Barriers to Democracy: Voter Suppression and the Mobilization of Black Voters

by

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Dedication

To all the blooming Black girls who came before, who carried me during, and who I will carry in the future. I love us deep.

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Thank you all.

With love,

Dr. Tangier Davis

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Abstract

The United States is a representative democracy, meaning that citizens vote to elect officials who represent them at the state level (i.e., house of representatives and senate), in the electoral college, and at the executive level (i.e., the President). Consequently, votes hold a significant amount of power, as they affect who leads the government and what decisions they make around policy and the political agenda. Due to the power of voting, researchers in both psychology and political science have explored facets of voting behavior, assessing what motivates an individual to vote and the factors that affect who they choose to vote for. However, little of the extant literature has centered Black people in their exploration, resulting in a limited understanding of the factors that affect Black voting behavior. This dissertation addresses this gap by exploring the following research questions: (1) How has Black people's socio-historical position effected their decision to vote?; (2) To what extent, if any, does social status explain variation in Black voter turnout?; (3) Is the relationship between social status and voting explained by political engagement and awareness of inequality?; (4) What are the mechanisms through which system-based factors (i.e., voter registration laws) and institution-based factors (i.e., unions, schools) mobilize/demobilize Black voters? To this end, in chapter 1, I provide a historical overview of Black people's experience with system-based disenfranchisement and mistreatment in the United States to clarify our understanding of their political reality. In chapter 2, I build a theory of Black voting outcomes that is informed by prior theory and research, in particular the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM). I posit that for Black people, social status (e.g.,

education, SES) predicts their decision to vote in an election and that this relationship is influenced through their political engagement and awareness of inequality. I also introduce structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors and suggest that the strength of the relationship between political engagement and awareness of inequality depends on a constituent's experience with these mobilization factors. Finally, in chapter 3, I test my proposed model and data from the American National Election Studies. This research is important because centering the Black voter will give insight into how systemic voter suppression effects Black voter turnout, which has implications for the priorities of those who have the structural power to address these experiences and improve the political access of Black people across the U.S.

Chapter 1 Introduction

"Our ability to participate in government, to elect our leaders and to improve our lives is

contingent upon our ability to access the ballot. We know in our heart of hearts that voting is a

sacred right—the fount from which all other rights flow." — Stacey Abrams

In the United States, voting is a form of communication between citizens and their

government. Votes can determine political leadership and agendas, as well as policies that shape

American lives (Dalton, 2008; Lee et al., 2004). Because of its power, researchers across

disciplines have extensively explored voting behavior (e.g., whether an individual votes, who

they vote for; Rule, 2014), and researchers have introduced enlightening theoretical models of

voting behavior that have helped us to gain some understanding of what precedes and influences

political participation, including voter turnout (Downs, 1957; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). The Civic

Voluntarism Model (CVM) is one such model, introduced by Verba et al. (1995), which posits

that voter turnout is predicted primarily by three factors: access to resources, political

engagement, and recruitment. The model provides an important theoretical basis for

understanding the decision-making process behind voting, as the CVM suggests that motivation

is not an individualized factor, but rather something that is contextualized within the social

reality of the citizen (Kim & Khang, 2014). For example, the model highlights that access to the

resources that motivate political engagement varies across social groups, so that those with more

privileged identities also have more access to these resources. This contribution to the literature,

and the resulting empirical evidence that supported this theory, has informed much of our

understanding around voter turnout (Francia & Orr, 2014; Kim & Khang, 2014; Kusumarani & Zo, 2019; Strömblad & Bengtsson, 2017). However, the CVM aims to provide a general model of turnout and stops short of theorizing about factors that are specific to particular social groups (Budros, 2013; Kidd et al., 2007; Ochs, 2006; Taylor, 2010). This presents an opportunity for further study and theorization, as Black Americans have experienced and continue to experience oppression in the United States that informs their social positionality and uniquely influences their group-level political attitudes and political decisions. Therefore, a model of voter turnout developed specifically for understanding the Black voter is valuable and needed.

Positionality refers to the way in which socially constructed identities like race, gender, and class work together to impact how Black people, as a group, understand and engage with the world (Parsons, 2008). As Hill Collins explains, "[e]very social group has a constantly evolving worldview that it uses to order and evaluate its own experiences" (2000, p. 10). Consider Black people, who occupy a unique position in the United States due to historic/continuing structural and interpersonal discrimination and oppression (e.g., de jure disenfranchisement, disproportionate incarceration, and government surveillance; Acharya et al., 2015; Harvey, 1993; Hench, 1997; Jones et al., 2012; Lerman & Weaver, 2014; Shineman, 2020). The disempowerment that Black people experience, particularly in the political realm, has been found to make the group more politically cynical (i.e., mistrustful of the government; Southwell, 2010; Taylor, 2010) and lowers their political efficacy (i.e., how much control they feel that they have over the government; Abramson, 1972; Mangum, 2003)—factors that have been found to impact political participation. Thus, positionality informs experience, perceptions, and behavior, and considering this is important when developing an understanding of political behavior (Philpot & Walton, 2007; Philpot & White, 2010). As such, the goal of this dissertation is to develop a

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model of Black voter turnout that builds upon the theoretical framework detailed in the CVM, but also introduces several factors that are important to understanding the Black voter, namely social status, awareness of inequality, and structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors.

Voting is not the only form of political engagement that can lead to a more equitable society. However, I have chosen to focus on voting turnout in this dissertation because it is one of the most influential forms of political participation and one of the most clearly measured, meaning I could directly track and assess voting turnout in a population. Examining the Black voter was of particular interest for several reasons. First, Black people have the potential to be a powerful voting bloc. They make up 13% of the population of eligible voters, and one-third of eligible Black voters reside in battleground states where their votes can sway elections (Budiman, 2020). Indeed, in 2008 and 2012, Black voters had turn-out that was on par with white voters, and they were an important component of the Democratic victories that occurred in those years (Stamm & Clement, 2016). In 2016, Black voter turnout declined and Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, won the election (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). In 2020, Black voters once again had high turnout, and the Democratic party was victorious (Wiltz, 2021). These numbers tell a story: when Black people are mobilized to vote, they are election deciders. As such, psychologists, political scientists, politicians, and policymakers should examine the factors that motivate Black voter turnout.

Examining the Black voter is also important to ensure that every U.S. citizen has political equity, or equal voice in government decisions (Guinier, 1991a; Still, 1981; Verba, 2001). As I will discuss in the next section, voter suppression has a long history in the United States (Anderson, 2018). Voter suppression impacts every person in the U.S., but communities of color are disproportionately harmed by these restrictions. This is purposeful, as voter suppression was

and is motivated by a desire to maintain institutional white supremacy, or a "political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources" (Ansley, 1989, p. 1024). In our current system, white supremacy is protected and embedded within American law, and impacts how we organize society, how we distribute resources, and who holds power (Crenshaw, 2010; Wilson, 2018). Although voting is not the only way to push for political equity, it is an opportunity to move closer to equity, since who turns out at the polls affects who is elected and the distribution of resources and power.

Again, the goal of this dissertation is to examine how Black people's political reality has impacted their relationship with voting and develop a model of voter turnout that accounts for this. As such, I will explore a series of research questions:

1. How does Black people's socio-historical position affect their decision to vote in an election?

2. To what extent, if any, does social status explain variation in Black voter turnout?

3. Is the relationship between social status and voter turnout explained by political engagement and awareness of inequality?

4. What are the mechanisms through which system-based factors (i.e., voter registration laws) and institution-based factors (i.e., unions, schools) mobilize/demobilize Black voters?

Overview

I aim to develop a model of voter turnout that accounts for Black people's socio-historical experiences. To this end, in the remainder of chapter 1, I provide a historical overview of Black people's historical and continued political history in the United States, in an effort to illuminate how their socio-historical positionality has informed their relationship with voting.

The CVM posits that the decision to vote is primarily based upon three factors: (1) resources, (2) political engagement, and (3) recruitment. With the historical overview I intend to illustrate how Black people's political and social disempowerment within the U.S. has impacted the group at each stage of the CVM, as oppression has limited their access to resources, disenfranchisement has led them to be less engaged in formal political activities, and voter suppression has often demobilized the group.

In chapter 2, I develop a theory of Black voter turnout that accounts for Black people's unique socio-political history. Specifically, I consider prior theory and research that has informed predictions of voter turnout and summarize the major tenets of the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM). I then discuss demographic differences within the determinants of turnout and describe how they might reshape our understanding of Black voting decisions, while also introducing several factors (social status, awareness of inequality, and structural/institutional (de)mobilization factors) that also influence turnout.

In chapter 3, I use data from the American National Election Studies to empirically evaluate some of the theorized relationships from the theory developed in chapter 2. Specifically, I examine RQ2–RQ4 using structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess the extent to which social status influences voter turnout, and whether this relationship works through an individual's political engagement and awareness of inequality. I also examine whether the strength of the effect of political engagement and awareness of inequality depends on the structural and institutional forms of (de)mobilization an individual encounters. This analysis will elucidate the role of social identity and context in Black people's voting turnout.

Establishing Black People's Political Reality

The political reality theory suggests that Black people's lower political engagement stems from the objective fact that Black people are politically and economically oppressed in America (Abramson, 1972). I use a political reality framework to contextualize Black people's relationship with voting and argue that Black people's positionality informs their political attitudes and engagement. To further elucidate on this argument, I provide a brief history of Black people's history with voting in the United States.[1]

Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement (1870–1965)

Each marginalized group in the United States had to fight for the right to vote. Black people's fight was unique, however, in that the group was subjected to violence and stripped of freedoms as they attempted to gain access to the polls. This is especially apparent during the Reconstruction Era, which refers to the period of time when the U.S. was reforming itself after the civil war. This period began in 1865 as the confederate states (i.e., Southern states that had seceded due to disputes over slavery) were reintegrated into the Union. The Emancipation Proclamation freed over 3 million enslaved Black people in these states, but the federal government gave no other protections to these Black people, nor did they provide any guidelines around how the states should rebuild in a way that integrated free Black people (Franklin, 1984; Suryanarayan & White, 2021). Consequently, many Southern states implemented "Black codes" as a way to continue to restrict Black people's freedom and to keep them as a cheap labor source even after slavery was made illegal. For example, in 1865 Mississippi required Black people to

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[1] I encourage you to read more about Black people's historical disenfranchisement in *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy* (Anderson, 2019).

have evidence of employment for the year every January, and they were subject to arrest if they did not or if they left that contract early (Middlemass & Smiley, 2019; Weed, 1990).

Black codes continued to pass throughout the south until the Reconstruction Act of 1867 passed, which included the 14th amendment (e.g., giving equal protection of the constitution to all people) and granted all men the right to vote in the U.S. regardless of race. In 1870, the 15th amendment was passed, promising that no citizen would be denied the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Federal troops were deployed to the south to ensure that these states were implementing these laws, and with that oversight the legislation was generally successful (Chin, 2003). Indeed, during this time, sometimes referred to as the "radical reconstruction" period, Black men were able to exercise their right to vote and even to run for office, and several Black men were elected to congress. However, Black people's increased freedom and electoral representation began to receive backlash from white people who were resentful at the disruption to the status quo. As a result, when federal troops withdrew from the south and were no longer there to enforce laws around voting access, the Jim Crow era began (Hosmer & Fineman, 1978). Between 1889 and 1908, state and local laws were passed that restricted Black people's access to voting (e.g., poll taxes, literacy tests, Grandfather clauses), and physical violence was used as well (Epperly et al., 2020; Folmsbee, 1949). As states began implementing these restrictive laws, the expansions to voting access that had been made by the 15th amendment was quickly erased as states began implementing these Jim Crow laws: for example, by 1910 Black voter registration had decreased to 15% in Virginia and to less than 2% in Alabama and Mississippi (Nieman, 2020). This rapid decrease in engagement makes it clear that system-level forces are a powerful determinant of Black people's ability to politically participate.

And indeed, Black people's disenfranchisement continued until the Civil Rights

Movement began in 1954. One of the main goals of the Civil Rights movement was to attain

voting rights and protections for Black people. Leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. John

Lewis, and Fannie Lou Hamer worked within and alongside organizations like the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to

fight for the vote. Oftentimes they were met with extreme violence from white supremacists

committed to disenfranchising these communities. One especially devastating attack has been

named "Bloody Sunday" (Pratt, 2017). On March 7, 1965, John Lewis and Reverend Hosea

Williams led hundreds of marchers on a 54-mile journey in Alabama from Selma to

Montgomery, the state capitol, where they were to demand voting and civil rights for Black

people. However, during the sojourn the marchers were blocked by white state troopers and

citizens who beat and gassed the crowd, resulting in dozens of hospitalized and injured marchers.

Bloody Sunday was widely covered by national and international news media, and the

pressure from this and from civil rights activists led the federal government to pass the Voting

Rights Act of 1965 (VRA; Bennett, 1993). The VRA gave suffrage to adult citizens of all races

and genders and attempted to address the voter suppression that Black people were experiencing

at the state and local level. For instance, the act banned literacy tests and other voting

requirements that were intended to prevent Black people from voting. The VRA did not solve all

issues of voter suppression, but it did provide Black people with a way to legally challenge

legislation that hindered their access to the poll. And the VRA seemed to be successful, as Black

voter turnout increased significantly; for example, within a year almost all Southern states had at

least 50% of Black people registered to vote (Evans et al., 2012).

However, the VRA was not a cure-all for voter suppression. While voter registration reached 50% after the legislation passed, only 59% of those registered Black voters voted in the 1968 presidential election (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). And indeed, since this legislation was passed, we still see Black voters turnout at lower rates than white voters in most elections (Ray & Whitlock, 2019). This shows that history matters. The violence and oppression that Black people were subjected to as they pursued their right to vote left its mark, and created a legacy of demobilization that still affects Black voters to this day.

