"I Voted!": Exploring the Roots of Over-Reported Voter Turnout

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November, 2025

Abstract

When taking a survey, Americans often claim to have voted despite not actually doing so. Researchers have typically attributed this phenomenon to social desirability bias, often linked to higher education and greater awareness of the importance of voting, but some also suggest it may result from misremembering or simply be an artifact of the questionnaire. However, most studies ignore other demographic variables and rarely examine how their interactions affect misreporting. I argue that more educated Black and Latino people undergo a dual socialization process as a result of their intersectional identities, leading to compounded social pressures, thus making them more likely to misreport their voting behavior compared to white and Asian respondents. To test this, I leverage the validated voter data in the Cooperative Election Study (CES), using the cumulative file covering presidential elections from 2008 to 2020, to examine sensitivity to norms in different racial groups across various education levels. I find that education does not have a unique, statistically significant effect on misreporting among Black and Latino populations, although I argue that this is a result of data limitations and not a flaw in the theory. The findings indicate that drawing results about different identities' impact on misreporting from self-administered surveys may obscure the social pressures in misreporting, especially when such pressures are not directly present or activated.

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The validity of self-reported voting is often questioned, as it is common for people to misreport their voting behavior (Clausen, 1968; Traugott & Katosh, 1979). Along with distorting the validity of self-reported turnout, misreporting also affects political participation and other political behavior measures. Understanding who misreports and why is crucial to interpreting turnout data, constructing theories around political participation, and informing survey design.

Currently, scholars explain the misreporting gap by arguing that it is a product of social desirability bias, where individuals lie about voting to appear more socially desirable. Under this theoretical framework, scholarly literature has largely concluded that more educated people misreport at higher rates to conform to the social norm of voting. However, attempts to apply this sociological explanation to several demographic groups, including varying levels of education, different racial groups, age, and gender, have produced conflicting and inconsistent results. Moreover, very little attention is paid to intersectional identities and their influence on misreporting, as scholars currently treat them as isolated variables. By solely focusing on education, researchers largely ignore the amplifying effects unique to racialized groups, which may mediate the relationship between education and misreporting.

I argue that the effects of education on misreporting are not uniform across all racial groups. By reframing education as a proxy for a person's sensitivity to a norm, I shift the approach away from education as a standalone explanatory variable and toward an increasingly nuanced understanding of how social pressures work. By doing this, the focus is no longer on who is a misreporter, but on what conditions misreporters exist under that influence their decision-making. By drawing from theories of group consciousness and norm sensitivity, it becomes clear that social pressures do not exist in isolation from one another. Rather, social pressures are often additive, compounding on each other. In misreporting, it is clear that people with more education are more likely to misreport. Because they are more aware of the salience of voting, they are more likely to lie to conform to the norm. Moreover, although not at the core of the literature, broader REP work indicates that social constraints experienced across racial groups

also influence political behavior, such as voting. People with high racialized group consciousness and linked fate are more likely to participate politically to move their group forward. Therefore, a Black or Latino person may be more likely to misreport because they feel more pressured to conform to the norm of racial uplift through political participation. Because of this dynamic understanding of social pressures, I expect highly educated Black and Latino people to misreport at a higher rate than their equally educated white and Asian peers.

To test my theory, I leverage the voter-validated data in the Cooperative Election Study to test misreporting behaviors across racial and educational groups. I specifically focus on the interaction of race and education to isolate differential effects of social pressure. I find that while education is a significant predictor of misreporting for whites, the same is not true for Black and Latino people, who misreport at slightly lower and higher rates than whites, although insignificantly.

Although it may seem as though the data disproves the theory, I argue that this is not necessarily a flaw of the theory, but rather a limitation of the data. Self-administered surveys, such as the CES, lack an interpersonal component, which may explain the lack of significant results. These findings also suggest that the field must take a theoretically driven approach to gain insight into social pressures and how they affect misreporting behavior.

Literature Review

Understanding why people vote is foundational to comprehending why they might misreport their voting behavior, as perceptions of civic duty, social expectations, and identity influence both actions.

Although the costs of voting usually outweighs the potential benefits, people continue to vote, highlighting a gap in understanding the rationale behind voting. The calculus of voting and minimax regret theory offer frameworks for explaining this seemingly irrational behavior. The calculus for voting theory proposes a rational choice framework in which individuals weigh the benefits of voting (e.g. satisfaction of compliance with the ethics of voting, affirming allegiance to the political system, affirming a partisan preference, etc.) against the costs of voting (e.g. time

and money) to decide whether or not to vote (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). Minimax regret theory, on the other hand, posits that people vote to minimize the likelihood of an undesirable outcome (Blais et al., 1995; Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974).

However, while these theories highlight individual cost-benefit analysis, they regularly ignore the normative and reputational social pressures that influence self-reported voting behavior. The theories' emphasis on demonstrating civic engagement and weighing potential regrets demonstrates that voting has substantial social implications, possibly explaining why people would misreport their voting behavior.

This sociological and psychological trend is known as social desirability bias, or the tendency of people to claim to comply with socially desirable traits and deny undesirable ones, to appear to adhere to social norms (Grimm, 2010; Nederhof, 1985). Social desirability bias has long plagued social science research, significantly affecting the validity of survey results (Fisher & Katz, 2000; King & Bruner, 2000; Klassen et al., 1975; Krumpal, 2013). Various scholars have used social desirability bias to explain why people lie about their voting behavior. Since voting is viewed as valued civic behavior (Holbrook et al., 2003), individuals lie about voting because they are too embarrassed to admit that they engaged in the undesirable act of not voting (Belli et al., 2001; Corbett, 1991; Górecki, 2011; Holbrook & Krosnick, 2010). Social pressure, such as being aware that someone's neighbors know whether they voted, can dramatically increase actual turnout, not just self-reported turnout, suggesting that voting behavior is strongly influenced by social norms (Gerber et al., 2008)

