

ETHNIC DIVERSITY, INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS, AND MASS
POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

A Senior Thesis

By

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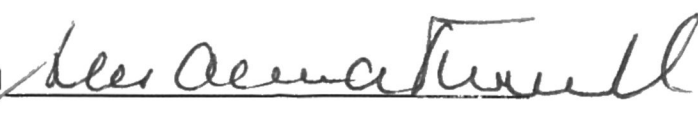
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Abstract

A number of Sociologists and Political Scientists have used what is called the Power Theory to explain political relationships between ethnic groups. Political Science research using this theory concludes that the more politically threatened the majority ethnic group feels, the more politically active its group members are. Yet there are reasons to suspect that existing research has not accurately tested Power Theory propositions. In this study, I offer new empirical tests of Power Theory propositions about ethnic majority political behavior that are designed to avoid the limitations of past research. My two research questions involve the political participation and ideology of the majority group members under varying degrees of political threat. While the predicted relationships between the variables were not as strong as in the past research, some of the basic hypotheses of the Power Theory were supported in this study.

Ethnic Diversity, Inter-Ethnic Relations, and Mass Political Behavior

Mass political behavior is interesting because it is such a complex phenomenon. There are many studies using a variety of variables to try to explain why and how people vote. Every new research project about mass political behavior adds new insight to understanding a piece of the puzzle of why people behave a certain way politically. Every new research project also adds to the general body of knowledge of political science.

The broad phenomena in which I am interested are why people vote and what makes them associate with a particular political party. More specifically, I will investigate relationships between ethnic groups that affect voting behavior and party identification. Many scholars have examined this general topic, and their research has led me to the theory I would like to test. The best research on this topic of voting and race relations, and that most closely related to my research question, is a recent series of studies by Dr. Micheal Giles from Emory University. Dr. Giles has researched this area with many different co-authors, including Kaenan Hertz of Emory University and Arthur Evans of Florida Atlantic University.

Giles and Hertz (1994) have proposed what they call the "Power Theory." The Power Theory examines the competitive positions of ethnic groups in political, economic, and social arenas and how they influence political relationships between racial groups. This model, simplified, basically says that

political threat to the position of the ethnic majority group affects the political behavior of members of that group. The political threat may be real or perceived. Also, the model may be different depending on the social class of the members of the majority group. Thus there are actually two models: the high income majority group's perceived or real political threat and its effects on their political behavior and the low income majority group's perceived or real political threat and its effects on their political behavior.

Giles and Hertz observed that over the past thirty years the Democratic party in the South has grown to rely more on black voters for support than any other regional American party. At the same time, the number of whites who identify with the Democratic party has been decreasing, and the number of whites who identify with the Republican party or who claim to be independents has been increasing. (Giles and Hertz 1994) Because of these observations, Giles and Hertz tested the Power Theory on voters in Louisiana parishes during the years 1975-1990. Besides the fact that Louisiana is a Southern state with large ethnic majority and minority populations, the researchers chose Louisiana because the state provided voter registration data classified by parish, race, and party. These data allowed them to examine voters from different races and the party with which they identified. (Giles and Hertz 1994)

Giles and Hertz hypothesized that in an area where there was a significant political threat posed by a minority racial group, the dominant ethnic group would be more hostile than in regions where there is not a significant

political threat by another ethnic group. To define “hostility,” the researchers gave the examples of lynchings, resistance to school desegregation, and voting for racist candidates as ways the majority group responded to a minority group increasing in size.

In their research Giles and Hertz found that high black population concentrations were associated with a decline in the percentage of white voters registered as Democrats and an increase in the percentage of white voters registered as Republicans.

A condition to the results Giles found in Louisiana was that the social class of the parish affected the hostility level of the majority group. Lower-class whites tended to be more hostile toward a minority group than upper-class whites. That is, black population concentrations were more closely associated with the two political party registration measures of hostility in lower social class parishes.

The reason social class is a factor is because of the physical situation of the ethnic groups. If the members of the dominant ethnic group are situated closely to the minority ethnic group, more of a threat is felt. The dominant group responds more negatively than members of the dominant group situated in a lower-threat context. (Giles and Hertz 1994) This is attributed to competition. Those dominant group members situated closely to the minority party feel a high level of political threat because they compete with the minority ethnic group for housing, public facilities such as schools and parks, and employment.

