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Political Participation: Beyond the Vote

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Introduction to Research:

The hunt for an agreeable definition for political participation is long dated and disputed. While some argue that political participation is the activities by individuals that are directly aimed to influence governmental figures and policies (Verba and Nie 1972), other scholars have argued that it expands into actions beyond this scope, such as boycotting and partaking in protests. For this study, I analyze political participation with the inclusion of non-electoral activities due to both; their relevance in the political sphere and the inclusion of these activities in the American National Elections Studies survey. Non-conventional forms of political participation are less often researched, with voting behavior often at the forefront of the conversation. While voting is one way an individual participate in a democracy, it's crucial to avoid limiting the conversation on participation to only electoral forms. However, due to the prevalence of voting behavior research, I can draw from findings on demographic impact to gain insight into how people are participating politically outside of voting.

Michigan Model:

Developed by the Michigan Survey Research Center, this model focuses on the psychological states of individuals. It excludes external causes to a voter's choice that are more distant from the actual vote choice (Chandler 1988). Looking at three psychological factors, party identification, concern with governmental policy, and attraction to candidates, (Knoke, 1974), this research group found party identification to be most impactful for vote choice decisions. Its sub-models showed factors that play into the development of an individual's party identification and its strength. While this model focuses particularly on voters' choice in electoral settings, its findings on ideological impact can give us insight into other forms of political participation (Chandler, 1988). Additionally, the prolific writings from this study have served as a foundation for researchers to expand on the impact of psychological and attitudinal impact on individuals' process for voting decisions.

Hypotheses:

- H1: Demographic groups with typically more resource accessibility will have higher participation levels.**
- H2: People of color are more likely to participate in protests and rallies than white people.**
- H3: There will be a positive relationship between level of education and attendance of a meeting to talk about political concerns.**

Methods:

The present study uses data from the 2020 American National Studies survey (ANES) in order to explore the relationship between respondents' age, income, gender, race, and education level, and the way in which they participate politically. These hypotheses were developed from the available research on voting behavior. Available literature largely finds higher participation in groups with higher resource accessibility, stronger held political identification, and other socio-economic and psychological based factors.

Hypothesis 1:

Figure 1:

Model	Coefficient (B)	Stand. Coefficient	Significance
Sex	-.191	-.056	.001
Education level	.249	.250	<.001
Family total income	.001	.015	.385
Age	-.011	-.109	<.001
Strength of Party ID	.065	.088	<.001

In this regression table, the percentage of the variation in this regression was 9.6%. This tells me that there are other variables that can account for participation count. While respondent age, sex, party ID, and education level were statistically significant, total income was not. Looking at these statistically significant variables, I can see that the largest impact variable was education level with a Beta of .25. Second to this was respondent age with a Beta of -.191. This tells us that higher education levels and older age result in higher levels of participation count in respondents.

