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# *Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations*

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While various models have been developed to account for differences in participation levels between African-Americans and Anglos, the empirical evidence for these models is rather limited; fails to include ethnic minority groups other than African-Americans; and assumes that the models are equally effective in explaining the behavior of all individuals regardless of race or ethnicity. This paper addresses these limitations by evaluating five models of participation to determine whether factors associated with Anglo and African-American participation are also associated with Mexican-American and Asian-American participation. We find that although the models apply differentially to each of the four groups, they nonetheless account for participation differences across racial/ethnic groups.

**S**tudies of mass participation in the U.S. repeatedly demonstrate the critical importance of socioeconomic status (SES) as a determinant of political involvement (e.g., Leighley and Nagler 1992a, 1992b; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Socioeconomic status is often cited as the primary factor accounting for variations in rates of political participation across racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).<sup>1</sup> However, scholars of minority politics have investigated a much wider range of theories of participation beyond that of socioeconomic status.

Early studies of black participation, for example, investigated group identity (or consciousness) and compensatory theories to account for blacks' "over-participation" (i.e., higher participation than whites when controlling for socioeconomic status; Guterbock and London 1983; Olsen 1970; Verba and Nie 1972; Williams, Babchuk, and Johnson 1973). Tate (1993), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of Jesse Jackson's candidacy in explaining black voter turnout, while Bobo and Gilliam (1990) stress the importance of political empowerment (i.e., black officeholding) in local politics. More recently, Cohen

<sup>1</sup>We generally use the current conventions with respect to names of the minority groups that we study below (e.g., African-Americans). However, in discussing research conducted in earlier periods, we use the terminology from the original studies.

and Dawson (1993) consider the effects of the local social environment on black political involvement.

The empirical evidence for these alternative models, however, is limited in some respects, and weak in others. Most studies consider only one or two models at a time, usually testing for the effects of socioeconomic status and psychological resources or group identity, and fail to include any other group-related or contextual factors. Hence, the relative importance of these various models has not been established.

Further, aside from several recent publications on Hispanic political involvement (e.g., Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Diaz 1996; Hero and Campbell 1996; Wrinkle et al. 1996), the study of minority participation has focused almost exclusively on black participation. This has two alternative consequences: either ignoring the political behavior of other minority groups or assuming that the behavior of blacks generalizes to that of other minorities. Yet to assume that the same factors that account for the participatory patterns of blacks similarly account for those of Latinos or Asian-Americans is dubious given the groups' diverse historical experiences, cultures and political goals (see Pinderhughes 1987, chap. 4).

Even with the recent availability of the Latino National Political Survey, which made possible the analyses of Latino participation cited above, comparisons across minority groups are virtually impossible due to differences in the timing and sampling of minority population surveys. Thus, at best researchers have compared blacks to Anglos, and Hispanics to Anglos, but rarely are able to compare Anglos to Hispanics *and* blacks, or blacks and Hispanics to one another.<sup>2</sup>

This paper tests the validity of five participation theories (Socioeconomic Status, Psychological Resources, Social Connectedness, Group Identity or Consciousness, and Group Conflict) across four racial/ethnic groups (Anglos, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Asian-Americans). Although each of these theories has been validated in earlier research, they have never been tested simultaneously. Nor have they been tested across such a large number of racial/ethnic groups. The data used to test these theories are drawn from a statewide public opinion survey in Texas, the second most populous state in the nation, and also one of the most ethnically diverse. While our findings might reflect, in part, the salient features of the political culture in Texas, they are nonetheless important due to the unique nature of the survey design. Moreover, the only previous survey that has included oversamples of the four ethnic groups we consider also used a state-based sampling design (in California; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989). We can thus comment on the generalizability of these earlier findings as we conduct similar analyses using the Texas data.

<sup>2</sup>Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) and Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet (1989) are notable exceptions to this point.

### Models of Minority Political Participation

The five models we have identified are derived from various scholars who utilize similar concepts and definitions to explain political behavior, although they may call their theories by different names. We briefly discuss each of these theories below.

#### *Socioeconomic Status*

Verba and Nie (1972) were among the first to elucidate this model as an explanation of mass political behavior: individuals with high levels of socioeconomic resources (e.g., education and income) are more likely to adopt psychological orientations that motivate their participation in the political system. Study after study has confirmed their finding that citizens with higher levels of education, income, and occupational status tend to vote more, contact more, organize more, and campaign more than do those with lower status (Conway 1991; Kenny 1992; Leighley 1990; Leighley and Nagler 1992a, 1992b; Nie et al. 1988; Verba et al. 1993, 1995; see also Leighley 1995 for a review of these studies).

Most studies that confirm the SES model have relied primarily on samples of non-Hispanics, and it is assumed that socioeconomic status works similarly across ethnic groups. Yet the empirical evidence on this point is mixed. Lien (1994a, 1994b), for example, finds that education is significantly related to participation among Mexican-Americans, but not for Asian-Americans, while Harris (1994), Tate (1991, 1993), and Dawson, Brown, and Allen (1990) find that education and income are only occasionally related to participation among African-Americans.

#### *Psychological Resources*

Although the SES model has dominated the study of political participation, it is not unimpeachable. One of the most vexing paradoxes in the study of political behavior, for example, is that as levels of education and income in the United States have increased over the past three decades, the level of voter turnout has decreased (Brody 1978). Many proposed solutions to this paradox have emphasized the importance of individuals' psychological orientations such as political interest, political efficacy, trust in government, and civic duty (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Aldrich 1993; Conway 1991; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

The most consistent results from this set of indicators are the significant relationships between political interest and efficacy on participation in electoral politics (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Teixeira 1992). When these two psychological indicators are included in studies of African-Americans or Mexican-Americans, they are often related to political activity (e.g., Dawson, Brown, and Allen 1990). However, these instances are fairly rare, as most studies

focusing on one minority group use group-oriented, rather than system-oriented, psychological indicators.<sup>3</sup> In the analyses below we test these two sets of attitudes as distinct influences on individuals' political participation.