Second Reconstruction to Barack Obama's Election (1965–2013)

The VRA is one of the most significant and successful voting-related pieces of legislation in U.S. history (Aiken et al., 2013). Since its passage, in some ways the VRA has been strengthened. For example, the VRA was expanded to also protect the voting rights of non-English speaking citizens and it was also extended for another 25 years in 2006 when congress passed the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, and Cesar E. Chavez Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act (Reichard, 2018). However, the VRA has not been unchallenged. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a case called *Shelby County v. Holder*. In this case, Shelby County (SC), a district in Alabama, filed a suit arguing that certain parts of the VRA were unconstitutional, and requesting an injunction against the laws. In a 5-4 ruling, the Supreme Court partly agreed with SC, striking down parts of the law that weakened the VRA (Calmes et al., 2013). For instance, after the court's decision, Texas implemented the most stringent voter ID laws in the country, which disproportionately impacted voters of color who are less likely to have the required forms of identification than their white peers (Lyman, 2013). Additionally, other states moved to restrict early voting and third-party voter registration

drives, both of which disproportionately affect people of color who commonly use these resources (Johnson, 2020).

Shelby was widely believed to be a backlash to the election of Barack Obama, the first Black president, whose election had the highest minority voter turnout in history (Lopez & Taylor, 2009). For many, President Obama's election represented a diversifying and changing country, which was scary to some (Blake, 2012). This belief is supported by the fact that *Shelby* and the myriad of laws passed since *Shelby* that further restrict voting access disproportionately impact people of color. Even though these laws are not explicitly race-based, in practice they are quite targeted: for example, people of color tend to have less of the resources needed to satisfy stringent voter ID requirements, are more likely to live in neighborhoods with less ballot locations, and more likely to work in jobs that make it difficult for them to vote while polls are open (Newkirk, 2018). Here again we see system-level efforts to disenfranchise Black voters, and the outcome of these efforts are reduced access to and turnout at the polls (Lyman, 2013).

Post-Shelby County to Present (2013–2022)

Since the *Shelby County* ruling more than 400 bills were introduced across 48 states that restrict voting in some way, and these policies continue to disproportionately impact communities of color (Johnson, 2020). The attention that voter suppression receives in the media waxes and wanes, but received national attention again in 2018, during Stacey Abrams' run for governor in Georgia. Abrams was the first Black woman gubernatorial nominee for a major party (the Democrats), and she ran against Republican Brian Kemp who was then Georgia's secretary of state. Kemp was accused of using his position as secretary of state to suppress votes and bias the election. For example, in 2018, Kemp held over 53,000 voter registration applications from being processed, preventing these people from voting; 75% of those applications belonged to

people of color. In the end, Abrams lost the election by 54,723 votes, but refused to concede because of her firm belief that Kemp did not fairly win the election (Caputo et al., 2019; Waldman, 2021).

Even after Abrams' run, voter access and suppression stayed on the national stage because of former president, Donald Trump. As the 2020 presidential election came closer, it was becoming more apparent that there was a chance that Trump would not be reelected and that his competitor, Joseph Biden, would be elected instead. In response, Trump began to raise unfounded alarms about the election being unfair and about illegal votes being cast (Funke, 2022). People of color, who have historically voted for the Democratic party, were seen as threats to Republicans. Through dog-whistles, Republican leaders made it clear that their efforts to restrict voting access was not about genuine concern for fair elections, but instead about making sure that they retained power and the status quo–which mainly benefits white Americans. For instance, Senator Lindsey Graham declared that if "Republicans don't challenge and change the U.S. election system, there will never be another Republican president elected again." (Payne, 2020).

Even though Republican officials are directly challenging Black voters, record breaking numbers of people from all groups voted in the 2020 election, which may lead some to think that voter suppression is not a true concern. However, the actual numbers from the election tell a different story. For instance, while 71% of eligible white voters voted in 2020, only 58% of non-white voters cast their ballot (Morris, 2021). Clearly, the racial gap in voting persists, and so does voter suppression, even if it looks different than it did during the Jim Crow era. For example, when challenging the election results, Donald Trump specifically targeted cities that are historically Black, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the votes and urging officials of these

primarily Black districts to refuse to certify the results of the election and disenfranchise swathes

of Black people (Summers, 2020). Further, the U.S. continues to institutionalize voter

suppression. As previously stated, in the last few years, 48 states have proposed over 400 bills

restricting voting access. An ACLU report names some of the tactics that were used in 2020

alone, which include voter registration restrictions (e.g., requiring identification or proof of

citizenship to register to vote); criminalizing voting (e.g., making it illegal to provide food and

water to voters in line at the poll, imposing harsh penalties for mistakes at the ballot box);

stripping felons of the right to vote; purging thousands of registered voters, often with no

notification to those who have been dropped; and gerrymandering (e.g., redistricting in a way

that privileges some voters and leads others to be under/misrepresented; (American Civil

Liberties Union, 2021).

As this history illustrates, the legacy of state-sanctioned voter suppression lives on. Black

people are still fighting for their right to the vote as legislation continues to pass that weakens the

existing voting protections and enacts new restrictions. Understanding this history is important,

as it sets the stage for this dissertation. Black people's experiences with voter suppression, both

in the past and in the present, create a unique political context for Black people. As Guinier

(1991b) articulated, voting access was one of the main priorities of the Civil Rights Movement,

as voting was believed to be "a vehicle for mobilizing the black community, articulating a black

social and economic agenda, and electing both authentic black and responsive white officials."

(p. 1084). For the Black community voting meant so much and yet, due to voter suppression,

remained unattainable for many within the community. Consequently, Black people either found

other ways to politically engage (e.g., via protests or other forms of activism; Bañales et al.,

2020) or became alienated from the political sphere and disengaged altogether (Manning, 2015).

As such, when examining Black voters through the lens of the CVM, it is essential that we consider the ways in which their access to resources were impacted by their oppression, how their ability to be politically engaged is stripped away by their disenfranchisement, and how voter suppression has created a continuing legacy that intentionally demobilizes this group. The aim of this dissertation is to understand the Black voter–that is, to examine the factors that influence a Black person's decision to vote or to not vote. I hope that gaining a deeper understanding will allow future researchers to develop interventions that counteract the long-lasting impact of Black disenfranchisement.

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Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Background

To frame my theory of Black voter turnout, I consider prior theory and research that has informed predictions of general political participation. First, I summarize the major tenets of the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) and discuss its relevance to turnout. Next, I discuss demographic differences within the determinants of voter turnout and describe how they might reshape our understanding of Black voting decisions. Finally, I discuss additional factors that are important to understanding Black turnout, specifically awareness of inequality and structural/institutional (de)mobilization.

The Civic Voluntarism Model

Verba and colleagues (1995), a team of political scientists, developed the Civic Voluntarism Model in the book *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. The aim of the theory was to identify factors that influenced individual political choices, such as what motivates a citizen to vote in an election. The researchers posited that interest in politics was not enough to explain voter turnout, positing that there are also social and contextual factors that have an important role in this decision. Put simply, Verba and colleagues (1995) argue that the decision to vote is predicated upon three questions: (1) Can the citizen participate (i.e., do they have the resources needed to participate)?; (2) Does the citizen want to participate (i.e., are they politically engaged)?; and (3) Has anyone asked the citizen to participate (i.e., have they been mobilized)?

Since it was published, *Voice and Equality* has been cited over 14,000 times, and used in a variety of ways that suggest the far-reaching utility of the theory. For example, the CVM has

been used to understand policy attitudes (Barkan, 2004) to explain how candidates decide to run for political office (Lane & Humphreys, 2011) and to determine the likelihood of political contact (Guo et al., 2021). The model is popular likely because it builds upon established knowledge about voting. For instance, many models of voter turnout include motivation and political engagement as an integral component of voter turnout (Harder & Krosnick, 2008; Siaroff, 2009). However, the CVM also *extends* knowledge around voter turnout with its suggestion that motivation is not an individualized factor, but rather something that is contextualized within the social reality of the citizen (Kim & Khang, 2014). The authors argue that "the motivation and capacity to take part in politics have their roots in the fundamental non-political institutions with which individuals are associated during the course of their lives." (pg. 3). In other words, social institutions and social positionality influence political behavior.

CVM Predictors of Voter Turnout

Verba and colleagues (1995) suggest that motivation to vote is determined by a citizen's access to the resources that make voting feasible, such as money, time, and civic skills. They also suggest that political engagement is not only determined by political interest, but also by party identification, political information, and political efficacy (see Figure 2.1; Kim & Khang, 2014). According to the CVM, these factors are developed throughout one's lifetime and refined in non-political environments, such as the workplace and religious institutions. They are also cumulative over the lifetime, so those who start with more access to resources and skills tend to become politically savvy more often than those with less access (Verba et al., 1995). In the following section, I will discuss these factors in more detail.

