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PREVIEW

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**Black political leaders and black political participation: The role of perceptions**

**Chung, Wonsub, Ph.D.**

**The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1994**

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106

PREVIEW

**BLACK POLITICAL LEADERS AND BLACK POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:  
THE ROLE OF PERCEPTIONS**

**By**

**Wonsub Chung**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Presented to the Faculty of**

**The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska**

**In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Major: Political Science**

**Under the Supervision of Professor John Hibbing**

**Lincoln, Nebraska**

**December, 1994**

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Black Political Leaders And Black Political Participation:

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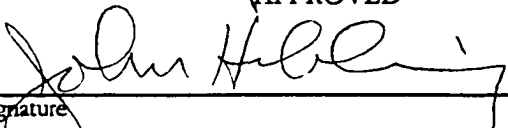
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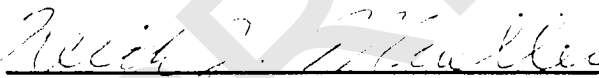
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# **BLACK POLITICAL LEADERS AND BLACK POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE ROLE OF PERCEPTIONS**

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University of Nebraska, 1994

Advisor: John Hibbing

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the relationship between black political perceptions toward black political leaders and black political participation. The dissertation confirms that blacks have developed positive perceptions toward the role of black political leaders in the American political system in improving black conditions. The dissertation also finds that some factors of black political leadership have influenced black political participation when they decide to participate in election related activities (e.g., help campaign, talk to someone to persuade why they should vote for a certain candidate).

This dissertation adds to our understanding of theories of black political participation by suggesting another determinant (positive perceptions among blacks toward the role of black political leaders in the American political system in improving black conditions) of black political participation. The dissertation also contributes to the study of black political leadership by pointing out factors of black political leadership (e.g., black political candidates' natural dispositions, policy orientations) that have influenced black political participation.

## Acknowledgements

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Finally, but most importantly, I would like to thank my parents, my wife, Myungok, and two children, Eunhae (Jane) and Kyutae (Eugene) for providing endless support and understanding throughout my quest for the doctorate.

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PREVIEW

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1. Definition, Scope, and Implications of Black Political Participation

##### Definition and Scope of Political Participation

Political participation is a complex, multi-faced concept. Scholars have offered many different definitions of the term, some broad and others narrow in scope. While Weiner (1971) finds various meanings and usages of the term in the literature,<sup>1</sup> Verba and Nie (1972) provide one of most influential definitions of the term. They define political participation as "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at

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1. First, according to Weiner, participation is often used to refer to either acts of support for or demands upon government elites. Second, participation is often used to mean only people's successful efforts to affect governmental actions (e.g., policy making) or to choose their preferred representatives to reflect their interests (demands) in the political system.

Third, some people define participation to include only such legitimate actions as voting, demonstrating, petitioning, lobbying, and others. Fourth, one school of democratic thought views representation as an appropriate form of participation in large-scale complex societies, since millions of citizens cannot effectively participate in government directly.

Fifth, alienation--as distinguished from apathy--is sometimes seen as a form of participation. Sixth, participation, although generally used to refer to acts aimed at choosing political leaders and influencing public policies, might also include efforts to influence bureaucratic actions.

Seventh, some definitions of participation include only activities affecting national politics, while others include participation in local institutions as well (Weiner, 1971). Also for more details on the typology of political participation, see Table 1-1.

influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba and Nie 1972, 2).

Although Verba and Nie do not include such unconventional political participation as participation in illegal protests, demonstrations, or subversive revolutionary movements, I agree with their argument that such conventional (legal) political participation as voting, discussing politics, joining political groups and participating (contributing to) in campaigns is central to democratic theory and process.

In this dissertation, I confine the scope of political participation to voluntary conventional activities (e.g., voting, campaign activities, etc.) since unconventional political participation might be simply discredited in the democratic system.<sup>2</sup> According to Piven and Cloward (1988a), such "defiant collective actions" as revolutionary uprisings, arson, rioting, and others are not allowed in the democratic system simply because voting and other conventional legal political participation (e.g., discussing politics, joining political groups, contacting officials, etc.) are available as the normative ways to act on political discontents. In this dissertation the term political participation means such conventional political participation as voting, campaign activities, and others since I confine the scope of political participation to conventional political participation.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Some argue that unconventional political participation is not unstabilizing the democratic system. Herrick (1991), for example, argues that personality influences individual's political perception on the issue and such individual perception is a major factor in determining unconventional political participation.

