

**Perception of Economic Standing and Political Participation
in Urban Neighborhoods**

by

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Dedication

To my parents,

Hyeran Choi and Moonjae Lee,

And to my husband, Sangbin,

Without whom none of this would have been possible.

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to address an unexplained aspect of the income-participation gap, particularly in instances where absolute income does not completely predict the resources needed for voting behavior, contrary to the predictions of resource theory. To establish a theoretical framework, I present a narrative in which the perception of relative wealth, derived from social comparison, leads to a sense of deprivation and, consequently, reduced turnout. Furthermore, the study investigates how the visibility of resources often triggers upward social comparisons, which can lead to a heightened sense of deprivation.

Building upon this theoretical base, the study progresses to an extensive empirical examination, focusing on the impact of perception of relative income on political participation. Comprising four parts, it explores the complex relationship between income inequality, individual perceptions of their own economic status, and political participation. The study combines a survey experiment, which centers on individual perceptions, with a neighborhood analysis in the Chicago and Detroit metropolitan areas. The survey assesses how perceptions of relative wealth, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward the rich and the poor influence voter turnout. Simultaneously, the neighborhood study examines the impact of relative income and income inequality within communities on electoral participation.

Key findings of this study reveal that, despite the null results from the initial survey, individuals' perception of their economic standing significantly influences political engagement. This effect is contingent on one's position on the economic spectrum because those at the

extreme ends are less likely to rely on social reference groups such as neighbors for voting decisions. In metropolitan neighborhoods, a higher degree of income inequality correlates with lower voter turnout. However, this relationship shows variation when controlling for median income levels. Moreover, the unique socioeconomic context of Detroit aligns with the narrative that when extremely limited resources constrain economic priorities, relative wealth becomes a less significant factor in electoral participation. At the individual level, in Detroit, individuals with median and low incomes were more likely to vote in unequal neighborhoods, while in Chicago, the opposite trend was observed, with lower voter turnout in high-inequality areas.

This research provides vital insights into the intricate relationship between economic perceptions and political behavior. It emphasizes important considerations for policymakers and political strategies, particularly concerning the influence of economic disparities and perceptions and the necessity of fostering neighborhood communities to bolster political engagement in urban areas. The findings, while not establishing a definitive causal link, pave the way for further exploration into how economic perceptions and local dynamics intertwine to shape voting behavior. This dissertation contributes to the broader discussion on political participation by highlighting the complex interactions between economic perceptions, neighborhood effects, and voter behavior.

Chapter 1 Introduction

How does an individual's perception of their economic status affect their political engagement?

This dissertation investigates this question, expanding upon a well-established observation: individuals with lower income tend to vote less. This phenomenon, known as the income-participation gap, has been extensively examined in classical studies within the mobilization and turnout literature (Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Brady et al. 1995). These studies predominantly focus on the role of objective income, arguing that adequate resources are essential for political participation, and their absence may lead to political disengagement. However, this research introduces a critical dimension that is often overlooked: the perception of one's economic status significantly shapes political involvement alongside objective wealth. By integrating this subjective element, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics that drive political participation.

This dissertation consists of four distinct parts. The subsequent chapter will initiate the discourse by delving into the income-participation gap. It highlights scenarios where traditional theories do not entirely account for this disparity. This paves the way for the central thesis of this research: the perception of one's wealth, alongside its absolute value, is a critical determinant in the decision to participate in elections. The theoretical expectations of this study are based on the assumption that if you feel impoverished, you will behave accordingly; the extent to which you feel impoverished depends on both the actual amount you possess and the amount you possess relative to others. First, a brief overview of how income and wealth have been measured in the literature on political participation will be provided, followed by an argument on why

relative income can potentially serve as a more insightful indicator for understanding unequal participation.

Chapter 3 studies the role of social comparison in shaping perceptions of economic status and its subsequent effect on political behavior. It examines why neighbors, especially in metropolitan areas, serve as primary reference groups for economic comparison and how these comparisons impact political engagement. The chapter discusses upward social comparison and its consequences, including diminished self-efficacy and reduced political involvement.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings of a survey experiment that examines the influence of relative wealth perception on political engagement. This part of the study dissects the narrative into individual causal links, focusing specifically on the connection between individuals' perception of relative wealth and political engagement. Involving 1204 respondents, the survey experiment exposed the treatment group to brief information about the wealth of the top 1% in the U.S., assessing its impact on their willingness to participate in elections. The findings indicated that there were no significant differences in election turnout willingness between the treatment and control groups. However, subsequent in-depth analysis of the data revealed additional insights. They both corroborate and challenge existing academic literature, demonstrating the nuanced effects of wealth perception on political behavior.

In Chapter 5, attention is turned toward spatial contexts, with a particular focus on neighborhoods and their role as informal institutions that shape one's economic perception. This section explains why neighborhoods, among various spatial boundaries, play a pivotal role in influencing an individual's voting behavior. It begins with a literature review detailing the diverse ways scholars have defined neighborhoods. It explores the impact of these neighborhood boundaries on a wide range of human perceptions and behaviors. Following this theoretical

discussion, the chapter presents empirical findings from a study that uses census tracts as proxies for neighborhoods. In this study, I have compiled a distinctive dataset that merges the commercial voter file, concentrating on individual voters as the unit of analysis, with data from the Census. Aligned with prior theoretical expectations, the study hypothesizes that residents from neighborhoods with high income inequality are likely to exhibit lower voter turnout, a consequence of the demobilizing effects of such inequality. This chapter aims to scrutinize this hypothesis, examining how the socioeconomic fabric of neighborhoods potentially impacts the political engagement of its residents.

This dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing political participation, highlighting the importance of considering both individual perceptions and neighborhood dynamics in voter participation analysis. By integrating the concept of relative wealth perception, this research offers a novel perspective in understanding how individuals perceive their place in the socio-economic hierarchy and how this perception translates into political behavior.

Chapter 2 Income-Participation Gap and the Effects of Feeling Poor on Turnout

In this chapter, I introduce my main research question: how does an individual's perception of their own economic status influence their political participation? The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion focusing on the income-participation gap and its explanation in existing literature. Although it is widely acknowledged that an income-participation gap exists, there remains an ambiguous area inadequately explained by the traditional resource model. I argue that in addition to the actual amount one possesses, the perception of one's economic standing relative to others is a determinant of political participation. This approach highlights the importance of subjective financial perceptions alongside objective economic measures in shaping an individual's engagement in politics.

2.1 The Income-Participation Gap

A large income-participation gap exists throughout the US and all over the world. The voice of the poor is underrepresented, even more than what would be implied by their low participation rate. A member of the richest 1% of the society is at least 2.5 times more likely to vote than someone in a homeless shelter (Erikson 2015). As a result, politics and policies are shaped and moved by wealthy people's opinions (Gilens 2012) and the rich also have greater influence on political outcomes. It is well established that people with fewer economic resources are less likely to vote than those with more and this participation gap is increasing.

One may wonder, then, why don't the poor vote to get their voice heard? The poor participate less in politics due to various reasons, and this silencing results in less equal distribution of wealth and less voice for the poor. As a result, they may tend to opt for other means of participation, potentially disruptive ones, such as protests, because voting requires information the poor may not have access to. Also, the poor tend not to have much trust in the institutions of society and the government; they don't think things could change by voting. While different means of participation matter, we need to work out ways to encourage the poor to vote and have their voices heard.

What makes it so difficult for the poor to actively engage in voting? The existing literature on individuals' resources and their political participation is extensive, and the relationship between them has been thoroughly studied. Why isn't everyone showing up at the polling station on election day? And why do they not raise their voices on political matters in their own interest? The simplest answer out there is due to (a lack of) resources. The poor vote less, because they have less.

2.2 A Resource Model: Why the poor don't vote

This phenomenon has been the subject of many classical studies in the mobilization and turnout literature. Resource models (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; see Brady et al. 1995 for Civic Voluntarism Model) argue that people need certain resources to participate in politics, and lack of these resources may lead to political inaction. Starting from the socioeconomic status effect (Verba and Nie 1972, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980) to the later Civic Voluntarism model on time, money, and civic skills (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), the resource model has been developed and potentially explains this gap between income and participation.

According to the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM hereafter), the poor vote less because: (1) they can't (lack of resources); (2) they don't want to (lack of engagement, political interest, and efficacy); and (3) nobody asks them to (lack of mobilization). While CVM considers many relevant factors, the model puts its emphasis on resources referred to as time, money, and civic skills. An interesting finding in this research is that although researchers have found that income does have a modest relationship to participation, education is usually more consequential than income in many studies, and income had been considered to have more indirect or less-clear-cut effects. This may not be surprising considering the class background of a person is a function not only of their income but also their education, occupation, and their social and residential surroundings. Verba et al. (1995) also clearly state that money is not necessarily a requisite for voting as there are no longer property ownership requirements or poll taxes. Still, income may serve as a practical stand-in for a more complex set of variables.

CVM has provided a useful theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between voters' income and their voting behavior. However, it also left open-ended questions on the subject. First, as stated, income only showed indirect effects according to the model as previously stated. This could mean that other well-known factors like education and political ideology may have a stronger effect than income and/or are mediating the relationship, but this interplay has not been clearly illuminated. Second, two people with similar incomes may still exhibit different voting behaviors (for example, see Jöst 2023), unlike what a resource model would predict. Several studies have shown that subjective status shapes political attitudes and behavior, which cannot be fully explained if we follow the previous definition of income as an absolute amount one receives. Kasara and Suryanayaran (2015), for example, have shown that the relationship between turnout and socioeconomic status is inverse in some places where the

rich anticipate taxation and the poor have incentives to vote. Fraga (2018) also showed that when a particular minority group is seen as having the potential to drive election outcomes, citizens from those minority groups are more likely to turn out to vote. Other scholars such as Ogorzalek et al. (2019) have suggested that absolute income isn't as good a measure as relative income defined locally. This research evidently shows that a sense of efficacy and income comparison can matter when we look at this relationship.

2.3 Why Relative Income Matters

Scholars have traditionally used absolute, objective income as a measurement of one's income (and often, a proxy of wealth) when studying the subject. Income has been considered as an absolute quantity one regularly receives. While this approach provides undeniable convenience and clarity, some aspects of people's decision-making on political participation need further exploration of the concept, as we've seen in the previous discussion. The relationship between income and turnout is often obscure. Also, do people really make economic and political decisions based on the absolute quantity of their possessions? If absolute low income is the cause of the low turnout of the poor, can we close the income-participation gap by handing out subsidies or cash transfers? We've seen many cash transfer programs in the US and around the world, but the long-term effects of such programs are still controversial.

Alternatively, understanding income as a relative quantity and feeling may help us examine the relationship between income and participation. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) suggested that people evaluate outcomes relative to a reference point and then classify gains and losses compared to it. This means that people make everyday decisions based on the perceived gap derived from comparison. But how accurately does one perceive her own relative income

anyway? We can suspect some deviations to exist. According to Elizabeth Dunn (*the Cut*), “for the average person, the correlation between objective and subjective wealth is around 0.5 or 0.6 where a perfect match would be 1.” Despite this imperfect lens, it may be the case that people make political decisions not solely based on their objective income but their subjective income relative to their reference group. Some studies examine how a person’s feelings affect their political decision-making. For instance, Levine (2015) found that making people feel insecure by reminding them of their economic fears and personal constraints leads to under-mobilization and non-participation. Yet the relationship between income and turnout hasn’t been widely studied in this perspective.

2.4 Higher effects for the poor

The perception of relative income and its effect on political turnout can be particularly crucial because the effect is more severe for the poor due to their higher opportunity cost for voting. Basic needs and everyday demands divert more of their resources and make them less likely to engage in politics and get involved. People with higher incomes do not have to choose basic needs over voting. A lack of income magnifies the effect of demands and the negative effect that demands have on participation will be greater among the poor. This would probably explain why below a certain income level turnout rate is somewhat flat and not in proportion to income. Below a certain point, such as a poverty line, your opportunity cost of voting is much higher because it includes food, housing security, and health care.

In addition to higher opportunity costs, the poor may often rely more heavily on cues and social groups for political decision-making, as noted by Armingeon and Schädel (2015). This reliance stems from a disparity in educational attainment and access to resources. Unlike

wealthier individuals, who typically have higher levels of education and a wider array of resources for independent information gathering, those with lower incomes, having generally lower educational attainment, are more inclined to rely on social cues and information shortcuts provided by others. In line with this, Rosenstone (1982) found that the effect of income on turnout is largest at the lower end of the income distribution and smallest at the higher end. Deimel et al. (2020) also said that the political knowledge and civic engagement of individuals are based on their socioeconomic status (SES) and the higher a family's SES is, the more frequent and richer the possible opportunities related to political learning they have.

2.5 Feeling poorer than your neighbors

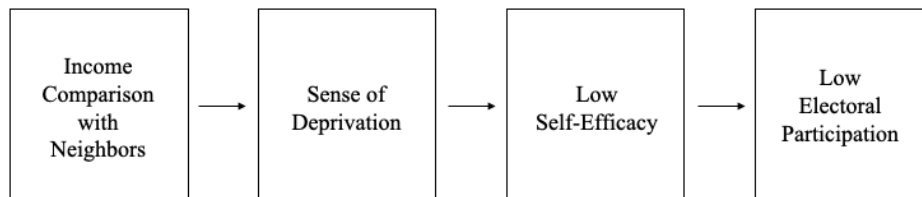
Even when you possess some resources to allocate to voting, your perception, more specifically a sense of deprivation, could inhibit you from voting. This feeling depends not just on one's own wealth but also on how it compares to that of other people. When we consider resources, especially money, we assess our position in the relative sense rather than in the absolute sense (Ojeda 2018). For example, Gelman (2009) argues that the tendency for the rich to vote Republican is stronger in poor states than in richer ones. Regarding the red-blue paradox, in which rich states seem to vote Democratic and poor states seem to vote Republican, he reasons that it is, in fact, those who are at the high end of the income spectrum who fit the pattern. The poor in both red and blue states still mostly vote Democratic, but the rich in red states vote for the Republican Party and the rich in blue states vote for the Democratic Party. This is due to availability bias; people tend to generalize and make decisions based on nearby information.

If you feel poorer than you actually are, your perceived opportunity cost is higher compared to others with similar income, and your feeling of deprivation could lead to a different

outcome from that predicted by your absolute income. In general, it is easier to feel poorer than richer than those around you because others' splurges are highly observable; spending is public, but saving is private. You see your neighbors owning fancy cars and going to a nice getaway, but you cannot observe how much they are saving for children and retirement. How this perception leads to low electoral participation can be seen below in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 shows how income comparison could lead to low electoral participation based on the discussion so far. I've explained why absolute quantity of income may not fully predict one's political participation, and how people use comparison and relative income in their everyday lives. Comparison with others leads to sense of self-deprivation without difficulty, and it results in low self-efficacy and intimidates electoral participation. This model would be less relevant to those who are in absolute poverty below the poverty line or the mega rich who would not see themselves as deprived after comparison with their neighbors. Nonetheless, I propose that it holds for those not at the extremes.

Figure 2.1 How income comparison with neighbors leads to low electoral participation



In the following chapter, I will look more closely at each link of this process. I will explain how our minds respond to the surrounding cues for social comparison and how we shape opinions of our economic status based on social comparison with neighbors, especially in metropolitan areas. I will also examine how a sense of deprivation, which is the likely result if

comparison, leads to low self-efficacy of a person, and depresses one's voting behavior in the end.

Chapter 3 Social Comparison and Political Engagement

In the preceding chapter, I explored the impact of perceived poverty, particularly the effect of feeling poorer relative to others on voting behavior. This chapter delves deeper into the mechanisms of social comparison. Does comparing income always result in a sense of deprivation? What happens when an individual perceives themselves as more privileged than their less affluent neighbors? This chapter aims to unravel how social comparison works and its implications for political participation.

3.1 Social comparison and relative income

Social comparison lets people gather information on their social class and their own rank in the class hierarchy in the society. Social class, or socioeconomic status, has typically been defined as contrasting levels of objective economic and social resources, including time, money, and education (Kraus et al. 2015). More recent studies, however, have revealed that these objective indices also shape how individuals perceive their own rank in the class hierarchy and predict their behaviors. For instance, Brown-Ianuzzi et al. (2015) argued that subjective comparison with other people could be a more relevant basis for self-interest than is objective material wealth. Newman (2013) also found that having economically distressed friends impacts one's views about the political economy and political preferences such as redistribution. Such relationships also increase one's perceived class-based bias. Other scholars have further concluded that the economic conditions of one's life are shaped by comparisons between one's own material

resources and those of others (Boyce et al. 2010; Kraus et al. 2013). This research clearly shows that people perceive their social class by comparing themselves with others.

3.2 With whom do we compare?

When we compare ourselves with others, then whom are we comparing ourselves with? Who is in our reference group? It can vary by individual, but one's immediate neighborhood is usually considered to play a crucial role as a reference group of social comparison. It is well established among scholars that individuals perceive their social class positions, including wealth, within their small social groups, such as local communities (see Kraus et al. 2015). This is because every encounter, including non-interactions within informal neighborhood networks, lets people compare themselves with others, often unconsciously. Woo et al. (2018) studied the subjective social status assignment process of Asian Americans and found that those who had high household income and whose household income was higher than the neighborhood median reported higher subjective social status. This finding shows that Asian Americans have internalized class identity and are influenced by social comparison in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is one of the most immediate groups people consider as a reference because it is often the place we strongly identify with, and the relationships and interactions within it tell us a lot about our neighbors, including their wealth and education. It is very natural that this information regarding wealth often comes from conversations with people who live nearby or who are encountered in daily life (see Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). This information gathering may result in the adoption of norms and cues from those in similar social positions or surroundings or contact with people from different social groups may also alter our beliefs (Allport 1954). Ansolabehere et al. (2014) came up with the idea of an incomplete information

theory of economic voting, arguing that when voters are imperfectly informed, instead of gathering additional economic information to inform vote choices, people tend to vote based on information personally collected from social networks and the media, especially the economic conditions of people similar to themselves. They say that these individual reports of economic perceptions do incorporate real information about their economic conditions. It is true, especially in the metropolitan areas in modern days, that not everybody knows who lives next door and not everyone has a strong bond with her own neighborhood. Even where the neighborhood ties are weak, however, local contexts people live in can still signal all kinds of socioeconomic status cues. Several studies examining the effects of social comparison suggest that, in certain contexts, people do get cues from the surrounding environment, shape their opinions based on perceptions, and subsequently act on them (Festinger 1954; Latané 1966). Many of these studies do not directly explore political participation as a response variable, but they examine how people's perceptions and comparisons affect their sense of economic inequality and the fairness of society, and their racial attitudes to outgroups.

3.3 How do people observe their economic status in their neighborhood?

As stated above, social comparison is an unavoidable aspect of perception during social interactions and it is how individuals gather information about the self and shape their goals and emotions (Kraus et al. 2017). Yet some information is easier to observe and gather than others. In several domains, many scholars have tested for positionality and have found that certain types of consumption are more conspicuous than others. For example, cars, clothing, and housing are, by nature, very easy to observe and quickly become the object of comparison. According to the literature, you can easily detect a person's class by: the clothing they wear

(Gillath et al. 2012); their cars and housing (Kuhlmann 2020); the foods they eat (Monisaivis and Drewnowski 2009); the leisure activities people engage in (Veblen 1973); and linguistic patterns and 60-second interaction (Kraus et al. 2017). However, this positionality of the goods may lead to inaccurate comparison because we cannot make a whole assessment but a partial one solely based on things we can observe.