Although social desirability bias provides a vital theoretical framework to help comprehend why people lie about voting, understanding the extent and patterns of this phenomenon requires scrutinizing empirical data on overreporting in surveys. Numerous studies have discovered various amounts of overreporting across surveys commonly used to investigate political behavior. For example, the National Election Study has been shown to overreport voting by nearly 24 points compared to official turnout data (Burden, 2000; Lacy & Burden, 1999; McDonald, 2011), although these findings have been recently challenged as increases in response

rates lead to matching characteristics between misreporters and truthful nonvoters (McDonald, 2003). Overreporting is also rampant in the Cooperative Election Study, where in some years half of nonvoters claim to have voted (Ansolabehere & Hersh, 2010, 2012). The Current Population Survey, although frequently used as a source to determine turnout in the US (Francia & Orr, 2014; Jackson, 2003), has consistently overreported turnout, especially for minorities (Ansolabehere et al., 2022; Bernstein et al., 2001). Finally, from 1964 to 1990, the American National Election Survey overreported voting between 7 and 14% of the actual vote (Belli et al., 2001). After reviewing the literature, it is clear that every major national election survey that explores political participation suffers from misreporting, a problem that potentially biases results of studies employing the data. Although having a broad understanding of misreporting trends among large surveys is helpful to contextualize the problem, this phenomenon has not significantly distorted results (Abramson & Claggett, 1989; Silver, Abramson, & Anderson, 1986), causing scholars to turn their attention to reducing misreporting rather than exploring why people misreport. Although reducing misreporting may help produce stronger results, it shifts attention away from who misreports, flattening the demographic nuances between voters, nonvoters, and misreporters.

Previous research consistently finds that the most educated individuals in a population are most likely to misreport their voting behavior (Belli et al., 2001; Bernstein et al., 2001; Silver, Abramson, & Anderson, 1986). This trend is theoretically explained as a story of adhering to the social norm of voting. As people become more educated, they are more likely to learn about the nature of voting as a tool for democracy, ultimately reinforcing the norm of voting as a social good, thus leading people to present themselves as voters despite not being one. These findings are particularly insightful because they shed light on the fact that the people most likely to vote are also the people likely to misreport their voting behavior.

Regarding race, studies have come to conflicting conclusions about who is most likely to misreport voting, with some finding Black and Latino respondents more likely to overreport than their white counterparts (Abramson & Claggett, 1989; Ansolabehere et al., 2022; Belli et al., 2001; Bernstein et al., 2001; Hill & Hurley, 1984), while others find insignificant differences

between the groups (Silver, Abramson, & Anderson, 1986). The trend of Black respondents misreporting at a higher rate is usually attributed to the unique social pressure that Black people experience as a result of their historical racialized oppression and collectively oriented decision making (Bernstein et al., 2001). Overreporting is further complicated when viewed through an intersectional lens between race and gender. Herrick and Pryor find that Anglo women are less likely to misreport their voting behavior, while Black men and women and Latina women are more likely to overreport voting behavior (Herrick & Pryor, 2020). In contrast, other studies, such as those by Silver et al., find that men are more likely to misreport voting than women, but this trend eventually becomes nonexistent (Silver, Abramson, & Anderson, 1986). Finally, in terms of age, the authors find a similar trend established by education, whereby misreporters are most like actual voters, since the 'youngest and oldest nonvoters are the least likely to overreport voting' (Silver, Abramson, & Anderson, 1986).

These findings are crucial because they demonstrate various discrepancies between studies about which populations are most likely to misreport their voting behavior. Despite their value, due to the age of these studies, many of their conclusions may be outdated because of the progress made in electoral accessibility, such as expanded early voting, increased absentee voting, online voter registration, and ballot drop boxes, which can influence overreporting rates. Along with a more accessible election process, other political phenomena, including people's understanding of voting as a civic duty and party polarization, may also have changed, which would also affect overreporting. As accessibility to the ballot and norms around voting fluctuate, it is reasonable to assume that misreporting behavior is also bound to change, as one is anchored on the other, meaning it is more important than ever to investigate the interaction between identity and misreporting.

Moreover, while numerous studies exist exploring the relationship between singular demographic variables and misreporting, very little intersectional research exists outside of race and gender. This is an issue because it assumes that people's identities are siloed from one another, which is deeply untrue. The reality is that identities constantly interact with each other,

which affects various outcomes, such as being sensitive to adhering to social norms. Focusing on more interaction effects is essential to drawing out deeper, richer understandings of how multiple identities interact with each other and modify the social pressures people feel.

Theory

By applying Harbaugh's theory (1996) and its subsequent iterations by Bernstein, Chaha, and Montjoy (2001), my objective is to explain which populations are most likely to overreport voting and the reasons behind it.

Voting and misreporting are separate actions that are influenced by similar reasons. In their 1996 paper, Harbaugh draws on rational choice and minimax regret theory, hypothesizing that people choose to vote, lie about voting, or admit to not voting based on what maximizes their benefit and praise (Harbaugh, 1996). In Harbaugh's model, the benefits of voting are viewed as a public good that is encouraged through social rewards, such as receiving praise from other people, which motivates people to vote. The same cost-benefit analysis applies to nonvoters, as they may misreport their voting behavior as an alternative method to obtain approval. Before lying, Harbaugh argues that individuals weigh the potential costs of being dishonest against the possible benefits of receiving praise, choosing to lie if the benefits outweigh the costs for an individual. When applied, the author finds that the more educated someone is, the more likely they are to lie about their voting behavior, getting to the crux of the theory. At the core, Harbaugh argues that those who are likely to receive the most praise (i.e., more educated and civically oriented people) are more likely to lie since the gain from lying outweighs the internal cost. Although Harbaugh's theory is seminal to misreporting scholars, I believe it falls short when disaggregating actors by various identities. The issue with solely applying this model to explain eligible voters' behavior is that different people have varying calculus of voting, which is contingent on their identity.

