

Why We Feel Powerless?

How Income, Education and Race Influence Political Alienation within the United States

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Introduction

Does a relationship exist between certain social factors and the attitudes individuals have toward the government? If so, then what social factors act to shape feelings of powerlessness that lead to a sense of alienation; why do some people have confidence in the effectiveness of government and the practices used to legitimize it while others don't; and what would influence some to feel that they have the ability to affect change in the political system while others feel powerless and disenchanting? By exploring political alienation - a sense of being left out or marginalized from the political system - within the U.S. and how it relates to the specific social factors of income, education and race, perhaps we can gain a better understanding of its roots, reasons for its emergence and potential consequences.

As a social science, sociology examines the forces that create or inhibit social cohesion. The concepts of anomie and social strain are often used when explaining alienation and can be applied to the study of political alienation within the United States. In seeking to understand what contributes to a sense of powerlessness among the American citizenry, and why such a phenomena exists within a democratic structure that has an emphasis on equal and fair representation of public interests and sentiment, my research will focus on the possible agents that create a mistrust toward the actions and interpreted intentions of public officials and political leaders. Specifically, I will explore how income, education and race operate to influence a belief that one's thoughts and feelings are irrelevant to the process of political decision-making, and examine whether these feelings are based upon a known historical pattern of powerlessness, mistrust and meaninglessness, or are arbitrary and relatively organic. After reviewing related studies of political alienation and through my own secondary data analysis of survey questions regarding anomie, political effectiveness and trust, I will attempt to establish a more comprehensive understanding of how the interplay of income, education and race influence attitudes toward the effectiveness of government as well as individual feelings of powerlessness within the American political system.

Review of Related Literature

In this section I will be reviewing relevant studies to further an understanding of political alienation in the United States, and provide a conceptual definition and supplemental empirical evidence to lay a foundation for my own research into the phenomena. These studies examine voting patterns as a manifestation of political

alienation, and the influences of such feelings are relevant in exploring the reasons why people choose not to participate.

Building an understanding of why certain individuals/groups participate in electoral races has been of interest to political scientists and sociologists alike. It is also of particular fascination to both the novice and the professional why abstention from voting occurs in a democracy like the U.S., when the basis of such a state is underwritten by the pillars of participation and representation. It is for these reasons that numerous studies have examined both voting and nonvoting patterns and traits in U.S. citizenry. The following studies on political alienation will serve as a means of exploring this dilemma further.

As researchers like Johnson, Hays and Hays (1998) have illustrated, it is important to identify political alienation as a concept measured in terms of its multi-dimensionality: internal efficacy, the extent to which one feels personally capable of exerting an effect on the political system; external efficacy, the extent to which one feels that the government and institutions are responsive to her/his needs and desires; and cynicism or lack of trust in the government to fulfill its obligations, or to do what is right. Borrowing from Robert Merton, “anomie occurs when the norms of a society do not match its social structure” (McIntyre, 166), we can develop an understanding of alienation as a disjunction between the accepted goals of a society and the legitimate means of achieving those goals. Here, we will consider the goal as a free, open and representative democratic society, and the legitimate means as civic participation in the form of voting.

From here, alienated voters can then be placed into two categories: 1) voting as a form of protest, influenced by cynicism (Sifry, 2000; Southwell, 1998); and 2) nonvoting as a rational decision, influenced by internal efficacy and/or external efficacy (Callahan, 1998; Herring, House and Mero, 1991; Shearer, Morris and Doppelt, 1998; Shienbaum, 1984). The following studies will be divided in terms of these categories with an additional section on political alienation in terms of its time and place – locating it within an historical context (Schoultz, 1978; Shienbaum, 1984; Wolfing, 1990). It is important to note that within all of these works a common thread is revealed - political alienation, in terms of voter turnout or citizen participation, is not a matter of apathy on behalf of the population. Instead, each study serves to illuminate the notion that it is more than a sense of carelessness or ambivalence that contributes to disengagement, it is a profound feeling of disconnectedness, disaffection and severance from the political system. The norms of voting that serve to legitimize the structure of democracy do not match up.