### *Social Connectedness*

Sociologists, social psychologists, and political scientists have theorized at great length about the nature of the individual's relationship to the larger society and the sometimes negative, isolating consequences of life for individuals as they struggle to make their way in mass society. These discussions have included concepts such as anomie, alienation, trust, estrangement, prejudice, and apathy (e.g., Allport 1954; Durkeim 1964; Lane 1954; Pettigrew 1964; Reisman 1956).

Putnam (1995), Teixeira (1992), and Uslaner (1995) argue that the decline in political participation over the past 20 years is directly related to the lack of connectedness between individual citizens and the larger political and social community. These contemporary scholars use structural or behavioral factors such as organizational involvement, church attendance, home ownership, and marital status as indicators of social connectedness in contrast to the earlier scholars (noted above) who emphasized the psychological aspects of social connectedness.

Few studies focusing on ethnic groups separately find social connectedness to be related to political activity. Tate (1991), for example, finds that home ownership is not associated with voting in presidential primary elections, but also reports that blacks who belong to a black organization or a politicized church are more likely to vote in presidential primary elections. Together these findings suggest that ethnicity-based institutional resources may be more important for minorities than attachment to the community at large, a conclusion consistent with the critical role that the black church has played in mobilizing black political participation (Harris 1994; Vedlitz, Alston, and Pinkele 1980; Verba et al. 1993), as well as the key role played by voluntary associations in mobilizing both African-American and Latino turnout (Barker and Jones 1994; Carton 1984; Diaz 1996; Hero 1992, chap. 4; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, chap. 6).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Scholars studying African-American participation, for example, most often include measures of individuals' identification with other African-Americans as a psychological factor enhancing participation, and exclude general orientations toward the political system, i.e., political interest or efficacy. One might interpret this modeling strategy as an assumption that it is the focused, group-oriented attitudes that are more relevant to black participation than the general orientations typically employed in analyses of Anglo participation.

<sup>4</sup>Unfortunately, we are unable to test for the importance of ethnicity-based institutions in stimulating turnout, as these questions were not included in the survey. We focus instead on the more general model of social connectedness, with measures oriented toward the general community, and the individuals' likelihood of interacting with, or having ties to, the community at large.

*Group Identity, or Consciousness*

Research in political science, psychology, and sociology has also demonstrated the importance of group identity as a factor influencing individual political behavior (e.g., de la Garza et al. 1992; Gurin, Miller, and Gurin 1980; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Jones and Vedlitz 1994; Shingles 1981; Tate 1991). The group consciousness model of political participation—arguably more relevant as an explanation of minority behavior than of Anglo political behavior—has its intellectual origins in early studies of differences in the participation levels of blacks and whites, discussed above, which posited that blacks participate more than whites, controlling for socioeconomic status, because of their heightened levels of group consciousness.

Miller et al. (1981) find that group consciousness is associated with participation for blacks, women, and the poor, while Wilcox and Gomez (1990) conclude that group identity significantly increases black participation.<sup>5</sup> However, group identity is not consistently related to participation when estimated separately for other ethnic groups (e.g., Lien 1994a; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989).

We use measures of two dimensions of group consciousness—group closeness (i.e., identity with one's own ethnic/racial group) and out-group distance (affect toward other ethnic/racial groups)—in the analysis below. Consistent with prior theory, we expect that both of these indicators will be positively associated with participation for racial and ethnic minorities, but not for Anglos.

*Group Conflict*

This theory, developed in several social science disciplines, emphasizes that individuals, and the groups with whom they identify, have real historical and present-day relations with other groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). These intergroup interactions may be or have been conflictual, either over the division of scarce (real or symbolic) resources, the application of political power, or fundamental cultural values like religion (e.g., Sherif 1953, 1961). Several themes are central to group conflict theory, particularly competition for limited resources, in-group identification, and out-group hostility—all of which are reflected in individuals' social, political, and economic behaviors.

Consistent with group conflict theory, Blalock (1967) argues that “an increase in minority percentage should result in an increase in discrimination both because of heightened perceived competition and increased power threat” (Blalock 1967, 154). In terms of political behavior, Key (1949) had first observed this

<sup>5</sup>Wilcox and Gomez's (1990) attempts to replicate Miller et al.'s (1981) claim regarding the multi-dimensional nature of group consciousness and its relationship to participation proved fruitless. In contrast to Miller et al.'s argument and evidence from the 1970's, Wilcox and Gomez find that group identity—one distinct dimension of group consciousness—is significantly associated with participation. Unresolved is whether the differences between the two sets of findings reflect sampling differences, question-wording differences, or changes in the nature of the group system since Miller's study. Hence, we use the terms consciousness and identity interchangeably.

group-based political phenomenon in *Southern Politics*: as the size of the black population increased, so did fear within the white community, which resulted in greater negative, controlling behaviors by whites. Similarly, Matthews and Prothro (1966) found that as the proportion of blacks in southern counties increased, white support of blacks' right to vote decreased.

More recently, Blalock's (1967) power-threat hypothesis has been adapted and confirmed in several studies by Giles and various coauthors (e.g., Giles and Evans 1985, 1986). Giles and his colleagues generally argue that as the threat to the dominant group from the minority group increases, individuals belonging to the dominant group will act to protect their interests. For example, high black population concentrations in Louisiana parishes were found to be associated with greater Republican Party identification (Giles and Hertz 1994) and greater support for conservative segregationist David Duke's senatorial candidacy (Giles and Buckner 1993; but see also Giles and Buckner 1996; Voss 1996a, 1996b).

