RACIAL CLEAVAGES IN POLITICAL INTEREST

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

Political interest (the degree to which citizens profess awareness of, are curious about, or pay attention to politics) is an essential topic in the study of democratic participation; however, many assumptions about political interest remain unexamined. Some of these assumptions deal with the impact of race on interest in politics. One way to study the effect of race is to observe differences in expressions of political interest among racial groups. This dissertation, therefore, uses public opinion surveys to compare the level of political interest between African Americans (or “Blacks”) and Anglo-Americans (or “Whites”). First, my research considers the conceptualization and measurement of political interest. Second, I analyze the impact of race on political interest as a dependent variable. Finally, my dissertation examines interest in politics as a racialized independent variable predicting political action.

The results from the analyses point to intriguing racial differences in political interest. Chapter 2 examines the effect of subtle changes in questionnaire design on the interpretation of political interest over time. I find that such changes do not bias interest trends as much as the experimental literature suggests, and I devote the remainder of my dissertation to examining racial differences in the amount of political interest shown by Blacks and Whites. By analyzing interest levels over time, Chapter 3 reveals that Whites tend to be more interested in politics than Blacks are. This racial gap in political interest is attributable to societal-level shifts in racial tolerance.
In Chapter 4, I study the interaction of race and political interest and its effect on political behavior. I find that race determines the strength of the relationship between political interest and political participation. Specifically, the link between interest and participation is stronger for Whites than it is for Blacks. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by discussing the implications of these findings for our understanding of race as a central concept in American politics, for the future of political interest scholarship, and for contemporary debates over how best to mobilize an allegedly apathetic society.
Dedicated to the Block and Haynes families
Dissertations test a person’s endurance as well as their scholarly abilities. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but I would like to recognize the contributions of those who helped me through what, at times, seemed to be a daunting and endless process.

I start by thanking my advisors for their patience and intellectual flexibility. I changed my dissertation topic several times, and they supported me through all these changes. I particularly appreciate Paul Allen Beck. Dr. Beck is one of the most thorough reviewers I know, and my research benefited greatly from his technical and stylistic suggestions. I also thank Herb Weisberg for help with my research methodology. Dr. Weisberg was always open to talking about survey research, and his knowledge of the American National Election Studies was invaluable. Next, I am grateful to Tom Nelson for guiding me as I grappled with the theoretical and empirical implications of my research. Finally, I owe a great debt to Harwood K. McClerking for helping me to synthesize public opinion and political psychology literatures to study racial differences in political interest. I value his candor, his constant encouragement, and his professional mentoring. Dr. McClerking plays the role of both cheerleader and critic, and I am glad that he took me under his wing.
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Special thanks go out to Stewart Gill of the Extreme Martial Arts Dojang and Ricardo Wilson of the Do Jung Ishu Martial Arts Club for reminding me that I can accomplish anything into which I put my heart and mind. Additionally, I want to recognize the helpful staff at the American National Election Studies for their advice on managing data sets, and I send an administrative “thank you” to the technical support office at MacKichan Software, Inc. for keeping me sane while I typeset my dissertation in \LaTeX.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have a long-term fascination with the study of mass political involvement. Political involvement is a key concept in democratic decision-making. Theorists may quarrel over how much involvement is desirable for a society to flourish, but there is a consensus that democracies require their citizens to concern themselves with politics. As Jan van Deth (2000, 1) notes, the debate is over the degree, not the necessity, of citizen involvement in democratic systems. As a civic virtue, political involvement is essential to participatory democracy. In many respects, a politically engaged citizenry distinguishes democracies from dictatorships.

Political involvement has two components. Scholars often distinguish behavioral involvement from psychological involvement, calling the latter “political engagement” and the former “political participation.” Participation often takes the form of voting, but it also includes contacting elected officials, donating to political causes, attending city council meetings, taking part in protests, and other activities. Broadly defined,

1Compare, for example, the “strong democracy” arguments of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762, Book III; Chapter XV) to the elitist views of Joseph Schumpeter (1975, 261). For a review of these debates, read Held (1987).

2While there are many suggested definitions for the term, this dissertation adopts Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) definition of political participation. According to these authors, participation is voluntary, it is an action, and it seeks to influence the government (Verba, et al. 1995, 38-39;
political engagement is the degree to which citizens feel psychologically “connected”
to politics (Campbell et al. 1960; Brody in King, ed. 1978, 301; Converse, in Apter,
ed. 1972; Verba and Nie 1987; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Scholars often
measure this connection by gauging a citizen’s interest in politics, political efficacy,
trust in government, civic duty, or political knowledge (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960;
Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Older works described political involvement as
the bridge by which citizens carry information to elites (see Verba, Nie, and Kim
1978). Recent research, however, compares political involvement to a “voice.” Be it
psychological or behavioral, citizens use their political voice to express their prefer-
ences and wishes to elites and to persuade these elites to respond (Nagel 1987, 1-8;
Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 37).

My dissertation focuses on an important but understudied dimension of psycho-
logical engagement: interest in politics. Political interest—defined here as the degree
to which citizens profess an awareness of, are curious about, or pay attention to
politics—sits quietly at the very core of the involvement literature. Democratic the-
orists place a great deal of value on the degree to which citizens take an interest in
politics and public affairs (Rousseau 1968, 49; Lipmann 1924, 24; Mill 1861). Polit-
ical interest was so vital to the ancient Greeks that their word for “idiot” refers to
political apathy, not to mental deficiency. This definition consists of both conventional
(i.e. voting in local or national elections, working on a campaign, contacting public officials, and
making contributions) and un-conventional acts (e.g. taking part in informal community activities,
attending protests and demonstrations, and being a member of an organization that takes a stand on
political issues). This definition does not include expressing political opinions or doing civic service
required by one’s profession.

Loosely translated, ηθληται (idiot) refers to a citizen who, through neglect or lack of training,
is neither knowledgeable about nor skilled in the affairs of the state. In its purest sense, the term
“idiot” best describes a layperson, not a foolish person. However, the word has become increasingly
derogatory. One can attribute the vulgarization of this term to the value that the ancient Greeks

see also Nagel 1987, 1; Milbrath and Goel 1977, 1-4). This definition does not include expressing political opinions or doing civic service
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democratic theory, interest has proven itself a worthwhile variable in models of polit-
cical behavior. Interest in politics is often one of, if not the strongest, determinants of political action.

Therein lies the puzzle, for the significance of political interest is eclipsed only by its ability to escape scholarly attention. Despite its normative and empirical importance, research on political interest is surprisingly underdeveloped, and, as a result, many assumptions about political interest remain unexamined. Some of the least tested assumptions deal with the effect of race on political interest. With the exceptions of Bennett (1986, 73), Matthews and Prothro (1966, 267) and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 349, 434) scholars have not studied race and political interest, and those who have done so treat race as a control rather than a theoretically central variable. This research shortage is even more conspicuous given the long tradition of studies showing that race figures prominently into people’s public opinions and political actions, a tradition that dates to the writings of de Tocqueville (1835) and Myrdal (1944).

As its title suggests, this dissertation explores the racial cleavages in political interest. To be clear, this dissertation will focus on America’s largest racial groups: Blacks and Whites. This is not to say that African Americans are the only politically placed on civic awareness. By its definition, idiots do not care about public affairs, which, by extension, would mean that they are civically ignorant. Because political involvement was so widespread in Greek nation-states, such citizens were socially deviant. Thucydides (1972, 147) makes this point succinctly in his rendition of Pericles’ funeral oration: “we do not say that [the Athenian] who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all.”

Like many social scientists, I recognize the subtle differences between the terms “African-American” and “Black” and “Anglo-American” and “White” while admitting that I will use these racial designations interchangeably. This choice is a practical one. Because scholars often use different descriptions when referring to the races, I vary my use of these terms to preserve the integrity of quotations. Secondly, “Black” and “White” convey unambiguous messages about racial identity and, despite the arbitrariness and fluidity of race, the terms work very well for distinguishing the
relevant minority group in America. Quite the contrary; the nation is more ethnically
diverse than it has ever been. The focus on Blacks and Whites reflects my fascination
with race politics, not a disregard of ethnic or gender politics. The value of such
research is beyond question, but the study of ethnic and gender differences in political
interest is beyond the scope of the dissertation.

My use of the term “cleavage” is deliberate, for the verb, “to cleave” represents
the dual processes of sticking together and splitting apart. As such, this dissertation
explores those features of political interest on which Blacks and Whites conform and
diverge. In the section that follows, I set the stage for my dissertation by locating it
within the literature on race and political involvement.

1.1 Literature Review

Research on race and political involvement is strewn across articles and books
from all fields in the social sciences and humanities. The goal of this review is to
unite these disparate works. Figure 1.1 depicts the connections among these litera-
tures. The rectangles represent the major concepts considered in this dissertation:
political interest, race, and political participation. The circle designates the intersec-
tion of race and political interest. The arrows in Figure 1.1 outline four causal paths
corresponding to the theorized relationships among these concepts. The arrow that
two groups in question. Finally, these designations conform to U.S. Census definitions of race. Ac-
ccording to the United States Census Bureau, the expression “Black” (or African American) refers to
those [non-Hispanic] citizens of the United States whose ancestors belong to any of the Black racial
groups of Africa. The term(s) includes people who self-identify as “African American,” or “Negro.”
It also covers U.S. residents who, when asked to specify their designation, described themselves as
“Afro American,” “Nigerian” or “West Indian.” The Census term “White” (Caucasian or Anglo-
American) refers to [non-Hispanic] North Americans of European, Middle Eastern, or (White) North
African ancestry. The term encompasses those U.S. citizens who self-identify as “White” or describe
themselves as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, Polish, or Iranian. In this
dissertation, I measure respondents’ race based on whether a person self-identifies with one of these
two major racial classifications.

4
connects race to interest (Path A) symbolizes the expected relationship between race and interest in politics. The arrow pointing from interest to participation (Path B) represents the widely assumed link between interest in politics and political action. The arrow labeled “Path C” is the impact of race on participation. Finally, Path D denotes the effect of the interaction of race and interest on political behavior.

1.1.1 The Study of Political Participation

As Karl (1974) rightly observes, scholarship on citizen participation has dominated the field of American politics since the 1950s, when Charles Merriam founded the “behavioral movement of political science” at the University of Chicago. The works
on political participation are too numerous to name here, but any discussion of the participation literature should start with the works of Sidney Verba and his colleagues (e.g., Verba and Nie 1972; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976; Verba, et al. 1995). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (1995), is by far the most comprehensive work on contemporary political participation, and Chapter One of this book offers a thematic overview of past research.

There are several theoretical approaches to studying participation. The first generation of political science research on participation began at Columbia University, borrowed heavily from the field of sociology, and argued that a person’s demographic standing determined her propensity to vote in presidential elections (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McFee 1954; see also Merriam and Gosnell 1924; Verba and Nie 1972). The Columbia school of thought waned in the 1950s with the emergence of more psychological models coming from the University of Michigan. The “Michigan School” emphasized the importance of partisanship (the strength and direction of citizens’ attachment to a political party) as a determinant of political action (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Bartels 2000; Miller 1991; but see Neimi and Weisberg 1993). A related approach to the study of participation stresses emotions. These emotion-based models focus either on the personality traits and decision-making patterns of political leaders, or they examine the role of emotions on the public’s opinion. For a particularly good summary of this body of research, see Marcus (2000).5

Perhaps the biggest recent innovation is the application of economic theories to political science. Scholars often associate these analyses with William Riker and his

students at the University of Rochester (for a biography of Riker and the influence of his teachings, see Amadae and Bueno de Mesquita 1999). The Rochester approach (what Riker calls “positive political theory” or “rational choice theory”) focuses on an individual’s decision calculus. In the context of political behavior, positive theorists argue that rational citizens base their voting decisions on whether the perceived benefits of activism outweigh the assumed costs (see Key 1966; Fiorina 1981). One such development in the economic study of participation is the “spatial model” of voting, introduced by Hotelling (1929) and modified by Smithies (1941) but best articulated by Downs (1957). According to the spatial model, political behavior is a function of the issue proximity of voters and candidates. Policy preferences fall along a liberal/conservative continuum; both citizens and candidates take positions along this continuum, and voters select their leaders by inferring how closely a candidate’s policy stances match their own.

Despite the preponderance of participation research, scholars have yet to understand why some citizens take part in politics while others abstain. Richard Brody mentions this when he wrote about the “puzzle” in the survey literature on voter turnout: Americans are more educated than they have ever been, and extensions to voting rights laws guarantee the franchise to all citizens, despite their race, ethnicity, and gender. Because of the removal of many demographic and legal barriers, overall participation rates should be rising; instead, they remain below expectations (Brody
in King, ed. 1978). Rational choice theorists meet with a different but equally troubling puzzle: since the odds of a citizen casting the decisive vote in any large election are slim to none, the costs of voting always outweigh the benefits. Based on this logic, citizens should not vote, and the positive model of participation does not account for nearly half the American electorate, who cast ballots despite the irrationality of doing so (Knack 1992, 133; Green and Shapiro 1994; Grofman 1993). In short, rational choice scholars cannot explain why people vote when the theories predict that they should not, and survey researchers cannot explain why people do not vote when the theories predict that they should.

1.1.2 The Study of Race

Like the literature on participation, the literature on race is abundant. Some of the best treatises on race come from literary, legal, and historical scholars. See, for example, the seminal works in the recent and controversial fields of Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefanie 2001; Krenshaw, Gothada, Peller, and Thomas, eds. 1995) and Whiteness Studies (Rodinger 1991; Jacobson 1999), which examine American

6McDonald and Popkin (2001) show that conventional methods of measuring turnout systematically underreport voting activity in America. Scholars usually measure turnout as the ratio between those who voted and those who were eligible to vote. Conventionally, the number of ballots cast in an election becomes the numerator in this formula and the voting age population (VAP) becomes the denominator. The authors propose a new denominator, one that excludes felons and the mentally or physically incapable from the pool of eligible voters while including citizens overseas. Using the voter eligible population (VEP) as the denominator, the authors show that turnout, though consistently low, is not declining.

7This quandary is known as the “collective action problem” among interest group scholars and the “paradox of participation” among those who study political behavior. Since governmental policies are collective goods (they affect citizens regardless of whether citizens participate or not) the rational, self-interested citizen has no incentive to participate. Because her abstention does not harm the collective, she can hitch a “free ride” on the activities of others and still reap the benefits. Based on this logic, not only is it costly to vote, but it is beneficial not to.
race relations through the respective lenses of Black subjugation and White privilege. There are extensive reviews on the study of race in the social sciences. For reports on the recent advances in race scholarship in the field of geography, see Schein (2002) Hoelscher (2003), Peak and Schein (2000), and Kobayashi and Peak (2002). Sears, Hetts, Sidanius, and Bobo (2000) summarize the major psychological theories of racism. McClain and Garcia (1993) and Hutchings and Valentino (2004) chronicle the evolution of race scholarship in political science. The sociological literature on race is enormous, so there is no single piece that encompasses the “state of the discipline.” There are, however, numerous articles on race-related topics in the recent volumes of the *Annual Review of Sociology,* and Omi and Winant (1994) give an excellent overview of the development of theoretical approaches to the study of race in sociology. The economic literature on race deals mostly with racial discrimination in the product, credit, and labor markets (see Becker 1957; Pascal, ed. 1972; Sowell 1975). A helpful introduction to this literature comes from the symposium on race, published in the spring 1999 issue of *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* (R. G. Fryer, Jr., personal communication, January 6, 2006).

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A recurring theme in the political literature on race is that racism undermines the stability of American democracy. The United States has a universally accepted creed of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity. The beliefs that all humans are born equals; that no citizen should be denied their right to life, liberty, and property; and that the government draws its power from the people’s consent flow through America’s essence. Leaders echoed these sentiments in documents like the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, and Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, but William Tyler Page summarized them best in 1918 when he wrote the “American’s Creed”:

I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed, a democracy in a republic, a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies (italics added).

Unfortunately, after roughly half a millennium of institutionalized slavery and nearly a century of Jim Crow, it is apparent that America falls well short of its creed in its treatment of Blacks. Some would point out that race relations are steadily improving, but Klinkner and Smith (1999) describe the reality of Blacks’ fight for racial inclusion in terms of hard-earned successes punctuated by bitter disappointments, or, as the saying goes, “two steps forward, one step back.” Myrdal (1944) described the disparity between our nation’s egalitarian principles and its repressive practices as an “American Dilemma.” Regardless of whether people want to face the issue of race,
no conversation about western democracy is complete without a candid discussion of the contradictions in America’s race relations.

1.1.3 The Study of Political Interest

As previously mentioned, a person’s interest in politics represents the degree to which he or she is curious about or pays attention to politics and public affairs (Bennett 1986, 58; Van Deth 1990, 278; Zaller 1992, 333-336). Extending this logic, political apathy is simply the absence of interest in politics (see Bennett 1986, 38; Van Deth 2000, 4). For many scholars, political interest (or its opposite, apathy) reflects a person’s psychological engagement to politics (Campbell, et al. 1960; Brody in King, ed. 1978, 301; Converse, in Apter, ed. 1964; Verba and Nie 1987; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Compared to the literature on race and participation, we know relatively little about political interest, and what we do know is controversial.

The most widely discussed topic in the survey literature on political interest is the pervasiveness of civic apathy. In fact, the fear of widespread political disengagement is a popular topic among scholars of contemporary democracies. Both scholarly and popular accounts speak of a depressing trend: citizens worldwide have been withdrawing from their governments. This withdrawal takes many forms. Some pundits lament the consistently low rates of voter turnout (see Powell 1986 for a cross-national review of the turnout literature). Students of European politics speak of citizens holding increasingly negative opinions of political parties (see Poguntke 1996, 319; Poguntke and Scarrow 1996, 258; Reiter 1989, 325-348; Webb 1996, 365-382). Distrust of government appears to be rule rather than the exception (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001 for research on distrust in America, and see Norris 1999 for research studying...
distrust abroad). Putnam (2000) claims that citizens are becoming estranged from their neighbors and leaders. Pollsters have been documenting the political naïveté of the American public since the 1930s (Converse 1975, 79; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). One of the most famous characterizations of America’s civic disengagement comes from Converse (1964), who argues that Americans have trouble arranging their political thoughts along ideological lines.

Some interpret these patterns as symptomatic of an unhealthy democracy (see, for example, Mills 1948; Marcuse 1964; Schattschneider 1960, 68); while others see apathy as a sign of stable government (Berelson et al. 1954, chapter 14; Almond and Verba 1963; Dahl 1961; Eulau 1956; Hadley 1978, 68; Huntington 1975, 114). Perhaps the more contentious of these interpretations has little to do with politics and more to do with public opinion surveys. Decades of research in cognitive psychology and survey methodology confirms that subtle changes in questionnaire design can have significant consequences on survey responses (see Schuman and Presser 1981; Martin 1983; Payne 1951; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwartz 1996; Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988, for research examples and reviews). Such findings expose the Achilles heel of public opinion research, for they suggest that year-to-year fluctuations in survey responses may reflect artifacts of the interview rather than real changes in attitudes. In addition to calling past results into question, the presence of survey artifacts can stifle future research on opinion change.

So what are we to believe? On the one hand, there is a growing body of survey evidence noting the ubiquity of political disengagement. For the many who believe in

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10Tom DeLuca (1995) gives an excellent summary of the arguments for and against political apathy. I do little justice to the author here, and I urge the reader to consult the introduction of his book, *Two Faces of Political Apathy*. 
the value of civic involvement, this is a depressing story indeed. On the other hand, there are strong arguments challenging the ability to infer latent public opinions from questionnaires. This is an equally depressing story because it suggests that the perceived decline in civic involvement might be, as George Bishop (2004) terms it, an “illusion.” This puts the state of survey research in a precarious position: in addition to puzzling over what appears to be an increasingly apathetic populace, scholars have yet to rule out the dreaded “artifact hypothesis” that looms over every public opinion study. This unresolved debate over the longitudinal study of political interest presents a tremendous opportunity for future research.

Having examined the research on race, participation, and interest in isolation, I now consider how these literatures are connected.

1.1.4 Race and Political Participation

Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which granted the franchise to African Americans, there has been considerable research on race and political participation. This body of research examines Black-White differences in the factors related to political activism: the issues that citizens support and the candidates for whom citizens vote (Sears and Kinder 1971, Sears et al. 1987, Knuckey and Orey 2000). This literature also explores the consequences of minority activism (both in political office and in the electorate) for American democracy. One can find summaries of the major works on race and political participation in Bobo and Gilliam (1990, 378) and Leighley (1995, 184-185). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady provide a comprehensive bibliography of the empirical research on Black political participation in the second footnote of the eighth chapter of their 1995 book (Verba et al. 1995, 229).
Conversations about political participation ultimately turn to political representation. For example, congressional studies often argue that representation is instrumental to the effective expression of minority interests: leaders who share their constituents’ social, cultural, or biological characteristics will work to serve these interests in government, and a critical mass of minorities in Congress provides a means of furthering non-traditional policies (see Whitby (1997), Lublin (1997), and Cannon (2000), but see Swain 1993 for a different argument). Shifting the focus from the elites to the masses, Verba et al. (1995) point out the importance (and abuses) of participatory representation (see Chapter 16 for a discussion study of representation through political activism). Returning to metaphor of political involvement being a “voice,” elite-level representation is acting in ways that “speak on behalf” of their constituents; mass-level representation is having one’s actions “heard” by leaders. In both cases, structural factors can contribute to the underrepresentation of the disadvantaged. Because the socio-demographic standing of those who are vocal is often different from that of those who are not, the composition of government seldom mirrors that of the nation, and leaders are less responsive to those who do not participate.

