yes	Other	Black, Latinx, Asian
Banerjee et al. (2014)	India	Yes	Other	OBC, SC (refcat general)
Carlson (2015)	Uganda	Yes	Shared	Both same tribe
Cammett et al. (2021)	Lebanon	No	Shared	Co-ethnic
Carnes and Lupu (2016)	US	Yes	Unjust	Black
Carey and Lizotte (2019)	US	Yes	Unjust	Black, Latinx
Carey et al. (2020)	US	Yes	Unjust	Black, Latinx
Costa (2021)	US	Yes	Other	Black, Latinx, Asian
Dahl and Nyrup (2021)	Denmark	Yes	Useful & Unjust	Immigrant (refcat Danish)
Funck and Mccabe (2021)	US	Yes	Other	Black, Latinx, Asian
Gershon et al. (2021)	US	No	Shared	Black, Latinx
Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas (2020)	Kenya	No	Other	Luo (refcat Kikiyu)
Hainmueller et al. (2014)	US	Yes	Other	Black, Latinx, Asian, Native, Caucasian
Kim (2021)	Kenya	No	Shared	Both Kikuyu, Luhya, etc
Kao and Benstead (2021)	Jordan	Yes	Shared	Both same tribe
Kaslovsky et al. (2021)	US	Yes	Shared	Black, Latinx
Kevins (2019)	Canada	Yes	Unjust & Useful	Asian
Kirkland and Coppock (2018)	US	Yes	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Krupnikov et al. (2016)	US	Yes	Unjust	Black
Leeper and Robison (2020)	US	Yes	Other	Black, Latinx, Asian
Lemi (2020)	US	Yes	Shared	Black, Latinx, Asian
Lemi and Brown (2019)	US	Yes	Shared	Darker woman (refcat lighter)
Lerman and Sadin (2016)	US	Yes	Useful	Black
Manento and Testa (2021)	US	Yes	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Mummolo et al. (2019)	US	Yes	Other	Black, Latinx
Ono and Burden (2019)	US	Yes	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Peterson (2017)	US	Yes	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Sances (2018)	US	Yes	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Sen (2017)	US	No	Useful	Black, Latinx, Asian
Snagovsky et al. (2020)	Australia	Yes	Shared	Born outside Australia (refcat born in)
Snagovsky et al. (2020)	Australia	No	Shared	Middle Eastern, Chinese, Indian, Born
Visalvanich (2017)	US	Yes	Unjust	Black, Latinx, Asian
Weaver (2012)	US	Yes	Unjust	Black

Seventy percent of the publications are from the US. We retrieved the original datasets for 81% of the publications. We categorized twelve publications as being part of the unjust stereotypes school, twelve publications as part of the useful stereotypes school and ten as the shared identification school, some publications combine schools. See the theoretical framework for our distinction between these three schools of thought. See Online Appendix 1 for a list of all references of included publications

identification' (see Table 1). First, the 'unjust stereotypes' school underlines the negative consequences racial/ethnic minority candidates face at the ballot box, and seeks to uncover how this is fueled by racism. The authors find that racial/ethnic minority candidates are disadvantaged (Terkildsen 1993). Second, the'useful stereotypes' framework emphasizes the utility of informational short-cuts, especially when voters know little about the candidates running for office. These authors use terms such as cues, heuristics, schemata and low-information shortcuts, and posit that minority candidates experience both advantage and a disadvantage (McDermott 1998). Third, the 'shared identification' approach posits that racial/ethnic minority candidates are sometimes advantaged and sometimes disadvantaged, depending on who the respondents are and how they identify (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Table 1 provides an overview of the publications and the theoretical frameworks in the selection. Key references in the three frameworks are: (1) Terkildsen (1993), (2) McDermott (1998) and (3) Tajfel and Turner (1979). All authors depart from the vantage point that candidate race/ethnicity influences how voters evaluate political candidates, yet the execution differs across publications.

First, Terkildsen (1993) is a key reference in the 'unjust stereotyping' school. She focusses on attitudes towards hypothetical Black candidates among white respondents. She finds that the awareness of racial/ethnic cues leads to either automatic or controlled processing of prejudice. Terkildsen studies levels of self-monitoring by using skin tone to tease out whether automatic or controlled processing is taking place in the minds of respondents. The hypothesis is that dark Black skin tone triggers conscious reactions, with some people self-monitoring to provide less prejudiced answers. The bias dark Black candidates are victims of leads to a particularly 'grim' conclusion: 'White voters must be held responsible for the low levels of African American elected officials in majority white districts and at the state and national levels' (Terkildsen 1993, pp. 1048, 1050). In short, she concludes that white voters disadvantage Black political candidates in their voting behavior.

