Education, Self-Importance, and the Propensity for Political Participation in the United States

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Introduction

Scholars have long troubled over the United States' abysmal voter turnout rates, which rank substantially below those of other democratic and developed countries. In an analysis of the most recent national elections of the thirty-five countries that constitute the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, a Pew Report found that the United States ranks twenty-eighth in voter turnout rates among those of voting-age (DeSilver, 2017). The same report found that voting rates in national elections among the United States voting-age population has lingered between fifty and sixty percent since the 1976 election. In the most recent national election—the 2016 presidential election between Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump—only 55.7% of the voting-age population and 61% of voting-age citizens showed up to the polls (DeSilver, 2017). Such trends show problematic prospects for American democracy, which is grounded in the conviction that all constituents and their voices are to be equally represented in government. More specifically, the American political system allows its constituents to make democratic decisions regarding the manner in which the country conducts itself. The ability of such a system to function equitably and based on the true demands of the public, however, becomes threatened when only a fraction of eligible voters turn up to the polls. To be sure, low political participation rates can result in a misrepresentation of the needs and wants of the American public, such that only those of the people who voted are realized. Ultimately, this can lead to unequal rights, disparate distribution of resources, unfavorable laws and policies, and so forth. Therefore, it behooves the American public to participate in our democratic political processes. Nevertheless, voting trends do not demonstrate a hopeful trajectory.

In an effort to understand such trends and to address measures to encourage greater turnout in the American democratic process, much analysis attempted to identify potential factors that may determine one's propensity to participate in politics. Perhaps one of the most studied determinants of participation is education. Among those who most famously advocated for education as a means of promoting engaged citizens is Horace Mann. Mann, often regarded as the father of the Common School Movement—a movement that sought to make education free and accessible to all—suggested that universal education would create a politically-stable and civically-responsible society. As he famously said, "education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of social machinery" (Mann, 1848). By Mann's account, greater access to education has the healing power to prepare all American citizens with the necessary tools to

participate, be heard, and succeed in American democracy.

Another highly studied determinant of political participation has been certain psychological factors, with scholars suggesting that, in general, a more positive sense of self facilitates greater immersion into the American political world (Carmines, 1978; Cohen et al., 2001). The contributions of these findings indicate that certain personal variables also predict a person's propensity to participate in politics. Previous research, however, has yet to connect these three variables. The present study intends to fill that gap in order to better understand what drives a person's propensity for involvement in politics. In doing so, the results of this study intend to inform rhetoric on how to better American political participation in order to establish a more equitable and representative democratic process.

Review of the Literature

Education and Political Participation

Since Mann's push for the Common School Movement in the mid-nineteenth century, scholars continued to study the association between education and political participation. Although a myriad of research named education as a predictor or cause of political participation, there remains some controversy over the validity of that relationship.

For example, in their study in which they used longitudinal data to perform two randomized experiments and one quasi-experiment, Sondeheimer and Green (2010) observe that "exogenously induced changes in high school graduation rates have powerful effects on voter turnout rates. These results imply that the correlation between education and voter turnout is indeed causal" (Sondheimer and Green 174). The determined relationship indicates that higher educational attainment causes an increase in one's propensity to vote, which one might speculate is due to the various abilities, understandings, and interests that education imparts.

Other researchers, however, doubt that a relationship between the two variables exists. For example, some scholars suggest that instead of being a cause of political participation, education is a proxy (Kam and Palmer, 2008). Such a theory follows that other factors influence both education and political participation, such that education does not cause political participation. Rather, the two have a spurious relationship in which other life experiences are responsible for predicting participation.

Psychological Traits and Political Participation

Education, however, is not the only factor research has identified as a predictor of political participation: scholars have also linked political participation and psychological tendencies, with particular attention being paid to traits such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and the like. On the one hand, research has demonstrated that those qualities have a positive effect on political participation. For example, Carmines (1978) found that adolescent self-worth is positively associated with both clear and accurate understandings of the political world, as

well as belief that one's voice matters in such processes.