1.1.5 Political Interest and Political Participation

The frequency with which scholars interchange the terms “interest” and “participation” is testament to the natural connection between these concepts. In fact, the participation literature rests on the assumption that a positive relationship exists between interest and activism: the more interest in politics a citizen expresses, the greater his or her level of political activism. There is an enormous body of research
confirming this link. Research studying the correlates of political interest consistently shows that political interest increases with political participation; a finding that holds true for numerous types of political acts (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 447; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999). The mobilizing power of political interest has been confirmed so many times that, as Milbrath and Goel (1977) note, few authors bother to report it (46).

The robustness of political interest as a motivator of participation may actually hinder continued research, for scholars tend not to study political interest independently of its link to political activism. Put differently, scholars usually focus on political interest as an explanation of participation, and research that seeks to explain political interest is less common (for exceptions, see Bennett 1986). This dissertation contributes to political interest scholarship by examining its connection to race, but I do more than simply “fill in the gaps” of the literature. In the next section, I present a rationale for why we should expect expressions of political interest to reflect racial differences.

1.2 Race and Political Interest

Political interest is only one of several indicators of a citizen’s political engagement. As previously mentioned, political engagement represents the rapport between citizens and their government. In this light, it is to be expected that Blacks and Whites would differ in their expressions of political interest—or in any form of political engagement, for that matter—because they are differentially connected to politics. These differences arise from the divergent social and political experiences of Blacks and Whites. Hacker (1992) speaks of “two nations” when he argues that Blacks and
Whites live in different Americas. Hacker’s description is an excellent point of departure for understanding race relations, and it makes sense that an analysis of racial differences would consider the separate environments in which Blacks and Whites reside.

The 2003 Nielsen demographic ratings revealed that Blacks and Whites watch different television programs. Using California birth records from 1961 through 2000, Fryer and Levitt (2004) find surprising variation in both the spellings and types of names given to Black and White children (see also Levitt and Dubner 2005). Furthermore, results from the 2003 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) make clear that Blacks and Whites smoke different cigarettes. There is abundant anecdotal evidence of Blacks and Whites going to different churches, liking different foods, dressing and talking differently, and enjoying different hobbies. Even the casual observer can find evidence of Blacks’ and Whites’ differing tastes.

In addition to living in separate nations, Blacks and Whites live in unequal worlds. These inequalities become most clear when one compares Blacks’ and Whites’ demographic backgrounds. Virtually every account of American race relations confirms that Blacks tend to have lower socio-economic status than Whites. Blacks typically have less education, hold worse jobs, earn less income, and own less property than Whites do (see Wilson, 1978, 1981; Bianchi 1980, 132; Darling-Hammond 1999, 76;

11 Of the top 10 TV shows most watched by Blacks and Whites, only CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) makes the list for both groups. Interestingly, CSI rates at the top of Whites’ list but comes in tenth among Blacks. Monday Night Football and The Simpsons make the top 20 lists as crossover favorites.

12 Nearly three-quarters of the Black smokers surveyed prefer Newport (a menthol cigarette) compared to one-quarter of White smokers. Related studies (see, for example, Ahijevych et al., 2002) suggest that Blacks’ fondness for menthol cigarettes explains why they get lung cancer at higher rates than Whites do. The reason might not be the chemical makeup of menthol as much as its cooling properties; smokers can inhale harder on cooled smoke, which increases their chances of lung cancer in the long term.
Hatch and Mommsen 1984, 464 for research showing racial disparities in income, education, occupational status and homeownership). These racial gaps narrow with time, but the fact remains that there has never been a period in America’s history when Blacks fared better economically than Whites.

These disparities produce what many describe as a “racial divide” in political worldviews. Racial divide scholars deal not with political interest per se but with the different political priorities of Blacks and Whites (see Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Dawson 1994; Hochschild 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Winter 2000; Schuman et al., 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991; Smith and Seltzer 1992; 2000; Tate 1993). However, one can apply this research to the study of political interest. While Whites tend to spread their support between the Democratic and Republican parties, Blacks show consistent support for the Democratic Party (Abramson et al. 1994; 2003; Miller and Shanks 1996). Likewise, students of political representation find that both Blacks and Whites tend to prefer candidates of their own race (Barker, et al. 1999; Canon 1999; Walton and Smith 2000). In addition to differences in partisanship and candidate choice, Blacks and Whites have polarized views about race-relevant issues such as affirmative action and social welfare (Gurin et al., 1989; Tate 1993; Dawson 1994; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Smith and Seltzer 2002) and non-racial policies like education, government spending for social services and assistance to the poor (Schuman et al. 1997; Kinder and Winter 2001). Finally, Bobo and Hutchings (2000) discover racial differences in citizens’ perceptions of how egalitarian the government should be, how much of a role it should play in the lives of citizens, and how fair and inclusive the economic, legal, and political system should be (see also Kinder and Winter 2001).
This evidence drives home a simple point: there are enduring social, economic, and political disparities between the races. While the above findings may appear disjointed, it is possible to integrate them into the broader theoretical framework of the “political reality thesis.” According to this thesis, Blacks and Whites have different socio-political realities that influence their evaluations of government and society (see Abramson 1972; Howell and Fagan 1988; Iyengar 1980). Given Blacks’ history of economic and political disadvantage, it makes sense that Blacks and Whites would differ in their psychological connection to politics. Particularly, it stands to reason that Blacks would be less psychologically involved than Whites are.

A careful reading of the participation literature supports this logic. For example, there is a wealth of research spanning numerous disciplines chronicling racial differences in levels of psychological involvement. Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1996, 144-154) and Iyengar (1986, 11) find that Whites perform consistently better than do Blacks on tests of general political knowledge. Political socialization scholars often mention White-over-Black differences in political efficacy. (See Abramson 1972 for a review of the literature showing differences among adolescents, and read Kleiman 1976, and Wu 2003 for studies finding similar results using adult samples.) Likewise, Tate (2003, 146) Hetherington (1998, 801-2), and Owen and Dennis in Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, eds. (2001) confirm a racial gap in levels of political trust. Additionally, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954, 197) find that Whites expressed a stronger sense of civic duty than Blacks did in the 1950s.

Taken together, this body of evidence suggests that Blacks are less politically engaged than Whites are. Blacks tend to know less than Whites do about politics, be less trusting of government, feel less obligated to vote, and have little confidence that
their actions will make a difference. Based on this set of findings, one would expect to find racial differences in levels of political interest. After all, interest in politics is a standard measure of psychological engagement, and it should behave similarly to other engagement variables. From this line of reasoning comes the expectation that levels of political interest will be higher among Whites than among Blacks.

The expected racial gap in political interest begs the question: why would such a gap exist? There is no explanation of the racial gap in political interest per se. However, one could develop such an explanation by drawing inferences from the minority political participation literature. Because interest in politics and political participation represent different facets of a broader construct best described as “political involvement,” it is possible that similar processes explain why Blacks and Whites differ in the extent to which they involve themselves in politics, be that involvement physical or psychological. From this standpoint, understanding racial differences in political participation will help us to explain the race gap in political interest.

Scholars give many reasons for the race gap in political activism. Rather than catalog these reasons here—curious readers can consult Bobo and Gilliam (1990, 378), Gutterbock and London (1983), and Leighley and Vedlitz (1999) for typologies—I find it more useful to group theses explanations by topic. For example, there are three families of explanations in the race gap literature. The oldest of these attributes the participation gap to racial differences in social class. Class-based explanations have a strong tradition in the social sciences (see, for example, the stratification theories of sociology and the Rational Choice perspectives in economics). A second family of explanations is attitudinal, focusing on the psychological rather than demographic factors that affect participation. The key sibling in the attitudinally-based family is
group consciousness (explanations of this type include the ethnic community models of minority political behavior and the common fate theories of minority public opinion). To account for the race gap, a third family of explanations stresses the importance of racial context. These contextually based explanations emphasize the racialized features within the electoral environment that can affect one’s willingness or ability to participate. These features include, but are not limited to, the formal and informal barriers to minority voting (for a review of these studies, see Walton 1985), changes in the racial make-up of the electorate (the focus of group conflict studies), and shifts in the proportion of minorities in elected office (a common topic amongst minority representation and political empowerment scholars).

The minority participation literature gives us fertile soil from which to account for racial differences in political interest. Unfortunately, it is difficult to borrow from this literature because race gap research is in a state of disorder. Even the most casual review of the demographic accounts reveals that conclusions can vary depending on which study one reads. Some authors maintain that Blacks out-participate Whites of similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Jaynes and Williams 1989, 234; Olsen 1970; Verba and Nie 1972); while others counter that Blacks are less active than equally-situated Whites (Abramson and Claggett 1984; 1986; 1989; 1991; 1992); and even others claim that, controlling for class differences, Blacks and Whites partake equally in politics (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 523). These conflicting findings make it difficult to determine the effect of social class on Black activism.

Results from the attitudinally-based studies are even less consistent. The link between racial group consciousness and political participation—a link often traced to
Gamson (1968, 1971), popularized by Olsen (1970), and refined in the works of scholars like Verba and Nie (1972), Miller, Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuck (1981), Shingles (1981) and later by Bobo and Gilliam (1990), Dawson (1994), Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), and Paolino (1995)—is an enduring topic in the study of minority politics. Despite the centrality of this link, scholars have yet to reach a consensus over whether group consciousness significantly shapes Black activism. Earlier studies confirmed that group consciousness boosts Black political participation (Gamson 1968; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuck 1981; Olsen 1970; Shingles 1981; Verba and Nie 1972), but recent studies suggest that the participatory effects of group consciousness among Blacks and other minorities are declining (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 355-356). Some scholars qualify the declining role of group consciousness on Black activism by arguing that it works indirectly, through psychological involvement, to affect participation (see, for example, the literature on the distrustful-efficacious hypothesis of Black participation). Nevertheless, scholars have agreed to disagree over the mobilizing properties of group consciousness.

Contextual explanations of the race gap suffer from similar inconsistencies, and the discrepancies are most visible in the racial group conflict literature. In his classic treatise on Southern politics, V.O. Key (1949, 5) presumes a relationship between Whites’ political involvement and the concentration of Blacks in a given locale: Whites vote defensively to offset rises in the Black voting age population, and Whites from racially diverse communities show less support for policies that benefit Blacks. Case studies of George C. Wallace’s 1972 presidential campaign lend support to Key’s hypothesis (Black and Black 1973; Crespi 1971; Lipset and Rabb 1969; Schoenberger and Segal 1971; Wasserman and Segal 1973; Wright 1977; Wrinkle and Polinard 1973), but
findings are less uniform in the analyses of David Duke’s 1991 run for governorship in Louisiana (compare Giles and Buckner 1993 to Voss 1996).

Additional studies produce equally conflicting results. While examining the 1989 New York City mayoral race between the Black Democratic incumbent, David Dinkins, and White Republican challenger, Rudolph Giuliani, Carsey (1995) finds that White New Yorkers living in racially diverse boroughs were more likely to favor Dinkins. Carsey’s findings suggest that contact with Blacks positively affects Whites’ political involvement, an idea for which Kinder and Mendelberg (1995) provide supporting evidence by showing that Whites’ racial attitudes are most negative in racially segregated areas. Then again, Huckfeldt and his associates (Huckfeldt 1980; Huckfeldt and Kofeld 1989) find that such population changes negatively affect Whites’ racial attitudes, and studies of elections in Georgia (Bositis 1998), Chicago (Kleppner 1985), and South Carolina (Loewen 1990) show that increased contact with Blacks triggers racially polarized voting among Whites. In light of these incompatible conclusions, Schuman (2000, 308) notes that the group conflict literature lacks an adequate interpretation of the correlation between racial context and political involvement.

Clearly, these findings complicate any explanation of racial differences in political involvement. Looking at the race gap literature, one cannot help but wonder which findings are correct. The frustrating response to this question is, “it depends.” Conventional explanations of the race gap tell different stories under different conditions. The puzzle, it seems, is determining which conditions affect the stories these explanations tell. The need to answer for the mixed (and oftentimes contradictory) roles of the demographic, attitudinal, and contextual explanations of the race gap in political involvement brings us to the writings of sociologist Nicholas Danigelis (see Danigelis
1977; 1978; 1982). Later in the dissertation, I will show that Danigelis clarifies not only which explanations are relevant to the race gap, but also why these explanations have the effects they have.

Most of the research on political involvement treats political engagement as a “cause” of political behavior. Given the known kinship between interest in politics and political action, it is useful to explore how race affects political participation. Unfortunately, race is strangely absent from the study of the relationship between political engagement and political participation. Scholars consider group differences in the constituent variables comprising the engagement-participation relationship but they neglect such differences in the relationship itself. This practice assumes (albeit implicitly) that the relationship between political engagement and political participation works similarly for all citizens. This “one-size-fits-all” assumption seems unrealistic and demands testing. Accordingly, part of my dissertation attempts to understand the role that race plays in the engagement-participation relationship. Understanding the role of race in this relationship requires a second look at both the minority and mainstream political behavior literatures, and it provides the occasion for examining the notion that group membership can strengthen or weaken the relationship between political engagement and political participation.

Throughout the dissertation, I will argue that race plays a key role in the study of political interest. Race affects the citizens’ level of interest in politics; it determines why people are politically interested; and it shapes the way in which citizens translate their political interests into political action. The final section of this chapter outlines the way that I will test these arguments.
1.3 Chapter Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters, including this introduction, which states the aim of the dissertation, establishes the importance of the topic, explains the key concepts, notes the insights and limitations of the extant literature, and lays the groundwork for thinking about racial differences in political interest.

Chapter 2 discusses the conceptualization and longitudinal measurement of interest in politics. As noted earlier, the rise in political apathy is a common topic in both academic and popular circles. Pollsters often infer interest trends from public opinion surveys; experimentalists, however, caution against such inferences by showing that fluctuations in self-reported levels of political interest may reflect discrepancies in question order rather than changes in “true attitudes.” If this is true, then can we confidently interpret changes in political interest (or any political attitude) over time? The analyses in Chapter 2 suggest that we can. I find that question order does not bias the interpretation of political interest trends as much as the experimental literature suggests. In addition to offering guidelines for analyzing interest trends, these findings lend some legitimacy to the use of surveys to measure political interest over time.

Chapters 3 explores the impact of race on political interest as a dependent variable (Path A). There is little published literature on the disparity in Blacks’ and Whites’ self-reports of political interest; and research examining this racial gap across time is even harder to find. Accordingly, this chapter pools survey data from 1952 through 2004 to examine racial differences in interest levels. It draws from past research that shows racial gaps in levels of political engagement more generally to explain why I expect to find a racial gap in political interest. The findings are consistent with my
expectations. While interest trends are similar across race, the evidence points to a small but consistent pattern of Whites expressing greater interest in politics than do Blacks. To explain this pattern, I focus on Blacks’ political involvement and extend Nicholas Danigelis’ (1977) concept of “political climate” (a concept best described as a form of racial policy mood) to the study of political interest. Using a composite index of aggregate support for federal policies to improve U.S. race relations, I conduct what is arguably the most faithful test of Danigelis’ longitudinal theory of political involvement to date. The results support the argument that over-time differences in political interest are attributable to societal-level shifts in racial tolerance.

Chapter 4 studies the role of race on political interest as an independent variable—specifically, as a predictor of political participation (Path D). The political involvement literature considers group differences in the constituent variables in the engagement-participation relationship but neglects such differences in the relationship itself. This practice implies that the relationship between political engagement and political participation affects all citizens similarly. Unfortunately, this "one-size-fits-all" assumption is contradicted by recent findings. First, recent research suggests that Blacks and Whites are similar in their levels of political activism when controlling for class differences. Second, Blacks and Whites have different levels of psychological engagement, regardless of class. This is an odd pattern because it contradicts the assumption, first, that politically engaged citizens are more active than disengaged citizens; and second, that people of higher socioeconomic status are more active than people of lower social standing. Blacks have fewer resources than Whites and are less interested in politics than Whites. Based on the “conventional wisdom” Blacks are doubly-disadvantaged
and should not participate as much as they do. Why do Blacks and Whites participate in equal proportions when they are differentially engaged and have different access to resources? These counterintuitive findings make more sense when viewed through the lens of race politics; however, there are no explanations for these patterns in the literature. Accordingly, Chapter 4 of the dissertation explores the role of race in the engagement-participation relationship. Understanding the role of race in this relationship requires a second look at both the minority politics and political behavior literatures, and it provides the occasion for examining the notion that group membership can strengthen or weaken the relationship between political engagement and political participation.

Having examined racial cleavages in political interest, I devote Chapter 5 to reflecting upon the dissertation. I divide this contemplative exercise into two parts. The first part of this chapter, which "looks back," reconciles the main ideas in the dissertation with the intellectual tendencies and implications of my past research. The second part of the chapter "looks ahead," noting the contributions of the project, discussing its limits and suggesting improvements, and pointing to avenues for future research.
CHAPTER 2

CAPTURING THE ELUSIVE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL INTEREST

Chapter Summary: The main purpose of Chapter 2 is to discuss the longitudinal measurement of political interest. It starts with the hypothesis presented by Bishop, et al. that trend changes in interest reflect discrepancies in the ordering of survey questions rather than rises in political apathy (Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber 1982; 1984a; 1984b). I compare this to the null hypothesis assumed by Bennett (1986) that interest levels declined because politics was less able to hold Americans’ attention. I analyze these competing arguments by replicating the effects of question order on self-reported interest levels in the 1952 through 2004 American National Election Studies. The analyses reveal that changes in question order have only a negligible effect on the interpretation of political interest trends. I conclude this chapter by relating these findings back to the Bennett vs. Bishop et al. debate, and I treat the minimal impact of question order as evidence for the continued usefulness of studying political interest over time.

Before examining racial differences in political interest, one must first be clear on what political interest means. Put differently, we must start with the top left rectangle of Figure 1.1 before examining Path A or Path D. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the study of political interest suffers from methodological issues related to its measurement over time. Accordingly, this chapter serves two purposes. First, it addresses the issue of analyzing political interest longitudinally; second, it adds to
the scholarly understanding of political interest by capturing what has traditionally been an elusive concept.

2.1 What is Political Interest?

The term “interest” is difficult to define, partly because it is so common in political science discourse. Students of foreign policy speak of “national interests,” a term that 1) dates to the writings of Thucydides and later to Machiavelli, 2) was studied extensively by Beard and Morgenthau (for a review of their works, see Clinton 1994, chapter 1), and 3) refers to the security and well-being of citizens and the goals that guide the actions of nation states within an international system (Clinton 1994, 69-70). Scholars of urban politics use a similar reasoning when they refer to “public” or “city interests” (see Peterson 1981). Economists often characterize human behavior as rational and “self-interested,” assuming that people make the choices that give them the greatest advantage with the least sacrifice. For an ethology of the caricature of *Homo economicus*, or “Economic [hu]man,” read Persky (1995). Likewise, public opinion researchers distinguish a citizen’s individual (pocketbook) from communal (sociotropic) interests when explaining the effect of financial conditions on voting decisions. Political institution scholars refer to “interest groups” when describing the individuals or organizations that attempt to persuade public officials to support a particular cause (See Smith 1995 and Potters and Sloof 1996). It is therefore clear that the meaning of “interest” varies according to the literature.

Throughout this dissertation, I discuss political interest as it is used in the participation literature; however, even in this context, there is no clear conceptual understanding of political interest. For example, political interest is depicted either as
an attitude or an action, as evidenced by the far-too-common practice of using the terms “political interest” and “political participation” interchangeably. A related practice is to treat participation as an outward expression of political interest, the rationale being that citizens do not take part in politics unless politics piques their interest. This is a problematic strategy because it does not account for apathetic activists or interested abstainers. Political interest is a psychological orientation, not a behavioral tendency, so, while they are linked closely, interest is not synonymous with action.

In addition to likening political interest to political behavior, scholars often conflate interest in politics with other political attitudes. There is a tendency to associate political interest with psychological orientations like partisanship, political efficacy, civic duty, political tolerance, media attention, and political knowledge (see Campbell et al. 1960; Brody 1978, 301; Converse 1964; Verba and Nie 1987; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Despite their obvious overlap, these concepts measure different aspects of political engagement, and, therefore, scholars must take care to treat these concepts as analytically distinct.

13 Although recent research is much more careful in its conceptualization of political interest, it is still common for scholars to speak of apathy rather than indifference when they refer to inactivity. For a sizable (but far from complete) list of scholars who are guilty of this practice, see Bennett (1986, 32).

14 For example, Campbell, et al. (1960, 102-107) measure one’s psychological involvement in politics by using a mixture of interest in the current campaign, concern over the election outcome, a sense of [internal] political efficacy, and expressions of civic duty. Almond and Verba (1963, 53-54) combine interest with trust in government, efficacy, and political tolerance to capture citizens’ subjective civic competence. Verba and Nie (1972) combine interest, partisanship, and ideology to evaluate what they consider a person’s "civic orientation." Likewise, Verba, Nie, and Kim’s (1978, 347-48) create an index of general engagement in politics consisting of a person’s level of interest in politics, political knowledge, frequency of political discussion, and awareness of community and national issues.
Bennett (1986, 37) goes to great lengths to cut many of these extraneous confounds from the study of political interest, and his depiction best captures the concept:

To describe levels of political interest across a large population, imagine a continuum of awareness, interest, and attention. At the one end is the individual who is so engrossed with his own psychological needs, or the affairs of his family, his work, or even his entertainment and recreational activities, that he has little or no psychic energy left for interest in public affairs. When such an individual declares that [s/he] “hardly thinks about politics at all,” or does not “follow public affairs much at all,” [s/he] can be classified as politically disinterested to apathetic. At the opposite end of the continuum is the person who says that [s/he] follows public affairs “very closely,” or thinks about politics “most of the time.” This person can be considered psychologically involved in governmental affairs.

Bennett’s definition is an excellent guide for making sense of political interest. According to Bennett, citizens can be arrayed along a continuum anchored by those who are highly politically interested on one end and those who are disinterested on the other. Bennett’s “interest continuum” clarifies how we should think about political interest, and I adopt his conceptualization here.