3. My data (i.e., the National Black Election Panel Study, 1984 - 1988) measure black political participation mainly through voting intention (do you expect to vote in the upcoming national election?), voting (did you vote for any black candidate in the

Political theorist and economist Schumpeter understands voting as a prerequisite of representative democracy. The essential element of democracy, Schumpeter (1950) argues, is citizen opportunity to vote for either the politicians in office or a set of competing political wishing to get into office. In short, Schumpeter argues that the role of voting in democratic systems is choosing the best (or the second best) from among a limited number of competing policies, candidates, or parties in order to reflect voters' preferred policies (opinions or interests) in the political system (Schumpeter 1950, 273-278).

#### Implications (Importance) of Black Political Participation

When blacks<sup>4</sup> were first brought to the United States, their status was more similar to that of indentured servant than that of a slave. It has been said that slaves enjoyed less freedom and could not own private property (e.g., land, house, etc.) compared to indentured servants (Aptheker, 1969; Fishel, 1976). Thus, when states attempted to pass legislation to change the status of blacks from indentured servants to slaves, according to Frazier (1957), blacks' political activity emerged in protest of such laws in the form of

---

November election?), and campaign activities (during this election year, did you help campaign for a black candidate?).

4. Although the term "African-American" is become more common in the literature, I employ the terms "blacks," or "black American" since, as Sigelman and Welch (1991) point out, blacks prefer "black" over "African-American" by a margin of 66 percent to 22 percent as of October 1989. The CNN/Time poll as of February 1994 confirms that 82 percent of black population prefer "blacks" over "African American."



resolutions and proclamations to local public officials, state governments and/or courts in order to keep their status (i.e., indentured servants rather than slaves).

As Cook argues in Black Political Parties: A Historical and Political Analysis (Walton, 1972a), blacks have had a significant impact on the American political system and process since early Colonial times. In other words, blacks, since the early Colonial times, have tried to improve their status from slaves to ordinary citizens through various ways of political participation mainly by asking for enfranchisement.

Although black political participation, at the national level, was directly affected by such systemic forces as the Compromise of 1877 and the subsequent disfranchising actions<sup>5</sup> during 1890-1901 (Davidson, 1992; Walton, 1972b), black political participation has significantly changed since the 1960s, especially since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965--no law can make it impossible for blacks to vote.

From the standpoint of black political participation, the vote was long sought as the

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5. In the Compromise of 1877, both northern Republicans and southern Democrats compromised so that, first, the federal government gave southern white Democrats the message that they might have discretion in dealing with blacks--by withdrawing federal troops in southern states, the federal government gave up protecting the black electorate in the South.

Second, southern white Democrats helped to resolve a contested presidential election by supporting Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. As a result, black political participation was in a standstill position until the mid sixties when the Voting Rights Act was enacted (Davidson, 1992; Walton, 1972b).

The most common ways of disenfranchising during 1890-1901 were literacy tests, poll taxes, and property requirement. Blacks, for example, had to satisfy a property requirement of \$250--a condition that did not have to be met by whites wishing to vote-- in New York (Grofman, et al., 1992; Morris, 1975).

principal goal of the movement that culminated in the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>6</sup> By electing blacks and/or moderate whites to office, it was expected that blacks could advance themselves through the public realm. In other words, the vote (political participation) would enable blacks to obtain important gains in a variety of areas, including education, employment, housing, and public services.<sup>7</sup> The vote, thus, held very significant policy implications for blacks (Brown, 1984; Button, 1989; Dahl, 1961; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Morris, 1975; Verba, Ahmed, and Bhatt, 1971).

Black Americans, according to Dahl (1961), have used political participation as a way of improving their socioeconomic status, and/or political equality. Morris (1975), from a similar point of view, argues that the impact of black political participation is "improvement of the quality of life for blacks so that blacks are enabled to achieve a

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6. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 replaced the Civil Rights Act of 1957 since the civil rights law brought about little progress in black voting (Thompson, 1982).

Litigation under the civil rights law, for example, was prolonged and limited to only a small percentage of the counties in which black registration was being limited. Many legal observers attributed the numerous delays and obstructions to the personal sympathies of some of the federal district court judges themselves.