It is very unlikely that you are the richest or poorest person in a certain group. Most people are somewhere in the middle. That means it is theoretically possible for a person to compare either upward or downward. People will feel deprived when they compare themselves with those who are richer than themselves and feel privileged when they compare with those who are poorer. However, people incomparably compare upward, with people who live better than themselves. It is practically much easier to compare upward because of the positionality and the visibility of luxury consumption (Alpizar et al. 2005; Boyce et al. 2010). Some scholars tested more specific conditions in which people tend to compare upward. Buunk and Gibbons (2018) conducted experimental studies showing that the tendency to compare upward is particularly stronger when the comparison can be made privately than when one anticipates actual contact with others. Also, an upward preference drives comparison when the motive of self-improvement is salient. So even when people try to find their similarities with others by social comparison, they can easily be threatened by a challenge induced by any wealthier neighbor.

There are many interesting studies in housing that show how important it is for people to have more than others. Charles (2019) did an online visual preference experiment to examine the preferences on positionality in housing. Using altered Google Streetview photos, she tested whether people preferred an aesthetically consistent house (i.e. a large house in a neighborhood

of large houses) or a positional house (i.e. a large house surrounded by smaller ones). Although a majority of the respondents preferred aesthetically consistent neighborhoods, about a third chose the positional house. In another study, Kuhlmann (2020) found that those who live in comparatively small houses are more likely to express dissatisfaction with their home than people living in units that are larger relative to other houses in their neighborhood cluster. The relevant theory is the McMansion effect by Bellet (2019), who claimed that when someone builds a big house in the neighborhood, it sets off a chain reaction of the homeowners within the neighborhood, and people who previously owned the biggest house are not satisfied with the size of their (now smaller) house anymore.

The concern is, however, that the perception based on which people shape their beliefs is very often inaccurate and distorted due to the aforementioned reasons. Not only the absolutely disadvantaged people are feeling unsatisfied, but even people who are way above the poverty line and living an average life can also feel very dissatisfied and deprived depending on their surroundings. There are many studies showing that this perception of one's own status can often be inaccurate. For example, Hauser and Norton (2017) showed that people often over-rely on cues from their local environment, leading to distorted beliefs about both the overall distributions of wealth and their own place in that distribution. According to their results, this (mis)perception of inequality, not actual levels of inequality, drives people's behavior and preferences for redistribution. So, what started as a spontaneous comparison with others can leave many people feeling deprived and dissatisfied with their status.

3.4 What will happen if we feel deprived? : Social comparison and political efficacy

Then how does this socially compare status lead to political (in)action? Political efficacy plays an active role in this process. Relatively little is known regarding mechanisms by which social comparison may influence one's self-efficacy, but some studies showed that sensing deprivation or other feelings through social comparison leads to a change in behaviors. Newman (2013) found that financial hardship experienced vicariously through one's friend influenced an individual's views about the political economy and their economic preferences. If your close friend had recently undergone an economic struggle, you might show more support for redistribution as a result. This change results from one's heightened perception of class-based bias and leads a person to seek equality. Kraus et al. (2017) theorized that social class signals activate social comparison processes that strengthen group boundaries between the rich and poor in society. They suggest that class signals are a "frequent, rapid, and accurate component of person perception." Social class signals can activate social class stereotypes and increase conflicts between the affluent and the poor in society.

The literature on emotion and turnout provides a notable explanation of how anger and other emotions mobilize people. One key aspect of this literature is how emotions, especially anger and other negative emotions resulting from deprivation, can motivate individuals towards political action. The mechanism behind this involves a shift in risk perception: typically, people are risk-averse, but under conditions of perceived loss, they become more inclined to take risks. This phenomenon is well explained in the foundational work of Kahneman and Tversky (1984), who argue that the prospect of losses can lead to increased risk-taking behavior.

Extending this concept to political behavior, research such as Valentino et al. (2011) demonstrates that anger, more than anxiety or enthusiasm, spurs political mobilization during

electoral campaigns and on election days. This effect can be understood in the context of a discrepancy between an individual's current state and their desired state (Mishra et al. 2015). When faced with such a discrepancy, individuals are motivated to alter their stance, transitioning from a position of risk-aversion to one of risk-seeking, particularly in decision-making scenarios."

Yet we've also seen that some anger leads to frustration and political inaction. There are studies that show people feel discouraged and inactive after feeling negative emotions. Magni (2017), as one example, showed that electoral participation has not substantially increased after the 2008 economic and financial crisis. Cognitive appraisal theories agree that anger develops when individuals can identify the cause of a threat with certainty, and when they can locate external accountability and blame others for the situation. More often than not, there are heightened political consequences where retribution is harder and you don't know whom to blame for a certain unfair incident, or when it appears that the whole system is to blame. Then people with low efficacy get frustrated and become demobilized. In this case, anger decreases electoral participation among citizens with low efficacy. Kraus et al. (2015) tested whether lower perceptions of social class rank elicit both reduced political participation and lower political self-efficacy. In a series of four studies, they found that students with lower perceived social class were less likely to participate in student government, and low political self-efficacy accounted for this link. Through perceptions of one's position in the class hierarchy relative to others, people participate less in politics (in part) because of their lack of a sense of personal control in political contexts.

To sum up, when you are reminded of your own deprivation as a result of social comparison with others, you are more likely to allocate your resources to meeting more basic

needs because you feel poor, and you are demobilized to participate in politics. Also, if you feel like your socioeconomic status rank is lower than others, you participate less in politics because this deprivation elicits feelings of lack of personal control which results in lower self-efficacy. To reiterate from the previous chapter, citizens with insufficient resources rely much more on cues and social comparison, and therefore, neighborhood surroundings can impact their voting behavior to a much greater extent. Building upon this theoretical foundation, I undertake two analyses in the following chapters to examine the connection between the perception of relative wealth and political participation: a survey experiment and a neighborhood study. Although it may not be entirely feasible to disentangle the precise causality leading to political engagement, my objective is to identify and illuminate several intermediary links that contribute to our understanding of this topic.

Chapter 4 Perception of Relative Wealth and Political Participation

In this chapter, I undertake a survey experiment to examine the causal impact of the perception of one's inferior economic status on political participation. This study challenges the traditional focus on absolute income as the key determinant of political engagement. Instead, it focuses on how the sense of economic deprivation of the survey respondents and their willingness to participate in the upcoming elections are interconnected. I propose that when people cannot identify external accountability for their relative deprivation, those with low efficacy will become frustrated and demobilized. By presenting participants with information about economically better-off individuals and observing its effect on their inclination to vote, this experiment aims to provide valuable insights into how the perception of relative income influences political engagement.

4.1 Theoretical Discussion

In the preceding chapters, I established that political participation is influenced not just by objective resources available to individuals, but also by their subjective perception of relative wealth and disparity, as supported by Solt (2018). Individuals are constantly exposed to the wealth and income levels of others, and in today's digital age, thanks to the internet and social media, this exposure has broadened significantly. One might assume that this proximity provides a clearer perspective on one's economic status within society. However, studies, including Cruces et al. (2013), indicate that people often use imprecise rules of thumb to gauge their

economic standing. This imprecision stems partly from informational limitations and is also a product of bounded rationality. As discussed in previous chapters, there is a tendency for upward comparison due to the visibility and observability of wealth.

Research has consistently shown systematic biases in how individuals perceive their income and economic status. A segment of this research contrasts relative income with subjective income perceptions, uncovering systematic biases. For instance, in the study by Cruces et al. (2013), about 30% of respondents had positively biased perceptions of income distribution, 55% had negative biases, and only around 15% accurately placed their own household income.

The significance of these imprecise and biased wealth perceptions lies in their potential impact on policy preferences and decision-making. Specifically, an individual's perception of their relative position in the income distribution can shape their views on wealth redistribution. Those who might benefit from redistribution policies could oppose them if they perceive themselves as wealthier than they are. This phenomenon has been demonstrated in various countries through recent studies, including those by Cruces et al. (2013), Fernández-Albertos and Kuo (2018), and Mu (2022). Consequently, these misperceptions can lead individuals to support policies that are not in their best interest, highlighting the importance of understanding and addressing these biases in the realm of political participation and policymaking.

4.2 Study Design

A survey experiment is designed to examine a causal link between one's perception of inferior economic standing and willingness to participate in politics. The survey experiment employs a

between-subjects design in which outcomes are measured post-treatment. The survey is divided into three stages.

Before the stimulus, in the initial stage, participants answer questions concerning their political interest, income, and housing status. These questions are designed to collect demographic information and prompt participants to reflect on their own economic standing. In the treatment phase, only those in the treatment group receive an informational snippet highlighting the wealth of the top 1% in America. This is intended to induce a sense of relative deprivation. Subsequently, all participants, including those in the treatment group, answer questions about their willingness to participate in upcoming elections and their political attitudes, allowing for an evaluation of the treatment's impact. Figure 4.2 depicts this survey flow.

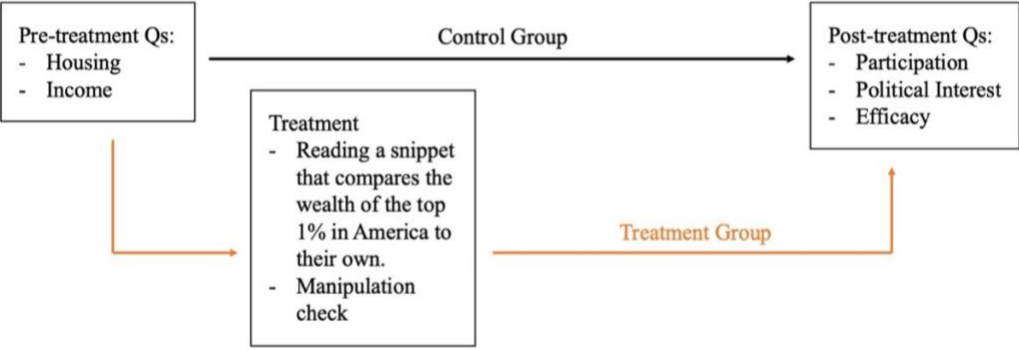


Figure 4.1: Survey Flow

Hypotheses

Based on the discussions in previous sections, the following hypotheses are formulated to examine the relationships between perceptions of relative wealth, self-efficacy, attitudes towards the wealthy, and political participation. These hypotheses are designed to methodically

investigate how these interconnected factors contribute to an individual's involvement in political processes.

Perception of relative poverty and voting likelihood

H1: The more people feel poorer than others, the lower their likelihood of voting in upcoming elections.

H1a. This effect will be observed among those who are above the poverty line.

This hypothesis tests a key aspect of the narrative. It posits that if individuals perceive themselves as economically inferior and feel relatively poorer, their likelihood of engaging in political activities, such as voting, decreases. The sub-hypothesis, H1a, is based on the notion that the perception of being relatively poorer for those below the poverty line may not significantly influence their political engagement. This is because their primary focus is likely on fulfilling basic needs rather than allocating resources for voting. In contrast, those above the poverty line, who may have more resources at their disposal, could be more influenced by their perceived relative economic status when deciding whether to engage in political activities.

Impact of Self-Efficacy on Political Demobilization

H2: The lower one's self-efficacy is, the greater the demobilizing effect of the sense of relative poverty.

This hypothesis suggests that individuals with a weaker belief in their ability to influence political or economic outcomes are more likely to be demobilized by a sense of relative deprivation. As previously discussed, individuals with a higher sense of self-efficacy might perceive the existing economic disparity as unjust, leading to feelings of anger that could mobilize them to vote. Conversely, those with lower self-efficacy, upon feeling disheartened

about their financial situation, might experience a sense of helplessness, consequently diminishing their willingness to participate in voting.

Influences of prior sentiment toward the rich and the poor

H3a: The more people believe that the rich deserve less than what they own, the lower the discouraging effect will be.

H3b: The more people believe that the poor deserve more than what they own, the lower the discouraging effect will be.

This hypothesis suggests that when individuals view the accumulation of wealth by the rich as undeserved, this perception may counteract the demotivating effect of their own perceived relative poverty. Such a viewpoint could potentially inspire a drive to demand change via political channels and mobilize voters. Similarly, if individuals hold the belief that the less fortunate deserve better, this sense of fairness might motivate them to actively participate in elections by turning out to vote.

Important Measured Variables

The primary outcome variable is the willingness to vote in upcoming elections, measured through two questions: “How likely are you to vote in the upcoming presidential election?” (extremely likely/very likely/moderately likely/slightly likely/not likely at all) and “How likely are you to vote in elections other than the presidential election (e.g., governor, state legislature, mayor, city council, referendum)?” (extremely likely/very likely/moderately likely/slightly likely/not likely at all). The manipulation check question assesses whether the treatment group received the manipulation as intended. It is framed as follows: “Which sentence best describes

how you feel about your financial situation?” (on a 5-point scale from “It makes me feel very bad about my financial situation” to “very good”).

Internal and external political efficacy is measured by asking how much they agree with the following statements: “I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics” and “I don’t think public officials care much about what people like me think.”

Deservingness measures two aspects: whether people believe that rich individuals deserve their wealth (“Would you say that most rich people have more money than they deserve, or less money than they deserve?” (a lot more/a little more/about the right amount/a little less/a lot less than they deserve)) and how often they have felt resentment toward rich people (always/most of the time/about half of the time/once in a while/never). Similarly, subjects were asked whether they believe the poor deserve what they have, and how often they have felt sympathy for them.

Stimulus

In my experiment, I expose the treatment group to a short piece of information about the wages of the wealthiest 1% in the U.S. This information encourages them to compare it with their own income and then respond to their willingness to participate in the upcoming election. The exact stimulus is as follows.

Are You Rich? Here’s How Much You Need to Be Rich

The richest 1% of American households earned over \$600,000 in income last year. To be part of this group, you would need to earn more than \$400,000 annually as an individual.

Now, take a moment to consider your own earnings from the past year. How much more do the top 1% make compared to you?

Next, think about the monetary value of all the things you own. How much money do you have in your bank accounts or investments? Do you own a house or a car? What is their monetary worth?

To be among the top 1% in America, you would need to have at least \$11 million in wealth.

This survey's design draws upon existing research that highlights the impact of information provision as a treatment in experimental settings. Numerous studies have demonstrated that specific informational inputs can effectively influence individual choices and behaviors. For instance, Kuziemko et al. (2015) discovered that awareness of income inequality can alter policy preferences. Similarly, Mu (2022) observed changes in perceptions of fairness and inequality after presenting participants with two types of information: general data on wealth concentration and personalized insights into their household income ranking. In line with these findings, by disseminating information about the income of the wealthiest individuals, I anticipate observing changes in participants' political engagement.

Additionally, the design aims to juxtapose subjective perceptions with objective reality, a methodology inspired by the approaches of studies like Manski (2004). By directly prompting participants to compare their income with that of the top 1%, the experiment aims to provoke a subjective assessment of their economic status and comparison. This design is expected to yield insights into how objective financial information intersects with subjective economic perceptions to influence political behavior.

4.3 Data Collection

I conducted the experiment from October 23 to 27, 2023 with 1204 respondents. There were 601 respondents in the treatment group and 603 in the control. Respondents were recruited from a subject pool of Prolific, an online survey platform. They had to be over 18 and located in the

U.S. To ensure high-quality survey responses, respondents were required to have an approval rate of at least 95% and have made 100 or more previous submissions (Eyal et al. 2021). The sample size was determined based on existing survey experiment literature in the field of political science, survey attrition, and budget constraints. Since the survey was conducted online, subjects were able to participate from any location with internet access. Participants received \$1.2 as compensation for completing the survey.

I included an attention check question in the midst of the post-treatment questions: “What is 213+1?” (With answer options 9/35/214) to exclude those who did not pass the test. All participants passed the check. Additionally, subjects were required to answer all questions in order to proceed and receive compensation.

4.4 Results

Comparing the Treatment and Control Groups

I begin the analysis with a t-test to evaluate whether there are statistically significant differences in the financial feelings between the treatment and the control groups. This was to determine if the treatment effectively made respondents in the treatment group feel economically inferior compared to those in the control group. The results indicate that there is no strong evidence to conclude that the treatment had a significant impact on making participants in the treatment group feel worse off about their financial situation in comparison to the control group (Table 4.1).

I also examined whether there were any differences in voting likelihood between the control and treatment groups (Table 4.2). For this test, I used the Wilcoxon rank sum test because the dependent variable, willingness to turnout in elections, is on the Likert scale and

highly skewed — over 65% answered that they are extremely likely to vote in the upcoming presidential elections. Despite this analysis, the survey did not reveal any discernible differences in political participation in all four variables according to the test results ($p > 0.05$). This implies that exposure to income comparison information did not statistically significantly affect participants' willingness to vote.

These findings prompt important reflections on the survey design and its implementation, as well as the underlying theoretical framework of the study. The lack of discernible impact raises questions about the experimental setup and the assumptions made about the influence of economic perceptions on political behavior. I will explore several possible reasons for this outcome in subsequent discussions.

Table 4.1: T-test Results Comparing Financial Feeling in Treatment and Control Group

	Treatment		Control		df	T	Sig,	95% Confidence Interval	
	Mean	sd	Mean	sd				Lower	Upper
Financial feeling	2.66	1.18	2.75	1.24	1200	1.3	0.19	-0.05	0.23

Table 4.2: Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test Results for Voting Likelihood

	Group	N	Median	W	p-value
Presidential Election	Treatment	601	5	183045	0.72
	Control	603	5		
Other Elections	Treatment	601	4	177264	0.5
	Control	603	4		
Event Participation	Treatment	601	1	183898	0.6
	Control	603	1		
Donation	Treatment	601	1	186798	0.27
	Control	603	1		



Figure 4.2: Treatment Group – “Which sentence best describes how you feel about your financial situation?”

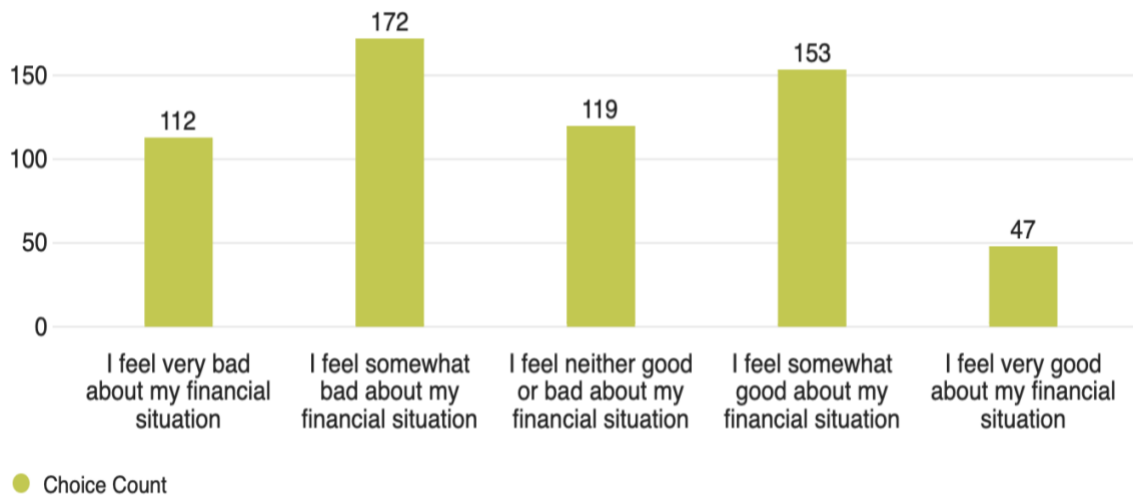


Figure 4.3: Control Group – “Which sentence best describes how you feel about your financial situation?”