2.2 Measuring Political Interest

Scholars often infer latent political attitudes from expressed public opinions, and scholars judge the extent to which citizens follow politics by examining self-perceived levels of political interest from public opinion surveys. One such survey is the University of Michigan’s Survey Research Center/Center of Political Studies’ American National Election Studies (henceforth called the ANES), a national and biennial poll that has asked questions about political interest since 1952. The ANES has a record of surveys from 1948 until 2004, and I combine information from these surveys to track political interest.

15These data are available through the Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor].
opinion changes. There are theoretical and practical justifications for pooling these surveys. The obvious benefit is that this approach combines questions from over half a century of surveys, making longitudinal analyses possible. In addition, because they are taking representative samples of the population, the ANES, like many national polls, will have racial compositions that reflect America’s racial make-up: more than 75% of the respondents are White and fewer than 20% are Black.\textsuperscript{16} The lack of sufficiently large Black samples in the ANES makes it difficult to analyze opinions across race within a given survey; however, pooling results from multiple surveys increases the number of Blacks respondents and thus bypasses this sample size problem. More importantly, much of the quantitative research on political interest draws at least partially from the ANES, and using this survey allows me to compare my results to those of other scholars.

Pooled survey analyses have many advantages, but pollsters did not design the ANES with longitudinal research in mind.\textsuperscript{17} Although the ANES measures similar variables over time, the surveys themselves draw from different samples. The ANES intends to collect the opinions of American adults, but those adults can change from one survey to the next (either through the loss of previous respondents or the introduction of new ones). In light of this, I follow Firebaugh’s advice and interpret these survey results as reflecting aggregate- rather than individual- level opinions (Firebaugh 1997, 1-3). To measure America’s interest, I examine two of the most widely

\textsuperscript{16}In the 1948 through 2004 American National Election Studies, Whites are usually more than 80% of the total sample while Blacks comprise between 9% and 16%.

\textsuperscript{17}There are several ANES longitudinal surveys, which are called panel studies (e.g. the 1956, 1958, 1960 American panel, the 1972, 1974, and 1976 series, the 1980 major panel, the 1990-1992 full panel, the 2000 panel, and the 2000, 2002, 2004 full panel) but these are the exception rather than the rule.
used ANES items for gauging respondents’ self-perceived interest in national politics.

Below is a widely-used question for measuring interest in political campaigns:

Some people don’t pay much attention to campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in political campaigns (so far) this year?

Likewise, here is a common ANES item gauging a person’s general interest in politics:

Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?

These questions are different indicators of an underlying construct, best described as “subjective political interest” (Miller, Miller, and Schneider 1980, 308; van Deth 2000, 3). Scholars are reasonably confident that these items to tap into the underlying notion of political interest in cross-sectional research (see, e.g., Jennings and Neimi 1974, 1981, 28; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and Gaudet 1968, 41). There is less consensus when it comes to interpreting responses to these questions over time. As noted earlier, scholars often study interest trends by comparing the proportions of citizens who express strong interest in politics with those for citizens who express weak interest. Perhaps a more straightforward approach is to plot summary measures of political interest across time. Accordingly, the dotted line in Figure 2.1 reports trends in political interest in the 1952 through 2004 ANES.18 The solid line traces median levels of interest in political campaigns, while the fragmented line records trend changes in

18Because I have ordinal- rather than interval- level data, the analyses employ medians as the appropriate measure of central tendency.
general political interest. For ease of comparison, I re-scaled both interest items to range from zero (weak political interest) to one (strong interest).

Figure 2.1 shows that the campaign interest questions were not asked until 1952, while the general interest questions first appeared in the ANES in 1960. A closer look at Figure 2.1 reveals that the median levels of general political interest are usually higher than those of campaign interest. One also notices that rises in political interest tend to coincide with presidential elections (this is particularly true for campaign interest). The largest fluctuation in political interest levels happens between 1976
and 1978, and, as I will explain in the next section, this decline in political interest inspired an overlooked dispute between Stephen E. Bennett and George Bishop over the longitudinal study of political interest.¹⁹

2.3 Revisiting the Bennett vs. Bishop et al. Debate

As Chapter 1 notes, survey researchers often worry that Americans are becoming indifferent to politics. This fear was brought on, in part, by a drastic change in ANES reports of political interest. This fear prompted Bennett (1986) to write what is arguably the leading longitudinal study on interest in politics.²⁰ His aptly titled book, *Apathy in America*, uses ANES data to monitor what he considers to be the decline of political interest from 1960 to 1984. Despite his inestimable contribution to the interest literature—particularly, his streamlined conceptualization and his extensive use of political interest as a dependent rather than an independent variable—several shortcomings bedevil Bennett’s analysis.

One problem with Bennett’s study is that his research is primarily descriptive. Unfortunately, this is a characteristic of the interest literature. Most of the research in American politics analyzes interest trends simply by comparing the number of citizens who express strong interest in politics to the number of citizens expressing weak interest.²¹ It is difficult to infer change by using this approach, because simply

¹⁹I say that the debate between Bennett and Bishop et al. is overlooked because, to my knowledge, the only mention of the dispute comes from Stanley Feldman (1987), who wrote a review of Bennett’s book.


²¹Brody (1978), Nie and Andersen (1978), Miller (1980) and Bishop, et al. (Bishop Tuchfarber, and Oldendick 1978; Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber 1982; 1984a; 1984b) compare the percentages
observing differences from one survey to the next often leads to assuming that short-term fluctuations are long-term trends (Firebaugh 1997; Romer et al. 2004).

A second and more serious problem is that Bennett minimizes the thorny issue of survey artifact. George Bishop and his colleagues published a series of articles demonstrating that responses to questions about political interest are sensitive to changes in the order in which these questions are asked (Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber 1980; 1982; 1984; see also 1981). Bennett acknowledges that survey artifacts can interfere with our ability to interpret interest trends (Bennett 1986, 50), but he never controls for such artifacts in his analyses. Because he analyzes trends descriptively, and because he does not deal directly with the effects of question order, Bennett falls short of his primary goal: to examine over-time changes in political interest. Until he corrects this deficiency, his statements about America’s apathy will remain tentative.

This is not to say that Bishop et al. have won the debate over interest trends. The authors expand our knowledge of political interest, but their research is far from definitive. Some of the more serious critiques pertain to Bishop et al.’s choice of interested and non-interested respondents across time. Another tool for assessing interest trends is the PDI (Proportion of Difference in Interest) scale. Conceptually, PDIs determine whether interested respondents outnumber disinterested ones or vice versa. For example, Miller’s (1980) PDI for general interest subtracts the percentage of respondents who report following politics “most of the time” from the percent who are interested “only now and then” and “hardly at all.” Miller measures the proportion of difference in campaign interest by subtracting percentages of “very interested” from “not much interested” citizens. Similarly, Bennett uses an additive index of campaign and general interest, from which he adds together the proportions of “very” and “slightly” interested respondents and subtracts them from the proportions of “slightly” and “Very” apathetic citizens (Bennett 1986; Bennett and Bennett 1989).

Bennett is quite familiar with the "artifact" hypothesis. Bennett and Bishop et al. published their major works on political interest within five years of one another. Robert Oldendick and Alfred Tuchfarber worked for the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati, while Stephen Bennett and George Bishop taught in Cincinnati’s Political Science department. Even more intriguing, Bennett co-authored an article with Bishop et al. noting the importance of context effects (Bishop, Oldendick, Tuchfarber, and Bennett 1978). The lack of artifact analyses in Bennett’s work is puzzling given his chronological, geographical, and intellectual association with Bishop and his associates.
of research design. For example, the authors study survey artifacts experimentally, which allows them to isolate the effects of question order on responses but not to apply their results to broader populations. (For a detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of experimental design, read Campbell and Stanley 1963.) Bishop et al. try to buttress the generalizability of their experiments by embedding them within local telephone surveys that simulate ANES interviews. These experiments appear to replicate the effects of ANES changes in the measurement of interest. At the end of the day, however, Bishop et al.’s research tells us more about the effects of question order on the political interest of Cincinnatians. There is no way of knowing if Bishop et al.’s findings will hold up at the national level.

To summarize, Bennett and Bishop et al. leave unresolved puzzles in the over-time study of political interest. Bennett concludes that interest trends are declining, but his evidence is suggestive and it does not account for changes in question order. Bishop et al. show that question order affects interest levels; however, they base their conclusions on local survey experiments that are inherently non-temporal and potentially weaker in external validity. This chapter addresses both puzzles. Using survey data from the 1948 through 2004 ANES Cumulative Data File, I combine

23Bishop, et al. make extensive use of the Greater Cincinnati Survey (GCS), a semi-annual telephone poll conducted by the University of Cincinnati’s Institute for Policy Research. The goal of the GCS is to provide researchers and policy makers with inexpensive and reliable data on adult Cincinnati residents, a very specific sample of citizens that may not represent the American electorate.

24There is a related debate between Sullivan et al. and Nie et al. on the impact of questionnaire changes on the Changing American Voter (Nie, Verba, and Petocik, ed. 1976). This debate turns on a very similar claim about how changes in questionnaire design led to apparently mistaken conclusions about trends in American public opinion.

25The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). THE 1948-2004 ANES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2005. These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Nos.: SBR-9707741, SBR-9317631, SES-9209410, SES-9009379, SES-8808361,
Bishop et al.’s insights with Bennett’s longitudinal framework. In addition to offering
guidelines for modeling interest trends, the analyses contribute to the literature by
showing how Bennett’s story about apathy changes once we take question order into
account.

2.4 Disentangling the Effects of Question Order

Analyzing the effects of question order is complicated because there are numerous
questionnaire arrangements to contend with, and these question groupings can have
many different effects on survey responses (Seymour and Sudman 1991). Political
interest scholars are particularly fortunate to have both theory and past research to
guide them. Not only do they know several ways in which question order affects
responses, but they also know how and why these orderings affect interest in politics.
For example, there are well-documented differences in the designs of the 1976 and
1978 ANES, and these differences are a point of reference for understanding question
order effects. To illustrate, Table 2.1 presents the changes in self-reported levels of
political interest from the 1976 to the 1978 ANES.

The distribution of survey responses in Table 2.1 shows a considerable decrease
in both general and campaign interest levels from 1976 to 1978. The percentage of
respondents claiming that they are strongly interested in politics in 1978 is lower
than in the 1976 survey. The percentage of respondents reporting that they are “very
interested in the current campaign” drops from roughly 37% in 1976 to nearly 22% in
1978 (approximately a 15% decrease), and the percentage of respondents who “follow

SES-8341310, SES-8207580, and SOC77-08885. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recom-
mendations expressed in this chapter are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views
of the funding organizations.
### Level of Interest in Political Campaigns 1976 1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1978</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much interested</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Sample size)</td>
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<td>(2,300)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difference test = 0.155*</td>
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</table>

### Level of General Interest in Public Affairs 1976 1978

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<tr>
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<th>1976</th>
<th>1978</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Follows politics most of the time</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows politics some of the time</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows politics only now and then</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows politics hardly at all</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sample size)</td>
<td>(2,399)</td>
<td>(2,280)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference test = 0.156*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Notes: Table entries are percentages. Difference tests are Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for equality of distributions. *Significant at 2.5%, two-tailed test.*

Table 2.1: Political Interest Levels in the 1976 and 1978 American National Election Studies
politics most of the time” exhibits a similar decrease (from about 38% to about 23%, also a 15% reduction). The percentage of respondents expressing little political interest tends to increase across surveys. The proportion of respondents expressing “not much interest” in political campaigns rises nearly 13% (from 21% in 1976 to 34% in 1978), and the percentages for respondents who follow politics “only now and then” and “hardly at all” climb almost six and seven percent, respectively.\textsuperscript{26} Miller et al. (1989, 308) note that this change in interest levels is greater than what one would typically observe during non-presidential election years, and Bishop et al. (1982, 178) find that the difference between 1976 and 1978 interest levels was greater than any changes previously reported in the ANES. In addition, equality of distributions tests reveals that the differences between the 1976 and 1978 political interest responses are not due to chance alone.\textsuperscript{27}

Bishop et al. (1982) interpret these changes in political interest as reflecting inconsistencies in the arrangement and administration of public opinion surveys. For example, the decline in campaign interest corresponds with a major change in the formatting of the ANES. Until 1976, the campaign interest question came immediately after questions about the election—particularly, the question that asks whether

\textsuperscript{26}It is easy to assume that such changes reflect a shift in responses from the margins to the middle of the political interest scales. Such an inference presupposes that the middle categories of the interest scales gain respondents from 1976 to 1978. Looking at Table 2.1, one sees that the percentages of respondents describing themselves as being “somewhat interested” in political campaigns and following politics “some of the time” increased, but only slightly, from 1976 to 1978 (about 2% for campaign interest and 3% for general interest).

\textsuperscript{27}To test for the equality of distributions, I conduct two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests on the 1976 and 1978 survey responses. K-S test are non-parametric difference tests that work similarly to t-tests but do not make any assumptions about the response distributions. The K-S tests lend evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between the 1976 and 1978 distributions of responses to the general and campaign political interest questions.
respondents “turned out” to vote in the last presidential race. In 1978, however, this was the first question in the survey. Noting the coincidental changes in survey design and survey responses, the authors attribute the decrease in campaign interest to the interplay between the political interest and turnout questions in the ANES. Their research shows that people usually express more interest in campaigns when they are asked about the election first. Given the tendency for surveys to over-report turnout rates (Bernstein et al. 2001; Silver et al. 1986), it is safe to assume that many respondents will answer “yes” to the voter turnout question, whether they actually voted or not. The desire to appear politically involved produces a potential priming/self-perception effect among survey respondents. If a respondent tells an interviewer that she voted, she might claim to be politically interested to appear consistent, reasoning that she must have been following the election if she voted in it (Bishop et al. 1982, 180; see also Bem 1978, 222).

A similar pattern occurs for general political interest. The location of the general interest question changed from the 1976 to the 1978 ANES, and these changes coincided with a dip in political interest levels. In this case, the general interest items followed questions that asked respondents to demonstrate their knowledge of politics.

With some minor changes, the ANES has asked the same voter turnout question for decades. The exact wording of the first half of this question starts as follows: “In talking to people about the election we [in the 1972 and later versions of the question, they insert the word ‘often’] find that a lot of people weren’t able to vote because they weren’t registered or they were sick or they just didn’t have time...” The 1956 through 1960 versions of this question then ask, “...How about you, did you vote this time?” From 1964 to 1970, the second half of this question takes the expanded form: “...How about you, did you vote this time, or did something keep you from voting?” The 1972-1976 questions revise this wording to say, “...How about you, did you vote in the elections this fall?” Every ANES question since 1978 has used the following phrasing: “...How about you, did you vote in the elections this November?”

Intriguingly, this question order effect does not work in the other direction. Bishop et al. (1984, 162) demonstrate that, while respondents use their voting reports to determine their interest levels, people are less likely to base their turnout responses on their levels of interest.
Scholars often note the connection between political interest and political knowledge (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996; Bennett 1986), and Bishop et al. (1982) find that respondents express less general interest in politics after being asked the names of their congressional representatives.30 One of the strongest findings in the public opinion literature is that Americans have little factual knowledge about their government (Converse 1975; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Delli-Carpini, and Keeter 1996, but see Gilens 2001). Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that respondents usually fare poorly on conventional knowledge questions in public opinion surveys. If a respondent is unable to answer knowledge questions correctly, he may say that he is not politically interested, assuming that he cannot be following politics too closely if he knows so little about it (Bishop et al. 1982, 188).

Although the general and campaign interest items respond to different question order effects, these effects stem from similar psychological processes. When asked to comment about politics, people tend not to scan their brains to “find” their opinions. Instead, they usually answer these questions “on the spot” based on the information that is most accessible to them at the time.31 The evidence borne out from Bishop et al.’s experiments suggests that participants base their subsequent answers to survey questions on previous information in the survey (Bishop et al. 1980; 353; Bishop et al. 1982, 180, 191). This question order effect persists even when there are “buffer”

30 Bishop et al. measure political knowledge using the state senator recall question in the ANES. Here is the exact wording of this question: “Do you happen to remember the names of two United States Senators from [RESPONDENT’S STATE]?” In this case, a knowledgeable respondent can correctly identify his or her senators.

31 Evidence from research in social cognition lends support to this idea of how citizens make use of (or process) information when forming their attitudes. For literature reviews on the topic of information processing and the formation of political attitudes, see McGraw and Lodge (1996), McGraw (2000), and Hastie (1986). For a general discussion of these topics, see Wyer and Srull in Hastie et al., eds. (1980).
or non-politics-related survey items separating the political interest questions from
texts about voting or political knowledge. These priming effects are minimized
by spacing out the “prime” and the “target” survey items (Tourangeau et al. 2000);
however, no matter how spaced apart the political knowledge and political involve-
ment items are, respondents think back to their answers to the turnout or knowledge
questions when they evaluate their interest in politics (Bishop et al. 1980).

Using the power of experimental methodology, Bishop et al. vary the order of
the questions on their surveys to discover its effect on political interest. They study
the effect of question order on self-reports of campaign interest by randomly assign-
ing subjects so that half of the respondents receive interest questions before election
questions and the other half receives election questions first. Likewise, they test for
the effect of question order on general interest by randomizing the order in which
subjects receive political knowledge and political interest questions. By varying ques-
tion order, the authors can determine whether people who receive the political interest
questions in one survey context respond differently from those who receive their ques-
tions in another context. Inspired by this idea, I examine question order effects in a
non-experimental setting: across respondents in the ANES. The ANES has a reputa-
tion for altering its questionnaire design from survey to survey. Therefore, rather
than manipulating them, I take advantage of the naturally-occurring question order
changes in the ANES, and I track changes in the location of the political interest
questions over time.
To accomplish this task, I obtained copies of every post-election questionnaire for every ANES ever conducted.\footnote{The ANES maintains a digital archive of all of its surveys. One can download scanned images or web-based copies (when applicable) of these documents from the ANES Data Center: http://www.umich.edu/~nes/studypages/download/datacenter.htm.} With a small team of research assistants, I read each questionnaire to see where the questions about campaign and general interest, political knowledge, and voter turnout appeared. Although this was a lengthy task, the procedures were straightforward because questions in these surveys are numbered (for example, the campaign interest item in the 1978 ANES is the first question, labeled \#A1). I divided the research assistants into two groups. Indexing surveys by year, one group recorded the location of the campaign interest questions while the other group recorded the location of the general interest items. They assigned a value of 1 for each survey where campaign interest questions come before voting questions, and they assigned 0s to all the other survey years. We used a similar coding logic for general interest, scoring 1s for those survey years when general interest came after knowledge items and 0s for the remaining surveys.\footnote{Rather than use the senator recall question, we create the general interest context variable by recording whether the general interest comes before or after the following question: "Do you happen to remember the names of the candidates for Congress—that is, for the House of Representatives in Washington—who ran in the November election from this district?" Of course, there are other questions measuring political knowledge (see for example, Delli-Carpini and Keeter’s 1993 1996 5-item knowledge battery). However, I select the above item because the ANES used it repeatedly since 1958, making it the longest-running knowledge question and thus ideal for longitudinal analyses.} In both cases, these scoring systems are designed to code for those contexts known to depress political interest: Respondents claim less campaign interest if they are not adapting to previous questions about the election, and they downplay their general interest levels after being asked questions about politics and presumably not knowing the answers to them. Once these research groups finished their first strategic reading of the surveys, they switched. The readers who had been assigned to the campaign interest question
now worked on the general interest questions, and vice versa. We compared coding results when the groups finished their second reading. Overall, there was sufficient agreement among the readers.\textsuperscript{34}

As noted, the campaign interest item in the 1976 ANES came immediately after questions about the election. Since 1978, however, this item has appeared at the beginning of survey. Pre-1978 fluctuations in campaign interest levels may reflect contextual influences within surveys (in this case, the question order effects); after 1978, however, self-perceptions of campaign interest are more susceptible to contexts beyond the survey because there are no survey questions that come before it and therefore no chance that earlier questions can affect campaign interest levels. For example, scholars show that attention to politics climbs during presidential election years (Bennett, 1986, 52-53; Bishop et al. 1982, 192), so it is important to take this electoral context into account. While the research notes the influence of presidential campaigns on campaign interest, there is less discussion of the effect of campaign context on general political interest. In addition to examining its impact on post-1978 campaign interest, it would be fascinating to see the effect (if any) of the campaign environment on general interest. To record electoral context, we flagged every survey that had been conducted during a presidential election.

Table 2.2 summarizes the distributions of the question order and electoral context variables. The check marks indicate survey years that meet the contextual criteria

\textsuperscript{34}We calculated the Kappa statistic ($\kappa$) because it is a conservative index of inter-coder agreement. This test measures the extent to which different raters match in their scoring results, but unlike other techniques, like the Proportion Agreement and Holsti methods, Kappa tends to underestimate rather than overestimate agreement levels (Argesti 1992; Dewey 1983; Maxwell 1977). Results from agreement tests fall within a 0 to 1 range, with 1 representing perfect agreement between coders. Our test produced a Kappa statistic of 0.88, which, by the standards mentioned in Viera and Garrett (2005, 362) suggests an acceptable level of agreement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Survey</th>
<th>Presidential Election Year</th>
<th>Campaign Interest before Voting</th>
<th>Knowledge before General Interest</th>
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<td>1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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*Note:* Checkmarks indicate survey years when there was a presidential election (column 1), when campaign interest questions come before voting items (column 2), and when political knowledge questions come before general interest items (column 3). Dots indicate survey years with no observations for political interest.