While this application of power theory has been productive, it is also somewhat limited, in three respects. First, it applies group conflict theory as an explanation of a narrow set of phenomena (i.e., vote choice and party identification). Giles's work, as well as Key's and Blalock's, deals directly with changes in voting behavior of the dominant group when faced with a growing minority threat. Yet it is also possible, if not likely, that group conflict or threat structures individuals' decisions about whether to go to the polls in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

Second, it suggests that group conflict theory is relevant to explaining only dominant-group behavior vis-à-vis a single subordinate group. In contrast, social psychologists use this model to explain subordinate group behavior as well. And third, the evidence relies almost entirely on aggregate-level data, which introduces the possibility of committing an ecological fallacy when explaining individual-level behavior as conditioned by the racial context.<sup>7</sup>

We thus expand on Giles's work on group conflict theory using individual-level data to test whether increased threat to either a dominant or subordinate group is associated with levels of political engagement. We interpret Giles's threat model as one of mobilization and expect that, in structuring participation, threat will increase involvement.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Matthews and Prothro (1966) are the sole exception to this point, for they tested whether (but found no evidence for) increases in black concentration were correlated with increases in white voter registration.

<sup>7</sup>An exception is Fossett and Kielcolt (1989), who use individual-level survey data and find that percent black is related to greater white opposition to racial integration.

<sup>8</sup>The prediction that increased threat will lead to greater participation by the threatened group derives from early studies of post-Voting Rights behavior of white southerners. These studies observed that after the implementation of the VRA, both black and white participation levels increased. It was assumed that this white increase was the result of a countermobilization vis-à-vis black mobilization. This assertion was not demonstrated empirically and, in fact, subsequent researchers such as Stanley (1987) and Cassell (1979) argue that this increase was definitely not a white countermobilization against black participation. For didactic purposes, and to test this disagreement, we present the original hypothesized relationship as our point of departure.

### Data, Hypotheses, and Operational Definitions

The survey data used to evaluate the five models are drawn from a statewide public opinion survey of Texans that oversampled African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Asian-Americans.<sup>9</sup> The survey was conducted using randomly selected telephone households in Texas between October 29, 1993, and February 23, 1994. The sample design was determined by the requirement to produce cost-effective, large oversamples of particular ethnic groups without biasing the sample.<sup>10</sup> The Anglo and Mexican-American samples and half of the African-American sample were selected by drawing a random sample of all households in Texas. The other half of the African-American sample was selected from telephone numbers in areas with higher concentrations of African-Americans.<sup>11</sup> Nearly all Asian-Americans were selected from listed numbers of households with Asian surnames.<sup>12</sup> In all cases, the actual ethnicity of the household was determined by the self-report of the respondent rather than the origin of the sample.

Our dependent variables include measures of the *level*, as well as the particular *type*, of participation individuals report. The first participation measure is an additive index, indicating how many political activities the respondent reported engaging in over the past 12 months, and whether the individual had voted in the 1992 presidential election. This “overall” participation score ranges from 0 (for those individuals who reported doing nothing) to 8 (for those individuals who reported voting and engaging in all of the other political activities).

Anglos report participating at substantially higher levels than members of the other groups. Only 13.4% of Anglos report engaging in no political activities,

<sup>9</sup>Research funding for this project was provided primarily by the Office of the Associate Provost for Research and Graduate Studies, Texas A&M University, through the Interdisciplinary Research Initiatives Program, along with the Center for Biotechnology Policy and Ethics, through the Institute of Biosciences and Technology; the Racial and Ethnic Studies Institute (RESI), the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI); and the Department of Political Science, all academic units of Texas A&M University. Principal investigators are James Dyer, PPRI; Jan Leighley, Department of Political Science; George Rogers, Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, Texas A&M University; and Gail Thomas, RESI.

<sup>10</sup>The survey design produced representative samples of each racial/ethnic group: African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Anglos. Additional sampling details are available from the authors upon request.

<sup>11</sup>Sampling from the higher-concentration areas was not viewed as a serious problem as African-Americans tend to live in relatively segregated areas. We compared the two African-American samples on each of the survey questions and found only the zip code to be significantly different—suggesting that the sampling technique did not introduce a systematic bias in the data.

<sup>12</sup>Sampling using listed surnames was dictated by the low percentage of Asian-Americans in the state and the fact that they are concentrated in small geographical areas. Insufficient data were collected on Asian-Americans through random sampling to allow for a meaningful comparison between the two samples, limiting our ability to assess whether the sampling technique biased the sample results. Our confidence in the data is based primarily on the fact that sampling by listed surnames is a commonly used technique in sampling Asian-Americans (see Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989).



compared to 24% of African-Americans, 35.1% of Mexican-Americans, and 43.2% of Asian-Americans. At the opposite end of the scale, 21.2% of Anglos report engaging in four or more activities, compared to 13.4% of African-Americans, 10.8% of Mexican-Americans, and 8.3% of Asian-Americans.

Our other participation measures are dummy variables indicating whether the individual reports participating in a particular type of activity (i.e., contacting, contributing money, and voting).<sup>13</sup> The same relative participation rates are evidenced in these particular types of activities as for the overall participation index: Anglos are the most likely to report engaging in each of these activities, African-Americans second most likely, Mexican-Americans third most likely, and Asian-Americans the least likely to report such activity.

We next describe the empirical measures we use to test the five participation models and state the direction of the hypothesized relationship between each indicator and participation. The *socioeconomic status* model is tested using two standard demographic indicators: **Education** and **Income**. The *psychological resources* model is operationalized using two indicators: **Political Interest**, a 4-point scale representing individuals' self-reported interest in politics and public affairs, and **Political Efficacy** (whether the individual feels she has a say in government). We expect each of these measures to be positively associated with political participation.