On the other hand, contrasting evidence negates that relationship, suggesting one's psychology and their political action is indirect and mediated by other factors. In studying the effect of certain personality traits (altruism, shyness, efficacy and conflict avoidance) on political participation, Blais and St. Vincent (2011) conclude that personality traits are correlated with political interest and sense of civic duty. However, their effect on voter turnout disappears when considering duty and interest, indicating that personality traits may be affected by other factors.

Psychological Traits and Education

Therefore, whether or not it is direct, the relationship between psychological tendencies—in particular self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-worth, and the like—calls into question the relationship between those traits and education; are they also related? Previous research has indeed linked the two variables, although the results again hold conflicting conclusions. While some findings have demonstrated a significant, positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement (Aryana, 2010), still others suggest that that relationship is spurious and only seemingly present because of other shared factors, such as academic performance, socioeconomic background, and so forth (Bachman and O'Malley, 1977).

Self-Importance

In my undertaking of this research, I did an initial test of the effect of education on voting behavior while controlling for age. I hypothesized that education levels would be positively correlated with propensity to vote, and, since access to education has increased over the past century, this would be particularly true of young people. In running the test, however, I found the opposite to be true: education increases political participation, which is especially true of older people. That is, older people (over 80) with graduate degrees were most likely to vote.

If education increases political participation, and is also more accessible and equitable now as opposed to when older voters were in school, why are voting rates not highest among young people? I hypothesize that this has to do with a new and related psychological trait: self-importance. Encompassing these aforementioned psychological traits, self-importance intends to weigh a person's sense of how important they believe themselves to be in the world. To be sure, a person who feels important might be more likely to have self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and so forth; combined, those characteristics might lead a person to believe themselves to be of importance in the world. The term does not inherently mean that a person who feels important is arrogant. Rather, it is an introspective term that intends to capture whether or not a person believes that what they bring into the world—their opinions, their work, their morals, and so forth—are valuable enough that they should be heard by others.

In the case of education, political participation, and age, older people with high levels of education might be most likely to vote because they feel themselves to be of importance in the world. To be sure, self-importance motivates both their propensity to vote and their likelihood of pursuing a higher level of education. More specifically, given that only a high school education was not necessary to obtain a livable, stable job during the time that older people (over 80) were in school and working, those people did not need to pursue a college-level education. It it is thus possible that they were motivated by their understanding of themselves as being important and worthy enough to have a higher degree at the time, even though it was not necessary. Therefore, that cohort of older people who were most likely to vote might have high understandings of their own importance. And, moreover, this understanding of their own importance might also inform their voting behavior, as a person who feels important might be more likely to believe their voice and opinions to be valuable in the American political process.

Thus, carrying over the concept of self-importance that was birthed from my analysis of education, political participation, and age, the present study seeks to understand the consequences of self-importance on the relationship between education and political participation.

The Present Study

The exploration of these variables in the present study is justified by the collection of previous findings, which indicate that the three variables—education, psychological tendencies, and political participation—share a linkage. In general, findings seem to suggest that both education and psychological qualities have effects on political participation, although consensus on the extent to which they correlate or the authenticity of those correlations is inconclusive. More research, therefore, is needed to clarify the conflicting findings of the relationship between the variables. Using data from the 2004-14 General Social Survey (GSS), the present study intends to serve that purpose by joining the three variables together, in an unprecedented manner, to understand what relationship—if any—the three have. In particular, the primary purpose of this study is to determine the consequences of educational attainment on political participation as mediated by self-importance.

Based on the literature previously presented that produced opposing arguments and results, the following hypotheses have been developed and will be tested in the study:

Hypothesis 1: Greater educational attainment is associated with greater political participation.

Hypothesis 2: Greater educational attainment is associated with greater political participation; however, education is more important in determining political participation among those who feel less important.

