



2014

# Solving the Puzzle of the Black Vote: Is Education Really the Missing Piece?

Xavier Robert Brown  
*Georgia Southern University*

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# **Solving the Puzzle of the Black Vote: Is Education Really the Missing Piece?**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors  
in the Department of Political Science  
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

By  
Xavier R. Brown

Under the mentorship of Dr. Richard Pacelle

## **ABSTRACT**

Given the popular knowledge that with greater education comes the likelihood of higher voting participation rates among Americans, it is puzzling that African Americans have not been subject to a rise in voting participation that is equivalent to the increase in the rate of education attainment over the last four decades. This study is dedicated to explaining why education is a weak predictive factor for voting participation among African American voters. It ventures to suggest and support that communal factors tied to group membership exert a strong force on whether or not African American citizens vote.

Thesis Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Dr. Richard Pacelle** \_\_\_\_\_

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Dr. Steven Engel** \_\_\_\_\_

April 2014  
Department of Political Science  
University Honors Program  
**Georgia Southern University**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend sincere and wholehearted thanks to Dr. Richard Pacelle who served as my primary research mentor for this project. He has provided not only guidance, knowledge, and an unwavering commitment to sharing his expertise, but also encouragement and inspiration throughout the duration of this study. Without him, my completion of this work simply would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank Dr. Krista Wiegand, a professor with whom I have had the pleasure of working with throughout the duration of my time here at Georgia Southern University. Her knowledgeable direction and insight have also been invaluable in the completion of this work.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow students Jana Simmons and Elijah Anderson who unknowingly provided me with inspiration as we worked through our individual research projects together. Their encouragement was a strong motivating force for this research.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The promises of freedom and equality under the law are two of the most heralding hallmarks of the political structure in the United States that have appealed to immigrants for decades. The prospect of having an equal say in the government is one that has attracted individuals of all nations and creeds to become American citizens. This steady immigration has slowly transformed America into an intricate mixture of individuals, a figurative estuary collecting the steady flow of races, religions, and ideas from all directions. This delicate relationship between public opinion and governmental policy is mediated by elections. With this in mind, elections and voter participation have become the most important facets in translating the will of the people into policy and thereby important factors in the operation of American democracy.

Although the election process is the tool used to translate public will into law, the opinions of the citizenry can only be accurately portrayed if there is participation on behalf of the public at large. If not, participation by only select subgroups in society could lead to a social structure that supports the hegemony of certain groups over others. Widespread and inclusive voter participation ensures that national and state legislatures take heed of the diverse needs and preferences of the various subgroups that make up the American citizenry. Therefore, it is in the interest of all citizens to promote voter participation and thereby shape laws in ways that benefit everyone. Likewise, voting cycles allow for differing opinions to gain preeminence in legislatures. Since no elected official is permanently incumbent, voting cycles allow voters to expel representatives that inadequately echo the will of their constituents. Voter participation and recurrent voting cycles allow elections to not only help gauge public opinion but to also allow legislatures to respond to changes in the public opinion over time.

The topic that I am venturing to address in this thesis is whether or not the level of education that individuals in the Black community achieve is the most indicative factor of whether or not individuals vote. It has long been argued that education is a great equalizer and research has shown that African Americans, like all other Americans, are more likely to vote as levels of education rise. In fact, education has been touted as an equalizing force for helping minorities and women attain political power. By comparing the effect that education has on the voting turnout of African American voters to the effects on Caucasian voters, I will be able to verify this expected outcome and validate the claim that higher learning decreases the turnout gap between different races. While education is seen as a panacea of sorts, it does not offer the level of empowerment for African Americans that is offered by close contact with like-minded peers in communal groups. After observing changes in the effects of education on African American voters over time, I will explore the topic in greater detail to discover if other factors have a stronger relationship with voting. This topic will explore the many motivations that African Americans have for voting and ultimately discuss which forces are the most effective predictors of political participation, namely in the form of voting in presidential elections.

One of the expected outcomes of education is to indoctrinate citizens with the understanding of how their government operates. This includes the understanding of the benefits that proper representation brings. Since most people desire to secure benefits in various forms for themselves and others close to them, it is a reasonable assumption that rational actors would partake in voting practices to obtain these benefits. Therefore, those with higher levels of education and understanding of the benefits of voting participation should be expected to vote with more frequency. However, I have come to question whether this is the case among African American voters. The research question that I am attempting to answer is: "Is education level

among African Americans the most prominent predictive factor in whether or not Black people vote or are other factors more closely tied with Black voting participation?" The puzzle that I wish to address is that of the complicated net of factors that are present in the lives of Black voters that are not commonly shared with others in the race who do not vote. I want to investigate what motivates African Americans to vote and whether these factors are different from the Caucasian majority and the non-voting portion of the Black race. I hypothesize that while education does have the expected effect on voting outcomes, other factors closely related to community norms and feelings of belongingness have major effects on voting participation as well. While the candidacy of Barack Obama will undoubtedly have an impact on the effect of group membership in the 2008 presidential election, these effects will serve to further display the influence of group membership on vote rather than blatantly confounding the results.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Political scientists have been studying the motivations behind voting virtually since the establishment of the institution in this country. Occurrences like the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that expanded suffrage, the adoption of the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that lowered the maximum voting age to eighteen years of age, the constant influx of immigrants, and the slow but steady population growth among minority groups have only served to increase the number and intensity of studies surrounding voting habits. As inquiring minds have delved deeper into the phenomenon of voting, questions have arisen concerning the motivation of individuals to participate in the voting process and furthermore if the motivations are the same for people of all subgroups and races. As far as motivation goes, it is regarded as a well-known fact that education is a primary factor in whether or not individuals vote regardless

