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The cost of racial animus on a black candidate: Evidence using google search data

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# THE COST OF RACIAL ANIMUS ON A BLACK CANDIDATE: EVIDENCE USING GOOGLE SEARCH DATA

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## Abstract

How can we know how much racial animus costs a black presidential candidate, if many people lie to surveys? I suggest a new proxy for an area's racial animus from a non-survey source: the percent of Google search queries that include racially charged language. I compare the proxy to Barack Obama's vote shares, controlling for the vote share of the previous Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry. An area's racially charged search rate is a robust negative predictor of Obama's vote share. Continuing racial animus in the United States appears to have cost Obama roughly four percentage points of the national popular vote in both 2008 and 2012. The estimates using Google search data are 1.5 to 3 times larger than survey-based estimates.

*Keywords:* Discrimination, Voting, Google

*First Version:* November 2011

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