Table 2.2: Distributions of the Question Order and Election Year Contexts
discussed above. The dots represent cases where there was either no ANES collected that year or there were no interest questions in that survey. The table shows that the campaign interest question did not appear in the ANES until 1952. The general interest item came eight years later, in 1960. Table 2.2 also reveals the stark difference between the pre- and post- 1978 survey contexts for campaign interest. As noted, the order of the campaign interest remains constant after 1976. Another clear pattern in Table 2.2 is that political knowledge questions come before general interest questions more frequently in the later survey years. If Bennett’s claim is that interest has recently declined, then his observation may have something to do with the clustering of these interest-reducing contexts.

2.5 Analyzing Interest Trends

There are no methodological standards for analyzing political interest over time, and, as noted, descriptive longitudinal analyses are less than optimal. Perhaps a more appropriate technique comes from van Deth (see van Deth 1991, 206; Gabriel and van Deth 1995, 396). In a comparative study of political involvement trends in Europe, van Deth (2000) dichotomizes interest responses at their extreme categories to create two binary variables: one that distinguishes citizens who express strong political interest from all other respondents, and another separating those who are weakly interested in politics from everyone else.\(^{35}\) His rationale is that respondents who select the highest interest category are unambiguously involved in politics and

\(^{35}\) van Deth uses political discussion rather than political interest items because the former were more faithfully collected in Eurobarometer surveys and therefore are more suitable to longitudinal analyses. van Deth acknowledges the disadvantages of this strategy (see van Deth 2000, 33), but he convinces his readers that this sacrifice in measurement takes little away from the strength of his findings.
those who select the lowest category are clearly apathetic (see Firebaugh 1997 for an application of this approach). van Deth uses these dichotomous variables in logistic regression models to predict the likelihood of a person expressing interest or apathy as a function of time (in this case, survey year).

While regression approaches to inferring interest trends are an improvement over descriptive assessments, I hesitate to adopt any modeling strategy that collapses response categories. The information gained from preserving the natural ordering of the interest variables outweighs any benefits of using simpler dichotomies. Therefore, I model the full range of interest responses using ordered probit regression.\footnote{Because ordered probit is less common than logistic regression, I briefly explain the estimation technique here. Ordered probit models, also called cumulative probit models, assume an underlying continuous latent dependent variable that takes on values at discrete, constant intervals (thresholds). Ordered probit coefficients estimate the cumulative probability or having higher rather than lower scores on that latent variable. For a technical description of this estimation technique, read Agresti (2002).}

I specify separate ordered probit models to analyze trends in campaign and general political interest, and I divide the survey years to reflect the periods before and after the 1978 change in question order. These models include covariates for time, context, and socio-demographic status. I measure demographic standing by examining levels of income and education. I standardize income levels across time by dividing levels of income into six percentiles and recoding this variable so that 0 = bottom percentile and 1 = highest percentile, adjusted over time. Education measures the number of years of formal schooling a respondent has completed. I divide this variable into education brackets, where 0 = 8 grades or less, 0.2 = 9\textsuperscript{th} through 12\textsuperscript{th} grade, 0.4 = high school diploma, 0.6 = some college, 0.8 = college degree, and 1 = education beyond college. I measure age by subtracting the respondent’s date of birth from the year of the survey, and I rescale the results to fit a 0 to 1 interval. To measure strength of partisanship,
I “fold” the party identification variable over at its midpoint and recode it to range from 0 = weak partisans to 1 = strong partisans. I use interviewer assessments of respondents’ sex to measure gender (1 = female; 0 = male). To measure time, I create a variable with 27 time points to represent the number of surveys in the time series. I code this variable so that it ranges from 0 (the year of the survey is 1952) to 1 (survey year is 2004). I measure survey context using the binary variables described in the previous section, and I create a dummy variable for electoral context that distinguishes midterm from presidential election years (1 = non-presidential election year and 0 = otherwise). Table 2.3 reports the results of the trend analyses.\textsuperscript{37}

The first row in this table tests the relationship between time and political interest. The magnitude and sign of the “year of survey” coefficient tells us the strength and direction of the interest trends, respectively. One can interpret ordered probit results in terms of shifts within response categories, estimated by dividing the difference between the threshold parameters ($\tau_j - \tau_i$) by the regression coefficients ($\beta$). The first half of Table 2.3 examines political interest trends from 1952 to 1976. The thresholds for campaign interest during this period are $\tau_1$ (0.348) and $\tau_2$ (1.429). $\tau_1$ marks the boundary between being “not much interested” and “somewhat interested,” and $\tau_2$ separates respondents who are “somewhat interested” from those who are “very much interested.” The difference between $\tau_1$ and $\tau_2$ is 0.348 - 1.429 = -1.081. Since $\beta_{\text{SurveyYear}} = 0.001$, we infer that, holding other factors constant, a one-unit change

\textsuperscript{37}Because my focus is on the relationship between interest, time, question order, and electoral context, I will limit my discussion to these variables and speak briefly about the demographic controls here. Overall, the results are consistent with expectations. Income and education both have significant and positive effects on political interest. Age and partisanship strength also relates positively to interest. The negative and significant gender coefficients confirm the gender gap in political interest. Subsequent analyses demonstrate that these results are stable over time: Regardless of survey year, interest in politics is highest among men, the elderly, strong partisans, and those of higher SES.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campaign Interest</td>
<td>General Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trends</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year of Survey</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.108**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question Order Context</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaign Interest before Voting</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge before General Interest</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-0.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electoral Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Presidential Election Year</td>
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<td>-0.229+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td>(0.134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (1 = Beyond College)</td>
<td>0.877**</td>
<td>1.039**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (1 = Top Percentile)</td>
<td>0.566**</td>
<td>0.551**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (1 = Oldest Respondents)</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
<td>0.012**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship (1 = Strong Partisan)</td>
<td>0.534**</td>
<td>0.332**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = Women)</td>
<td>-0.167**</td>
<td>-0.310**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Threshold Parameters</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>$\tau_1$</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>1.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.221)</td>
<td>(0.270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\tau_2$</td>
<td>1.429</td>
<td>1.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.210)</td>
<td>(0.230)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\tau_3$</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Size</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14,119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wald $\chi^2$</strong></td>
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<td>8,580</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Table entries are maximum likelihood (ordered probit) regression coefficients with robust standard errors (adjusted for clustering on time) in parentheses.

+ significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%, one tailed test.

Table 2.3: Trend Analyses of Political Interest (1952 - 2004)
in time (from 1952 to 1976) moves the response distribution less than one-thousandth
(0.001/-1.081 = -0.001) the width of these thresholds toward weak campaign interest.
Likewise, $\tau_1$ for general interest (1.109) is the threshold between following politics
“hardly at all” and being interested “only now and then.” $\tau_2$ (1.539) divides the
“only now and then” responses from those who report following politics “some of the
time.” $\tau_3$ (2.642) sets the boundary between expressing interest “some of the
time” and “most of the time.” For general interest, $\beta_{\text{SurveyYear}} = 0.108$, which suggests that
a unit change in time (from 1960 to 1972) significantly shifts the response distribution
roughly one-fourth (0.251) the distance from $\tau_1$ to $\tau_2$ and one-tenth (0.098) the width
from $\tau_2$ to $\tau_3$.

The second half of Table 2.3 reports political interest trends from 1978 to 2004.
The effect of time during this period is negative for campaign interest ($\beta_{\text{SurveyYear}}$
= -0.007), shifting responses one-two hundredth the distance from $\tau_2$ to $\tau_1$ ($\tau_2 - \tau_1$
= (1.646 - 0.314) = 1.332; shift = -0.007/(1.332) = -0.005). In contrast, time has a
positive impact on general interest ($\beta_{\text{SurveyYear}} = 0.011$), suggesting a slight upward
trend that pushes the distribution roughly one hundredth the width from $\tau_1$ to $\tau_2$
and from $\tau_2$ to $\tau_3$ (shifts = 0.013 and 0.010, respectively). Neither the campaign nor
the general interest trends reach statistical significance. In fact, the only model in
which the year-of-survey variable is statistically significant is the “General Interest”
model from 1952 to 1976.

The effect of question order context is negative for both campaign and general
interest, which is what we would expect based on Bishop et al.’s predictions. In-
triguingly, neither of these question order effects is statistically significant. For the
pre-1978 models, asking political interest questions before voting questions pushes
predicted campaign interest responses nearly one-fiftieth the distance from “some-
what interested” to “not at all interested” ($\beta_{CampaignContext} = -0.019; \tau_2 - \tau_1 = -1.081; \text{shift} = -0.018$). A similar change in question order moves projected general interest about two-fifths the width between the boundary separating the categories for following politics “only now and then” and “some of the time” and the threshold bordering following politics “only now and then” and “hardly at all” ($\beta_{GeneralContext} = -0.16; \tau_2 - \tau_1 = 0.430; \text{shift} = -0.372$). Changing question order shifts responses three-twentieths the distance between following politics “some of the time” and “most of the time” ($\beta_{GeneralContext} = -0.16; \tau_3 - \tau_2 = 1.103; \text{shift} = -0.145$) toward following politics “only now and then” and “hardly at all.” As noted, question order has no effect on campaign interest after 1978 because the location of this item in the ANES no longer changes. Finally, placing interest questions after vote questions lessens general interest by pulling it one five-hundredths the distance from $\tau_3$ to $\tau_2$ (0.002) and from $\tau_2$ to $\tau_1$ (0.002).

Unlike the question order variables, electoral context plays a role in respondents’ interest in politics. Before 1978, general interest was significantly lower during midterm elections than during presidential races. Holding other factors constant, this difference amounted to a shift of nearly half the distance from following politics the “most of the time”/“some of the time” threshold to the “some of the time”/“only now and then” border (shift from $\tau_1$ to $\tau_2 = 0.532$). Likewise, the absence of a presidential race decreases general interest about a fifth of the distance from $\tau_2$ to $\tau_3$ (shift = 0.208). Electoral context had no effect on pre-1978 campaign interest. This pattern changes after 1980, for electoral context significantly decreases campaign
interest—moving it nine-fiftieths the width of its thresholds towards apathy (shift = 0.179)—but has a negative and significant effect on general interest in politics.

### 2.6 Discussion

The analyses in this chapter present some methodological and normative implications for analyzing political interest over time. A consistent non-finding in Table 2.3 is that question order has no meaningful impact on political interest levels. The lack of question order effects is particularly fascinating because it suggests two things: first, there is little need to control for question order effects when analyzing interest trends, especially if one analyzes campaign interest trends after 1976; second, past research that did not control for question ordering is not wholly invalid. Intriguingly, the only contextual factor with a noteworthy effect on political interest is election year, and, as expected, interest tends to climb during presidential races. In fact, knowing whether the ANES conducted its surveys during a presidential campaign helps us predict how much interest respondents will pay to political campaigns (post-1978) and to politics in general (pre-1978). This suggests that, no matter how specific the interest question, respondents have elections in mind (either those in the immediate past or those in the not-too-distant future) when they evaluate how closely they follow politics.

It is a common practice in public opinion research to combine multiple measures of political interest into composite indices.\(^{38}\) The above analyses lend support to this practice, but this support comes with some caveats. Almond and Verba (1963)

\(^{38}\) Almond and Verba (1963, 88-89) used measures of following politics generally and paying attention to political campaigns as indicators of "civic cognition," and Bennett (1986) borrowed this operationalization when he combined campaign and general interest items in measuring political apathy. Other scholars have used various combinations of similar measures. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) combine items gauging a respondent’s interest in both local and national politics when they examine the effect of political interest on political activism, and Lupia and Philpot (2005) create a five-item interest index to assess the role of the internet on citizens’ interest in politics.
argued that the campaign interest question overestimates political interest during election years, and they advised scholars to merge this item with the general interest question to minimize this bias. As noted above, both the general and campaign interest questions are susceptible to "election year effects." Scholars can join these questions because they seem to tap into the same underlying concept of interest in national, electoral politics, but adding campaign to general interest does not lessen the need to control for election year.

Earlier, I referred to the Bennett vs. Bishop et al. debate as being an obscure one, mainly because the issue of measuring political interest over time fueled surprisingly few scholarly exchanges. To my knowledge, the only mention of this debate comes from Stanley Feldman (1987), who wrote a review of Bennett’s book. The findings of Chapter 2 breathe new life into the study of political interest and its trends. More importantly, the analyses presented here inform the dispute between Stephen Bennett and George Bishop.

On the one hand, the results fit awkwardly with Bishop et al.’s discovery of survey-induced opinion change. Bishop et al. credit the decline of political interest in 1978 to factors within the ANES, but the evidence from this chapter suggests that interest fell because of factors within the political environment. It may prove useful to consider the events surrounding the 1976 presidential election between the Republican incumbent, Gerald Ford, and the Democratic challenger, Jimmy Carter, when interpreting this decline. Americans were highly attentive to politics in 1976, which makes sense given the closeness of the Ford-Carter presidential race (Ford lost the election, gaining 48% of the popular vote to Carter’s 50%). Political interest reached a historic low in 1978, a drop many pundits believed reflected citizens’ desensitization to (or at worse,
frustration with) politics in the wake of the turbulent 1960s and early 1970s, a period that experienced the assassinations of John and Robert F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the conflicts over civil rights, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal (see Heath 1975).

At the same time, the analyses challenge Bennett’s pessimism with political involvement. Bennett (1986) makes the case that Americans are less interested now than they were in previous decades. To be fair, Bennett is not the only scholar making such claims, but he is particularly insistent about it. Rather than playing into these fears, this chapter suggests a more complicated story. Interest trends upward until 1976, drops in 1978, and eventually stabilizes. While Bennett would prefer that citizens express more political interest, the results from this chapter show that Americans are best characterized by the consistency of their political interest, not by their lack of it.

The issues discussed in this chapter extend well beyond the Bennett vs. Bishop et al. debate. The implications of this research speak to the broader issue of measurement error in public opinion surveys. Measurement error can occur randomly, and therefore be unobservable, or it can be systematic, manifesting itself through the order or wording of questions, response biases, etc. As Zaller (1992, 32-33) notes, researchers have been "remarkably uncurious" about the sources and consequences of measurement error. This is why this analysis, and others like it, are valuable: they offer guidelines for analyzing, rather, than avoiding, measurement error. Bishop et al. show that question order effects are possible, but the real question is whether such effects compromise our ability to analyze survey items longitudinally. Granted,

39In a personal communication with Bennett (April 23, 2006), he informed me that he earned the description of being the “apathy” man for his 1986 book, and he has yet to live this moniker down.
much more research is necessary before we can say with confidence exactly how much changes in question order bias responses to ANES questions over time. Nevertheless, the current project offers encouragement to scholars who want to continue studying interest in politics, for they can feel some reassurance knowing that responses to these survey items represent more than "white noise."

In short, political interest trends are resilient to question order effects, which makes interest in politics fair game for further analyses. Having shown that trend analyses of political interest are not as problematic as Bishop et al. would have us believe; scholars can take some comfort doing longitudinal research on political interest.
CHAPTER 3

EXPLAINING BLACKS’ POLITICAL INTEREST

Chapter Summary: Chapter 3 analyzes data from the 1952 through 2004 American National Election Studies to explain changes in Blacks’ political interest levels over time. It explains these racial changes using Danigelis’ (1977) political climate theory, which argues that fluctuations in Blacks’ political involvement reflect shifts in Americans’ tolerance of the political inclusion of Blacks. Using Stimson’s (2004) composite index of racial policy attitudes, this chapter finds that Blacks’ political interest rises when the political climate is “warm” (racially tolerant) and drops when the climate cools. It also shows that shifts in political climate affect conventional explanations of Black political involvement (for example, explanations that attribute racial differences to disparities in social standing, social consciousness, and political context).

Understanding Blacks’ political interest speaks to the greater issue of minority representation, for the citizens who are least politically attentive are often those whom politics overlooks. The research on this topic is limited. With the exceptions of Matthews and Prothro (1966, 267) and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 349, 434) scholars have not examined political interest levels among Blacks; those who do must rely on cross-sectional surveys, which can only tell us about interest differences at a certain point in time. Only Bennett (1986, 73) looks at Black interest over time, and, as explained in Chapter 2, his research is largely descriptive (he merely compares politically interested respondents to disinterested ones). What the literature lacks is a systematic and longitudinal study of Blacks’ political interest.
This chapter therefore constitutes a first step towards a longitudinal study of political interest among Blacks. I begin by confirming small but consistent racial differences in interest levels, where Whites tend to express more interest in politics than do Blacks. To explain this pattern, I revisit the work of sociologist Nicholas L. Danigelis (1977; 1978; 1982) whose critique of research on Black activism develops one of the richest longitudinal theories of race and political involvement. Danigelis’ framework not only reconciles the competing, and often contradictory, conclusions of the race literature (see Chapter 1), but it also offers a fuller explanation of Black interest change over time. Innovations from the policy mood literature (particularly, Stimson 1991; 1998 and Kellstedt 2000; 2005) allow for a more a comprehensive test of Danigelis’ theory, and the evidence tends to support (and in some cases, qualify) his expectations.

3.1 Over-Time Changes in Blacks’ Interest

In Chapter 1, I reviewed the research showing racial differences in political engagement to discuss why we should expect a racial differences in political interest. Preliminary analyses bear out this expectation. Figure 3.1 reports racial differences in political interest levels using pooled data from the 1952 to 2004 ANES. Following Bennett (1986), I measure interest in politics as an additive index of general and campaign interest.\textsuperscript{40} I scale this index to fit a 0 to 1 interval. The solid line in Figure

\textsuperscript{40}Bennett adds “Don’t Know” responses (DKs) into the apathetic category. I do not feel as comfortable as Bennett does with assuming DKs are apathetic. Therefore, I make use of a more conservative measure and recode DKs into missing values. Once I recoded the variables, I ran several tests to see how well they fit together. The two interest items have an overall correlation of 0.5093*** (n = 31,622), and they have an overall reliability rating of 0.6632. The data points before 1960 are for campaign interest only because the general interest item had yet to appear in the ANES.
Notes: Data points are average levels of political interest by race and over time.

Figure 3.1: Racial Differences in Levels of Political Interest (1952 – 2004)

3.1 traces the trends in political interest among African American respondents in the ANES, while the fragmented line displays interest patterns for the White respondents.

One of the most cogent findings in Figure 3.1 is that the trends in political interest among Blacks resemble those for Whites. Regardless of race, the same visual pattern persists: interest in politics ebbs in the early 1950s and bottoms out in the late 1950s to early 1960s. Then, interest rises to a peak in the mid 1960s, then plateaus until the mid-1970s. Political interest temporarily drops in the late 1970s and then fluctuates from the 1980s to the end of the period. Correlation analyses corroborate
the association between Blacks’ and Whites’ interest trends. Statistically, correlations show, on a scale of -1 to +1, the extent to which changes in the values of one variable match up with value changes in another (Lewis-Beck 1995, 23, 41). In this case, the analyses measure whether fluctuations in Blacks’ levels of political interest correspond to those of Whites. A weak statistical correlation suggests that these trends are moving independently of one another, while a strong correlation suggests that the trends move in tandem or in opposition. There is a significantly strong and positive association between Blacks’ and Whites’ interest levels (r = 0.74; p < 0.01), suggesting that these trends have parallel trajectories.

A closer look at Figure 3.1 reveals some small but predictable racial differences in levels of political interest. Whites generally express greater interest in politics than Blacks do, a pattern that holds for most of the survey years. Means difference tests for the entire period confirm these racial differences in levels of political interest. Means difference tests assess whether the averages of two groups differ from each other (Levin and Fox 2003). These tests, therefore, evaluate the hypothesis of significant difference between the mean levels of Blacks’ and Whites’ political interest. The analyses reveal that the mean level of Blacks’ interest in politics is significantly lower than the mean level of Whites’ interest (F = 33.58; p < 0.001). In addition to this test,

41 For further interpretation, I calculated coefficients of determination ($r^2$) from the correlation between Blacks’ and White’s interest. Coefficients of determination (measured as the square of a correlation coefficient) are useful because they allow researchers to determine the proportion of variation in one variable is predictable from another variable. The $r^2$ for the correlation between interest trends is 0.55, which means that 55% of the fluctuation in Whites’ interest can be explained by changes in Blacks’ interest trends. The other 45% of the total variation between these variables remains unexplained.

42 Mean difference tests assume a null hypothesis of no difference between Blacks’ and Whites’ interest levels (H0: $\mu_{Blacks} = \mu_{Whites}$). Although t-tests and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (both of which are standard means difference tests) yield mathematically equivalent results, I use ANOVA to examine racial differences in political interest.
I examine the differences of means for each year. While interest in politics does not
differ significantly by race in 1964, 1976, 1990, and 2000, the results show that racial
differences are the rule, not the exception. These results, while impressionistic, lend
some credence to Bennett’s observation that Whites are “usually, but not always”
more politically interested than are Blacks (Bennett 1986, 72).

Conventional explanations of race and political involvement yield conflicting re-
sults. As noted in Chapter 1, the demographic, attitudinal, and contextual expla-
nations lead to mixed conclusions regarding changes in Blacks’ political involvement.
The following section proposes an alternative approach to explaining the race gap in
political interest.