of race. Studies sampling election data from as early as 1968 display that this assumption is true, stating that “among blacks (and whites), as education increased, so did the percentage turning out to vote (Wright 1975).” A later study broadens these findings by emphasizing that, in examining the correlation between college education and voting over time, that “the effect of college education increased starting in 1980s, thereby magnifying the ability of educational attainment to predict turnout (Burden 2009).”

With this being the case, many have attempted to explain this truth using different theories. Sondheimer and Green offer three theories as to why education and voting are so tightly and naturally intertwined. The first, being adapted from an earlier study, states that “education imparts the skills to negotiate bureaucratic hurdles associated with voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).” Higher levels of education are typically thought to endow individuals with the ability to handle organizational structures used in government and procedures used for voting registration. Furthermore, individuals are thought to be empowered to handle these situations and become a part of the political process. Another theory that Sondheimer and Green posit that was also adapted from earlier studies is that “education increases one’s general interest in and knowledge of politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).” Naturally, an informed citizen who has an interest in politics is a very probable candidate to participate in the electoral process. The third theory that Sondheimer and Green offer is that “increased educational attainment expands one’s social network and thus likelihood of participating in community and political endeavors (Sondheimer and Green 2010).” All of these theories assume that education makes one more equipped for voting by adding unto the individual some type of knowledge, whether it be bureaucratic, social or otherwise.



Though many regard the fact that education is a natural and logical predictor of whether any individual votes as a ubiquitously known fact, still others question this. It could be the case that education level and voting participation have more in common than previous studies have sought to expose. One study posits that “factors such as family background or cognitive skills may lead individuals to both attend college and participate in politics” which in that case makes the relationship between the two a spurious one (Berinsky and Lenz 2011). Though the conclusions of this study stand opposed to the majority opinion, the link of a third factor like “family background” or “cognitive skills” would explain the high level of association in the studies of researchers like the aforementioned Wright or Burden.

Enquiries also have been posed regarding the generalizability of the assumption to all individuals regardless of income level, race, religion, or any other qualifying factor of socioeconomic measurement. Much like the topic of my study, other researchers have further challenged the fact that this assumption holds completely true in the case of the African American race. A study dedicated to the demographics of voting in five large southern cities (Atlanta, New Orleans, Memphis, Dallas, and Houston) found that voting levels among White Americans were more affected by variations in socioeconomic status (qualified mostly by the components of income and education level) while the participation of Black Americans was affected significantly less (Murray and Vedlitz 1977). These findings certainly suggest that there is a difference between the motivations of the two races and therefore a fundamental flaw in the equalizing effect on voting levels that education supposedly possesses.

So if education is not the key to motivating African Americans to vote, what is? The answer to this question has been addressed in many different ways. If formal education is not the greatest factor, then it stands to reason that this motivation comes from some informal place such

as in the home or community. The theories of Sondheimer and Green supported the idea that education was the major factor in individuals' participation in voting because of its inherent capacity to broaden social networks and therefore afford individuals greater contact with the community. The idea that community has a significant effect on voter participation is one that has also been explored deeply. Some researchers put great stock in the "ethnic community theory" positing that Black Americans are motivated by the norm of activism in the Black community and are furthermore expected to be "more politically active than whites of equivalent social status (Danigelis 1977)." This theory suggests that African Americans are responsive to group mobilization and the pressure of their peers towards political activism.

This type of "racial group consciousness" is the focus of a recent study conducted by Sharon Austin, Richard Middleton, and Rachel Yon in which the researchers examine changes in voting participation among African Americans and other African ethnics that share similar experiences and therefore have a common goals and desires. The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that both socioeconomic status and group consciousness have an effect on political activism. However, the data suggested that racial group consciousness has a positive and significant effect on all forms of African American participation (including voting) while socioeconomic status (comprised of the education and income variables) has a significant effect only on rallies and voting (Austin, Middleton, and Yon 2012). Another factor that proved to affect only voting participation in this study was attendance at churches that frequently address political topics which are highly prevalent in African American communities. "Social networks among African American churchgoers encourage a higher amount of voting than white churches and other African Americans" and therefore become an integral component in voter participation in Black communities as well (Liu, Austin, and Orey 2009).

The type of research that I endeavor to conduct will have much more in common with the studies focused on racial group consciousness and ethnic community than those that rest on the superiority of education as the major impetus for voting among African Americans. It expands on the standard literature on this topic by considering both education and the target group's surroundings as possible variables in the puzzle of Black voting participation whereas most studies rely exclusively on one variable or the other. This research will also look at these effects over the course of two presidential election cycles to identify if effects are increasing or decreasing from one election to the other whereas most studies assume that the effects of education on voting observed in past studies will hold true in later research and that the impact will remain just as strong. My aim is to examine whether African Americans are motivated mostly by social factors rather than just education and its benefits.