Indiscernible Differences

Potential invalidity of the underlying theory

One explanation for the indiscernible differences could be that the foundational theory discussed in the previous chapter — that perceptions of relative poverty demobilize political participation — might not be as universally applicable as initially suggested. While political participation is undoubtedly influenced by various factors, including political ideology and partisanship, additional analysis provides only partial support for my theory. This outcome raises questions about the overarching validity of the theoretical framework in explaining political behavior.

Valid theory but Contextual Inapplicability

Another possibility is that the theory itself is sound but may not be applicable in the specific context of this study. The pivotal element in this theory is the feeling of relative poverty when compared to others. However, the online survey might have had limitations, such as challenges in accurately measuring participants' initial perceptions or defining a clear reference group for comparison.

Valid and applicable theory, but inadequate stimulus

Alternatively, the experiment's stimulus — information about the top 1%'s wealth — may not have been potent enough to significantly alter participants' perceptions of their economic status. The treatment could have been insufficient in shifting their sense of relative wealth or might not have addressed the key aspects of their economic perceptions. Additionally, the duration and depth of the exposure to the stimulus might have been inadequate to produce a notable effect. Considering the inherent salience of financial concerns in people's lives, especially for those facing financial constraints, the brief treatment used in this survey may not have been impactful enough to produce a discernible change.

From the data obtained, it is challenging to conclusively determine which of these potential explanations is most accurate, as they result in observationally equivalent outcomes. This highlights the intricate nature of exploring causal relationships in this area and underscores the importance of continued research. Future studies could focus on refining the theoretical framework, experimenting with different contexts, or adjusting the treatment to impact participants' perceptions more effectively. The treatment could be redesigned to be more engaging to draw the comparison by targeting specific income groups or demographic cohorts. Additionally, incorporating qualitative follow-up studies might offer deeper insights into the observed lack of distinction between the treatment and control groups.

4.5 Expanded Results: Examining the Link Between Financial Feeling and Turnout

Acknowledging the identified limitation of the survey design, in this section, I turn my analysis to examine the link between financial feeling and political engagement. While the treatment turned out to be ineffective in differentiating the responses following stimulus between two groups, valuable insight could still be gained by exploring the relationship between how people feel about their wealth and political participation. In the following models, I used financial feeling as a predictor and the likelihood of voting in the upcoming presidential election as the main dependent variable to explore this relationship.

I first examine the modified version of Hypothesis 1 — the more people feel bad about their financial situation, the lower their likelihood of voting in the upcoming elections. Ordinal logistic regression models were employed to test this hypothesis, with the likelihood of presidential election turnout as the dependent variable. Table 4.3 displays the results of multiple ordinal logistics regression models. While there exist some fluctuations, a general correlation is

observed between financial sentiment and a higher likelihood of voting. Across different models, the coefficients for financial feelings indicated a positive, statistically significant relationship with the probability of voting, with the notable exception being the interaction model. This finding suggests that individuals' feelings about their economic status significantly influence their decision to participate in the election. Additionally, other demographic variables such as income, age, gender, political affiliation, education, and some ethnicity groups showed consistently significant effects on the likelihood of voting. The effects of these variables reconfirm the previous literature on voting, and the presence of these significant predictors clearly shows that the decision to vote is influenced by a combination of various factors.

Objective Income and Financial Feeling

One crucial challenge in this analysis is to demonstrate that financial feeling is a separate measure from objective income. If this is not the case, then the previous results only reiterate the previous research on absolute income: the rich vote more. Inherently, these two measures are expected to have a positive relationship because one is more likely to feel better when she has more wealth, but it is worth checking whether they are interchangeably close in the responses and model. It turns out that while the two variables are inherently correlated, they are not the same and do not have linear relationship. Figure 4.4 shows the distribution of financial feeling across income categories. Although there exists a positive relationship between these two variables, as anticipated, the relationship does not seem to be strictly linear. In assessing multicollinearity within the main model, no strong multicollinearity was observed among the predictor variables, including the interaction effect between financial feeling and income. This suggests a low risk of inflated standard errors due to multicollinearity, with further details

provided in the Appendix. Additionally, an interaction term between financial feeling and income was incorporated into Model 5 in Table 4.3 to examine any possible combined effect of these two variables. However, the model reveals that the combined effect of financial feeling and income does not significantly influence the likelihood of voting.

Table 4.3: Ordinal Logistic Regression Coefficients for Likelihood of Voting in the Upcoming Presidential Election

Variables		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Financial feeling		0.21*** (0.05)	0.16*** (0.06)	-	0.11* (0.06)	-0.49 (0.13)
Income		-	-	0.14*** (0.04)	0.10** (0.05)	-0.03 (0.11)
Age		-	0.03*** (0.006)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.34*** (0.01)
Female		-	0.27** (0.13)	0.30** (0.13)	0.31** (0.13)	0.32** (0.13)
Democrat		-	1.06*** (0.13)	1.06*** (0.13)	1.06*** (0.13)	1.06*** (0.13)
Education		-	0.48*** (0.10)	0.42*** (0.11)	0.40*** (0.11)	0.39*** (0.11)
Ethnicity	Black	-	-1.21*** (0.22)	-0.99*** (0.22)	-1.01*** (0.22)	-1.01*** (0.22)
	Asian	-	-0.86*** (0.23)	-0.83*** (0.23)	-0.84*** (0.23)	-0.85*** (0.23)
	Mixed	-	-0.27 (0.26)	-0.22 (0.26)	-0.25 (0.26)	-0.24 (0.26)
	Other	-	-0.09 (0.34)	-0.12 (0.34)	-0.07 (0.35)	-0.10 (0.34)
Financial feeling*Income			-	-	-	0.05 (0.03)
N		1204	1204	1204	1204	1204
AIC		2645.81	2489.877	2488.498	2487.168	2457.279

Note: standard errors in parentheses.

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

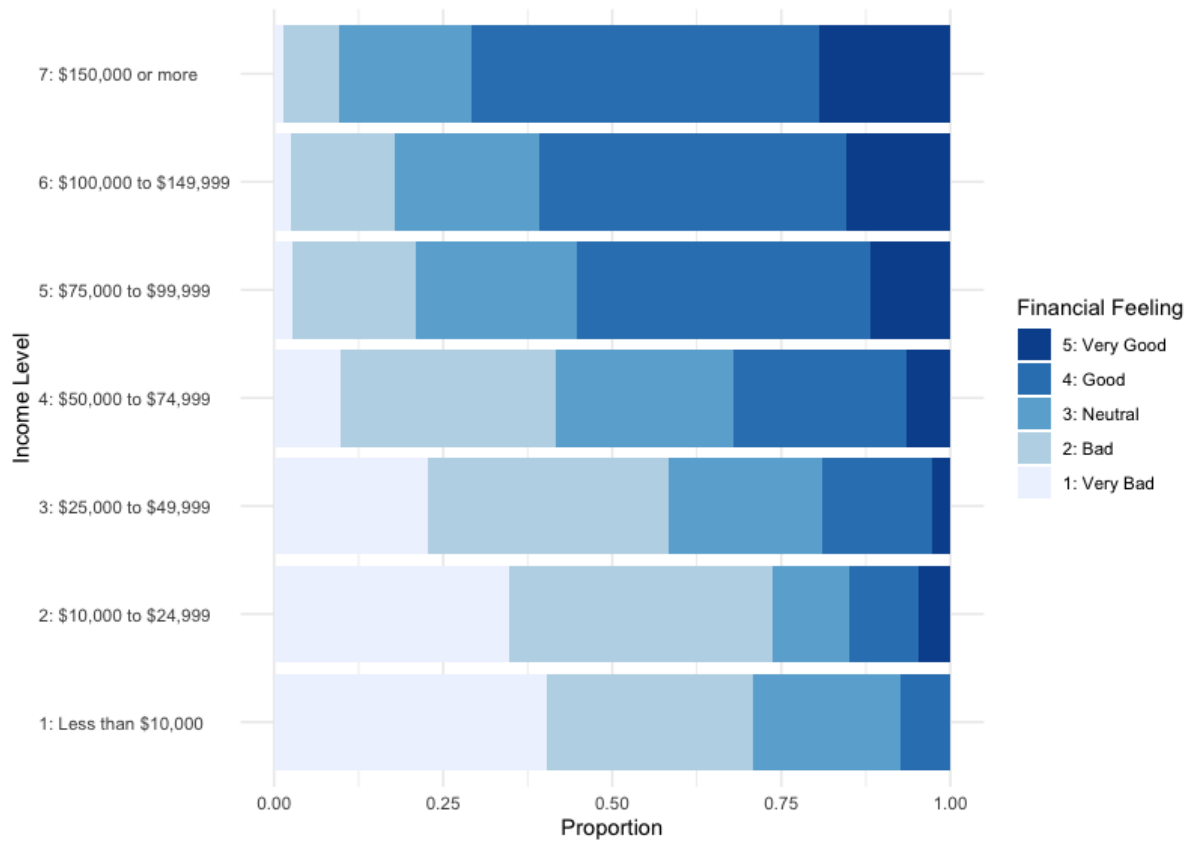


Figure 4.4: Distribution of Financial Feeling across Income Categories

Above and Below Poverty Line

In order to test the modified version of Hypothesis 1a, I divided the respondents into two income groups: those who are above and below the poverty line. Then these two groups were tested using ordinal logistic regression. As predicted in the preceding chapter, this relationship between financial feeling and the likelihood of voting is not statistically significant for those below the poverty line, suggesting no strong association with voter turnout in this subgroup. This result supports the story where the poor have limited resources to invest in political activities, reaffirming previous literature on the subject. Figure 4.5 illustrates the comparison of the coefficients of the two models. It shows that identifying as a Democrat has a lesser impact on the likelihood of higher voter turnout in this group compared to the above the poverty line group. On the other hand, education had more influence on the likelihood of higher voter turnout for those below the poverty line. This analysis not only confirms existing theories about the constraints faced by economically disadvantaged groups in political participation but also highlights the nuanced differences in factors influencing voter turnout across different income levels.

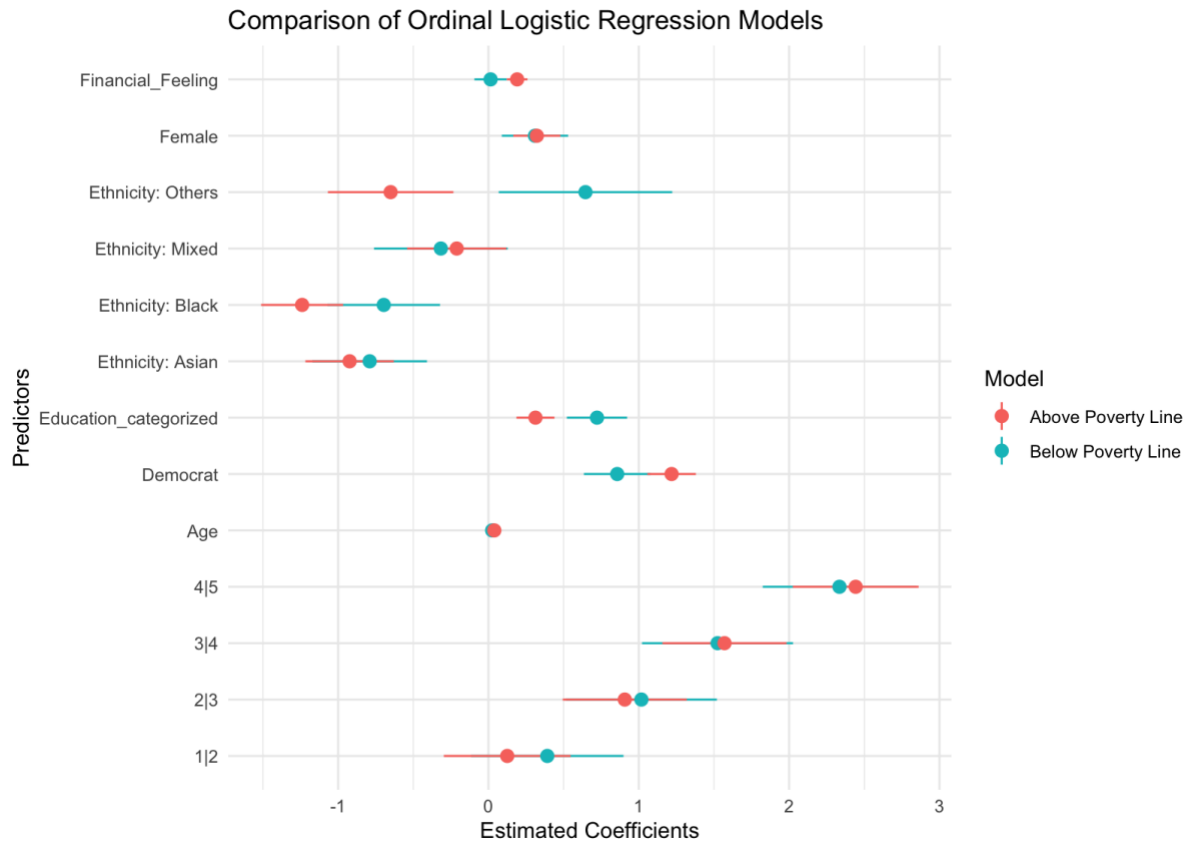


Figure 4.5: Comparison of Ordinal Logistic Regression Models: above and below Poverty Line

Self-Efficacy

In exploring the link between self-efficacy and voter turnout, correlations among individuals' feeling[perception] about their financial situation, both internal and external self-efficacy, and their willingness to engage in electoral participation were examined. The results illustrated in Figure 4.6 are based on the theoretical model introduced in Chapter 2 and provide the Spearman correlation coefficients for each factor.

The analysis revealed a weak, yet statistically significant, positive correlation between both internal and external measures of self-efficacy and feelings about one's financial situation. This indicates a modest association between financial feeling and self-efficacy, aligning with theoretical expectations, though the strength of these relationships is relatively low.

The relationship between internal self-efficacy and voter turnout was found to be moderate and statistically significant, suggesting a more substantial link. In contrast, the correlation between external self-efficacy and turnout, while still statistically significant, was comparatively weaker. Notably, internal efficacy demonstrated a stronger association with voter turnout than external efficacy. This finding illuminates the differing impacts of various efficacy types on electoral participation, highlighting the more pronounced influence of internal self-efficacy.

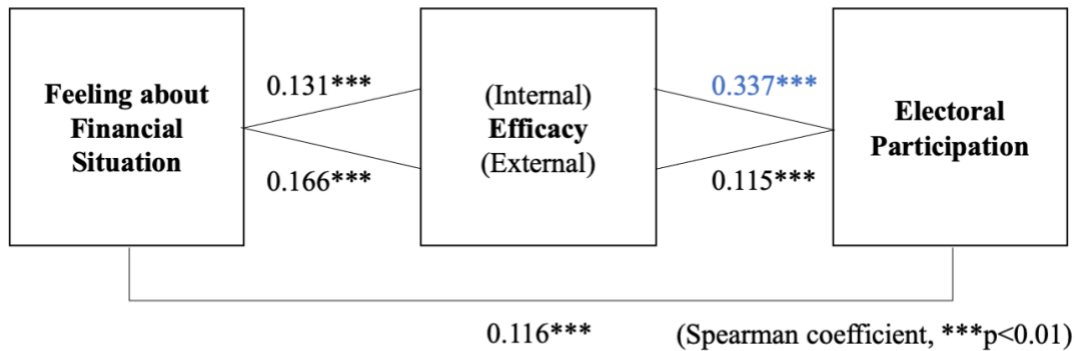


Figure 4.6: Correlation Analysis: Theoretical Model

Sentiments toward the rich and the poor

I turn to test Hypothesis 3, exploring the relationship between sentiments toward the rich and the poor and their willingness to vote. The deservingness of the rich and poor was measured in the survey by asking people whether they think the rich[poor] have more or less money than they deserve. Additionally, I measured how often subjects have felt resentment toward the rich and sympathy for the poor. These series of questions were borrowed and adapted from Piston (2018), where he studied how the attitudes toward the poor and the rich affect policy preferences and candidate evaluations.

Initially, I investigated the correlation between attitudes toward the rich and the poor and electoral participation. Figure 4.7 details the Spearman correlation coefficients for each variable. The analysis revealed that all these correlations are notably weak but positive, with attitudes of deservingness towards the rich and sympathy for the poor displaying especially faint associations

with voter turnout. While further examination is required, these results hint at the possibility that electoral participation may be more strongly influenced by assertive emotions like resentment.

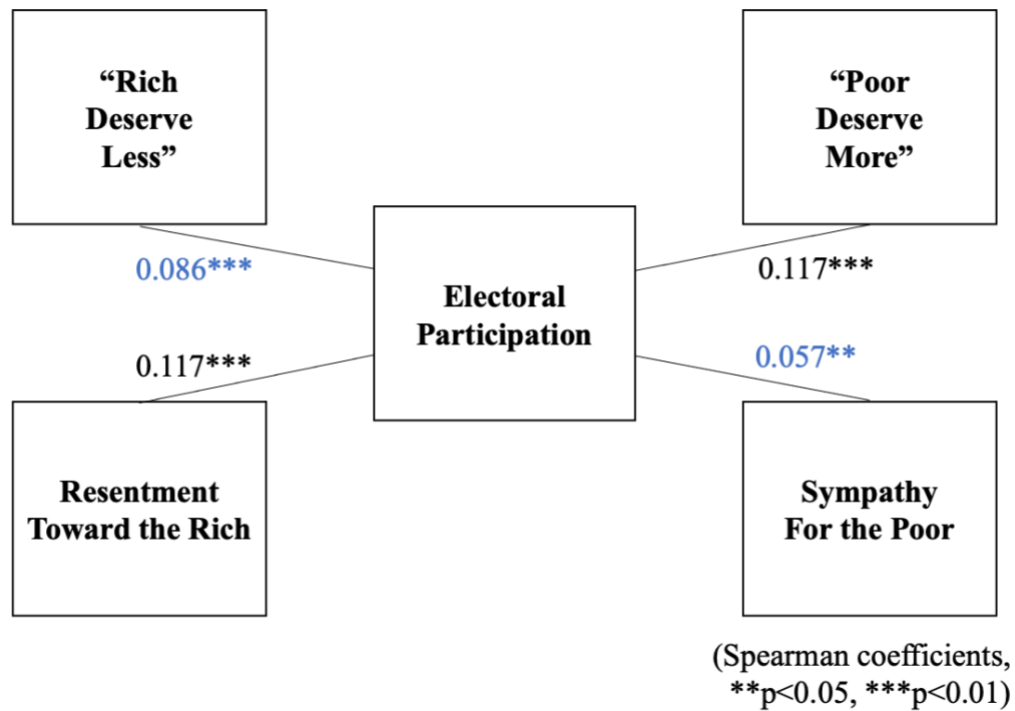


Figure 4.7: Correlation: Turnout and Attitudes toward the Rich and the Poor

For a more detailed investigation, I tested ordinal logistic regression models. Table 4.4 illustrates the results highlighting how subjective attitudes can influence political behavior. The results show that the perception of deservingness of rich is negatively associated with the likelihood of turnout. The effect was significant in two out of three models. This suggests that individuals who perceive the rich as deserving [more] are less likely to turn out. Conversely, poor deservingness has a positive and statistically significant association with turnout in all three models. This indicates that seeing the poor as deserving [more] increases the likelihood of

turnout. Meanwhile, financial feeling was consistently positive and significant across all models, reinforcing the argument that it plays an important role in this multifaceted relationship. The negative association between the perception of rich deservingness and voter turnout needs further investigation, but it possibly implies either acceptance of social hierarchy (hence no need to change) or political cynicism (again, no need to vote). On the other hand, the positive relationship between poor deservingness and voter turnout aligns with the previous literature where anger drives mobilization, which was discussed in the previous chapter. An additional model testing the effects of resentment toward the rich and sympathy for the poor (Table 4.5) shows that resentment toward the rich has a positive, statistically significant association with turnout, while sympathy showed a non-significant, weak relationship.