The *social connectedness* model is tested using three indicators: **Marital Status** (a 1/0 dummy variable where 1 indicates being married), **Length of Residence** in the community (measured in years), and **Home Ownership** (a dummy variable indicating whether the individual owns a house or not). Being married, longer periods of residence in the community, and owning a home are assumed to increase the individual's likelihood of developing social ties in the community, and are thus hypothesized to increase the probability of participating.

The *group consciousness* model consists of two variables: **Group Closeness** and **Intergroup Distance**. The closeness measure, similar to group identity indicators used in earlier studies, is based on individuals' self-reported closeness to his/her own ethnic group members.<sup>14</sup> The 5-point scale ranges from "very close" (5) to "not close at all" (1), with the scale value of 3 (neutral) including those individuals who responded that they didn't know or refused to answer. The model hypothesizes that the greater the closeness, the greater the participation. The intergroup distance variable indicates how close the respondent feels toward the *other* three ethnic

<sup>13</sup>The question on participation other than voting asked respondents which of the following political activities they had engaged in over the past 12 months: working or cooperating with others to solve a problem affecting the community, contacting a public official, contributing money or working for a party or candidate, attending a meeting, attending a demonstration or rally, signing a petition, and talking to friends or neighbors about a problem.

<sup>14</sup>The exact question wording is: "How close would you say you feel to [Anglos/African-Americans/Asian-Americans/Mexican-Americans] other than your family? Would you say you feel very close, fairly close, not too close, or not close at all?"

groups.<sup>15</sup> Each respondent reports a distance score for each of the other three groups, from “very close” (1) to “not close at all” (5), with the scale value of 3 (neutral) including those who responded that they didn’t know or refused to answer; these scores are then added to construct an overall distance measure. The variable ranges from 3, little distance, to 15, great distance. The group consciousness model predicts that the greater the intergroup distance, the greater the participation.

The *group conflict* model is conceptualized as the potential threat from out-groups, and is operationalized using the size of the out-group in the individual’s local community (as identified by zip code). More specifically, it is the percentage of the population comprised of ethnic groups other than the respondent’s own, within the individual’s self-reported zip code region.<sup>16</sup> It thus assumes a countermobilization effect where larger out-group size reflects more threat to the individual respondent’s group. This measure is similar to that employed by Giles and Buckner (1993), who use the black percentage of the parish population as an indicator of threat for whites.

The population data used to measure threat are taken from the Census Bureau’s *Census of Population* (U.S. Department of Commerce 1990a), where each survey respondent is assigned the value of 1.0 minus the proportion of the total population in the community of residence that is made up of the respondent’s own ethnic group.<sup>17</sup> All individuals reported as Mexican-American are coded as Mexican-American, regardless of race; the other three groups measured are African-American, Asian-American, and Anglo. The threat measure varies from 0.03 to 1.0 for the entire sample, with a mean of 0.67.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, previous research on immigrant populations emphasizes the importance of individuals’ citizenship status and acculturation into U.S. society (e.g., de la Garza and DeSipio 1992; DeSipio 1996; Lien 1994a, 1994b; Pachon and DeSipio 1994). While investigating the nature of the relationships between citizenship, acculturation, and participation is not the primary focus of the analysis below, this earlier research suggests that these factors should be taken into account in testing the models identified above.

Due to possible problems created by directly asking individuals’ their citizenship status, and the questionable validity of such self-reports, we use the

<sup>15</sup>The exact question wording is: “Now I’d like to ask you how close you feel in your ideas and feeling towards different groups of people. Please tell me if you feel very close, fairly close, not too close, or not close at all to each of the following groups.”

<sup>16</sup>Because we had to match individuals’ self-reported zip codes in 1993 with 1990 census data for this variable, individuals who were residing in areas with new zip codes had to be coded as missing. This reduces the sample size from one-third to one-fourth, and is why later tables are based on a smaller number of cases. Given the loss of such a large number of cases, we replicated all the analyses reported in the paper excluding the threat variable with no differences in substantive findings resulting from the larger sample size.

<sup>17</sup>The zip code-level census data were provided by the Texas State Data Center at Texas A&M University, Dr. Steve Murdock, director.

<sup>18</sup>The mean and range for each of the ethnic groups is: for Mexican-Americans, .54, .05–.96; for African-Americans, .75, .58–1.0; for Asian-Americans, .97, .87–1.0; and for Anglos, .37, .03–.74.

individual's self-report as to being born in the United States or not as a citizenship proxy.<sup>19</sup> Our indicator of acculturation to U.S. society is whether the respondent reports the use of English as the primary language used at home.<sup>20</sup>

### A Comment on Research Design

The typical analytic approach used in quantitative studies of minority participation is to estimate a multivariate model consisting of a set of theoretically relevant variables with the addition of dummy variables for each minority group represented in the sample. Significant coefficient estimates for an ethnicity dummy variable indicate that individuals belonging to that group participate more (in the case of a positive coefficient estimate) or less (in the case of a negative coefficient estimate) than Anglos (the reference group, for whom there is no dummy variable included in the model).

The significance of race is then interpreted as a reflection of these ethnicity dummy variables; insignificant coefficient estimates suggest that observed differences in the level of minority participation (as compared to Anglos) simply reflect compositional differences, in terms of the other variables included in the multivariate model, across groups. The most common findings regarding race/ethnicity and participation in this respect are that, controlling for socioeconomic status, psychological resources, and acculturation, African-Americans and Latinos are equally as likely, while Asian-Americans are significantly less likely, to participate as are Anglos (e.g., Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The interpretation typically offered in light of the findings regarding Asian-Americans is that there are additional, unmeasured "cultural" barriers to Asian-Americans' participation in political life.