Therefore, since the lower class whites are the group most closely situated to the minority group and are more often forced to compete with that group, they are the ones who are the most hostile. (Giles and Evans 1985)

Giles and others have only provided limited support to the power theory. Earlier research has not examined voter turnout as it is affected by race relations in addition to the many other variables tested in previous studies. Based on this gap, I will consider the political party of the majority group members in both high- and low-threat situations and test whether they responded to political threats by actually voting. I propose that majority group members in high-threat situations will respond to minority group political threats by voting more often than their counterparts in low-threat situations. At the same time, these majority group members in high-threat situations will identify more frequently with the Republican party than majority group members who are not as politically threatened.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

My research will be conducted with individual-level survey data from respondents in Texas. My principal research question concerns the political participation of members of the majority group in the face of varying levels of minority group threat. Are the members of the group more or less politically active, and with which political party do they most closely identify? This inquiry will allow me to examine differences in political participation of the majority group

in areas of both large and small minority groups. Past researchers have not addressed this specific question.

My second research question concerns how ethnic-majority voters' party identification is related to levels of ethnic minority political threat. Past research suggests conflicting evidence about whether majority group members will support a particular political party in response to the size of the minority group. I will test whether an ethnic majority respondent's political party identification is a result of the size and proximity of the minority group.

For the purposes of this study, the majority group is considered to be whites and the minority groups are blacks and Hispanics. I will use the respondents' zip codes to classify majority group members by geographic location in the state and, hence, with the minority group population in their county.

I will use the 1990 national census to determine the population size and percentage of minorities in each of the counties in the state in which each white respondent resides.

Another explanatory variable I will examine is the percentage of elected officials who are minority group members. The number of minority group elected officials in an area shows the actual political strength of the minority group. One might also see this number as an indicator of the size of the minority political elite in an area. A large minority political elite may be an alternate threat to the majority ethnic group that elicits a greater majority group reaction in response

than does the size of the minority population alone. Again, other researchers have not addressed whether political elites present a greater threat to the majority group.

Another data source for this study is the publication Black Elected Officials (1993) produced by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Press. This publication lists data by states and includes the numbers for the total population, black population, voting-age population, black voting-age population, registered voters, and black registered voters. It also shows the percentage of blacks in each of the congressional districts and a description of the specific state government, as well as the number of counties, municipalities, judges, courts, school districts, and school board members in the state. It then provides the names, addresses, and titles of all the black elected officials in the different levels of government in the state. I have created a measure of the percentage of eight locally elected offices in each survey respondent's county that is black. These locally elected offices include Mayor, Mayor-Protem, Councilmember/Alderman/Commissioner, County Commissioner, County Judge, State Senator, State Representative, and U.S. Representative.

A third data source is the National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials (1992). This roster was compiled by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO). This source provides the same kind of information as the previous source, but it includes data relating only to Hispanics. From this source I have created a measure of the percentage of the

same eight locally elected offices as in the measure of black elected officials, in each survey respondent's county that is Hispanic. My overall measure of minority political elite strength in a county is the sum of the number of black and Hispanic elected officials in the offices mentioned above divided by the total number of elected officials in those offices.

Next, I will determine the social class of the majority party respondents by considering the respondents' education level. Giles and his co-authors have suggested that lower-class majority group members feel more of a political threat than upper-class majority group members, and I will investigate whether this is true of the groups in Texas at the time of the survey.

The principal data source is a survey conducted by Texas A&M University in 1993 with random samples of each of the state's principal ethnic/racial groups. It collected answers to a wide range of questions concerning political participation, social class, situation, turnout, voter identification, and geographic area. As is appropriate to my theory tests, I analyzed data for the 566 white respondents in this survey.

Four additional explanatory variables were used in all of the data analyses to control for rival explanations of the likelihood of political participation and party identification. Two variables were used to explain interest in politics and voter efficacy. The first asked the respondent to agree or disagree with the statement, "I have no say in government," which indicated the person's political efficacy. The other asked the respondent his or her level of interest in politics

ranging from very interested to not interested at all. Two variables were used to determine social class of the respondent. The first was education level and the next was household income. Each set of tests includes a test including all white respondents in the survey as well as tests for the lower, middle, and upper classes. The classes were divided using the education variable where a high school diploma or less indicated the lower class, a respondent with some college experience was ranked as middle class, and a respondent with a bachelor's degree or higher was ranked as upper class.

The first set of tests used a summary of majority group voter participation variables as the dependent variable. The summary statistic was comprised of answers to seven questions in the survey that asked whether the respondent participated in certain political activities. The activities included signing a petition, contacting a public official, attending a public meeting, contributing money to a political party, attending a rally, joining a political organization, or voting. The affirmative responses to these questions were tallied in this summary variable and the respondents received scores of 0 to 7, depending on their participation levels. The explanatory variables included education level, family income, interest in politics, and political efficacy as well as the percent of the county that is an ethnic minority.