I also ran the deservingness models by partisanship subgroups, as the sentiments toward the rich and poor are expected to be highly correlated with political affiliation, as depicted in Figures 4.6 and 4.7. The results show that partisanship significantly shapes how attitudes toward the rich and the poor influence voter turnout. While Democrats and independents seem to be more influenced by their views on the deservingness of the rich and poor, these attitudes play a less significant role for Republicans.

Table 4.4: Ordinal Logistic Regression Coefficients for Likelihood of Upcoming Presidential Election Turnout

Variables	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Deservingness: rich	-0.13* (0.07)	-0.10 (0.07)	-0.12* (0.07)			
Deservingness: poor				0.23*** (0.08)	0.19** (0.08)	0.23*** (0.08)
Financial feeling	0.13** (0.06)		0.18*** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)		0.2*** (0.06)
Income	0.10** (0.05)	0.14*** (0.04)		0.10** (0.05)	0.15*** (0.04)	
Age	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Female	0.30** (0.13)	0.29** (0.13)	0.26** (0.13)	0.28** (0.13)	0.27** (0.13)	0.24* (0.13)
Democrat	1.01*** (0.13)	1.01*** (0.13)	1.00*** (0.13)	0.97*** (0.13)	0.98*** (0.13)	0.97*** (0.13)
Education	0.39*** (0.11)	0.41*** (0.11)	0.47*** (0.1)	0.39*** (0.11)	0.42*** (0.11)	0.48*** (0.1)
Ethnicity Black	-1.00*** (0.22)	-0.99*** (0.22)	-1.02*** (0.22)	-1.04*** (0.22)	-1.02*** (0.22)	-1.05*** (0.22)
Asian	-0.78*** (0.23)	-0.78*** (0.23)	-0.81*** (0.23)	-0.77*** (0.23)	-0.76*** (0.23)	-0.79*** (0.23)
Mixed	-0.25 (0.26)	-0.22 (0.26)	-0.28 (0.26)	-0.23 (0.26)	-0.2 (0.26)	-0.26 (0.26)
Other	-0.04 (0.35)	-0.10 (0.35)	-0.07 (0.35)	-0.02 (0.35)	-0.09 (0.35)	-0.05 (0.35)
N	1204	1204	1204	1204	1204	1204
AIC	2486.182	2488.455	2489.098	2481.03	2484.613	2484.131

Note: standard errors in parentheses.

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

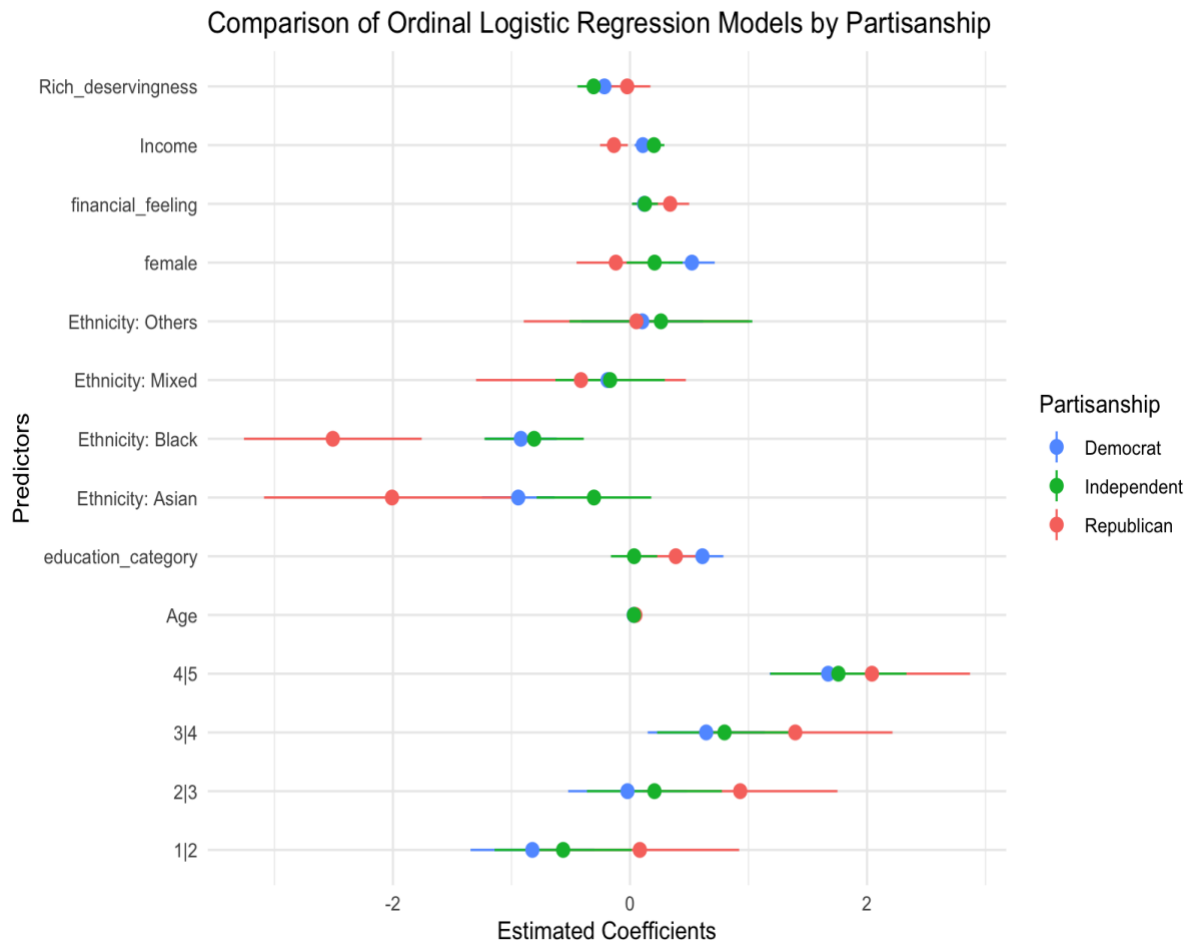


Figure 4.8: Comparison of Partisanship Models: Rich Deservingness

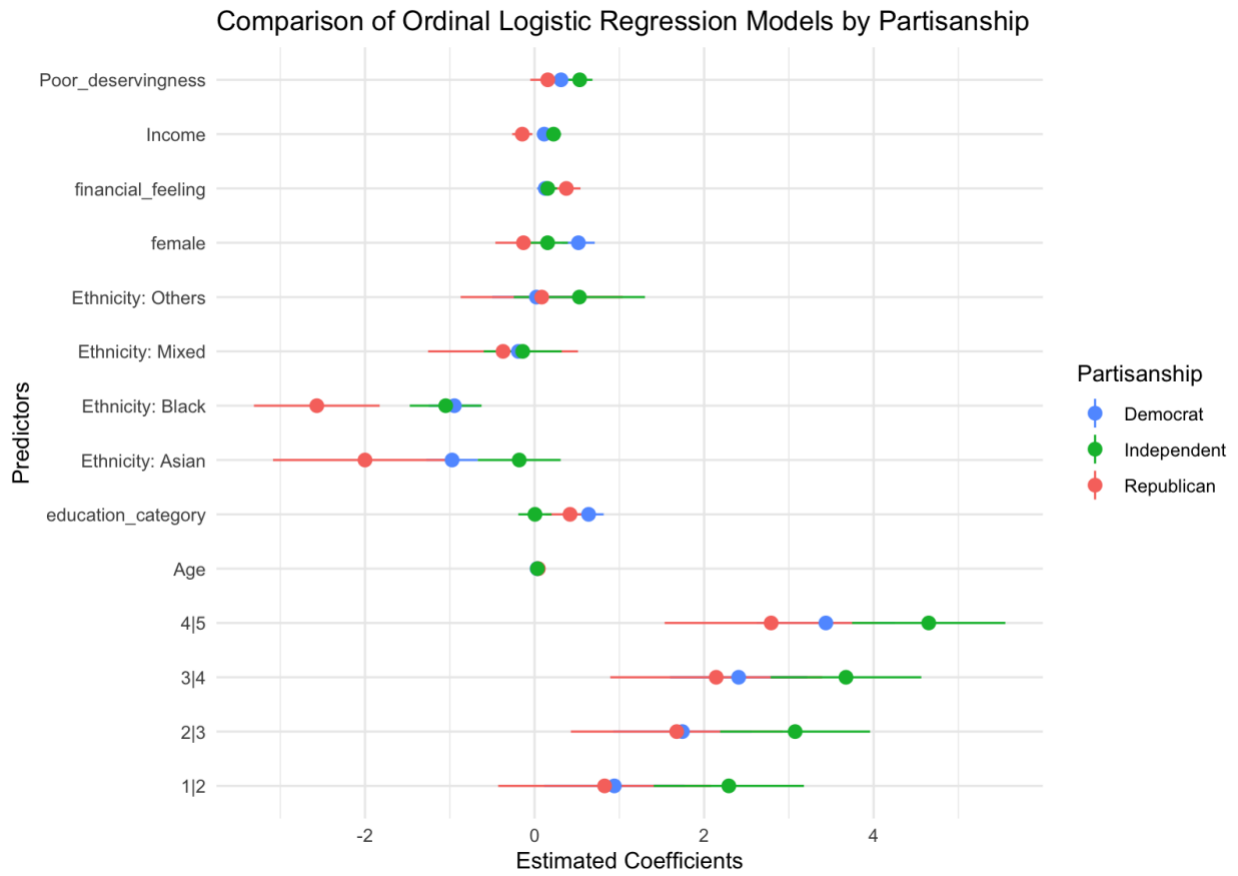


Figure 4.9: Comparison of Partisanship Models: Poor Deservingness

Table 4.5: Ordinal Logistic Regression Coefficients for Likelihood of Upcoming Presidential Election Turnout

Variables		Resentment Model	Sympathy Model	Resentment and Sympathy Model
Resentment toward the Rich		0.2 (0.06)***	-	0.2 (0.06)***
Sympathy for the Poor		-	0.08 (0.06)	0.02 (0.07)
Financial feeling		0.16 (0.06)**	0.12 (0.06)**	0.16 (0.06)**
Income		0.09 (0.05)**	0.1 (0.05)**	0.1 (0.05)**
Age		0.04 (0.01)***	0.03 (0.01)***	0.04 (0.01)***
Female		0.97 (0.13)***	1.04 (0.13)***	0.96 (0.13)***
Democrat		0.29 (0.13)**	0.29 (0.13)**	0.29 (0.13)**
Education		0.37 (0.11)***	0.39 (0.11)***	0.37 (0.11)***
Ethnicity	Black	-0.89 (0.22)***	-1.01 (0.22)***	-0.89 (0.22)***
	Asian	-0.75 (0.23)***	-0.8 (0.23)***	-0.75 (0.23)***
	Mixed	-0.25 (0.26)	-0.24 (0.26)	-0.25 (0.26)
	Other	-0.03 (0.35)	-0.08 (0.35)	-0.04 (0.35)
N		1204	1204	1204
AIC		2477.393	2487.388	2497.288

Note: standard errors in parentheses.

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

4.6 Implications

This survey experiment was designed to unravel the intricate relationship between the perception of relative wealth, self-efficacy, and sentiments toward the rich and the poor. It also investigated how these factors influence political participation, specifically voter turnout in presidential elections. The results showed no notable differences in the willingness to turn out for elections between the treatment and control groups. Nonetheless, a more detailed analysis of the data yielded further insights. The findings from correlation analyses and multiple ordinal logistic regression models have explored these nuanced relationships, providing the following insights on political engagement.

The first analysis examines the relationship between individuals' feelings about their financial standing and their likelihood of voting. It consistently reveals a positive and significant relationship across ordinal logistic models, indicating that individuals' perception of wealth plays a crucial role in influencing their decision to vote. Analysis based on poverty line subgroups reveals that this relationship does not hold true for those below the poverty line, as expected. This aligns with the previous narrative that the impact of limited resources outweighs financial feelings or perceptions.

The correlation analysis reveals that while individuals' perceptions of their financial situation and their self-efficacy (both internal and external) are positively associated with voter turnout, these relationships are relatively weak. This suggests that financial perception and self-efficacy, although contributing factors as anticipated in the theoretical framework, may not be the strongest predictors of electoral participation and calls for future research.

Furthermore, the subsequent investigation into attitudes toward the rich and the poor indicates that these sentiments have very weak correlations with electoral participation. Notably, feelings of deservingness towards the rich and sympathy for the poor show particularly faint associations with voter turnout. This implies that more assertive emotions, such as resentment, might play a more significant role in motivating electoral participation. The findings from ordinal logistic regression models reveal a negative relationship between perceiving the rich as deserving and voter turnout, suggesting that individuals who hold this belief are less likely to vote. Conversely, perceiving the poor as deserving shows a positive correlation, aligning with previous research on anger and mobilization. These findings highlight the complexity of factors influencing political engagement and suggest that future research should delve deeper into the emotional and psychological drivers behind voting behavior. This dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on political participation by emphasizing the need to look beyond traditional economic and resource-based models, considering the nuanced roles of perception, emotion, and social dynamics in shaping political action.

Chapter 5 Neighborhood Inequality and Voter Turnout

In this chapter, the focus shifts from the individual-level perceptions and subjective experiences of economic status to the broader, community-level dynamics found within neighborhoods. The context of a neighborhood is crucial, not only as a collective of individuals but also as influential entities affecting its residents. This neighborhood-focused study, drawing upon insights from the previous survey experiment and revisiting theoretical discussions in chapters 2 and 3, aims to deepen our understanding of political participation. It examines the impact of both the spatial and social contexts of individuals' living environments on their voting behavior, focusing on income inequality and one's economic standing compared to the rich within these neighborhoods. Emphasizing the significance of relative income and neighborhood income disparities, this chapter investigates how these local economic factors shape the political engagement of residents.

5.1 Theoretical Background

The influence of Neighborhood on individual perception of economic status

Neighborhood is often perceived as the primary spatial boundary in one's everyday life. It is where you and your neighbors live, and it often becomes your reference group simply because of the frequency of encounters. Many studies have emphasized the role of the neighborhood in one's life. According to Bartle et al. (2017), the neighborhood is "part of the lived experiences of individuals." Neighborhoods contribute to residential satisfaction (Rossi 1955) because major

life events often prompt changes in housing needs, leading to relocation. For instance, people may move to a larger house when starting a new relationship, having children, or responding to other life changes such as divorce or children leaving home. While the concept of neighborhood is significant for many, perceptions of it can vary: for some, a neighborhood is home, a place of belonging; for others, it is merely a location where they happen to reside (Hays, 2015).

A plethora of studies have examined how a person is affected by one's own neighborhood. For example, Newman et al. (2015) argue that citizens are "receiving the [neighborhood] treatment" by demonstrating that perceptions of one's context — such as levels of local immigration and assessments of the health of the local job market — mediate one's views on relevant economic and immigration attitudes. Scholars have also shown how people shape different subjective statuses determined by various socioeconomic factors of their neighborhood and their relative position within it (Tam Cho and Baer, 2011; Woo et al., 2018). This suggests that people perceive their relative social status based on cues gathered from their own neighborhood.

Neighborhood effects on political efficacy and participation

How does our address affect the way we think and vote? Different neighborhoods impact residents' perceptions and actions in diverse ways. Some research, building on Allport's Contact Theory (1954), examined this influence and showed that neighborhood diversity influences attitudes toward social and economic issues. For instance, Minkoff and Lyons (2019) showed that people's opinions on inequality are influenced by the places where people live. Residents exposed to income diversity were more aware of the economic gap and often supported reducing it, especially those with less education or at the extremes of the income spectrum. Other studies

have shown that racially heterogeneous neighborhoods can reduce hostility towards different races (Carsey 1995; Giles and Evans 1986; Key 1949). Moreover, Tam Cho and Baer (2011) observed that high-status neighborhoods with diverse populations are more conducive to racial harmony than low-income, educationally disadvantaged areas. All these studies clearly show that people's perceptions of society and their attitudes are affected by their neighborhood communities.

However, the influence of neighborhood may vary depending on an individual's resources and socioeconomic status. Individuals with fewer resources in diverse neighborhoods may feel a heightened sense of deprivation and lower self-efficacy when exposed to wealthier individuals. This dynamic underscores the importance of empowering poorer communities to foster political participation. For instance, Jöst (2023) demonstrated that lower-income voters are more likely to emulate their neighbors' voting behaviors, especially in poorer neighborhoods. This suggests that encouraging electoral turnout among similar income groups can have a positive impact on overall participation.

Lastly, Bartle et al. (2017) examined the impact of spatial inequality, highlighting that socioeconomic segregation and heterogeneity significantly affect voting behavior. Their findings indicate that segregation, particularly among poorer populations, decreases voting likelihood, while heterogeneity can somewhat increase participation by emphasizing group identities. However, the negative effects of segregation often outweigh the positives, affecting social capital access and leading to reduced political engagement in isolated poor communities.

This body of literature informs the following analysis: a person's perception of their economic status and their likelihood to participate in elections are influenced by the neighborhood they live in. The diverse effects of neighborhood characteristics provide a

potential explanation for the inconsistent findings regarding the impact of income on political participation.

Research Question and Hypothesis

In this study, I focus on examining the influence of neighborhoods on voter turnout. I focus on two factors: neighborhood income inequality and one's relative income compared to the richest residents within the neighborhood. I expect to find that higher levels of neighborhood inequality are associated with lower voter turnout. This expectation is based on the premise that individuals exposed to significant income disparities within their neighborhood may feel demobilized, aligning with the previous theoretical argument. Again, this effect is likely to be moderated by the absolute income of each individual and household because those at either end of the wealth spectrum are less likely to be affected by their neighbors' economic standing. Based on the preceding discussion, I also expect to find that as the disparity between one's income and the richest residents increases, people will get demobilized.

5.2 Study Design

Scope of the study

In this chapter, the focus is on metropolitan areas, which present a diverse array of neighborhood perceptions and experiences. Metropolitan areas offer a rich context for studying the daily interactions of people and their influence on political decisions, especially when contrasted with rural settings. The metropolitan area typically consists of a core area with a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social integration with that core, according to the Census Geographic Areas Reference Manual (1994). A city, in

contrast, is an incorporated municipality within metropolitan areas. Examining metropolitan areas is crucial, as the impact of neighborhoods often transcends city boundaries, affecting the surrounding suburban areas. Focusing solely on inner cities could overlook the experiences of middle-class suburban residents commuting to the city or those displaced by gentrification.

