

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF
STUDENTS AND IT'S EFFECT ON POLITICAL EFFICACY:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON POLITICAL
BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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By
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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is on the effects that voluntary and political organizations have on students at a university campus. Does being a member of voluntary and political organizations increase one's political efficacy, and does it reduce political cynicism? It would be interesting to examine the political attitudes of students in the aftermath of the "Watergate Crisis," and since the election of a new president.

Much literature has been written on social participation, however it pertains to the general population. This project will be concerned with the political behavior of students. The format employed in this research paper will be a discussion of the literature. Discussion of the actual analysis follows; next will come a discussion of the results, and finally the conclusion.

Chapter 1

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When attempting to answer some of the questions concerning variations in political efficacy of America's population, one looks for causal explanations, i.e., why do individuals or groups behave in a particular manner? What causes individuals to engage or not to engage in a particular form of political behavior? Could it be that some people act in a particular manner because of feelings they have for certain candidates? Could it be that some people act because they want to see a change, while others act to maintain the status quo? Political behavior is comprised of many different forms, i.e., demonstrations, rioting, contacting and influencing political elites, getting involved in political campaigns, and voting.

The main purpose of this thesis is to compare the differences in the degree of political efficacy of ethnic groups, and the effect that voluntary and political organizations may have in increasing or producing political efficacy. In particular, the question arises, do minority group members who belong to voluntary associations become politically responsive and work more effectively to achieve their goal as a group, or do they feel that it does not matter because political elites seem unresponsive?

One can only guess, initially, that when one belongs to a voluntary association it increases one's political efficacy. Put more clearly, a person may well feel that he has a better chance at contacting and influencing decision-makers as a member of a group than as an individual.

For the population as a whole, lack of political efficacy seemed to be the problem since being pointed out that only 55 percent of the American electorate voted in the presidential election in 1972, and 53 to 59 percent were attracted to the polls in 1976. A congressional off-year election attracts less than 50 percent, state and local elections turn out even less (Olsen, 1972:317). However, Black political activity and the activity of other minority groups is distinct from that of the dominant group. It is distinct because it is aimed at fighting segregation, discrimination, and gaining equal opportunity. Blacks are likely to employ more political activities, methods, devices and techniques that advance their policy preferences than are whites.

Blacks are also more likely to employ "direct action" with the probability that it will bring quicker and more favorable results. In 1972 two-thirds of the Black population approved of efforts to halt actions through sit-ins and mass demonstrations.

On the other hand, Whites are less tolerant of such behavior (Pomper, 1975:126).

The cause of protest employed by Blacks has changed. In 1968, protest was based on hope: a fair government will respond when injustice is brought to attention. More recently, protest has been based on despair: demonstrations are necessary to oppose an unfair government.

Pomper states that White political behavior has also changed; Whites are increasingly engaging in actual demonstrations for a different purpose. These demonstrations have resulted from American involvement in Vietnam or in opposition to school busing. Whites still do not favor protest to the same extent as Blacks, but maybe as time passes White protest will be as likely to increase.

The character of Black politics results from the necessity for Blacks to resolve their problems. Black politics itself is not a homogeneous phenomenon. It differs according to location and type of segregation and discrimination found in different parts of the country (Walton, 1972).

Furthermore, the different political techniques used by Blacks as pointed out by Pomper help to distinguish it from White politics.

Walton states that observers discuss segregation in the Northern and Southern regions, but fail to distinguish between the types of segregation. Even in the same region, segregation is not found to be the same. For example, one may guess that in the deeper parts of the South Blacks are confronted with the "Jim Crow" laws, while in the upper

portions of the South they may well be fighting for desegregation of schools and housing.

It has been suggested that Black politics has moved through four stages, but there has been no simultaneous occurrences of these four stages across regions. These four stages are: (1) non-participation, (2) limited participation, (3) moderate participation, and (4) full participation (Walton, 1972). According to Walton Blacks are still in the non-participation process in some areas, or in some counties in the states of Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. Furthermore, if the voting right act expires, it is possible that Blacks in a more advanced stage of the political process will be forced back to a lower stage (Walton, 1972:13).

The move from one stage to another takes place because of some significant event. These events occur because of demands made on society by Blacks, or by others on their behalf.

This accounts for the degree of political efficacy of minority groups. Efficacy is the ability to advance to a higher level of political participation suggested by Walton. It also entails the ability to influence decision-makers. What has held true for Blacks might also hold true for Mexican-Americans. Keeping in mind that Walton postulates that these stages do not necessarily occur in order.

The second stage is characterized by extremely low political participation--only a few Blacks participate in the

political process. The third stage is characterized by more than 50 percent Black political participation--Blacks have been motivated to enter the political arena due to occurrences and events in their own community.

The "Ethnic Community" theory is relevant here because it discusses collective political participation mobilized against an outside force. This theory will be discussed later. The fourth stage entails full participation in the political system--Blacks not only acquire consciousness, but obtain political efficacy. In this final stage, Blacks have access to power. They have the tools and devices, as mentioned above, to make an impact on power holders.

Black politics is continually changing. For example, the renewal of the 1965 Voting Rights Act might be a determinant of whether Blacks advance or are forced into a lower level.

It could be hypothesized that ethnic groups become politically efficacious if their participation in voluntary associations is a prerequisite for movement into the third stage. One may pre-suppose that similar statements can be made about other minority groups rather than just one particular minority. It might be added that in conjunction with the fourth stage, one might state that Blacks no longer vote solely on socioeconomic status and social class alone. Indeed, the change may have shifted to racial group consciousness, and organized responsiveness to political events.

Contemporary Black leaders may have helped shape the political meaning of being Black in ways that Black leaders two decades before could not (Miller and Levitan, 1976:27).

The preceding discussion attempted to indicate the difference between Blacks and Whites in politics. There is differentiation between the methods used by the two groups, and reasons for entering into the political arena. The discussion now turns to the relationship that social participation in voluntary organizations has on political efficacy.

VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL EFFICACY

Marvin Olsen's multi-variate analysis of voter turnout, and social participation brings into focus the relationship of political activity and membership in voluntary associations. Olsen cites three reasons why social participation increases individual political activity: it broadens one's sphere of interest and knowledge in public affairs, and political issues become more salient; secondly, it brings the individual into contact with other people and these relationships bring him into the political arena; thirdly, it trains the individual for social interaction, leadership skills, and provides sources for effective political activity.

Olsen refers to two versions of the "Social Participation Theory." These versions are the "Mobilization Version," and the "Mediation Version." "Social Participation