Data and Measurement

The data used in this study is from the GSS, a nationally representative survey that has been conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago annually beginning in 1972 and every-other-year since 1994. The data is collected through face-to-face interviews that tend to last around 90 minutes; and respondents are asked questions about a wide range of topics.

The present study uses GSS data sets from 2004 to 2014 (an aggregate of seven different data sets). The seven different data sets had response rates ranging from 69% to 71%. The cumulative data set has a sample of 15,901 persons; however, the data on psychological traits were only collected in the 2004 GSS data set, which had a sample size of 2,812 persons. Furthermore, the responses on voter turnout were re-coded such that a majority of the number of valid cases decreased. Due to those caveats, the sample sizes for individual cross-tabulations may vary according to the variables used.

Independent Variable

The present study examines educational attainment as a predictor for political participation. Educational attainment will be measured by respondents' highest degree earned (DEGREE), which includes the following values: LT (less than) High School, High School, Junior College (also known as community college), Bachelor, and Graduate. The independent variable was chosen based on previous literature that has cited the importance of relative levels of education in determining one's likelihood of participating in politics (Sondheimer and Green, 2010; Kam and Palmer, 2008; Aryana, 2010; Bachman and O'Malley, 1977).

Control Variable

The analysis will control for self-importance when studying the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The GSS, however, has never collected data from respondents on such a variable. In 2004, however, it did collect data on respondents' various feelings towards themselves, five of which closely reflect the essence of *self-importance*. The control variable of self-importance, therefore, was created by aggregating the index of those five variables (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.712). Respondents answered *strongly agree* = 1, *agree* = 2, *disagree* = 3, or *strongly disagree* = 4 to the following five questions; "At times I think I am no good" (NOGOOD), "I wish I could have more respect for myself" (SLFRSPCT), "I am inclined to feel I am a failure" (AFAILURE), "On the whole I am satisfied with myself" (SATSELF), and "I am a person of worth, at least equal to others" (OFWORTH).

Because the latter two variables' responses decline from more positive feelings to more negative feelings, while the former three variables' responses incline from more negative feelings to more positive feelings, the responses for the latter two (SATSELF and OFWORTH) were first recoded (before the index was created) to mimic the trends of the former three (NOGOOD, SLFRSPCT, and AFAILURE). Their re-coded responses read *strongly disagree* = 1, *disagree* = 2, *agree* = 3, and *strongly agree* = 4.

The new index variable's values range from 6 through 20, with lower values representing more negative feelings of importance and higher values representing more positive feelings of importance. Those index values were then finally dichotomized into two more general response-values of self-importance, using the approximate median number of respondents as the reference point at which to separate the response groups. That is, the index values that coincided with the bottom half of respondents were summed into one more general response-value while the index values that coincide with the top half of respondents were summed into another more general response-value. The final form of the control variable, named "self-importance," measures respondents' sense of how important they deem themselves and their voice in the world; the dichotomized responses are *less self-important* = 1 (representing index values 6 through 16) and *more self-important* = 2 (representing index values 17 through 20).

The control variable was chosen and created in accordance with previous literature that focuses on similar psychological traits, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-worth, and so forth (Blais and St. Vincent, 2011; Carmines, 1978; Aryana, 2010; Bachman and O'Malley 1977). To be sure, the previously studied psychological traits are closely related to the five variables that were summed to create the control variable; thus, the control variable of self-importance is closely aligned with variables previously studied, and is justified in using.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable of political participation as chosen for use in the present study. Political participation is measured by voter turnout in the 2000 presidential election (VOTE00), an election between Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush in which neither candidates were up for reelection for a second term. The variable is measured by asking respondents whether they voted in the 2000 presidential election. Response-values for the variable are: *voted* = 1, *did not vote* = 2, *ineligible* = 3, *refused to answer* = 4. The variable was re-coded so that only eligible respondents who answered the question were included; therefore, values 3 and 4 were coded as missing. The variable was furthermore recoded so that it ascended from *did not vote* = 1 to *voted* =2. Doing is justified by previous literature, as it more appropriately captures the essence of increasing odds of political participation as educational attainment increases (Sondheimer and Green, 2010).