Figure 2.1 The Civic Voluntarism Model, Verba et al., 1995

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│         Resources           │
│  (Time, Money, Civic Skills) │
└─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────────┐
│     Political Engagement    │                  │      Political       │
│  (Political Interest, Efficacy,│  ──────────▶   │    Participation     │
│  Information, Partisan Identity│                 │      (Voting)        │
│         Strength)           │                  └──────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────┐
│         Recruitment         │
│ (Family, Friends, Institutions)│
└─────────────────────────────┘
```
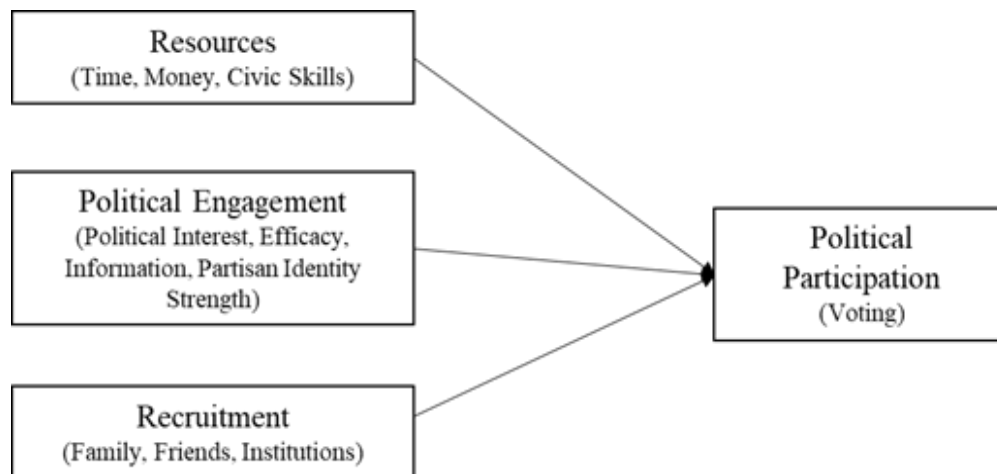
Resources

Access to resources has long been examined as a factor that influences voting, particularly in regard to socio-economic status (SES; i.e., education, income, and occupation; Lindgren et al., 2017, 2019). These studies suggest that those with higher SES levels are more likely to vote and to be politically engaged in general. In examining the mechanisms of the relationship between resources and turnout, Brady and colleagues (1995) proposed the resource model of voter turnout. This model combines rational choice theories of political engagement, which argue that individuals engage in politics to achieve their own self-interest, with SES-based models of political engagement. The model posits that higher SES leads to more political participation because it leads to an increase in time, money, and civic skills, which are resources that are particularly important in politics. The authors argue that "variations in resources flowing from social stratification enable and restrict individual [political activities]" (Brady et al., 1995, p. 272).

Research examining the importance of money, time, and civic skills as they relate to turnout has largely supported the resource model of participation. For instance, children with high socio-economic status parents are more likely to grow up to be politically active citizens than children from low SES backgrounds (Gidengil et al., 2016; Lindgren et al., 2017).

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Moreover, Polacko and colleagues (2021) found that in elections where economic inequality is not on the ballot, those from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to mobilize and vote in an election. One explanation that has been put forth for this finding is that those from lower SES backgrounds are less politically knowledgeable than those from higher SES backgrounds (Morris & Morris, 2017). Political knowledge is an important motivator for engaging in social action and pursuing political power, and as such having less knowledge can prevent an individual from politically engaging (Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996). Thus, in many instances SES can act as a barrier that hinders full political participation.

Time is also posited as an important predictive factor in voter turnout. Political scientists typically conceptualize time as the amount of free time an individual has, with the rationale being that those who have more free time are also more likely to vote because they have the freedom and ability to invest more time in learning about the elections, to physically go to vote, and to engage in politics (Harder & Krosnick, 2008). Access to free time has also been linked to SES in the literature, as many posit that those who are higher in SES are more likely to have free time because they have less demanding jobs and more access to support than those with lower SES (Verba et al., 1995). However, empirical evidence examining the relationship between time and voting has been mixed, with several studies finding that there is no relationship between reports of free time and voter turnout (Berman & Wittig, 2004). Indeed, those with less free time are just as likely to vote as those with more free time. Still, time should be considered as a resource that can impact voting, but it may be that free time is not the conceptualization that most influences turnout. Wolfinger et al. (2002) found that while having more or less free time to vote did not impact voting turnout, having a lower cost of voting (e.g., it is easy to register to vote, polls are accessible and efficient) did increase turnout. As such, it seems that how much

free time an individual has does not matter as much as how they choose to spend that free time, and they are perhaps more likely to choose to spend their time voting when the cost of turnout is low.

The last major resource discussed in the CVM are civic skills, which can be broadly defined as the ability to communicate, organize, make collective decisions, and engage in critical thinking (Kirlin, 2005). While this definition is wide in scope, Galston (2003) explains that "all education is civic education in the sense that individuals' level of general educational attainment significantly affects their level of political knowledge as well as the quantity and character of their political participation" (p. 219). As such, civic skills are developed in a variety of ways and from a multitude of sources, including school, parents, and work; for example, engaging in public speaking as part of a homework assignment or work task would develop one's communication skills, and thereby their civic skills (Verba et al., 1995).

Civic skills have an important role as a determinant of political engagement, as they impact an individual's understanding and acceptance of democratic principles, attitudes towards specific political issues, and in turn, their decision to vote (Galston, 2001; Perrin & Gillis, 2019). Civic skills have also been examined as one way to close the voting gap that exists between high and low-SES groups. For instance, Lindgren and colleagues (2019) found that increasing civic education led to an increase in voter turnout from low SES homes but did not affect turnout in high-SES homes, suggesting that civic education does indeed improve political knowledge and stimulate political interest within marginalized groups (Campbell & Niemi, 2016; Neundorf et al., 2016). This aligns with the CVM's supposition that as individuals develop enhanced civic skills, they become more aware of the benefits of their political involvement and consequently become more politically active.

Political Engagement

The second influential component of turnout proposed by Verba et al. (1995) is

psychological engagement with politics. Psychological engagement with politics is important to

consider in models of voter turnout in the United States because voting is a voluntary behavior,

so gaining insight into how psychologically engaged an individual is with politics also provides

insight on why some do or do not choose to politically participate (Kim & Khang, 2014).

According to the CVM, psychological engagement has four main components: (1)

political efficacy, which leads citizens to feel that their political participation makes a difference;

(2) political interest, which can motivate an individual to seek out and participate in political

activities; (3) political information, which reflects an individual's political knowledge; and (4)

strength of identification with a political party, which influences how a citizen votes and

encourages political engagement overall. The expectancy-value model explains the relevance of

these components, suggesting that individuals are motivated to engage in tasks based on their

expectations of success and how much they value those tasks (Levy & Akiva, 2019). In terms of

voting turnout, interest and efficacy play important roles because they affect how much attention

an individual gives a particular election and whether the citizen believes their vote efforts will be

successful. Indeed, Schulz (2005) found that these orientations are linked, with those who report

higher political interest also reporting more political efficacy. It may be that political interest is

the catalyst for seeking information related to politics, which impacts an individual's political

knowledge and the familiarity and confidence with which they are able to politically engage and

make decisions (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019).

Political party identification and political information matter as well because these factors

influence how much *value* an individual places in voting. For instance, Finkel and Opp (1991)

found that strength of political party identification reflects a concern for the outcome of the election, such that those who identify strongly with a party are also more concerned about the outcome and more likely to cast their vote (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). Further, stronger identification with the political group may also lead an individual to place more value on the group's social norms, of which voting is one (White et al., 2014). Additionally, political information reflects an individual's political knowledge, and those who are more politically informed tend to be more motivated to politically engage (Abdo-Katsipis, 2017; Amer, 2009; Jones & Dawson, 2008). In sum, having higher psychological engagement with politics often means that a citizen is more politically oriented and sophisticated, and consequently more likely to turnout to vote.

Recruitment

The last component of the CVM involves political recruitment. While an individual may be politically engaged and have ample access to resources, Verba et al. (1995) argue that they still may not actually turnout to cast their ballot unless they are asked by family, friends, political parties, or even social institutions (e.g., church; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Consistent with this argument, people who are contacted by a political group or candidate are more likely to participate in politics than those who have not been contacted (LeRoux & Krawczyk, 2014; Panagopoulos & Francia, 2009). Further, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) estimate that approximately half of the overall decline in voter turnout between the 1960s and the 1980s was due to the declining efforts of parties to mobilize potential voters, further speaking to the importance of political recruitment.

Berinsky (2005) suggests that recruitment has such an important role in voter turnout because the cognitive costs of being informed for an election are high and one of the biggest

barriers to convincing the average citizen to vote. As such, being contacted by a peer or a

political volunteer can work towards lowering the cost of voting by sharing information with

them, reminding them that they are politically efficacious, and giving potential voters the

motivation they need to become actual voters (Moseley & Stoker, 2013).

Group Differences within the CVM

One of the primary questions of this dissertation is how Black people's socio-historical

positionality affects their voting turnout, and I use the CVM as a framework to develop this

understanding. However, while this study is unique in its contributions, I am not the first to use

the CVM to explore the relationship between race and voter turnout. For instance, while

developing the CVM, Verba and colleagues (1995) considered race-based differences in the

CVM factors. They provided a descriptive analysis of the differences in access to resources,

political engagement, and recruitment. Specifically, they found no race-based differences in

access to resources, that Black people had high-to-moderate mean levels of political engagement

compared to their white and Latinx counterparts, and that Black people were more likely than

others to be recruited in certain institutions (e.g., church). This exploration of race-based

differences within the CVM is informative, but as Verba et al. themselves note, these results do

not explain the group-based variation in turn out and do not imply that race is not an impactful

factor. To clearly understand the impact of race in decisions to vote, we must center race in the

analysis and examine how socio-historical positionality can influence not only how accessible

voting is, how politically engaged an individual is, and how mobilized they are, but also the

ways in which socio-historical positionality can lead to these factors having a unique effect on

the turnout of the group.

Francia & Orr (2014) exemplify this in their study, which examined whether Latinos who were involved with unions were more likely to turnout to vote than non-Latino's who were involved in unions. They theorized that race differentially shapes the impact of the factors discussed in the CVM. For instance, they argue that for Latinos unions are a particularly powerful influence because less efforts are made to mobilize this group to be politically active due to social biases; as a result, membership in a union may provide the mobilization and education needed to increase turnout and their involvement with this institution may be impactful for their social group in ways that it is not for other social groups (Bedolla & Michelson, 2012; Michelson, 2005). And indeed, they found that union affiliation increases Latino voter registration and turnout, and in ways that are disproportionate to non-Latinos. These findings show that race can drive differences in turnout and should be centered in analyses rather than considered as one of many predictive variables, which may obscure its impact.

Additional research has examined similar questions among Black voters. For instance, using the CVM as a model of voter turnout, Slaughter (2021) assessed whether racial resilience acted as a counter to Black people's limited access to resources. In particular, Slaughter noted that because of racial trauma, Black people do have less access to resources, are less politically engaged, and are less likely to be recruited to vote. However, the author notes that despite their limited capacity to participate, Black people still turnout at higher-than-expected rates. She posits that racial resilience acts as a buttress for Black people that still encourages their turnout even in the face of resistance, and she finds support for this argument, such that Black people with more racial resilience turnout at higher rates than Black people with less resilience. This finding aligns with the central aim of the current study, which is to examine the impact of the CVM factors

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within the Black community, while also exploring additional factors that are particular to their social group that may further impact their decision to politically participate.

Building a Model of Black Voter Turnout

The aim of this dissertation is to develop a model of voter turnout that can predict Black voting behavior. Although there are valuable models of turnout that explain and predict voter turnout across the United States, only a limited number specifically examine *Black* voter turnout. Black people have a unique political reality due to their historical and continued oppression in the U.S., and that their oppression impacts their relationship with the government and political engagement in ways that differ from their non-Black peers (Abramson, 1972; Philpot & Walton, 2014). As such, I propose a model of voter turnout that builds upon the Civic Voluntarism Model, but also incorporates the political reality that Black people exist within given the history that I detailed in chapter 1.

To do this, I build a model integrating several factors that I argue are especially relevant to Black people due to their socio-historical position, namely (1) social status, (2) awareness of inequality, and (3) systematic and institutional mobilization/demobilization. I suggest that for Black people, their social status (i.e., their SES and education level) influences their political engagement and awareness of inequality, and that these two factors in turn impact turnout. However, I also posit that this latter relationship is further affected by system- and institution-based forms of political (de)mobilization (see Figure 2.2). In the following section, I delineate this model, discussing the CVM factors as they relate to Black voters and discussing the additional factors I integrate in my model.

Figure 2.2 Model of Black Voter Turnout, Theorized in this Dissertation
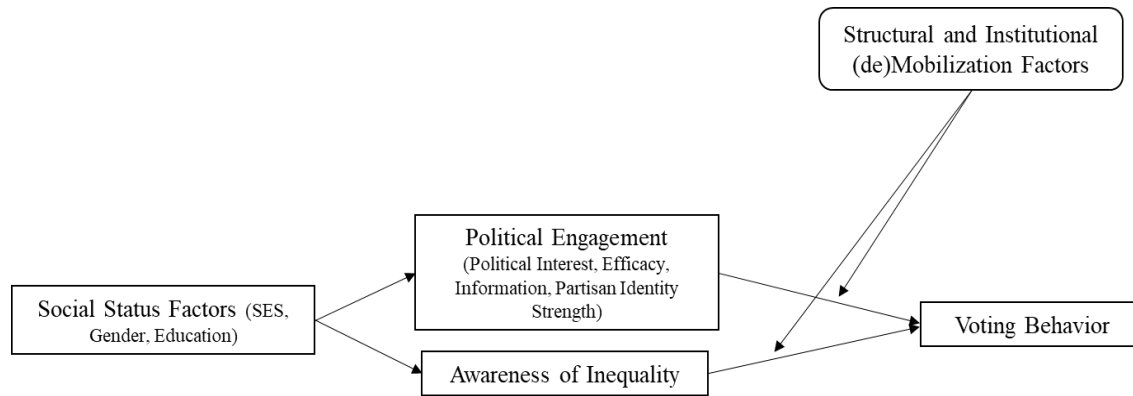
Social Status

In the CVM, the authors position resources as an antecedent to turnout, such that those with more access to resources (e.g., money, time, and civic skills) will be more likely to politically participate because the cost of voting will be lower for these individuals. However, when considering the Black voter access to resources may not provide a full explanation because the historic and continued oppression they experience has raised the overall cost of voting for the group. For example, structural inequality has limited Black people's access to wealth, as studies show that the median Black American has $251,000 less wealth than the median white American (E. Smith et al., 2022). As such, only examining resources as an antecedent to turnout may suggest that Black voters would turnout at far lower rates than their white counterparts. However, while a racial gap in voting does exist, Black people have been found to be more politically active than white people at the same SES level (Shingles, 1981). As such, resources may not explain the full story for Black voters. Perhaps broadening 'access to resources' to instead reflect social status may help to answer this question.

As such, in my theory, I examine multiple social status factors rather than solely examining resources. I introduce socio-economic status (SES) and education. Research has found that these factors predict variation in Black political behavior, and they have each been

linked to voting behavior. For example, those from higher SES backgrounds and those with more education have been found to vote at higher levels than those from lower SES backgrounds (Lindgren et al., 2019) or those with less education (Sondheimer & Green, 2010). While there are many ways to measure socio-economic status, I chose to measure SES by combining two subjective measures of education and social class. I used this approach because research suggests that how people categorize themselves affects their political behaviors and opinions, as their subjective views are influenced by their unique social context and life circumstances (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015, 2021). In all, I argue that social status, as defined by an individual's SES and education, is a distal predictive factor that impacts the more proximal predictors of turnout, such as awareness of inequality and mobilization.

H1: Social status (e.g., SES and education) will significantly predict voter turnout.

Political Engagement

In the literature, political engagement has been consistently linked to voter turnout (Fridkin et al., 2006). Social identities, in particular race/ethnicity, gender, and social class, have been found to reliably predict political engagement in U.S. citizens (Laurison, 2016; Schlozman et al., 1994; Verba et al., 1995). Specifically, citizens who are white, male, and from higher SES backgrounds tend to be more politically engaged than their minoritized counterparts. Efforts to predict and increase voter turnout within the Black community must acknowledge the race-differences between political engagement and understand the roots in order to develop a model assessing Black voter turnout. As such, in this section, I discuss the different forms of political engagement and their link to voting; I also note how and why they may differ for Black constituents so that the complex relationship between race and engagement becomes somewhat clearer.