We take issue with this modeling strategy and interpretation. Beyond reducing the significance of race to identifying differences in participation levels across groups, these analyses require one highly questionable assumption: that in estimating the theoretically relevant variables, the population parameters are equal across ethnic groups.<sup>21</sup> Yet if we acknowledge that the political and social

<sup>19</sup>Only 13.7% of Asian-Americans report being born in the U.S. This likely reflects the relative recency of large numbers of Vietnamese immigrants to Texas in the post-1970s era, which is also confirmed by the high proportion (47.3%) of Asian-Americans born in the U.S. who report that their parents were the first ancestors to come to the U.S. In contrast, approximately 72% of Mexican-Americans report being born in the U.S., and their self-reports of which generation came first are more evenly distributed across generations.

<sup>20</sup>Approximately 60% of Asian-Americans report speaking an Asian language the most at home, compared to 40% of Mexican-Americans who report that they mostly speak Spanish.

<sup>21</sup>We, too, in effect make this assumption by grouping individuals of different national origin in the pan-ethnic group we label "Asian-American." We believe this has limited effects on the empirical results, for two reasons. First, the Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce 1990b) reports that over 50% of the Asian population in Texas are of either Chinese or Vietnamese origin; hence, the diversity of the population in terms of nativity is not especially high. And second, ethnicity in the survey is determined by a self-report question using "Asian-American" as an option, but also allowing individuals to specify an alternative ethnic identity.

experiences of these groups are structured, if only in part, by ethnicity, then we must question the assumption that these parameters are indeed equivalent. Does, for example, the same level of education for African-Americans provide the same privileges and opportunities as that for Anglos? for Latinos? If not, then even “objective” factors will be related to participation in different ways across groups.

This problem is amenable to empirical validation by testing the participation models discussed above separately by racial/ethnic group. Unlike previous studies, we are able to do so because of the exceptionally large size of the group subsamples included in the survey. And doing so provides valuable new evidence in terms of the generalizability of the theories we are testing. Specifically, it demonstrates whether these theories are valid within significant subgroups of the population.

This is particularly important for studies of minority participation, as most studies of participation “in general” or in the case of a particular ethnic group assume that the population of interest is homogeneous. The problem that results in the former instance is that “general” theories of participation are tested using national survey data consisting almost entirely of Anglos. In the latter instance, where surveys of one particular ethnic group are used, it is impossible to test for differences across groups due to timing, sampling, and contextual variations across surveys. The analyses below are motivated by our interest in addressing this assumption of the homogeneity of parameters across racial/ethnic subgroups, and providing more precise estimates of these differences across groups.

### Testing the Alternative Models

We first estimate an OLS regression model that tests the five alternative participation theories separately for each racial/ethnic group, using the overall participation score as the dependent variable. These results are presented in Table 1. The SES and psychological resources models are strongly supported, with **Education**, **Income**, **Political Interest**, and **Political Efficacy** significantly associated with higher levels of participation. The three exceptions to this point include **Income** being an insignificant predictor of overall participation for Asian-Americans, and **Political Efficacy** being an insignificant predictor of participation for African-Americans and Asian-Americans. In all other cases, individuals with higher levels of status or psychological resources participate more.

The social connectedness model, which typically receives strong support when tested with national samples consisting primarily of Anglos, is partially confirmed in these results. The longer one has lived in the same community, the greater the level of overall participation. Further, **Home Ownership** is a significant predictor of overall participation for Asian-Americans and Mexican-Americans. In no case, however, is **Marital Status** associated with individuals’ levels of participation.

TABLE 1

## Basic Participation Models, Estimated Separately by Ethnic Group

	Anglos	African-Americans	Asian-Americans	Mexican-Americans
<i>Socioeconomic Status</i>				
Education	.37*** (.08)	.24*** (.09)	.19*** (.08)	.22*** (.07)
Income	.21*** (.05)	.18*** (.05)	.03 (.04)	.11** (.05)
<i>Psychological Resources</i>				
Political Interest	.46*** (.10)	.54*** (.09)	.31*** (.09)	.37*** (.09)
Political Efficacy	.30** (.17)	.01 (.16)	.03 (.16)	.40** (.17)
<i>Social Connectedness</i>				
Length of Residence	.02*** (.01)	.01* (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.01* (.01)
Marital Status	.05 (.19)	.15 (.18)	-.08 (.17)	.07 (.17)
Home Ownership	.25 (.20)	.15 (.18)	.48*** (.18)	.28* (.18)
<i>Group Consciousness</i>				
Group Closeness	.001 (.08)	-.10 (.09)	.05 (.07)	.12 (.11)
Intergroup Distance	-.02 (.03)	-.05** (.03)	-.05** (.03)	-.01 (.03)
<i>Group Conflict</i>				
Threat	-1.08** (.50)	.15 (.91)	-2.34 (3.68)	-.03 (.32)
Born in United States	.10 (.46)	.47 (.44)	.61*** (.26)	.81*** (.22)
English Spoken at Home	1.92** (.96)	-.03 (.82)	.28* (.18)	.05 (.19)
Intercept	-3.51*** (1.29)	-1.37 (1.15)	-3.46 (3.63)	-1.99** (0.72)
Adjusted $R^2$	.31	.26	.20	.31
Number of cases	280	324	317	302

Table entries are OLS regression coefficients, followed by the associated standard error.

\* $p < 0.10$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

\*\* $p < 0.05$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

The group consciousness model receives little support across racial/ethnic groups. *Group Closeness* is insignificant in every case, while *Intergroup Distance* is significant only for African-Americans and Asian-Americans.<sup>22</sup> The latter finding is exactly the opposite, substantively, of what we hypothesized: African-Americans and Asian-Americans who feel more distant from other groups are *less* likely to participate than are those who feel closer to other groups. Hence, negative attitudes toward out-groups “matter”—but tend to demobilize, rather than mobilize, political involvement for African-Americans and Asian-Americans. Our expectation that the model is more suitable as an explanation of minority, rather than Anglo, participation is basically confirmed.