As an extension of Harbaugh's theory, Bernstein, Chaha, and Montjoy especially considered how fluctuating identities may affect a person's self-reported voting behavior. They argue that misreporting is the result of the sense of guilt people feel when they do not fulfill their civic duty to vote, leading them to claim to have voted to avoid being shamed (Bernstein et al.,

2001, p. 25). More educated groups uniquely feel this pressure because, as someone becomes more educated, voting becomes more salient to their class interests (Silver, Anderson, & Abramson, 1986), they are increasingly told that their vote matters, boosting their political efficacy (Bernstein & Packard, 2000; Flanigan & Zingale, 1998), and higher education socializes them to increasingly view voting as a social norm (Bowman, 2011; Glynn et al., 2009; Hansen & Tyner, 2019; Rolfe, 2012; Stevens et al., 2008).

Although the literature has consistently found that education is the most robust predictor of misreporting voting, this interpretation overlooks a vital underlying mechanism. Education itself is not inherently causal, but instead, it serves as a proxy for an individual's sensitivity to norms surrounding political participation. It is not simply someone's attainment of higher education that makes them more likely to misreport their voting behavior compared to those with lower educational attainment; rather, as people in higher education are socialized to view voting as a civic social norm, they are more likely to present themselves as adhering to the norm to avoid shame. Although seemingly pedantic, understanding education as a proxy for sensitivity to norms is crucial, as a person's attunement to social expectations should fluctuate based on other factors related to social pressures, such as race.

Similar to education, sensitivity to social norms also depends on the social contexts in which different racial groups operate. To understand these various social contexts, it is essential to consider the significance of group consciousness and its impact on political behavior. Group consciousness is a form of group identity that goes beyond simply recognizing oneself as part of a group. Instead, it is an identification in the group that is shaped by a set of beliefs about the social standing of a group relative to the rest of society, often leading to a call for collective action to improve the status of the group (Jackman & Jackman, 1973; McClain et al., 2009). Group consciousness is especially influential as it pertains to political participation, evidenced by increased political participation by Black people and Latinos with salient group consciousness (Sanchez, 2006; Shingles, 1981; Smith et al., 2024; Stokes, 2003). In Black and Latino communities, group consciousness facilitates a social norm that advocates for political action,

such as voting (Hill & Hurley, 1984), to advance the group's interest and status. In Black and Latino social spheres, stories are told of their ancestors who fought for their right to vote, the potential descriptive gains from voting, and the possibility of achieving moral order through voting, further strengthening the norm (Anoll, 2022; Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Morrison, 1987). As a result, when members of the Black and Latino community do not vote, they may feel pressured to misreport their behavior to seem like they are committed to advancing the group's interests.

While the existing literature examines education and race as isolated predictors of misreporting, I argue that these factors interact to create compounded social pressures that amplify the tendency to misreport. This interactive effect occurs through two intertwined mechanisms: dual socialization processes and intensified social pressures. Highly educated Black and Latino people are socialized to view voting as a civic norm in two ways. Academic environments influence them to see voting as a democratic responsibility, while racial group consciousness orients it as a tool for racial uplift. In tandem with this dual socialization process, this population also experiences more intense social pressures, as failing to conform to the established norm would result in being perceived as a civic failure (education effect) and a traitor to group progress (racialized group consciousness effect). In contrast, while highly educated whites are motivated by norms instilled through education, and less educated Black and Latino people experience racialized constraints, the socialization and norm crystallization occur only on one dimension, thereby excluding them from compounded pressure and making them less likely to misreport their voting behavior.

Therefore, I hypothesize that *more educated Black and Latino people will be more likely to misreport their voting behavior than their white and Asian counterparts*.

Method

I utilize the Cooperative Election Study (CES) Cumulative Common Content file. The CES is a "50,000+ person national stratified sample survey… about general political attitudes, various demographic factors, assessment of roll call voting choices, political information, and vote intentions" (Kuriwaki, 2024). The dataset includes responses from 2006 to 2023, but my

analysis specifically focuses on U.S. citizens during presidential election years (2008, 2012, 2016, 2020). Midterms are dropped because compared to presidential elections, turnout is always lower, the electorate is more educated on average, and they are less racially diverse, which are all conditions that would affect the explanatory variables of interest (Skelley, Geoffrey and Kondik, Kyle, 2017). I chose to solely view citizens as they are eligible to vote, which is a prerequisite to being able to misreport voting behavior. Moreover, I subset my sample to only nonvoters because only they have the capacity to falsely claim to have voted. By including actual voters, I would be collapsing two behaviorally distinct groups, which would distort the results. Previous research on political participation finds that combining groups that diverge in their opportunity to engage in an action can bias inferences by masking the decision-making process (Timpone, 1998). This research demonstrates that restricting the analysis to the group for whom the behavior is possible is the methodologically appropriate approach. After filtering for all conditions, I am left with 177,202 observations. The survey's final weights were also applied to secure national representativeness.

The outcome of interest is misreporting voting, which is constructed by referencing a participant's self-reported behavior and their validated vote. That is, misreporters are categorized as people who claimed to have voted on the self-reported question in the survey but did not vote according to the validated voting data. To clarify, this outcome does not capture the alleged vote choice of an individual, only the claim to vote. Moreover, although people who claim not to have voted when they actually did are technically misreporters, this rarely occurs, and it does not fit the traditional understanding of a misreporter, so these observations are dropped. Finally, I removed individuals who did not have a voter file, although this only included 45 people in the dataset Table 5. I focus on education and race as my main explanatory variables and control for gender, age, income, and the importance of religion.

This study utilizes descriptive analyses to examine the relationship between several demographic characteristics and the level they misreport voting. Descriptive analysis refers to identifying and describing patterns found in data (Loeb et al., 2017). Although establishing causal

relationships is the gold standard in research, descriptive analysis is the foundation of future research, which is why the method is prevalent in political science research (Campbell & Feagin, 1975; Downding, 2021; Loeb et al., 2017; Pollock, 2008).

To model the probability of an outcome as a product of the independent variables, I use a logistic regression model. The model estimates the log-odds of the outcome as a linear combination of the explanatory variables. The log-odds probability p for an observation is modeled as follows:

$$\text{logit}(p_{it}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Race}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Education}_{it} + \beta_3 (\text{Race}_{it} \times \text{Education}_{it}) + \beta_4 X_{it} + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where X is a vector of the independent variables. I include year fixed effects, or γ_t, to account for unobserved differences between elections and an individual-level error term, or ε_i.