Political Interest. Political interest is defined as a citizen's willingness to pay attention to politics (Lupia & Philpot, 2005), and it has been established as a reliable predictor of turnout (Block, 2010). In the CVM, political interest is considered a core dimension of psychological engagement with politics, perhaps because citizen's who have an interest in politics are more likely to seek out information about politics, be positively oriented towards politics, and make informed political choices (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; Prior, 2010).

Research exploring race differences in political interest have found that Black people are less politically interested than white people, perhaps because Black people's political neglect and oppression has led to a disengagement from politics (Block, 2010). From this, it may seem that political interest is not a strong motivator for Black voters. However, research examining political interest within Black people suggests that political interest is important but has a nuanced role for the group. Collins and Block (2020) explored whether Black voters in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections were motivated by political interest or by a sense of civic duty and commitment to activism. They found that while political interest was an important factor in determining Black voter turnout, its role was conditional and depended upon their feelings of civic duty. Black people were most likely to vote when they had a sense of civic duty that stems from the hardships their group endured to attain the right to vote. In other words, Black people are politically interested, but when that political interest wanes they also have a high sense of civic duty that attenuates their lower interest and still increases their likelihood to vote. Thus, it is important to consider political interest and its effect on Black voter turnout. However, disenfranchisement may have dampened the importance of political interest for Black voters; after all, if the cost of voting is high, disengagement is a likely response (Grasso & Giugni, 2022). It may be that other forms of political engagement, like a sense of civic duty, or the other

forms of engagement discussed in the CVM, matter for Black voters as much or more than political interest.

Political Efficacy. Political efficacy refers to the belief that one's political actions have or can have an impact on the government or political process (Campbell et al., 1960; Clarke & Acock, 1989). Political efficacy is a type of political attitude (Rosenberg, 1942; Stern & Ondish, 2018) and informs an individual's opinions on social issues and policies, in turn impacting their political behaviors (Mazumder, 2018). Psychologists have often used efficacy to explain how a person's belief that they *can* engage in an activity then influences whether they attempt to engage in that behavior (Netemeyer & Burton, 1990). Models of political behavior have also invoked efficacy and found that political efficacy is an important predictor of various forms of political engagement (Levy, 2013).

Research on race differences in political efficacy has shown that Black people report feeling less efficacious than white people, one of the lasting consequences of the political oppression and neglect that Black people have experienced throughout the centuries (see chapter 1; Taylor, 2008). As a result, efficacy may be a particularly important factor that affects Black voter turnout. For instance, Barreto and colleagues (2018) found that Black people with lower political and racial efficacy (i.e., belief that the government will make political change as it relates to race) were less likely to vote in the 2016 election. The authors argue that continuing social and structural oppression (e.g., police brutality, increasingly explicit forms of voter suppression) may cause Black people to feel especially inefficacious, leading them to politically disengage. Similarly, Porter (2007) examined the relationship between demographic characteristics and trust in government and found that groups who have been historically discriminated against have lower trust in the government. They suggested that their findings

were a result of Black people developing a shared social reality of government mistreatment and

mistrust that negatively orients them towards the government and impedes their political

efficaciousness. Hence, it seems that those with greater social power are more likely to have

access to resources and knowledge that allows them to feel empowered to make and create social

change and they are consequently more likely to feel politically efficacious (Yeich & Levine,

1994).

Political Information. Within the CVM, political information reflects how politically

knowledgeable an individual is (Krishna & Sokolova, 2017). Ostensibly, those who have more

political information are also more likely to develop the knowledge and skills needed to

politically participate and more capable of forming political opinions that motivate them to

participate. And indeed, political information has been empirically linked to higher voter turnout

(Abdo-Katsipis, 2017; Galston, 2003) To explain the mechanisms behind this relationship,

Kiousis and colleagues (2005) argue that those who are motivated to gather political information

are also likely motivated to actively deepen their understanding of politics and engage in

conversations that further develop their burgeoning political identity and motivates them to vote

(Jones & Dawson, 2008).

Research exploring race differences in political information has found that racial/ethnic

minorities tend to be less politically knowledgeable than white people (Verba et al., 1995). As

with other race-based differences, one of the primary theories for the political information gap is

that political information is inequitable distributed, so that those with more access to resources

are also more likely to be politically informed–and access to resources is inexorably linked to

race (Abrajano, 2015; Mondak & Anderson, 2004). As such, I theorize that Black people with a

higher social status will be more politically informed. Moreover, I also expect that those with higher political information will vote at higher rates than those with low political information.

Strength of Partisan Identity. Many political theorists believe that political party identification is a key determinant of voting behavior (Almohammad, 2016; Campbell et al., 1960). In the seminal book *The American Voter*, Campbell and colleagues (1960) propose that citizens develop a stable psychological preference for either the Republican or Democratic party (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Huddy et al., 2020). However, despite research supporting the determinative role of party identification on voting behavior, there is also evidence that voters do sometimes change their votes or their political identification (Reny et al., 2019). Perhaps because these shifts occur, the CVM discusses partisanship strength rather than party identification as the last form of political engagement that determines political participation (Verba et al., 1995). Partisanship strength describes the extent to which an individual defines themselves as a political party member, and has been found to affect their perceptions, evaluations, and actions within the political system (Hooghe & Oser, 2017). Partisanship strength also increases the likelihood that a citizen considers themselves a political stakeholder, which can motivate them to vote (Bartels, 2000; Goodman & Murray, 2007).

Using partisanship strength to understand voter turnout is particularly useful when it comes to understanding Black voting behaviors because Black people tend to homogenously identify and vote as Democrats (Butler & Broockman, 2011). As such, there is little variation within the group in terms of which party they identify with, and this would not be as powerful a predictor for this group. In line with this, McKenzie (2004) found that partisanship strength and group consciousness has a positive effect on Black voter turnout and suggests that these identities work together to create a political group identity that in turn primes and produces a

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responsiveness to group-wide civic norms (e.g., Black people vote and so should you; Democrats vote and so should you; (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; White et al., 2014). Thus, partisanship strength is likely an important aspect of Black voter turnout.

To summarize, I posit that social status (e.g., SES and education) predicts political engagement, such that those with higher social status will also be more politically engaged. I also propose that Black voters who are highly politically engaged—that is, high in political interest, efficacy, information, and partisan identification—are more likely to vote than those who are not strongly engaged.

H2: Social status will have a significant positive impact on political engagement factors (e.g., higher social status will lead to more engagement).

<p align="center">A Novel Model of Black Voter Turnout</p>

Up to this point, I have discussed the factors of the CVM that I am retaining in my proposed model of voter turnout. However, while my model builds upon the CVM, it is important to understand that the models are different. The CVM is a general model of voter turnout that was developed to understand the average voter's decision to turnout at the polls. Alternatively, the model developed in this dissertation specifically centers Black voters because I posit that the historic and ongoing oppression/disenfranchisement that Black people experience in the United States have an undeniable psycho-social effect on their voting decisions. While centering Black voters is a valuable contribution, I take the model a step further by introducing factors that I believe are uniquely relevant to Black voters' political reality. Namely, I introduce awareness of inequality and structural/institutional (de)mobilization factors. Neither of these factors have been considered in conjunction with the CVM, and their inclusion may help

researchers understand what drives race-based differences in voter turnout. I describe the theorized role of these factors in the remaining sections.

Awareness of Inequality

In the current model of voter turnout, awareness of inequality not only means that an individual is aware that inequality exists, but also that they attribute inequality to the *system* rather than to the *individual* (Seider, 2011; Watts et al., 2011). Previous research has linked awareness of inequality to political behavior, but the findings have been somewhat conflicting. On one hand, awareness of inequality has been found to impact engaging in political activities such as voting (Diemer & Li, 2011) or engaging in protests (Hope & Bañales, 2019). This link may occur because awareness of inequality can lead to the development of a critical consciousness (i.e., an awareness of inequality and a commitment to engage in work that will lead to social justice; Heberle et al., 2020; Plummer et al., 2022), which can encourage an individual to politically engage. However, the literature also suggests that awareness of inequality can lead to political cynicism (i.e., negative feelings towards and expectations of the government and politicians; Van Assche et al., 2018). Specifically, when political action does not seem to sway politicians or make an impact, an individual may begin to believe that they do not have the power to address structural inequality (Watts et al., 2011). In this case, political cynicism can lead to reduced feelings of political efficacy and cause constituents to disengage from politics.

Regardless of how awareness of inequality impacts political engagement, the literature does suggest that Black people are especially likely to be aware of inequality, perhaps because structural inequality is a part of their political reality as they must contend with different forms of discrimination and its consequences daily (Thomas et al., 2014). However, there is even

variation within Black people here, as research suggests that some Black people tend to attribute experiences of inequality to structural discrimination, while others tend to blame the individual for inequality (Kam & Burge, 2018; C. W. Smith, 2014). This shift may be the result of discrimination becoming less overt, which has caused the narrative that the United States is a post-racial society to become ubiquitous (Smith, 2014). Therefore, awareness of inequality fluctuates across Black people, and may explain variations in Black voter turnout.

Separate bodies of literature suggest that awareness of inequality can either lead an individual to develop a critical consciousness that leads to higher political engagement, or it can lead an individual to become politically cynical and to disengage. Because the exact nature of this relationship is unclear, I do not make direct hypotheses about whether more awareness of inequality causes an individual to vote or to not vote.

H3: Social status will have a significant negative impact on awareness of inequality (e.g., lower social status will lead to higher awareness of inequality).

H4: Political engagement factors will have a significant positive impact on voter turnout.

H5: Awareness of inequality will have a significant impact on voting turnout, but I have no prediction about the direction of this relationship.

Systematic and Institutional (de)Mobilization

The final components of my model are voter mobilization and demobilization. Voter mobilization encompasses those factors and forces that motivate potential voters to become actual voters (Condon et al., 2016; Jackson, 1996). Within the CVM, mobilization is discussed, but the model focuses on recruitment, a form of mobilization. Specifically, the authors suggest that even when people have sufficient interest and resources that increase their ability to vote, they are most likely to vote when someone asks them to (Verba et al., 1995). And indeed, studies

show that constituents who are contacted by a political group or candidate are more likely to participate in politics than those who have not been contacted (Nickerson, 2005; Ramírez et al., 2018). While I agree that recruitment is an important motivator for voter turnout, in my model I focus on mobilization forces rather than recruitment. Using the logic proposed by Verba and colleagues (1995), I suggest that even when Black people are sufficiently resourced and engaged, they will be most likely to vote when they are mobilized (Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2009; Enos et al., 2014; Gerber & Rogers, 2009).

Voter mobilization can take a variety of forms, including actions by campaigns, parties, or interest groups (e.g., volunteers calling potential voters; Nickerson, 2005), structural features (e.g., ease of registering to vote; Jackson, 1996), or attitudes (e.g., political partisanship; (Condon et al., 2016). Each of these factors have been shown to increase the likelihood of a constituent deciding to vote in an election and provide insight on the decision-making process of a potential voter. However, to have a complete picture of this process, it is important that models of voter turnout also consider forms of *de*mobilization. As political parties compete for votes, they often aim not only to mobilize their supporters to vote, but also to demobilize their opposition's voters (Bentele & O'Brien, 2013). Efforts to demobilize voters increase the cost of voting for constituents by creating barriers to the polls, which can discourage them from politically participating.

Voter (de)mobilization efforts often take two forms: structural or institutional. Structural forms of (de)mobilization refers to state- and federal-level policies and regulations around voting that make participating in an election more or less accessible (e.g., strict voter ID laws). On the other hand, institutional forms of (de)mobilization refers to efforts made by social institutions to either encourage or suppress turnout; for instance, churches who are politically affiliated can

motivate and mobilize their congregation to vote in an election (Djupe & Gilbert, 2006; McKenzie, 2004). Both structural and institutional (de)mobilization are particularly important to consider in models of Black voter turnout because Black people are disproportionately likely to be under-mobilized or demobilized (Norris, 2015; Ramírez et al., 2018).

Structural (de)Mobilization

This form of mobilization encompasses those factors that are either legal characteristics such as registration laws, aggregate measures of state institutional strength (e.g., local strength of the political party), or state socioeconomic status (e.g., aggregate income or education). When laws and policies are put in place that make voting more difficult, they create monetary and information costs that hinder citizens from voting, especially if they were already low in resources or less politically engaged from the start (Geys, 2006; Leighley & Nagler, 1992).

Laws that make voting difficult are not coincidental, nor are they victimless; they have roots in white supremacy and are a legal form of voter suppression (Bentele & O'Brien, 2013; Darrah-Okike et al., 2021; Montoya, 2020; Pitzer et al., 2021). these laws tend to be more prevalent in areas with greater racial diversity, which also tend to have lower levels of voter mobilization, weaker mobilizing institutions, and more barriers to voter turnout (Hill & Leighley, 1999)–none of which is incidental (Hill & Leighley, 1999). Even beyond Jim Crow laws and the weakening of the VRA (see Chapter 1), there are clear examples of ongoing efforts to demobilize Black voters that continue to this day. For example, Spalding County (Georgia) passed a law that made voting on Sunday illegal (Mena, 2022), which is a blow to Black voters as local Black churches in the county (and across the country) organize after-church transportation to the polls for their mostly Black constituents. System-based efforts to weaken the power of social

institutions have increased across the country and are a worrisome example of how systems and structures can demobilize the Black community.

H6a: Structural (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between political engagement factors and voting outcome.

H6b: Structural (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voting outcome.

Another important determinant of voter turnout to consider is institutional (de)mobilization efforts. In the current context, 'institutions' refers to political and non-political social institutions that promote civic development and engagement, such as unions, churches, or schools (Cassel, 2019; Francia & Orr, 2014; Neundorf et al., 2016). Youniss and Hart (2005) suggest that social institutions provide social (and sometimes economic) capital for the community or group that can encourage civic development even in the absence of individual resources. Union members, for example, are more likely to vote and more likely to vote democratic, suggesting that institutions influence multiple forms of political behavior (Freeman, 2003). Social institutions are so influential perhaps because these organizations have the ability to coordinate the tangible and intangible resources needed for political action, while also motivating their members to engage and participate (Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Cassel, 1999). And indeed, trust in social institutions has been linked to political opinions and actions, such that when trust decreases, citizens are less likely to politically engage, particularly when they belong to a minority group (Blankenship et al., 2021).