RESULTS OF THE THEORY TESTS

The results for the first set of theory tests are reported in Table 1. In this test, the percent minority population was not a significant indicator of voter

participation in the county at any class level. In the tests of all majority group respondents and lower class respondents, the education level, income, and political interest were significantly related to the dependent variable. In the middle and upper classes, only income and political interest were significantly related to political participation (because there is little or no variation in the education measure for the latter two class groups).

The next set of tests used the summary political participation variable as the dependent variable again, and included education, income, political interest, and political efficacy as explanatory variables. In these tests, however, the percentage of the elected officials in a county that were minorities, or the percentage of minority elites, was another explanatory variable.

The results of these tests are reported in Table 2. In these multiple regressions, the percentage of minority elites was not a significant indicator of overall participation among whites collectively or in any social class subset. For all white respondents and lower class respondents, education level, income, and political interest were the significant explanatory variables. In the middle and upper classes, income and political interest were significantly related to participation.

A third set of tests used a variable indicating the respondent's party identification and strength as the dependent variable. This variable was measured on a scale of 1 to 7 ranging from strong Democrats to strong Republicans according to responses to three questions. The first question

asked political party affiliation and this was followed by a question of strength as a Republican or Democrat, or closeness to the three parties if the respondent considered him-or herself an Independent in the first question. In addition to education, income, political interest and political efficacy, the percentage of the county population considered an ethnic minority was used as an explanatory variable.

The results of this set of tests are reported in Table 3. In these regressions, the percentage of ethnic minorities was significant in the tests of all white respondents and lower class respondents. Education level was a significant explanatory variable in the tests of all white respondents and upper class respondents, and family income was significant in the tests of all white respondents and lower and upper class respondents. The explanatory power of none of these regressions is remarkable, yet they still provide support for hypotheses based on the Power Theory.

In the fourth set of tests, education, income, political interest, and political efficacy were used as explanatory variables. In this test, however, the percentage of minority elites was also included in the test as a predictor variable. The dependent variable tested was party identification and strength. In these tests, the percent minority elite variable was significant in the lower class subset. Education level was significant in the tests of all white respondents and upper class respondents. Income was significant in the cases of all white respondents and upper and lower class respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

The question I have researched is whether majority group members in situations of high political threat from a minority group exhibit different political behavior than their counterparts in situations of low political threat. I hypothesized that the majority group members in the high-threat situations would respond by voting more frequently and identifying more with the Republican party than majority group members in low-threat situations. This research design differs from earlier research in that neither the relationship between voter participation and minority population size or the number of minority political elites has been previously tested.

The regressions reported in this paper to test the preceding expectations show the same results as different tests run with these variables. First, neither the size of the minority population nor the percentage of minority elected officials in a county significantly affected whether the people in that county had high or low political participation. Thus, neither measure of minority group threat was related to the political participation levels of the members of the majority population.

The other results of these analyses generally follow widely accepted theories. For example, in all four tests which included all white respondents, the education level and family income variables significantly and positively affected the political participation and party identification variables. However, the percentage minority population and percentage minority elite variables did not

significantly affect the political participation variable in any case, and they did not have a strong relationship with the party identification and strength variable in most cases.

The Power Theory holds that social class affects the hostility level of the majority group members. In the analysis where party identification and strength among whites was the dependent variable and minority population size was tested as an explanatory variable, there was a significant positive relationship in the total and lower class majority group respondents. Also, when party identification and strength was tested with the minority elite explanatory variable, there was a significant positive relationship in the lower class subset. This reaffirms Giles' hypothesis that lower class majority group members' party identification is affected by both the size and power of the minority group. Thus, one major proposition of the Power Theory is supported in two separate tests.

There are many reasons why the tests of this data contained different results than in Giles' studies and do not seem to completely follow the Power Theory. The principal difference is that Giles' results may have been affected by his attempt to infer individual-level relationships with aggregate data. Although Giles used data from a 15 year time span, this may not have been enough to correct for his use of data on a parish level to infer relationships on the individual level. While one set of tests is not enough to negate a theory, the relationships between variables in these tests cast a shadow of doubt on the

strength of the Power Theory to predict political relationships between ethnic groups other than in Louisiana between 1975 and 1990.