I use ROC AUC to test the sensitivity of my logistic regression model. To determine the area under the ROC, we first get the true positive rate (TPR) of a classification model, or the proportion of positives that are correctly classified by the model, which in this case is my logistic regression model (Carter et al., 2016). After evaluating the TPR, it is plotted against the model's specificity, which is the true negative rate (TNR), or the proportion of negatives that are correctly identified as such. The ROC plot is then created by plotting the true positive rate on the x-axis and the true negative rate on the y-axis (Carter et al., 2016). Area under the ROC ranges from 0.5 and 1, with 1 meaning perfect classifications. This robustness test is especially useful for my model because it helps discern whether the classification of individuals as misreporters is better than random chance. The better the ROC AUC, the better the model at classifying types of voters.

To obtain predicted probabilities, I turn the linear function into the following predicted probability model:

$$p = \frac{1}{1 + \exp\left(-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Race} + \beta_2 \text{Education} + \beta_3 \text{Race} \times \text{Education} + \beta_4 X\right)}$$

where p is the predicted probability of an observation and $\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Race} + \beta_2 \text{Education} + \beta_3 \text{Race} \times \text{Education} + \beta_4 X)$ are the estimated coefficients from the linear model. I use a

predicted probability model because it provides a more intuitive interpretation of how changes in the explanatory variables affect the outcome.

Finally, to best interpret the interaction between education and race, I use an average marginal effects model. An average marginal effect is the partial derivative of the expected outcome concerning a specific variable, modeled as follows:

$$\text{ME} = \frac{\partial E[Y|X]}{\partial X}$$

An average marginal effect is the instantaneous rate of change in the outcome, misreporting, for a change in the independent variable. Average marginal effects are especially useful for interpreting the relationships between interactions and the outcome. Since this paper focuses on the interaction between race and education, that is the only average marginal effect I report.

Results

Table 1 shows the proportion of people who claimed to vote and voted (Truthful voters), claimed not to vote and did not vote (Truthful nonvoters), claimed to vote and did not vote (Misreporters), and claimed not to vote and voted (Technical Misreporters). There are several interesting observations just from viewing the table. First, participants in the CES turnout more often than the general American population, demonstrating a potential selection bias of more politically inclined individuals. This turnout remains stable for all four years, except for 2016, which can potentially be the result of an increasingly politicized and controversial presidential election. Second, every year, there are more misreporters than truthful voters, often double or triple the amount. Lastly, as mentioned earlier, people rarely claim not to vote but vote, evidenced by the consistent proportion hovering around 0.4%. As mentioned, although these people are technically misreporters, we removed them from our analysis because they do not capture what is meant by a misreporter.

Table 1: *Reported and Validated Voting Behavior by Year*

Reported Behavior	**2008**	**2012**	**2016**	**2020**
Claimed to vote and voted	71.1%	73.1%	64.0%	74.3%
Claimed not to vote and did not vote	10.4%	6.4%	7.3%	5.4%
Claimed to vote and did not vote	18.0%	20.2%	28.3%	19.9%
Claimed not to vote and voted	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%

Table 6 presents the percentage of truthful voters, truthful nonvoters, and misreporters for each subgroup across all controls. Regarding race, the overwhelming majority of respondents are white, although there is still a significant number of Black and Latino respondents, but a severe lack of Asian people. As far as misreporting, 20 to 25% of Black, Latino, and Asian people misreport their voting behavior, which is at least 3% more than their white counterparts. It is important to note that Asian respondents have the highest share of misreporters across all variables at 25.9%. For education, it is marginally true that more educated groups misreport more than less educated ones, although the difference between the two is roughly 5%. Misreporting across all control groups hovers between 15 and 22

Table 2 details the raw count and percentage of voters, nonvoters, and misreporters for the interactions of race and education. For white people, their misreporting gradually increases as education increases, with 15.7% of whites with high school or less education inaccurately reporting, while 18.6% of postgraduates misreport. This trend remains true for Black participants as well, although their misreporting dramatically increases as education increases. While 15.2% of Black people with an educational attainment of high school or less falsely reported having voted, the proportion increases by 8% at the highest level of education. Latinos closely resemble Black respondents, as the difference in misreporting between the lowest and highest educated groups is 12%. Asian respondents also exhibit a misreporting gap, with 19.8% of the least educated and 29.2% of the most educated falsely reporting that they voted—a 10% difference.

Table 3 shows the results of the logistic regression models in predicting misreporting voting behavior. The model evaluates the effects of race, education, and their interaction on the outcome. The coefficients are estimated against the reference category of a white person with a college degree. Moreover, the regression is controlled for gender, partisanship, income, and importance of religion.

Before exploring the results, it is worth taking note of the area under the ROC. In my study, the AUC score represents how well the model can distinguish between truthful nonvoters and misreporters. Figure 3 shows that the AUC of the model is 0.736, which indicates a moderate ability to correctly classify truthful nonvoters and misreporters. This means the model has some predictive power, but it can be stronger. Although this is far from ideal, the AUC still indicates that the model classifies better than random guessing.

The results of the regression table provide insight into the effect of race, education, and their interaction on misreporting. To help with interpretation, the coefficients in Table 1 are converted to Odds Ratios in Table 7. The theory suggests that, all else equal, Black and Latino people should misreport at a higher rate than their white and Asian counterparts. I find that Black people are less likely to misreport voting compared to equally educated whites by 10%. Although this may present evidence against the theory, this relationship is not significant at the 95% confidence level. Latinos exhibit a different trend than Black participants, as they falsely report 3% more than whites, holding education and other factors constant. Again, despite its potential to strengthen the theory, this association is not significant.