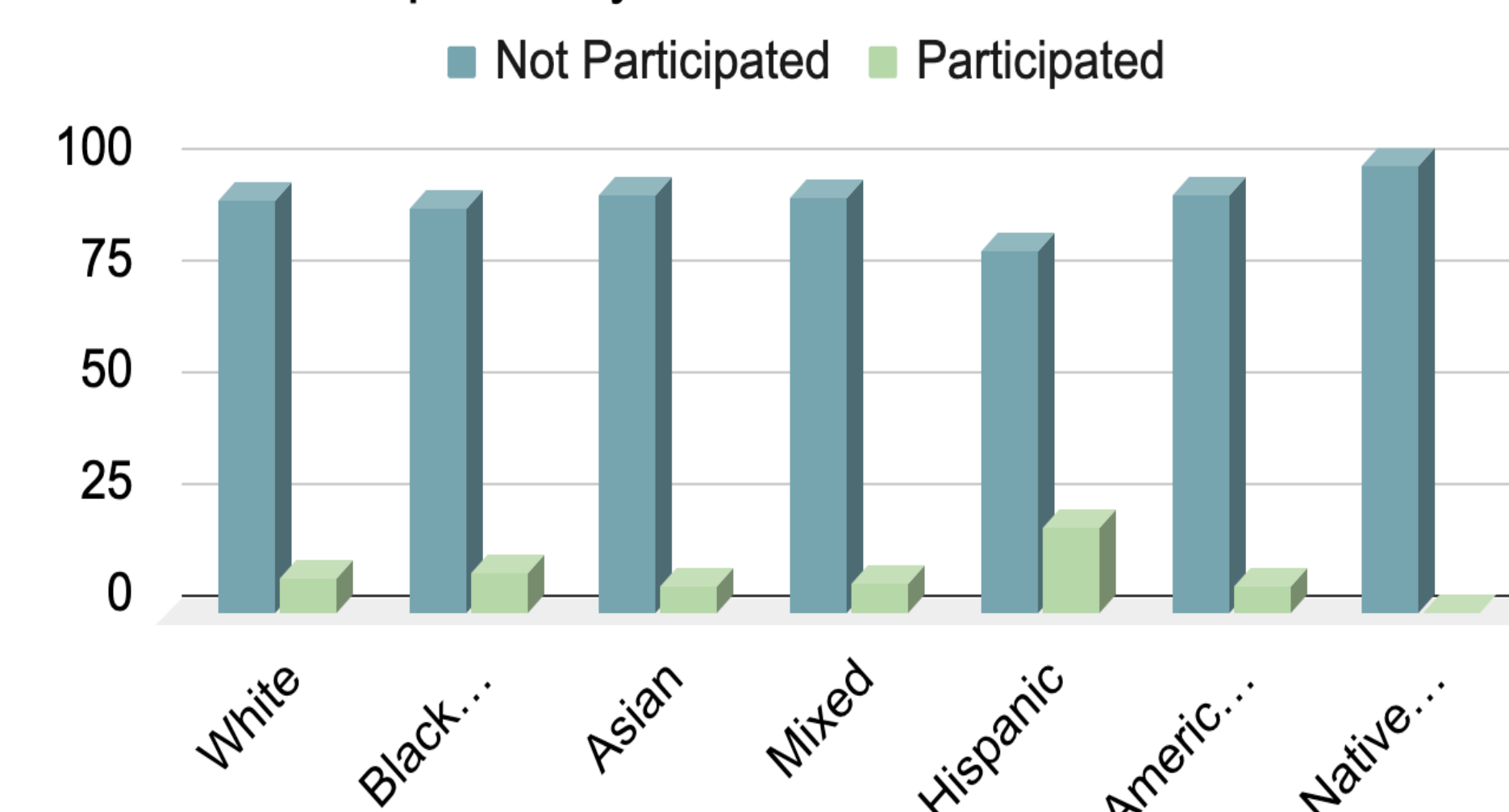
Hypothesis 3:

By running a Pearson correlation, I was able to observe a positive, mild relationship between level of education and attendance to meetings to talk about political concerns. This correlation was .238 and significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 2:

Figure 2:

Protest Participation by Race



In a cross-tabulation with seven categories for racial identity against protest participation, I found that 7.8% of White respondents answered that they had participated in a protest in the last 12 months. This percentage was significantly less than that of Black respondents, in which 9.2% responded that they had. Compared to Hispanic respondents, in which 19% reported attendance to protests, White respondents participated far less in this activity than these two racial groups. In comparison to the remaining racial groups, however, White respondents reported more attendance to protest within the previous 12 months.

Conclusion:

While there is limited research on non-conventional forms of political participation, what we know about voting behavior may help us understand other forms of political participation. As shown in Figure 1, when conducting a regression on the displayed demographics, we can see that factors like education level and age hold significance to participation levels. We know that older and more educated people typically have higher voter turnout, so this analysis finds that these demographic groups participate more in other realms outside of electoral participation. A little more surprising, income in this regression held far less impact than anticipated with what we know about resource accessibility and voting behavior. While this may be an interesting difference between voting participation and less conventional forms of participation, this may also be due to the usage of the family income variable rather than one that accounts for an individual's income level. Similarly, in Figure 3, we can observe that trends in voting behavior theories can be observed in this political participation analysis. Hypotheses 2 and its findings give insight into how these resource-based theories may lack when analyzing less conventional forms of political participation than voting behavior. These findings further point to discrepancies in political participation that have been found in voting behavior and give insight into the possible alternative activities of the non-voter. Analyzing who participates and how in these findings further questions the accessibility of democracy and its efficiency in true representation.

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