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Table 1
Determinants of Summary Political Participation Rates Among Whites

Independent Variable	All White Respondents	Lower Class	Middle Class	Upper Class
Pct. of County Population Ethnic Minority	-0.005 (0.005) -1.061	0.000 (0.007) 0.029	-0.008 (0.009) -0.964	-0.008 (0.009) -0.983
Education Level	0.229** (0.059) 3.905	0.229* (0.150) 1.528	-----	0.136 (0.329) 0.412
Family Income	0.213** (0.036) 5.926	0.181** (0.059) 3.087	0.229** (0.060) 3.785	0.240** (0.073) 3.268
Interest in Politics	-0.443** (0.076) -5.822	-0.365** (0.102) -3.592	-0.470** (0.147) -3.188	-0.657** (0.201) -3.265
Political Efficacy	0.144 (0.129) 1.120	0.112 (0.188) 0.593	0.142 (0.231) 0.613	0.194 (0.300) 0.647
R ²	0.274	0.185	0.175	0.246
Adjusted R ²	0.264	0.159	0.148	0.205

Note: The cell entries are the regression coefficient, the standard error, and the t-coefficient.

* p<.10

** p<.05

All tests of statistical significance are one-tailed.

Table 2
Determinants of Summary Political Participation Rates Among Whites

Independent Variable	All White Respondents	Lower Class	Middle Class	Upper Class
Pct. Minority Elites	-0.338 (0.429) -0.788	-0.583 (0.644) -0.904	-0.462 (0.825) -0.560	0.123 (0.857) 0.143
Education Level	0.228** (0.059) 3.886	0.247* (0.150) 1.641	-----	0.167 (0.331) 0.503
Family Income	0.215** (0.036) 5.974	0.193** (0.059) 3.291	0.219** (0.060) 3.667	0.242** (0.075) 3.228
Interest in Politics	-0.440** (0.077) -5.716	-0.361** (0.102) -3.523	-0.466** (0.149) -3.133	-0.637** (0.205) -3.116
Political Efficacy	0.147 (0.130) 1.127	0.118 (0.190) 0.620	0.139 (0.235) 0.591	0.235 (0.303) 0.774
R ²	0.273	0.190	0.171	0.246
Adjusted R ²	0.263	0.164	0.143	0.205

Note: The cell entries are the regression coefficient, the standard error, and the t-coefficient.

* p<.10

** p<.05

All tests of statistical significance are one-tailed.

Table 3
Determinants of Party Identification and Strength Among Whites

Independent Variable	All White Respondents	Lower Class	Middle Class	Upper Class
Pct. of County Population Ethnic Minority	0.016* (0.007) 2.477	0.026** (0.012) 2.256	0.016 (0.012) 1.282	0.003 (0.011) 0.315
Education Level	0.230** (0.086) 2.670	0.201 (0.254) 0.792	-----	-0.814** (0.368) -2.210
Family Income	0.144** (0.053) 2.716	0.179** (0.094) 1.905	0.021 (0.091) 0.226	0.230** (0.091) 2.532
Interest in Politics	-0.046 (0.117) -0.394	0.041 (0.175) 0.235	-0.205 (0.222) -0.923	-0.165 (0.239) -0.691
Political Efficacy	-0.068 (0.190) -0.356	-0.162 (0.308) -0.526	-0.015 (0.348) -0.043	-0.153 (0.355) -0.432
R ²	0.076	0.074	0.024	0.080
Adjusted R ²	0.066	0.045	-0.006	0.045

Note: The cell entries are the regression coefficient, the standard error, and the t-coefficient.

* p<.10

** p<.05

All tests of statistical significance are one-tailed.

Table 4
Determinants of Party Identification and Strength Among Whites

Independent Variable	All White Respondents	Lower Class	Middle Class	Upper Class
Pct. Minority Elite	0.762 (0.635) 1.199	1.747* (1.082) 1.616	1.105 (1.263) 0.875	-0.928 (1.008) -0.922
Education Level	0.215** (0.087) 2.460	0.157 (0.258) 0.607	-----	-0.834** (0.377) -2.215
Family Income	0.146** (0.053) 2.745	0.196** (0.095) 2.065	0.041 (0.090) 0.460	0.213** (0.091) 2.327
Interest in Politics	-0.023 (0.120) -0.195	0.098 (0.180) 0.542	-0.203 (0.227) -0.905	-0.169 (0.243) -0.695
Political Efficacy	-0.043 (0.195) -0.219	-0.108 (0.316) -0.342	-0.015 (0.352) -0.044	-0.101 (0.363) -0.277
R ²	0.057	0.056	0.017	0.070
Adjusted R ²	0.046	0.023	-0.014	0.034

Note: The cell entries are the regression coefficient, the standard error, and the t-coefficient.

* p<.10

** p<.05

All tests of statistical significance are one-tailed.