



The Association between Employment and Political Participation among Liberal and Conservative American Adults



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Introduction

- The effect of rising levels of unemployment on political participation has been a frequent topic of study in economics and political science literature.
- There is disagreement in the literature on whether rising unemployment levels in a community are positively or negatively correlated with political participation (Cebula, 2017).
- The traditional view, supported by some observational study, is that unemployment suppresses political participation (Brody and Sniderman, 1977; Basinger, et al., 2010).
- However, recent research suggests unemployment may increase voter turnout (Burden and Wichowsky, 2014).
- There has been comparatively little study of the effect of employment on the political participation of individuals.
- This work examines how political participation is associated with employment status (if an individual is employed) and employment type (if an individual is employed by others or by themselves).

Methods

Sample

- The General Survey Study (GSS) is an annual survey of a representative sample of American adults which polls on economic, social, and political topics.
- This work makes use of the GSS administered in 2014. This year was chosen because it is the most recent survey which includes sufficient measures of political participation.
- The survey questions used in this work were administered to 971 respondents.

Measures

- Level of political participation was measured with a series of 11 questions which asked respondents about specific politically motivated actions, such as voting in an election or donating to a political campaign.
- For each of these 11 questions respondents were assigned a value of one if they had every done the activity in question. These values were summed to create a quantitative score with higher values reflecting higher political participation.
- Employment status was coded as employed, unemployed, or not working by choice.
- Among those respondents whose employment status was employed, employment type was coded as self-employed or employed by others.
- Political leaning was coded as liberal, conservative, or moderate based on how the respondent self-identified.

Research Questions

- After controlling for political leaning, is political participation associated with employment status?
- After controlling for political leaning, is political participation differently associated with employment for adults who are self-employed and those who are employed by others?

Results

Univariate

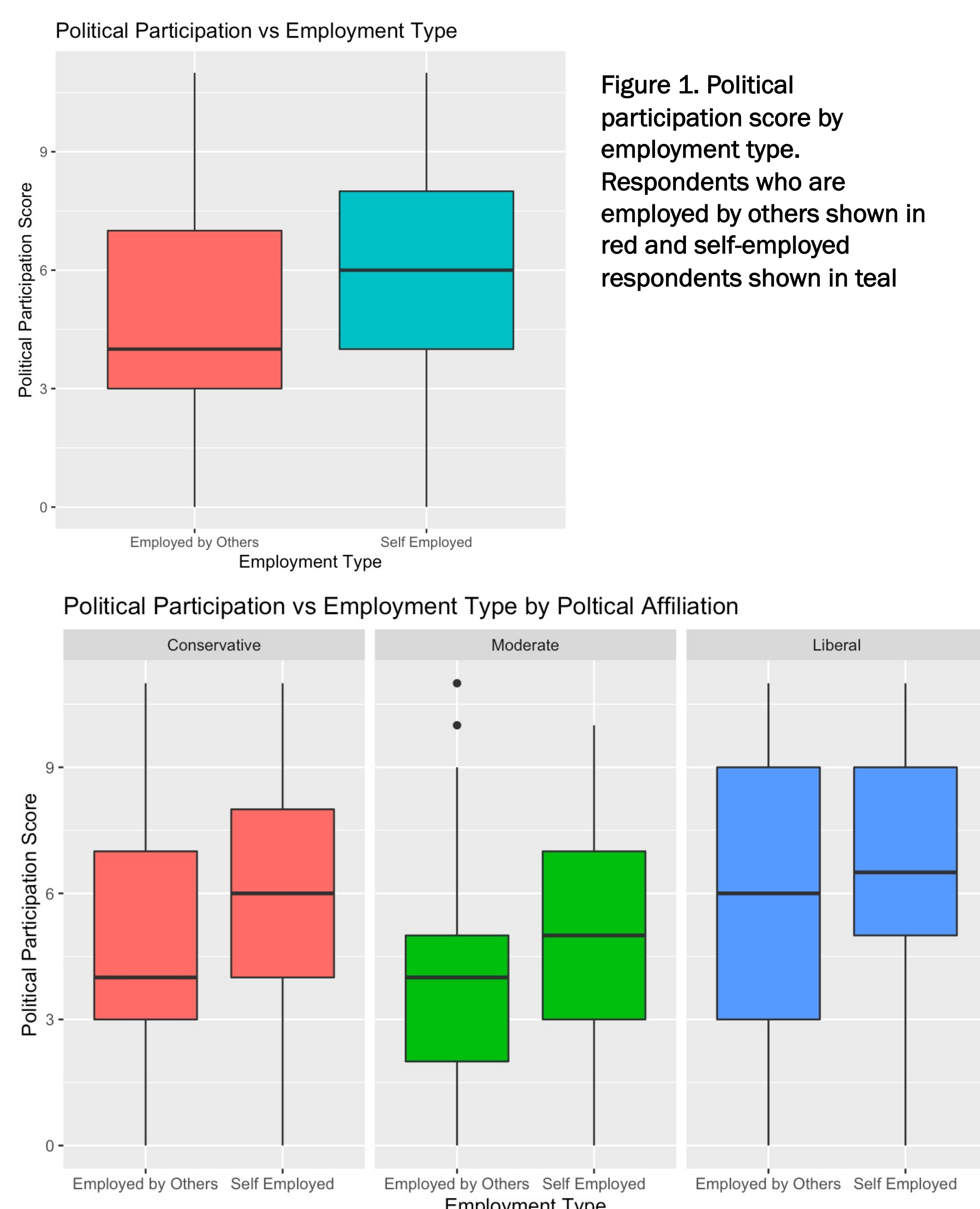
- Of the 971 respondents, 63.5% were employed, 30.8 were not working by choice, and 5.6% were unemployed.
- Of the 617 employed respondents, 85.5% were employed by others and 14.5% were self-employed
- Among all respondents, the mean political participation score was 4.82 with a standard deviation of 2.82
- Of the 971 respondents, 34.2% were conservative, 38.8% were moderate, and 27.0% were liberal