The theory claims that more educated people should misreport at a higher rate than less educated individuals, which is confirmed by the findings for white people. White people demonstrate an extremely linear relationship between education and misreporting, as every additional unit of education greatly increases the likelihood of misreporting. Not only are white nonvoters with an educational attainment of high school or less 72% less likely to inaccurately report having voted than whites with a college education, but postgraduate nonvoters are also 33% more likely to misreport. This relationship is also statistically significant for all levels,

Table 2: *Voter Types by Race and Education (Percent and Count)*

Race	Education	Liar	Nonvoter	Voter
White	HS or Less	15.7%	31.8%	52.4%
		(15,400)	(31,158)	(51,354)
White	Some College	16.5%	17.2%	66.2%
		(16,643)	(17,343)	(66,670)
White	College Degree	18.8%	10.6%	70.6%
		(14,175)	(8,034)	(53,265)
White	Postgraduate	18.6%	6.0%	75.3%
		(7,947)	(2,579)	(32,144)
Black	HS or Less	15.2%	48.7%	36.1%
		(2,104)	(6,739)	(4,999)
Black	Some College	20.6%	30.7%	48.7%
		(4,221)	(6,278)	(9,967)
Black	College Degree	26.2%	20.5%	53.3%
		(2,599)	(2,034)	(5,284)
Black	Postgraduate	23.3%	15.9%	60.8%
		(1,003)	(684)	(2,612)
Latino	HS or Less	14.5%	54.6%	30.9%
		(1,846)	(6,952)	(3,937)
Latino	Some College	20.7%	35.5%	43.8%
		(3,830)	(6,561)	(8,093)
Latino	College Degree	29.4%	21.3%	49.3%
		(3,051)	(2,214)	(5,119)
Latino	Postgraduate	26.8%	15.3%	57.9%
		(1,050)	(598)	(2,264)
Asian	HS or Less	19.8%	53.9%	26.3%
		(256)	(696)	(340)
Asian	Some College	21.3%	40.2%	38.5%
		(498)	(942)	(903)
Asian	College Degree	29.4%	26.9%	43.7%
		(1,011)	(926)	(1,505)
Asian	Postgraduate	29.2%	21.1%	49.7%
		(587)	(424)	(997)

Table 3: *Race and Education Effects on Misreporting*

	Model 1
Black	-0.106^{*}
	(0.056)
Latino	0.033
	(0.054)
Asian	-0.076
	(0.088)
HS or Less	-1.273^{***}
	(0.033)
Some College	-0.565^{***}
	(0.032)
Postgraduate	0.286^{***}
	(0.046)
Black × HS or Less	-0.044
	(0.070)
Latino × HS or Less	-0.187
	(0.073)
Asian × HS or Less	0.137^{**}
	(0.171)
Black × Some College	-0.103
	(0.063)
Latino × Some College	-0.107
	(0.081)
Asian × Some College	0.044
	(0.125)
Black × Postgraduate	-0.248^{**}
	(0.114)
Latino × Postgraduate	-0.182
	(0.117)
Asian × Postgraduate	-0.559
	(0.250)
Constant	-0.903^{***}
	(0.045)
Observations	266,597
Log Likelihood	−87,624.290
Akaike Inf. Crit.	175,306.600

Note: Reference categories are: White, College Degree.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

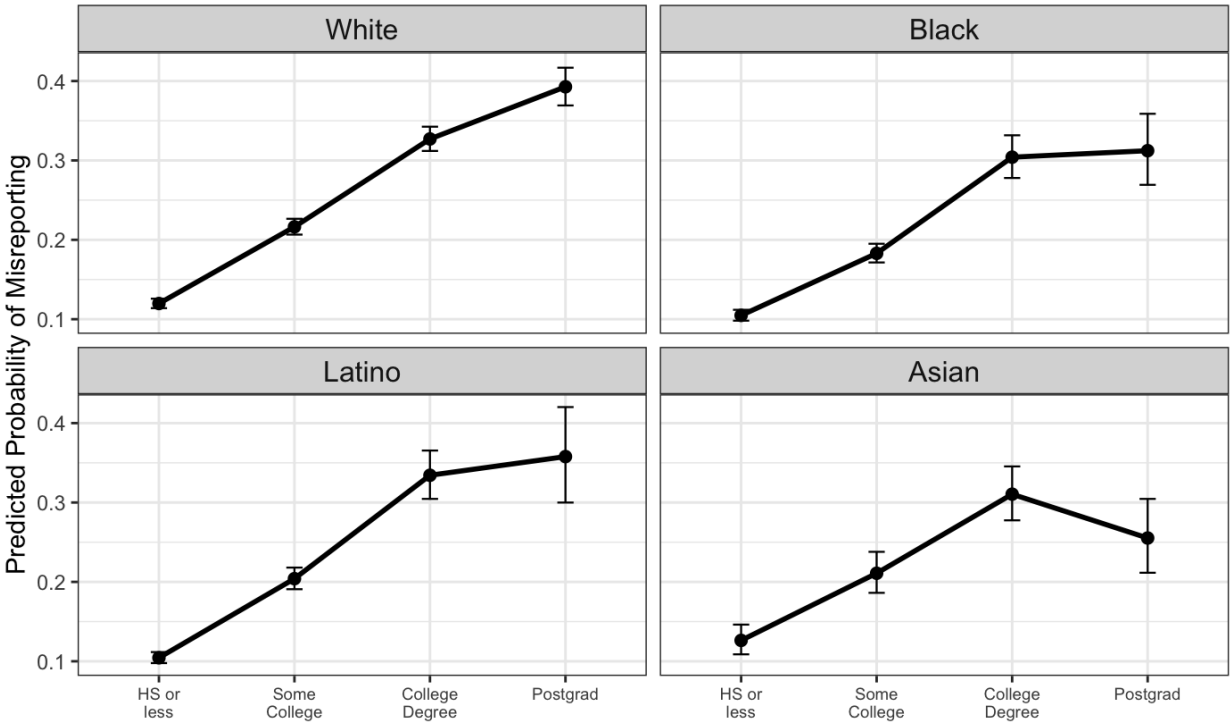
demonstrating that educational attainment greatly affects misreporting for whites. This finding alone does not discredit the theory, as more analysis must be done to look at the differences within the interaction terms.