The study specifically concentrates on two Midwestern metropolitan areas: Chicago and Detroit. These two areas, relatively close to each other, offer potentially compelling comparative perspectives. When it comes to neighborhood changes, Chicago has been under the gentrification influence since the 1920s. Gentrification is still ongoing, and while Chicago is not considered the most gentrified city in the US, it often gets its place around the top 10. However, Detroit is hardly being gentrified at all according to existing studies. For example, a study shows that only two out of one thousand most gentrified Census tracts in the US is from Detroit, which is less than 1% of its potential tracts (Brummet and Reed 2019). In Detroit, poverty remains a predominant issue, with over a quarter-million residents living below the poverty line as of the American Community Survey (ACS) data, and poverty rates having risen significantly from 2009 to 2014. Moreover, both Chicago and Detroit exhibit high degrees of racial segregation, though their patterns differ markedly. Chicago is divided between the North and South with a distinct boundary, while Detroit's segregation is characterized by a divide between impoverished inner-city communities and more affluent outer-ring suburbs. These contrasting dynamics make Chicago and Detroit compelling case studies for exploring how neighborhood communities influence political behavior.

Data

For this study, I have assembled a unique dataset by combining the voter file, which focuses on individual voters as the primary unit of analysis, obtained from L2, a commercial data provider, with Census data. This method provides a detailed perspective while ensuring accuracy. The voter file, sourced from official records, is highly reliable for voter registration information. However, it may not capture certain variables like income with complete precision. To mitigate this limitation, I integrated the data using census tract-based geographical identifiers with Census data. This dataset will be utilized to examine the impact of neighborhood-level income inequality on voter turnout rates. While the establishment of a direct causal link is not the central aim of my study, nor is it entirely achievable due to data constraints, the analysis is designed to explore this relationship and shed light on the potential connection between income inequality and political engagement.

Using census tracts as proxies for neighborhoods

Before discussing how neighborhoods can affect one's political behavior, an important question must first be addressed: Do people perceive and define 'neighborhood' in a consistent and meaningful way? The concept of a neighborhood can be highly subjective, and the scale of the neighborhood to which people feel they belong may vary greatly. To address this question, studies have introduced various ways of defining and measuring neighborhoods. Popular methods include using existing governmental boundaries and units, such as census tracts (Woo et al. 2018) or county boundaries and ZIP codes (Newman et al. 2015), while some scholars have utilized a 1-mile radius measurement (Minkoff and Lyons 2019).

This raises the question of whether census-based measures effectively reflect individuals' perceptions of their own neighborhoods. The answer is not straightforward; different measures of

context have yielded different results. For instance, Wong et al. (2012) concluded that people's perceptions of their environment do not always align with governmental units and that people define their environment differently. More recently, however, Velez and Wong (2017) countered this study, arguing that census-based measures are more closely aligned with people's perceptions of neighborhoods. They proposed that if contextual effects depend on residents perceiving their context in a way that mirrors actual local area demographics, then census-based measures may be superior to personalized "map[s]" of one's neighborhood. They offer two explanations for this finding: first, there is considerable heterogeneity in how subjects draw their contexts and traverse space within community boundaries; second, while personal experiences with minority groups may provide some racial cues, these encounters do not necessarily enable inferences about local area demographics. The local news media may also inform people about their community beyond their direct experiences. I find this argument persuasive and useful, and thus, I will primarily base my neighborhood measures on governmental boundaries such as census tracts.

Income inequality measures

In addition to using the traditional Gini index to examine income inequality in the study areas, I also incorporate income percentile ratios. While some scholars have criticized Gini index for its limited depiction of income inequality (Manduca 2019; Reardon and Bischoff 2011), its widespread use and comprehensive nature make it valuable for facilitating comparisons across areas. Conversely, income percentile ratios are particularly useful for understanding disparities among different segments of the population.

Income percentile ratios quantify income inequality by providing a comparative measure of income distribution. The p90/p10 ratio measures the disparity between the top 10% and the bottom 10% of earners; the p90/p50 compares the top 10% to the median; and the p50/p10 compares the median to the bottom 10%. Each ratio focuses on different aspects of income distribution and captures more nuanced aspects of income inequality.

Gini index data was acquired from ACS survey (2020). To calculate income percentile ratios, I utilized income data from the American Community Survey (ACS) for the year 2020. Since obtaining exact income data at the desired level of granularity was not possible, I opted to use income bracket data across census tracts. Although this income bracket data does not allow for precise estimation, with 16 brackets of income range, it can provide a reliable approximation. I estimated the total income for each segment by multiplying the number of households in each income bracket by the midpoint income value of that bracket. I then calculated the 10th, 50th, and 90th income percentiles for each census tract.

5.3 Analysis

Overview of Income inequality measures in Detroit and Chicago

Table 5.1 shows the descriptive statistics of income inequality in Detroit and Chicago, in both the city and metropolitan statistical areas respectively. My analysis focuses on two key measures of income inequality: the Gini index and income percentile ratios. The Gini index is a widely accepted measure of income inequality, ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). The income percentile ratios provide further insights into the disparity between high and low-income distributions.

Table 5.1: Income Inequality by Census Tract in Chicago and Detroit Metropolitan Area

	Median Household Income (\$)		Gini Index*			
	mean	median	mean	median	min	max
Detroit City	52538	43799	0.46	0.46	0.25	0.75
Detroit Metropolitan Area	67599	61979	0.42	0.41	0.22	0.75
Chicago City	71797	64896	0.46	0.45	0.30	0.80
Chicago Metropolitan Area	80811	73971	0.42	0.42	0.10	0.80
	P90/P50**		P90/P10		P50/P10	
	mean	median	mean	median	mean	median
Detroit City	3.75	2.98	20.89	12.15	5.02	3.88
Detroit Metropolitan Area	6.87	4.59	62.85	30.38	8.42	5.96
Chicago City	6.89	4.65	48.13	24.60	6.92	5.06
Chicago Metropolitan Area	8.69	6.23	82.56	45.08	9.78	6.38

Note: *0 represents perfect equality; 1 represents perfect inequality

**P90/P50 compares the income at the 90th percentile to the 50th percentile

While the table does not directly present a comparison between the city core and suburbs, comparing the city and metropolitan area provides some insight into this aspect. Both Detroit and Chicago cities exhibit higher Gini indices compared to their respective metropolitan areas, suggesting more pronounced income inequality within the city limits. However, this could indicate the presence of a more diverse population within the city compared to the large area of suburbs, including both high-income and low-income residents living in closer proximity.

On the other hand, some income percentile ratios (P90/50 and P90/10) were higher in the metropolitan areas. This pattern may suggest that while the city areas have a more even spread of income levels, the suburbs might be experiencing segregation of economic classes. The complexity of these findings underscores the intricate relationship between income inequality and voter turnout. This reveals that the dynamics of income distribution and its impact on political participation are far from straightforward, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach.

Transitioning from these initial observations, Figures 5.1 through 5.6, which map the areas under study, complement the descriptive statistics by visually demonstrating the patterns of income segregation. The figures also highlight Detroit's prevalent poverty issue, contrasting with Chicago's gentrification trends. Additionally, they visually depict the differing patterns of racial segregation in both cities: Chicago's clear North-South divide and Detroit's segregation between impoverished inner-city areas and wealthier suburbs. This spatial perspective offers a better understanding of how income distribution varies across different urban and suburban areas.

Figure 5.1: Median Household Income by Census tract in Chicago and Detroit Metropolitan Areas

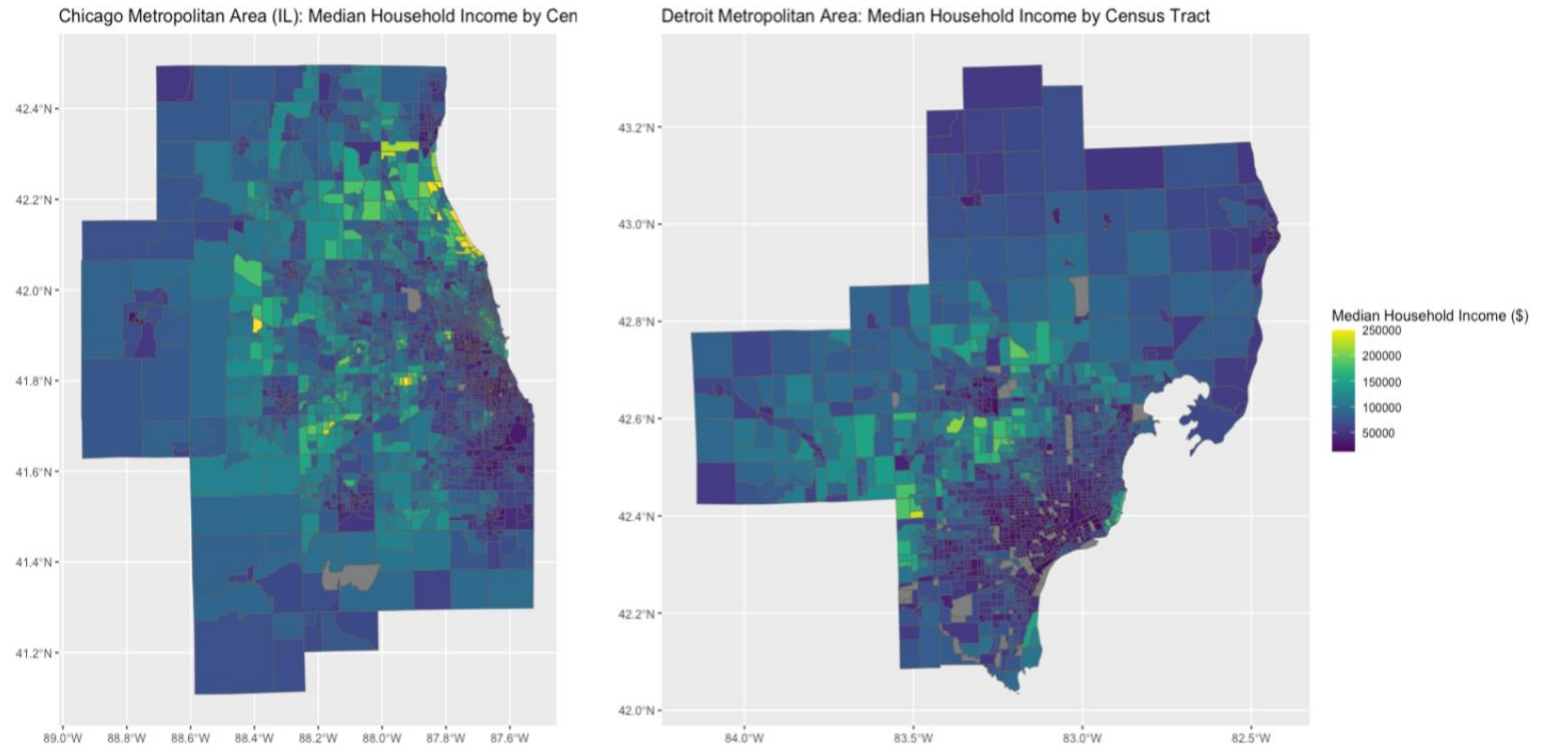


Figure 5.2: P90/P50 by Census Tract in Chicago and Detroit Metropolitan Areas

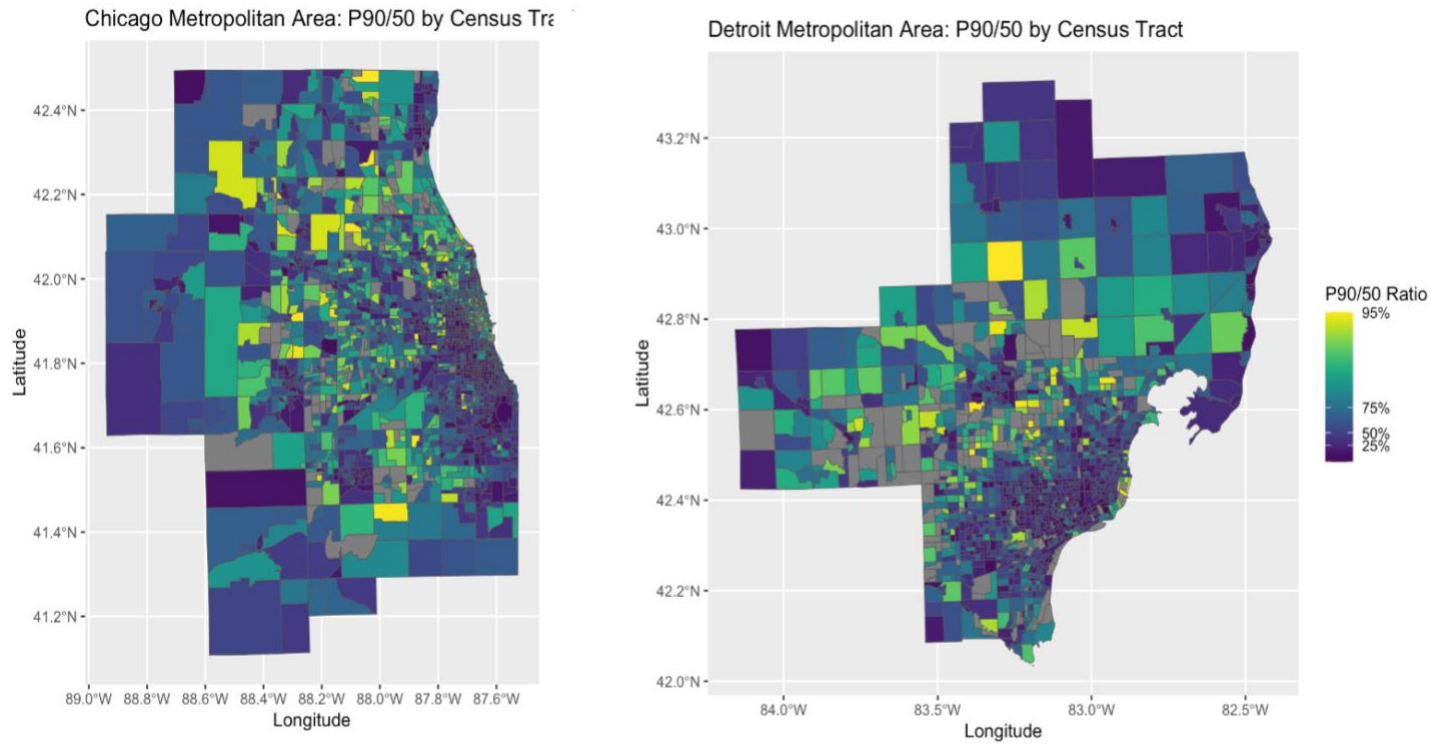


Figure 5.3: Turnout Rate by Census Tract in Chicago and Detroit Metropolitan Areas

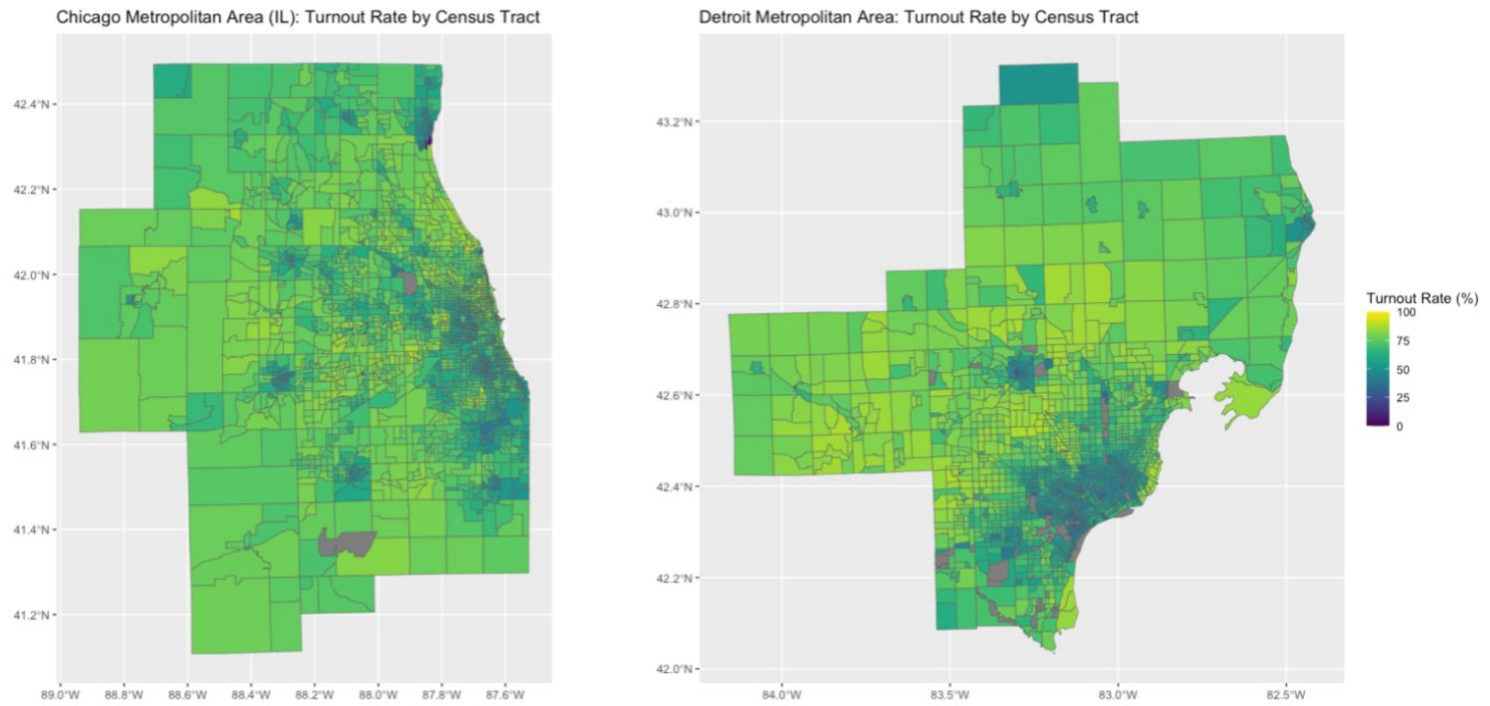


Figure 5.4: Median Household Income by Census Tract in Chicago and Detroit Cities