Our hypothesis regarding the group conflict model is, likewise, partially supported, in that *Group Threat* is significantly related to participation for Anglos. But instead of threat mobilizing participation, as we had anticipated, it depresses participation: Anglos residing in communities where the size of the out-group is large are *less* likely to participate than individuals who reside in communities where the size of the out-group is small.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the greater the perceived threat, the less likely Anglos are to participate in politics.<sup>24</sup>

More broadly, Table 1 demonstrates the critical importance of the SES and psychological resources models to all groups, in contrast to the mixed applicability of the other models across each of the four racial/ethnic groups. The unexpected findings—both in the direction of estimated effects for *Threat* and *Intergroup Distance*, as well as for which groups various models were suitable—likewise underscore the critical importance of the modeling assumptions made in earlier research: the population parameters are not equivalent across groups, and our modeling techniques should accommodate this reality. Otherwise, we are

<sup>22</sup>We also tested several alternative (multiplicative) measures of group consciousness, as suggested by Miller et al.'s (1981) persuasive argument and findings regarding the multidimensional nature of group consciousness. None of these measures were associated with political participation.

<sup>23</sup>We also considered two modifications of this analysis. First, we tested whether this finding might reflect a nonlinear relationship between threat and participation, a possibility suggested by Matthews and Prothro (1966) as well as Blalock (1967). We did so by estimating the effect of threat as the combination of two variables: the original value of *Threat* (as used in Table 1) plus the squared value of *Threat*, expecting that a significant coefficient for the squared term would indicate a nonlinear relationship. In every case the same basic finding holds: *Threat* is significant, and negative only for Anglos, and the nonlinear (*Threat*-squared) term is insignificant. Second, we also investigated the possibility that the threat argument was relevant only for blacks as an out-group, by substituting the size of the black population as an alternative measure of threat in the model presented in Table 1. This produced the same substantive result: the coefficient for the size of the black population was estimated to be significant and negative, but only for Anglos.

<sup>24</sup>An alternative interpretation of this finding is that it results from a self-selection process: that Anglos who find themselves residing in areas of high threat who would otherwise mobilize against such threat choose to relocate, and that what we observe in this cross-sectional data is the result of Anglos who “choose” to remain exhibiting a different (i.e., negative) response to threat. This possibility deserves further consideration, but we cannot do so within the constraints of our research design and data.

drawing incorrect inferences regarding which factors motivate participation across racial/ethnic groups, as well as the very generalizability of the models themselves.

The evidence offered in Table 1 must be interpreted cautiously, for the conclusions that parameter estimates vary across groups is based simply on comparing whether a variable is significant (or not) across multiple equations, rather than determining a precise level of significance for parameter differences. To provide statistical estimates of significant differences in population parameters across groups would require combining the four subsamples and estimating a new “interactive” model consisting of all of the variables included in the models in Table 1 plus interaction terms for each variable and each group. That is, to the basic model presented in Table 1 we would add three additional variables for each existing variable: the existing variable multiplied by a dummy variable representing whether the individual was African-American or not; the existing variable multiplied by a dummy variable representing whether the individual was Asian-American or not; and the existing variable multiplied by a Mexican-American dummy variable. With four variables for each concept of interest, we would have statistical estimates of whether the variable has an independent effect on participation for the entire sample, and whether the effect of that variable varies significantly for Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Mexican-Americans.

The problem with this approach is that it results in an equation with 52 independent variables (13 original variables +  $[13 \times 3]$  interaction variables). Aside from the basic problem that some of these coefficients will be estimated incorrectly simply by chance (at a conventional significance level of  $p < .05$ ), the multicollinearity associated with the large number of interaction variables included in the model simply prohibits us from confidently drawing substantive conclusions using the  $t$ -statistics associated with each coefficient estimate.

A common solution to this multicollinearity problem is to investigate whether *sets* of coefficients are significant as predictors, and this is the approach that we have adopted to see if the theories that we are testing vary in their applicability across groups. This approach has the advantage of yielding more precise and reliable statistical estimates of differences across groups than what the “eyeball” estimates of Table 1 allow.

The general strategy that we employ is to combine the four subsamples and compare results for the basic model (consisting of the 12 variables used in Table 1, plus the three dummy variables for African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Mexican-Americans) with the results for three additional models (one for African-Americans, one for Asian-Americans, and one for Mexican-Americans). Each of the latter models consists of the basic model plus a set of 12 interaction terms, where each independent variable is multiplied by a racial/ethnic group dummy variable for each group separately (and hence, three resulting models, each with 27 variables).

More specifically, we first estimate the basic model (with 15 variables) on the combined sample. This is the standard approach to modeling the effects of race on participation used in earlier research, and we refer to this as the “restricted” model. Then to the restricted model we add 12 interaction terms, consisting of a dummy variable for one of the ethnic/racial groups multiplied by each of the 12 independent variables. This results in a model with 27 variables (the 15 variables from the basic model plus the 12 interaction terms), which we refer to as the unrestricted model. Then we compare the difference in the residual sum of squares between the restricted and unrestricted models (distributed as an F-statistic) to test whether the subset of interaction variables is significant (see Johnston 1984, 187).<sup>25</sup> A significant test statistic suggests that the parameters of the “basic” variables for the group being considered differ sufficiently from the estimates for the entire sample that our model predicts participation better when including the interaction terms. We can thus conclude that the process through which individuals from the group being considered come to participate in politics is significantly different from that of the other groups. We then repeat this same modeling strategy—comparing the restricted and unrestricted model results—for Mexican-Americans and then for Asian-Americans.