To reiterate, the theory expects that highly educated Black and Latino respondents will inaccurately report at a higher rate than educated white and Asian people. Figure 1 depicts the predicted probability of misreporting and voting for different levels of education across all racial groups. The topline observation is that education seems to increase the probability of misreporting for all groups, although there is some variation for Black, Latino, and Asian respondents between college degree and postgraduate. The predicted probability plots for misreporting further demonstrate that, in opposition to my expectations, highly educated white people are the most likely to misrepresent their voting behavior, as there is roughly a 40% chance that white postgraduates misreport their voting behavior, the highest probability for all racial groups and educational attainments. Latino postgraduates have the second-highest propensity to falsely report at 35%. This is closely followed by Black postgraduate respondents, whose likelihood of misreporting is 31%. Finally, Asian postgraduates exhibit the lowest chance of misreporting, with a probability of 25%. Interestingly, postgraduate educational attainment does not yield the highest likelihood of wrongly reporting turnout, as Asian people with college degrees have a misreporting probability of 31%. While the predicted probabilities help visualize the chance of someone misreporting given all variables are constant, it is limited in showing how unit changes in education affect each group's self-reporting behavior.

The insignificance of education across racial groups on misreporting is best highlighted in the marginal effects plot. An average marginal effect says, on average, how much an outcome changes when one variable changes, all else equal. Figure 2 demonstrates that the average marginal effect of education on Black people hovers around zero across all education levels, with a weak correlation between higher educational attainment and misreporting, excluding postgraduates. However, these effects are not significant, indicating no significant relationship between the two variables. Latinos share a relatively similar pattern, although it is less direct, as

Figure 1

Predicted Probability of Self-Reporting Vote by Education and Race

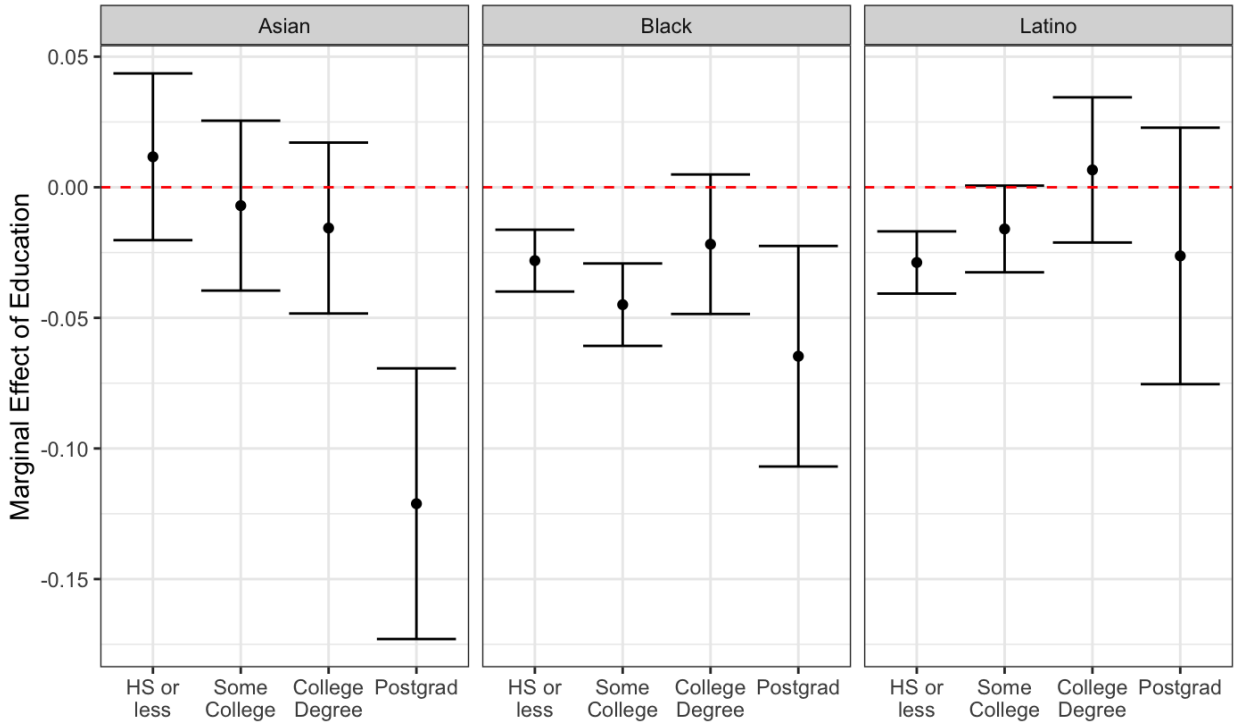


Notes: Estimates computed using regression analysis with covariates held at observed values.

they also hover around zero throughout different education levels. However, excluding postgraduates, as Latinos become more educated, they are more likely to misreport, aligning with the theory. This relationship is also insignificant, demonstrating no significant change in misreporting as education increases for Latinos. Asian respondents have a more consistent trend, as misreporting decreases with each unit increase in education. The effect is especially strong for postgraduates, denoting that Asian people misreport less as they become more educated. The insignificance across lower education levels and the stark significance for postgraduates suggest that the relationship may be meaningful.

Figure 2

Average Marginal Effect of Education by Race on Misreporting



While the marginal effects of education on racial groups show a potential increase in overreporting for more educated Black and Latino people, these findings are weak, inconsistent, and statistically insignificant.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine whether more educated people, especially those within marginalized racial groups, would be more likely to misreport their voting behavior because of compounded social pressures of each of their identities. The findings provide mixed results for this hypothesis, but they also provide ample pushback.

The descriptive statistics in (Table 2) demonstrate that misreporting rates are generally higher among more educated Black, Latino, and Asian groups. This observation is true when comparing varying levels of education within racial groups and with other races. However, descriptive statistics alone cannot establish a causal relationship between variables, which I

establish through my regression model.