Second, McDermott (1998) is a key reference in the 'useful stereotypes' school. She shifts the focus from a 'bias against' towards a more 'content-based' view of how racial/ethnic cues serve as 'shortcuts [in] low-information elections' (p. 896). If respondents have more liberal beliefs, they will use belief-stereotypes to choose either a woman or a Black candidate in low-information settings. McDermott further suggests that we should relinquish the widespread focus on 'potential bias or racism' in favor of a focus on 'neutral stereotyping', influencing the voting behavior of both white and Black voters (p. 901). Voters' use of candidate race/ethnicity and gender does not necessarily lead to the unjust under-representation of racial/ethnic minority politicians, but informs voting behavior based on voters' political beliefs. According to this logic, using "race-belief stereotypes" (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Schneider and Bos 2011) could signal to voters that Black candidates more strongly favor universal healthcare and government interventions to reduce poverty (Sigelman et al. 1995). Such assumptions are called 'heuristics', conscious or unconscious strategies that make political decision-making easier (Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

Third, Tajfel and Turner (1979) is a key reference in the 'shared identification' school. They focus on the human inclination to strive for positive distinctiveness for the group they belong to, as theorized in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1974; Turner and Reynolds 2009). This predicts a general tendency towards in-group favoritism as a strategy towards gaining a positive self-group-image (Tajfel and Turner 1979). If individuals cannot choose which group they are a part of, as is usually the case with race/ethnicity, groups engage in collective social creativity by finding ways in which to boost their group's reputation (Haslam 2001, p. 25) and "act as a group" (Turner et al. 1987). This socially creative drive for positive distinctiveness means that voters will favor candidates with whom they share the same racial/ethnic identification. Many authors also refer to a second mechanism. Voters might also prefer their in-groups because of the assumption that descriptive representation leads to substantive representation (Pitkin 1967; Simon and Hoyt 2008; Zipp and Plutzer 1996). The supposed cognitive mechanism is that voters assume candidates share their policy preferences and issue priorities based on the candidate's race/ethnicity, which can be based on either stereotyping or projection (Lerman and Sadin 2016). As such, voters will be more inclined to favor similar candidates because voters expect them to stand up for their interests more (Cutler 2002, p. 484).

In the nineteen nineties, the 'unjust stereotypes' school was the most prominent, but has been surpassed by the 'useful stereotypes' school. Researchers increasingly borrow from a combination of different schools (Dahl and Nyrup 2021; Gershon and Lavariega Monforti 2021). The 'shared identification' school's rise is more recent, with half of the studies dating from the last three years (Kao and Benstead 2021; Lemi 2020; Snagovsky et al. 2020). Within this most recent school, many authors combine narratives underlining the mechanisms that touch upon social identity theory and heuristics/useful stereotypes.

Methods

Candidate experiments, in which researchers randomize attributes of hypothetical political candidates, are flourishing since conjoint experiments were popularized (Hainmueller et al. 2014). There were a few candidate experiments conducted in the twentieth century, though since the turn of the century it did not pick up again until 2012 (Weaver 2012). To compile the selection of this meta-analysis, we systematically searched the scholarly databases Scopus and Web of Science using the search string (conjoint OR factorial OR vignette OR vignet) AND (candidate OR politician OR office-holder) AND (political OR politics OR election) in December 2021. We complemented this search with a set of loose searches of the keywords in various databases like Google scholar and journal websites. After initial screening based on the titles and abstract, this yielded 106 unique references, which we assessed for eligibility based on the full text. Our inclusion criteria are (a) independent manipulation of race/ethnicity, (b) the dependent variable is some form of candidate evaluation, (c) citizens/voters are the target population, and (d) the study is published (e) between 2012 and 2022. Finally, 43 studies meet these criteria (see Table 1 for an overview and Online Appendix 2 for a full list of references). See

Online Appendix 1 for the Prisma flow diagram (Moher et al. 2015) of the search process.

We were able to retrieve the dataset from authors' personal websites, online appendices, Harvard Dataverse, or by contacting the authors by e-mail of three quarter of the articles. To generate comparable effect sizes, we ran linear models without any control variables or conditions that vary from study to study. When the datasets contained sufficient information, we weighted the observations and clustered the standard errors. When no dataset was available, we retrieved the results from the article, rescaling the outcomes of the least-specified OLS regression models. We ran subsequent analyses over all the results using the R-packages Robumeta (Fisher 2017) and Metafor (Viechtbauer, 2019). Because researchers draw upon different populations, we used a random effects model and a restricted maximum likelihood estimator (Quintana 2015). We present our data with forest plots including name of the study, effect size, majority politicians as the reference category and 95% confidence intervals (see replication code).

Pooling available datasets enables us to include outcomes that are not necessarily statistically significant or reported in the articles. In doing so, we go beyond what literature studies or systematic reviews can offer (Smith and Hunter 2014). We ran funnel plots and conducted ranked correlation tests (Quintana 2015), and the outcomes suggest no problems with publication bias (see Online Appendix 4). Finally, we ran diagnostic tests through Baujat plots to ascertain which studies are the most influential in the calculation of the summary estimate, (see Online Appendix 5).

Results

The unjust and useful stereotypes schools both focus on candidate characteristics from the perspective of the general or majority (white) population. The shared identification school focusses on racial/ethnic congruence, bringing in the perspective of the minority population. First, we analyze the results from the perspective of the general population, following the ideas of the unjust and useful stereotypes schools. Second, we analyze the results from the shared identification school, from the perspective of racial/ethnic subgroups.

Unjust or useful stereotypes?

Based on an N of 255,037 observations, our meta-analysis reveals that voters on average tend to assess racial/ethnic minority candidates 0.235 percentage points higher than the racial/ethnic majority reference category (i.e. white candidates in the US context), as displayed in Fig. 1. This estimate is close to zero and statistically insignificant, therefore we consider this to be a null-effect. In Figs. 2, 3 and 4 we consider whether there might be differences across race/ethnicity and focus on the three most researched racial/ethnic minority groups: Blacks, Latinx and Asians, almost all drawing on the US.