## **THEORY**

The basic motivation for voters in public elections is the desire for representation in legislating bodies that shape public policy. In this way, voters have direct influence on who speaks for their needs and have the opportunity to indirectly negotiate legislation that would be beneficial to them. Put simply, voting is a way for citizens to exert political power and have investment in the political system that guides them. Considering that voting is the most direct method of gaining political clout for individual citizens, participation in elections presents itself as a desirable action. However, there has always remained a sizable faction of citizens who do not vote. Among these is a large amount of the African American population. The fact that African American voter turnout is generally lower than the average for all citizens is likely because African Americans continue to realize the effects of a past of economic, social, and legal

inequality. They feel apathetic towards voting due to past injustices and therefore largely do not participate in voting. Nevertheless, these effects could be addressed by utilizing proper representation to combat these trends through the practice of voting. This begs the question of why African Americans do not participate in the voting process seeing that it could bring significant individual and collective benefits.

Previous studies and popular logic concerning voting suggest that there is a positive correlation between voter participation and level of education. The underlying assumption of this theory is that greater education gives citizens a greater understanding of the impact that government has on their individual lives and thereby the importance of participation. However, though the education attainment rate of African Americans has increased over the years, voter participation has not grown at a similar rate. This suggests that African Americans may have an understanding of the benefits of voting but are not convinced of the accessibility of these benefits possibly due to feelings of distrust in the legislature or supposed futility of their individual vote. Alternatively this could imply that, while the promises of the benefits provided by representation remain appealing, the education system has failed to convey these benefits adequately to educated African Americans.

Since no convincing relationship between education attainment and voter turnout among African Americans is reflected by the present trends, there arises a need to replace this familiar theory. To better explain the motivation for Black voter participation, I build on the ethnic community theory elucidated by Danigelis (1977) positing that political activism for African Americans is significantly impacted by the political activism of others with whom they feel communal ties. The feeling of connection among Black voters likely produces a confidence in voting as a collective action rather than an individual endeavor. The basic assumption is that

Black voters, presumably like all others, participate because of a feeling that their actions matter. This feeling is usually fostered by a sense of belongingness. To date, education has been a factor that has made African Americans feel more comfortable in their abilities to cope as a minority in this country. However, other factors within the ethnic community can lend themselves to promoting belongingness and thereby Black voter turnout. In communities in which voting is a normal, comfortable factor, individuals are socialized to vote rather than pressured by their peers.

I believe that education does have the expected positive effect that most assume it does however its impact is not as substantial when applied to the African American race as an individual subgroup of the population. I argue that the factors of community play the largest role or at least are a major intervening variable in the relationship between education and voting. These factors include church attendance, membership in organizations, and participation in other local functions. The strong ethnic tie, common social experiences, and shared political aims should promote Black Americans to not only vote in the same way but also to actively seek to solicit varying levels of political activism from others in their community. Though there is a noticeable relationship between education level and black voting participation, I expect to find that it is only a spurious one that can be explained best by some outside force. The following are the two hypotheses that I will test in this research:

Hypothesis 1: While education is positively related to voting participation, its impact for Black voters will be significantly less than that for White voters.

Hypothesis 2: Black voters are strongly influenced by communal influences, most notably group membership with other race cohorts.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, I used data sets created by the American National Election Studies for the presidential elections of 2004 and 2008. Of course, the nomination of an African American as the standard bearer for the Democratic Party in 2008 marked a pivotal event in American political history. This event would certainly be expected to cause some deviations from the normal expectations of elections. For that reason, I included an analysis of 2004 as well as 2008. The U.S. Census Bureau reports an increase of voter participation among Black voters from 60% in 2004 to 64.7% in 2008 and I attempt to account for this increase in this study by explaining the effect of group membership on voting participation among African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau). Participants in the ANES survey completed pre-election and post-election questionnaires in which respondents answered questions not only concerning electoral participation, voting behavior, public opinion but also in other areas such as media exposure, cognitive style, values, and predispositions.

For the purpose of my study, I used voter turnout as the dependent variable. Voter turnout is a dummy variable simply based on whether the respondent voted or not where 0=R did not vote and 1=Yes R did vote. To study how turnout is affected by socioeconomic factors, I chose to analyze the joint simultaneous effects of age, income, education, group membership, and feelings concerning the federal government as independent variables.

In order to analyze the relationship between education and voter participation in the African American community, which is the basis of this study, it was necessary for me to compare the effects of education to the effects of other pertinent variables. I chose to also use age, income, and the participants' opinion of the federal government as independent variables because these variables have been widely used in previous voting studies. I used the number of

groups that participants were involved with as a variable to assess the validity of my hypothesis that voter participation in the Black community is positively affected by involvement in groups.

To test the validity of my first hypothesis concerning the inadequacy of education to explain Black voter turnout, it was necessary to include education as an independent variable. For the purpose of this study, education is measured by how many years of school the respondent successfully completed. “Year” refers to completed grade levels rather than actual calendar year, and is coded numerically ranging from 0 to 17, with 0-12 representing school before college, 13-16 corresponding with undergraduate college studies, and 17 representing any education passed the typical four-year bachelor’s degree. Since no coding exists for kindergarten, 1=1st grade and etc. My assumption is that as the level of education rises among citizens so does the likelihood of their voting participation.

