

SOCI 4308

Final Research Paper

Alyssa Hernandez

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According to Pew Research Center, 2016 primary turnout has been the highest for republicans since 1980, and the highest for democrats since 1992 (2016). When statistics like such are presented many questions arise such as, who politically participates? This topic and question are important to discuss due to the current American political environment. Since president Barack Obama's term is coming to a close, it is time for the nation to look into new presidential candidates. With that being said, it is important to research who is political active and why are they politically active, which is what this paper examines. In this paper, it examines political participation, how it is defined, and who are the political active individuals.

### **Literature Review**

When discussing political participation, it is often coupled with educational obtainment because some research attempts to draw either correlation or causation between level of education and political participation (Berinsky and Lenz 2010). This review, will be discussing how other factors such as: race, religiosity, age, and income influences an individual's political participation.

Political participation in this context means how an individual identifies politically and if they vote. There were a few inconsistencies amongst the literature and research when defining political participation. Therefore, I defined political participation in a more restricted way, because voter turnout and affiliation were the major consistencies amongst the research used.

Race can be a strong predictor of whether a person participates politically or not, and one way to explain this is by how populations are drawn on congressional district lines. For instance, there are negative effects when a precinct is completely redrawn for predominantly African American locations; one of the negative effects is an increase in voter roll off. Roll off is "when a citizen casts a vote for a top-ticket election but fails to mark a choice in a race farther down the

ballot” (Hayes and McKee 2012:120). Also, it is noted that citizens who have been redrawn into new districts are less likely to identify their incumbent, significantly (McKee 2008) and this could lead to a lack of voting within the district due to a lack of familiarity with the representative. This particularly harms African Americans more than it harms whites because they are less likely to recall the name of their representative (McKee 2008). Another argument on how race plays a role in political participation is how it can influence an increase in political participation. Using the same research by Hayes and McKee, they found that congressional districts that were redistricted and had an African American incumbent, had a decrease in roll-off as the size of the black population increased (2012). This particular piece of research emphasizes that lack of political participation is not always connected to education.

Religiosity also influences political participation. Some will argue that those who have religious views are more likely to be politically conservative. Research by Ariel Malka found some discrepancies with the popular belief of a correlation between religiosity and conservatism. First, there is some-what of a correlation but only for those who have a stronger commitment to their religious beliefs (Malka et al. 2008), which cuts down the overgeneralized correlation between religious people and political affiliation. Also, there was variation within religious groups and how they identified politically. It states that white Evangelical Protestants, white Mainline Protestants, and white Catholics had the tendency of possessing conservative political characteristics, which differs from black Protestants who had the tendency to possess liberal political stances. Within religion there is difference in political stance and it could be due to the religious sect and race or ethnic background, which could go back to the race variable. The research also shows low political participation does not relate to religiosity. With this information it can be assumed that an individual’s religious background and identification might

not be as big of an influence on political participation, it seems that other variables tend to be a better indicator of political participation.

It seems to be common knowledge to know that young people do not vote as much in comparison to older people but still tend to identify with a political party. Patrick Fisher points out how the political climate in which generations are raised in strongly influences political affiliation. Some generations will either be mostly Democratic or Republican depending on the political climate they were raised in and where they formed their political views (Fisher 2010). Also, they tend to maintain these views over their lifetime (Fisher 2010). In recent research, it displays that younger voters tend to identify as Democrats more so than other age groups (Fisher 2010). Within young voters, one potential influence to their political participation could be their political climate and how that political climate helped form liberal affiliation. One of many potential reasons as to why young voter's politically participate is that young voters are more critical of presidents' failures. For instance, during the 2008 presidential election many young people were in favor of Obama because he was the Democratic primary, and he was running after president George W. Bush's term. Fisher notes that many young voters were not in favor of Bush because they did not approve of Bush's actions as president, some examples include policy failures, annual GDP growth rate was one of the lowest during his administration, and the decision to invade Iraq and go to war (2010). Potentially a reason why there was a large amount of young voters voting for Obama because he was the Democrat nominee and his ideologies appealed to the younger generation of voters. In a case like such, it is not the amount of education one receives that influences their affiliation, but the political climate they were raised in.