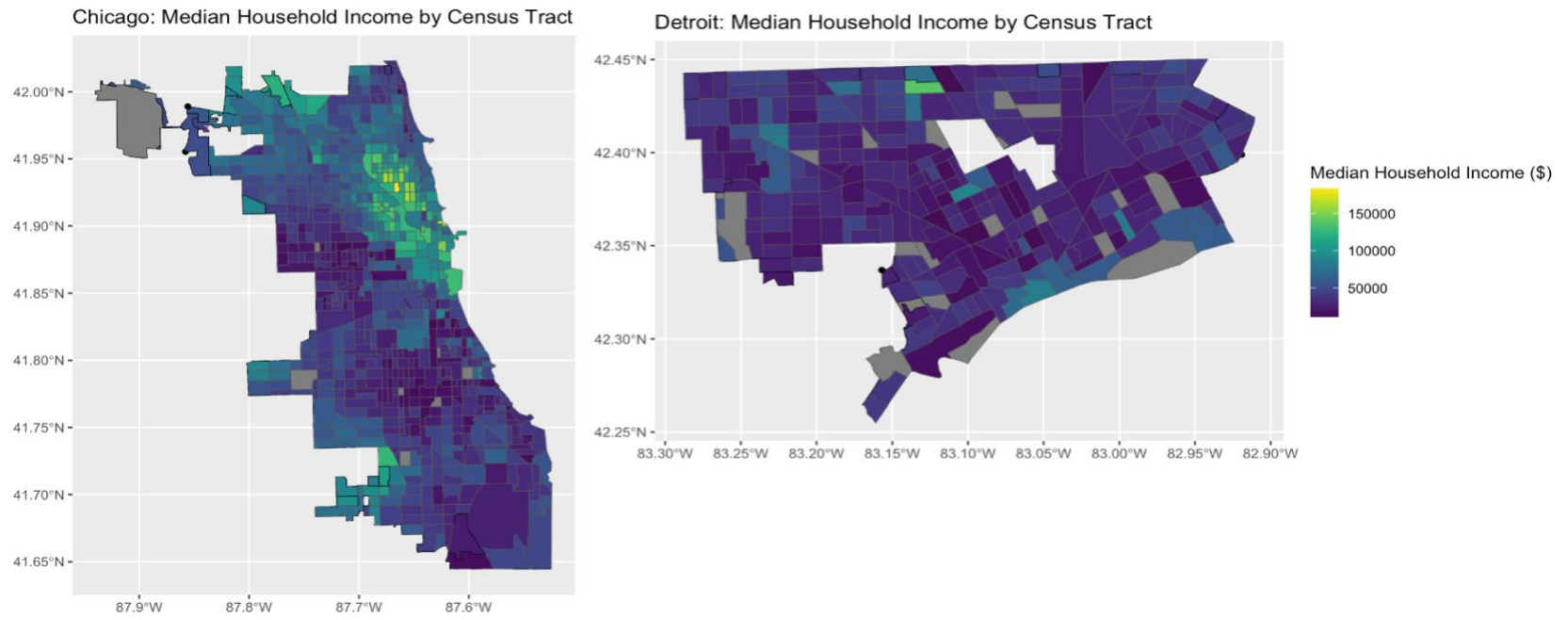


Figure 5.5: P90/50 by Census Tract in Chicago and Detroit Cities

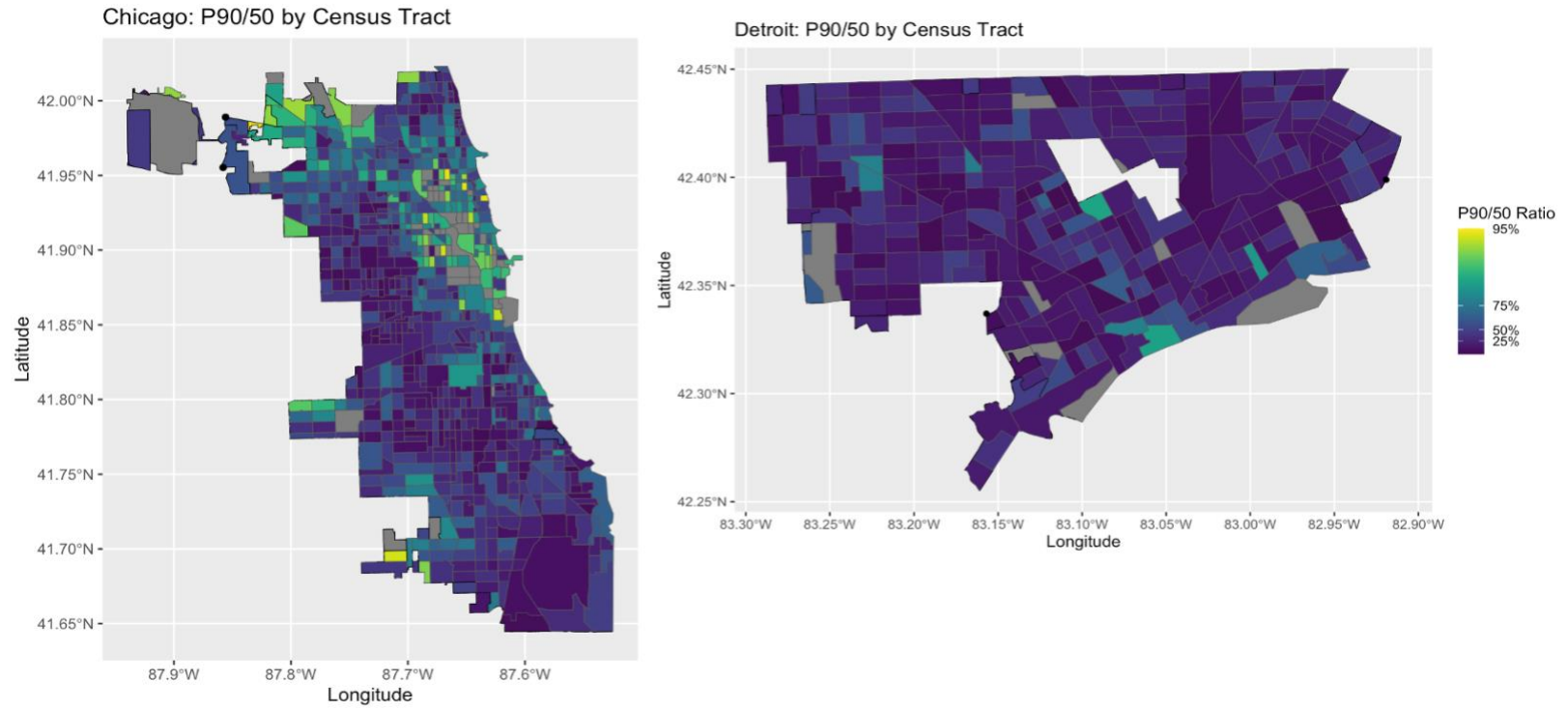


Figure 5.6: Turnout Rate by Census Tract in Chicago and Detroit Cities

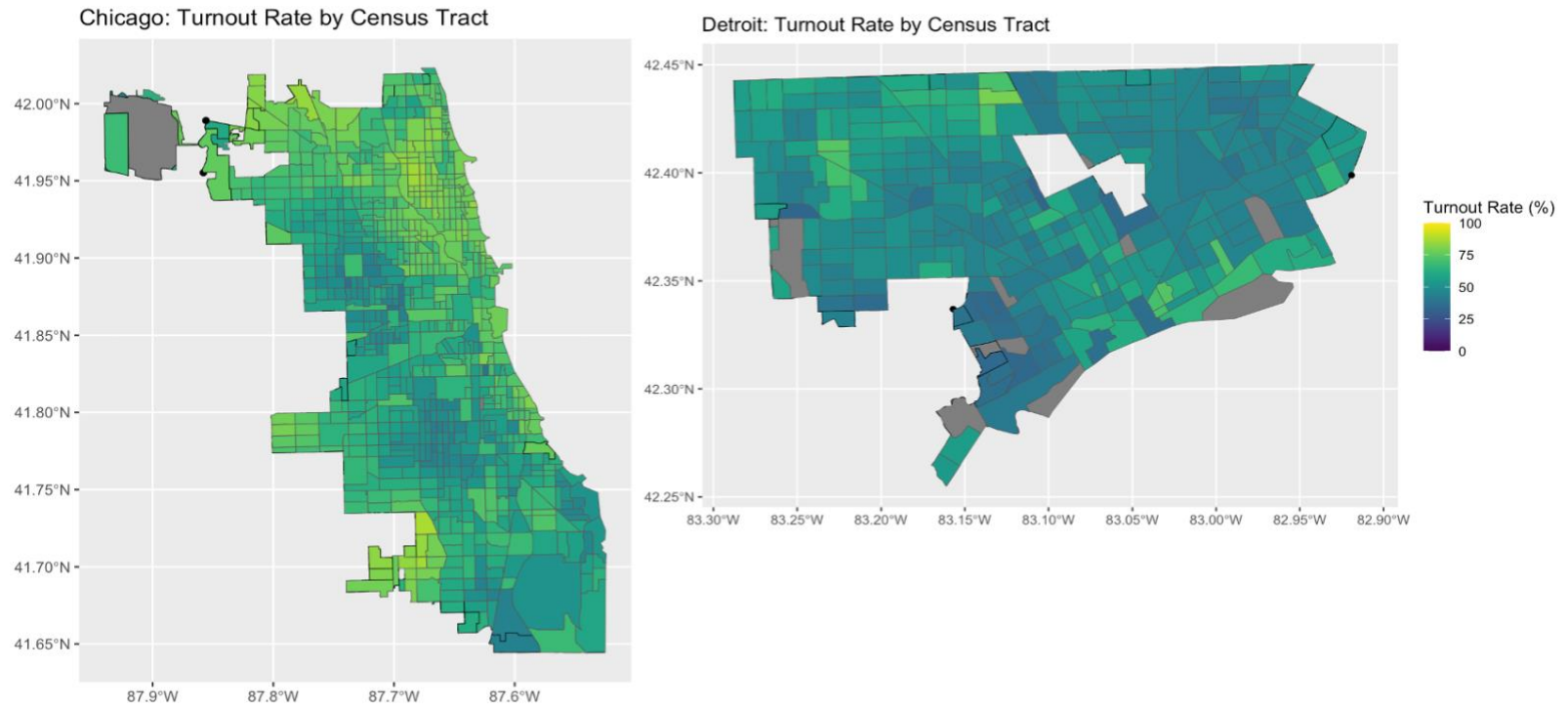


Figure 5.7 Income Inequality and Turnout Rate in Chicago and Detroit Metropolitan Areas

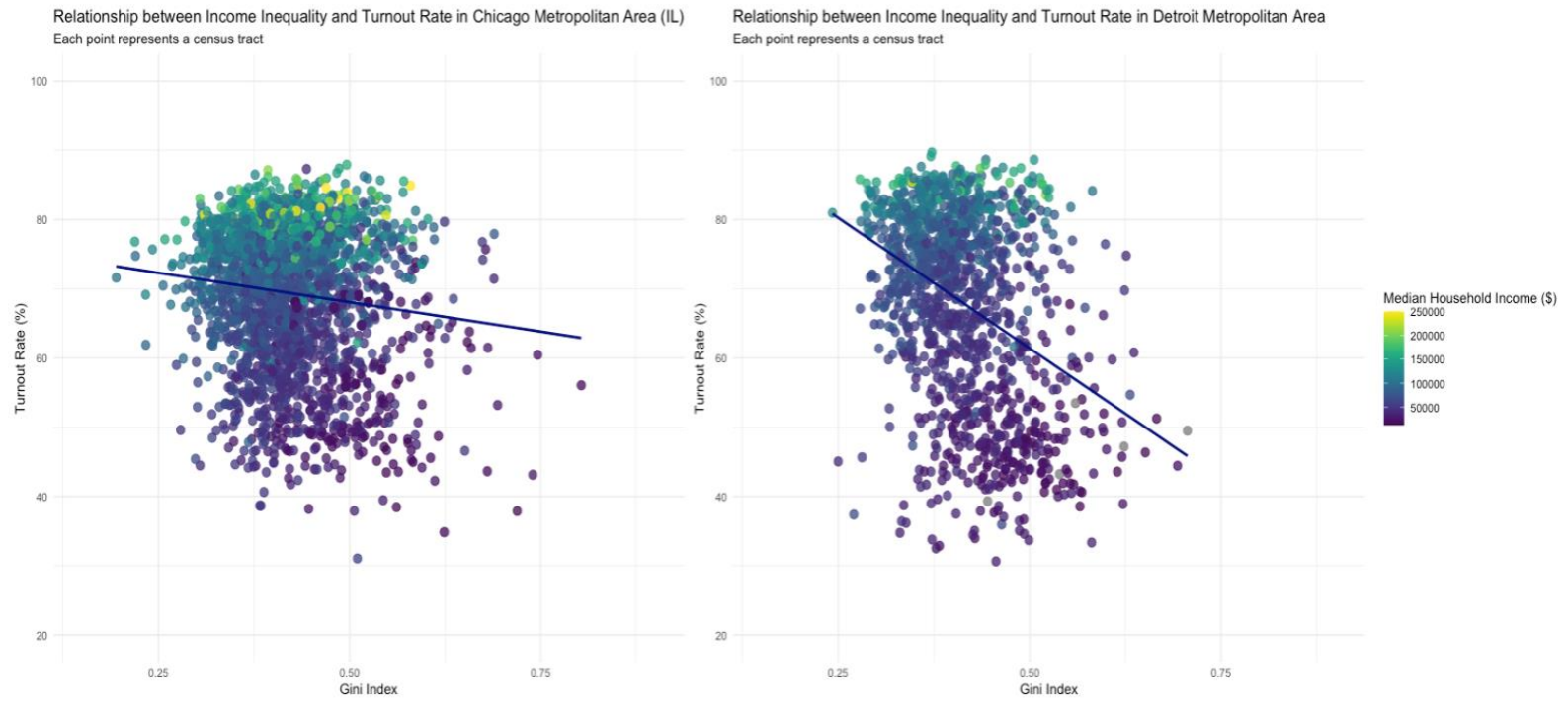
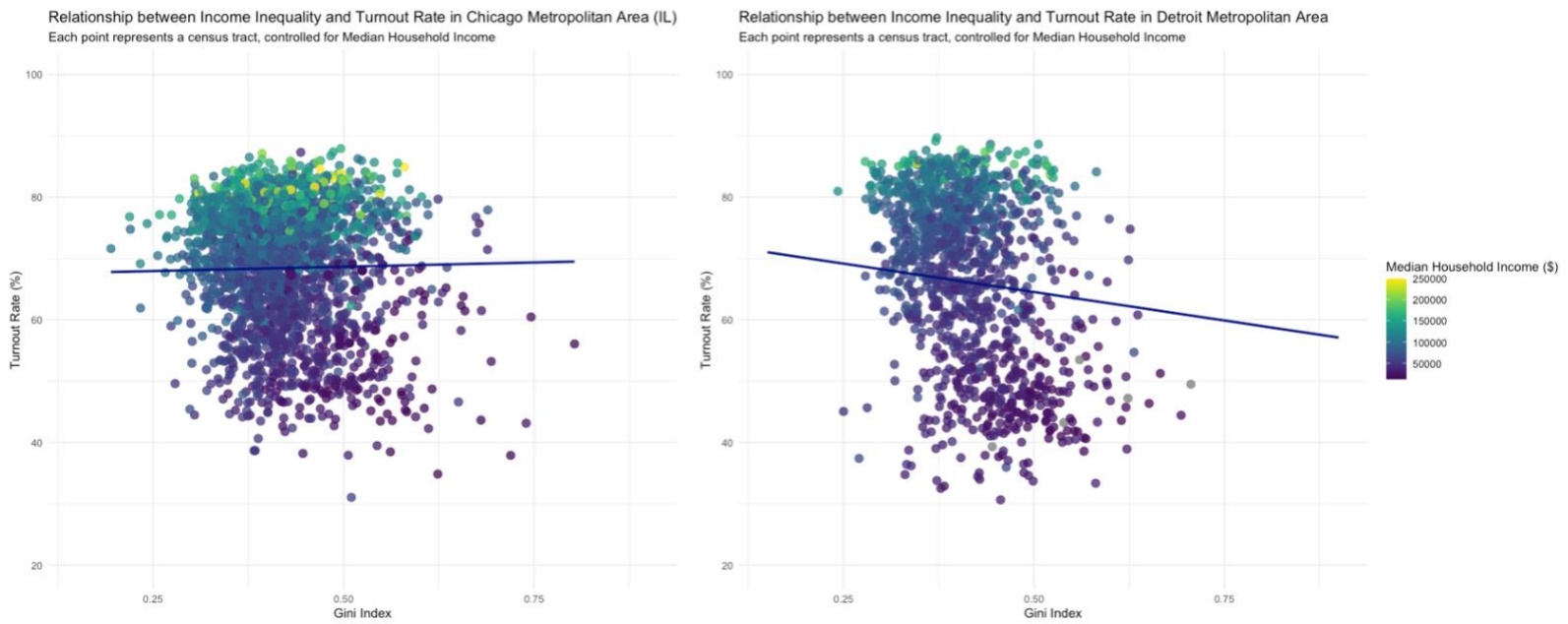


Figure 5.8 Income Inequality and Turnout Rate controlled by Income in Chicago and Detroit Metropolitan Areas



Income Inequality and Election Turnout

Building upon these geographical distinctions, a more direct analysis was conducted on income inequality and electoral turnout. Figures 5.7 and 5.8 show the correlation between income inequality and voter turnout in the metropolitan areas of Chicago and Detroit, respectively. Each point plotted in these figures represents a census tract, color-coded with its median household income. Figure 5.7 reveals a direct relationship between income inequality and turnout, while Figure 5.8 explores this relationship further, controlled for median household income.

The data clearly indicates that high-income neighborhoods tend to have higher voter turnout rates. There is a general negative association between income inequality and turnout rates across neighborhoods, indicating that areas with greater income disparity typically experience lower voter participation. However, adjusting for income nuances this relationship. In the Chicago area, once income levels are controlled for, the negative correlation between income inequality and turnout becomes less pronounced, highlighting the significant role of income levels in influencing turnout patterns. In contrast, the Detroit area maintains a downward trend in voter turnout in relation to income inequality, even after accounting for median income. This suggests that in Detroit, factors other than income levels, possibly unique to its socio-economic context, are influencing the continued lower turnout in areas with more pronounced income inequality.

This opens possibilities for further investigation to understand the mechanisms through which income inequality influences voter turnout. To dissect how income inequality manifests across different income brackets, I segmented the dataset according to median household income. This approach was aimed at examining the interplay between income levels and the

influence of income inequality within various income strata. To accomplish this, linear regression analyses were conducted with voter turnout as the dependent variable and the Gini index (representing income inequality) plus median income as independent variables. Subsequently, separate regression analyses were done for census tracts categorized as either above or below these median household income thresholds. The median household incomes used for this segmentation were derived from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) data: \$32,498 for the city of Detroit, \$62,768 for the Detroit metropolitan area, \$62,097 for Chicago city, and \$74,621 for the Chicago metropolitan area.

Table 5.2 displays the regression analysis results, shedding light on the varying effects of income inequality on voter turnout across different economic groups within these metropolitan areas. For Detroit neighborhoods below the median income, a significant relationship was found between income inequality and voter turnout. However, this correlation was not statistically significant in neighborhoods above the median income level. Notably, income's influence was more distinct in areas above the median income, but the scale was very minimal. These findings might be explained by the relatively low median income of Detroit city (\$32,498), where being below the median income approaches the poverty line. Consequently, in these neighborhoods, factors like income inequality might have a diminished role in influencing voting decisions. This pattern is contrasted in the broader Detroit Metropolitan area, where a higher median income (\$62,768) amplifies the role of income in tracts below the median income level.

Conversely, Chicago, characterized by its diverse income spectrum within the city, displays patterns similar to the Detroit metropolitan area. A similar trend is also evident in the Chicago metropolitan region. The regression models from these areas imply that the negative association between income inequality and voter turnout in Detroit is likely attributable to the

prevalence of extreme poverty. This insight is crucial for future research, suggesting that in neighborhoods marked by severe poverty, even when income inequality levels are comparable, the influence of local economic disparities on voter behavior might be less pronounced.