Figure 2 depicts the results of the meta-analysis with only Black candidates, based on 89,711 observations. The result is another slightly positive overall effect size (0.66 percentage points) which is not statistically significant. We also consider this a null-result. Almost all studies are sampled from US-populations, except for two that study Brazil. The study by Armendariz et al. (2020) is the largest positive effect; they study how being involved in a protest interacts with candidate race/ethnicity and find that left-leaning candidates tend to reward political candidates who were involved in (left-leaning protests). This interaction might have influenced the overall outcome, causing this study to come out as having the highest effect size (and a relatively large standard error). Overall, Black candidates receive approximately the same assessments as the reference category, white candidates.

Based on 86,740 observations, Fig. 3 shows that voters assess Latinx candidates about the same as white candidates. We find another very small, negative overall effect size (−0.17 percentage points) which does not reach statistical significance. Although some authors stress the relative disadvantages Latinx citizens and candidates face in the US context (Abrajano 2018), our analysis suggest Latinx candidates are just as (dis)advantaged at the ballot box as the white reference category.

Based on 52,968 observations, Fig. 4 shows that voters assess Asian candidates slightly more positively than white candidates. The overall effect is positive (0.76 percentage points) and statistically significant. Indeed, some authors stress the relative advantages Asian citizens and candidates have in the US, leading to Asian Americans receiving "positive racial stereotyping" (Visalvanich 2017) or being seen as an "acceptable" group (Kevins 2019, p. 7). Our results echo these findings, though the effect is substantively small.

Given the effect sizes for how the general population assesses racial/ethnic minority candidates, we conclude that the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority citizens in politics is not caused by voters first impressions of racial/ethnic minority candidates, but that the cause lies elsewhere. Since Norris and Lovenduski (1993) classic work, scholars tend to refer to demand and supply-side explanations for underrepresentation of minority groups (Azabar et al. 2020; Holman and Schneider 2018). Our meta-analysis focusses on demand-side explanations, do voters prefer certain candidates? There is no evidence that the general population prefers candidates with majority over minority races/ethnicities, we point towards the supply-side to explain the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority candidates in politics.

Supply-side explanations refer to the availability and selection of candidates, not to voter preferences, the demand-side. Indeed, many party selectors lament how hard it is to find suitable candidates who can bring more racial/ethnic diversity to their political party, although the rates at which minority and majority citizens are interested in running for office are not different (Dancygier et al. 2021). Party selectors' ideas about how white voters might react to racial/ethnic minority candidates are more likely to cause for underrepresentation, because they fear that voters have more doubts about minority candidates than their white counterparts (Dancygier et al. 2021; Doherty et al. 2019). In the gender and politics literature, this is referred to as "strategic discriminations", where people reproduce prejudice because they overestimate other people's prejudice (Bateson 2020).

Fig. 1 How do voters assess racial/ethnic minority political candidates? Voters do not assess racial/ethnic minority candidates differently than majority (white) candidates. The overall effect size is 0.00235, racial/ethnic minority candidates are not at an average significant disadvantage. We base this summary random effects estimate on 253.627 observations across 112 different studies/races/ethnicities/dependent variables in the period 2012−2022