As such, while systemic voter suppression should be addressed to increase political engagement, it is not enough. In conjunction with addressing systemic forms of disenfranchisement, it is also imperative that community efforts be made to mobilize voters

(Barnes & Rangel, 2018; LeRoux & Krawczyk, 2014). Pillsbury and Rivera (2004) suggest that the most efficacious way to improve turnout is to develop a partnership between community-based advocacy organizations, local governments, and faith-based partnerships as the best way to build sustained and widespread voter mobilization, especially within minority communities. Consistent with this, research has found that measures of institutional strength (i.e., union membership, church attendance) are strong predictors of turnout in elections (Caldeira et al., 1985; Leighley & Nagler, 1992).

Thus, social institutions have the power to mobilize minority groups, as they provide important political (e.g., social and economic) capital that both develops civic knowledge and encourages voting within communities that traditionally have less access to these resources. But, when the social institutions are weak or not intentional in supporting minoritized groups, these groups remain demobilized. For example, contact from political parties has been found to increase constituent mobilization; however, political parties tend to focus on contacting constituents who live in battleground states (i.e., states that can be won by either Democrats or Republicans; Wong et al., 2012). This is problematic because most Black people do not live in battleground states (Ramírez et al., 2018), and are consequently less likely to be contacted by a political party. This is an institutional failure that leaves Black people politically disadvantaged and undermobilized as a voting bloc (Barreto, 2018).

H7a: Institutional (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between political engagement factors and voting outcome.

H7b: Institutional (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voting outcome.

In sum, while my model posits that political engagement and awareness of inequality work together to influence voter turnout, I also suggest that voter (de)mobilization has a vital role in that relationship. Specifically, even if a citizen is politically engaged and has a critical consciousness that raises the likelihood that they will vote, mobilization moderates this relationship, such that those who are more mobilized will be especially likely to turnout. On the other hand, for citizens who are not mobilized, the relationship between engagement/awareness of inequality and turnout will be weaker.

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Chapter 3 Method and Results

In this chapter, I test my proposed model of Black voter turnout. I theorize that social status affects political engagement and awareness of inequality; in particular, I expect that those with higher social privilege will be more politically engaged, while those with lower social status will be more aware of inequality. I also expect that political engagement and awareness of inequality will, in turn, influence Black voters' turnout. Moreover, I predict that the strength of these factors' influence will depend on the structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors they encounter during an election year. Those who are more mobilized will be more likely to vote than those who are less mobilized (see Figure 3.1). As such, I test several hypotheses in this study:

H1: Social status (e.g., SES and education) will significantly predict voter turnout.

H2: Social status will have a significant positive impact on political engagement factors (e.g., higher social status will lead to more engagement).

H3: Social status will have a significant negative impact on awareness of inequality (e.g., lower social status will lead to higher awareness of inequality)

H4: Political engagement factors will have a significant positive impact on voting turnout.

H5: Awareness of inequality will have a significant impact on voting turnout, but I have no prediction about the direction of this relationship.

H6a: Structural (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between political engagement factors and voting turnout.

H6b: Structural (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voting turnout.

H7a: Institutional (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between political engagement factors and voting turnout.

H7b: Institutional (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voting turnout.

Figure 3.1 Model of Black Voter Turnout, Examined in this Dissertation
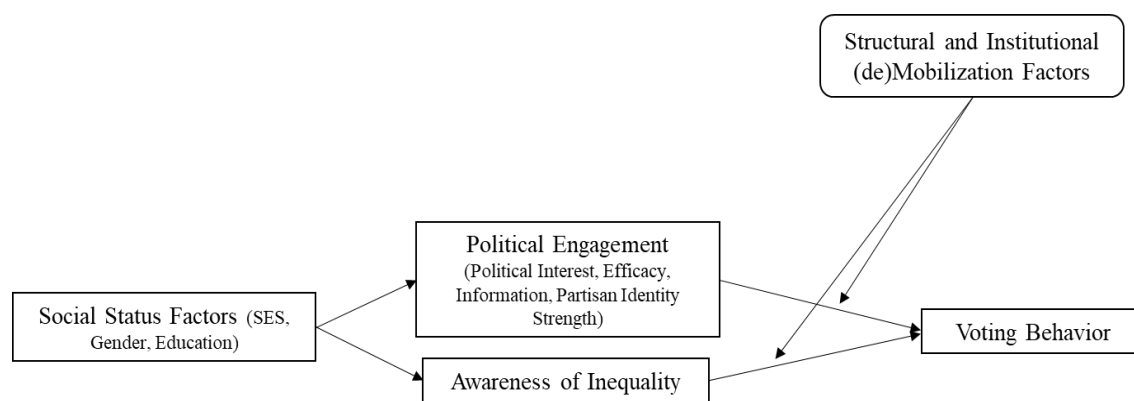
Method

Data Collection and Participants

Data came from the American National Election Studies (ANES) 2020 time series study. The ANES was developed in 1948 by Angus Campbell and Robert Kahn at the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The goal of the ANES is to provide quality data exploring electoral behavior, political participation, and public opinion for social scientists and policy makers who hope to understand and explain election outcomes (*History of ANES American National Election Studies*, 2019). Each ANES wave consists of multiple studies, but I focus on the time-series studies in this dissertation. The ANES is disseminated during both the midterm elections and presidential elections. During midterms, participants are interviewed only once after the election. However, during Presidential elections, participants are interviewed twice,

before and after the election. I am using the pre- and post-election data from the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

Pre-election interviews for the 2016 ANES began in September 2016 and continued until November 7, 2016 (election day was November 8). Data collection for the post-election survey began November 9th and concluded January 8, 2017. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, and participants were randomly sorted into their mode of interview; respondents were able to take the survey in their home or in a location of their choice. The interviews lasted approximately 80 minutes and were conducted in either English or Spanish.

The 2020 ANES pre-election interviews began in August 2020 and continued until election day, November 3, 2020; data collection for the post-election interviews began November 8, 2020 and continued until January 4, 2021. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were not conducted in person and the ANES used Marketing Systems Group, an online provider who develops research surveys and panels, to recruit participants. In the 2020 ANES, there were two sets of participants: (1) a fresh cross-sectional sample who had not previously participated in an ANES study before 2020 and (2) a sample of participants who had also taken part in the 2016 ANES survey and were re-sampled for the 2020 survey.

Participants in the 2016 and 2020 sample were all U.S. citizens. The study sample was drawn randomly from the USPS computerized delivery sequence file, and selected addresses were sent a series of letters recruiting one household member to take part in the study. In the 2016 and 2020 online and virtual interviews, all residential addresses across the 50 states and Washington DC were equally likely to be selected; however, in 2016, Alaska and Hawaii respondents were excluded from taking part in face-to-face interviews.

In both 2016 and 2020, participants were offered monetary incentives to participate in the survey. Participants were initially sent a recruitment letter that included $5-$10 in cash, and participants were promised $25-$50 to complete the survey. In 2016, an interviewer visited the participant's address with a screening interview and randomly selected an adult in the household to participate in the study. In 2020, this was done virtually, and respondents were given a link to a screening instrument that randomly selected one adult U.S. citizen at the address to complete the ANES questionnaire.[2] Once they completed the screener, the respondent was then invited to complete the full interview. Non-respondent households were offered increasing incentives of up to $200 to engage in the survey.

To determine the participant's interview medium in 2020, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) web only, (2) web and phone, or (3) web, phone, and video. The interviews were conducted by trained interviewees using computer software, and the interviews were conducted in English or Spanish at the discretion of the participant. The interviews typically lasted 71 minutes. Participants were able to take the survey on their own devices anywhere that had internet or phone service. For telephone interviews, interviewers used a web questionnaire that used information provided by the respondents who had previously completed a self-administered web questionnaire; interviewers read the questions aloud to the participants. In the video interviews, interviewers still used computer-aided interview software and used Zoom to connect with the respondents. The interviewers were able to share a window with the response booklet so that respondents could see the questions in addition to reading them

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[2] It is important to note that some researchers are concerned with the use of fully online surveys (Grewenig et al., 2018). In particular, these surveys are often not representative because people without access to the internet are not able to engage in the survey. This disproportionately excludes low-income citizens from engaging in surveys because they are the most likely to not have internet access. To my knowledge, no studies have examined how this shift affected the 2020 ANES sample, but this is a limitation to be cognizant of.

aloud and, when relevant, participants were also shown the response options. In the video and phone interview components, participants responded verbally.

Participants

The ANES 2016 had 4,271 pre-election interview respondents (50% response rate for in-person interviews; 44% response rate for online interviews). For the post-election interview in 2016, there was a 90% response rate for the face-to-face component and an 84% response rate for the online interview. In the 2020 ANES, there were 5,441 new participants in the pre-election interview respondents (36.7% response rate) and 4,779 post-election interview respondents (90% response rate). In total, there are 9,712 respondents. However, in the current study I am only using the Black participants from the 2016 and 2020 ANES samples ($N = 905$; 9% of total sample). Further, because participant's education and socio-economic status were focal predictors in the analysis, participants were excluded if they did not report these demographics. As a result, the final sample consisted of 677 participants. See Table 3.1 for the sample demographics.

Measures

The ANES directly measured several of my constructs of interest (e.g., political efficacy), and I use these measures when possible. However, some of my theorized constructs were not directly measured in the ANES, such as awareness of inequality. In these instances, I combined conceptually relevant items from the ANES to create scales that assess my constructs of interest. Creating these measures for the current study has several important implications. First, because the items were not originally intended to be a unidimensional measure, they do not always use the same response scale. As a result, I standardized each variable and used the standardized scores in all analyses. Next, because I created the measures, there are no previous tests of

reliability to compare the current reliability scores to. I include reliability analyses, and if the Cronbach's alpha is over .60, I consider it to be a reliable measure (Taber, 2018).

Social Status

I created a social status variable that reflected each participant's social location, which I defined as the relative social position that an individual holds which affects their access and outcomes. Following Cech's (2022) approach to examining intersectional differences across social identities, I created a dichotomous social status variable using the participant's self-reported education level and socioeconomic status.[3] Specifically, I collapsed the original 5-item education item so those who had less than a Bachelor's degree were classified as 'lower education' and those with a Bachelor's degree or higher were classified as 'higher education'. Similarly, I collapsed the social class item so that respondents who reported that they were in the lower or working class were now classified as 'lower class' while those who reported being in the middle and upper class were classified as 'higher class'. From here, I created a social status factor combining these variables so that those participants who were in both the higher education and higher-class category were grouped as "high social status" (1) and all others were grouped as "low social status" (0). See Appendix A for demographics and social status items.

Awareness of Inequality

Awareness of inequality refers to an individual's awareness that race-based social inequality exists, and I measured this construct using four-items from the ANES. Sample items from the measure read, "In general, does the federal government treat whites better than blacks,

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[3] Originally, I also theorized gender as an important determinant of social status, and the high social status group would have consisted of those with high social class, high education, and who are male-identified. However, for this group Black women were the most likely to have high education and high social class, so this categorization greatly limited the variability needed to compare high and low social status groups. Indeed, when gender was included in the analysis, some of the effects described in the results were obscured (i.e., relationship between social status and political interest). Future research should consider the role of gender, particularly in a sample of Black voters with a more diverse distribution of SES and education.

treat them both the same, or treat blacks better than whites?" and "How much discrimination have you personally faced because of your ethnicity or race?" The full measure appears in Appendix B. Each item used different response options, so I standardized the scores and created a mean score of awareness of inequality using the standardized responses. Higher scores indicate more awareness of inequality, while lower scores indicate less awareness. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was .658.

Political Engagement

Political engagement describes an individual's psychological engagement with politics. In line with the Civic Voluntarism Model, I conceptualized political engagement as comprising four constructs and measured each: political interest, political efficacy, political information, and partisan identity strength. The full political engagement measure is in Appendix C.

Political Interest. Political interest refers to a citizen's willingness to pay attention to politics (Lupia & Philpot, 2005). I measured political interest with a single item from the ANES that read "How interested would you say you are in politics?" Participants responded on a scale of (1) *very interested* to (4) *not at all interested*.

Political Efficacy. Political efficacy is defined as the belief that one's political action has or can have an impact on the government or political process (Campbell et al., 1960; Clarke & Acock, 1989). In the current study, participant's political efficacy was measured using two items from the ANES that assessed the respondents' beliefs about their capacity for political influence. A sample item from this measure is 'People like me don't have any say about what the government does.' The items in this measure had different response scales, so I standardized each item and used the standardized scores to create a mean score, where higher scores indicate

more political efficacy and lower scores indicate less political efficacy. The alpha for this measure was .681, indicating acceptable reliability.

Political Information. Political information reflects how politically knowledgeable an individual is (Krishna & Sokolova, 2017). As such, I measured this construct with four items assessing the respondents' basic knowledge about the US government and political system (Pietryka & MacIntosh, 2013). This included items like "For how many years is a United States Senator elected - that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?", and participants were asked to type in their response. For these basic knowledge items, I recoded the item responses to be dichotomous, such that responses were either (1) *correct* or (0) *incorrect*.

The political awareness measure also included one item reflecting the interviewer's rating of the interviewee's political knowledge. The interviewer was asked the following question: "the participant's general level of information about politics and public affairs seemed", and the interviewer responded on a 1 (very high) to 5 (very low) scale. I then recoded this item so that participants who were rated as "fairly high" and "very high" in political knowledge were now coded as (1) "highly knowledgeable" and those who were "average" or "low" were coded as (0) "less knowledgeable" (Lelkes & Sniderman, 2016). Using an approach detailed by Pietryka and MacIntosh (2013), I then created a composite variable using the average number of correct responses and the item with the interviewer's rating of political information.

Partisan Identity Strength. The last measure of political engagement is partisan identity strength, defined as the extent to which an individual defines themselves as a political party member (Hooghe & Oser, 2017). I measured partisan identity with a single-item that read, "Would you call yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or a not very strong

Democrat/Republican?" Participants were then asked to respond on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) Strong Democrat to (7) Strong Republican, with (4) an Independent as a mid-point. Because I was interested in the overall effect of strong vs. weak partisanship, I recoded this variable to that Strong Partisans = 1, Weak Partisans = 2, and Neutral = 3.

Voter (de)Mobilization

Voter mobilization describes how motivated (or demotivated) a potential voter is to become an actual voter. Mobilization can occur at the institutional level and at the structural level, and I explored both forms in the current study. Institutional-level voter mobilization refers to the political and non-political social institutions that promote civic development and engagement. The full mobilization measures are in Appendix D.