Table 5.2: Linear Regression Coefficients for Predicting Turnout Rate by Census Tract

Variable	Detroit City				Detroit Metropolitan Area			
	Below Median		Above Median		Below Median		Above Median	
	estimate	se	estimate	se	estimate	se	estimate	se
Intercept	31.67***	6.04	34.42***	5.00	16.39***	3.08	62.24***	1.55
Gini Index	23.63**	8.83	9.55	10.29	26.25***	5.25	6.76	3.66
Income	0.00	0.00	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.00
N	155		144		651		626	
Adj. R-squared	0.03307		0.4968		0.5563		0.3647	

Variable	Chicago City				Chicago Metropolitan Area			
	Below Median		Above Median		Below Median		Above Median	
	estimate	se	estimate	se	estimate	se	estimate	se
Intercept	23.81***	3.04	54.8***	2.21	21.84***	2.08	60.62***	1.01
Gini Index	38.34***	4.89	19.7***	4.99	40.6***	3.48	16.36***	2.29
Income	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.00
N	480		372		1056		1034	
Adj. R-squared	0.3185		0.2807		0.402		0.2499	

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

In summary, this regression analysis highlights differing impacts of income inequality on voter turnout in Detroit and Chicago. In lower-income Detroit neighborhoods, income inequality significantly affects turnout, whereas this effect diminishes in higher-income areas and is minimal in wealthier sectors. Chicago shows similar trends. These findings suggest that in areas with extreme poverty, like Detroit, income inequality's influence on voting behavior may be less pronounced, pointing to the need for further research on economic disparities and voter participation in impoverished neighborhoods.

Individual-level Analysis

Then I shift to individual-level analysis in Chicago and Detroit metropolitan areas in this section. This is a critical transition from understanding the broader, community-level dynamics of political participation to exploring how these dynamics influence individual voter behavior. This is done through two distinct but complementary analytical models.

The first model explores how neighborhood-level income inequality impacts individual voting decisions. In this model, the neighborhood is defined as a census tract, and income inequality is measured through the p90/p10 income ratio. This approach aims to capture not only the direct effect of an individual's income on their likelihood of voting, but also how this effect might be modulated by the economic disparities they observe in their neighborhood. The inclusion of the interaction term allows for a nuanced understanding of how personal and neighborhood-level economic factors interplay to influence voter turnout.

$$Turnout_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Income_i + \beta_2 * Inequality_j + \beta_3 * (Income_i * Inequality_j) + \varepsilon_i + \mu_j$$

To test this model, logistic regression was employed, given that the dependent variable, voter turnout, is binary in nature (represented as 1 for turnout and 0 for non-turnout). The results are shown in Table 5.3. The results from the Chicago model suggest that individuals earning a median income have a lower likelihood of turnout in highly unequal neighborhoods compared to more economically equal neighborhoods. This trend is also observed for those who are at the lower end of the income spectrum. This aligns with the theory developed in previous chapters. However, in Detroit, both median income earners and low-income earners showed a higher

likelihood of voting in unequal neighborhoods. This suggests that the impact of income inequality on voter turnout may vary based on geographic and socio-economic contexts, challenging the assumption of a uniform effect of economic disparities on electoral participation.

Table 5.3: Logistic Regression Results on Voter Turnout in 2020 Presidential Election, Income, and Inequality

Variables	Detroit MSA	Chicago MSA
Intercept	-5.77*** (0.07)	3.48*** (0.04)
Income	0.49*** (0.01)	-0.40*** (0.00)
Inequality	0.93*** (0.02)	-0.67*** (0.01)
Income * Inequality	-0.05*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.00)
N	3,204,422	7,522,661
AIC	3,728,400	9,502,919

***p<0.001.

The second model then narrows the focus to the role of relative income in determining electoral turnout. This examines more directly the aforementioned theoretical framework: people's voting behavior is influenced by their relative economic standing. I measure relative income by the ratio of an individual's income relative to the 90th percentile income in their neighborhood.

$$Turnout_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Relative\ Income_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Again, logistic regression was employed and the results are shown in Table 5.4. In Chicago model, the positive coefficient (0.29) for relative income suggests that as the disparity

between an individual’s income and the income of the richest in their neighborhood (90th percentile) increases, the likelihood of turnout also increases. However, the negative intercept (-2.31) indicates that at the base level, when relative income is at minimum, the predicted log-odds of turnout are negative, suggesting a lower baseline likelihood of voting.

Similarly, the positive coefficient (0.09) in Detroit model indicates that a greater income disparity between an individual and the wealthiest in their neighborhood is associated with a higher likelihood of turnout. The positive intercept (0.36) suggests a higher baseline likelihood of voting compared to Chicago when relative income is at its minimum.

Table 5.4: Logistic Regression Results on Voter Turnout in 2020 Presidential Election and Relative Income

Variables	Detroit MSA	Chicago MSA
Intercept	0.36*** (0.01)	-2.32*** (0.01)
Relative Income	0.01*** (0.00)	0.29*** (0.00)
N	3,204,422	7,522,661
AIC	3,886,952	9,429,374

***p<0.001.

In both cities, the models imply that higher economic disparity between an individual and the wealthiest in their neighborhoods (potentially higher sense of deprivation) is associated with increased turnout. These findings indicating a positive association between relative income disparity and voter turnout, present an interesting deviation from the initial theoretical expectations. Contrary to the hypothesis that greater economic disparity within a neighborhood would lead to lower political engagement due to potential feelings of deprivation, the results suggest the opposite.

5.4 Implications

This chapter examined the relationship between neighborhood contexts and voter turnout. Building upon the previous discussion about the impact of personal economic perceptions on voting decisions, it focused on how neighborhood income disparities can shape an individual's view of their own economic status. I examined how neighborhood inequality and one's economic standing within a neighborhood influence electoral participation within the specific spatial contexts of the Detroit and Chicago metropolitan areas. I considered the various ways in which neighborhood characteristics can affect political efficacy and engagement to provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between individual perceptions and the broader economic context in shaping political participation.

Although this analysis does not establish a causal link due to its inherent methodological limitations, it nonetheless raises an important question worth exploring further. I've discussed in the previous chapters how individuals' perceptions of their income status can be influenced by the socio-economic conditions around them. In areas with high-income inequality, even those with moderate incomes might feel relatively poorer compared to their wealthier neighbors.

The findings in this chapter suggest that the effects of relative income and income inequality on voter turnout are nuanced and vary across different economic strata. For instance, in neighborhoods below the median income, the relationship between income inequality and voter turnout was more pronounced compared to those above the median income. Furthermore, the chapter highlights how these dynamics differ between urban areas like Detroit and Chicago. In Detroit, individuals with median and low incomes were more likely to vote in unequal neighborhoods, while in Chicago, the trend was the opposite, with lower voter turnout in high-

inequality areas. This emphasizes the importance of considering local contexts when examining the relationship and calls for future research to better understand the mechanism.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This dissertation examines the unexplained aspect of the income-participation gap, particularly in cases where absolute income does not completely predict voting behavior, contrary to the predictions of resource theory. It began with an exploration of the complex interplay between individual perceptions of economic status and political participation. As a theoretical foundation, I present a narrative in which the perception of relative wealth, derived from social comparison, leads to a feeling of deprivation, and ultimately reduced turnout. Then, the study investigated how the visibility of resources often triggers upward social comparisons, which can lead to a heightened sense of deprivation.

The combination of survey experiment and neighborhood analysis provides a multifaceted view, despite methodological limitations. The findings from both the survey experiment and the neighborhood study revealed nuanced insights into how income inequality and perceptions of economic disparity influence voter turnout, especially in urban contexts. The results have both supported and challenged existing theoretical frameworks. The inability to establish causality calls for more longitudinal and other approaches in future research. The findings have significant implications for policymakers, suggesting that addressing income inequality and changing perceptions of economic status could be key to enhancing voter engagement, particularly in metropolitan areas. Below are several takeaways:

Importance of perception of wealth in political engagement

The consistent positive relationship between individuals' perceptions of their economic status and their likelihood to vote underscores the significance of subjective economic perceptions in political engagement. This finding highlights the need for political campaigners and policymakers to consider not just the objective economic conditions but also how people perceive their economic standing when devising strategies to increase voter turnout.

Revisiting assumptions about the economically disadvantaged

The lack of a significant relationship between financial feeling and voting likelihood among those below the poverty line suggests that economic distress may overshadow subjective perceptions in influencing political behavior. This insight is crucial for understanding voter behavior in economically disadvantaged demographics and emphasizes the importance of addressing fundamental economic needs to enhance political participation for the group.

The role of self-efficacy in the mechanism

The study reveals a moderate yet significant relationship between internal self-efficacy and voter turnout, indicating that personal belief in one's own abilities is a key driver in electoral participation. In contrast, external self-efficacy, while still relevant, has a weaker connection with turnout. This highlights the greater impact of internal self-efficacy over external factors in motivating individuals to vote, underscoring the importance of fostering personal empowerment to enhance political engagement.

Impact of Attitudes Toward Economic Classes

The negative correlation between viewing the rich as deserving and voter turnout, and the positive correlation with perceiving the poor as deserving align with theories of anger and mobilization. These findings are particularly relevant in today's political climate, where economic disparities are a significant topic of public discourse. They suggest that attitudes

towards different economic classes can be substantial motivators or deterrents to political participation.

Limitations and Future Studies

Finally, it is essential to reflect on its limitations and the avenues this dissertation opens for future studies. While the research has provided valuable insights into the relationship between perception of income and voter turnout, there remain aspects that could be further explored to deepen our understanding of this subject. The following suggestions for future studies aim to address these gaps and build upon the foundational work laid out in this dissertation:

Qualitative research on voter motivations

Future studies could benefit from qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups. Conducting these with individuals from diverse socioeconomic classes and neighborhoods would allow for a deeper exploration of their motivations for voting, particularly in areas with high income disparity. This approach could yield valuable insights into the psychological and socioeconomic factors driving political participation.

Refinement in survey experiment

Further research might also involve more sophisticated survey experimental designs particularly when it comes to triggering stimulus. These could better isolate and understand the effects of specific variables on voter behavior, enhancing the reliability and depth of the findings.

Longitudinal studies

Conducting a longitudinal study could provide insights into how voter turnout changes over time in relation to shifts in neighborhood dynamics, such as gentrification. This would help to

determine whether the relationships observed in this study are stable or subject to change with evolving socioeconomic conditions.

Incorporation of broader economic and social factors

Future research could also examine the interplay between income disparity and other economic and social factors, such as levels of community engagement. This would offer a more holistic view of the various elements that influence political participation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

[Media Use] How closely do you follow politics on TV, radio, newspapers, or the Internet?

- Extremely closely (1)
- Very closely (2)
- Somewhat closely (3)
- Not very closely (4)
- Not at all closely (5)

[Political Talk] How many days in the past week did you talk about politics and public affairs with family or friends?

- Zero days (0)
- One day (1)
- Two days (2)
- Three days (3)
- Four days (4)
- Five days (5)
- Six days (6)
- Seven days (7)

[Housing] Thinking about the place in which you now live, do you (or someone else you live with) pay rent for it, make monthly mortgage payments for it, own your home outright with no payments due, or have some other living arrangement?

- Pay rent (1)
- Pay mortgage (2)
- Own home with no payments due (3)
- Some other arrangement (4)

[Income] What was your approximate total individual income during the past 12 months? This includes money from jobs, net income from business, farm or rent, pensions, dividends, interest, and Social Security payments.

- Less than \$10,000 (1)
- \$10,000 to \$24,999 (2)
- \$25,000 to \$49,999 (3)

- \$50,000 to \$74,999 (4)
- \$75,000 to \$99,999 (5)
- \$100,000 to \$149,999 (6)
- \$150,000 or more (7)

Instruction Please take a moment to read the following information and answer the question below.

[Treatment]

Are You Rich? Here's How Much You Need to Be Rich

The richest 1% of American households earned over \$600,000 in income last year. To be part of this group, you would need to earn more than \$400,000 annually as an individual.

Now, take a moment to consider your own earnings from the past year. How much more do the top 1% make compared to you?

Next, think about the monetary value of all the things you own. How much money do you have in your bank accounts or investments? Do you own a house or a car? What is their monetary worth?

To be among the top 1% in America, you would need to have at least \$11 million in wealth.

[Manipulation Check] Which of the following best describes how you feel after reading "how much you need to be rich"?

- Angry (1)
- Anxious (2)
- Helpless (3)
- Neutral (4)
- Relieved (5)
- Satisfied (11)
- Excited (12)

[Turnout 1] In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people are not able to vote or choose not to vote for good reasons. How likely are you to vote in the upcoming presidential election?

- Extremely likely (1)
- Very likely (2)
- Moderately likely (3)
- Slightly likely (4)

- Not likely at all (5)

[Turnout 2] How likely are you to vote in elections other than the presidential election (e.g. governor, state legislature, mayor, city council, referendum)?

- Extremely likely (1)
- Very likely (2)
- Moderately likely (3)
- Slightly likely (4)
- Not likely at all (5)

[Event participation] How likely is it that you will participate in any political events, rallies, speeches, fundraisers, or things like that in the next 12 months?

- Extremely likely (1)
- Very likely (2)
- Moderately likely (3)
- Slightly likely (4)
- Not likely at all (5)

[Donation] How likely is it that you will donate money to an individual politician, any political campaign, or a political organization in the next 12 months?

- Extremely likely (1)
- Very likely (2)
- Moderately likely (3)
- Slightly likely (4)
- Not likely at all (5)

[Attention Check] What is $213+1$?

- 9 (1)
- 35 (2)
- 214 (3)

[Efficacy1] What do you think of the following statement?

“I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics.”

- Agree strongly (1)
- Agree somewhat (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree somewhat (4)
- Disagree strongly (5)

[Efficacy2] What do you think of the following statement?

“I don’t think public officials care much about what people like me think.”

- Agree strongly (1)
- Agree somewhat (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree somewhat (4)
- Disagree strongly (5)

[financial_feeling] Which sentence best describes how you feel about your financial situation?

- I feel very bad about my financial situation (1)
- I feel somewhat bad about my financial situation (2)
- I feel neither good or bad about my financial situation (3)
- I feel somewhat good about my financial situation (4)
- I feel very good about my financial situation (5)

[Rich_deservingness] Would you say that most RICH people have more money than they deserve, or less money than they deserve?

- A lot more than they deserve (1)
- A little more than they deserve (2)
- About the right amount of money (3)
- A little less than they deserve (4)
- A lot less than they deserve (5)

[Poor_deservingness] Would you say that most POOR people have more money than they deserve, or less money than they deserve?

- A lot more than they deserve (1)
- A little more than they deserve (2)
- About the right amount of money (3)
- A little less than they deserve (4)
- A lot less than they deserve (5)

[Resentment] How often have you felt resentment toward rich people?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half of the time (3)
- Once in a while (4)
- Never (5)

[Sympathy] How often have you felt sympathy toward poor people?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half of the time (3)
- Once in a while (4)
- Never (5)

Appendix B: Tables and Figures

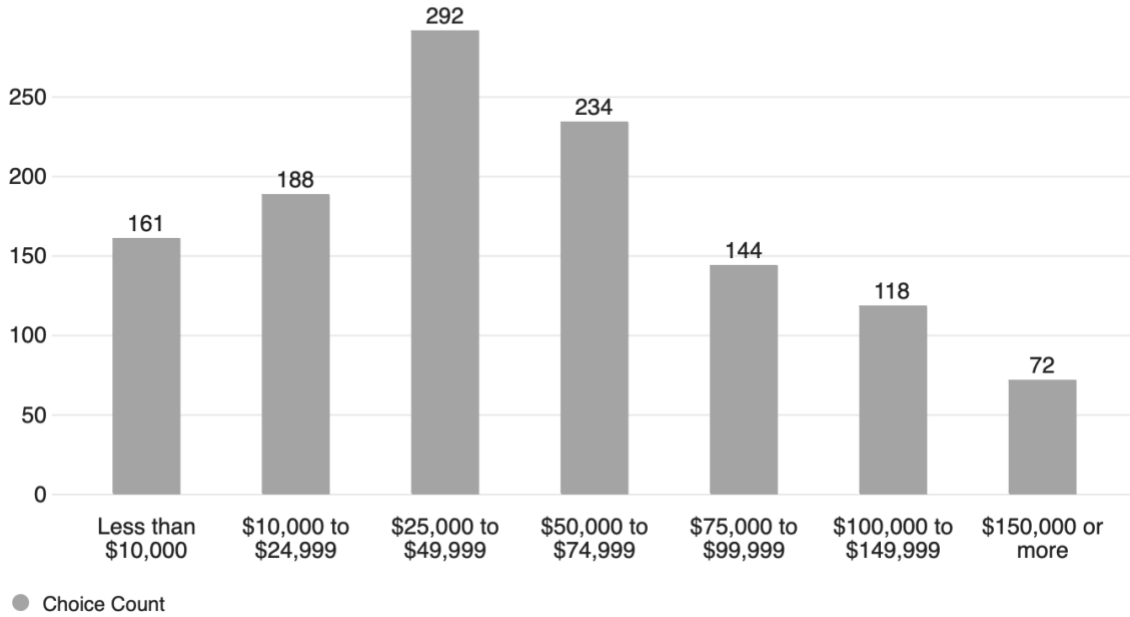
Appendix Table B.1: Distribution of Demographic by Experimental Conditions

Variables		Treatment	Control	Total
Age		39.6 (12.2)	38.4 (12.6)	39.0 (12)
Gender	Male	317 (53%)	308 (51%)	625 (52%)
	Female	284 (47%)	295 (49%)	579 (48%)
Ethnicity	White	482 (80.2%)	460 (76.3%)	942 (78%)
	Black	36 (6%)	45 (7.5%)	81 (7%)
	Asian	41 (6.8%)	40 (6.6%)	81 (7%)
	Mixed	25 (4.2%)	38 (6.3%)	63 (5%)
	Other	17 (2.8%)	20 (3.3%)	37 (3%)
Partisanship	Democrat	310 (51.6%)	326 (54.1%)	636 (53%)
	Republican	93 (15.5%)	100 (16.6%)	193 (16%)
	Independent	157 (26.1%)	145 (24%)	302 (25%)
	Other	17 (2.8%)	16 (2.7%)	33 (3%)
	None	24 (4%)	16 (2.7%)	40 (3%)
Income Category	1 (less than \$25,000)	169 (28.1%)	179 (29.7%)	348 (29%)
	2 (\$25,000 - \$49,999)	145 (24.1%)	146 (24.2%)	291 (24%)
	3 (\$50,000 or more)	287 (47.8%)	278 (46.1%)	565 (47%)
Education	Highschool or below	146 (24.3%)	157 (26.1%)	303 (25%)
	Community College or Undergraduate	357 (59.4%)	345 (57.3%)	702 (58%)
	Graduate degree or above	98 (16.3%)	100 (16.6%)	198 (16%)
Media Usage		2.87 (0.94)	2.85(0.95)	2.86 (0.94)
Political Talk Frequency		2.48 (1.21)	2.71(2.70)	2.6 (1.96)
Internal Efficacy		2.56 (1.26)	2.47 (1.24)	2.52 (1.25)
External Efficacy		2.09 (1.02)	2.23 (1.06)	2.16 (1.04)
N		601	603	1204

n(%); mean(sd)

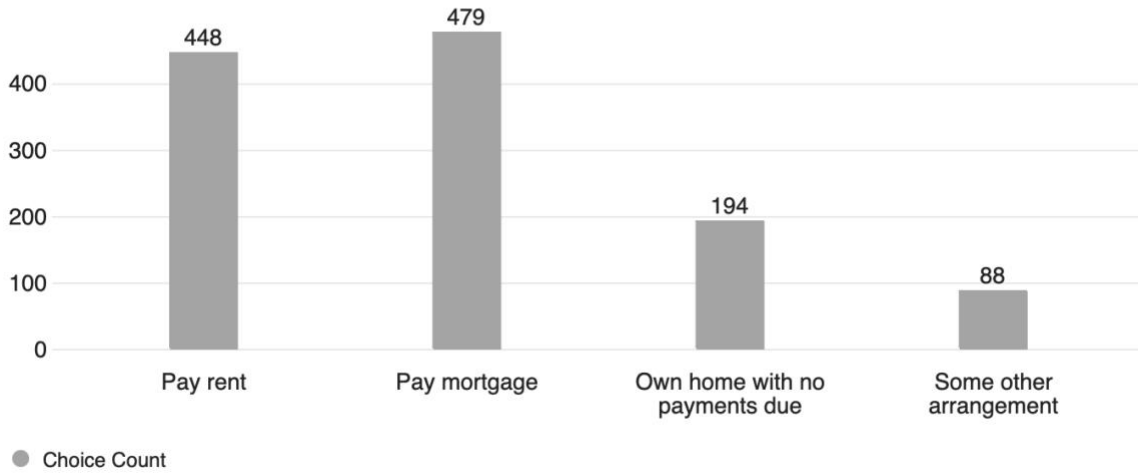
Appendix Figure B.1: Income Distribution

[Income Distribution] What was your approximate total individual income during the past 12 months? This includes money from jobs, net income from business, farm or rent, pensions, dividends, interest, and Social Security payments.