Voting as a Form of Protest

In both their studies, Sifry (2000) and Southwell and Everest (1998) examine the concept of what Southwell et al. terms the “protest voter.” Measuring alienation in terms of cynicism, lack of trust in the government, this subgroup of the population is characterized by its use of voting as a means of sending a message to those within the status quo. Rather than abstain from casting their votes, these voters utilize the process as a mechanism of relaying dissatisfaction and discontent. Using the National Election Studies (NES) to measure national disaffection with the government over a period of four decades, Sifry indicates, “the percentage agreeing that ‘people like me don’t have any say

about what the government does' rose from 31 percent in 1952 to 53 percent in 1996" He also finds that just as internal efficacy has increased in the recent decades, so has cynicism, a growing distrust in the government and its actions. And it is this cynicism that draws people out to vote for candidates like Jesse Ventura, Paul Wellstone, Ross Perot and Bernie Sanders, each a politician whose image is one of an "outsider" and appeals to a population feeling outside the political system, the politically alienated.

With her study of the 1992 presidential election, Southwell et al. (1998) illustrates how the candidacy of Ross Perot drew the politically alienated out to the polls as an outlet for disaffection (1998). She writes, "fourteen percent of those who voted for Perot, or about 2.6 percent of the electorate, indicated that if Perot had not been running, they would not have voted" This can be explained, as Southwell et al. indicate, by the political cynicism of respondents to such survey questions as, "How often do you trust the government to do what is right?" and "Is the government run for the benefit of all or for a few big interests?" While the alienated are less likely to vote, that does not mean they don't, exemplifying the notion that politically alienated persons are not apathetic; rather the political system, its processes and candidate policies do not resonate with them. What mobilizes the alienated is a sense of connection, a feeling that what they think, feel and do matters to the overall process of the system, that those in power respond and they can be trusted.

Just as Sifry(2000) found, Southwell et al. (1998) discovered specific traits of those who felt politically alienated, whether they harbored feelings of cynicism, internal inefficacy, or external inefficacy. These traits can be identified in terms of demographics. "The standard demographic variables of age, education, gender and family income show a strong relationship to the voting decision" (Southwell et al., 1998). While Southwell et al. found that the middle aged, middle income and highly educated comprised those who are more likely to vote, Sifry (2000) adds the components of race and occupation as a part of the demographic measurement to illustrate their negative relationship to voting. "People are more likely to believe that they 'don't have any say' if they are black rather than white, are poor rather than well-off, have a limited education compared to a college diploma or postgraduate degree, or work in a blue-collar jobs rather than white collar or professional fields."

These two studies serve to illustrate the image of the politically alienated as those who feel disaffected and detached from the political system, its processes and its candidates. In her analysis of the 1992 election, Southwell et al.(1998) shows how cynicism is unrelated to voter turnout. In fact, it was the lack of trust in the two party system, in the status quo, that drove the nonvoters to vote in protest. These studies contradict the notion that nonvoters are apathetic and don't care about politics. Rather, they have nothing to connect with, nothing to tell them that their votes matter, and that the government can be trusted.

Nonvoting as a Rational Decision

This section will focus on studies that show nonvoting as a rational decision on behalf of the citizen. The level of internal and external efficacy of the nonvoter influences this action. The four studies that will be reviewed all indicate a reciprocal relationship between those who do not vote and the policies of the candidates running for

office. Levels of internal and external efficacy correlate negatively to voting. If the voter feels that s/he has no affect on the system, if the voter feels that the government is unresponsive to her/his feelings and needs, then the individual will abstain from participating in an election. This then serves to further separate the populations of those who vote and those who don't in terms of the political agendas of the candidates. We will see again here that demographics such as income, race, age and education in relation to popular policies work to influence the levels of internal and external efficacy of voters.

In her book entitled *Beyond the Electoral Connection*, Kim Shienbaum(1984) formulates her concept of the political system in the United States as one composed of the haves and the have-nots (1984). Through this lens she lays the foundation of her framework: a system based upon, operated by and beneficial to the population of the haves, those who are of the middle to upper income, middle aged and highly educated. Focusing on these components, Shienbaum recognizes that those who do not benefit from the system, those whom the policies and processes don't benefit or include, will adopt a feeling of powerlessness and frustration and will react with disengagement. This group tends to be comprised of the less educated, who also tend to be in the lower income group and oftentimes young. It is these people who do not have the skills or resources to participate in a political system that requires the allocation of both time and money. And their lack of participation, fueled by a sense of powerlessness and inefficacy, serves to perpetuate the cyclical correlation between alienation, political involvement and popular policies. They are outside the system and remain as such.