In order to analyze whether there exists a relationship between Black voter turnout and pressure from community factors which is the basis of my second hypothesis, I realized that these community factors must first be conceptualized more succinctly to later be used as an independent variable. I chose to conceptualize the extent to which cohorts exert force on individuals in the Black community as group membership. Membership in groups such as labor unions, work association, fraternal groups, community and school groups among others show the investment of African American voters in the community. These groups foster the communal ties and feelings of belongingness among Black citizens prompting them to engage in voting. Used as an independent variable in this study, group membership was coded numerically with questionnaire respondents giving the number of organizations of which they are members. For the purpose of this study, members who are members of no groups are coded as 0; those who are

members of 1 group are coded as 1 and so on. My prediction concerning group membership is that citizens who are members of groups are more likely to vote than those who are unaffiliated.

As an additional independent variable, I added a measure of respondents' opinion of the federal government. For the purposes of this study, the respondents' opinion on various aspects of the performance and decisions of officials working in the federal government are summed into the variable called "Feeling Thermometer: Federal Government in Washington," or "Federal Government Thermometer (ANES 2008)." Respondents were asked to rate the federal government's performance using a "feeling thermometer." The "feeling thermometer" is coded numerically consisting of ratings from 0 to 100, where ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees denoted favorable and warm feelings toward the government, ratings between 0 and 50 degrees denoted unfavorable or cold feelings toward the government, and a rating of exactly 50 meant that the respondent feels neither particularly warm or cold toward the government. This variable was added to show whether people's opinion of the federal government actually affected their participation in voting. It is likely that those who have more positive feelings about the federal government are more likely to vote assuming that these positive feeling reflect a belief in the efficiency of the federal government.

To ensure a thorough analysis of voter turnout, age and income variables were added. Age, coded numerically, reflects how many years the respondent has attained since birth. For the purpose of displaying results, I have created ranges of age cohorts in which Age Cohort Group 1 consists of ages ranging from 18 to 25, Age Cohort group 2 ranging from age 26 to 39, Age Cohort Group 3 ranging from age 40 to age 59, and Age Cohort Group 4 consisting of ages 60 and above. Concerning age, I expect a higher likelihood of voting from older citizens rather than younger citizens. With age comes an intricate network of investments and responsibilities that



make voting more crucial to individual interests. For the income variable, respondents were asked to categorize their income using 25 preset ranges. For the purpose of displaying results, I have collapsed these group into 3 large groups with Income Group 1 ranging from “None or less than \$2,999 per year” to \$19,999 per year, Group 2 is comprised of \$20,000-\$59,999 per year, and Group 3 reflects those respondents that make between \$60,000 and over \$150,000 per year. My expectation is that as income increases so does the likelihood of voting due to the increased efficacy and influence that is associated with greater wealth.

I ran a logistic regression of the post-election data controlling for race in which the results for white voters were coded as race = 1 and for black voters race=2. I used the logistic regression model because my dependent variable (vote) was a dichotomous variable where the response could only be affirmative or negative as to whether individuals voted. This model was also the most appropriate for dealing with my categorical independent variables and predicting their joint effects on voting participation. In the tables used to display the results, the data from the average of all voters who took part in the survey is labeled Model 1, for White voters is Model 2, and for Black voters is Model 3. Before I examine the logit model, I begin by analyzing the individual variables and their relationship to voting.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

Although most analysts have identified education as the primary or a major factor in voting, I hypothesized that the effect of education is much less important than some other variables when considering only African Americans. I expected to find that other factors were more solid indicators of this phenomenon. First turning to age, my initial assumption was that as citizens got older the likelihood of them voting would increase. This increase would be due to the fact that,

with age comes a greater knowledge of how the American political system operates and the further understanding of the benefits associated with choosing representatives to uphold interests of importance to voters. Also, as citizens get older they generally have more stake in government when considering investments, children, schools, taxes, homes, and other factors and responsibility that come with age.

To adequately comprehend the data, it is necessary to first investigate the impact of various factors on their own. The variable age is the first under consideration. The data from 2004 respondents show that, in the case of all voters and the subgroup of White voters, age did have an effect on turnout. This supports the assumption that as the age of respondents increased, so would the likelihood of voting. This positive correlation between age and voting is evident in Tables 1 and 2 with the exception of Age Group 4 which represents respondents age sixty and above. This group shows slightly diminished numbers of respondents who did vote in the 2004 election. This shift in participation for the oldest age group may suggest the prevalence of debilitating factors possibly including health factors, lack of mobility, or lack of transportation. With this in mind, the impact of age is presented as curvilinear with the rate of voting participation starting low, then growing as age increases, and finally diminishing among the oldest citizens.

For Black voters, the data show very little change in voting habits as the age of respondents increased (Table 3). Groups 2-4 (voters age 26 and over) showed virtually identical ratios of voting participants compared to nonvoters with roughly 25% of respondents in each age group not voting and the remaining 75% or so voting in this election. Group1, representing the youngest age group ranging from respondents age 18 to age 25, showed only a slightly lower turnout rate of 68.4%. Overall, the assumption that with age increase also comes an increase in

voting participation was only applicable to the data presented for all voters and for White voters as the data for Black voters in 2004 show little correlation between age and voting. These data could be indicative of the fact that as Black citizens age, they feel no more empowered to implement change than they did when they were younger. This translates to low expectations for the power of their individual vote and therefore a stagnant rate of turnout across age groups.