The measure of institutional voter (de)mobilization assessed participant's engagement with several especially influential social institutions—specifically, church (Djupe & Gilbert, 2006; McKenzie, 2004), unions (Freeman, 2003), and political parties (Ramírez et al., 2018). I chose to measure engagement with these institutions because they have been linked to voter mobilization efforts, particularly for marginalized group members. Church, for example, is an influential source of mobilization for Black voters as they often receive politized messages from their religious leaders and may be contacted by political figures while they attend church. Within the Black community, those who attend church more frequently have also been found to belong to a larger number of political organizations, have more political interest, be contacted by political officials at higher rates, and have higher voting turnout (Alex-Assensoh & Assensoh, 2001; Panagopoulos and Francia, 2009). The same is true for those who belong to unions and active members of political parties. In explaining this link, McKenzie (2004) argues that engaging with certain social institutions leads to indirect mobilization. In particular, social

institutions that encourage political engagement, like churches, help to develop a political consciousness in citizens and develop group civic norms that increase social pressure to politically participate (Calhoun-Brown, 1996). As a result, I used engagement with these institutions as a measure of mobilization and posited that higher engagement will in turn lead to higher turnout.

The institutional mobilization measure consisted of 4-items that assessed participant's engagement with church ("Do you go to religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?"); unions ("Do you or anyone else in this household belong to a labor union or to an employee association similar to a union?); and political parties ("Did anyone from one of the political parties call you up or come around and talk to you about the campaign this year?"; "During the campaign this year, did anyone talk to you about registering to vote or getting out to vote?"). For each item, I recoded the responses as dichotomous to reflect participants' (1) engagement with the institution or (0) lack of engagement with the institution (Panagopoulos & Francia, 2009). I then created an index of engagement consisting of the average of these recoded responses, such that higher scores indicate more institutional mobilization and lower scores indicate institutional demobilization.

Structural (de)mobilization describes those factors that are either legal characteristics (e.g., registration laws), state institutional strength (e.g., local strength of the political party), or state socioeconomic status (e.g., aggregate income or education) (Bentele & O'Brien, 2013; Darrah-Okike et al., 2021; Montoya, 2020; Pitzer et al., 2021). To measure this, I used the Cost of Voting Index (COVI), which was developed by Li and colleagues (2018). The purpose of the COVI is to create a standardized and comparative measure of how difficult it is to vote in each US state. The COVI used information from state electoral laws, such as laws around felony

disenfranchisement and same-day voter registration laws, to create a unidimensional scale that

quantifies how restrictive or lax each state's electoral environment is (Juelich & Coll, 2020). In

the COVI, higher values represent larger voting costs and more restrictive states. The creators of

the COVI recalculate the index for each presidential election, and since I am using data from the

2016 and 2020 presidential elections, I am using the COVI score that was developed for the

participant's state in the year they participated in the ANES. The scores range from -2.02 to 1.09

in 2016 and from -2.92 to 1.21 in 2020.

Vote Outcome

I determined whether or not the participant voted in the 2016 and 2020 elections with a

single-item from the ANES that read, "In talking to people about elections, we often find that a

lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or they just

didn't have time. Which of the following statements best describes you?" Participants were

asked to choose from the following options: (1) I did not vote (in the election this November);

(2) I thought about voting this time, but didn't; (3) I usually vote, but didn't this time; (4) I am

sure I voted. I recoded the variable to be dichotomous, such that participants either (1) voted or

(0) did not vote. See Appendix E.[4]

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Vs. 28. Before I began hypothesis testing, I

conducted preliminary analyses. I began with an analysis of the patterns of missing data and

found that all data was missing completely at random (MCAR). Next, I examined the bivariate

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[4] The reader might notice that several of the measures in this study were dichotomized, which is an unusual approach as it can cause a loss of variance in the overall model. I chose to follow the original scoring methodology cited for each measure, resulting in the several dichotomized measures. Please see each citation for more detail on the rationale.

correlations among the study variables; several of the scales were correlated but none were highly correlated enough to invoke issues with multicollinearity (Table 3.2).

To test the remaining hypotheses, I used the PROCESS Macro created by Andrew Hayes. I chose to use this analysis because the PROCESS macro is robust, uses bootstrapping, and provides a 95% confidence interval (2013). Additionally, PROCESS has the power to analyze moderation and mediation effects simultaneously, which was necessary for this analysis. For simplicity, I report the results by hypothesis.

H1: Social status (e.g., SES and education) will significantly predict voting turnout.

To test H1 and examine the possible association between the predictor variable (social status) and the outcome variable (political participation), I conducted a logistic regression analysis. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 13.62$, $p < .001$, indicating H1 was supported. Specifically, the model explained 3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in voting outcomes and correctly classified 74.0% of cases. High status individuals were 4.04 times more likely to vote than low status individuals.

Moderated Mediation Analysis

I examined the remaining hypotheses using PROCESS Model 16, a moderated mediation analysis. In particular, I assessed whether the effect of social status on turnout was influenced by political engagement and awareness of inequality; I also examined whether the relationship between turnout and awareness of inequality was moderated by structural and institutional mobilization factors.

In this analysis, I used 5000 bootstrap sampling and 95% biased corrected confidence intervals. Model 16 provides indices of partial moderated mediation which quantifies the "…relationship between one moderator and the size of X's indirect effect on s indirect effect on

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Y through M when the second moderator is held constant" (Hayes, 2018, p. 10). This model allows researchers to assess the effect of multiple mediators and moderators in one simultaneous analysis, rather than requiring a series of separate analyses. In this study, I am interested in examining the relationship between social status and voting behavior. The independent variable was social status (e.g., education level and socio-economic status), while political engagement factors (e.g., political interest, efficacy, awareness, partisan identity) and awareness of inequality were mediators. Structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors were included as moderators of the M to Y path (see Figure 1), and vote outcome was the dependent variable.

H2: Social status will have a significant positive impact on political engagement factors (e.g., higher social status will lead to more engagement).

Moderated mediation analyses revealed that H2 was partially supported (see Table 3.3). I found a significant, positive relationship between social status and political efficacy, as well as social status and political information. Specifically, those with higher social status were also more politically efficacious and had more political information. However, contrary to H2, there was a significant negative relationship between social status and political interest, such that those with lower social status reported more political interest.[5] Further, social status did not significantly impact partisan identity strength.

H3: Social status will have a significant negative impact on awareness of inequality (e.g., lower social status will lead to higher awareness of inequality)

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[5] I want to note that while the relationship between social status and political information is positive in the mediation analysis, the bivariate correlations for this relationship is negative. This is due to the coding of the social status variable, where lower social status has a higher value than lower social status. See the appendices to see variable coding.

The analysis revealed a non-significant relationship between social status and awareness of inequality. Thus, H3 was unsupported.

H4: Political engagement factors will have a significant positive impact on voting turnout.

The indirect effects of the political engagement factors were non-significant. This indicates that the proposed political engagement factors did not mediate the relationship between social status and voter turnout. As such, H4 was not supported.

H5: Awareness of inequality will have a significant impact on voting turnout, but I have no prediction about the direction of this relationship.

The indirect effect of awareness of inequality was non-significant, indicating that awareness of inequality did not mediate the relationship between social status and political participation. As such, H5 was not supported.

H6a: Structural (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between political engagement factors and voting turnout.

H6b: Institutional (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between political engagement factors and voting turnout.

Hypotheses 6a and 6b received partial support. The analysis revealed a significant and positive indirect effect of political interest in those who experienced moderate institutional and structural mobilization and for those with moderate institutional mobilization and high structural mobilization. This suggests that for voters who experience moderate structural and institutional mobilization, higher political interest is associated with higher rates of turnout.

However, the index of partial moderated mediation provided by PROCESS Model 16 reported that the effect of institutional (de)mobilization is non-significant, -.042, 95% CI [-.380, .272]. The effect of structural (de)mobilization was non-significant as well, .020, 95% CI [-.083,

.135]. Thus, while institutional and structural mobilization factors moderate the relationship between political interest and voter turnout, this does not explain the relationship between social status and voter turnout. That is, structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors do not moderate the relationship between social status and voter turnout through political interest.

The analysis also revealed a significant and positive indirect effect of political information in those who experienced low institutional and structural mobilization. This indicates that for those who experience low structural and institutional mobilization, higher levels of political information is associated with higher voter turnout rates. However, the index of partial moderated mediation was nonsignificant for institutional mobilization, -.165, 95% CI [-.639, .255], indicating that institutional mobilization factors do not moderate the relationship between social status and voter turnout through political information.

On the other hand, the index of partial moderated mediation for structural mobilization was significant, indicating moderated mediation, -.149, 95% CI [-.311, -.025]. This finding suggests that structural mobilization does moderate the indirect effect between social status, political information, and voting outcome. In other words, social status does impact voter turnout through political information, and this is particularly true for those voters who experience low structural and institutional mobilization.

H7a: Structural (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voting turnout.

H7b: Institutional (de)mobilization will have a moderating effect on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voting turnout.

The analysis revealed a non-significant effect of both structural and institutional mobilization factors on the relationship between awareness of inequality and voter turnout. As such, H7a and H7b were not supported.

Findings Review

The aim of this dissertation was to answer a series of research questions around Black voting behavior. Specifically, I examined (1) how has Black people's socio-historical position affected their voting turnout?; (2) to what extent, if any, does social status explain variation in Black voting turnout?; (3) is the relationship between social status and voter turnout explained by political engagement and awareness of inequality?; and (4) can systems and institutions mobilize/demobilize Black voters, and does this impact the potential influence of political engagement and awareness of inequality? To this end, I hypothesized that social status (i.e., SES and education) would predict Black people's turnout at the polls, and that this relationship would be explained by political engagement and awareness of inequality. I also hypothesized that structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors would moderate the relationship between both political engagement and awareness of inequality on voter turnout. The study results partially supported my hypotheses. Specifically, I found that for Black voters, social status does indeed predict voter turnout. Further, while not all forms of political engagement explain the relationship between social status and voter turnout, political information did have some explanatory power. Lastly, when considering institutional and structural forms of mobilization, I found that structural mobilization did impact Black voters.

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Table 3.1 Demographics for 2016 and 2020 ANES Black Subsample

Demographic Categories	n	%
Gender		
Female	557	62%
Male	341	38%
Highest Level of Education		
Less than high school credential	78	9%
High school credential	191	21%
Post-High School Education, no bachelor's degree	365	41%
Bachelor's Degree	157	18%
Graduate Degree	108	12%
Socio-Economic Status		
Lower Class	95	11%
Working Class	286	32%
Middle Class	276	31%
Upper Class	25	3%
Rural or Urban Area		
Rural	64	9%
Suburb	327	46%
Urban	316	45%
Total N	905	

Table 3.2 Correlations and Alphas Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Social status	--						
2. Political interest	-.141*	--					
3. Political efficacy	.202*	-.118*	--				
4. Political information	-.197*	-.128*	.069	--			
5. Partisan identity	-.014	.200*	.032	-.025	--		
6. Awareness of inequality	-.045	.118*	.112*	-.062	.184*	--	
7. Structural mobilization	-.003	-.016	-.034	-.051	.011	.065	--
8. Institutional mobilization	.134*	-.130*	.068	.025	-.062	-.063	.023
Alphas			.681			.665	

Note. $N = 677$; $*p < .05$.

Table 3.3 Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients (with Standard Errors [SEs]) from Moderated Mediation Model (PROCESS Model 16)

	M_1: Political Interest	M_2: Political Efficacy	M_3: Political Information	M_4: Partisan Identity Strength	M_5: Awareness of Inequality	Y: Voting Turnout
			Outcome			
Constant	2.34 (.039)*	-.084 (.033)*	.327 (.010)*	2.07 (.068)*	-.014 (.032)	1.40 (.572)*
X: Social Status (High Social Status vs Low Social Status)	-.332 (.084)*	.378 (.071)*	.111 (.022)*	-.06 (.144)	-.060 (.068)	.707 (.292)*
						$R^2 =.17$
Y: Voting Turnout	-.335 (.185)	.163 (.227)	1.21 (.759)	-.170 (.110)	-.126 (.234)	
Structural Mobilization (SM)	--	--	--	--	--	.524 (.441)
Institutional Mobilization (IM)	--	--	--	--	--	1.69 (1.42)
		Interaction Effect of M_x and Moderators (SM and IM) on Y				
M_x x SM	-.061 (.147)	.105 (.172)	-1.34 (.566)*	-.118 (.076)	.095 (.186)	
M_x x IM	.121 (.460)	-.194 (.542)	-1.48 (1.80)	-.215 (.248)	-.087 (.536)	
Moderators		**Index of Partial Moderated Mediation [95% bootstrap confidence interval (based on 5,000 bootstrap samples)]**				
Structural Mobilization (SM)	.020 [-.083, .135]	.040 [-.094, .184]	-.149 [-.311, -.025]	.014 [-.091, .129]	-.006 [-.053, .023]	
Institutional Mobilization (IM)	-.040 [-.380, .272]	-.073 [-544, .354]	-.165 [-.639, .255]	.008 [-.037, .062]	.005 [-.095, .111]	

Note. N = 656; *p = Upper and lower 95% confidence interval does not contain 0.

Chapter 4 Discussion

Understanding the factors that influence voter turnout can help researchers and policymakers alike encourage political equity and move towards a society in which every citizen has a voice in the governing of the country (Guinier, 1991; Still, 1981; Verba, 2001). Because of its importance, theoretical models predicting voter turnout are important for those interested in identifying intervention points that can lead to higher turnout levels. The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) provides a valuable framework that gives insight into several factors that have strongly been associated with voter turnout: resources, political engagement, and recruitment. According to the CVM, constituents are most likely to vote when they (1) have the time, money, and civic skills to vote; (2) have interest in voting; and (3) when someone asks them to. Since the development of this model, a myriad of empirical evidence supporting its utility has been published by psychologists and political scientists alike (Francia & Orr, 2014; Kim & Khang, 2014; Kusumarani & Zo, 2019; Strömblad & Bengtsson, 2017).

The aim of this dissertation was to further contribute to this literature by answering a series of research questions around Black voting behavior. Specifically, I examined (1) how has Black people's socio-historical position affected their voter turnout?; (2) to what extent, if any, does social status explain variation in Black voter turnout?; (3) is the relationship between social status and voter turnout explained by political engagement and awareness of inequality?; and (4) can systems and institutions mobilize/demobilize Black voters, and does this impact the potential influence of political engagement and awareness of inequality?

Using the CVM to Build a Model of Black Political Participation