After re-coding VOTE00, there are 32.2% (or 5,114) valid cases. When controlling for self-importance, however, there are 13.6% (or 2,156) valid cases, which is reflective of the fact that only one GSS data set is used, rather than the cumulative set of seven. The dependent variable was chosen based on previous literature, which has used civic engagement, participation in political protests, political interest, sense of civic duty, voter turnout, and similar measures to capture the essence

of the American population's participation in politics (Sondheimer and Green, 2010; Kam and Palmer, 2008; Blais and St. Vincent, 2011; Carmines, 1978). As voter turnout is one of those important aspects of political participation, the present study will follow suit and use voter turnout [in the 2000 presidential election] to measure political participation.

Limitations of the Data

Given that the GSS is nationally representative, it is an appropriate data set to use for the purposes of the present study. However, the nature of the data collection, as well as the creation of the control variable, presents some limitations of the data.

First, the data for the variables necessary to create the index variable of *self-importance* were only collected in 2004. As *self-importance* only represents one of the six total data sets, the number of valid cases in any cross-tabulation in which that variable is employed decreases significantly. The number of valid cases is even lower when considering the rotational design of the GSS, which makes it so that only a subset of the entire sample answers certain questions (as is the case with the five variables whose indexes were summed to create the control variable). Nevertheless, I was able to keep the number of valid cases in each test substantial enough (at the least, N = 1,067) to draw conclusions.

A second issue arises with the voter turnout rates and rates of education levels, both of which fail to match current national trends.[1] For educational levels, it is possible that disparate rates in national trends and that of the GSS can be attributed to the manner in which the data is collected: Census data draws conclusions based on adults aged 25 and older, whereas the GSS includes people aged 18 and older. In this manner, the GSS should inherently have an inflated number of people with only a high school degree because it samples a younger demographic. Therefore, GSS educational trends might not be completely incongruent with national trends.

Furthermore, for both education levels and voter turnout rates, it is possible that variations can be attributed to the fact that the data set is aggregated from responses across a ten-year span. It is also possible that the variation is due to respondents who lied or misremembered their responses—especially in the case of their voting behavior. In an attempt to account for the variation in voter turnout rates, I re-coded the VOTE00 variable such that only those eligible to vote at the time of the 2000 election were included in the tests. In doing so, I minimized error in voter turnout rates.

A final limitation of the data is that it relies heavily on data from 2004. As the present study is being conducted in 2017, it is possible that trends for each of the variables has changed since they were originally collected. Therefore, while it is important to keep in mind the temporal

[1] Voter turnout rates are much higher than the national average (DeSilver, 2017). The percentage of those with a high school degree is higher than the national average (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2017).

context of the data in drawing conclusions about the present political climate, the results from the present study nonetheless hold important implications for twenty-first century understandings of political participation.

Results

Univariate Statistics

Table 1 presents the univariate statistics for each of the variables used in the analysis. In regards to the dependent variable of *Voter Turnout (2000 Presidential Election)*, the vast majority (70.1%) of respondents report having voted.

As for the independent variable of *degree*, "high school" was the most popular response to "highest degree earned" with half of the sample falling into that category. "Bachelor" and "LT (less than) high school" were the second and third most popular responses, respectively, among respondents, with approximately fifteen percent of the sample falling under each of them. "Graduate" and "Junior college" were the fourth and fifth most popular responses, respectively, with each of them only representing approximately ten percent of the population.

Finally, in terms of the control variable of *self-importance*, half of respondents fell into the category of "less self-important" while the other half fell into the category of "more self-important." That even breakup, however, is due to the nature of the creation of the variable, which intentionally dichotomized the response-values at the median number of respondents.

