

The Effect of Media Bias and Race on Public Opinion of Black Violence

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Objective

In today's societal consciousness, the Black American is widely perceived as being more likely to commit crimes than their White American counterparts. However, this fear is misplaced when looking at data and factors affecting criminal reporting.

Studies on American news consistently find that Black criminal suspects are frequently portrayed in a more menacing, violent light than White suspects on news stories on violent crime.



In this study I seek to:

A) Draw a link between the belief that Black Americans are violent-prone to news and race

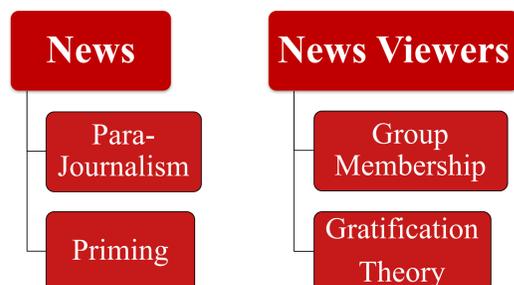
B) Explain why these relationships exist, faulting both news media bias and the incentives news viewers gain by viewing biased news

Literature

The Characterization of Blacks as Violent

- Racial prejudice among Whites encouraged by news (Dana Mastro et al. 2009)
- News can preserve or transform cultural values (Robert Entman, 1992)
- Changing skin color from white to black leads to criminal identification (Peffley et al. 1996)
- Whites' misidentification of violent and nonviolent criminal suspects (Mary Oliver et al. 2002)

Theory



Theory Continued

The causal explanation for the link between violent perception bias of Blacks is a two-way street between news and viewers.

News

- Para-Journalism Theory: News reporting that strongly reflects the point of view of the writer or editor or that uses techniques not practiced conventionally
- Priming Theory: Media images stimulate related thoughts in the minds of audience members, and the more coverage an issue receives, the more of an impact it has on public opinion

Viewers

- Group Membership Theory: Identification to a group of people bound together by common social standards, interests or characteristics
- Gratification Theory: People actively seek out specific media to satisfy a need to see their group in a reinforcing light

Hypotheses

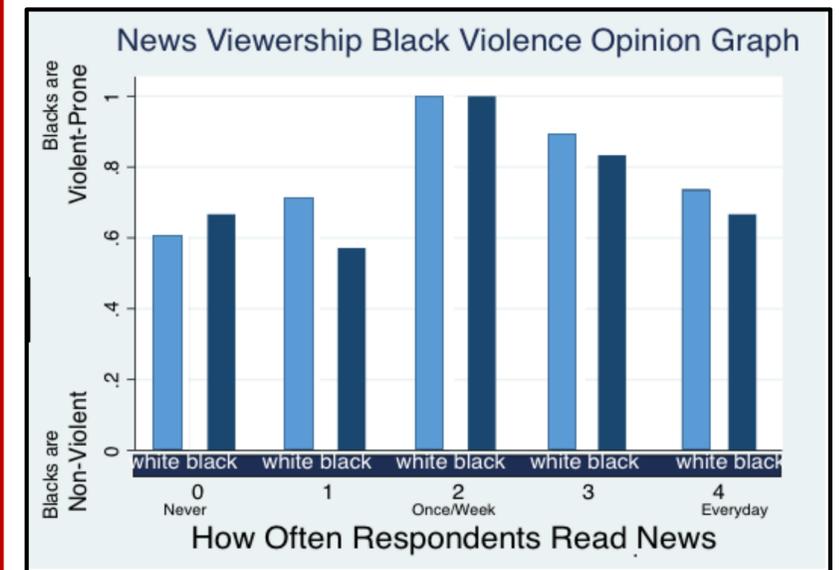
Race and news subscription both affect perception of Blacks as violent-prone. News consumption frequency and being a White viewer will have a positive effect on whether a respondent answers Blacks are violent-prone. Thus, White respondents who consume news everyday will have the highest violent-prone response on average.

Research Design

Experiment

- Dependent Variable:
 - News viewers' perception of Blacks as either being non-violent or violent-prone
 - Dummy variable: Non-violent
- Independent Variables:
 - Race of Viewer/Respondent
 - Dummy variable: White respondents
 - Viewership/Consumption Frequency
 - Range: Never, less than once a week, once a week, more than once a week & everyday

Results



The overall result confirmed both causal effect of race and news viewing frequency with opinions on Black violence. However, the result failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Responders Opinions	Non-Violent	Violent-Prone
White	22%	78%
Black	18%	72%

- Even though the effects of both causal variables are present, they were not highly impactful
- Only 13% of all respondents answered whether they thought Blacks are violent-prone

Conclusion

- Intentional bias of news
- Culpability of news consumers
- Group identification
 - Racial/Ethnic
- Black violence opinion extends well beyond White community
- Retrieving authentic results for difficult opinion questions requires additional indicative questioning



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