

Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 17: Participation

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Overview

1. Readings

Wong et al., *Asian American Political Participation*

Leighley and Nagler, *Who Votes Now?*

Hersh, *Hacking the Electorate*

Readings

Questions

1. **Who** participates in elections and other forms of political expression?
2. **Why** do people participate politically? What motivates them?
3. **How** do the activities of campaigns shape participation?
4. **How** do people who vote differ from people who do not vote, and what are the consequences?

Readings

Wong et al., *Asian American Political Participation*

Asian American Political Participation

Important in its own right:

- Fastest-growing share of eligible voters in the U.S.
- High variation in partisanship
 - Vietnamese Americans: 42% Republican
 - Indian Americans: 28% Republican

A case study in political identity:

- Asian Americans are an extremely diverse group in terms of:
 - **Nation of origin:** Bengali, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Malay, Pakistani, Thai, Vietnamese...
 - **Religion:** Buddhist, Catholic, Confucian, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, atheist...
 - Time of immigration to US

Linked Fate

And yet, to many members of this diverse group, an Asian-American identity is meaningful. **Why?**

Linked fate: *The sense that what happens in the lives of other members of one's group affects what happens in one's own life.*

- gender
- race
- national origin
- profession

Linked fate is thought to promote group cohesion in spite of internal divisions, e.g. education and income. **How does linked fate arise?**

Self-Identification

We talked last class about how people identify with groups. But **which groups?** How do social identities form? And why does it matter?

“People of Asian descent in the U.S. use different terms to describe themselves. In general, do you think of yourself as...?”

- [Ethnic] American
- [Ethnic group]
- Asian American
- Asian
- American
- Other

Self-Identification and Linked Fate

Despite significant variation, overall pattern is:

- Relatively small proportion identifies as **Asian American**
- Larger proportion identifies as **Ethnic Group**
- Largest proportion identifies as **Ethnic American**

Correlation between self-identification and linked fate:

- 54% of self-identified Asian Americans feel linked fate with other Asian Americans
- Asian: 47%
- Ethnic American: 45%
- Ethnic Group: 44%

Self-Identification and Political Participation

TABLE [3] Ethnic and Self-Identified Categories by Political Participation

	<i>Likely Voter</i>	<i>Political Contributor</i>	<i>Contact Government Officials</i>	<i>Protester</i>	<i>Community Activist</i>
Asian American	49	15	10	4	24
Ethnic American	48	15	11	5	21
Ethnic group	42	9	6	4	17
Asian	44	9	7	4	16

NOTE: Rates are in percentages.

SOURCE: Authors' compilation of data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey (Wong et al., 2011).

Linked Fate and Political Participation

TABLE [4] Rates of Political Participation by Ethnic Identification

	Likely Voter	Political Contributor	Contact Government Officials	Protester	Community Activist
Pan-ethnic linked fate					
Yes	46	15	11	6	24
No	45	11	8	4	20
Ethnic linked fate					
Yes	46	15	11	6	23
No	45	11	8	3	20
Commonality with Asians					
Yes	45	14	10	5	23
No	47	8	5	3	15
Political commonality with others					
Yes	46	14	10	5	23
No	39	6	3	2	12
Discriminated against					
Yes	44	17	13	6	27
No	46	10	7	4	18
Victim of hate crime					
Yes	42	16	17	8	29
No	46	12	9	4	21
All	43	13	9	4	21

Readings

Leighley and Nagler, *Who Votes Now?*

How Representative Are Voters of Nonvoters?

Unproblematic case: voters and nonvoters share all preferences

(Obviously) problematic case: voters and nonvoters have different preferences on candidates and issues

(Deceptively) problematic case: voters and nonvoters have same preferences on candidates, but different preferences on issues

- Imagine a world with two types of people (voters and nonvoters) and two dimensions (social and economic)
- **Voters** who prefer R to D do so based on economic issues
- **Voters** who prefer D to R do so based on social issues
- **Nonvoters** who prefer R to D do so based on social issues
- **Nonvoters** who prefer D to R do so based on economic issues

Governing vs. Electoral Outcomes

Assuming equal proportions of voters and nonvoters prefer R to D, it makes no difference to the **electoral** outcome whether the nonvoters stay home or come out and vote.

But it makes a big difference to **governing** outcomes if elected officials know and respond to the issue preferences of their voters.

Thus, full assessment of representation requires comparing voters to nonvoters on preferences over both **candidates** and **issues**.