Table 1-3: Crosstabs of Age and Participation 2004

Model 1

Participation	Age of Respondents				
	18-25	26-39	40-59	60 and Over	Total
Did Not Vote	49 (37.7%)	62 (23.4%)	87 (17.4 %)	31 (18.2%)	229 (21.5%)
Voted	81 (62.3%)	203 (76.6%)	414 (82.6%)	139 (81.8%)	837 (78.5%)
Total	130	265	501	170	1,066

Model 2

Participation	Age of Respondents				
	18-25	26-39	40-59	60 and Over	Total
Did Not Vote	31 (38.8%)	37 (21.6%)	54 (14%)	25 (17.4%)	147 (18.8%)
Voted	49 (61.2%)	134 (78.4%)	332 (86%)	119 (82.6%)	634 (81.2%)
Total	80	171	386	144	781

Model 3

Participation	Age of Respondents				
	18-25	26-39	40-59	60 and Over	Total
Did Not Vote	6 (31.6%)	13 (25.5%)	18 (25.4%)	4 (25%)	41(26.1%)
Voted	13 (68.4%)	38 (74.5%)	53 (74.6%)	12 (75%)	116 (73.9%)
Total	19	51	71	16	157

I initially expected for there to be a difference between the effects of age between 2004 respondents and those of 2008 owing to the candidacy of Barack Obama. Obama’s candidacy would likely inspire more feelings of efficacy among older Black citizens and lead to greater

turnout. The data from 2008 respondents displayed in Tables 4-6 show a positive correlation between age and voting participation among all groups including Black voters. These findings further support the assumption that older citizens understand the benefits of voting and therefore are more likely to vote. Unlike the 2004 data concerning age presented in tables 1-3, these data show that age is a viable predictive factor for Black and White citizens whereas in 2004 age had little correlation with whether Black people voted. The participation rate among 2008 respondents age 40 and over (Groups 3 and 4 in Table 6) were comparatively higher than that of 2004. This suggests that these older respondents felt a greater impetus to participate, possibly owing to the candidacy of Barack Obama. These findings corroborate my assumption concerning the effects of the Obama candidacy. These data also differ from the 2004 data because they do not show diminished participation among respondents age 60 or older as the 2004 data did.

Table 4-6: Crosstabs of Age and Participation 2008

Model 1

Participation	Age of Respondents				
	18-25	26-39	40-59	60 and Over	Total
Did Not Vote	90 (40.2%)	164(28.6%)	186(19.9%)	50 (15%)	490(23.7%)
Voted	134(59.8)	410(71.4%)	747 (80.1%)	283 (85%)	1,574(76.3%)
Total	224	574	933	333	2,064

Model 2

Participation	Age of Respondents				
	18-25	26-39	40-59	60 and Over	Total
Did Not Vote	50 (41.3%)	101(28.9%)	117(20.3%)	40 (16.3%)	308 (23.9%)
Voted	71 (58.7%)	248(71.1%)	458(79.7%)	205 (83.7%)	982 (76.1%)
Total	121	349	575	245	1,290

Model 3

Participation	Age of Respondents				Total
	18-25	26-39	40-59	60 and Over	
Did Not Vote	18 (30.5%)	31 (22.3%)	37 (14.7%)	9 (13.2%)	95 (18.4%)
Voted	41 (69.5%)	108 (77.7%)	214 (85.3%)	59 (86.8%)	422 (81.6%)
Total	59	139	251	68	517

Where income is considered, the data from 2004 respondents show that there is a positive correlation between income and voting participation among all voters without regard to race. The data in Tables 7-9 suggest that citizens with higher incomes feel more inclined to participate possibly in order to protect their assets or further ensure their financial success by electing representatives to reflect their interests on a national scale. Lower income respondents likely feel have less efficacy and therefore feel powerless to protect their more modest financial state. This feeling of helplessness leads to lower voter turnout.

Table 7-9: Crosstabs of Annual Income and Participation 2004

Model 1

Participation	Annual Income			Total
	0-\$19,999	\$20,000-\$59,999	\$60,000 & above	
Did Not Vote	121 (32%)	74 (17.2%)	15 (9%)	210 (21.6%)
Voted	257 (68%)	357 (82.8%)	150 (91%)	764 (78.4%)
Total	378	431	165	974

Model 2

Participation	Annual Income			Total
	0-\$19,999	\$20,000-\$59,999	\$60,000 & above	
Did Not Vote	72 (27.5%)	48 (15.2%)	12 (8.8%)	132 (18.5%)
Voted	190 (72.5%)	267 (84.8%)	124 (91.2%)	581 (81.5%)
Total	262	315	136	713

Model 3

Participation	Annual Income			
	0-\$19,999	\$20,000-\$59,999	\$60,000 & above	Total
Did Not Vote	26 (39.4%)	12 (19.4%)	0 (0%)	38 (27.1%)
Voted	40 (60.6%)	50 (80.6%)	12 (100%)	102 (72.9%)
Total	66	62	12	140