Multivariate

- When controlling for political leaning, no significant association was observed between employment status and political participation. Multiple linear regression revealed that, on average, unemployed respondents had a political participation score 0.46 higher than employed respondents.
- Multiple linear regression revealed political leaning to be a moderator to the association between employment type and political participation.
- No significant relationship between employment type and political participation was observed for liberal respondents ($p=0.475$).
- A significant relationship between employment type and political participation was observed for conservative and moderate respondents.
- On average, **self-employed moderate respondents had political participation score 1.25 greater than moderates employed by others** ($p=0.0076$).
- On average, **self-employed conservative respondents had a political participation score 0.93 greater than conservatives employed by others** ($p=0.046$).

Bivariate

- ANOVA analysis showed that there is no significant difference in political participation in respondents who were employed, not working by choice, and unemployed ($p=.346$).
- ANOVA analysis showed that there is a significant difference in political participation score among employed respondents who are self-employed and employed by others ($p=.0022$).
- Linear regression analysis showed **self-employed respondents, on average, had a political participation score .864 greater than a respondent employed by others** ($p=.0023$)



Discussion

- No significant association was found between employment status and political participation, even when controlling for political leaning.
- Further study with a greater sample of unemployed respondents may be needed to discover if there is any relationship between employment status and political participation.
- There is a significant positive association between political participation and being self-employed. This association was moderated by political leaning, with the greatest positive association being among moderate respondents.
- The associations presented in this work could be used by politicians and political advocacy groups to examine the economic factor that motivate or prevent groups of people from participating in the political system.

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Brody, R. A., & Sniderman, P. M. (1977). From Life Space to Polling Place: The Relevance of Personal Concerns for Voting Behavior. *British Journal of Political Science*, 7(3), 337-360.

Burden, Barry C, and Amber Wichowsky. (2014). Economic Discontent as a Mobilizer: Unemployment and Voter Turnout. *The Journal of Politics*, 7(3), 887-898.

Cebula, Richard J. (2017). Unemployment and Voter Turnout Revisited: A Brief Note. *Electoral Studies*.