Findings

Looking over the 10 presidential elections from 1972 to 2008, voters are more conservative than nonvoters on **redistributive issues** and **candidates**, including:

- Their beliefs about how much the government should do to provide jobs, health insurance, and services
- Partisanship (6/10 elections)
- Ideology (2/10 elections)

But not so much on **value-based issues**, including:

- Women's equality
- Aid to Black citizens
- Defense spending

Readings

Hersh, *Hacking the Electorate*

Campaigns Target Voters With Different Messaging

It is well known that campaigns craft messaging differently based on the audience — including, the race of the receiver.

Racial appeals include:

- Focus on different issues
- Language (Mendelberg's *The Race Card*: Willie Horton & 1988 presidential campaign)
- Whom **not** to target

How is targeting achieved?

- “Surgical approaches”: Canvassers, phone bankers, mailers
- Radio and TV advertisements
- Facebook, Instagram, email...

How Racial Perceptions Affect Campaign Strategies

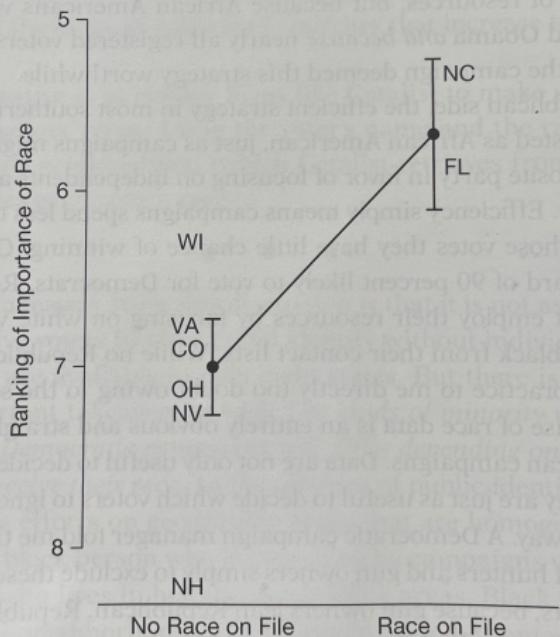
Eight Southern states make voter registration records **with race** publicly available:

- Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee

Discussion: What are the differences in campaign strategy that might arise from **estimating race** vs. directly **perceiving race**?

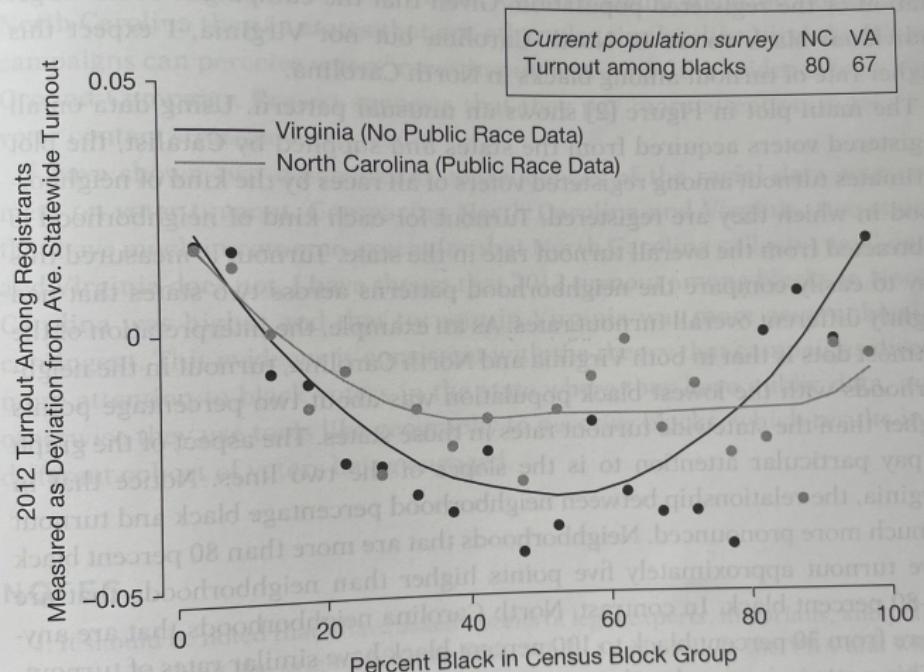
Effects on Campaigns

FIGURE [1] Importance of Voters' Race to Campaign Mobilizers
in Different Data Environments



Downstream Effects on Voters

FIGURE [2] Turnout in 2012 by Block Group Percentage Black in Virginia and North Carolina



Discussion

1. How might we extend Hersh's findings to the hypertargeting made possible by Facebook and other social media platforms? What further predictions might we make about downstream political outcomes?
2. What theoretical mechanisms might explain the correlations between ethnic self-identification, linked fate, and political participation? How could we go about testing these theories?
3. How might American politics look different if voting was compulsory?