Income inequality results in lack of voter turnout among those who make a low income. Rates of political participation are higher among the top quintile of the population than among those with less income (Cook, Page, and Moskowitz 2014). The discussion does not just stop at the general public it also continues on to how there is even a difference between truly wealthy Americans and merely affluent Americans. The wealthy participate politically even more so (Cook et al. 2014), which leads to more power and more say in American politics. When discussing the variable of wealth and its influence on political participation it is important to note why there seems to be an increase in political participation the wealthier the individuals are. Those who possess more wealth do not simply just vote and identify with a political party, due to their abundance of resources they are able to be very active meaning: they attend meetings, volunteer for political organizations, pay attention to political conversation, donate to political organizations, etc. (Cook et al. 2014). This type of participation and time spent is something the wealthy can afford to do, and disadvantage groups cannot because the accessibility and resources are not there. It is important to discuss since wealthy and affluent individuals are very keen on political participation and they have a huge say in the world of politics that these reasons alone could potential discourage low-income people from voting because now the political discussions are in favor of the wealthy voters.

There are plenty of reasons and explanations as to why people politically participate and this review discussed some of those reasons why people politically participate. It is important to note since there were inconsistencies when defining political participation, it also narrowed down the research findings used in this paper. In this paper, the research papers used all shared the same general definition of political participation (voter turnout and political affiliation) except some papers broaden their definition by adding more factors.

This study attempts to discuss current research findings concerning other variables besides education obtainment that influence political participation. This will be discussed by addressing the following three research hypotheses:

- 1) African Americans are less likely to be active politically in comparison to other races.
- 2) Religiosity can be a potential influence on political participation, specifically political identification.
- 3) Age is positively associated with political participation (the older one is, the more politically active he/she is) due to political climate.
- 4) Income is positively associated with political participation due to accessibility.

## **Methods**

To answer the proposed hypotheses, I used data from the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS). GSS is a nationally representative dataset of individuals age 18 to 98, which is housed by National Opinions Research Center (NORC). GSS is suited for testing the proposed hypotheses because it consists of variables that pertain to wealth, racial and religious identifications, and political participation. I used SPSS to analyze the data collection in GSS to answer my four hypotheses. The final sample size varies depending on my hypotheses and missing data.

The dependent variables in this study include political participation, which was divided into two variables to better define political participation. The two dependent variables are political identification and if the respondents voted in the 2012 presidential election. For the first variable, respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?". Response options were (0) strong democrat, (1) not strong democrat, (2) independent near democrat, (3) independent, (4) independent near

republican, (5) not strong republican, and (6) strong republican. (0) through (2) were recoded into (1) democrat. Options (3) and (4) were recoded into (2) independent. Lastly, options (5) and (6) were recoded into (3) republican. For the second variable, respondents were asked, "In 2012, you remember that Obama ran for president on the democratic ticket against Romney for the Republicans. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?". Respondent options were (1) voted, and (2) did not vote.

The independent variables for this study are: race, religion, age, and income, and all variables were recoded into categorical variables. For the first independent variable respondents were asked, "what race do you consider yourself?". Respondent options were (1) white, (2) black, (3) other. Race was recoded into dichotomous variables, (1) black, and (2) other races. For the second variable the question was, "What is your religious preference?". The respondents' options were: (1) Protestant, (2) Catholic, (3) Jewish, (4) none, (5) other, (6) Buddhism, (7) Hinduism, (8) other eastern, (9) Moslem/Islam, (10) Orthodox-Christian, (11) Christian, (12) Native American, and (13) inter-nondenominational. Religion recoded into (1) protestant, (2) Catholic, (3) Jewish, (4) none, and (5) through (13) were recoded into (5) other. The third variable simply asked for the respondent's age. Age recoded into groups, (1) ages 18 through 29, (2) ages 30 through 39, (3) ages 40 through 49, (4) ages 50 through 59, (5) ages 60 through 69, (6) ages 70 through 79, (7) ages 80 through 88, and (8) 89 and older. The last variable asked for the participants' total family income in dollars and the options were: (0) less than \$1,000, (2) \$1,000 to \$2,999, (3) \$3,000 to \$3,999, (4) \$4,000 to \$4,999, (5) \$5,000 to \$5,999, (6) \$6,000 to \$6,999, (7) \$7,000 to \$7,999, (8) \$8,000 to \$9,999, (9) \$10,000 to \$14,000, (10) \$15,000 to \$19,999, (11) \$20,000 to \$24,999, and (12) 25,000 or more. Income was recoded into, (0) less than \$1,000 into (1), (2) \$1,000 to (4) \$4,999 into (2), (5) \$5,000 to (8) \$9,999 into (3), (9)