The model shows that, across the board, increased education correlates with higher misreporting. Among white respondents, this relationship is especially pronounced and significant, suggesting that whites with postgraduate degrees are more likely to falsely report their voting behavior than their less educated peers. This finding supports the theory's focus on social pressures as salient to misreporting. That is, the more educated a person is, the more they will view voting as a civic norm, leading them to claim to vote despite not doing so to avoid reputational costs. Regarding race, the results show mixed support for the notion of different races experiencing varying social pressures as a result of their racialized group consciousness. Although Asian and Black people are less likely to misreport than whites, and Latinos are slightly more likely, these findings fail to support the theory because of their insignificance. Furthermore, the expectation that these pressures would compound for highly educated Black and Latino people is also not supported. While the descriptive statistics show that highly educated Black, Latino, and Asian people misrepresent their votes at higher rates than whites, the interaction effects are not statistically significant, and the average marginal effects are relatively weak, inconsistent, and concentrated around zero. These null results indicate that higher levels of education do not necessarily amplify social pressures to conform to the norm of voting for Black or Latino groups.

Although the results did not support the expectations, I argue that this reflects limitations in the survey instrument rather than a flaw in the theory itself. Accepting the results at face value would mean acknowledging that people in different racial groups, so long as their educational attainment matches, experience the same social pressures. The problem is that this interpretation contradicts the larger body of research that demonstrates how race shapes individuals' perceptions toward civic norms.

As mentioned, previous literature demonstrates how Black and Latino people view political behavior through a collective lens, resulting in a view of participation as a tool for progress. This form of consciousness specifically shapes how Black and Latino individuals view the group consequences of voting and, by extension, claiming to vote. This same socialization

does not exist for white people. Instead, whites are individual actors in political and social contexts, causing them to feel a unique social pressure in survey settings.

This explanation is supported by previous research that tested whether introducing social pressures into environments would affect Black people's likelihood to misreport. Using the ANES's face-to-face interview data, the researchers determined that Black people misreported at a higher rate when they had a Black interviewer compared to a white one. These findings highlight how social pressure can emerge when identity-relevant variables are introduced into a given environment. I compared these self-reported turnouts to those in the CES for each respective year that matched. Unfortunately, only 2008 and 2012 matched; however, comparing the self-reported turnouts supports my explanation for the lack of significance in my study. Black respondents who had a Black interviewer were upwards of 40 percentage points more likely to self-report having voted compared to those who took the CES, an interviewless survey. Although this does not directly measure misreporting, the difference in reported turnout outlines several key takeaways.

For instance, the mode of the survey affects misreporting, as face-to-face interviews introduce interpersonal dynamics that are not captured in self-administered surveys. This provides further evidence that the absence of significant findings in my survey may be the result of the CES's lack of an interpersonal element.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, these results suggest the existence of a dormant social pressure among Black and Latino individuals. One that is activated when identity-salient elements are introduced into an environment, subsequently shaping their sensitivity to norms and broader political behavior.

Table 4: *Black Self-Reported Turnout, 2008 and 2012*

	ANES[1]	CES	Difference
2008	85.1%	68.6%	16.5-points
2012	89.7%	47.4%	42.3-points

[1] The estimates for the ANES are from Jenkins, C., White, I., Hanmer, M., & Banks, A. (2021). Vote Overreporting While Black: Identifying the Mechanism Behind Black Survey Respondents' Vote Overreporting. *American Politics Research*, 49(5), 439–451. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X211022189.

The results of my study also have implications for the reliability of self-reported turnout data. The fact that the most educated, especially white people, misreported the most means that survey bias may overestimate the voting behavior of the most privileged groups. Therefore, the assumption that Black people misreport more than other racial groups may require revising.

Besides these implications, it is equally important to recognize the limitations of the study. First, since the data are observational, it is more difficult to establish causality due to potential unobserved confounders. Typically, the best manner to account for this would be to control for as many potential confounders as possible, but data limitations meant the model could not control for all potential confounders. Although the model includes vital controls (e.g., race, gender, age, income, education, and religious importance), it does not include psychological or contextual variables that may strongly influence misreporting. This includes the likes of political interest, trust in institutions, group consciousness, linked fate, and more.

Another significant limitation in the study is the sampling imbalance across racial groups and educational groups, which may affect the reliability of comparisons between subgroups. Across races, whites are oversampled, and Asian people are significantly undersampled. This particularly becomes an issue when comparing interactive subgroups of education and race, as it introduces noise to the results, evidenced by the distinctly large error bars for Asians in all models.

Building on these findings and limitations, future research should move away from solely focusing on who misreports and turn their attention to asking why people misreport. I argue that the field needs to fundamentally change how it conceptualizes misreporters. Misreporters are not simply artifacts of a survey; instead, they are people navigating complex social pressures, identity-salient cues, and normative expectations. Researchers need to embrace a theoretically driven approach that aims to explain how activating mechanisms influence people's decision to misreport. Mixed-methods studies, such as the inclusion of semi-structured interviews, could provide unique insights into why people misreport. By reframing misreporting as a meaningful political act influenced by identity, we can uncover nuances about participation and pressure.

Furthermore, researchers should turn their attention toward further investigating the role of identity and identity-salient cues in influencing reporting behavior, especially among minoritized populations. Moreover, underutilized research designs, such as experimental designs and different modes of surveys, should be employed to isolate the mechanism of social pressure. Future voting data collection should also oversample underrepresented groups, especially highly educated Black, Latino, and Asian people, to allow for more robust comparisons between subgroups, thus gaining better insight into interaction effects.

By reorienting the way we think about misreporting, the field can get a better grasp on intersectional identities and the way they influence political behavior, instead of applying blanket theories for people across one of their identities.