Fig. 2 How do voters assess Black political candidates? Voters do not assess Black political candidates differently than majority (white) candidates. The overall effect size is 0.006. On average, Black candidates are not at a significant disadvantage. We base this summary random effects estimate on 89.711 observations across 39 different studies/dependent variables
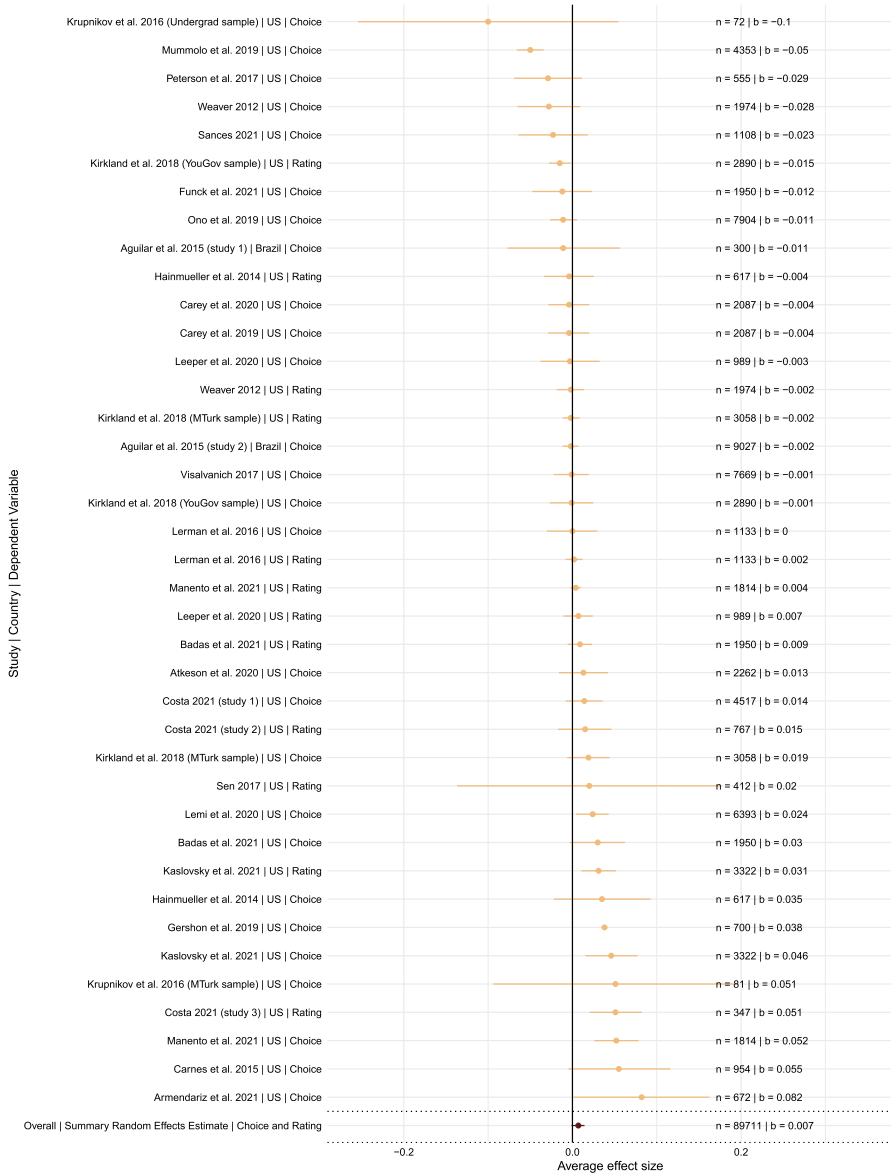
Fig. 3 How do voters assess Latinx political candidates? Voters do not assess Latinx political candidates differently than majority (white) candidates. The overall effect size is −0.002. On average, Latinx candidates are not at a significant disadvantage. We base this summary random effects estimate on 86.740 observations across 31 different studies/dependent variables
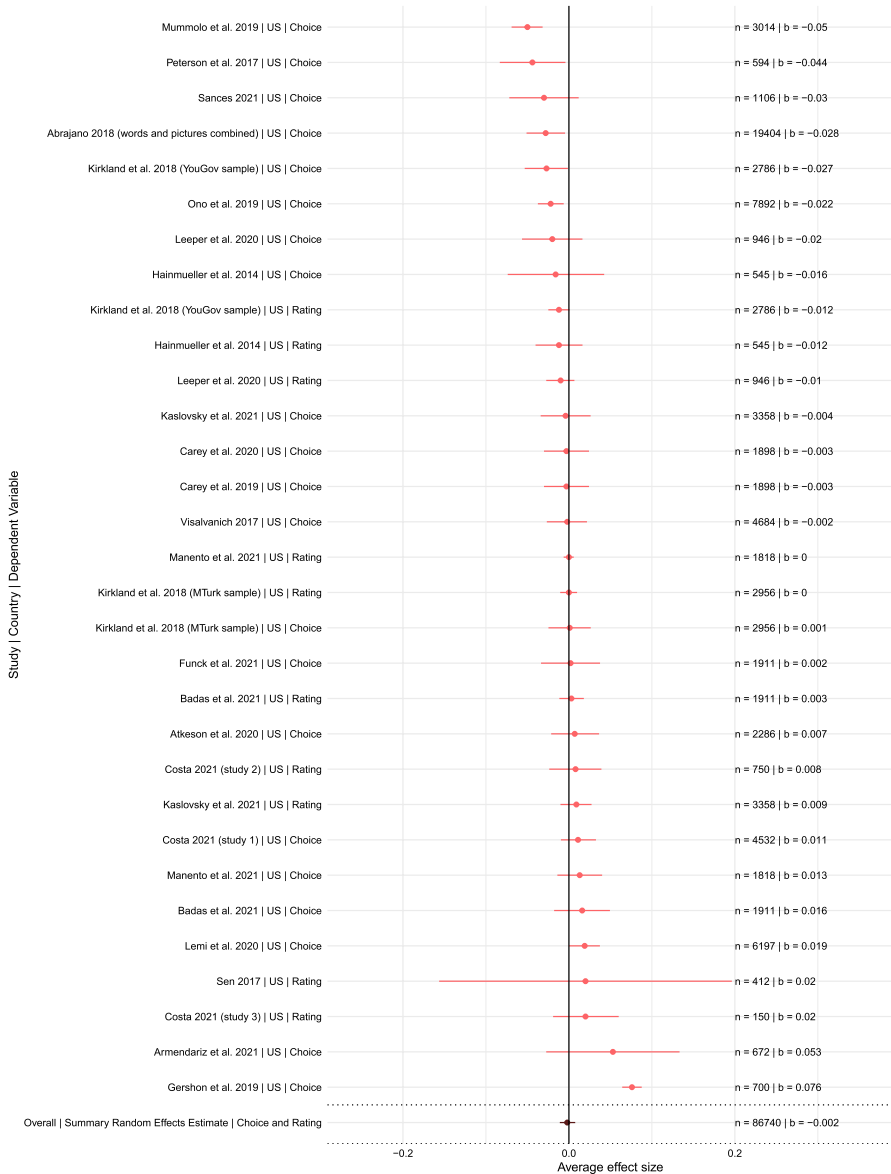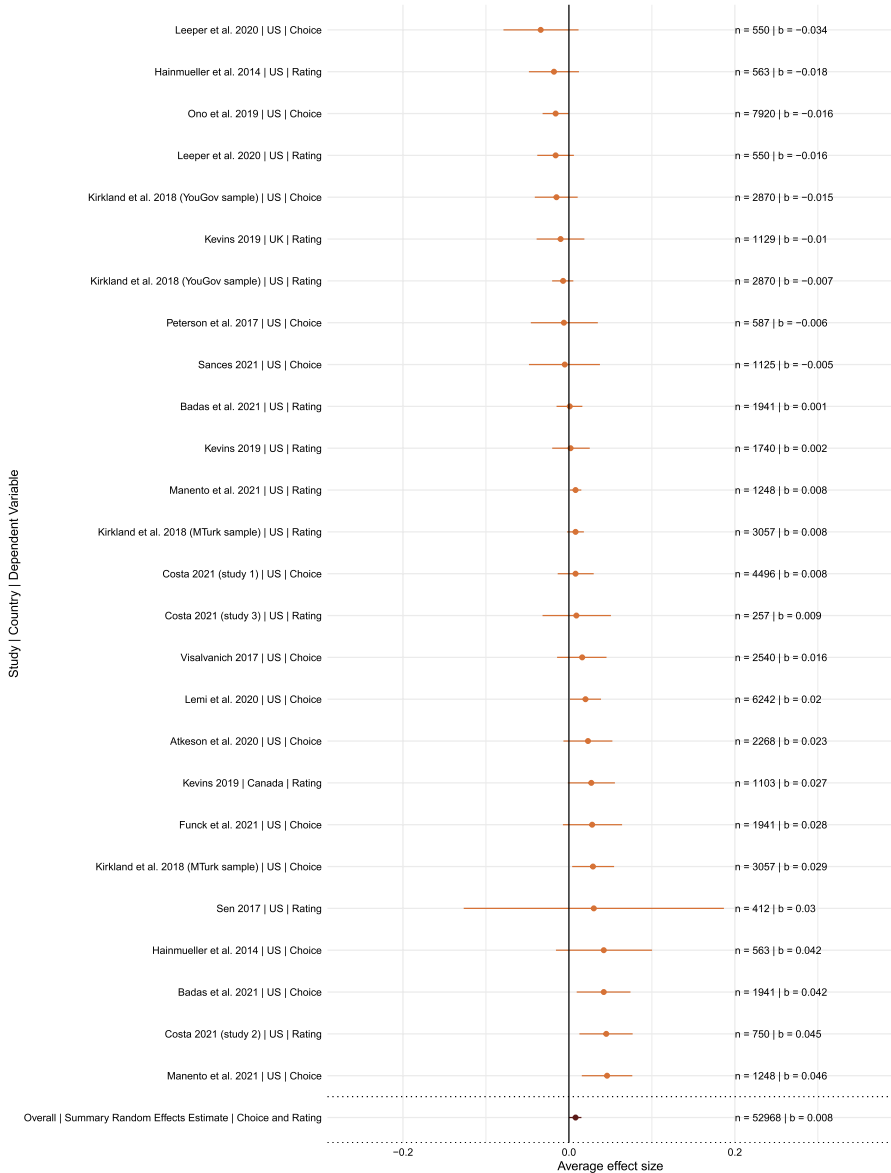
Fig. 4 How do voters assess Asian political candidates? Voters assess Asian political candidates more positively than majority (white) candidates. The overall effect size is 0.0076. On average, Asian candidates are at a significant advantage. We base this summary random effects estimate on 52.968 observations across 26 different studies/dependent variables

