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An AP poll on election week eve sent up red flags on the Presidential election. The poll found that more Americans expressed anti-black attitudes as well as anti-Hispanic bias than four years ago. Certainly few blacks and Hispanics, and many whites, have any illusions that racism has somehow been magically banished from American life or politics. The relentless battering of Obama and at times First Lady Michelle Obama with nooses, watermelons, and witch doctor depictions, and the obsessive borderline racial digs, hits, and rants against Obama by rightwing bloggers, websites, and talk show hosts is blatant proof of that.

But many assumed this was just the dying gasps of a narrow band of unreconstructed bigots, or simply below the belt political jabs at the president. During the GOP presidential primary campaign GOP presidential candidates reinforced the subtle racial jabs with the stream of race-tinged references that Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, and Romney made to food stamps, welfare, work ethics, and an entitlement society. Then there were the racially-loaded newsletters from Ron Paul that resurfaced. The racial inferences didn't stop there. Romney surrogate, former New Hampshire senator John Sununu touched off a brief flap when he lambasted Colin Powell for endorsing Obama claiming that Powell's endorsement was based on race. He walked it back, but Powell's former aide Lawrence Wilkerson took his own shot at the GOP and lambasted it as a party full of racists.

It's easy to finger point the GOP for racism, but the AP survey flew heard in the face of the notion that racism is the exclusive province of conservative Republicans. Racial bigotry cut across party lines with nearly as many Democrats and Independents as Republicans expressing prejudice against blacks. Obama struggled in the 2008 Democratic primaries among many white Democrats. They simply refused to back him, they preferred rival Hillary Clinton, and in exit polls and surveys made it clear that they would not vote for not because of his views or political disagreement, but solely because he was black. Their racial animus toward him didn't completely melt away with his solid election victory. During primary elections earlier this

year a significant number of white Democrats in some states notably West Virginia and Ohio still said they could not bring themselves to punch the ticket for Obama. They were blunt about why and said race was the reason, the only reason. Overall, Obama garnered slightly more than 40 percent of the white male vote. Among Southern and Heartland America white male voters, Obama made almost no impact. In South Carolina and other Deep South states the vote was even more lopsided among white voters against Obama. The only thing that made Obama's showing respectable in those states was the record turnout and percentage of black and Hispanic votes that he got.

The second racial red flag reconfirmed what other surveys found after the 2008 victory. A Harvard post-election assessment of the 2008 presidential vote and other surveys reconfirmed that race was not totally absent from the general election vote. That overt racist sentiment cost Obama an added five percent of the national popular vote. This was partly offset by the estimated two percent of the vote that Obama got due to pro-black sentiment, from the record turnout of blacks and Hispanics, and a large segment of whites. The net loss due to race then was two percent. This translated out into thousands of votes that were lost to him. But in 2008 that didn't much matter. The voter discontent over GOP corruption, scandals, and bungling, Bush administration fumbles, the economic meltdown, and a ridiculously weak GOP challenger and running mate, made the racial vote shortfall to Obama little more than a passing election footnote. This time it could be different. If even a small fraction of white Democrats don't punch the tab for Obama because of racial bias in the six or seven of the closely contested must win battleground states it could be catastrophic.

Obama campaign strategists recognize this possibility. As partial insurance, they've revved up their efforts to a fever pitch imploring black and Hispanic voters to swell the polls on Election Day as they did in 2008. This is open recognition that this election is not solely about percentages. It's about numbers, and the election hangs precariously on the thread of those numbers.

The AP survey, and other similar polls and surveys on racial attitudes, exploded the illusion that Obama's election permanently ushered in a post racial America. This alone should not send up red flags, since it was always the height of naiveté or wishful thinking or both to hope that Obama's election alone could erase centuries of racial bigotry. But the possibility that racial bias hidden or overt might have some influence on this presidential election should send those red flags fluttering.

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