Concerning education, the 2004 data presented in tables 10-12 show a positive correlation between education level and voter turnout. The aggregate data of all respondents, that of just White respondents, and that of Black respondents all show that as the level of education increases so does the likelihood of voting. The 2008 data also reflect the strong positive relationship between education and voting participation (Tables 13-15). The findings that show a strong positive correlation between education and voting do not appear to support my first hypothesis education is not a strong predictor for voting. These data reflect the common theory that education brings a broader understanding of the benefits associated with voting and thereby contributes to higher voter turnout among more educated citizens. Education can also lead to greater social benefits and economic benefits while promoting concern for the future of society. All of these impulses drive individuals to vote at higher levels in order to protect and promote their interests. Though these results suggest that the impact of education was originally underestimated in the first hypothesis, the more refined models will be more revealing.

Table 10-12: Crosstabs of Education and Participation 2004

Model 1

Participation	Level of Education			Total
	HS or Less	2yrs College	3yrs or More College	
Did Not Vote	134 (33.3%)	50 (21.2%)	45 (10.5%)	229 (21.5%)
Voted	268 (66.7%)	186 (78.8%)	383 (89.5%)	837 (78.5%)
Total	402	236	428	1,066

Model 2

Participation	Level of Education			Total
	HS or Less	2yrs College	3yrs or More College	
Did Not Vote	84 (30%)	33 (19.2%)	30 (9.1%)	147 (18.8%)
Voted	196 (70%)	139 (80.8%)	299 (90.9%)	634 (81.2%)
Total	280	172	329	781

Model 3

Participation	Level of Education			Total
	HS or Less	2yrs College	3yrs or More College	
Did Not Vote	27 (35.5%)	9 (26.5%)	5 (10.6%)	41 (26.1%)
Voted	49 (64.5%)	25 (73.5%)	42 (89.4%)	116 (73.9%)
Total	76	34	47	157

Table 13-15 Crosstabs of Education and Participation 2008

Model 1

Participation	Level of Education			Total
	HS or Less	2yrs College	3yrs or More College	
Did Not Vote	338 (34.5%)	101 (19.3%)	57 (9.7%)	496 (23.7%)
Voted	642 (65.5%)	423 (80.7%)	531 (90.3%)	1596 (76.3%)
Total	980	524	588	2,092

Model 2

Participation	Level of Education			Total
	HS or Less	2yrs College	3yrs or More College	
Did Not Vote	214 (38.5%)	66 (20.3%)	33 (7.7%)	313 (23.9%)
Voted	342 (61.5%)	259 (79.7%)	395 (92.3%)	996 (76.1%)
Total	556	325	428	1,309

Model 3

Participation	Level of Education			Total
	HS or Less	2yrs College	3yrs or More College	
Did Not Vote	69 (23.3%)	18 (13.4%)	9 (9.9%)	96 (18.4%)
Voted	227 (76.7%)	116 (86.6%)	82 (90.1%)	425 (81.6%)
Total	296	134	91	521

Turning to the variable of group participation, my initial assumption was that group membership among citizens increased the likelihood that they vote because it shows a personal investment in local communities. These organizations could also exert a socializing force on individuals indoctrinating the group’s political goals among its members. The data from 2004 respondents show a notable positive correlation between group membership and participation in voting (Tables 16-18). Models 1-3 all show that the likelihood of citizens voting increases as the number of groups with which they are affiliated increases regardless of race. Model 3 displays evidence that supports my second hypothesis stating that group membership is a strong indicator of whether or not Black citizens vote.

There is a noticeable difference between voter turnout among Black respondents who were not the members of any organizations and those who were members of at least 1 organization or community group. This provides evidence for my second hypothesis stating that group membership is a strong indicator of whether Black citizens vote. The data confirm that at the higher rates of group activity there are high percentages of participation in voting among Black voters. Model 2 shows that group membership is also a strong indicator for voting participation among White citizens. The data for White voters show a steady increase of voter turnout as group membership increases though not as drastic as that of Black voters.



Table 16-18: Crosstabs of Group Membership and Participation 2004

Model 1

Participation	Number of Groups					Total
	0	1	2	3	≥4	
Not Vote	174(28.1%)	37 (18.8%)	11 (8.7%)	5 (7.6%)	2 (3.6%)	229(21.5%)
Voted	446(71.9%)	160(81.2%)	115(91.3%)	61 (92.4%)	54 (96.4%)	836(78.5%)
Total	620	197	126	66	56	1,065

Model 2

Participation	Number of Groups					Total
	0	1	2	3	≥4	
Not Vote	104(24.5%)	28 (19.4%)	9 (8.5%)	5 (8.9%)	1 (2%)	147(18.8%)
Voted	321(75.5%)	116(80.6%)	97 (91.5%)	51 (91.1%)	48 (98%)	633(81.2%)
Total	425	144	106	56	49	780

Model 3

Participation	Number of Groups					Total
	0	1	2	3	≥4	
Not Vote	37 (33.3%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	41 (26.1%)
Voted	74 (66.7%)	27 (90%)	6 (100%)	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	116(73.9%)
Total	111	30	6	5	5	157

The data from 2008 respondents also show a positive correlation between group membership and participation in voting (Tables 19-21). Similar to the data from 2004, these data show that the likelihood of citizens voting increases as the number of groups with which they are affiliated increases regardless of race. Though the data gathered from 2004 and 2008 show slightly diminished turnout rates among Black citizens who were members of four or more groups, this result is hardly generalizable because of the small number of total respondents in that category. Overall, it remains evident that individuals who are members of groups are much more likely to participate in voting than those who are not involved in groups.