3.2 A Political Climate Theory of Black Interest

Danigelis links changes in levels of Black activism to over-time shifts in what he
calls the “political climate.” Danigelis articulates his political climate theory most
clearly in, “A Theory of Black Political Participation in the United States” (1977,
Figure 1), but he also refers to this idea in his later works (Danigelis 1978; 1982).
Distilling his argument, Danigelis expects a positive correlation between the political
climate and Black activism: Black participation is lowest when the political climate
is “intolerant” (for example, when structural factors demobilize Blacks). Blacks are
moderately active in politics when the climate is “neutral” or “ambiguous”—when
sentiments toward Blacks are so divided that neither racial hostility nor racial accep-
tance dominates the political environment. Participation is highest in “supportive”
climates: when there is widespread encouragement for (or, at least a lack of wide-
spread opposition to) minority involvement.
Danigelis’ theory of political climate reconciles the uneven findings of the minority participation literature by discussing them from an historical perspective. Treating society as the unit of analysis, he argues that America’s tolerance towards Black political involvement fluctuates with time, the biggest climate shifts happening between the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954 and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. For example, Danigelis argues that the most intolerant climates were in the post-Reconstruction, pre-Civil Rights South (a period extending roughly from 1877 through the second World War), where institutional and social racism suppressed Black participation. No matter how racially conscious or affluent Blacks are, they cannot take part in politics if society prevents it. Under such conditions, contextually-based explanations do predict non-participation among Blacks, while the attitudinal and demographic explanations are less relevant. During the Civil Rights Movement (characterized by a tolerant political climate), Blacks used their attitudinal resources to underwrite the costs of activism, for there were strong psychological incentives for Blacks to take part in politics. These conditions contributed to the political activity of Blacks, and group consciousness emerged as the chief motivator of Black activism. In the racially ambiguous climates of the post-Reconstruction North and post-Civil Rights South, racial barriers to the franchise still exist, but the author maintains that their effects would be minimal. In such a climate, class will determine the race gap, context and consciousness will matter little, and Black and Whites will have comparable participation rates.

Extending the concept of political climate to psychological involvement, I expect America’s political climate to influence the effects of class, consciousness, and context.

\textsuperscript{43}Debates over the exact dates aside, scholars often count the Civil Rights Movement as the ten years between the Brown decision in 1954 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
on the race gap in political interest. Politically intolerant climates depress Blacks’ interest levels, and contextually-based accounts best explain Blacks’ interest. Blacks pay more attention to politics in tolerant political climates, and attitudinal explanations best account for this pattern. Racially ambiguous political climates eliminate Black-White differences in political interest levels and lend themselves to demographic explanations because disparities in political interest will be a function of class rather than racial inequality. Table 3.1 summarizes these expectations.

Danigelis introduces a concept that can reconcile the mixed (and often confusing) conclusions of the race gap literature. Unfortunately, he has yet to develop a proper measure of political climate. Danigelis’ 1977 essay made many suggestions but presented no empirical analyses. In 1978, he conducted the first test of his theory, but he limited his definition of political climate to perceived racial discrimination among Blacks. Although a key element of the political climate, perceived racism is not a sufficient proxy for something as abstract as the racial “spirit of the times.” Danigelis
refers again to political climate in his 1982 article, but only in passing; the focus of this article was on the interactive effects of race and class on political involvement. Despite several attempts, Danigelis’ theory remains to be fully tested. After all, how does one quantify Zeitgeist? In the next section, I argue that the policy mood literature can help us create a theoretically consistent indicator of political climate.

3.3 Political Climate as Racial Policy Mood

The idea that societies have political atmospheres is an old one. Political socialization scholars often speak of the “social climate” when describing the intangible factors that guide the thoughts and actions of youth (for a review of this literature, see Giordano 2003). Lippmann (1922) uncovers a philosophical tradition dating back at least to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see, in particular, his discussion of the General Will) positing the existence of diffuse and overarching sentiments that are both the product and the basis of public opinion. Economists evoke a similar idea when they refer to the phantom, macro-level market processes that influence consumer preferences; this is what Adam Smith (1776) proposed when he spoke of “the invisible hand.” Those who study social movements (see McAdam 1982 and Tarrow 1994, for example) often speak of “waves” or “cycles” of protest in their descriptions of the rise and fall of conflict within a social system. More relevant to the study of race, Hanes Walton, Jr. refers to the “political context variable” when he discusses the powerful but often-invisible effect of the racial environment on Black political behavior (see Walton 1995; Walton, ed. 1997).

James A. Stimson has devoted a significant portion of his career to quantifying this abstract, societal atmosphere, in what has become known as “[public] policy
mood.”44 By mood, Stimson refers to the cumulative manifestation of Americans’ shared opinions about government, opinions that move together across time (see Stimson 1991; 2004b, 9). To use an analogy: mood is to public opinion what currents are to fish. Just as schools of fish swim with the current, clusters of opinions change according to the public mood. Tides exist independently of fish, but one can observe the tendencies of fish to infer the direction of tides. Likewise, an electorate’s mood exists beyond its citizens, but one can deduce this mood by examining aggregate shifts in voters’ political attitudes.

There are problems with inferring policy mood from public opinions: surveys tend not to ask the same policy questions over time, and when they do, surveys do not ask them at consistent intervals. To resolve these issues, Stimson developed a technique that allows researchers to compile multiple indicators of presumably related policy preferences collected irregularly across different surveys (see Stimson 1991 and Kellstedt, McAvoy, and Stimson 1996 for technical discussions). Specifically, Stimson (1999) studies the responses of multiple surveys over many years to demonstrate that America oscillates between periods of liberalism and conservatism. There are times when the polls reveal a liberal trend, when opinions call for a stronger presence from the federal government as “provider” and “protector” of jobs, education, health care, housing, etc. (Durr 1993, 159). At other times, policy preferences signal a conservative trend, when the polls suggest an aversion to government involvement. For Stimson, the mood is more meaningful than collective opinions, but he finds traces of policy mood in the synchronized tendencies of citizens’ policy preferences. This

inclination for society to prefer “big” government at one time and “small” government at others has tremendous implications for policymaking. Just as anglers use tides to know when and where to cast their lines, leaders confer with public mood when making political decisions (see Kingdon 1984).

One can draw parallels between Stimson’s concept of policy mood and Danigelis’ notion of political climate. Stimson examines the perceived role of the federal government on matters pertaining to education, abortion, foreign policy, and others. Danigelis seeks to understand how the public views the federal government’s responsibility for improving race relations. In this sense, political climate is a racially-specific dimension of policy mood. As a type of mood, political climate is an aggregate-level manifestation of racial tolerance. Broadly defined, tolerance is a person’s willingness to accept as “equals” people whose appearance, worldviews, and lifestyles differ from (or disagree with) their own (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982, 2). Political tolerance, therefore, is the readiness to recognize those who are different as “equal citizens” and thereby to grant others the basic rights and liberties of citizenship (Gibson and Bingham 1982; Stouffer 1955). In addition to extending civic freedoms to nonconformists, tolerance implies a commitment to support policies that protect equal rights (see Smith’s 1981 research on attitudes toward school desegregation). Therefore, one can observe a nation’s willingness to include Blacks in political decision-making by its support for racially redistributive policies.

Based on this idea, it is possible to combine respondents’ opinions about specific racial policies into a longitudinal index of generalized racial sentiment (for examples of

45 For Stimson, changes in America’s mood reflect changes in political ideology; however, ideology need not explain America’s shifts in racial tolerance. Whether these shifts reflect racial prejudice or conservative sentiments, one cannot deny that public sentiment fluctuates in how much of a role the government should play in resolving the issue of racial inequality.
such indices appear in Kellstedt 2000; 2003; Stimson 2004, chapter 2). The analyses in Chapter 3 use Stimson’s (2004) index of racial policy preferences (shown in Figure 3.2) as a measure of political climate. There is a non-technical discussion of this index in Stimson (2004, 45-47, 71-72), and Stimson describes the methodology from which he constructed this index in the Appendix of the 1999 edition of his book, *Public Opinion in America, Mood, Cycles, and Swings*. Readers should start with these documents to learn more about policy mood. What follows is my adaptation of Stimson’s (2004) index of racial policy preferences. To use Stimson’s phrasing, this index measures aggregate shifts in preferences about what the government should or should not do to improve America’s race relations (J. A. Stimson, personal communication, July 16, 2005). As such, Stimson’s estimate of racial policy mood compiles information from an extensive search of 223 questions from seven polling organizations, each question pertaining to different types of racial policies.46

To replicate Stimson’s index, I examined the response distributions for these questions, looking specifically for the proportion of respondents who express “supportive” attitudes towards these racial policies. Information from these questions were grouped by the date of the survey, the “score” for that particular items, and the sample size of the poll from whence the item came. Taking the ANES, for example, there have been 58 survey items dealing with subjects related to racial policy over the period of 1948 to 2004. I catalogued information from these questions and analyzed them using Wclac, a software program that implements Stimson’s algorithm for building what can best be described as “dynamic factor scores.” They are dynamic in the sense that they are collected longitudinally, but the description of the estimation technique as

46The exact wording for these questions appears in the Appendix.
Note: Data points are aggregate support for federal policies designed to improve U.S. race relations (expressed as proportions).

Figure 3.2: Trends in America’s Political Climate (1956 - 2000)
factor analysis is misleading. In the longitudinal case, survey items measuring policy preferences are not collected at consistent intervals, making them difficult to compare over time. In some years, certain policy questions are not collected at all by polling organizations, meaning that there will be many instances where there are no observations to compare across survey years. Stimson’s algorithm gets around these issues by estimating what resembles longitudinal principal components factor analyses with missing data.\(^{47}\) The correlations presented below are based on Stimson’s estimates. Table 3.2 reports the dynamic correlations between the political climate index and the items comprising it.

The results from Table 3.2 show, with only few exceptions that the racial policy attitudes hold relatively well together. If the composite index intends to measure racial policy mood in the abstract sense, then one would expect responses to polling questions about busing, housing segregation, affirmative action, etc. to correlate strongly and positively with it. There are several items (for example, the ANES questions on school segregation and helping Blacks, and the Roper Center’s items on ghettos, race and poverty) that correlate weakly with the index. Kellstedt (2003) uses a similar measure to Stimson’s, and he argues that weak correlations are often the function of small sample sizes: these are fewer of these survey items available, so the results they produce are more erratic.

Danigelis makes two important claims. The first is that the political climate directly influences Blacks’ political involvement by acting as a surrogate for racial tolerance and therefore determining whether Blacks can enter politics. Second, Danigelis

\(^{47}\)See Stimson (1991; 1998) for details about this dimensional extraction algorithm (Wcalc). One can download Stimson algorithm from his website: \url{http://www.unc.edu/jstimson}.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Organization</th>
<th>Subject of Race-Related Question(s)</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Correlation with Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Aid to Minorities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Busing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.521</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Equal Access to Public Accommodations</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Fair Treatment in Jobs (Long)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Fair Treatment in Jobs (Short)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Help Minorities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>Openness to Residential Diversity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANES</td>
<td>School Segregation</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS-NYT</td>
<td>Affirmative Action</td>
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<td>0.358</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gallup</td>
<td>Integration Too Fast</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>Affirmative Action (Education/Employment)</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>Affirmative Action (Women/Minorities)</td>
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<td>0.391</td>
</tr>
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<td>NORC/GSS</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>0.805</td>
</tr>
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<td>NORC/GSS</td>
<td>Help Blacks</td>
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<td>NORC/GSS</td>
<td>Improving Conditions for Blacks</td>
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<td>Open Housing</td>
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<td>NORC/GSS</td>
<td>Assistance to Blacks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roper</td>
<td>Ghettos, Race, and Poverty</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendex</td>
<td>Aid to Minorities</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
The American National Election Studies
CBS News/New York Times Poll Series
The Gallup poll of public opinion
The NORC/General Social Surveys
The Harris Poll
The Roper Public Opinion Research Center
Trendex News Polls

Table 3.2: Correlations of Indicators of Political Climate with Overall Index
argues that political climate exerts an indirect influence on political involvement by determining the effect of political climate on the demographic, attitudinal, and contextual explanations of Black political involvement. I will analyze the direct and indirect impact of political climate on Blacks’ interest in politics in the next sections.

### 3.4 The Direct Effect of Political Climate on Blacks’ Political Interest

Could an indicator of racial policy mood reflect America’s political climate? One way to assess the trustworthiness of a mood index is to see whether it behaves according to theory. In this case, a measure of Danigelis’ political climate would have to rise and fall in accordance with America’s racial tolerance. The index must also show a relationship to fluctuations in Blacks’ political involvement. Figure 3.3 compares the race gap in political interest to trends in the political climate. As before, the solid and fragmented lines represent the interest trends for Blacks and Whites, respectively. The dashed line replicates Stimson’s estimate of racial policy attitudes, where higher values indicate greater proportions of citizens expressing support for racial policies.

The trends in Figure 3.3 are intriguingly similar. Perhaps the most fascinating comparison is that the association between political interest and political climate is stronger for Blacks than for Whites. The correlation between Blacks’ interest trends and political climate is both positive and moderate ($r = 0.40; p = 0.101$), while there is no statistical relationship between Whites’ interest trends and political climate ($r = 0.18; p = 0.732$).\(^{48}\) The magnitudes of these correlations are consistent with Danigelis’ claim that political climate has more bearing on Black political involvement.

\(^{48}\)Roughly 16% of the variation in Blacks’ interest trends is predictable by political climate ($r^2 = (0.4)^2 = 0.16$). Shifts in political climate account for only three percent of the changes in Whites interest trends ($r^2 = (0.18)^2 = 0.032$).

*Note:* Data points are the proportion of Blacks’ and Whites’ political interest levels compared to the proportion of America’s political climate.

Figure 3.3: Comparing the Race Gap in Political Interest to Trends in America’s Political Climate
than it does for White involvement. Also, the signs of the correlations support his expectation that political involvement would increase with the warming of America's political climate. In addition, the political climate appears to rise with time, while the race gap seems to narrow. This pattern backs Danigelis' arguments that the race gap widens and narrows according to the amount of racial tolerance.

An examination of the fluctuations in the political interest and tolerance trends lends further support to Danigelis' thesis. As expected, political climate is least tolerant and the race gap in political interest is widest immediately before the Civil Rights Movement. The political interest and political climate trends spike in 1964, and, for the first time, the mean level of Blacks' political interest was higher than the mean for Whites. The difference between these means is historically meaningful even though it is not statistically significant ($F = 1.30; p = 0.26$), suggesting that the interest gap closed in 1964. This rise in racial tolerance, and the disproportionate increase in Blacks' attentiveness, might reflect the hyper-visibility of race at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The year 1964 witnessed some major milestones. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment abolished the poll tax used in Southern states to discourage Black voters; civil rights organizations like CORE and SNCC took part in large voter mobilization efforts in what became known as "Freedom Summer"; and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, the most extensive piece of anti-discrimination legislation since Reconstruction.

Immediately after 1964, there was a considerable drop in both tolerance and political interest, and the interest gap reverted to its original state; these reversals coincided with the race riots that marred the period immediately following the signing of the

\cite{McClerking1999} In an automated content analysis of political science journals, McClerking (1999) shows that both scholarly and popular attention shifted to race relations during the Civil Rights Movement.
Voting Rights Act. The 1965 riots in Watts and San Francisco, California claimed more than 30 lives and injured nearly a thousand (Horne 1997; Hippler 1974). In the Midwest, racial unrest contributed to about 43 deaths in Detroit, Michigan (Locke 1969). In the Northeast, fierce riots in the Newark, New Jersey led to 23 deaths, more than 725 injuries and close to 1500 arrests (Hayden 1967), and there are numerous accounts of the rioting in Harlem and Rochester, New York (see Boesel and Rossi, eds. 1971). The assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was followed by a flood of brutality that engulfed more than 120 cities. Hutchings and Valentino (2004, 383) were correct in their assessment that the nation “convulsed” with violence.

Both interest and tolerance recovered from this period of “Blacklash” only to drop again—with the lowest point in both figures occurring during the late 1970s–early 1980s. In Chapter 2, I linked the rise in political interest to the events surrounding the Ford-Carter presidential race. Unfortunately, the drama of Jimmy Carter’s narrow victory could not offset the inattentiveness to politics that characterized the Carter administration. The 1960s and early 1970s were a divisive and emotionally charged period (Beck and Jennings 1979, 737; Huntington 1981; Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979). Carter took office at a time when citizens were disillusioned with politics, and as Bennett (1986, 89) notes, the decrease in political attention in the early 1980s indicated that the Americans wanted little to do with government (Bennett 1986, 89). In addition to “tuning out,” Americans were turning away from politics. From the late 1970s through the early 1980s, the American public had become politically disaffected. Carter delivered a speech in 1979 addressing the harmful effects of the popular mood. One of the more memorable quotes from Carter’s “malaise speech” was that America was in the midst of a “crisis of confidence.” The riots had settled,
but America was clearly in a racially cool political climate. Moreover, the events surrounding the Watergate scandal left a sour taste in the mouths of the American public.

There is a reversal of trends in 1984. The mean level of Blacks’ interest in politics was significantly higher than that of Whites ($F = 8.51; p = 0.01$), and this trend accompanied an increase in racial tolerance. This shift in political interest and political climate overlaps with Jesse Jackson’s first campaign for the presidency in 1984. Many would argue that Jackson had little chance of winning; however, his decision to run received tremendous media exposure, which, in turn, heightened racial group consciousness and bolstered grassroots political motivation. As a result, Blacks followed politics more closely that year than they had previously. For detailed treatments of the impact of Jackson’s campaign on Blacks’ involvement, see Gurin et al. (1989), and Tate (1993).

After mild fluctuations during the Reagan and first Bush administrations, there is another spike in political interest and political tolerance in the early 1990s. In 1992, William Jefferson Clinton defeated George H.W. Bush to become America’s 42nd president, getting 43 percent of the popular vote to Bush’s 37 percent. Though it was not a particularly close race, Clinton was the first Democratic challenger to defeat a Republican incumbent since Jimmy Carter. Intriguingly, Blacks showed more interest than Whites in 1998 ($\mu_{Blacks} = 0.54; \mu_{Whites} = 0.57; F = 33.58; p < 0.01$), and, surprisingly, this racial shift in interest levels happened at a time when the political climate was slightly cooler than it had been in the previous year. This small drop in aggregate racial tolerance occurs in the same year that James Byrd, Jr., an African American man, was brutally murdered in Jasper, Texas, an event that
prompted President Clinton to appoint his Advisory Commission on Race and made race relations a dominant political issue.

As for the rise in Blacks’ political interest, it is plausible that Blacks were fascinated with the media coverage of Clinton’s affair with a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. Despite the conservative tilt of his administration, Clinton enjoyed widespread support from his Black constituents. Walton and Smith (2000, 142) show that more than 80% of the Black voters favored Clinton in the 1992 and 1996 presidential contests, and [sources] demonstrate that Blacks consistently rated Clinton’s performance in office more positively than Whites did. Clinton faced possible impeachment for denying his affair with Lewinsky, and, as [source] notes, many Blacks saw Clinton’s departure from Washington as a potential loss for minority group interests.

3.5 The Indirect Effects of Political Climate on Blacks’ Political Interest

To explore the claim that political climate shapes the relationships that social class, group identification, and racial context have on political interest, I run a series of means differences tests, where I vary the political climate to observe the effect of race on political interest across different values of education (a reliable proxy for social class) group identification (my measure of group consciousness) and racial context (in this case, geographic region). The dependent variable is political interest, measured with the two-item index described in Chapter 2 and displayed in Figures 3.1 and 3.3. The theoretically-central independent variable is race, and the analyses test for significant differences in the mean levels of political interest expressed by these racial groups. The analyses that follow examine whether the mean levels of political interest
for Blacks and Whites will vary accordingly to climate for those with low or high social standing, for those who identify weakly or strongly with their racial group, and for those who live in passive or competitive racial contexts.\footnote{In its original conceptualization, Danigelis speaks of the political climate having three relevant temperatures: cool (racial hostility), moderate (racial ambivalence or neutrality), and warm (racial tolerance). Danigelis characterizes the period following the civil rights movement as politically moderate. However, the evidence in Figure 3.2 show that the years following 1965 fluctuated between hostility and tolerance. It is less theoretically useful to speak of racially moderate periods and my analyses focus on warm and cool political climates.}

### 3.5.1 Social Class

Scholars credit differences in political involvement to disparities in socio-demographic standing (Almond and Verba 1963, 381; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 291; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, 420). Of the many indicators of social status, scholars like Bennett (1986, 68) and Campbell and (1962, 20) note that education is by far the strongest and most reliable predictor of political interest. Campbell (1962) explains the importance of education to political interest. In addition to broadening access to political information, he argues that education (often measured in terms of formal schooling) increases citizens’ ability to appreciate political events, and, when necessary, to act with confidence in politics (Campbell 1962, 58). Almond and Verba (1963, 381) echo this sentiment when they argue that educated citizens are “better equipped” to take part in politics than those who lack this civic resource (see also Verba et al. 1995). In previous analyses (see Chapter 2, Table 2.3) I have found that education is the chief demographic predictor of political interest, and the consistency of this finding motivated my decision to focus my analyses on the crucial indicator of socio-economic status.
To compare its effect on political interest across political climates, Figure 3.4 uses levels of education to distinguish the respondents with at least a high school diploma (having “high education”) from those who did not finish high school (having “low education”). I divide this figure into two portions. The top portion classifies respondents as being in “warm” or racially tolerant environments when the political climate is above its mean of 0.507. The bottom portion of Figure 3.4 labels respondents as being in racially “cool” surroundings if the political climate below the mean of 0.507. Throughout this figure, the darker bars symbolize mean levels of political interest among African Americans; the lighter bars denote the mean interest levels for Whites. Again, I compare interest levels across race using mean difference tests.

Examining the connection between education and interest by race and political climate yields some fascinating, but not surprising, results. Regardless of race, interest rises predictably with education levels. In cooler climates, Blacks and Whites with less than high school educations express similar levels of political interest ($\mu_{Blacks} = 0.435$; $\mu_{Whites} = 0.436$; $F = 0.110; p = 0.956$). In this context, the lack of formal schooling tends to equalize interest levels across race. The effect of education become more pronounced at higher levels of education, as Whites with more than a high school diploma express significantly more interest in politics ($\mu_{Blacks} = 0.542$; $\mu_{Whites} = 0.581$; $F = 11.15; p = 0.001$). When the political climate is warm, Blacks without a high school education tend to express more interest in politics than do comparable Whites ($\mu_{Blacks} = 0.472$; $\mu_{Whites} = 0.438$; $F = 3.13; p = 0.077$). Blacks with high

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51 The correlation between political interest and education, the correlation for respondents in warmer climates, and the correlation for respondents in cooler climates is 0.275, 0.271, and 0.277, respectively. The magnitude of the correlations suggests that we can predict seven percent of the changes from one variable to the next. The sign of the correlations confirm the positive relationship between education and interest levels.
When the Political Climate is Cool

When the Political Climate is Warm

Note: Darker bars represent Blacks’ political interest levels. Lighter bars denote Whites’ levels of political interest.