\$10,000 to \$14,999 into (4), (10) \$15,000 to \$19,999 into (5), (11) \$20,000 to \$24,999 into (6), and (12) \$25,000 or more into (7).

After the variables were recoded, I performed a bivariate analysis to determine the extent of the relationship between each individual independent variable and the dependent variables. I started with the first hypothesis, with race being the independent variable and ran an analysis between race and partyid, then ran another analysis between race and vote12. I continued this process for the remaining independent variables: religion, age, and income. Then I used Chi-Square as the methodology because all of the analyses were bivariate and all of the independent and dependent variables were either nominal or ordinal.

## **Results**

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Univariate Analysis.**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Political Identification</b>			1.75	0.79
Democrat	1162	45.8		
Independent	751	29.6		
Republican	537	21.2		
<b>Voted in 2012 presidential election</b>			1.4	0.59
Voted	1652	45.8		
Did not vote	722	29.6		
<b>Respondents Race</b>			1.85	0.4
Black	386	15.2		
Other races	2152	84.8		
<b>Respondents Religious Preference</b>			2.26	1.43
Protestant	1124	44.3		
Catholic	606	23.9		
Jewish	40	1.6		

None	522	20.6		
Other	228	9		
<b>Respondents Age</b>			3.47	1.74
18 to 29	388	15.3		
30 to 39	487	19.2		
40 to 49	417	16.4		
50 to 59	511	20.1		
60 to 69	368	14.5		
70 to 79	243	9.6		
80 to 88	96	3.8		
89 and older	19	0.7		
<b>Respondents Family Income</b>			6.31	1.35
\$1,000 to \$4,999	65	2.6		
\$5,000 to \$9,999	104	4.1		
\$10,000 to \$14,999	150	5.9		
\$15,000 to \$19,999	114	4.5		
\$20,000 to \$24,999	157	6.2		
\$25,000 or more	1684	66.4		

The means (averages) in the univariate analysis explain each variable used in this study. For the political identification variable, it is apparent that most people identified as a democrat. Also, more people voted in the 2012 presidential election. For our first independent variable, there were more people who identified as another race than black. For our religious variable, there were more people who identified as Protestant. For the respondents age variable, it appears that the largest age group was 50 to 59 with ages 30 to 39 following closely behind. In terms of income there are more people who make \$25,000 or more.

### **Bivariate Analysis**

Chi-square analysis was used to analyze how respondents race, religion, age, and family income interact with political identification and if they voted in the 2012 presidential election.

### **Table 2. Chi-Square Analysis (Political Identification)**

	Pearson Chi-Square	P-Value	Measure of Association
<b>Respondents Race</b>	186.7	0	0.666
<b>Respondents Religious Preference</b>	123.548	0	-0.18
<b>Respondents Age</b>	48.866	0	0.029
<b>Respondents Family Income</b>	35.109	0	0.151

Table 2 reveals that all of the independent variables are statistically significant when associated with the dependent variables. This tells us that political identification is dependent on race, religious preference, age, and income.

**Table 3. Chi-Square Analysis (Voted in 2012)**

	Pearson Chi-Square	P-Value	Measure of Association
<b>Respondents Race</b>	13.383	0.001	0.207
<b>Respondents Religious Preference</b>	54.939	0	0.163
<b>Respondents Age</b>	281.959	0	-0.404
<b>Respondents Family Income</b>	102.001	0	-0.359

Table 3 reveals a statistical significance with all independent variables. Meaning those who voted in the 2012 presidential election are dependent on race, religious preference, age, and family income.