Table 2 presents the statistical estimates for the basic (“restricted”) models of overall participation, voting, contacting, and contributing. We include the latter three dependent variables as part of the analysis so that we can assess the extent

TABLE 2  
Basic and Group-Interaction Models of Political Participation

	Participation	Voting	Contacting	Contributing
Constant	-1.50** (.37)	-5.51** (.66)	-4.21*** (.69)	-5.09** (.73)
Education	.25** (.04)	.52** (.07)	.26** (.07)	.20** (.07)
Income	.14** (.02)	.11** (.04)	.04 (.04)	.19** (.04)
Political Interest	.41** (.05)	.45** (.08)	.69** (.09)	.49** (.09)
Political Efficacy	.17* (.08)	.33* (.14)	.17 (.15)	.33* (.16)
Length of Residence	.01** (.004)	.05** (.01)	.01* (.01)	.02** (.01)
Marital Status	.07 (.09)	.37** (.14)	.05 (.15)	-.18 (.16)
Home Ownership	.29** (.09)	.59** (.15)	.43** (.16)	.25 (.17)

<sup>25</sup>For the voting, contributing, and contacting models (dichotomous dependent variables), we computed a similar test statistic by comparing -2 times the log likelihood of the “restricted” and “unrestricted” models, which is distributed as a chi-square statistic (see Kennedy 1992, 61–63).



TABLE 2 (continued)

	Participation	Voting	Contacting	Contributing
Group Closeness	.02 (.04)	-.01 (.07)	-.10 (.07)	.17 (.09)
Intergroup Distance	-.03* (.01)	-.03 (.02)	-.07** (.03)	-.07** (.03)
Threat	-.30 (.25)	.02 (.43)	-.31 (.43)	-.22 (.44)
Born in United States	.55** (.14)	1.26** (.24)	.60* (.27)	.15 (.27)
English Spoken at Home	.19 (.13)	.63** (.20)	-.02 (.24)	.05 (.24)
Black	.03 (.15)	-.22 (.26)	-.37 (.25)	.14 (.26)
Asian	-.33 (.22)	-.79* (.38)	-.38 (.38)	-.30 (.39)
Hispanic	-.04 (.13)	-.40 (.23)	-.36 (.22)	-.05 (.23)
Number of cases	1,226	1,485	1,433	1,470
Adjusted/Cox & Snell $R^2$	.31	.32	.14	.11
Residual Sums of Squares/-2	2,233.57	1,439.61	1,316.47	1,263.23
Log Likelihood				
Percent correctly predicted		76.77%	78.51%	82.38%
<i>Black Interactions</i> , Residual	2,211.47	1,423.61	1,310.55	1,256.84
Sums of Squares/-2 Log				
Likelihood				
F-statistic/Chi <sup>2</sup>	.998	16.01	5.92	6.39
<i>Hispanic Interactions</i> , Residual	2,213.31	1,421.76	1,302.89	1,250.90
Sums of Squares/-2 Log				
Likelihood				
F-statistic/Chi <sup>2</sup>	.914	17.86	13.58	12.33
<i>Asian Interactions</i> , Residual	2,188.49	1,406.62	1,309.25	1,244.77
Sums of Squares/-2 Log				
Likelihood				
F-statistic/Chi <sup>2</sup>	2.058*	32.99*	7.22	18.46

Table entries are OLS coefficients, followed by the associated standard error in the first column, and MLE coefficients, followed by the associated standard error, in the last three columns.

\* $p < .05$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

\*\* $p < .01$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

to which our findings regarding overall levels of participation are consistent with those for particular types of participation. To the extent that there are race/ethnicity-related patterns of mobilization to different types of participation, or where racial/ethnic groups have different preferences for specific types of participation, the various participation models would not yield similar estimates

across participation types. Hence, we test this possibility by analyzing these three alternative forms of participation.

Below the results for each basic (restricted) model in Table 2 are the model statistics used to compute the F or chi-square tests of significance for each of the unrestricted (group-specific interaction) models, i.e., either the residual sums of squares associated with the overall participation regression or the log likelihood value (multiplied by -2) for the other models.

Although not our primary interest, we comment briefly on the coefficient estimates for the restricted models on three points. First, the results for overall participation are generally consistent with previous findings: the socioeconomic status, psychological resources, and social connectedness models are generally supported, while the findings for the group consciousness model are quite weak. Second, these findings generally hold across types of participation. And third, we find that African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Mexican-Americans participate at the same level as Anglos do (i.e., the coefficient estimates for the racial/ethnic group dummy variables are insignificant), controlling for other factors. The one exception to this point is that of Asian-Americans, who, *ceteris paribus*, tend to vote less than Anglos. While previous research has concluded that this reflects cultural barriers to Asian-American participation, we offer an alternative explanation, which we return to (and clarify) in the analyses presented in Table 3.

Our primary interest in Table 2 is testing whether the coefficient subsets consisting of the racial/ethnic group interaction terms are significant as predictors of either individuals' overall level of participation or probability of voting, contacting, or contributing. These results are reported in the bottom half of the table, where the F-statistic (or, in the case of the logistic regressions, the chi-square statistic) suggests whether the parameter variations modeled by the interaction terms for the particular group are significant. In only 2 of the 12 cases do the models yield significant F-statistics, and in both cases the group being considered is Asian-American: for overall participation as well as voter turnout, the subset of interaction terms are significant. This suggests that for Asian-Americans, the parameter estimates for the basic variables are not the same, and that we can better understand the participation and voting behavior of Asian-Americans by explicitly modeling these differences.

To begin this modeling process, we note that not all of the 12 interaction terms, of course, were significantly associated with overall participation and voter turnout. Thus, to be more specific regarding race/ethnicity-based differences in the effects of the various participation models, we repeated these tests for significant differences for subsets of coefficients by comparing the model results with the 12 interaction terms (the unrestricted models that the tests in Table 2 are based on) for overall participation and voting with a restricted model consisting of the basic model plus only those coefficients estimated to be significant in the unrestricted (27-variable) model including the Asian-American interactions.