Table 1. Univariate Descriptive Statistics

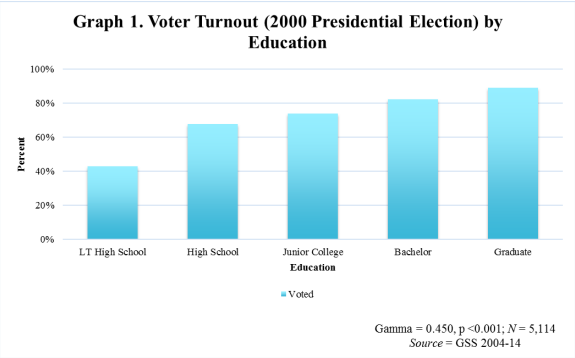
Variables	n	%
Degree		
LT High School	2275	14.3%
High School	7957	50.1%
Junior College	1256	7.9%
Bachelor	2826	17.8%
Graduate	1582	10.0%
Voter Turnout (2000 Presidential Election)		
Did not vote	1529	29.9%
Voted	3586	70.1%
Self-importance		
Less self-important	1206	51%
More self-important	1152	49%

Source: GSS 2004-14

Bivariate Cross-Tabulation: Voter Turnout by Education

Graph 1 presents the results from a bivariate cross-tabulation of the independent variable (*degree*) on the dependent variable (*vote00*), and their coinciding p-value and level of association (see Appendix for its accompanying table). The results indicate that education has a positive, moderately strong association (gamma = 0.450) with voter turnout in the 2000 presidential election, as each incremental change in education returns an increased percentage of respondents who voted. For example, on the two far ends of the spectrum of educational attainment, 43% of those with less than a high school degree voted in the 2000 presidential election while 89% of those with a graduate degree did. That percentage point difference of -46 indicates those with higher levels of education are more likely to have voted in the 2000 presidential election than lower educated ones. These findings are statistically significant (p-value < 0.001), meaning that there is a genuine difference in

likelihood of voting across varying levels of educational attainment that can be generalized to the population with more than 99.99% confidence.



Tri-variate Cross-Tabulation: Voter Turnout by Education by Self-Importance

Table 3 presents the results from a tri-variate cross-tabulation of education (IV) on voter turnout (DV), while controlling for self-importance. The tri-variate analysis acknowledges that there may be another factor affecting the relationship between the independent and dependent variables; thus, it seeks to hold the third variable constant in order to understand more clearly the importance of the third variable in determining the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable.

The results indicate that, among those who report feeling less self-important, there is still a positive, moderately strong, statistically-significant relationship (gamma = 0.455, p-value < 0.001) between education and voter turnout that can be generalized to the population with more than 99.99% confidence. This is exemplified in the percentage point difference of -52 between the two extremes of educational levels (32.9% - 84.9%), demonstrating that, when controlling for those who feel less important, those with higher levels of education are still more likely to vote than those with lower levels of education.

The same relationship can be seen between education and voter turnout when controlling for those who feel more important. In particular, the percentage point difference of -39.4 between those with less than a high school degree and those with a graduate degree indicates that, among those who feel more important, those with higher levels of education are more likely to vote than those with lower levels of education. Therefore, there is still a positive, statistically significant relationship (gamma = 0.398, p-value < 0.001) between the two that can be generalized to the population with more than 99.99% confidence.

Important, however, are the percentage point differences between the two extremes of education levels and their accompanying levels of association in both the bivariate and tri-variate analysis.

First, the percentage point difference (-52) between the two extremes when controlling for those who feel less important is larger than that of the bivariate analysis (-46).