### **Conclusion**

Political participation is commonly examined by social scientist because it examines human behavior, controllable and uncontrollable factors ( e.g. race), and the personal and societal environment of people. There have been many studies that examined political participation, what it entails and who politically participates. There has been a great amount of studies that specifically look at the association between political participation and education, instead I looked at other factors that are associated with political participation. For one, there are

many variables that are associated with education and who receives an education, and for this study I thought it would be fitting to look at the underlining variables because it is the underlining variables that are independent. Secondly, Educational obtainment itself can be viewed as a dependent variable depending on the context and to better understand who politically participates it is best to examine the true independent variables. Using the 2014 GSS data set, I investigated four research hypotheses:

- 1) African Americans are less likely to be active politically in comparison to other races.
- 2) Religiosity can be a potential influence on political participation, specifically political identification.
- 3) Age is positively associated with political participation (the older one is, the more politically active he/she is) due to political climate.
- 4) Income is positively associated with political participation due to accessibility.

The results indicate that all independent variables are associated with political identification and whether or not the individuals voted in the 2012 presidential election. Since the results were significant for both dependent variables, then it concluded that each independent variable is significantly associated with political participation.

For the first hypothesis, African Americans were less likely to be politically active according to our GSS dataset, but this can be explained due to the lack of African American individuals. There were more people of other races than black so that was a limitation in the study. According to literature, the lack of African American votes can be due to the lack of African American representatives. Kenny J. Whitby stated “that African American descriptive representatives do have a politicizing effect on the African American potential electorate” (2007:

1021), it can be inferred that African American representatives do have an effect on the African American vote. Meaning, potentially if there is an increase in African American representatives then the number of African American voters would increase, as well.

The second hypothesis examines religious identification and political participation. GSS dataset details the association between religious preference and political participation, and the results show that there is a significant number of Protestants and Catholics who identify as a Democrat. This finding is in contrast to other research because other research shows that the Democratic party depend heavily on secular citizens (James L. Guth et al. 2006), and the 2014 GSS dataset shows that 273 individuals who do not have a religious preference identify as a democrat, which was lower than Protestants and Catholics.

Third hypothesis examines the positive association between age and political participation. Despite there being a significance between age and the dependent variables there is not a positive association between the variables. The largest age cohort to vote in the 2012 election was 50 to 59 year olds, after that the number of voters per age group starts to decrease. The largest age cohort to not vote in the 2012 election was 30 to 39 year olds, which demonstrates the fluctuation with the results in the GSS dataset. When it comes to age, it appears that it is hard to identify which age groups politically participate the most. Within political participation it seems that age is more heavily associated with party identification. According to Patrick Fisher, younger age groups are more supportive of Democratic candidates than any other age group, and older age groups are more likely to be conservative regarding policy issues and “less supportive of Democrats than they use to be” (2008: 504). Age and party identification is more comprehensive to research and understand compared to age and voting.

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis examines the positive association between income and political identification. This hypothesis came out to be true, income is positively associated with both dependent variables. This is an important variable to look into since we see a positive association because this is a topic that can be expanded, and further researched. This is important to study because since those with a higher income politically participate they have more say in our American politics. Page I. Benjamin, Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright researched a topic regarding wealthy Americans and political participation, and they specifically looked into wealthy Americans' political ideologies. They found that wealthy Americans are more concerned with the budget deficits, cutting social programs, less willing to broaden educational opportunities and healthcare coverage, and are against increasing government regulation of Wall Street firms (Page et al. 2012). This research raises questions on inequalities in American due to politics.

There were some research limitations regarding the GSS dataset, it only accumulates limited data because there were not enough African American respondents for the race variable, which left the data vague. This research should be carried on in regards to researching income and political participation, and specifically examining the accessibility for citizens to vote and the behaviors and ideologies of each income groups.

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