TABLE 3

## Final Model Estimates for Overall Participation and Voting

	Participation	Voting
Constant	-1.64** (.37)	-5.85** (.68)
Education	.23** (.04)	.53** (.07)
Income	.18** (.03)	.09* (.04)
Political Interest	.41** (.05)	.60** (.09)
Political Efficacy	-.16* (.08)	.32* (.14)
Length of Residence	.01** (.004)	.04** (.01)
Marital Status	.07 (.09)	.38** (.15)
Home Ownership	.29** (.09)	.56** (.15)
Group Closeness	.02 (.04)	.001 (.07)
Intergroup Distance	-.03* (.01)	-.03 (.02)
Threat	-.31 (.25)	-.11 (.44)
Born in United States	.55** (.14)	1.25** (.24)
English Spoken at Home	.18 (.12)	.64** (.20)
Black	.07 (.15)	-.17 (.26)
Asian	.30 (.31)	.31 (.65)
Hispanic	-.02 (.13)	-.37 (.23)
Income*Asian	-.14** (.05)	—
Interest*Asian	—	-.62** (.17)
Years*Asian	—	.08** (.02)
Number of cases	1,226	1,485
Adjusted $R^2$ /Cox&Snell $R^2$	.31	.33
Percent correctly predicted		77.44%
Residual Sums of Squares/-2 Log Likelihood (Restricted Model)	2,217.97	1,413.69
Residual Sums of Squares/-2 Log Likelihood (Unrestricted Model)	2,188.49	1,439.61
F-statistic/Chi <sup>2</sup>	1.468	7.07

Table entries are OLS coefficients, followed by the associated standard error in the first column, and MLE coefficients, followed by the associated standard error, in the second column.

\* $p < .05$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

\*\* $p < .01$  (one-tailed  $t$ -test)

Here we are testing whether the entire set of interactions for Asian-Americans predicts participation or voter turnout significantly better than only the subset of interactions that were estimated to be significant in the unrestricted models reported in Table 2.

More specifically, we estimate the basic model of overall participation, adding the multiplicative term for income and Asian-Americans (the only variable estimated to be significant in the unrestricted model reported in Table 2), and compare these results to the unrestricted model, computing an F-test of statistical significance. As shown in Table 3, Column 1, this interaction term is statistically significant and negative as a predictor of overall participation: income has a positive effect on participation, but for Asian-Americans that effect is significantly less. More importantly, the F-statistic based on the comparison of the restricted (with only the multiplicative income/Asian-American term added to the basic model) and unrestricted (all interaction terms) model is insignificant, suggesting that we have lost nothing in predictive ability by dropping all of the other interaction terms for Asian-Americans. This, then, is our "final" model of overall participation.

Similarly, we estimated the basic model for voter turnout, adding to it the two significant interaction terms for Asian-Americans in Table 2: interest and years in the community. Comparing these model results to those reported in Table 2 (the unrestricted model) yields an insignificant chi-square statistic, suggesting that the unrestricted model of voter turnout is not significantly better than the restricted model (see Table 2, col. 2). Substantively, the model of voter turnout presented in Table 3 yields similar results to those presented in Table 2, except that in this new model the parameter coefficient for Asian-Americans is no longer significant. We thus find (in contrast to Table 2), that when we allow the effects of our model estimates to vary across racial/ethnic groups, and when all alternative models are specified, that there are no differences in participation levels, regardless of the type of participation being considered.

## Conclusions

Our primary goal in this paper was to assess the robustness of five models of political participation for Anglos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Mexican-Americans. Such a comprehensive test of this diverse set of models has never been offered by scholars of political participation, despite compelling theoretical reasons to do so. Estimating the general participation model separately across the four ethnic groups reflects on how effective, and generalizable, each theory is. The more consistent the results across the subgroup analyses, the stronger the support for the model being considered.

The socioeconomic status, psychological resource, and social connectedness models (the latter measured by years in the same community) receive strong support as predictors of overall participation across each of the four ethnic/racial

groups. In contrast, the group consciousness model fails to account for individuals' level of political engagement, with the exceptions of intergroup distance depressing participation levels for Asian-Americans and African-Americans.

The group conflict model is supported only in the case of Anglos, but the effect of threat is to depress, rather than mobilize, individuals. This finding is an important contribution to the limited literature on group conflict and political behavior in several ways. First, it is the only test of the group conflict model to rely on individual-level data. Second, we provide empirical evidence that threat acts only on the majority group, as opposed to "minority" groups. Third, we provide the first empirical evidence that threat depresses, rather than enhances, participation.

Another notable finding relates to our evidence regarding the relative participation rates of the various racial/ethnic groups. A consistent finding in previous research is that Asian-Americans are significantly less likely to participate than Anglos, even controlling for various demographic, attitudinal, and acculturation factors. We have replicated this finding, but *only for voter turnout, and only when using the standard "dummy variable" modeling approach*. This suggests that, compared to earlier studies, our ability to include more "group-based" theories of participation, as well as allowing parameter estimates to vary across racial/ethnic groups, account for all differences in the relative participation rates across groups. Our finding thus suggests that cultural or attitudinal explanations offered in previous studies as reasons for the lower participation levels of Asian-Americans are not valid in general. And although we must be cautious in our generalizations due to our data being restricted to Texas, we suspect that "theoretically inclusive" studies, with correct model specifications, in other states or nationwide will confirm our findings in the future.

Thus, our findings challenge conventional wisdom regarding the existence of differences in participation levels across groups, as well as the importance of group consciousness as a stimulus of political participation. Further, we have demonstrated rather convincingly that the group conflict model is relevant to the study of political participation—and, unlike previous studies, have done so using individual-level data. Each of these findings deserves further attention to better understand how the political system structures participation opportunities, and therefore, the political behavior, of an increasingly diverse mass public.

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