Figure 3.4: The Effect of Education on Political Interest by Race and Political Climate

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school educations follow politics more closely than those who do not, but educated Whites remain the most politically-interested respondents ($\mu_{Blacks} = 0.558; \mu_{Whites} = 0.594; F = 2.94; p = 0.091$).

The results of Figure 3.4 lend support to the argument that the political climate has an indirect effect on the relationship between social class and political interest. Warmer climates raise the political interests of both racial groups, but the effect is stronger for Blacks. A fascinating finding in Figure 3.4 is that the race gap in political interest reverses when one compares less-educated Blacks and Whites.

### 3.5.2 Group Consciousness

Group consciousness entails three conditions: membership in a certain group, identification with that group, and the awareness of that group’s social position (Miller et. al. 1981, 495). While commonly applied to the study of minority political activism (see Carmichael and Hamilton 1966, Ginsberg and Shefter, 1991, Harris 1999b, and Orum 1966), Zilber (1996) shows that the tenets of group consciousness are universal to all social groups. Despite its logical applicability to Whites, there are surprisingly few political science studies of White group consciousness.\(^{52}\) Survey methodology reflects this deficiency. The ANES, like most surveys, tends to ask group consciousness questions only to minority groups, which makes it difficult to compare the effect of group consciousness across racial groups.

In the absence of better alternatives, I rely on a crude but faithfully-recorded component of group consciousness: racial group identification. The ANES asks respondents to evaluate various politicians, activists, and political groups using “feeling

\(^{52}\)An exception to this rule is the recent research on White Nationalism (see Swain 2002; Neili and Swain 2003).
thermometers.” Such thermometers range from zero to 100 degrees, and judge the extent to which a respondent “identifies” with a given person or group. Respondents who feel “warmly” towards a group are said to identify with that group, while respondents who feel “coolly” towards that group do not. To measure racial identification, I generate two variables: one measuring Whites’ evaluations of other Whites, and another that measures Blacks’ feelings toward other African Americans. In theory, this is a step backwards, but making use of this crude measure of group identification allows me to move forward empirically.\(^{53}\)

Figure 3.5 tests the effects of racial group identification on interest levels by race and political climate. I calculate the mean level of racial group identification for Blacks and Whites (83.59 and 75.51 “degrees,” respectively), and I separate respondents according to whether they express group identification levels that are one standard deviation above (“high group ID”) or one standard deviation below (“low group ID”) the respective means. Again, the darker bars denote Blacks’ interest and the lighter bars represent that of Whites. In addition, I separate respondents by whether they are in a “cool” or “warm” political climate.

The patterns in Figure 3.4 suggest that that group identification has a stronger effect for Blacks. Blacks’ interest in politics tends to rise with group identification, a pattern that holds true in all political climates.\(^{54}\) Conversely, Whites who express low levels of group consciousness are no more interested in politics than those who identify highly with other Whites. In cooler political climates, the difference in Whites’

\(^{53}\)In some ways, the cruder measure makes for a stricter test of Danigelis’ arguments, for if I uncover an effect of group identification on political interest with these measures, then it is possible that would see cleaner results with finer measures.

\(^{54}\)The overall correlation between Blacks’ political interest and group identification is 0.225, suggesting a coefficient of determination of five percent. The correlations for warm and cool climates are 0.241 \((r^2 = 5.81)\) and 0.198 \((r^2 = 3.92\%)\), respectively.
When the Political Climate is Cool

Note: Darker bars represent Blacks’ political interest levels. Lighter bars denote Whites’ levels of political interest.

Figure 3.5: The Effects of Racial Group Identification on Political Interest by Race and Political Climate
interest levels is negligible ($\mu_{LowID} = 0.553; \mu_{HighID} = 0.562$), and this pattern also shows up in warmer political climates ($\mu_{LowID} = 0.570; \mu_{HighID} = 0.590$). Despite the crudity of group identification as a measure of group consciousness, the results in Figure 3.4 are consistent with the minority politics literature, which argues that group considerations play a significant role in Blacks’ psychological involvement in politics.

Changing the political climate has a fascinating effect on the relationship between race, group identification, and political interest. In cooler political climates, Blacks who identify strongly with other Blacks have higher levels of political interest than those who do not (cool climate: $\mu_{LowID} = 0.407; \mu_{HighID} = 0.541$). In warmer climates, the trend persists, with Blacks showing an increase in interest levels and an appreciable difference between respondents with low and high group identification ($\mu_{LowID} = 0.463; \mu_{HighID} = 0.579$). One also notices that Whites take more interest in politics than Blacks do when levels of racial group identification are low. The difference in the mean interest levels of Blacks and Whites is significant when the climate is cool ($F = 7.64; p = 0.006$) and when the climate is warm ($F = 7.44; p = 0.009$). The racial differences in political interest are much smaller when respondents have higher levels of racial identification. In cooler climates the difference is not slight but significant ($F = 3.30; p = 0.101$). In warmer climate, the race gap disappears ($F = 0.842; p = 0.621$).

Taken as a whole, the results in Figure 3.5 are consistent with the literature on minority politics, which argues that group identification plays a large role in Blacks’ psychological involvement in politics. Blacks identify more with other Blacks than Whites identify with their racial group. Blacks’ political interest tends to rise with
group identification, and as expected, Blacks in cooler political climates are less interested than they are when they are in warmer climates.

### 3.5.3 Racial Context

In Chapter 1, I described the indicators of racial context (institutionalized and informal racial barriers, Black population density, racial political empowerment, etc.). Given the longitudinal nature of my analyses, it would be difficult to measure racial context using these conventional methods. For example, to quantify racial empowerment (traditionally defined as minority control over the mayoral office) it would be necessary to trace the general location of each respondent in the ANES for each year to determine whether the respondent lived in a city governed by an African American mayor. In light of these difficulties, I follow a technique employed by Danigelis (1978) and use geographic region as a longitudinal measure of racial context, with the assumption that the political climate is cooler in the South than it is in the North. Historical accounts of American race relations often refer to North/South distinctions in the nature of race relations and race politics (see, for example, Key 1949), and Danigelis (1982, 540) describes such regional differences as creating a “geographical” racial context that complements the temporal context of political climate.\(^{55}\)

\(^{55}\)Danigelis inferred the political climate from geographic region in his 1978 study, which led to the misinterpretation that he was prescribing region as a proxy for political climate. In a series of communications with Danigelis, I learned that he viewed region as a correlate rather than an indicator of political climate. In the absence of a precise measure of political climate, Danigelis felt comfortable assuming that northern states were more racially progressive than southern ones. However, he never fully believed that region could represent something as something as diffuse as the racial “spirit of the times.”
3.6 divides respondents by whether or not they live in the “political South,” and it tests for regional differences across race and political climate.

Figure 3.6 shows that it is possible to infer racial context from geographic region. Interest in politics is generally higher outside of the Southern states. In cool political climates, the mean level of political interest among Blacks Southerners is 0.508, while the mean interest level of Blacks outside of the South is 0.511. In warmer political climates, Black Southerners’ political interest ($\mu = 0.535$) is lower than that of non-Southern Blacks ($\mu = 0.566$). Likewise, non-Southern Whites in cool political climates express more interest in politics than Whites from the South do ($\mu_{South} = 0.548; \mu_{Non-South} = 0.560$). This pattern is similar in politically warm climates ($\mu_{South} = 0.570; \mu_{Non-South} = 0.573$). When examining racial difference in political interest, one notices that non-southern Blacks and Whites in warm political climates express comparable amounts of political interest ($F = 0.53; p = 0.469$). In every other context, there are significant racial differences in expressions of political interest.

3.6 Discussion

I integrate research from political science and sociology to explain over-time changes in Blacks’ political interest. The results bring the contours for this “race gap” into sharper relief. Blacks and Whites do pay differential attention to politics. The longitudinal data confirms that descriptive differences in Blacks and Whites’ interest levels are symptomatic of a larger political trend. This trend is stronger in some years than in others, and, sometimes the trend reverses itself. In fact, one of

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56 Southern respondents are those living in the eleven states of the confederacy: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to respondents who do not live in one of these states as “non-Southerners.”

Note: Darker bars represent Blacks’ political interest levels. Lighter bars denote Whites’ levels of political interest.

Figure 3.6: The Effects of Geographic Region on Political Interest by Race and Political Climate
the key conclusions of this chapter is that what we know about race and political interest depends on when we examine interest in politics among Blacks.

More importantly, the analyses show that the way in which we explain Blacks’ interest depends on the political climate. Overall, the results from Chapter 3 show that the effects of demographic resources, attitudinal motivation, and contextual barriers on Blacks’ interest are stronger in racially intolerant climates. The effects of these factors on Black interest are less noticeable in tolerant political climates.

The results of this chapter re-organize the literature on race and political involvement to show that America’s openness to the political inclusion of Blacks indirectly shapes the effects of class, consciousness, and context on interest in politics. Until now, many of Danigelis’ claims about political climate have gone untested. Although my research focuses on interest in politics rather than political participation, the ideas discussed in this chapter add to the richness of Danigelis’ theory of racial differences in political involvement.
CHAPTER 4

RACE AS A MODERATING VARIABLE

Chapter Summary: There is an enormous body of research confirming the link between interest in politics and political activism. The research consistently shows that citizens are more politically active if they are highly interested in politics. The conclusion that interest increases participation is so entrenched that scholars treat it as a given. No one questions the validity of this link, so scholars see little need to examine it. As a result, many assumptions about the relationship between interest and activism go untested. Implicit in this literature is the assumption that the interest-participation link works similarly across demographic subgroups; however, a thorough reading of the mainstream and minority participation literatures reveals that the correlation between political interest and political participation is consistently different for Blacks than it is for Whites. To my knowledge, no theories have explained this empirical irregularity. Accordingly, this chapter draws upon the race politics, political participation, and political psychology literatures to account for the moderating effect of race on the interest-participation relationship.

Up to this point, my analyses focused on the effect of race on political interest as a dependent variable. Chapter 2 discussed several issues regarding the conceptualization and longitudinal measurement of political interest. Chapter 3 uncovered racial differences in the distribution of political interest levels, where Whites expressed more interest in politics than did Blacks. This chapter explores the effect of race on political interest as an independent variable. Specifically, it will demonstrate that race and political interest interact to influence political action, and this chapter will discuss
both how and why race influences or “moderates” the link between interest in politics and political participation (Path D). Psychologists Reuben M. Baron and David A. Kenny define a moderating variable as a third variable that determines the direction and/or strength of the relationship between two other variables (Baron and Kenny 1986, 1174). By describing race as a moderating variable, I argue that race determines how strongly citizens relate their political interest to their political actions, and I propose an analytical framework for studying the moderating effect of race on the interest-participation relationship.

4.1 Racial Differences in the Interest-Participation Relationship

The mainstream literature on political involvement assumes that the relationship between political engagement and political participation works similarly for all demographic groups. This assumption stems from two conclusions about the effect of social class and political engagement on political action: 1) that citizens of higher social standing are generally more politically involved than citizens with fewer socioeconomic resources, and 2) that citizens who feel a strong psychological attachment to politics are more active than citizens with a weak attachment. There is so much empirical support for these conclusions, that scholars often take these relationships for granted. Extending the logic of these assumptions, one would expect all citizens, regardless of group status, to take part in politics if they have the necessary socio-demographic resources and the psychological motivation. Likewise, one would expect the resource-poor and disengaged citizens to be the least politically active. Intriguingly, the literature on minority political involvement fits awkwardly with this common wisdom.
In 1971, Sidney Tarrow wrote an important case study of French politics. He found that the rural French express less psychological involvement in politics than their urban compatriots do. In itself, this is not a surprising finding, given that income and education correlate positively with civic involvement, and city-dwellers typically have more of both. As noted, the literature predicts that activism is higher among politically engaged citizens and lower among disengaged ones. Based on this prediction, the urban French (who are richer in resources and strongly attached to politics), should out-participate the rural French (who have fewer resources and are less politically attracted). What Tarrow found, however, was “counterintuitive.” Despite their economic and psychological disadvantages, French villagers often reported higher voting rates than did French urbanites (Tarrow 1971, 344). Tarrow argued that these patterns were unique to France, but research in Korean politics points to similar urban-rural differences in political involvement. Like French peasants, Korean farmers are poorer, less educated, politically disengaged, yet on the whole more politically active than their urban neighbors (Yun 1961; Kim 1980; Kil, Kim, and Ahn 1987; Mo, Brady, and Ro 1991).

Moving to American politics, many public opinion studies reveal that (compared to men) women are less psychologically involved in politics. Additionally, the body of literature confirming gender inequalities in education, occupation, income, and family circumstance is enormous. (For a review of this literature, read Burns, Verba, and Schlozman 2001.) Men generally have more social and political resources than women do, and men are, by many reports, more engaged in politics. One would expect men to outvote women; however, Conway (1997) notes that women match men in their
self-reported levels of voter turnout. Students of gender politics have long puzzled over this counterintuitive pattern.

More relevant to this project, research in race politics consistently demonstrates that Blacks are less psychologically involved in politics than Whites are (for a review of such research, see Chapter 1). Furthermore, there is a plethora of research confirming racial inequalities in socio-demographic resources (Wilson, 1978, 1981; Bianchi 1980, 132; Darling-Hammond 1999, 76; Hatch & Mommsen 1984, 464). Again, one would expect such conditions to depress Blacks’ political activism. However, as I show in Chapter 3, scholars often speak of Blacks participating as much if not more than Whites of similar economic backgrounds (see Bobo and Gilliam 1990, 378; Jaynes and Williams 1989, 234; Verba et al. 1995, 523).^57

These authors work variations on a similar theme. Each set of studies deals with the relationship between behavioral and psychological involvement in politics. The authors compare the levels of political involvement levels between minority and majority groups. In the contexts of France and Korea, rural citizens represent the political minority. In America, Blacks have minority status, and even though numerically there are more women than men, women are considered political minorities. While the processes differ for each minority group (women and Blacks experience unique barriers to political inclusion, and Korean and French farmers have little in common) the outcomes are similar: minority groups are more politically active than

\[^{57}\text{Comparing survey responses with validated turnout, Abramson and Claggett discover that Blacks are still less active than equally situated Whites, but Blacks are more likely to claim that they voted (Abramson and Claggett 1984; 1986; 1989; 1991; 1992). However, the important thing is not that Blacks out-participate Whites but that that they claim to be doing so. In this case, the perception of hyperactivity is more interesting than the perception. Besides, White people over-report too, and the fact that over-reporting is more common among Blacks than among Whites shows that these groups do not relate engagement to participation in identical ways.}\]
their social position and psychological engagement would suggest. These findings are counterintuitive because the mainstream assumptions about class, political engagement, and political action cannot explain them. One should expect the lack of resources and psychological involvement to depress minority participation, but this does not apply to American women and blacks. The research on racial, gender, and urban-rural cleavages challenges the conventional wisdom by showing that majority and minority groups relate their political engagement to political action differently. It is fascinating that these minority groups (who, in terms of demographic and psychological resources, are doubly disadvantaged) maintain competitive levels of political activism. When it comes to political involvement, it appears that minority groups do more with less.

In short, there appear to be inconsistencies in the literature on political involvement. Mainstream scholars assume that the engagement-participation relationship works similarly for all groups, hypothesizing that group membership has no effect on the connection between psychological and behavioral involvement. Minority group researchers provide evidence suggesting group differences in the link between psychological and behavioral involvement in politics, evidence that points to an alternative hypothesis that group membership influences the effect of political engagement on political action. At first glance, the mainstream and minority literatures on political involvement seem incompatible. However, considering the potential effect of group membership as a moderating variable will inform our theoretical understanding of political involvement by allowing us to reconcile these seemingly irreconcilable sets of findings. Moderating variables often help to explain inconsistent relationships between other variables, and it is obvious that the association between interest and
participation is not identical across race. Perhaps studying group membership more
generally (and race specifically) as a moderating variable will move us closer to resolv-
ing the “puzzles” in the political involvement literature by delineating the conditions
under which the mainstream assumptions about social class, psychological engage-
ment and political participation hold true. I devote the remainder of this chapter to
developing and testing the moderator hypothesis.

4.2 Understanding this Moderated Relationship

I expect the interaction between race and political interest to have a significant
effect on levels of political participation. Specifically, I expect the association be-
tween interest and participation to be significantly stronger for Whites than it is for
Blacks. In this section, I develop a rationale for why we should expect significant
racial differences in the interest-participation relationship.

There are two debates in the racial group consciousness literature. The widely
known scholarly contention deals with the connection (or lack thereof) between group
consciousness and political participation (see Chapter 1). The more subtle debate
is over the intervening/mediating variables in the relationship between group con-
sciousness and participation. For Shingles, these mediating factors (what he calls
the “missing link”) is the combination of distrust in government balanced with po-
itical efficacy (see Shingles 1981; Fraser 1970). In theory, participatory democracy
is healthiest when all citizens have faith in the system, but for Blacks, distrust in
government may actually foster civic engagement. To use the jargon, political trust
and efficacy act as mediating variables standing between Black group consciousness

58 This expectation implies a null hypothesis of no relationship between the race*interest interac-
tion and participation.
and participation. On the one hand, racial solidarity motivates Black activism; on the other hand, group consciousness is a by-product of Blacks’ confidence in their abilities to effect change in a racially exclusive political system.

Regardless of how one feels about its role in Black participation, group consciousness offers a rationale for understanding racial differences in the political interest—political participation relationship. The group consciousness literature demonstrates that social class and political engagement are not as important as determinants of political action for minority groups as they are for non-minority groups because Blacks use communal resources to compensate for their lack of other individual-level participatory resources. Magnum (2003) makes a similar argument. In an analysis of the 1996 National Black Election Study, he finds that group-based political efficacy (which evokes the sentiment of overcoming political exclusion through collective efforts) is a strong predictor of Black voter turnout. It is possible that group consciousness, or group efficacy, is indicative of something broader. In this case, they represent a form of group “self-interest.”

Andrea Campbell (2002) finds evidence of this group-regarding self-interest in her research on elder Americans. She finds that seniors with lower incomes are more politically active than seniors with high incomes. This is a strange finding because, as noted earlier, it violates the assumption that activism rises with income. Campbell’s analyses actually find the reverse of this logic: political involvement among the elderly actually decreases with income. To explain these distinctive patterns, she argues that income for the elderly signals self-interest more than demographic standing. Social Security, a federal policy that gives pensions to retirees, is more relevant to low-income seniors because changes in such policies would affect this group most. Older
Americans with higher income can afford to pay less attention to Social Security because this policy matters less to their financial well-being.

Campbell’s study contributes to my explanation of why minority groups participate at competitive levels despite their relative lack of resources and political engagement. Her findings suggest that groups are selectively attentive to politics (see also Hutchings 2005). The literature on the racial divide shows this for Blacks and Whites, and the literature on self interest allows us to talk more generally about different groups and their respective political foci. The results in Chapter 3 suggest that Blacks pay the most attention to politics when politics has a direct bearing on their lives. For confirmation, one need only review Figure 3.2, which illustrates that peaks in Blacks’ political interest coincide with peaks in aggregate support for redistributive racial policies. While less so than for policies like affirmative action, messages about Social Security speak to “leveling the playing field”—not through “handouts,” but through giving citizens what they have earned. Obviously, citizens who have something at stake will look more closely at these messages. Minority citizens (whether in terms of age, race, gender, or residency) behave as our conventional theories predict when the political stakes are few or low. Behavior patterns changes when the stakes are high, and the counterintuitive nature of these patterns informs our theories. The puzzles in the minority participation literature reinforce the need to consider the moderating effect of group membership on the psychological involvement-behavioral involvement relationship. I devote the remainder of this chapter to testing the moderator hypothesis as it applies to race.
4.3 Testing for Moderator Effects

There is surprisingly little advice on testing for moderator effects. Baron and Kenny (1986) offer what is perhaps the only methodological guidelines on the subject, and the following analyses draw heavily from their insight. It is possible to study the moderating effect of race on the interest-participation relationship using a path diagram. I expect the association between interest and participation to be significantly stronger for Whites than for Blacks. Based on the coding of the variables used thus far in the dissertation, I argue that the interaction between race and political interest (Path D) will have a significant and inverse effect on levels of political participation, because the evidence from the literature on political involvement demonstrates that interest in politics is not as important a determinant of political action for minority groups as it is for non-minorities.

4.3.1 A Correlational Approach

One way to test the moderator hypothesis is to compare the strength of association between political interest and political participation by racial group. I begin by examining interest-participation correlations over time using the 1952–2004 ANES, the results are in Figure 4.1. For this set of analyses, I measure political interest using the two-item interest index mentioned in Chapter 3. Following Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 544), I measure political participation by combining the full range of political acts available for this dataset into an additive index: voting in the past presidential election; working as a volunteer for a candidate running for local, state, or national office; making a contribution to an individual candidate, a party group, a political action committee, or any other organization that supports candidates in
elections; initiating contact with government officials or someone on the staff of such officials to discuss social problems or issues of concerns; taking part in a protest, rally, march, or demonstration; and being an active member of a political organization. I test for racial differences in the association between interest and participation using Cohen and Cohen’s (1983) test of the equality of two correlation coefficients. The trends in Figure 4.1 reveal that the correlation between political interest and political participation are stronger for Whites than for Blacks. With the exception of 1958, 1978, and 2000, the differences in correlations across race are statistically significant (p < .05) for each year in the time series.