In short, it was still dangerous business for blacks to attempt to vote under the Civil Rights Act of 1957. For details on the relationship between the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and black political participation, see U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1968; Davidson, 1992; Edwards, 1985; and Grofman, et al., 1992.

7. Jennings (1992), on the other hand, doubts the possibility of improving the quality of black life by electing black officials (leaders). As the black population grows, Jennings argues, "demands for local public services will rise along with the cost of these services. Whites especially those who unable to move to the suburbs, may not support taxation policies geared to paying for these services, even while living conditions in black residential areas deteriorate" (Jennings 1992, 28). Under this situation, as Jennings implies, I do not think that black elected officials can make policies aimed to improve the quality of black life without support from other electorates (e.g., whites).

socioeconomic status comparable to that of whites" (p. 168). In addition, Brown (1984) maintains that increasing political participation among blacks (especially middle-class blacks) resulted in legislative, judicial, and bureaucratic victories that essentially created more economic and political opportunities for themselves. On the other hand, from Schumpeter's point of view, we can say that blacks might vote for black (or white) candidates who provide favorable policies (e.g., building more low income houses) for blacks.

Recently, Jennings (1992) points to a more fundamental implication of black political participation. Today, blacks seek more than just a "piece of the pie." In other words, Jennings maintains that blacks try to determine "the size and the flavor of the pie, as well as who the baker is and how the economic pie actually will be cut and shared" (p. 11) through increased political participation (especially by electing black officials).

The most important implication of black political participation, according to Jennings (1992), is that black leaders especially in urban areas are using black political participation as "not only response to depressed socioeconomic conditions in the Black community but also a way to directly challenge those private leaders who continue to support public policy frameworks that have not substantially changed racial and economic hierarchies in urban America" (p. 85).

Once we understand the meaning (implication) of black political participation, the next step is pointing out the major determinants of black political participation. In other words, if political participation has a significant implication for blacks (e.g., improved quality of black life), what has encouraged blacks to participate more actively in politics?

In the next section, I detail theories on black political participation. How have political scientists explained the relatively low/high political participation rates of blacks compared to whites? And what has conditioned black political participation?

## 2. Theories of Black Political Participation

### Socioeconomic Status Model

Since Dahl has argued in his famous book, A Preface to Democratic Theory (1956), that people with lower socioeconomic status (SES) are less likely to participate in politics than those with higher SES, many scholars have tried to point out the pattern of political participation by focusing on individual voting behaviors based on various demographic characteristics especially socioeconomic status (Campbell et al., 1960; Dahl, 1961; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Olsen, 1970, 1972; Tate, 1993; Verba and Nie, 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Wright, 1974).

In general, it has been argued that the higher one's education, income, occupation, etc., the more likely one is to participate. In other words, the participation level would increase as the individual achieved high SES.<sup>8</sup> The logic is that the higher SES provides

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8. Some, however, argue that there is little relationship between SES and black political participation. Bartley (1970), for example, argues that SES showed little effect on black voting (political participation) behavior after examining presidential, congressional, mayoralty, and aldermanic electoral contests in both Atlanta and Macon,

more time and resources to participate at the higher levels in campaigning, contributing to campaigns, and running for the office. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) point out that among variables combining to form socioeconomic status, education is the most important determinant of individual's decision to vote.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of black political participation, Matthews and Prothro (1966) conclude that "most Negroes have low social status, relatively small incomes and limited education received in inferior schools .... The low voting rates of Negroes in the South are, to perhaps a large extent, a result of these factors rather than of direct political discrimination by the white community" (p. 308).

From a similar point of view with Wolfinger and Rosenstone, Wright (1974) finds a linear relationship between level of education and black turnout in the 1968 presidential election--the higher black's education level, the higher turnout rates.

In short, the lack of black political participation, according to the socioeconomic

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Georgia.

9. Salamon and Van Evera (1973) raise a question on the relationship between education and political participation. Although many have argued that educated people are more likely to participate in politics than uneducated people because uneducated people (e.g., blacks) cannot think about politics in a conceptual way, are unable to organize their political attitudes along with ideological lines, and show great instability in their opinions on political issues (Converse, 1964; Campbell, et al., 1960), Salamon and Van Evera argue that such explanation, at least in the context of Mississippi society, is open to serious question.