Second, the percentage point difference between the two extremes among those who feel more important (-39.4) is smaller than both that of the bivariate analysis and the tri-variate analysis that controls for those who feel less important. With the largest percentage point difference, therefore, it can be determined that education has the strongest effect on voter

turnout among those who feel less important. Conversely, education has the weakest effect on voter turnout among those who feel more important. These conclusions are corroborated by the levels of association, which is highest among those who feel less important and lowest for those who feel more important.

The results of the tri-variate analysis also show that the likelihood of voting is lower at every level of education for those who feel less important than when not controlling for self-importance at all. For example, while 43% of those with less than a high school degree voted in the bivariate analysis, only 32.9% of those with less than a high school education who feel less important voted. The same trend is true of all other levels of education, including the other far extreme of education levels, where 89% of those with a graduate degree voted in the bivariate analysis, while only 84.9% did among those who felt less important.

It should also be noted that the likelihood of voting is generally higher across education levels among those who feel more important than in the bivariate analysis. For example, among those who feel more important, 49.4% of those with less than a high school degree voted in comparison to the 43% that did in the bivariate analysis.[2]

More noticeably, however, is that respondents who felt more self-important were more likely to vote at every level of educational than were respondents who felt less important. For example, when controlling for those with "less than a high school degree," those who felt more important were 16.5 percentage points more likely to vote than those who felt less important. Similarly, when controlling for those with a graduate degree, those who felt more self-important were 3.9 percentage points more likely to vote than those who felt less important.[3] These results indicate that people who feel more important are more likely to vote than are those who feel less important.

Implications for H_1

In summary, the initial analysis conducted examined the relationship between education and voter turnout. The results show that education is a moderately strong, significant predictor of voter turnout (gamma = 0.450, p-value < 0.001). In particular, there is a positive association between the two in which higher levels of educational attainment return higher levels of voter turnout; those findings can be generalized to the population with more than 99.99% confidence. The results, thus, confirm the first hypothesis that "greater educational attainment is associated with greater political participation."

Implications for H_2

Furthermore, when controlling for self-importance, education still has a strong, significant effect on voter turnout, which

[2] The exception to this trend is among those with bachelor and graduate degrees, although the percentage-point difference between the bivariate and tri-variate analysis is only 0.4 and 0.2 respectively.

[3] Table 4 (see Appendix) justifies making this cross-table comparison, as it shows that there is a statistically-significant difference (p-value < 0.001) in voter turnout across differing levels of self-importance.

can be generalized to the population with more than 99.99% confidence. However, self-importance confounds the relationship between education and voter turnout such that education is particularly important in determining propensity to vote among those who feel less important. The tri-variate analysis, thus, confirms the second hypothesis that "greater educational attainment is associated with greater political participation; however, education is more important in determining political participation among those who feel less important."

Discussion

The apparent positive, significant relationship between education and voter turnout could be attributed to a few factors. First, formal instruction on history, government, and general politics could increase a person's general understanding and knowledge of the American political process (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Sondheimer and Green, 2010). Instruction on those subjects is most institutionalized at the secondary education level, meaning that most individuals who have completed high school have had at least some exposure to teachings of American politics. Although those topics are also available in higher education, they are most often not required, but rather taken electively. Therefore, the obligatory nature of those topics in high schools could explain why the increase in likelihood of voting is largest between those with less than high school and high school degrees and then steadily increases with each incremental change in education.

In the same manner, a second possibility is that, through the same exposure to the subjects previously mentioned, education fosters more interest in the political process (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Delli Carpini, and Keeter, 1996; Hyman, Wright, and Reed, 1975). Through increased interest in the area, individuals with higher levels of education might then value turning out to the polls more so than their peers with less education.

Finally, a third possibility is that education allows students to experience navigating bureaucratic relationships (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980), which might equip them with the skills necessary to overcome challenges in voting or participating in other political activities. Exposure to those experiences is, furthermore, more prevalent among those who have attended college (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980), which helps explain the increasing likelihood of voting as individuals move through levels of education beyond high school.