To examine my research questions, I developed a model of Black voter turnout that was built on the theoretical tenets of the CVM, insofar that I continued to emphasize the importance of resources, political engagement, and recruitment. However, while the CVM offers a general model of political participation, I aimed to develop a model that was specific to predicting Black voter turnout. In this vein, my model deviated from the CVM in that I also considered how Black people's historical and continued social oppression impacts their political attitudes and turnout. As such, I included social status, awareness of inequality, and structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors in my model. These additions to a model of Black voting behavior are important for several reasons. First, considering social status within Black voters helps to explain variations within the group, such as why some vote while others do not; in particular, I posit that Black people with a higher social status will also have more access to resources that lower the cost of voting and encourage turnout (and vice-versa). I also considered awareness of inequality in my model because this factor has been linked to political engagement, and Black people are especially likely to be aware of inequality, perhaps because structural inequality is an embedded part of their political reality (Diemer & Li, 2011; Van Assche et al., 2018). I also offered voter (de)mobilization as a novel addition to the model. I added this because despite a wide body of literature showing that mobilization is an essential factor in promoting voter turnout, Black voters tend to be under or de-mobilized, typically due to institutional and systematic forms of voter suppression. As such, in line with the CVM, I argue that even when Black people are sufficiently resourced and engaged, they will be most likely to vote when they are mobilized (Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2009; Enos et al., 2014; Gerber & Rogers, 2009).

I examined several hypotheses in this study. First, I predicted that social status (i.e., SES and education) would predict Black people's voter turnout, and that this relationship would be

explained by political engagement and awareness of inequality. I also hypothesized that structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors would moderate the relationship between both political engagement and awareness of inequality on voter turnout. The study results partially supported my hypotheses. I found that for Black voters, social status does indeed predict voter turnout. Further, while not all forms of political engagement explain the relationship between social status and voter turnout, political information did have an explanatory role in Black people's voter turnout. Lastly, when considering institutional and structural forms of mobilization, I found that structural mobilization did impact Black voters. I further detail these results below.

As expected, I found that higher social status leads to higher rates of turnout. Establishing this relationship in Black voters is one of the most interesting findings of this study. In my theory of Black political behavior, I explained that resources, as described by the CVM (i.e., time, money, and civic skills) may not tell the full story for Black voters. Research broadly considering the role of social status in political behavior has found that citizens with higher social status tend to wield disproportionate political influence and to behave in politically conservative ways that reify their social dominance (Bonica et al., 2013; Thal, 2020). However, few studies have considered how race may complicate this relationship, particularly in the face of evidence that racial discrimination can lead to less access to political resources and consequently hinder turnout (Butler & Broockman, 2011). To account for this complicated relationship, in my theory I highlighted the importance of considering social status rather than access to resources. While Black people may have less access to political resources, there are Black people with higher social status who might be protected by their status and vote more often; alternatively, it may be that systemic racial discrimination reduces the protection afforded

by their social status, blocking their participation. The findings from this study support the relationship I posited in my theory of Black voter turnout. Specifically, it seems that higher social status affords some protection for Black voters, as those with higher social status voted at a higher rate than Black people with low social status.

In addition to showing the link between social status and voter turnout, my hypotheses about the mechanisms behind this relationship were partially confirmed. Specifically, I found that Black voters with higher social status also reported more political efficacy, which is generally consistent with the extant literature (Taylor, 2010; Yeich & Levine, 1994), and with my theory of Black political behavior. However, contrary to my expectation, I did not find a relationship between political efficacy and voter turnout. While this was not what I hypothesized, it is not unheard of in the broader literature. For instance, Southwell and Pirch (2003) found that political inefficacy did not have a strong impact on Black voter turnout, and political cynicism actually mobilized Black voters more than efficacy. One potential explanation for this finding is that political efficacy does matter for Black voters' political participation broadly, but not for turnout specifically. Marien et al. (2010) found that for marginalized group members, political efficacy was a strong predictor of non-institutionalized forms of political engagement (e.g., activism), but not of institutionalized forms of engagement. Thus, it may be that political efficacy does influence Black voters, but not when it comes to their decision to vote. Instead, it may affect other forms of political participation that I did not consider in the current study.

I also found the hypothesized link between social status and political information. This aligns with existing research that has found that accessing political information is easier for those with more privilege. As Carpini and colleagues (1996) explain, there is a "disconcerting correspondence between the distribution of political knowledge across the public and the

distribution of other valuable resources that are both the source of political power and a consequence of it" (p. 174). However, here too I did not find the hypothesized relationship between political information and voter turnout, indicating that this form of engagement does not explain the relationship between social status and turnout. This may be part of a larger trend, as research has found that political information is decreasing across the electorate as a whole (Snyder, 2011).

One explanation that has been put forth is that due to increasing political polarization and systemic forms of political manipulation (i.e., gerrymandering), citizens are starting to believe that their political choices matter less, and that election outcomes are predetermined (Lassen, 2005; Snyder, 2011). Adherents of this argument essentially suggest that there is less need for constituents to gather information when their choices are limited. Research on the political party heuristic supports this, as it has been found that when political choices are limited voters tend to use low-information cues (i.e., partisan identity) to make their decisions (Schaffner & Streb, 2002; Sheppard, 2015; Singh & Thornton, 2013). This argument is especially relevant for Black voters, who are disproportionately subjected to systemic voter suppression efforts, and report lower feelings of political efficacy than white voters as a result. As such, Black voters may be even less likely to gather political information because of their political cynicism, further demobilizing the group. Addressing political hopelessness in American citizens, especially within the most vulnerable groups, may help to reestablish the relationship between political interest and voter turnout.

In line with my hypotheses, I also found that Black voters with a higher social status were less politically interested, and that higher political interest was associated with less turnout. This finding is notable because in the extant literature, most researchers predict that those who are

politically interested will also be more motivated to seek out political information and more easily turnout to vote (Glasford, 2008; Schaffner & Streb, 2002), and my findings go against that expectation. One explanation for this unexpected finding comes from Denny and Doyle (2008), who explored whether political interest was exogenous (e.g., related to) or endogenous (e.g., a cause of) political participation. They posited that certain experiences and factors may lead to greater political interest, but this does not necessarily translate to higher voter turnout, and suggest that "…a characteristic, say union membership, may be sufficient to make one interested in politics (which is costless by itself) but not to vote (which requires effort). Therefore, these results point to the existence of a class of individuals who are interested in politics but not sufficiently interested to induce them to vote given the fixed costs associated with voting." (Denny & Doyle, 2008, p. 309). Thus, in the current study, despite those with lower social status reporting higher political interest, it may be that their interest was not enough to overcome the additional costs to voting they experienced due to their marginalization (Denny & Doyle, 2008; Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Tolbert & Mcneal, 2003).

This may also explain why, contrary to my hypothesis, Black people with higher social status still vote at higher rates than those with lower social status despite reporting less political interest. As alluded to previously, research has shown that when information is easily available, voters tend to use easily-accessed heuristics to make their political decisions rather than seeking out information on their own (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019)—thus, ironically, more access to political information is associated with a decrease in political interest. As such, it may be that Black voters with higher social status tend to have more access to political information, and are less likely to develop an active political interest because they do not need to seek out information to stay informed (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019; O'Hara et al., 2009). If political interest is indeed

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exogenous to voter turnout, as Denny and Doyle argue, it may explain why Black voters with higher social status report lower political interest but still turnout to vote at higher rates.

I did not find the theorized relationship for partisan identity. The lack of a relationship between social status and partisanship does make sense within the larger literature, as Black people tend to homogenously identify as Democrats (Butler & Broockman, 2011). Indeed, most participants in the ANES sample identify as strong Democrats; as such, finding that there was no link between social status and political identification may reflect the limited partisan diversity captured within the sample. What was surprising, on the other hand, was the absence of the relationship between partisanship and voter turnout. Previous research has often linked the two, such that those with a higher partisan identity are also more likely to participate. However, because Black people do widely identify as Democrats, it could also be that partisanship alone is not enough to motivate voters to turnout. Fairdosi and Rogowski (2015) examined whether partisanship was enough to increase turnout for Black voters, or whether a mobilizing factor needed to be present—in their study, a same-race candidate acted as the mobilizing factor. They found that partisanship is not enough, and that particular mobilizing factors must be present to impact turnout. Specifically, they found that Black candidates mobilized Black Democratic partisans, but not Black conservative partisans. Applying similar logic in the current study, the findings may suggest that on its own, partisanship does not invoke turnout for Black voters.

Also contrary to my hypothesis, I did not have significant findings in the relationship between social status and awareness of inequality; however, I did find that awareness of inequality was negatively related to voter turnout. One potential explanation for the lack of relationship between social status and awareness of inequality comes from the 'linked fate' theory. Specifically, because Black people have a long and shared history of subjugation in the

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United States, it is theorized that the group developed a belief that what happens to one member of their community affects all of them (Jenkins et al., 2021; McClain et al., 2009). If this is the case, it may be that Black people, regardless of their social class, are aware of social inequity, even if they are somewhat protected from it due to their class. The finding that higher awareness of inequality leads to less voter turnout is especially interesting, because I did not predict the direction of the relationship because, as previously discussed, there is conflicting literature around whether awareness of inequality leads to a critical consciousness and higher political participation, or whether it leads to cynicism and lower political participation (Bañales et al., 2020; Diemer & Li, 2011). Here, I found that awareness of inequality led to lower turnout, suggesting that for Black people more awareness can breed political cynicism. This finding offers an important contribution to that debate by supporting the theory that awareness of inequality leads to cynicism and disengagement. However, it is also important to note that the indirect effect was not significant, indicating that awareness of inequality did not explain the relationship between social status and voter turnout—perhaps as a result of the aforementioned linked fate explanation.

The moderated mediation analysis provided an index of partial moderated mediation that allowed me to examine whether structural and institutional mobilization factors influenced the impact of the proposed mediators, and my hypotheses were only partially confirmed here as well. Specifically, I found that structural mobilization did indeed moderate the indirect effect between social status, political information, and voter turnout. However, none of the other hypothesized relationships were present.

The significance of political information suggests that the indirect effect of social status varies depending on one's level of political information, and that the effect of political

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information affects turnout the most for voters who experience low structural mobilization. For instance, our findings suggest that if an individual experiences structural demobilization, such as higher cost of voter registration or more stringent voter ID laws, the voters with more political information are more likely to overcome those barriers and turnout at the polls. This aligns with expectations, as those with more political information are likely more capable of understanding how to navigate the political landscape and aware of the stakes in the election (Nickerson, 2015), encouraging them to vote despite the higher costs.

Besides the link between political information and participation, I did not find that structural mobilization impacted any of the other mediators. Additionally, institutional mobilization did not have the expected outcome with any of the mediators. Both findings were contrary to my hypotheses. The limited role of structural and institutional mobilization may the result of a general trend in American society of decreased voter turnout (Lyons & Alexander, 2000; Stockemer et al., 2013). Specifically, Americans, across racial and class lines, are generally voting less because of increasing frustration and disillusionment with the government. As Laurison (2015) argues, "[political] indifference is only a manifestation of impotence" (p. 928). This is especially true for Black people who are low in efficacy because of the political neglect they experience. And research has shown that due to their disillusionment, Black people tend to engage in non-institutionalized forms of political participation, such as protests rather than voting (Smith, 2022). Thus, while structural mobilization may impact political participation, it may be that voters are generally frustrated with the government and consequently disengaged with institutionalized forms of political engagement (i.e., voting). This disillusionment may overshadow the role of mobilization and its effect on political interest, efficacy, and partisanship, as well as awareness of inequality may have a role in participation. This is an empirical question

to be measured in the future. Indeed, it may be that when Black people are mobilized, it stimulates participation, but not institutionalized participation—instead, it may provoke them to engage in protests or other forms of political activism. As such, promoting a sense of trust within American voters may be an essential step for those invested in increasing Black voter turnout.

Contributions and Recommendations

The current study provided several valuable contributions to the literature. Namely, it is one of very few studies that centers Black voters and explores the ways in which historic and ongoing oppression affects Black voter turnout. As suppression efforts in the United States continue and amplify, studies exploring Black people's unique relationship with the political system are more important than ever. The findings of the study are also a valuable contribution. Specifically, from the findings, we understand that political information can drive turnout for the Black voters, especially those who are undermobilized. This finding suggests intervention points for both researchers and political strategists who are invested in the Black voter; for example, focusing on disseminating information to Black voters may help to drive turnout. In my proposed model, I also introduced several novel factors to models of voter turnout, namely awareness of inequality and structural and institutional (de)mobilization factors. While my theorized relationships around these factors were not significant, I hope that the theoretical background I delineated provides researchers with other ideas of antecedents to voting that they can explore as it relates to the Black voter.

I want to note here that my recommendation to continue exploring factors that affect Black voter turnout does not mean that I recommend that researchers discontinue using the Civic Voluntarism Model. Although my findings around political interest were novel, the overall study findings do not indicate that prior models of voting behavior, such as the CVM, are inaccurate

for Black voters. Therefore, continuing to use the CVM to understand voters in general is appropriate, especially in regard to broad questions around political participation. Still, I recommend that researchers continue to explore antecedents to voting that are especially relevant for Black voters. Access to resources may be the primary factor explaining differences in Black and white voter turnout. But more in-depth understanding of political engagement factors would allow researchers and political strategists to develop targeted interventions that can help to reduce this gap.

Further, I have several recommendations to leave readers with. First, as stated above, I recommend that researchers continue to explore the antecedents of Black voter turnout. What might this exploration look like? The questions asked in this dissertation may be a good place to start, but I also suggest that researchers take it further by developing measures that capture the theorized constructs of interest, as the results may have been very different. For example, in this dissertation I used items from the ANES that more accurately assess awareness of discrimination, rather than my theorized construct of awareness of inequality. This distinction is important, because as I theorized, it is awareness of structural inequality that may trigger voters to engage in political activities that have structural outcomes. Thus, using a proper measure of awareness of inequality may indeed explain differences in mobilization and turnout. I would also suggest that future researchers examine multiple forms of political participation, rather than just one. In my model, I focused only on one form of political participation, voting turnout, which is a narrow definition of participation and may have impacted the results. In specific, there is research on Black political participation that suggests that Black people are less inclined to participate in traditional forms of politics, including voting, and more likely to engage in non-traditional forms (i.e., protests, community-based efforts; Engist & Schafmeister, 2022). I chose