Table 19-21: Crosstabs of Group Membership and Participation 2008

Model 1

Participation	Number of Groups					Total
	0	1	2	3	≥4	
Not Vote	396(31.6%)	72 (18.9%)	21 (9.1%)	4 (3%)	5 (5%)	498(23.7%)
Voted	858(68.4%)	308(81.1%)	210(90.9%)	128 (97%)	96 (95%)	1,600(76.3%)
Total	1,254	380	231	132	101	2,098

Model 2

Participation	Number of Groups					Total
	0	1	2	3	≥4	
Not Vote	252(34.1%)	45 (18.1%)	12 (7.9%)	3 (3.2%)	3 (3.7%)	315 (24%)
Voted	486(65.9%)	203(81.9%)	139(92.1%)	90 (96.8%)	79 (96.3%)	997 (76%)
Total	738	248	151	93	82	1,312

Model 3

Participation	Number of Groups					Total
	0	1	2	3	≥4	
Not Vote	80 (23.7%)	12 (13.3%)	3 (5.6%)	1 (3.8%)	1 (6.7%)	97 (18.5%)
Voted	258(76.3%)	78 (86.7%)	51 (94.4%)	25 (96.2%)	14 (93.3%)	426(81.5%)
Total	338	90	54	26	15	523

The initial results provide some perspective on the separate influences of age, education, group membership, income, and feelings about the federal government on voting but it is important to look at the variables' composite influence. Therefore, after analyzing all of the individual relationships between each independent variable and voting, it is necessary to analyze the broader model in order to see the joint simultaneous influence of these related variables on turnout. To test my hypotheses concerning the usefulness of education and group membership as

predictors for voting participation, I used a logistic regression analysis to predict if there are correlations between the dependent variable and the five independent variables.

After analyzing the election data from the 2004 presidential election, the results for the total pool of voters in 2004 showed that the variables “age”, “income”, “education”, and “group membership” all had a positive, statistically significant relationship with voting turnout at the .05 level of confidence. A fifth variable, a federal government thermometer was not statistically significant meaning that it has little or no measurable effect on voting turnout. This suggests that a citizen’s feelings concerning the federal government have little effect on whether or not the citizen votes. Whether they have positive or negative opinions of the federal government, these opinions are not persuasive enough to increase their probability of voting. These findings do not support the expectation that positive feelings about the government would lead to higher voter turnout. Personal feelings about the government, regardless of how strong they are, do not equate to a change in and individual’s personal sense of the ability to institute change through voting.

Since my initial interest is understanding voter participation among African Americans, I controlled for race. These results reveal the differences and similarities between the simultaneous effects of the independent variables on the voting participation of Black and White respondents. The data from Caucasian voters mirror the overall distribution of voters in which the variables “age”, “income”, “education”, and “group membership” proved to be have a positive and statistically significant effect on voting participation. The “federal government thermometer” was not statistically significant. The findings from the total distribution of all voters support my hypothesis that, on average, education does play a strong role in whether American citizens vote. It also follows that, since Caucasians are the majority race in the country, the findings for this individual race would closely mimic those for the total pool of voters.

The results for African American voters deviate substantially from those gleaned from the total pool of voters. Income was the only variable that had a positive, statistically significant impact on the probability of voting after controlling for all other variables. The variables “age”, “education”, “group membership”, and the “federal government thermometer” were not statistically significant. The results support my theory that education is not the primary influence. In fact education does not have a statistically significant relationship with vote. In contrast, the model shows “income” as a significant variable. The most surprising result, given my expectation, is the lack of impact for group participation. This result is likely caused by the fact that group membership had little individual contribution to voter turnout when holding all variables consistent. As follows, the effect of group membership is attributed to its relation to other variables like age, education, or income.

The 2008 presidential election was expected to offer results that differed from 2004 because of the candidacy of a Black presidential nominee supported by a major party. Barack Obama’s candidacy is thought to have contributed to the increase of voting participation among Black citizens by intensifying feelings of belongingness among African Americans and therefore increasing the effect of group membership on voting participation. The 2008 presidential election results offered similar results to those of 2004. After analyzing the election data from the 2008 presidential election, the results for the total pool of voters in 2008 showed that the variables “age”, “education”, “income”, and “group membership” all proved to have a positive, statistically significant effect on voting participation at the .05 level of confidence. Thus, as each rises the probability of voting increases. The federal government thermometer was not statistically significant. After again controlling for race, the results from White voters show that the variables “age”, “education”, “income”, and “group membership” all proved to have a

positive, statistically significant impact on vote while the federal government thermometer variable again was not statistically significant. The data gleaned from the total pool of voters and the data from White voters in 2008 both showed the same results as those from 2004. These also supported my hypothesis in that education is statistically significant for the average and majority voters.