Do unjust or useful stereotypes matter nonetheless?

One could also argue that these null-effects are misleading, presenting an overly positive picture. We discuss three possible arguments for this: (1) intersectionality, (2) intensity of responses and (3) social desirability bias.

First, a reason why one could argue that the null-effects should not be interpreted too optimistically, could lie in the intersectional nature of political candidates who, besides an race/ethnicity also have a gender and many other attributes. Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) is an increasingly popular approach to understanding the position of minority women in politics (Ward 2016, 2017). An intersectional analysis is distinct from a unitary or multiple one (Hancock 2007). Where a unitary analysis foregrounds one background characteristic (e.g., race or gender) and a multiple analysis adds up the effects of multiple ones (e.g., race and gender), an intersectional analysis highlights the interaction between them (e.g., race interacts with gender) (idem). To quantitatively study the intersectional position of minority women in politics, many scholars call the use of interaction effects and candidate experiments viable yet "underutilized" methodological solutions (Klar and Schmitt 2021, pp. 493, 495). However, Schwarz and Coppock (2022) have conducted a meta-analysis of all candidate experiments in which researchers both randomize race/ethnicity and gender and conclude that voters assess white women candidates more positively than Black women candidates, although the difference between the two is not statistically significant. They conclude that evidence for intersectional effects is "modest" (Schwarz and Coppock 2022, p. 9).

Although Schwarz and Coppock (2022) point towards modest support for a "double disadvantage" for Black woman candidates, some researchers also points to a "strategic advantage" for women of color (Gershon and Lavariega Monforti 2021), often dependent on the political context (Hughes, 2013, 2016; Kao and Benstead 2021). Double disadvantage posits that the disadvantages political candidates face are more than a sum of their subordinate group memberships. Strategic advantage means that multiple disadvantaged background characteristics could amount to *less* disadvantage than a sum of its parts. In other words, belonging to more than one disadvantaged group cancels out part of the negative effect of the disadvantaged categories. One could argue that the average null-effects might obscure intersectional effects, where one subgroup of Black candidates does face bias, while another does not. This is an important avenue for future research, especially since these dynamics could obscure the outcomes of this meta-analysis, as many studies randomize both gender and race/ethnicity at the same time.

