

What Motivates You to Vote: Trust in the Political System or Belief in Your Impact?

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Introduction

- Active political participation of a polity's citizens are critical towards the maintenance of democratic systems (Schulz, 2005).
- In the 1960s, the first documented systematic decline in political trust was recorded – led to the questioning of what role trust and self-efficacy had in active political participation (Hooghe, 2013).
- By determining whether political self-efficacy or political trust is correlated with active participation allows for civic programming and education to bolster said trait(s) in minority voting populations, thus ensuring stable democratic political systems that may best represent its citizens (Solhaug, 2006).

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between political trust and political participation?
- Is there a relationship between political self-efficacy and political participation?
- Are there additional demographic factors that may affect political participation?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=1,573) were drawn from the 2012 Outlook on Life Surveys (OOL), a nationally representative sample of English-speaking, non-institutionalized adults in the U.S.

Measures

- Political trust was measured through one's response to the question: "How much do you think you can trust the government in Washington?". Scores ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always).
- Political self-efficacy was assessed through one's response to the question: "How much can people like you affect what the government does?". Scores ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal).
- Political participation was coded dichotomously into Voted (1) and Did Not Voted (0) from the 2012 U.S. Election.

Results

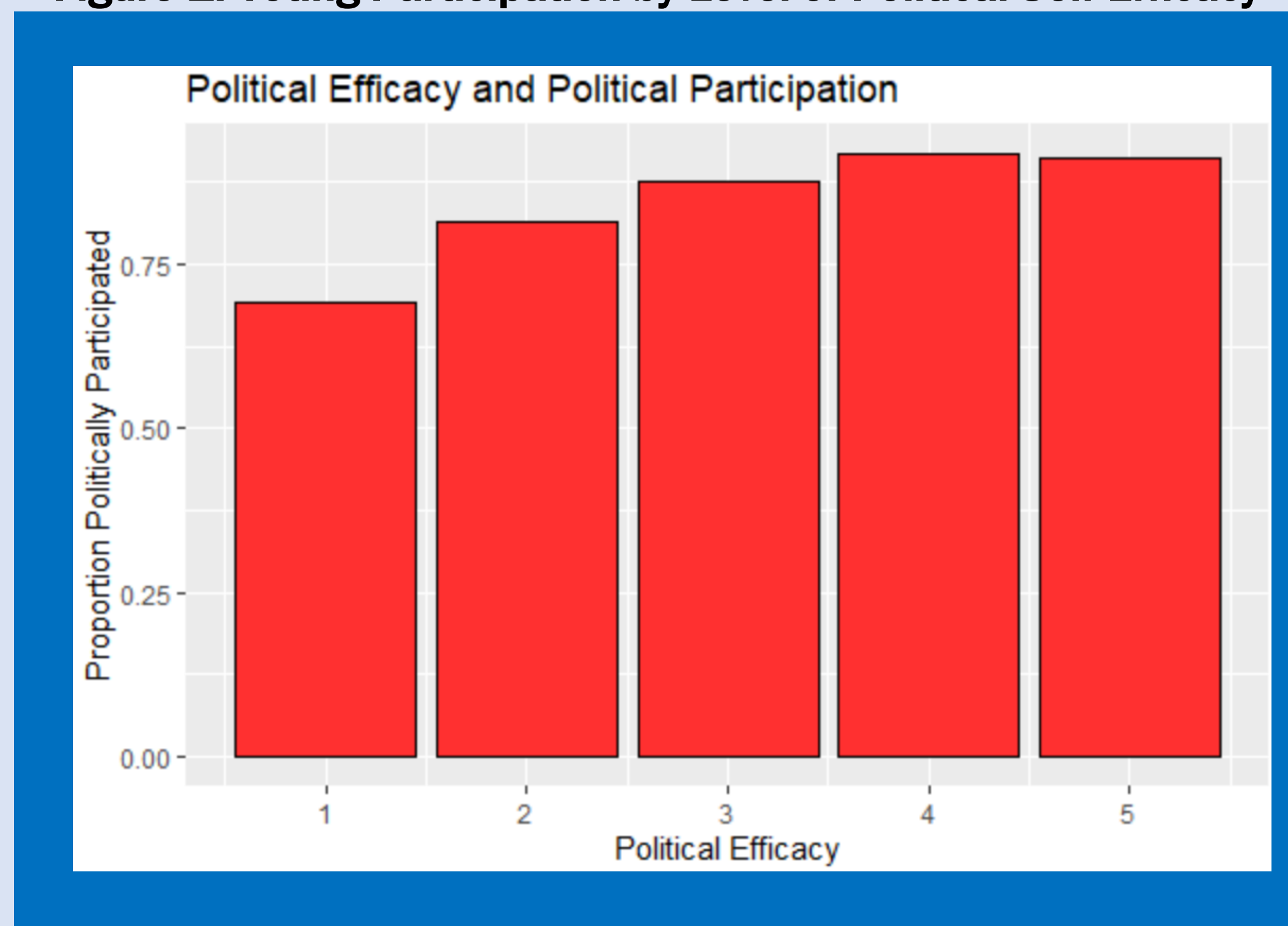
Univariate

- 81.8% of respondents voted in the 2012 U.S. Election.
- 1.6% of respondents report having the highest political trust level while 18.6% having the lowest political trust level.
- 27.5% of respondents have a political self-efficacy level of higher than "moderate".