The results from African Americans in 2008 show results that vary from those found for African Americans in 2004. The variables “age”, “income”, and “group membership” all proved to be significant for African American voters in 2008. “Education” and “federal government thermometer” were both found to have no statistical significance. The findings for African American voters in 2008 greatly support my hypothesis that education is not the most significant factor in whether or not African American voters participate in voting practices. It supports my theory that group membership is a more accurate variable predictor for voting in the African American community. Despite my expectations, the findings differed from those for 2004, perhaps because of the impact of the Obama candidacy on Black citizens. Groups that normally did not participate in voting were energized in a unique way by the candidacy of a Black presidential nominee and therefore group membership strengthened individual voting participation among African Americans who were a part of these groups. Thus, holding all variables equal, independent contribution of group membership on voting participation is greater among Black citizens in 2008 than among those same citizens in 2004.

**Table 22: Logistic Regression of Voter Turnout for 2004 Presidential Election**

<b>Vote_2004</b>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<b>Age</b>	.018*** (.005)	.022*** (.006)	.001 (.014)
<b>Income</b>	.040*** (.015)	.034 (.018)	.096** (.041)
<b>Education</b>	.394*** (.067)	.426*** (.082)	.282 (.178)
<b>Group Membership</b>	.409*** (.105)	.359*** (.116)	.288 (.314)
<b>Federal Gov. Thermometer</b>	.008 (.004)	.009 (.005)	.000 (.011)
<b>N</b>	961	705	138
<b>Log -Likelihood</b>	-430.15917	-289.33151	-71.729794

Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 23: Logistic Regression of Voter Turnout for 2008 Presidential Election**

<b>Vote (_2008)</b>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<b>Age</b>	.027*** (.004)	.029*** (.005)	.021** (.008)
<b>Income</b>	.028*** (.010)	.037*** (.013)	.105*** (.028)
<b>Education</b>	.825*** (.127)	1.084*** (.162)	.149 (.296)
<b>Group Membership</b>	.544*** (.079)	.637*** (.103)	.532*** (.200)
<b>Federal Gov. Thermometer</b>	-.001 (.003)	-.003 (.003)	-.006 (.005)
<b>N</b>	1917	1204	470
<b>Log – Likelihood</b>	-914.9325	-546.39579	-195.44789

Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A portion of the conventional wisdom concerning American voting asserts that education is one of the strongest indicators of whether or not citizens vote. The level of education is thought to have a positive correlation with voting so that the more educated citizens are the greater their likelihood to vote. Education imparts understanding of the American political system, creates social and economic benefits for individuals, and also socializes citizens to be productive members of society. All of these influences presumably lead to voting participation. In this study however, I challenged that conventional wisdom with respect to African American citizens. I theorized that among African Americans feelings of group belongingness are a stronger socializing force and therefore act as a better predictor for Black voter participation than education. Though education does have a positive impact on African Americans voting participation, there is not a strong relationship between the two. Rather the following variables are more important and seem to replace education in having the positive effects.

Overall, the data support my hypothesis that education does not have a significant effect on voter turnout among Black voters when considered separately from the general population. The data also support my hypothesis that Black voters are strongly influenced by the effects of communal group membership. The results show that though the increase in the level of education among African Americans is consistent with increasing voting turnout, the relationship between education and voting participation is weak after controlling for the effects of other variables. Membership in groups is shown to be a significant indicator of voting participation for Black voters in 2008, but also to have a positive correlation with participation among White voters in both 2004 and 2008. The results suggest that the effect of group membership is a prevalent force among all voters and possibly a stronger indicator for White voters than Black voters.



Concerning African American voters, it is possible that the effects of group membership were increased by Barack Obama's candidacy. Since the candidate was an African American, it was easier for Black citizens to identify with him as a leader. This common identification was a new factor in presidential elections and one that energized groups and individuals to vote.

Furthermore, income was found to have a positive correlation with whether or not Black citizens vote both in 2004 and 2008. The fact that income proved to be the only variable that had a significant relationship with voting in all models suggests that income is the variable with the strongest predictive value for voting participation. On the contrary, the federal government thermometer variable proved to have no statistical significance among any of the models in this study. This suggests that the effects of individual opinions of the federal government have little or no impact on whether or not citizens vote.

With regards to further research, this research should be expanded to include races other than Caucasian and African Americans. Considering the prevalence of income as a predictive factor for voting the study should also be expanded particularly to see if income and voting have maintained the same positive relationship further back in the history of voting in this country or if these findings reflect a relatively new trend or even a cycle where different factors become indicative of voter participation in different eras. In addition to the previously mentioned alterations, the whole study could be undertaken in a way that does not deal exclusively with presidential elections to see if these same findings are present when voters are polled concerning state and local elections, not just national presidential elections.

All research could be instrumental in helping expand voter participation on a broad scale if used properly by political actors and interest groups. Further study of the impetus behind voting could be utilized by politicians to help them find the best way to appropriate time, money, and

other campaign resources in order to gain as much of the vote as possible. Discovering ways to mobilize the vote of all of the diverse subgroups in the American population could potentially result in substantial change in public policy as well as the evolution of prominent social ideas concerning class, race, and other socioeconomic factors.

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