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Soc131

CH 8 Assignment TED: Nate Silver: Does Race Affect Votes?

According to Silver’s postulations, several different factors seem to have an effect on whether they cast their vote in a racially motivated manner. Overall level of education of a voter seems to have a measurable effect, with more educated individuals being less likely to vote with a racial bias. I would suggest that with a higher level of education comes greater tolerance, not only of different types of people, but of different viewpoints as well. Silver’s definition of education is not tied to any specific achievement level; instead he focuses on total years of education an individual has completed.

Another factor affecting racial bias in voting is the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood you live in, with individuals with at least one non-white neighbor being far less likely to have a problem voting for a black president than someone with all white neighbors. This illustrates the dangers of ignorance and shows again how education, even if it is simply having the opportunity to meet someone of a different race, opens the eyes and minds of individuals to new points of view. I do rather like Silver’s idea of having exchange students from liberal eastern areas attend school in more rural and conservative areas like Arkansas and vice versa.

A third factor affecting voting with a racial bend is the type of neighborhood you live in. Rural neighborhoods tend to be more isolated and generally have less racial diversity among inhabitants. Silver also points out that cities provide fertile grounds for interracial interaction among individuals, simply by virtue of their densely packed nature. In addition to population diversity in cities, I would also point out that you are far more likely to have friends of another race if you grow up in a city, especially if you are part of a racial minority in a given area. As someone who spent the first 13 years of my life growing up in rural mid-Michigan, I can attest to the lower level of racial diversity in my community; however I will also point out that the few minority kids who I went to school with seemed well adjusted and well accepted in our society. Once I moved to Dearborn though, I started attending Advanced Technology Academy, a charter school that ended up being about 97% African American. To be a minority was a new experience for me and gave me useful insight into the perspective of minority populations and how they interact with the majority.

An important side of racist voting that Silver fails to address is “reverse racism”, in other words minorities voting for Obama regardless of his qualifications, simply because he is a minority. I have witnessed firsthand people who have, with complete candor, told me that they voted for Obama because he is black. This, to me, seems a dangerous manner of thinking. I pride myself on being a racially unbiased individual, raised by progressive and unbiased parents. It does, however, irk me when I see someone almost proudly admit that they did not cast their vote based on any confidence that their chosen candidate was the best choice, but voted for him because he was of the same racial group. I would think that this warrants as much concern and study as discrimination against Obama by racially motivated non-minority individuals. I would suggest that the same research questions should have been asked of minority individuals and their answers compared to the answers of non-minority individuals with comparative neighborhoods and education levels.

All in all Silver makes insightful observations about racially motivated voting, and breaks the relevant information down in clear and logical patterns. He makes logical and well-reasoned points about how education of an individual and racial makeup of a neighborhood can affect the voting habits of individuals. As well as showing how the density of an individual’s neighborhood can lead to greater opportunities to meet and interact positively with members of other races, therefore promoting tolerance and understanding between races. He fails, however, to address a possible racial bias towards a minority candidate by minority voters.