Second, researchers are becoming aware of how the intensity with which voters respond to candidate race/ethnicity drives results in conjoint experiments (see Abramson et al. 2019). It is, therefore, important to understand results as averages, without being able to infer preferences of the majority of the population or indeed every part of the population. Abramson et al. (2019) point out that null-effects can coexist with racist responses. Additionally, negative responses can average-out to null-effects when accompanied by some highly positive results. One could

argue that this might be the case in these studies. As we will point out in the next section, sharing the same race/ethnicity causes more positive assessments. That means that the white population might be more negative than the general population (see Figs. 1–4). In the articles of which we have data on which respondents are white we can disentangle whether white respondents produce more negative effect sizes. Online Appendix 6 demonstrates that this is not the case; white subsets do not produce more negative responses than the general population. It could still be the case, however, that some respondents respond more intensely, but this does not apply to white respondents on average.

A third possible reason the null-effects could be misleading is that voters are more racist in their preferences than these results suggest, but that the effect sizes are toned down because of social desirability bias. When voters feel that their answers might be socially undesirable, Krupnikov et al. (2016) find that social desirability bias is mitigated if the design provides participants the option to explain their answers. In the condition where respondents were allowed to explain their answers, the negative bias towards Black candidates was much stronger (idem). This suggests that other studies which do not include the option to explain oneself, might underestimate the effect of racism against racial/ethnic minority political candidates. At the same time randomizing multiple attributes can could already mitigate social desirability bias. Petsko et al. (2022) find that respondents of conjoint experiments tend to single out one attribute they find very important, instead of letting all attributes weigh together evenly. Each extra attribute serves as a potential explanation a respondent can hide behind while the respondent is focusing on one specific attribute (idem). Shockley and Gengler (2020) finds clear evidence that conjoint experiments indeed garner less socially desirable results that simple survey questions. She asks whether respondents prefer candidates from a certain group and finds null-effects, while the outcomes of the conjoint reveal they do favor one group over the other (idem).

Moreover, social desirability bias only is an explanation for outcomes in the unjust stereotypes school of thought, not if you understand stereotypes to be a useful heuristic to base voting decisions on. Voters may very well prefer white over Black candidates because they expect the Black candidate to stand for policies they disagree with, such as universal healthcare or taxing the rich (Crowder-Meyer et al. 2018). In Europe, racial/ethnic minority citizens are most likely to vote and run for traditional left-wing parties (Aktürk and Katliarou, 2021, p. 391). Voters therefore might expect more left-leaning policy positions from racial/ethnic minority candidates than their majority counterparts.

It is difficult to disentangle whether voters prefer certain candidates because of their preferences (unjust stereotypes) or because of the policy they are deducing from their race/ethnicity (useful stereotypes). It would require especially tailored conjoints in which researchers explicitly ask the policy positions a voters expects a candidate to stand for (Arnesen et al. 2019). Whatever the mechanism, we conclude that, on average, the general voting population does not discriminate against racial/ethnic minority political candidates.

Shared identification?

The shared identification school studies whether minority voters prefer candidates of their racial/ethnic in-group. Figure 5 summarizes the results of all studies that include information (in their datasets) on respondent racial/ethnic characteristics. Across all minority races/ethnicities and based on more than 47,485 observations, we find an overall effect size of 7.9 percentage points, which is statistically significant and substantively meaningful. In fact, none of the studies reveal a statistically significant negative effect when respondents and candidates share the same race/ethnicity, whereas many report statistically significant positive effects. This means that racial/ethnic minority voters assess racial/ethnically congruent politicians 7.9 percentage points higher than they assess the reference category, majority politicians. In Online Appendix 7 we take the effects of race/ethnicity in a politician and compare the racially/ethnically minority congruent respondents with majority respondents and meta-analyze the difference-in-differences. This separate meta-analysis reveals an effect of 10 percentage points, even higher than the effect in Fig. 4, making the case for shared identification even more strongly. Not only do minority respondents assess congruent political candidates more positively than they assess majority candidates, they also assess them more positively than majority respondents do.

In Fig. 6 we report the summary random effects estimates of each most randomized race/ethnicity separately and find that although both being Black garners higher effect sizes than both being Latinx, none of the summary estimates differ significantly from each other.

While the majority of the studies from the unjust and useful schools draw samples from US-populations, researchers apply a shared identification perspective to a wider range of contexts. This includes Brazil, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon and Uganda. Only recently, scholars apply the shared identification framework to the US (e.g. Lemi and Brown 2019). For instance, Aguilar et al. (2015) study the effect of ballot length on Brazilian voters who share racial/ethnic characteristics with candidates up for election. When respondents evaluate a short ballot, with three candidates only, 'white' and 'brown' respondents do not necessarily favor racial/ethnically congruent candidates whereas 'Black' respondents do. As the ballot length increases, all groups tend to favor racial/ethnically congruent candidates. Kao and Benstead (2021) study the conditions under which voters prefer women candidates in Jordan. They find that, overall, women are disadvantaged at the ballot box. However, sharing the same ethnicity with a candidate closes the gender gap completely. This means that (mostly male) respondents who will otherwise not choose a woman candidate will do so if they share the same ethnic identification. The authors call this surprising in light of the patriarchal inclinations of tribalist societies and point to the importance of an intersectional understanding of the dynamics of voting behavior (pp. 31–32).

