

# Opinion: Racial attitudes divide political parties

By Sean McElwee, Al Jazeera America

Barack Obama's presidency has been marked by heated debates about the Republican Party's racial attitudes. Many liberals have noted the dog whistles – subtle cues that play on stereotypes and may trigger taboo sentiments – employed in Republican attacks on the president. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, for instance, famously called Obama a “food stamp president,” former Sen. Rick Santorum accused him of giving welfare to “blah people,” and many conservatives have claimed Obama couldn't have been born in the United States.

For the most part, the public abhors and condemns such blatant racism. But recent data on public sentiments suggest that many Americans hold beliefs affirming subtler, structural racism and that the popularity of these beliefs divides sharply along party and political lines.

I began my examination of whether there is a partisan divide on racial issues with the American National Election Studies 2012 survey. The first set of questions I examined measures racial stereotyping, asking respondents whether they believe that black people are “hard-working” or “lazy,” “intelligent” or “unintelligent” and whether they have “too much influence” or “too little influence” in politics – in other words, questions measuring explicitly racist attitudes.

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