Bivariate

- A Chi-Square test of independence revealed that **political self-efficacy** was significantly and positively associated with **political participation** ($\chi^2=58.31$, $df=4$, $p<0.001$).
- Post hoc comparisons of different levels of political self-efficacy revealed that the lowest rates of self-efficacy ("not at all" or "a little") participated significantly less than those with medium-to-high levels of self-efficacy ("moderate", "a lot", or "a great deal").

Figure 1. Voting Participation by Level of Political Self-Efficacy

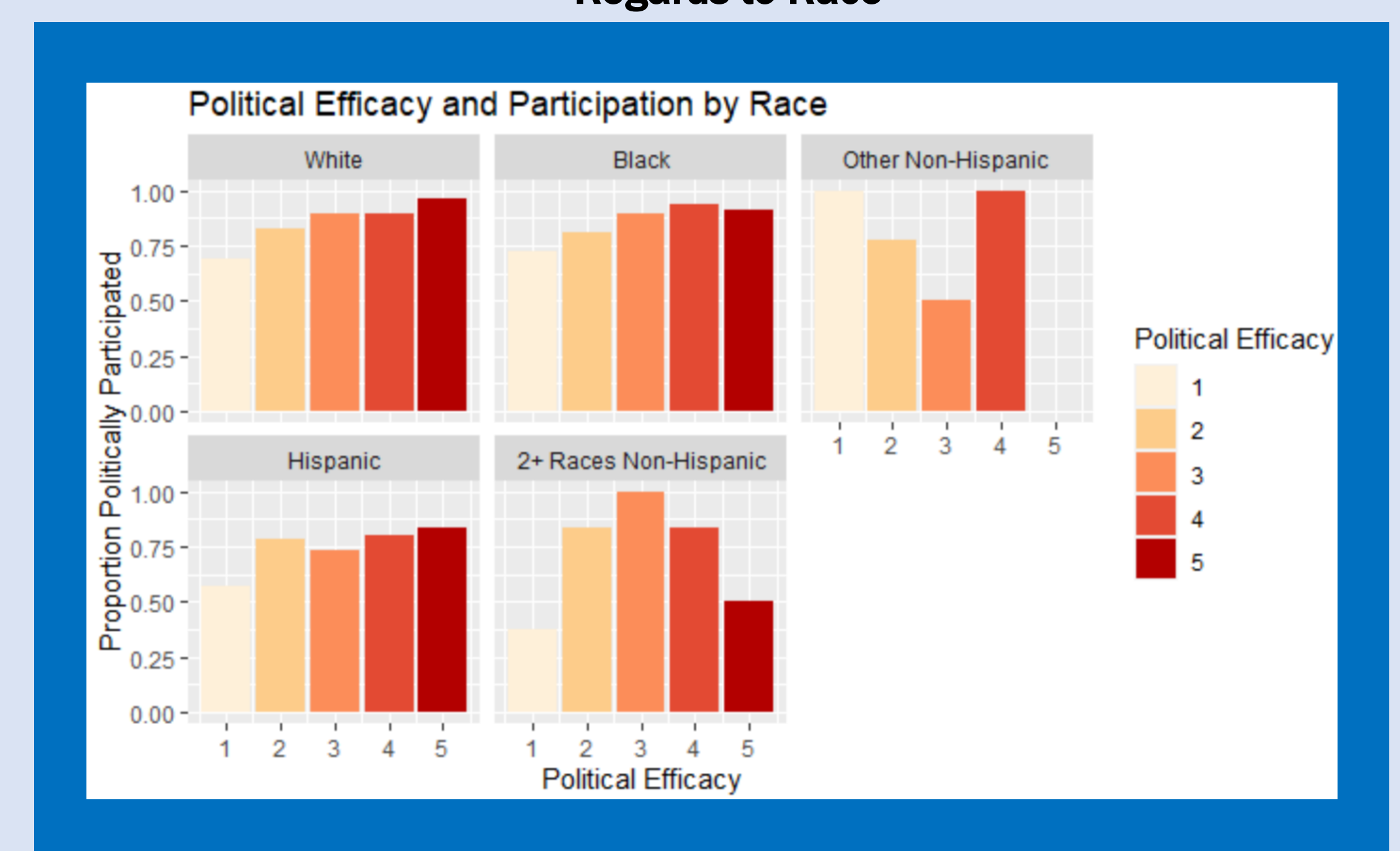


- Additionally, post hoc comparisons showed that political participation **was not statistically significant** among individuals who have a medium level of self-efficacy compared to individuals with a high self-efficacy.

Multivariate

- After controlling for race, political self-efficacy is still **significantly associated** with political participation.
- While self-efficacy and participation are positively correlated for White and Black respondents, the relationship needs further clarification for other races (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Voting Participation by Level of Political Self-Efficacy with Regards to Race



Discussion

- Political self-efficacy has stronger effects on active political participation compared to political trust.
- Civic programming and education might use this information to create initiatives which promote political self-efficacy among adolescents and minority voting populations to build a strong foundation for active democratic political participation.
- Further research is needed to determine whether and how household income, race, gender and other factors influence access to voting opportunities.