Appendix Figure B.2: Housing

[Housing] Thinking about the place in which you now live, do you (or someone else you live with) pay rent for it, make monthly mortgage payments for it, own your home outright with no payments due, or have some other living arrangement?



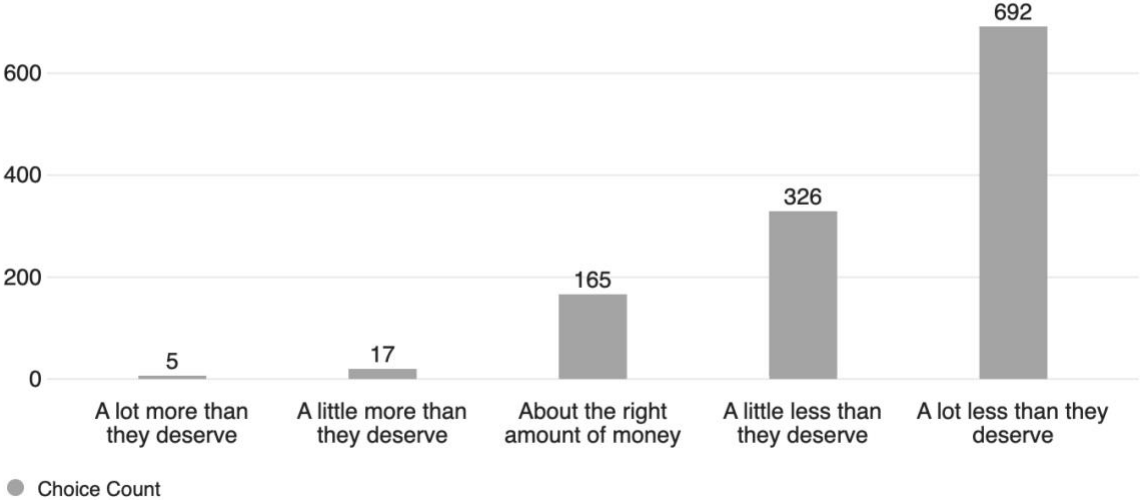
Appendix Table B.2: Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Income and Financial Feeling Model

Variables	GVIF	Df	GVIF^{1/(2*Df)}
Financial feeling	1.33	1	1.15
Income	1.56	1	1.25
Age	1.08	1	1.04
Female	1.06	1	1.03
Democrat	1.04	1	1.02
Education	1.28	1	1.13
Ethnicity	1.09	4	1.01

Note: GVIF values represent the Generalized Variance Inflation Factor. GVIF^{1/(2Df)} values above 2 may indicate potential multicollinearity concerns.

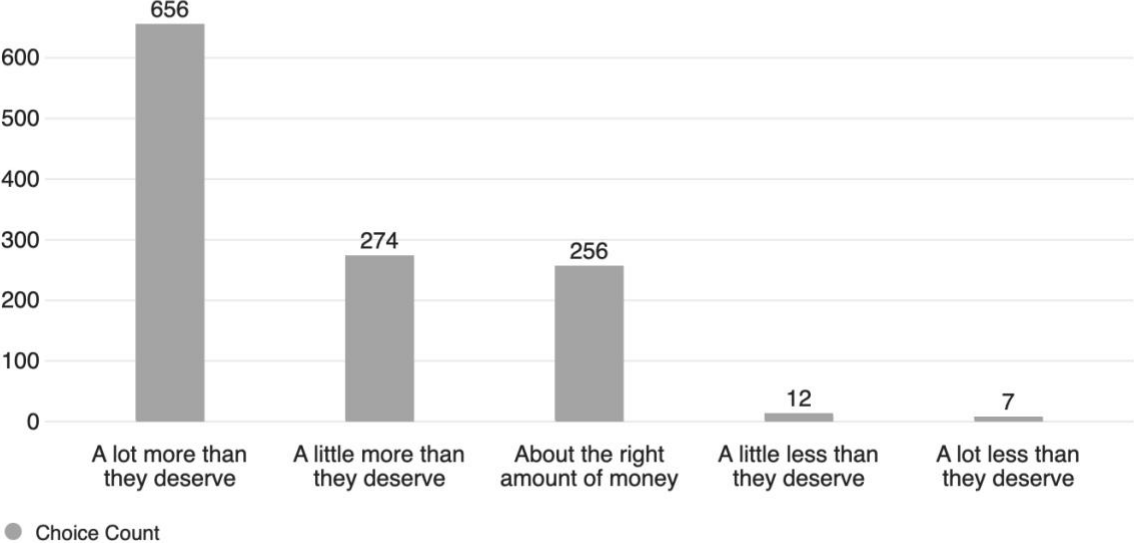
Appendix Figure B.3: Poor deservingness

Poor_deservingness - Would you say that most POOR people have more money than they deserve, or less money than they deserve?



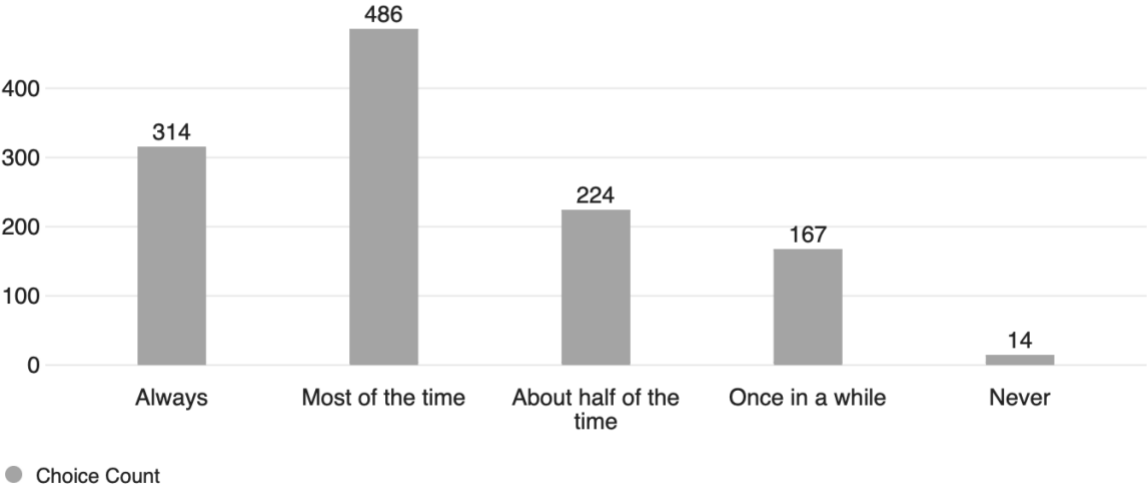
Appendix Figure B.4: Rich deservingness

Rich deservingness: Would you say that most RICH people have more money than they deserve, or less money than they deserve?



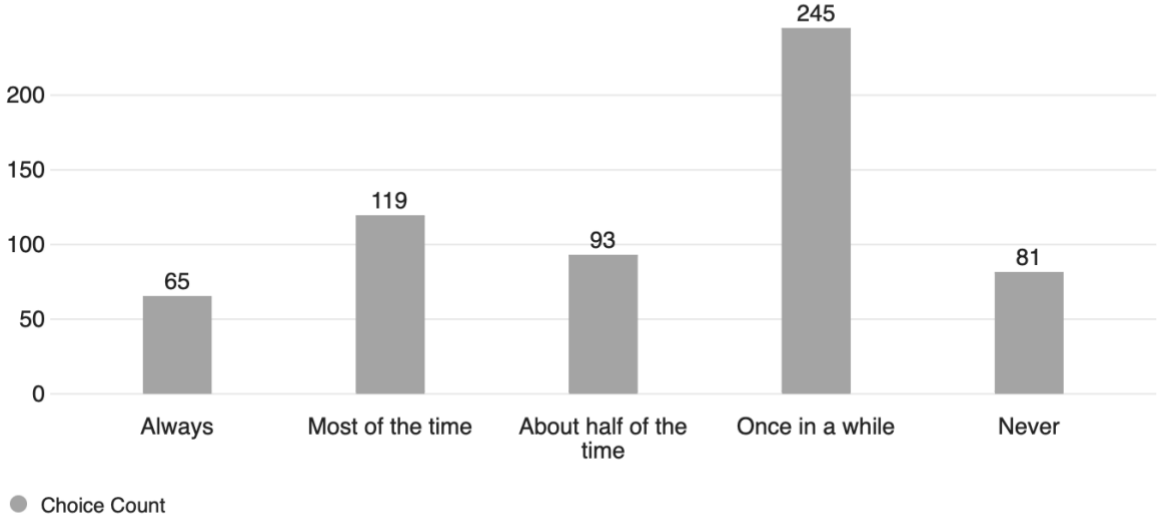
Appendix Figure B.5: Sympathy

Sympathy - How often have you felt sympathy toward poor people?

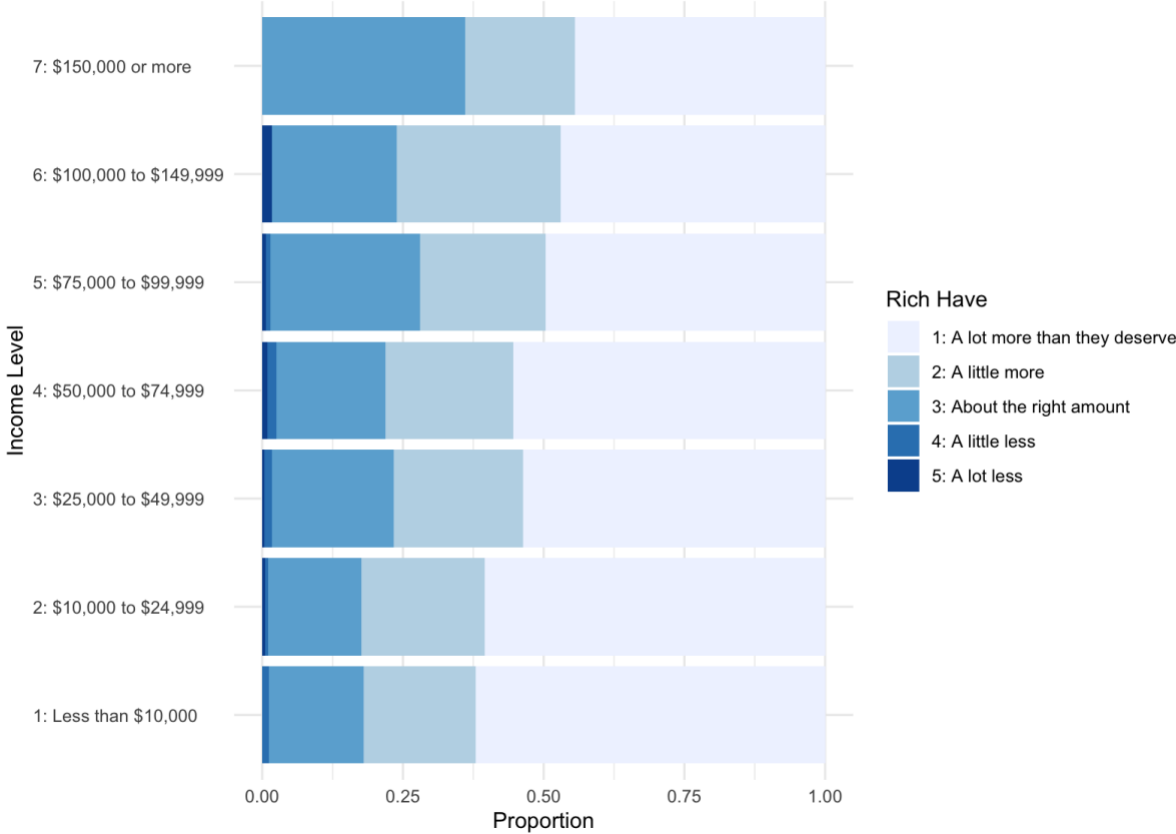


Appendix Figure B.6: Resentment

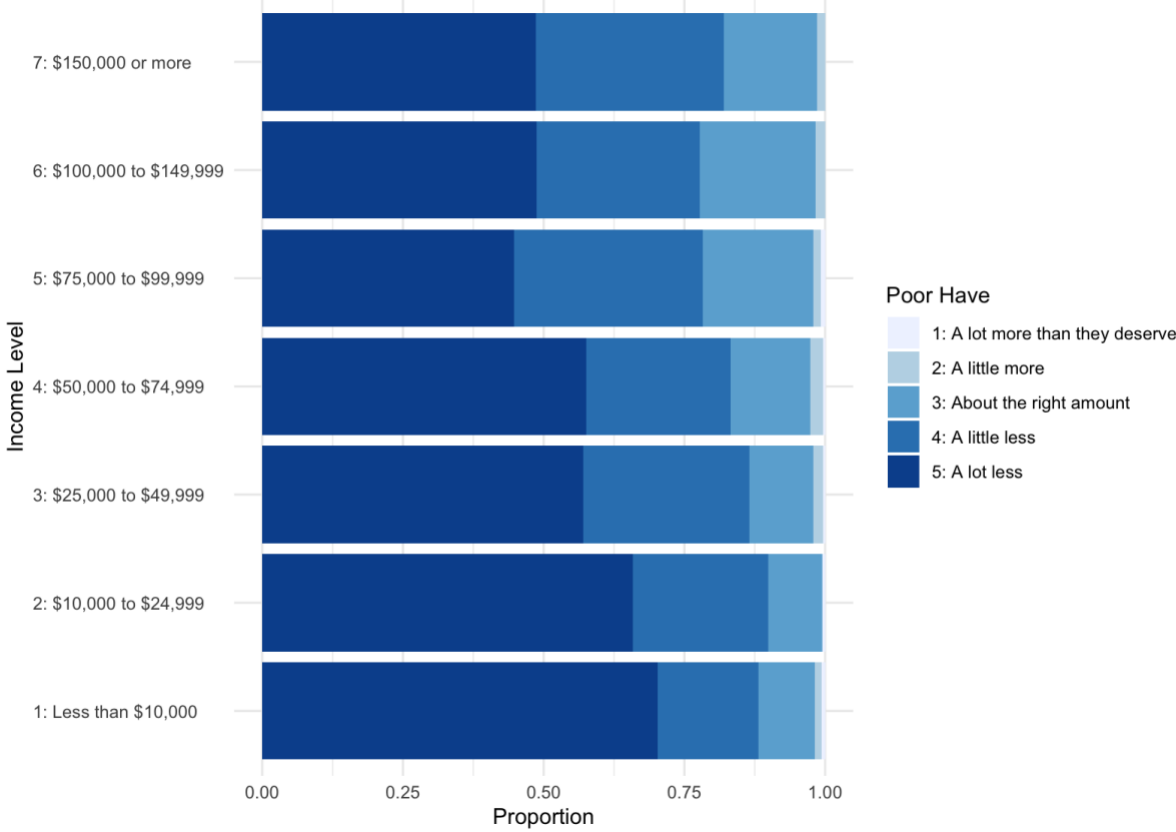
Resentment - How often have you felt resentment toward rich people?



Appendix Figure B.7: Rich Deservingness and Income



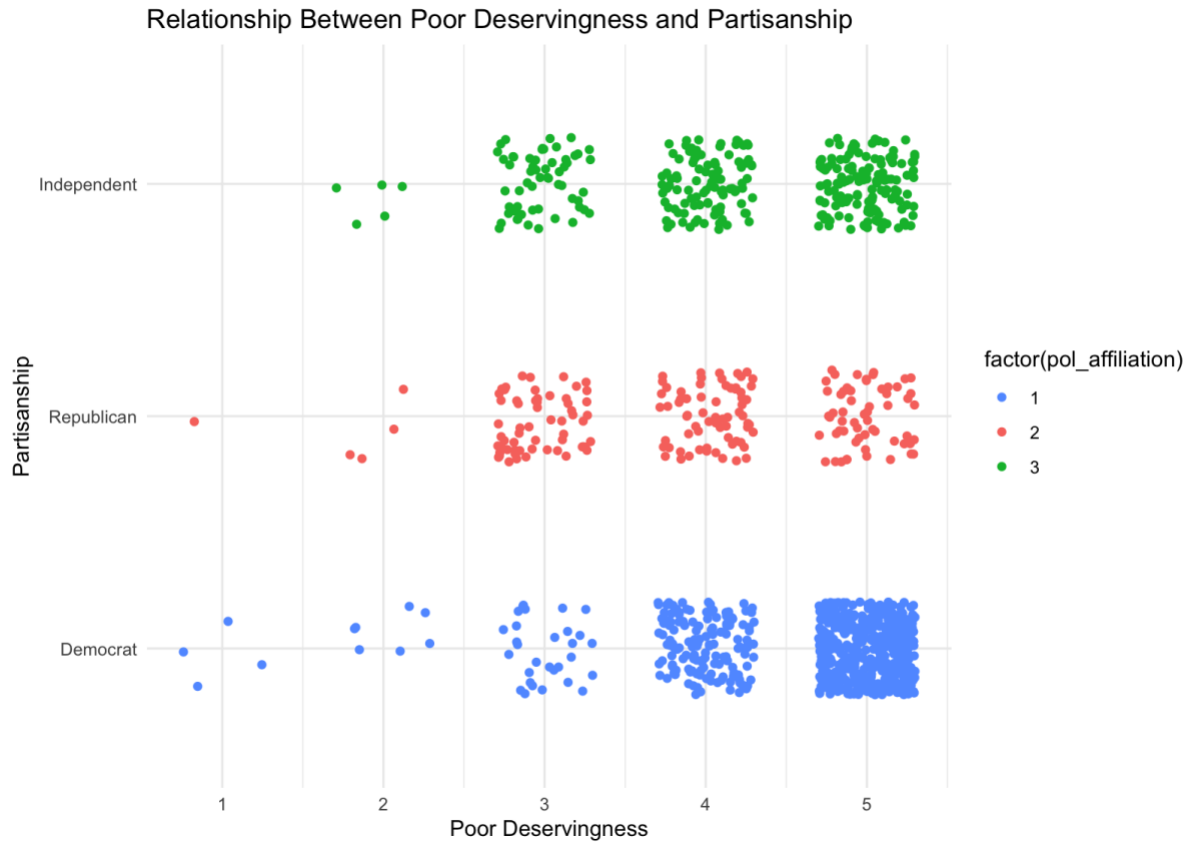
Appendix Figure B.8: Poor Deservingness and Income



Appendix Figure B.9: Rich Deservingness and Partisanship



Appendix Figure B.10: Poor Deservingness and Partisanship



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