As a comparison, I analyze interest-participation correlations over time and by race using the 1982 – 1996 General Social Surveys (GSS). Like the ANES, the GSS records responses to commonly asked survey items over time. Unlike the ANES, the GSS does not ask political interest questions regularly. In 1982, the GSS introduced a survey item asking respondents to rate how important they believed politics was to their lives. That same year, the GSS also included a question that resembled the general political interest question of the ANES, which asks respondents to describe how closely they “follow” politics and public affairs (see Chapter 2). There was a differently worded political interest question in the 1987 GSS. This survey item literally asked respondents to evaluate how interested in politics they were: “Are you very interested, somewhat interested, slightly interested, or not interested in what goes on

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60 Here is the exact wording of that question: “On these cards are various aspects of your life. We want to know how important each of these aspects of life is to you. On each of these cards you see on the right hand side a scale with seven points. The lowest point with number 1 indicates that this aspect of life is unimportant to you. Point 7 at the top indicates that this aspect is very important to you. The numbers in between indicate varying degrees of importance.”
Note: Data points are correlations between political interest and political participation across racial groups and over time.

Figure 4.1: Comparing Interest-Participation Correlations in the 1952-2004 ANES
in politics and public affairs?” The 1990 and 1996 GSS utilize a modified version of the 1987 question that list five rather than four response options (respondents can rate themselves as “very interested,” “fairly interested,” “somewhat interested,” “not very interested,” and “not at all interested.” There is more uniformity in the political participation questions asked in the GSS, and I create an additive index of the following activities: voting in presidential elections, campaign volunteering, donating to political causes, contacting elected officials, attending political rallies, joining political organizations, and taking part in protests.

Figure 4.2 reports the results. Despite having fewer time points and different versions of political questions, the trends for the 1982-1996 GSS are similar to those in the 1952 – 2004 ANES: There are significantly stronger correlations between interest in politics and political participation among Whites than among Blacks. The consistency of these patterns suggests that racial differences in the strength of association between interest and activism are time invariant—they hold steady regardless of survey year. Because of the steadiness of these results, it is no longer necessary to explore longitudinal racial differences in the interest-participation relationship. Therefore, I devote the remainder of the chapter to the cross-sectional analysis of the interaction between interest in politics, race, and political participation.

Table 4.1 reports the results of these cross-racial correlations across several national public opinion polls: the 1952 - 2004 ANES, the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (ACPS), the 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey

61 All the racial group differences are significant at the 0.05 level in the GSS analyses.
Note: Data points are correlations between political interest and political participation across racial groups and over time.

Figure 4.2: Comparing Interest-Participation Correlations in the 1982-1996 GSS
I compare correlations across race using conventional summary indices of political participation. I developed participation indices by using the six participatory acts that are common to each of these surveys: voting, volunteering, donating, contacting, protesting, joining political organizations. The first column in Table 4.1 lists the surveys from which I conduct my analyses. The second column records the correlations between interest and participation for Blacks, and the third column lists the interest-participation correlations for Whites. The fourth column tests the equality of the correlation coefficients.

The correlations tell an interesting story. As noted, similar correlations between interest in politics and political behavior would lend support to the conventional wisdom that race does not moderate the interest-participation relationship. However, the patterns in Table 4.1 give little support for this assumption. The association between interest and participation tends to be weaker for Blacks than it is for Whites, and, with the exception of the results for the 1990 ACPS, the racial differences between these correlations are statistically significant.

I measure interest in politics in the General Social Survey using POLINT, the survey item which asks respondents to rate their level of political interested on a five-point scale ranging from “very interested” to “not at all interested.” The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey has a similarly-labeled variable that evaluates respondents’ interest in politics and national affairs using a four-point scale. Because there are multiple items in the American Citizen Participation Study and the American National Election Studies, I combine items about political interest into additive indices. For the ACPS, I combine the questions that gauge a respondent’s interest in national and local politics (variables “natint” and “locint,” respectively). As in Chapter 3, I measure interest by combining the campaign and general interest items.

The first wave of the 1990 ACPS queried more than 15,000 adults and selected from these adults a disproportionate amount of respondents who are highly involved in politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Appendix 1). The over-sample of activists in the final version of the ACPS explains why the correlations between interest and participation are generally higher than in other surveys. It also explains why there are no significant racial differences in the interest-participation correlations in this survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Difference Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1952 - 2004 ANES</strong></td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>0.390</td>
<td>-2.489*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5,163)</td>
<td>(42,275)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1990 ACPS</strong></td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td>-0.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(478)</td>
<td>(1,664)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2000 SCCBS</strong></td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>-2.164+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3,502)</td>
<td>(20,877)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1982 - 1996 GSS</strong></td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>-2.433*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5,615)</td>
<td>(34,083)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Difference Test H₀: Correlation for Blacks = Correlation for Whites

*Note:* Table entries are correlation coefficients with sample sizes in parentheses. Difference tests are Cohen and Cohen’s (1983) tests of equality of two correlation coefficients

+ p ≤ .05; * p < .025; ** p ≤ .0125, two tailed test

Table 4.1: Comparing Associations between Interest and Participation by Race (Correlation Analyses)
While the results in Table 4.1 are encouraging, there are several potential problems with this procedure. For example, this correlation-based approach assumes homogeneity of variance across groups. This case presumes that levels of political interest vary similarly for Blacks and Whites. If the variance is not similar across racial groups, then the correlation approach produces biased results because the interest-participation’s relationship will be greater for the racial group with the higher amount of variance in political interest levels (for a discussion of the issue, see McNemar 1969).

Another problem with the correlation approach is that any racial differences in the correlation between interest and participation may be spurious if the amount of measurement error in political participation varies as a function of race. There is some cause for concern over this problem because Abramson and Claggett (1984; 1986; 1989; 1991; 1992) have shown that Blacks are more likely than Whites are to over-report. Over-reporting voter turnout represents a bias in the results because it keeps us from inferring true turnout from self-reported turnout, and, therefore, such over-reporting is a form of measurement error. Since Blacks over-report more than Whites do, the amount of measurement error in self-reported voter turnout is not uniform across race. Because of the potential for group differences in measurement error, one must consider alternative approaches to comparing the strength of association between interest and participation across race. One such approach is to move from a correlation to regression framework. Unlike correlation coefficients, regression estimates are not biased by racial differences in the variance of political interest, nor are they sensitive to racial differences in the measurement error of political participation. Because of its resilience to changes in variance and measurement error, Duncan
(1975) argues that it is preferable to compare the effects of a predictor (political interest) on a dependent variable (political participation) using regression analysis.

### 4.3.2 A Regression Approach

Before comparing the interest-participation relationship across race using regression, one must first specify a model of political participation. As noted in Chapter 1, students of political behavior share a goal: to predict and explain mass-level participation. The attempt to understand why citizens become involved in politics inspires libraries of research. Scholars categorize the findings borne out from this body of research in different ways. For example, social conflict theorists distinguish explanations of participation according to whether they reflect long-term political habits that citizens acquire through socialization (e.g. party identification or ideology) or short-term stimuli based on information about issues and candidates (LeVine and Campbell 1972; Chong 2000; see also Marcus, Newman, and MacKuen 2000). Students of political context divide the literature into two camps. One camp emphasizes the importance of personal traits like socio-economic status that “push” citizens to participate. The other camp stresses the power of external forces in the political environment (i.e. parties, leaders, activists, organizations, movements, etc.) that “pull” or mobilize citizens into action (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Leighley 2000).

The most recent and arguably most comprehensive theoretical model of participation comes from Sidney Verba and his colleagues (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Focusing on political abstention rather than activism, Verba, et al. argue that citizens don’t take part in politics “because they can’t; because they don’t want to; or because nobody asked” (Verba, et al.
Verba, et al.’s oft-quoted explanation for political inactivity summarizes the workings of their Civic Voluntarism Model of political activity. According to the authors, nonparticipation is a function of citizens lacking 1) the resources to bear the costs of participating, 2) the psychological inclination to become politically engaged, and 3) the access to recruitment or mobilizing networks that bring citizens into politics. Verba, et al.’s framework is the strongest model of political participation to date, and I have adopted their model. Although Verba, et al. test their Civic Voluntarism Model using their 1990 American Citizen Participation Study, I base the following analyses on data from the 2004 National Election Study. I apply Verba, et al.’s framework to different surveys. First, both the 1990 ACPS and the 2004 ANES contain multiple indicators of political participation. In fact, the political activity index that I create from ANES data is virtually identical to the one that Verba, et al. use in the 1990 ACPS. Secondly, I ran the analyses using both the 1990 ACPS and the 2004 ANES, and the results are similar. Because of the similarity in findings, I prefer to report results from the two-year old rather than 16-year old data.

Testing Verba et al.’s theoretical model of participation requires creating variables for resources, psychological engagement, and political mobilization. As noted in Chapter 3, political involvement correlates positively with social standing; therefore, any resource model must include variables for education and income levels. In

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64 Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) quantify the concept of political participation with an index of political activity that combines the following participatory acts: voting, campaign volunteering, making contributions, contacting elites, protesting, informal community activism, membership in local boards, and affiliation with political organizations. The authors code these eight participatory acts into an additive scale (alpha = 0.62) ranging from 0 to 8, where 0 means that the respondent engaged in no participatory acts and 8 means that the respondent engaged in all participatory acts. The 2004 ANES has each of these eight acts, which allows for a more faithful replication of their participation index. Like Verba, et al.’s index, my measure of overall participation (alpha = 0.66) ranges from 0 to 8 and counts the number of participatory acts a citizen engaged in during the past 12 months.
addition to these standard socio-economic indicators, Verba, et al. (1995) measure resources in terms of free time and civic skills. By free time, the authors refer to the amount of time citizens can devote to politics when they are not working, studying, doing chores, or sleeping. Civic skills (like writing letters, giving presentations or speeches, and organizing events at one’s school, church, or job) facilitate political activity but are cultivated in non-political settings. Although my dissertation is concerned with interest in politics, the 2004 ANES allows me to quantify several other psychological engagement variables, including political knowledge, trust in government, political efficacy, strength of partisanship, and, of course, political interest.

For this analysis, I measure political engagement by gauging citizens’ interest in politics and political knowledge. One of the benefits of the 2004 ANES is that several questions deal with elite recruitment (or mobilization), which allows me to create a

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65 I measure free time in the ANES using V045171, a Yes/No question asking whether respondents are able to devote time to politics. This item is less crude than the operationalization used by Verba, et al., who subtract the amount of time spent in a typical day on non-political pursuits from 24, to determine the remaining time a citizen can devote to politics. However, the results from this simpler measure of free time match those of the authors.

66 Following Verba, et al. (1995) I measure civic skills by creating an additive index of three politically-relevant activities that respondents practice in their jobs and in their place of worship: giving speeches or presentations, planning or chairing meetings, and serving on committees. There is a total of six civic skills items in the 2004 ANES (three ask about speech giving, committee service, and meeting planning/chairing at work and the other three asks about these actions at church). Therefore, my civic skills index ranges from 0 to 6 and indicates a respondent’s level of civic skill.

67 I measure political knowledge by gauging whether a respondent can correctly recognize Dennis Hastert, Dick Cheney, Tony Blair, and William Rehnquist. I also test whether a respondent can correctly identify which political party is the more ideologically conservative. I measure political trust using the University of Michigan Survey Research Center’s (SRC) standard five-item index of trust in government. I divide political efficacy into internal and external efficacy. I measure internal efficacy using the following question: “People like me have no say about what the government does.” I measure external efficacy with the following item: “Public officials don’t care what people like me think.” Like in Chapter 2, I create a folded measure of party identification to measure a respondent’s strength of partisanship.
summary index of the number of times a respondent has been asked by political elites or church members to take an active role in politics.\textsuperscript{68}

Using these variables, I compare the effect of political interest on political participation across race. Table 4.2 reports the results of this comparison. Although political interest is the independent variable in this relationship and political participation is the dependent variable, one must concede that arrow of causality may point simultaneously in both directions. For example, while attitudes are thought to influence actions, political philosophers and social psychologists show that actions can also affect attitudes.\textsuperscript{69} This is particularly true for political interest, but the argument that political attitudes and political actions are reciprocally related applies to the other measures of psychological engagement, and, to a lesser extent, to political mobilization (see Verba, et al. 1995, 276-279). Accordingly, Table 4.2 reports the results of the second stage of a Two-Stage Least Squares (2SLS) regression model analyzing the endogenous relationship between political interest and political participation.\textsuperscript{70} The columns in this table represent separate regressions for Blacks and

\textsuperscript{68}The 2004 ANES asks respondents whether they have been contacted by representatives from either a political party (V045008) or a non-political organization (V045009), I measure as a summary index of these items.

\textsuperscript{69}Much of the literature presumes that interest ‘causes’ participation. However, the evidence that emerges from this literature is non-experimental and thus can only show that interest and participation correlate. What is more, research has yet to explore the idea that participation ‘causes’ interest, a possibility mentioned by democratic theorists and social psychologists but never directly tested (Rousseau 1762; Mill 1859; see Pateman 1970, see also Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber 1982, 1984; Finkel 1990).

\textsuperscript{70}The instrumented variables are political interest, political information/knowledge, trust in government, internal and external political efficacy, strength or partisanship, and institutional recruitment. Instruments for the 2SLS are citizenship, education, vocabulary, speaking English at home, family income, working, retired, job level, non-political organizational affiliation, religious attendance, Catholic, number of children under 18, preschool children, gender, spouse, working full or part time, Black, Latino, education of parents, age, political information, and partisan strength. Verba, et al. (1995) explains the details of estimating this 2SLS model in the Appendix B of their book (see pp. 604-609).
Whites, respectively. I conduct a Chow test (1960) to compare the effect of interest on participation across racial groups.\textsuperscript{71}

Though not a direct replication, the results of Table 4.2 are consistent with those reported in Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 444), and they tell us a great deal about the role of race in the interest-participation relationship. Looking at the control variables, one notices that the resources of education, free time, and civic skills are significant determinants of White political participation. Free time was the only significant resource for Blacks. As expected, strength of partisanship has a significantly stronger correlation with White participation, and, given the controversial nature of the 2004 elections, it is not surprising that cynicism contributed to Whites' participation—although I would expect a similarly significant finding for Blacks. Echoing the conclusions of Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) citizen mobilization plays a key role in political action, a pattern that is consistent across race. The model fits, while similar, suggest that Verba, et al.'s Civic Voluntarism model does a better job of explaining White than Black participation. \textsuperscript{72}

Most importantly, the results in Table 4.2 corroborate those in Table 4.1: interest in politics is a consistently significant predictor of political action. Holding other variables constant, a unit change in interest levels (from low to high) raises Blacks' activism by roughly one participatory act ($\beta = 1.06; p = .052$) and increases White

\textsuperscript{71}Economist George C. Chow devised a test to determine whether the regression coefficients estimated for one sample of data are equal to the coefficients estimated for another sample. Chow tests can be performed easily in STATA, but readers interested in deriving the Chow test manually should read his 1960 paper, “Tests of Equality between Sets of Coefficients in Two Linear Regressions.”

\textsuperscript{72}Comparing the goodness of fit for 2SLS models is complicated because the $R^2$ can range anywhere from negative infinity to more than one. Therefore, the $R^2$ is not a meaningful goodness measure for 2-stage models. Following the advice of Nanak Kakwani and Eric Sowey (1996), I calculate the goodness of fit by taking the square of the correlation between the predicted and raw values of the dependent variable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Black Participation</th>
<th>White Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education (1 = Beyond College)</td>
<td>0.321</td>
<td>0.424*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.435)</td>
<td>(0.190)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income (1 = Top Percentile)</td>
<td>-0.258</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.417)</td>
<td>(0.226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Time (1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.456*</td>
<td>0.731**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.270)</td>
<td>(0.121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Skills Index (1 = Highly Skilled)</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>1.875**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.381)</td>
<td>(0.228)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship (1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.322</td>
<td>0.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.467)</td>
<td>(0.165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest (1 = Strong Interest)</td>
<td>1.061*</td>
<td>1.648**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.486)</td>
<td>(0.237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Information (1 = Very Knowledgeable)</td>
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<td>0.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.449)</td>
<td>(0.244)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust in Government (1 = Strong Trust)</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>-0.557*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.655)</td>
<td>(0.276)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Efficacy (1 = Strong Efficacy)</td>
<td>0.360</td>
<td>-0.116</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.269)</td>
<td>(0.117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Efficacy (1 = Strong Efficacy)</td>
<td>-0.235</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.298)</td>
<td>(0.120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship (1 = Strong ID)</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.563*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
<td>(0.235)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Index (1 = Highly Recruited)</td>
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<td>0.872**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.355)</td>
<td>(0.160)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.712)</td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
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<td>731</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
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<td>0.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Test</td>
<td>2.64*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** 2004 National Election Study

**Note:** Table entries are Two-State Least Squares (2SLS) regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Difference Test $H_0: \beta_{\text{Interest}}$ for Blacks = $\beta_{\text{Interest}}$ for Whites $^{+} p \leq .10; \ast p \leq .05; \ast\ast p \leq .01$, one-tailed test

Table 4.2: Comparing Associations between Interest and Participation by Race (Regression Analyses)
activism by more than one and one-half participatory acts ($\beta = 1.65; p = .012$). As expected, the model for Blacks yielded a slightly smaller coefficient than the model for Whites, which further suggests that the interest-participation correlation is smaller for Blacks. A test of equality between regression coefficients confirms a statistically meaningful difference between Blacks and Whites regarding how strongly they relate their political interest to political action ($z = 2.64; p \geq |z| = .047$).

The results in Table 4.2 paint a fuller picture of what I see as a moderated interaction among race, interest, and participation, but the small sample for Blacks concerns me. There are only 158 African Americans in the 2004 ANES, and I cannot say with confidence that the lack of a larger sample does not bias the results. An ideal test of the moderator hypothesis would be to re-create Verba, et al.’s 2SLS model of political participation including variables for race. This technique is statistically similar to separating participation models by racial groups, but it allows me to work with a larger sample. I re-specify the participation model in Table 4.3. The first column (Model 1) of this table reports the second stage of a 2SLS regression model with the original variables for resources, psychological engagement, and political recruitment and an additional variable for race, coded 1 if the respondent is Blacks and 0 if the respondent is White. The second column (Model 2) includes all the variables in Model 1 plus an interaction terms for race and political interest.$^{73}$

The results for Model 1 mirror those in Table 4.2. Education, free time, and civic skills are participation-facilitating resources. Political interest, cynicism and partisan strength are psychological spurs to political action, and respondents are more likely to take part in politics if elites recruit them. As noted elsewhere in the dissertation,$^{73}$

$^{73}$To create the interaction terms, I normalized the political interest variable to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of roughly 1.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race (1 = Black)</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>-0.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.145)</td>
<td>(0.145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education (1 = Beyond College)</td>
<td>0.283⁺</td>
<td>0.381⁺</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.185)</td>
<td>(0.185)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income (1 = Top Percentile)</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Time (1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.672**)</td>
<td>0.681**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Skills Index (1 = Highly Skilled)</td>
<td>1.240**)</td>
<td>1.222**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship (1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.163)</td>
<td>(0.185)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest (1 = Strong Interest)</td>
<td>1.535**)</td>
<td>1.665**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.208)</td>
<td>(0.224)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Information (1 = Very Knowledgeable)</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.084</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.224)</td>
<td>(0.225)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Government (1 = Strong Trust)</td>
<td>-0.430⁺</td>
<td>-0.445⁺</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Efficacy (1 = Strong Efficacy)</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>-0.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Efficacy (1 = Strong Efficacy)</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship (1 = Strong ID)</td>
<td>0.333⁺</td>
<td>0.325⁺</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.157)</td>
<td>(0.157)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Index (1 = Highly Recruited)</td>
<td>0.870**)</td>
<td>0.858**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.154)</td>
<td>(0.154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race * Political Interest</td>
<td>-0.810⁺</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.415)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.361</td>
<td>-0.421⁺</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.253)</td>
<td>(0.255)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
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<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td>0.312</td>
<td>0.324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2004 National Election Study

Note: Table entries are Two-State Least Squares (2SLS) regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p \leq .10;$ *$p \leq .05;$ **$p \leq .01,$ one-tailed test

Table 4.3: The Effect of Race on the Association between Political Interest and Political Participation
race has no significant effect on political participation, a finding that corroborates the idea that Blacks and Whites are equally politically active once we account for differences in resources, engagement, and recruitment.

The interpretation for the interactive model (Model 2) is slightly different from that of Model 1. Consider the following example, were “\( P \)” (political participation) is a function of “\( R \)” (respondents’ race) “\( I \)” (political interest) and the interaction of race and interest (“\( R \times I \)”).

\[
P = f(I + R + I \times R)
\]

The coefficient for \( I \) estimates the relationship between \( P \) and \( I \), if \( R = 0 \). Put differently, this coefficient tells you what the relationship between political interest and political participation would be if the respondents were White. Since political participation is the dependent variable, and the key independent variable in Model 2 is the interaction between race and political interest. If this interaction is negative and significant, then you have support for the moderator hypothesis. This would mean that interest and race interact to predict participation. The interaction term (“\( R \times I \)” ) shows the relationship between \( P \) and \( I \), if \( R = 1 \) (if the respondents were Black). Looking at Model 2, we see that interacting race and interest produces a negative and significant coefficient (\( \beta = -0.81; p = .101 \)). Like the previous results, the patterns in Table 4.3 show that the correlation between interest in political and political participation is indeed different (and in this case, smaller) for Blacks than it is for Whites.
4.4 Discussion

The relationship between political interest and political action is a foregone conclusion in the political involvement literature. Scholars treat it as a given that politically interested citizens are more active than uninterested ones, and the literature implies that the interest-participation connection works similarly for both racial groups. This chapter argues for a more careful analysis of the association between political interest and political participation. It reviews the minority politics literature to show that Blacks and Whites relate their political interest to political action differently, and it offers evidence showing that race shapes (or moderates) the relationship between political interest and political participation.