Non-experimental research echoes the findings in this meta-analysis. English et al. (2018), use surveys to study attitudes towards Members of Congress and other representative bodies in the United States and find clear shared racial/ethnic identification effects as well. Indeed, Blacks commonly understood to 'vote as a bloc' (Tate 2003, p. 64). This is not a new finding; nor is it confined to voting behavior as it influences attitude formation as well (Mansbridge and Tate 1992).
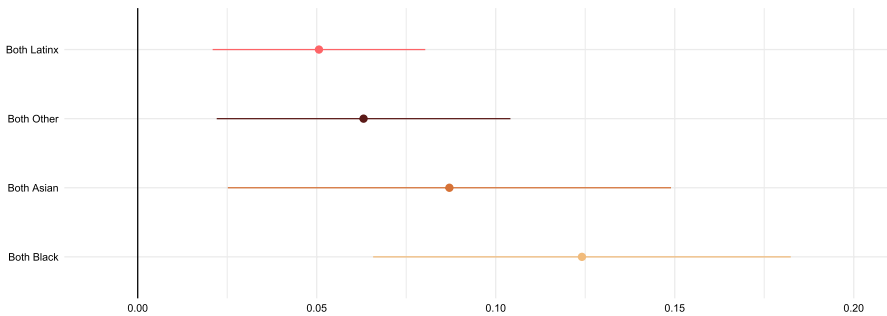
Fig. 5 Shared identification: Do racial/ethnic minority voters prefer political candidates of the same racial/ethnic minority group? Racial/ethnic minority voters tend to prefer candidates of the same racial/ethnic minority group 7,9 percentage points more than they prefer racial/ethnic majority candidates. We base this summary random effects estimate on subset analyses 52.005 observations across 31 different studies/values/dependent variables
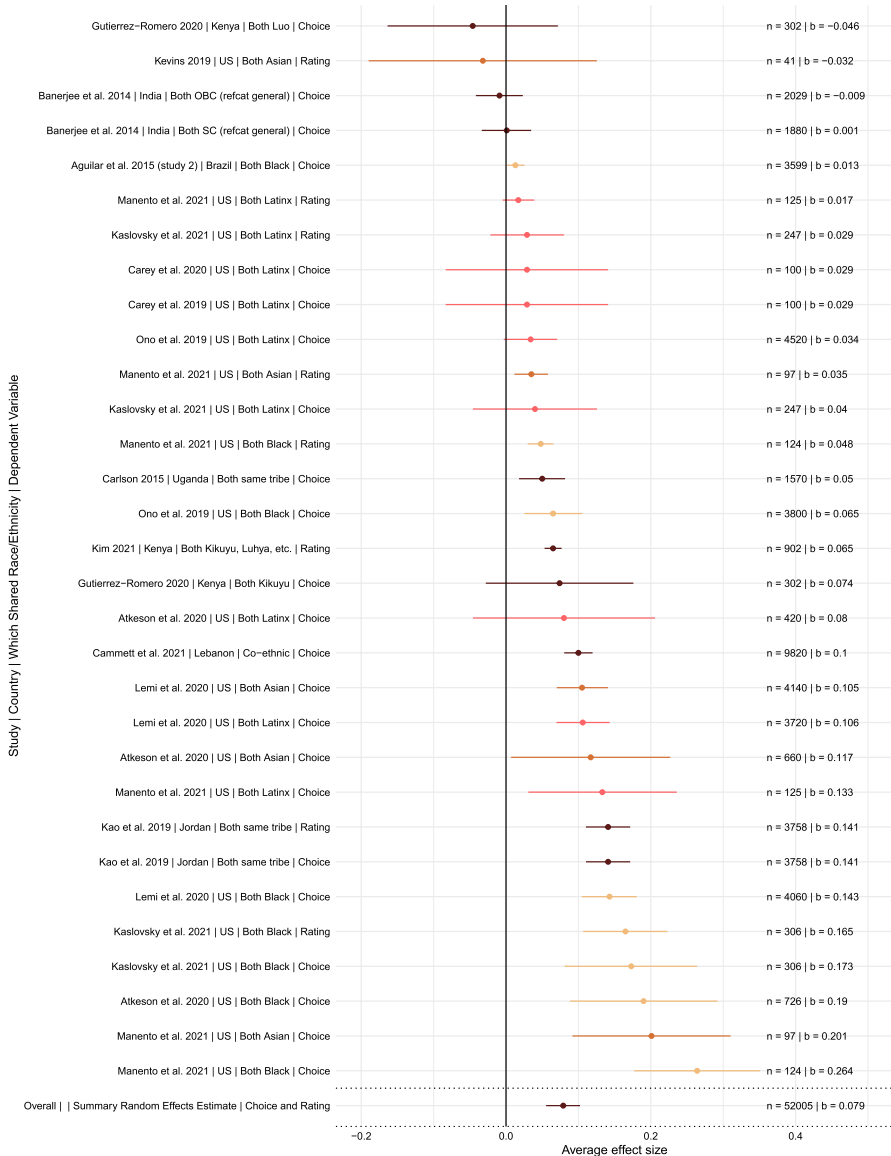
We find that comparisons between experimental and non-experimental data point to shared racial/ethnic identification in a similar fashion (Philpot and Walton 2007; Stout and Le 2017). The chance of descriptive representation increases the turnout

Fig. 6 Do voters prefer political candidates of the same racial/ethnic minority group? Overview of the results of four meta−analyses using random effects estimates showing that all four categories do not differ from each other significantly

rates of 'co-ethnics' (Miller and Chaturvedi 2018) and 'Blacks' (Whitby 2007) alike. Shared racial/ethnic identification matters in both experimental and non-experimental settings and drives voters' choices in numerous ways.