In terms of the control variable of *self-importance*, the evidence found that education has a particularly strong effect on voter turnout among those who feel less important. Those findings might be explained in considering the implications of one holding a more positive sense of their importance in the world. First, research has found that individuals with a higher sense of self-worth are more likely to understand and hold accurate views of the American political world (Carmines, 1978). Similarly,

evidence also suggests that those with a higher sense of self-worth are surer that their voice matters and has an impact on political outcomes (Carmines, 1978). Therefore, because of those values and understandings, those who hold a higher sense of their importance in the world are more likely to vote than those who feel a lower sense of importance. Moreover, because they are already more likely to vote, education only serves to reaffirm the value of political participation and encourage them to keep doing so.

Conversely, by having greater misunderstandings of and cynicism towards the political process, those who feel less important are more likely to predetermine that political participation is not worthwhile, therefore excluding themselves from doing so. Education, then, is particularly important for those individuals in equipping them with the interest, skills, and knowledge needed to participate in politics, as they lack the foundational psychological traits that might propel them to do so.

It is, however, premature to conclude that education has a causal effect on political participation, as the analysis has only accounted for one additional impactful factor. On that note, it is also premature to suggest that education and self-importance are the only variables that determine propensity to participate in politics. Previous research has identified family background and pre-adult life experiences as factors that influence both education and one's sense of importance (Kam and Palmer, 2008; Blais and St. Vincent, 2011). Furthermore, other research has also indicated that interest in a given election trumps other factors in determining likelihood of voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980), which may vary by each election's factors, such as the candidates, the prominent platforms, whether or not it is a reelection, and so forth. Thus, more research is needed to explore the impact of those variables.

Further research can also service this study by creating more appropriate measures for political participation and self-importance. In particular, future researchers could sum the indexes of multiple variables that address involvement in politics to measure political participation. In terms of self-importance, data collectors could create a question that asks respondents directly about their feelings of importance. In expanding the research in the suggested ways, research will be able to identify more clearly what drives one to participate in politics.

This study and its successors are imperative in informing policy that could improve classroom environments to ensure that all students foster a sense of importance, such that they understand their voice is of value. In particular, lower feelings of importance might disproportionately affect underrepresented or marginalized groups, who may suffer from the internalization or psychological trauma of the negative stereotypes of people who look like them (Gupta et al., 2011). Those groups might similarly develop depressed understandings of their importance from their experiences of constant neglect by their government or larger society. In order to support and uplift students' understanding of their worldly

importance, therefore, educational systems might do well to adopt pedagogical approaches that embrace diversity, emphasizing the societal value of diversified institutions. That might do so by broadening the focus of history lessons, for example, to incorporate more histories of people of color, women, and so forth. In addition to shaping classroom environments to support the marginalized students' understandings of importance, educational systems can also take measures to better encourage the self-importance of all students. Among the various manners of achieving such is allowing students a broader range of academic subjects so that they more easily explore their passions and realize their potential within those fields. In addressing these areas of improvement, educational systems and classrooms will be better equipped to develop within students a stronger sense of importance, and, in turn, increase their likelihood of participating in American politics.

In that manner, this research is an important step in establishing a more democratic society in which all voices are equally represented in American governance. More specifically, American politics is the system that allows us, as a nation, to decide the conduct of our country. The voting process, both for candidates and for issues, therefore, should represent needs and wishes of the American people. American politics, however, cannot possibly meet the true demands of its people if all those people do not participate initially and continuously. As the results of this study have demonstrated, those with lower levels of education—who most typically also have fewer financial means—are less likely to vote than are their more highly educated (and financially well-off) counterparts. Such groups of people might benefit from and desire affordable higher education, paid maternity leave, better paying low-skill jobs, and so forth; however, the absence of those people at the polls—those most likely to vote in favor of such initiatives—means that their voice will not be heard and their needs not met. In this way, low political participation rates are unfavorable for the wellbeing of the United States in that they mean that the desires of a fraction of Americans are disproportionately represented. Ultimately, this phenomenon can result in unequal distribution of resources, laws and policies that protect the elite and further marginalize socially and economically disadvantaged groups, and so forth. In uncovering some underlying factors that suppress political participation, this research, thus, begins to address and solve for those consequences in order to establish a more equitable democracy.