In other words, they argue that "it is questionable whether the number of years that blacks spend in local public schools has any relation at all to the amount of politically relevant knowledge they have acquired .... [because] even social science teachers neglected to discuss politics in class for fear of losing their jobs" (Salamon and Van Evera 1973, 1304).

status model, is due to the disproportionately low SES levels in the black community. Tate's recent study (1993) on black political participation confirms the SES thesis--black political participation is strongly affected by social position. Rich and educated blacks, according to Tate, are more likely to participate than poor and less-educated blacks.<sup>10</sup> In other words, she maintains that blacks who have college education are three times more likely to participate (vote) than those who do not graduate high school. In addition, according to Tate, blacks with lower SES tend to not be involved in any political campaign activities.

#### Organization, and Group Consciousness (Identification)

Some argue that the SES model cannot properly explain black political participation since blacks show higher political participation rates than whites when some SES variables are controlled (Verba and Nie, 1972). What, then, makes blacks actively participate in politics? Olsen (1972), and Verba and Nie (1972) argue that group consciousness<sup>11</sup> (identification) and/or organizational involvement are major determinants of black political

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10. Since Tate focuses on the relationship between black political participation and black SES, she cannot say whether education is more powerful among blacks or whites.

11. Some use "racial consciousness" instead of "group consciousness" in explaining black political participation. For example, Shingles (1981) and Verba, Ahmed, and Bhatt (1971) argue that regardless of educational differences, racial consciousness is an important condition of black political participation. However, there is a lack of consensus concerning what specific form of racial consciousness is the most important predictor of black political participation.

participation.

Group consciousness (identification) is "a sense of belonging, plus an awareness of the salience of one's group" (Milbrath and Goel 1977, 56)). Group identification, according to Milbrath and Goel, can become a belief system leading to greater political activity. We can see the best example of blacks' efforts to build group identification in such slogans as "black power," and "black is beautiful" during the 1960s and the 1970s. Evidence indicates that persons who exhibit a strong sense of group identification (consciousness) tend to more actively participate in politics (Verba, Nie, and Kim, 1971).

More recently Jennings (1992) argues that since the 1980s many new black voters who represent the groups that in the past were the least likely to register to vote (e.g., the young, the poor, women, and the elderly) have begun to believe that they can make a difference with a strong sense of group consciousness. This is, according to Jennings, true especially "when the choices presented seem to attack their ethnic pride or group identity or when opposing forces are seen as hostile to black interests" (Jennings 1992, 119).

Matthews and Prothro (1966) and Hunter (1953) point out the importance of organizational involvement in black political participation. Matthews and Prothro (1966) argue that although blacks show lower political participation (voting) rates than whites, a higher proportion of blacks belong to political organizations and associations. Hunter (1953), by the same token, finds more than 350 organizations within the black subcommunity of Atlanta and argues that black organizations tend to have a political content which is not found in the other larger community. Recently, from a similar point of view, Tate (1991) argues that political participation of blacks might be promoted by

such community based resources as church membership and involvement in black political organizations (e.g., National Urban League). I agree with Verba and Nie's (1972) argument that organizational involvement, with an emphasis on group consciousness (identification), might encourage blacks to participate at rates beyond what one would normally expect based on socioeconomic status.

Some argue that organizational involvement among blacks, on the other hand, has been affected by their socioeconomic status, especially the level of formal education--the higher one's educational level, the more likely to involve in organizational activities (Almond and Verba, 1963; Morris, 1975).<sup>12</sup> In addition, evidence has shown that there are conflicting policy goals between middle and lower class groups among blacks when they are participating in organizations (or politics)--while middle class blacks favor such "status goals" as an end to racial discrimination, lower class blacks favor "welfare goals" like improved housing and schools in their communities (Banfield and Wilson, 1963). Although different class groups among blacks pursue different policy goals (e.g., either status or welfare goals), it can be said that blacks who are actively involved in organizational activities are more likely to participate in politics than those who are not involved in any organizational activities.

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12. Traditionally, such national groups as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) have been found to have highly educated, professional black activists (Morris, 1975). After comparing political attitudes in five nations (i.e., U.S., U.K., Germany, Italy, and Mexico), Almond and Verba (1963) argue that persons with higher levels of education are more likely to have organizational membership than persons with lower level of education.