Studying shared identification in candidate experiments is a relatively new development in the US-literature. Whereas researchers used to study voter evaluations of candidates from the perspective of the general population, researchers increasingly study racial/ethnic subgroup assessments of descriptive candidates. In the past there might have been a streetlight effect: researchers are more prone to shine their light on questions that are relatively easy to answer with existing data, while questions that require greater data-gathering effort remain in the dark despite scientific and societal relevance. More recently, researchers have been going the extra mile to oversample racial/ethnic subgroups or to increase sample sizes and sampling methods are changing rapidly (Cassese et al. 2013; Coppock and Green 2015; Coppock and McClellan 2018; Peyton et al. 2021). Earlier experiments in the social sciences were almost all conducted amongst students. These samples comprised less racial/ethnic diversity than the general population. Currently, researchers use online survey agencies such as Lucid, MTurk, TESS and YouGov. Despite some pitfalls in sampling methods, the advantage is that they are more diverse than student samples (Cheung et al. 2017, p. 349). This diversity is vital to avoid external validity problems. Due to high internal validity in experimental designs, it can be tempting to prefer this over external validity. But even when causal claims can be made, it does not mean that the particular causal path holds across groups. Until recently, many social science experiments were done on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (i.e. WEIRD) samples, which distorts outcomes.

Conclusion

In this meta-analysis, we re-analyzed all studies published between 2012 and 2022 that conduct candidate experiments in which researchers randomized candidate race/ethnicity and asked respondents to choose or rate political candidates. The results show no significantly negative effects of candidate race/ethnicity on

assessments. This indicates that, on average, the political underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority citizens is unlikely to be caused by voters. Additional literature on political representation points to supply-side explanations: there is demand among voters, but there are not enough available candidates. Recently, researchers apply a shared identification framework to candidate experiments. The data shows that sharing the same race/ethnicity has a statistically significant positive effect of 7.9 percentage points. This statistically significant positive effect is consistent across all most researched racial/ethnic groups. Racial/ethnic minority candidates might have more electoral advantages than disadvantages, especially in diverse electoral districts. On average, the general population is not necessarily opposed and voters who share the same race/ethnicity tend to prefer them, therefore party selectors need not fear electoral pushback as much as they do. However, these generally positive results for the electoral viability of racial/ethnic minority candidates can coexist with a small minority of voters being more intensely racist in their assessments (Abramson et al. 2019). Meanwhile this small racist minority might still be able to hurt real-life candidates disproportionately through hate-speech or negative campaigning, posing disadvantages that obliterate the advantages gained through shared identification. Researchers departing from the unjust stereotypes school, should focus on the effects of a small minority of racist voters who might prevent equal representation through hate-speech and abuse targeted at racial/ethnic minority candidates.

Researchers departing from the unjust stereotypes school could also benefit from an intersectional perspective in which both double disadvantage and strategic advantage are possibilities (Gershon and Lavariega Monforti 2021). In some contexts racial/ethnic minority women in politics have an advantage (Hughes 2013, 2016) and in some a disadvantage (Schwarz and Coppock 2022, p. 9). Context is a crucial for an intersectional analysis (Anthias 2008). For this reason, researchers need to move beyond the US experience. Understanding when multiple subordinate categories are an advantage will increase the understanding of mechanisms that drive unjust (intersectional) stereotypes. Disentangling when voters use useful and when they use unjust stereotypes requires new survey questions that pose questions about voters expectations and attitudes (see van Oosten 2022). Few researchers have attempted to scrutinize the influence expectations have on evaluations (except Arnesen et al. 2019; Lerman and Sadin 2016), yet this is crucial to advance the useful stereotypes school.

The relatively new shared identification school offers fruitful avenues for future research, avenues that the unjust and useful schools can benefit from as well. Knowing one's respondent is central to interpreting the data derived from candidate experiments. The study of shared identification improves the understanding of the outcomes of candidate experiments. Not all group memberships are equally salient and not all individuals identify with 'their' group to the same extent (de Jong and Duyvendak 2021). When scholarship includes racial/ethnic group-membership, this can improve understanding questions on the unjust nature of candidate assessments (de Jong and Mügge 2022). This approach should incorporate not only top-down identities as ascribed by others, but also bottom-up processes of identification (de Jong and Duyvendak 2021). Moreover, group membership varies

across national contexts, possibly garnering completely different results (de Jong and Mügge 2022). By always keeping in mind the question whether voters prefer their in-groups because of a simple preference or the expectation of substantive representation would advance the unjust and useful stereotype schools as well.

The shared identification school offers a new dimension to study whether biases are unjust or useful because centralizing the respondent is imperative to interpreting these mechanisms. Is it unjust to prefer your in-group if your in-group has been historically marginalized and underrepresented in politics? Do in-groups use the same heuristics to choose candidates as out-groups do? Do voters project their own opinion onto in-group candidates or do they stereotype in-groups all the same as out-groups might do? No matter what the political and social context is, we need to recognize that today's candidates are tomorrow's representatives. Awareness of how voters choose candidates is indispensable as it influences who gains political power and who does not and tells us how our representative democracy is functioning.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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