Appendix A

Table 2. Crosstabulation of Voter Turnout (2000 Presidential Election) by Education

		Education				
		LT High School	High School	Junior College	Bachelor	Graduate
Voter Turnout	Did not vote	57.0%	32.2%	26.2%	18%	11%
	Voted	43.0%	67.8%	73.8%	82%	89%
	total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n	(642)	(2532)	(454)	(967)	(519)

Gamma = 0.450, $p < 0.001$; $N = 5{,}114$

Source: GSS 2004

Table 3. Crosstabulation of Voter Turnout (2000 Presidential Election) by Education by Self-Importance

	Education									
	Less Self-Important					More Self-Important				
Voter Turnout										
	LT High School	High School	Junior College	Bachelor	Graduate	LT High School	High School	Junior College	Bachelor	Graduate
Did not vote	67.1%	37.0%	29.3%	23.5%	15.1%	50.6%	31.0%	23.2%	18.4%	11.2%
Voted	32.9%	63.0%	70.7%	76.5%	84.9%	49.4%	69.0%	76.8%	81.6%	88.8%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(149)	(592)	(82)	(179)	(86)	(87)	(490)	(99)	(239)	(152)
	Gamma = .455, $p < 0.001$, $n = 1088$					Gamma = .398, $p < 0.001$, $n = 1067$				

Source: General Social Survey 2004 (N = 2155)

Table 4. Crosstabulation of Voter Turnout (2000 Presidential Election) by Self-Importance

		Self-Importance	
		Less Self-Important	More Self-Important
Voter Turnout	Did not vote	36.6%	26.2%
	Voted	63.4%	73.2%
	total	100%	100%
	n	(1089)	(1067)

Gamma = 0.238, $p < 0.001$; $N = 2{,}156$

Source: GSS 2004

Appendix B

Variables Used in the Study (Source: General Social Survey 2004-14)

Did R vote in the 2000 election? In 2000, you remember that Gore ran for President on the Democratic ticket against Bush for the Republicans. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?—Voted, Did not vote, Ineligible, Refused to Answer, or Don't know/remember? (VOTE00)

R's highest degree. What is the highest grade in elementary school or high school that (you/your father/ your mother/your [husband/wife]) finished and got credit for? IF FINISHED 9th-12th GRADE OR DK: Did (you/he/she) ever get a high school diploma or a GED certificate? Did (you/he/she) complete one or more years of college for credit--not including schooling such as business college, technical or vocational school? IF YES: How many years did (you/he/she) complete? Do you (Does [he/she]) have any college degrees? (IF YES: What degree or degrees?) CODE HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED.—LT High School, High School, Junior College, Bachelor, or Graduate? (DEGREE)

Respondent's sense of their own importance in the world. Index variable created using the five variables below.—Less self-important or More self-important? (SELFIMPORTANCE)

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by selecting the number that comes closest to your answer: On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.—Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree? (SATSELF)

All in all, I'm inclined to feel I'm a failure. Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by selecting the number that comes closest to your answer: All in all, I'm inclined to feel I'm a failure.—Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Agree? (AFAILURE)

I wish I could have more respect for myself. Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by selecting the number that comes closest to your answer: I wish I could have more respect for myself.—Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Agree? (SLFRSPCT)

I feel that I am a person of worth. Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by selecting the number that comes closest to your answer: I feel that I am a person of worth.—Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Agree? (OFWORTH)

At times I think I am no good at all. Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by selecting the number that comes closest to your answer: At times I think I am no good at all.—Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Agree? (NOGOOD)

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