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Appendix

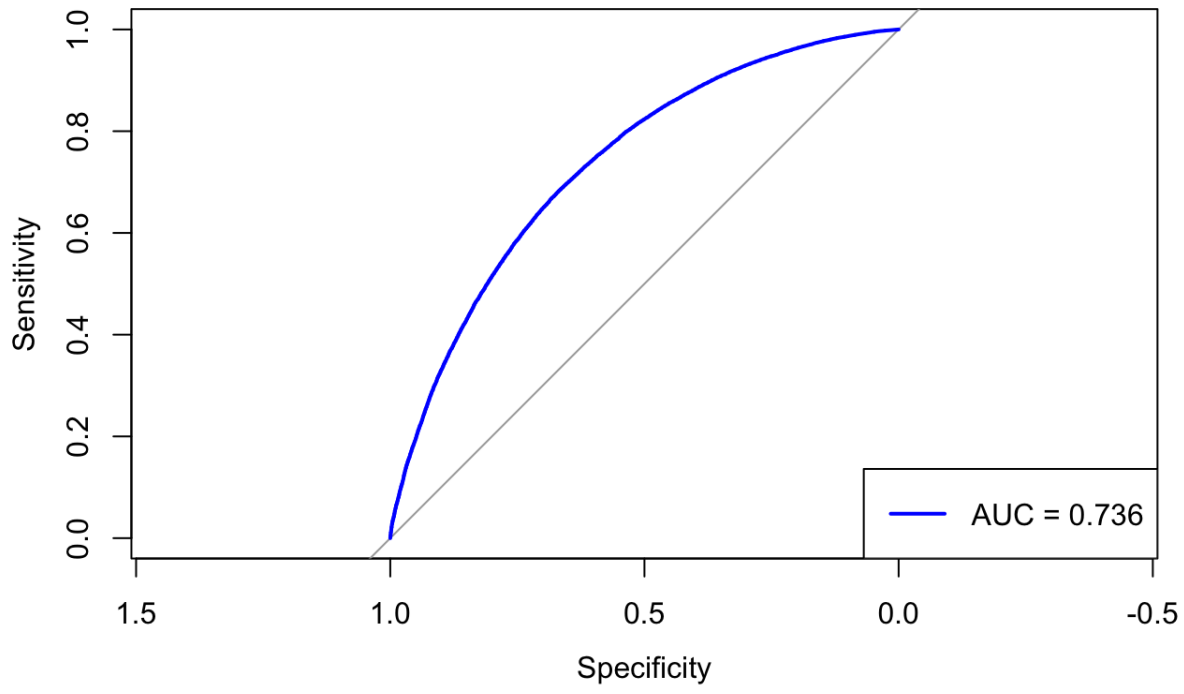
Table 5: *Voting Record by Year*

	2008	**2012**	**2016**	**2020**
Voter File	99.9%	100%	100%	100%
	N = 32755	N = 54535	N = 64600	N = 61000
No Voter File	0.1%	–	–	–
	N = 45	–	–	–

Note: After 2008, there are no more 'No Voter File' observations in the CES.

Figure 3

ROC Curve for Misreporting



Notes: Specificity is the true negative rate, or the amount of correctly identified negatives. Sensitivity is the true positive rate, or the number of correctly identified positives.

Table 6: *Descriptive Statistics by Voter Type*

Category	Truthful Voters	Truthful Nonvoters	Misreporters
White	64.2% (203433)	18.7% (59114)	17.1% (54165)
Black	47.1% (22862)	32.4% (15735)	20.5% (9927)
Latino	42.7% (19413)	35.9% (16325)	21.5% (9777)
Asian	41.2% (3745)	32.9% (2988)	25.9% (2352)
Native American	53.8% (1716)	24.7% (787)	21.5% (684)
Middle Eastern	48.4% (290)	31.9% (191)	19.7% (118)
Mixed	55.4% (3585)	26.1% (1688)	18.5% (1199)
Other	66.6% (4292)	11.9% (765)	21.5% (1387)
Male	62.5% (124869)	18.5% (37073)	19.0% (38001)
Female	56.8% (134245)	25.6% (60352)	17.6% (41567)
High school or less	48.1% (62243)	36.3% (47051)	15.6% (20151)
Some College	60.3% (89379)	21.8% (32364)	17.8% (26395)
College Degree	65.7% (67950)	13.2% (13709)	21.1% (21811)
Postgraduate	71.7% (39764)	8.1% (4469)	20.3% (11252)
18-29	34.4% (24350)	47.8% (33831)	17.7% (12530)
30-44	48.7% (46380)	30.1% (28609)	21.2% (20196)
45-59	63.0% (79862)	17.9% (22713)	19.1% (24154)
60+	75.6% (108744)	8.6% (12440)	15.8% (22729)
Strong Democrat	66.4% (72798)	15.0% (16394)	18.6% (20411)
Weak Democrat	55.8% (52327)	25.5% (23923)	18.8% (17610)
Independent	39.8% (28868)	43.8% (31799)	16.5% (11946)
Weak Republican	61.9% (52311)	19.0% (16033)	19.1% (16122)
Strong Republican	70.2% (52204)	12.1% (8970)	17.7% (13167)
Low Income	53.5% (115445)	29.5% (63698)	17.0% (36665)
Middle Income	65.1% (81071)	15.3% (19096)	19.6% (24376)
High Income	69.4% (16359)	11.0% (2598)	19.6% (4630)
Religion Not Too Important	57.6% (37344)	24.7% (16016)	17.7% (11504)
Religion Not at All Important	61.3% (53520)	21.3% (18583)	17.4% (15171)
Religion Somewhat Important	55.7% (63255)	25.5% (28935)	18.8% (21307)
Religion Very Important	61.7% (105099)	19.8% (33694)	18.5% (31578)

Note: Percentages and raw counts shown for each voter type.

Table 7: *Logistic Regression: Odds Ratios (Misreporting)*

	Model 1
Black	0.899*
Latino	1.033
Asian	0.927
HS or Less	0.280***
Some College	0.568***
Postgraduate	1.331***
Black × HS or Less	0.957
Black × Some College	0.902
Black × Postgraduate	0.781**
Latino × HS or Less	0.829
Latino × Some College	0.899
Latino × Postgraduate	0.834
Asian × HS or Less	1.147**
Asian × Some College	1.045
Asian × Postgraduate	0.572
Constant	0.405***
Observations	144,825
Log Likelihood	−39,795.300
Akaike Inf. Crit.	79,648.600

Note: Outcome is misreporting. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.