The first set of analyses examines racial differences in the strength of association between interest in politics and political participation. I find that the correlation between political interest and political participation is consistently stronger for Whites than it is for Blacks. This pattern holds true across different surveys, and it even emerges in over-time analyses.

Taking the most recent of my surveys, the 2004 ANES, the second set of analyses study racial differences in the interest-participation relationship using multiple regression. Table 4.1 confirms the longstanding conclusion that political interest has a strong and positive impact on activism. This pattern holds for both racial groups, which suggests a main effect for interest and participation. Likewise, Table 4.2 demonstrates that there are no significant racial differences for the main effect of race on political participation. However, one of the most fascinating findings in Chapter 4 is that the interaction of race and political interest has a significant impact on political participation: the bottom of Table 4.2 tells us that, holding other variables constant,
the effect of political interest on political action is considerably stronger for Whites than it is for Blacks. Taken together, these results suggest that Blacks are more politically active than one would expect given their obvious disadvantages. Blacks participate in politics on levels that are comparable to those of Whites despite the fact that Blacks have fewer socioeconomic resources and less psychological motivation.

By studying the interaction of race, interest in politics, and political participation, this chapter tests the limits of the conventional wisdom of the interest-participation relationship. Such a test was long overdue, for political involvement scholars have been amassing “puzzling” evidence on the relationship between psychological and behavioral involvement: particularly, how could minority groups be as active as they are when their economic and psychological positions would suggest they would be inactive. Up to this point, political involvement scholars have not analyzed to these puzzles systematically. On the one hand, some dismiss the evidence from minority involvement literature as atypical, treating these anomalies as the exception(s) that confirm the rule. Others see the findings of the minority involvement literature as contradicting (or even invalidating) the mainstream (White) assumptions about political engagement and political action.

A moderate viewpoint should counterbalance these extremes. The minority literature differs not because minority politics is aberrant but because minorities are not Whites and do not behave as Whites. The mainstream literature is too rich and empirically grounded to be dismissed in light of conflicting evidence. I propose that both lines of research inform one another, for there is obviously some truth in both literatures. Particularly, the mainstream research on political involvement is correct when it concludes that political interest is a powerful motivator of political
action. This finding holds true across racial, ethnic, and gender groups and no matter how political interest is measured. Likewise, the minority research on political involvement is correct in showing that mainstream assumptions do not apply to all groups. If it did, then minority groups, who have and continue to lag behind Whites in socio-demographic psychological, and representational resources, would never be able to involve themselves in politics as well as they do. As mentioned in Chapter 2, political interest is a measure of individual-interest, and group interest (conceptualized and measured as group consciousness) is much more important to minority participation than self-interest is. Group consciousness allows Blacks to compensate for their lack of resources, their lower levels of psychological engagement, and their decreased chances of being mobilized by elites in their path to participation.

The analyses in this chapter bring us closer to reconciling the results from the minority involvement literature with those of the mainstream literature. By exploring how race conditions the interest-participation relationship, I am actually elaborating on the existing theories by showing how race fits into conventional discussions about political involvement. Scholars in the mainstream and minority politics literatures often work in isolation. Such disciplinary sectionalism prevents the spread of ideas and, in the case of political involvement can lead to researchers making different, and seemingly irreconcilable, conclusions. Only though merging the conventional with the minority politics literatures can we repair these disciplinary fissures, and only by blending these programs of research can we determine why citizens become involved in politics.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Looking Back

I have written numerous papers on race. Focusing on the African American experience allows me to take up a variety of topics, and I characterize my work as progressing from disillusionment to disengagement, from disengagement to political engagement, and from engagement to political interest. My intellectual biography helps me to explain how my current project complements my past research.

My original research interest was disillusionment, a topic of particular relevance to race scholars (see Dawson 2001; Cose 1993; Hochschild 1995; Sniderman and Piazza 2002). Unfortunately, most of the literature on disillusionment rests on anecdotal evidence and has yet to link disillusionment to political involvement. In an attempt to study disillusionment’s relation to participation, my previous work examined disillusionment as a sign of [dis]engagement, a psychological deterrent to taking part in politics. I once reasoned that disillusionment has an indirect effect on political behavior; it shapes the way in which citizens evaluate the political system, and these evaluations determine whether or not citizens enter politics. Drawing on Michael C. Dawson’s Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies (2001), I found that disillusionment among Blacks flows from the belief

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that American race relations remain unfair despite the rhetoric of racial equality. This disillusionment among Blacks did not significantly affect their levels of political activism, but it was strongly related to their support for Black ideologies, especially Black Nationalism. I am working on several projects that explore the association between Blacks’ disillusionment with American race relations and their support for Black Nationalism. My preliminary results suggest that disillusionment with race relations and support for Black Nationalism are mutually dependent. In other words, some of the processes that shape disillusionment contribute to support for Black Nationalism.

My initial research on disillusionment succumbed to what at the time seemed to be an insurmountable challenge: I did not know how to characterize disillusionment. In fact, the main criticism of my earlier work was that I had not distinguished disillusionment from other forms of political disengagement, like trust in government or political efficacy. While searching for a definition of disillusionment, I realized that my fascination reflected a broader curiosity about political engagement; my notion of political disillusionment was analogous to what social scientists describe as political apathy. This discovery paved the way for my current research. This dissertation is the culmination of my scholarly development.

The original title of my dissertation was “The Impact of Race on the Magnitudes, Correlates, and Participatory Consequences of Political Interest.” Although I prefer the current, shorter version, the old title better explains the intent of my research. Throughout this dissertation, I argued that people’s race influences how interested they are in politics (the magnitude of their interest), why they take an interest in politics (the correlates of political interest), and how strongly they connect their
interest to political action (the participatory consequences of political interest). As I explain below, the findings of the dissertation are consistent with these arguments.

5.1.1 Overview of Findings

To synthesize the major findings, I return to Figure 1.1, which in many respects, structures the dissertation. In my introduction, Figure 1.1 organized the literature on race and political involvement. In later chapters, I used this figure to test the expected relationships between race, interest in politics, and political behavior. When used as an analytical rather than a descriptive tool, Figure 1.1 specifies four theorized paths connecting race to psychological and behavioral involvement. Path A is between race and interest. Path B is between interest and participation. Path C is between race and participation, and Path D covers the intersection of race and interest and participation.

The first two chapters dealt with political interest as a dependent variable. Chapter 2 was about interest alone, and it took up the challenge of measuring political interest. In this chapter, I examined the effects of changes in question order on self-reported interest levels in the 1952 through 2004 American National Election Studies (ANES). Experimental research on political interest suggests that interest in political campaigns is higher when respondents get such survey questions after questions about voting. The experimental literature also shows that general political interest is lower when such questions follow questions about political knowledge. I content analyzed the 1952 – 2004 ANES questionnaires to determine what years 1) campaign interest questions preceded voting items and 2) general interest questions followed knowledge items. I used information from the content analysis to examine the effect
of question ordering on over-time changes in campaign and general interest. I found that subtle changes in questionnaire design do not bias the interpretation of political interest trends as much as the experimental literature suggests, and I then explored whether these trends differ across racial groups (Path A).

Chapter 3 uncovered racial differences in political interest, where Whites expressed more interest in politics than Blacks did. To explain this pattern, I applied Danigelis’ (1978) political climate theory of Black political participation to the study of political interest. Danigelis argues that over-time changes in America’s racial tolerance (what he calls America’s [racial] political climate) determines Blacks levels of political involvement. To measure political climate, I used Stimson’s (2004) composite index of aggregate support for racially redistributive policies. The analyses in Chapter 3 showed that Blacks’ interest in politics changes with the political climate: Blacks are more politically interested when the climate is racially tolerant, and Blacks are less attentive to politics when the climate is racially intolerant. Understanding these climate changes helps to bring harmony to the disorderly literature on racial differences in political involvement.

The connections between Path B (political interest and political participation) and Path C (race and political participation) are firmly established and therefore not covered in the dissertation. Chapter 4 focused on the less studied topic of Path D, the link between race, interest in politics and political action. Specifically, this chapter explored the effect of race on political interest as an independent variable predicting political participation. Using data from the 2004 ANES, Chapter 4 reveals that the interaction of race and political interest has a fascinating impact on political activism: the strength of the relationship between political interest and political participation
is significantly weaker for Black respondents than it is for White respondents. The consistency of this interaction lends evidence to the idea mentioned in Chapter 4 that Blacks are “doing more with fewer resources.” Recent research shows that, despite their limited access to demographic resources and their lower levels of psychological motivation Blacks participate comparably to Whites.

I remain cautious about inferring too much from the available data; however, my evidence of racial differences in political interest fits nicely within the context of the “political reality” thesis, which argues that Blacks and Whites have different socio-political realities that influence their evaluations of the government (see Chapter 1). Given Blacks’ history of economic and political disadvantage, it makes sense that Blacks and Whites would differ in their expressions of political interest. Viewed through the lens of unequal political realities, the White-over-Black gap in political interest levels seems logical: Blacks claim that they are less connected to politics because they are in fact politically marginalized. The degree to which Blacks feel marginalized, and the ability of demographic, attitudinal, and contextual factors to explain the race gap, depends on racial context (in this case, the political climate). The political reality framework can also explain why the connection between interest and participation is weaker for Blacks than it is for Whites. As noted in Chapter 4, there is a consensus in the literature on race politics that Blacks’ activism is highest when Blacks have the proper balance of political distrust and political efficacy. The distrust-efficacy hypothesis paints a fuller picture of Black activism, for it suggests that Blacks can overcome both economic and psychological barriers to activism when they believe their political involvement will lift the race.
5.1.2 Implications

The big picture questions refer not to the research itself but to the implications of this research: Who cares? Political scientists have gotten by just fine without concerning themselves with interest in politics. Why should they start now? My modest response is that “we should all care.” There are serious implications of studying race and political interest, for, despite their centrality, both topics have contentious histories in the participation literature.

For example, interest in politics is a major predictor of political participation, but there is relatively little research on political interest for several reasons. Political interest, a subjective political attitude, is poorly defined and therefore more difficult to quantify than objective concepts like income and education (Abramson 1983). Likewise, it is easier to say that demographic standing comes causally prior to participation. It is more difficult to claim that political interest causes political action because political action might also cause political interest. Furthermore, research sometimes blurs the distinction between psychological and behavioral political involvement, making it difficult to isolate the effects of interest and participation. In addition, some scholars trivialize the role of political engagement more generally, arguing that it is more distressing to say that people do not participate politically because they can’t or because no one asked than to say that non-participation is a sign that people simply do not want to take part in politics.

Essentially, the first two criticisms suggest that scholars hesitate to study political engagement because it is tricky to do so. These are damning but not devastating censures, for I see the measurement difficulties, the issues of causality, and the conceptual confusion of political interest as opportunities for continuing research, not
excuses for avoiding it. The third critique—that political engagement generally, and political interest particularly, are less important than other, more crucial explanations for participation—is much tougher to dismiss. Some believe that attributing non-participation to disengagement is tantamount to blaming citizens for not taking part in politics (see Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Others remind us that institutional barriers to participation persist and that elites continue to recruit voters selectively (Leighley 2001). But these ideas do not overturn the fact that many Americans offer disengagement as their main reason for abstaining from politics (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Scholars must consider the importance of engagement because many people, despite having the resources and the invitation, are simply not emotionally or psychologically attached to politics. Marcus, Newman, and MacKuen (2000, 82) note that it is “enormously” important that citizens involve themselves in politics, and organizations like the National Alliance for Civic Education (NACE) express with a sense of urgency that all Americans, especially the young, understand the importance of Democracy and take part in America’s ongoing attempt to approach its democratic ideals. These ideas provide further evidence that political engagement plays a non-trivial role in explaining political behavior.

Race meets a similar challenge in the participation literature. The lack of research on the topic suggests that race is not an important determinant to political interest. My dissertation examines this assumption, and I find that, rather than having a minimal impact, race plays a key role in the study of political interest. I marshal some evidence showing that Blacks and Whites are differentially connected to politics, but I am concerned about how others will interpret these findings. The evidence presented here does not imply that Blacks care less about politics than do Whites, nor does it
hint that Whites are somehow more politically minded. Such interpretations run the risk of chastising Blacks for their political disengagement, or, worse yet, portraying Blacks as helpless victims of political exclusion. Conversations with colleagues helped me to understand that Blacks may use their political voices in ways that may not fall under traditional definitions of political involvement.

That said, there is an obvious “disconnect” between African Americans and their government. In a society where all citizens should have equal access to politics, then this disconnection speaks to the broader issue of democratic fairness. Rather than assume that Blacks are “less interested than are Whites,” it may be the case that Blacks pay selective attention to politics; Blacks may follow politics when politics is most relevant to them. This line of reasoning resonates with the racial divide literature, which shows that Blacks and Whites have different political foci. In 2002, Andrea Louise Campbell found that, among the elderly citizens who earned lower incomes were most involved in social security policies than senior citizens with higher incomes—an idea that reverses the logic that political engagement rises with socio-economic status. Her research lends credence to the claim that minority groups (whether they are based on race, ethnicity, gender, or age) connect differently to politics. The goal, it seems, is not to insist that minority groups “speak up” or “speak differently,” but for the government to communicate more clearly with these groups.

5.2 Looking Ahead

In the last section, I discussed the origins of my research. In this section, I reflect upon its future.
5.2.1 Scholarly Contributions

This dissertation will contribute to the study of political involvement. Much of what we know about the role of race on political involvement comes through speculation rather than research. My work is an exception. The immediate goal of my dissertation is to study racial differences in political interest, but my fascination with political interest extends beyond race, for I want to learn about political involvement as a phenomenon. As mentioned in Chapter 1, inequalities in political involvement get to the heart of the issue of political representation, and it is my sincere hope that this research will prove useful to those concerned with mobilizing historically marginalized segments of the American populace.

My work can enrich the study of participation, but one of the key contributions of my dissertation is that it will reinvigorate the research on political interest. The study of political interest progressed in two stages. The first stage lasted from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s, and the research tested the connection between interest in politics and political activism. The second stage started in the mid 1980s and dealt mainly with the perceived decline in political interest. Very little has changed in the interest literature in the past two decades. Where others see a fallow field, I see an opportunity for continued research. I envision myself spending the next decade cultivating this field. I hope that future researchers will include my works in their discussions of the third phase of scholarship on political interest.

5.2.2 Limits of the Study

Any study that relies on the secondary analyses of survey data is bound to suffer from problems, many of which could have been avoided if the researcher had the
means to run his or her own survey. My dissertation deals with national-level racial
differences in political interest, and, given my budgetary and time constraints, it
would have been impossible to replicate a large sample probability survey as grand
as the American National Election Study, the NORC/General Social Survey, or the
American Citizen Participation Study. I make use of data from these polls with full
knowledge that I must accept this data “as is.”

One survey-related limitation is the pre-existing measures of political interest.
The ANES interest items have fewer response categories (three for campaign interest,
and four for general interest) than the traditional seven-point attitude scales of most
political surveys, and I am sure that finer measures would have yielded cleaner results.
Also, in Chapter 3 I borrow heavily from Stimson’s estimate of racial policy mood,
a measure that extends from 1956 to 2000. While it serves its purpose well, further
analyses would extend Stimson’s measure to the present. Finally, in Chapter 4 I
complain about the difficulties of finding measures of group consciousness that are
comparable across racial groups. In fact, the lack of survey items measuring Whites’
group consciousness reflects the idea debunked by critical race theorists that Whites
represent America’s cultural default and therefore need no group consciousness. I
would like to replicate the results of that chapter by using my own survey that contains
an expanded measure of group consciousness asked of all respondents.

Another limit to this study is that focuses on Black-White differences in political
interest. I made the decision early to limit the analyses to these two groups, and I have
never been comfortable with it. Because of my training in multicultural politics, it is
difficult for me to eschew the question of whether the dissertation findings generalize
to other minority groups. In later versions of my dissertation research, I plan to
compare Whites’ expressions of political interest to those of women, Latinos, and Asians.

5.2.3 Avenues for Future Research

Of course, my immediate goal is to publish this dissertation. Many of the technical articles on political interest (and virtually all the articles written by George Bishop et al.) appeared in Political Behavior. I would like to develop my work in Chapter 2 on the effect of question order on the [mis]interpretation of political interest trends and couch it within the Bennett v. Bishop, et al. debate. Because of the journal’s history of publishing such work, Political Behavior is the logical place for me to submit my first post-dissertation manuscript. I have presented many versions of Chapters 3 and 4 at the National Conference for Black Political Scientists. My chapter on the racial gap in political interest was well received, and reactions to my chapter on race as a moderating variable have been equally positive. Because of this support, I realize that these chapters are the foundation of a book dealing extensively with racial differences in the causes and effects of political interest.

A potential article and book project are huge endeavors, but I have even more ambitious plans. My original dissertation sought to examine the oft-cited but under-theorized relationship between political interest and political participation. There is an enormous body of public opinion research confirming the link between interest in politics and political activism. The underlying assumption is that political interest “causes” political action. However, the evidence borne out from this research is non-experimental and thus can only show a correlation between interest and participation. In addition, this literature has yet to explore the idea that participation
"causes" political interest, a possibility mentioned by democratic theorists and social psychologists but never tested.

To understand the causal mechanisms in this relationship, I plan to conduct two sets of experiments. For the first set of experiments, I plan to manipulate subjects’ interest in politics and track their participation levels. The purpose is to confirm that political interest has a strong and independent effect on political activism. Conversely, the second set of experiments will manipulate subjects’ participation levels and track their levels of political interest. These experiments will determine whether taking part in politics can pique a person’s interest in politics. The results from these experiments may prove that political interest and political participation are reciprocally related: On the one hand, being highly interested in politics causes a person to be more politically active. On the other hand, being highly active in politics causes a person to be more politically interested.

I will pursue these and many other ideas after the dissertation. I will be joining the faculty at Florida State University this fall, and I have the support of the Department of Political Science and the College of Social Sciences to establish these programs of research.
APPENDIX A

ITEMS USED IN STIMSON’S INDEX OF RACIAL POLICY ATTITUDES

Survey Organization: ANES

Topic: Aid to Minorities
Question Wording: Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of Negroes and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any effort to help minorities because they should be expected to help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

Topic: Busing
Question Wording: There is much discussion about the best way to deal with racial problems. Some people think that achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools outside their neighborhoods. Others think that letting children go to their neighborhood schools so important that they oppose busing. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

Topic: Equal Access to Public Accommodations
Question Wording: As you know, Congress passed a bill that says that [Black] people should have the right to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, just like anyone else. Some people feel that this is something the government in Washington should support. Others feel that the government should stay out of this matter. Have you been interested enough in this to favor one side over another? [If yes] Should the government support the right of [Black] people to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, or should it stay out of this matter?
Topic: Fair Treatment in Jobs (Long Version)

Question Wording: Some feel that if Negroes are not getting fair treatment in jobs the government in Washington ought to see to it that they do. Others feel that this is not the federal government’s business. Have you had enough interest in this to favor one side over the other? [If yes] How do you feel? Should the government in Washington see to it that [B]lack people get fair treatment in jobs or is this not the federal government’s business?

Topic: Fair Treatment in Jobs (Short Version)

Question Wording: If Negroes are not getting fair treatment in jobs and housing, the government should see to it that they do (Agree/Disagree)

Topic: Help Minorities

Question Wording: Some people think that the government in Washington should make every effort possible to improve the social and economic position of Negroes and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any effort to help minorities because they should be expected to help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

Topic: Openness to Residential Diversity

Question Wording: Some people say that Negroes should be allowed to live in any part of town they want to. How do you feel? Should Negroes be allowed to live in any part of town they want to or not?

Topic: School Segregation

Question Wording: Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that [W]hite and Negro children are allowed to go to the same schools. Others claim that this is not the government’s business. Have you been concerned enough with this question to favor one side over the other? [If yes] Do you think the government in Washington should see to it that [W]hite and [B]lack go to the same schools, or stay out of this area, as it is not its business?
Survey Organization: CBS-NYT

Topic: Affirmative Action

Question Wording: Do you believe that where there has been job discrimination against [B]lacks in the past, preference in hiring or promotion should be given to [B]lacks today?

Survey Organization: Gallup

Topic: Integration Happening Too Fast

Question Wording: Do you think the [current presidential] Administration is pushing racial integration to fast, or not fast enough?

Survey Organization: Harris

Topic: Affirmative Action (Education/Employment)

Question Wording: Now let me read you some statements about affirmative action programs in education and employment. For each, tell me if you agree or disagree. After years of discrimination, it is only fair to set up special programs to make sure that women and minorities are given every chance to have equal opportunities in employment and education.

Topic: Affirmative Action (Women/Minorities)

Question Wording: Do you favor or oppose federal laws requiring affirmative action programs for women and minorities in employment, provided there are no rigid quotas?

Survey Organization: NORC/GSS

Topic: Busing

Question Wording: In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of (Negro/[B]lack) and [W]hite children from one district to another?

Topic: Help Blacks

Question Wording: Some people think that ([B]lacks/Negroes) have been discriminated against for so long that government has a special obligation
to improve their living standards. Others believe that government should not be giving special treatment. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

**Topic:** Spending to Improve Conditions of Blacks  
**Question Wording:** ... Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on... improving the conditions of [B]lacks?

**Survey Organization:** Roper

**Topic:** Spending on Assistance to Blacks  
**Question Wording:** Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on... assistance to [B]lacks?

**Topic:** Ghettos, Race, and Poverty  
**Question Wording:** I’m going to show you a list of problems, and I’d like you to tell me if each is something the government should be making a major effort on now, or something the government should be making some effort on now, or something not needing any particular government effort now... Trying to solve the problems caused by ghettos, race, and poverty?

**Survey Organization:** Trendex

**Topic:** Aid to Minorities  
**Question Wording:** ... [Would you] like to see the government do more, less, or do about the same amount as they have been on... Helping minority groups?