to focus on voting in this dissertation because it is a powerful and well-examined form of engagement, and Black people's relationship with the polls is not well-understood; however, the story my findings tell is limited because it does not account for the alternative forms of political engagement Black people prefer. Future researchers would benefit from expanding their definition of political participation.

In a similar vein, future researchers may introduce other measures of structural mobilization to the model. In the current study, I only used the Cost of Voting Index (COVI), which includes a myriad of factors that determine how difficult voting is by state. This is a fascinating measure that I plan to use in the future; however, it is important to note that while voting access varies state by state, it varies even more city-to-city and county-to-county. The COVI does not capture these variations, and so introducing more specific measures of structural mobilization–perhaps comparing neighborhoods–would give valuable insight into questions of how resources and race interact to affect voting behavior.

Beyond research-oriented recommendations, I also have several practical recommendations for political strategists who might be interested in wielding the study findings to drive voter turnout. For example, since political information is a driving factor for Black turnout, I suggest that strategists focus on developing ways to provide information to Black voters, especially low-SES Black voters. For these groups, TV advertisements and mail may not be enough to get them the information they need to mobilize as voters. Developing novel, targeted outreach efforts should be a priority. For example, using churches as a home-base for increasing political information may be a valuable intervention–perhaps churches hosting courses that help to develop civic skills and disseminate political knowledge may further drive turnout.

Additionally, I recommend that strategists focus on mobilization and efficacy. Across research on voter turnout, political efficacy has an important role. That is, a constituent feeling that their participation would make a difference is a strongly influential factor in turning out to vote. Although in this dissertation, I did not find that efficacy has a significant effect in the wider model, I still encourage political strategists to focus on building efficacy in Black voters, especially low SES-Black voters who feel less politically efficacious. Continue to remind them of their value, give examples of ways that high levels of Black voter turnout have affected policies and made their lives easier. Campaigns should engage in grassroot efforts to reach out to constituents who are normally overlooked in elections. Black voters have been neglected and that is likely one of the driving forces behind their turnout differences, and engaging in intentional outreach efforts may lead to increased efficacy and turnout.

In addition to these micro-level interventions, it is also essential that macro-level interventions occur. This means that policymakers and political strategists must continue to push for structural changes while they also encourage individual-level mobilization. As described in chapter 1 of this dissertation, the United States has a long history of implementing laws that hinder Black people's access to the polls, and these structural-level barriers are continuing to occur today. As such, addressing structural demobilization is the most important recommendation that I can give. Fighting back against gerrymandering, voter ID laws, and felony disenfranchisement, are a few examples of structural-level efforts that will affect the Black voter. These are just a few recommendations, but there is much more that can be done to support and mobilize the Black voter. I challenge researchers to continue to center these voters in their work as we continue to fight for equitable access to the polls.

Limitations and Future Directions

There were several important limitations to this study, and most stem from my use of secondary data. I used data from the 2016 and 2020 ANES in this study, and there are pros and cons to using this dataset. The pros include the fact the ANES is a large and ongoing study that is well-respected by political scientists and psychologists alike. As such, researchers who use this dataset have access to a plethora of data that they may not be able to attain on their own, and reviewers can be assured of the quality of the data and the methodology that was used to collect the data. However, there are disadvantages to using secondary datasets. For example, rather than making my own decisions around how to measure my constructs of interest, I am constrained to the items and measures that the developers of the ANES chose. If I were able to decide on how to measure awareness of inequality using my own items, for instance, that measure may have looked quite different.

Additionally, my use of secondary data also led to some sample-based issues. For instance, many participants in the study did not report their socio-economic status. This is not uncommon when it comes to self-report data, especially when the participant is being interviewed by another person, as discussing money may be considered culturally taboo or embarrassing. This presents an issue because those that I did include in the study self-selected to share their SES and may present bias in the data as a result. For instance, maybe those on the far end of the spectrum, such as those who are very wealthy or those who are very poor, are less likely to share their SES (Höglinger et al., 2016). If that is the case, the study results only represent those within the middle of the spectrum and may not actually be representative of the U.S. Black population. Future research should experiment with different ways of asking participants about their SES in ways that are culturally appropriate and more likely to be answered by participants when they are engaging in surveys with an interviewer.

Another limitation is the small number of identities included when developing the social status factor; specifically, I only included SES and education. Other research that used a similar framework to develop an identity-based variable used a myriad of identities to incorporate intersectionality into their study—that is, to show experiencing multiple and interlocking forms of structural oppression can lead to different outcomes for those who hold different constellations of identities (Crenshaw, 1989). While I would have liked to take this approach and consider more identities in my study, this was not possible due to the low amount of variation within the ANES sample. While the ANES did engage in purposive sampling to have a representative sample, the data was only representative at the national level. In my study, I only used Black participants, and the sample was not developed to be representative at the social group level. As such, I was limited in the social identities I was able to consider when developing this analysis, and I would have liked to further diversify my sample. For instance, I would have also liked to include sexual orientation as an identity, as this group has a rich and diverse set of political concerns informed by their social status that likely impacts their political participation (Bejarano et al., 2020; Lopez Bunyasi & Smith, 2019; Moreau et al., 2019). For similar reasons, I would have also liked to include age cohort, region, and even zip-code level variations to further explore the impacts of socio-economic status. One potential solution is to develop a sample of Black U.S. citizens while engaging in purposive sampling, so that future researchers can continue to explore the questions raised in this dissertation with a sample that provides sufficient power and insight.

Lastly, some may consider my choice to use a regression-based framework to conduct my analyses rather than using structural equation modeling (SEM) to be a limitation. SEM describes a multivariate statistical technique that allows for the simultaneous estimation of a theorized

model and for the introduction of latent variables into the model (Cheng, 2001; Nusair & Hua, 2010). Regression-based analyses, on the other hand, allow researchers to examine variables as predictors and assess how much variance in the model the predictors are able to explain (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Nusair & Hua, 2010). Both tools have been widely used and both could have been used to answer the research questions posed in this study. However, I chose to use a regression-based analysis for several reasons. First, SEM is a confirmatory technique, and is best suited for such research questions (see Tomarken & Waller, 2003 for more discussion). However, several of the relationships theorized in this study were exploratory, such as assessing the relationship that awareness of inequality has with voter turnout (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). Moreover, research suggests that using a regression framework is the better choice in studies that utilize truly categorical variables (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2007). Consequently, in this study, where both the independent variable and the dependent variable are categorical, logit regression was a more appropriate technique (Allison, 1999). For these reasons, using a regression framework in this study was the better choice. However, SEM does have value in estimating complex models, and future research should utilize the technique to further explore the determinants of voter turnout.

Conclusion

This dissertation highlights the importance of considering the role of both race and social status when attempting to understand political behaviors and participations. While the Civic Voluntarism Model offers an important framework that can help predict turnout broadly, I found that many of the factors included in the model are not predictive for Black constituents. As we continue to push for an equitable society, access at the polls is one of the most important ways we can work towards achieving this goal. Voter suppression is part of the United States' history,

and while discussion of continued attacks against access to the polls has recently increased, the effects of disenfranchisement have always impacted the Black community. Continued research examining the implications of disenfranchisement and the ways that we can mobilize the Black voter is of the utmost importance.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Demographics and Social Status

Demographics	**Original Response Options**	**Recoded Response Options**
1. Gender/Sex: What is your sex?	-9. Refused 1. Male 2. Female	
2. Rural or Urban Area: Do you currently live in a rural area, small town, suburb, or a city?	-9. Refused -8. Don't know -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW) 1. Rural area 2. Small town 3. Suburb 4. City	1. 'Rural' 2. 'Suburb' 3. 'Urban'

Social Status Vars	**Original Response Options**	**Recoded Response Options**
1. How would you describe your social class? Are you in the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class?	-9. Refused -8. Don't know -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW) 1. Lower class 2. Working class 3. Middle class 4. Upper class	1. Higher Class (combined middle and upper class) 2. Lower Class (combined lower and working class)
2. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?	-9. Refused -8. Don't know -2. Missing, other specify not coded for preliminary release 1. Less than high school credential 2. High school credential 3. Some post-high school, no bachelor's degree 4. Bachelor's degree 5. Graduate degree	1. Higher education (Bachelor's degree and above) 2. Lower education (Less than a Bachelor's degree)

3. Social Status 1. High social status (higher class and
   Variable higher education)
   2. Low social status (all others)

Note. Refused, don't know, and incomplete interviews were recoded as missing

Appendix B: Awareness of Inequality

Item	Original Response Options:
1. In general, does the federal government treat whites better than blacks, treat them both the same, or treat blacks better than whites?	-9. Refused -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW) 1. Treat whites better 2. Treat both the same 3. Treat blacks better
2. In general, do the police treat whites better than blacks, treat them both the same, or treat blacks better than whites?	-9. Refused -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW) 1. Treat whites better 2. Treat both the same 3. Treat blacks better
3. For each of the following groups, how much discrimination is there in the United States today?	-9. Refused -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW) 1. A great deal 2. A lot 3. A moderate amount 4. A little 5. None at all
4. How much discrimination have you personally faced because of your ethnicity or race?	-9. Refused -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW) 1. A great deal 2. A lot 3. A moderate amount

4. A little
5. None at all

Appendix C: Political Engagement

Political Interest

1. How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, or not at all interested?

Original Response Options:

-9. Refused
-8. Don't know
-7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview
-6. No post-election interview
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
1. Very interested
2. Somewhat interested
3. Not very interested
4. Not at all interested

Political Efficacy

1. For the following statements, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree: 'Public officials don't care much what people like me think.' Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?

Original Response Options:

-9. Refused
-7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview
-6. No post-election interview
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
-4. Technical error
1. Agree strongly
2. Agree somewhat
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree somewhat
5. Disagree strongly

2. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.' Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?

-9. Refused
-7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview
-6. No post-election interview
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
1. Agree strongly
2. Agree somewhat
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree somewhat
5. Disagree strongly

Partisan Identity   **Original Response Options**   **Recoded Response Options**

1. Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/ Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/ Republican]?

-9. Refused
-8. Don't know
1. Strong Democrat
2. Not very strong Democrat
3. Independent-Democrat
4. Independent
5. Independent-Republican
6. Not very strong Republican
7. Strong Republican

(1) Strong Partisans (includes Strong Democrat, strong Republican)
(2) Weak Partisans (includes Not very strong Democrat, Not very strong Republican)
(3) Neutral (includes Not very strong Democrat, Independent-Democrat, Independent, Independent-Republican)

Political Information

1. R's general level of information about politics and public affairs seemed:

Original Response Options:
-7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview
-6. No post-election interview
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
-1. Inapplicable
1. Very high
2. Fairly high
3. Average
4. Fairly low
5. Very low

Recoded Response Options
(1) 'highly knowledgeable' (includes participants rated as "fairly high" and "very high")
(0) 'Less knowledgeable' (includes participants rated as "average" or "low")

2. For how many years is a United States Senator elected - that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator? Type the number.

-9. Refused
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
Text Entry

(1) *correct* or (0) *incorrect*

3. On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least?

-9. Refused
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
1. Foreign aid (correct in 2016 and 2020)
2. Medicare
3. National defense
4. Social Security

(1) *correct* or (0) *incorrect*

4. Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington?

-9. Refused
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
1. Democrats (correct in 2020)
2. Republicans (correct in 2016)

(1) *correct* or (0) *incorrect*

5. Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. Senate

-9. Refused
-5. Interview breakoff (sufficient partial IW)
1. Democrats
2. Republicans (correct in 2020 and 2016)

(1) *correct* or (0) *incorrect*

Note. Refused, don't know, and incomplete interviews were recoded as missing

Appendix D: Voter Mobilization

Institutional Mobilization	Original Response Options	Recoded Response Options
1. As you know, the political parties try to talk to as many people as they can to get them to vote for their candidate. Did anyone from one of the political parties call you up or come around and talk to you about the campaign this year?	-8. Don't know -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -1. Inapplicable 1. Yes 2. No	(1) Contacted (0) Not contacted
2. During the campaign this year, did anyone talk to you about registering to vote or getting out to vote?	-8. Don't know -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview 1. Yes, someone did 2. No, no one did	(1) Contacted (0) Not contacted
3. Do you or anyone else in this household belong to a labor union or to an employee association similar to a union?	-9. Refused -8. Don't know 1. Yes 2. No	(1) Union household (0) Non-union household
4.		
5. Do you go to religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?	-9. Refused -8. Don't know -1. Inapplicable 1. Every week 2. Almost every week 3. Once or twice a month 4. A few times a year 5. Never	(1) regular church attendance (included every week and almost every week) (0) Non-regular church attendance (included once or twice a month, a few times a year, and never)

Note. Refused, don't know, and incomplete interviews were recoded as missing

Structural Mobilization   **Index Information**

1. COVI (Cost of Voting Index)　　　　States with smaller values make voting more accessible than states with larger values.

Appendix E: Voter Turnout

Vote Outcome	Original Response Options	Recoded Response Options
1. In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or they just didn't have time. Which of the following statements best describes you:	-9. Refused -8. Don't Know -7. No post-election data, deleted due to incomplete interview -6. No post-election interview -1. Inapplicable 1. I did not vote (in the election this November) 2. I thought about voting this time, but didn't 3. I usually vote, but didn't this time 4. I am sure I voted	(1) Voted (0) Did not vote

Note. Refused, don't know, and incomplete interviews were recoded as missing