Herring, House and Mero (1991) explore this concept as they study racially based changes in alienation within the United States. Using data from the NES from 1964 to 1984, they discovered that "changes in political alienation were generally differentiated by race and reflective of issues and events that were at times divisive and politically salient" (Herring et al., 1991; p132). Here, Herring et al. identify the changes in alienation as correlating to the advanced popular policies. From the data gathered, "blacks' levels of alienation increased much more rapidly than those of nonblacks from 1968 through 1972, dropped below the levels of nonblacks from 1980 through 1984 ... the differential trends are in accord with what would be expected from the significant changes in race-related federal policies which turnovers in presidential administrations in 1968, 1976, and 1980 produced" (Herring et al., 1991; p132). This study provides support for the Shienbaum's(1984) concept that those who are not the beneficiaries of the process will not engage in it, because the policies of the times neglected the needs and desires of the black population, voter participation decreased, and therefore, representation was not proportionate. This study also serves to illustrate the influence of internal and external efficacy on political alienation. Because the black voters felt personally powerless and intentionally ignored by the government, alienation increased.

Another study to examine nonvoting as rational was conducted by David Callahan through his research on the correlation between the urban poor and political alienation (1998). Callahan looks at internal efficacy as a source of political estrangement within the urban poor by using case studies of impoverished neighborhoods within three U.S. cities, New York, Miami and San Francisco. He writes, "Matching up census tract data from 1990 and turnout reports at the precinct or assembly district level, a clear pattern is evident that parallels national trends: the poorest registered city dwellers vote by 15 to 25 percentage points less than the wealthiest" (Callahan 1998). He also takes care to

identify the “vicious cycle at work” – the urban poor, those who are less likely to vote, are in the most need of public assistance - if they don’t vote, they won’t be addressed, and if they aren’t addressed, they won’t vote.

Using the 1996 elections, Shearer, Morris and Doppelt(1998) identify five subgroups of nonvoters: *doers*, *unplugged*, *irritable*, *don’t knows*, and *alienated*. While dividing them based upon the demographics of age, income and education as well as answers to survey question regarding attention to politics and political opinions, Shearer et al. also recognize common traits that cut across all five subgroups in comparison to their counterparts – voters. All five groups were disproportionately young, not yet having turned thirty; they were significantly less educated than the general population, earning less than or equal to a high school degree; their household incomes were lower, 48 percent below \$30,000 a year; they were mostly minorities; and they were less likely to follow politics (Shearer et al., 1998).

Drawing a connection to the studies by Callahan and Shienbaum(1998), Shearer et al.(1998) continue to show how those feeling the least connected, who feel the least benefited by the process, who feel internally as well as externally ineffective, will more likely disengage from the norm of voting. Reinforcing the notion that nonvoters are not apathetic, Shearer et al. write, “Overall, 41 percent of the likely nonvoters reported engaging in at least one of four quasi-political activities: volunteered with a charity or other nonprofit organization; contacted a federal, state or local representative; attended a political meeting; or contacted their local newspaper” (p24). It is not a decision made in haste or carelessness, but rather a rational choice, almost as if to say: “If I’m not taken into consideration within the policies, then why should I participate? If I have no bearing on the outcome of the process, if what I say and feel doesn’t matter in the grand scheme of political decision making, then why should I take day off of work, lose money and time for something that I am not even important to?”

Alienation in Time and Place

In this section I would like to review studies that have placed political alienation in a broader historical or cultural context. Departing from the definition of political alienation stated earlier, Lars Schoultz examines what he calls political normlessness within voters of the United States in comparison to those of Argentina, a country thought to have widespread political normlessness from 1955 to 1973 (1978). Normlessness, as defined by Schoultz is a break between the perception of norms and actual actions. As referred to before in the paper, voting is considered to be a norm used to legitimize the political structure of democracy. Enactment of this norm, shared belief or value, reinforces and legitimizes democracy. While Schoultz recognizes the negative relationship between socioeconomic status and normlessness within the U.S. – an increase in SES correlates to a decrease in political normlessness - he makes an important addition to this already established concept. He asserts that when examining political alienation, especially in the United States, a state underwritten by a belief in democracy that leads to expected norms and values, one needs to factor in culture as an influential variable. He contends that a third variable in conjunction with SES is at work, “an intervening variable – the expectation of political equality – exerts a differential impact upon politics in the two societies” (Schoultz, 1978, p102). Here, Schoultz illuminates the

influence of culture upon political normlessness in his comparison of America's history of democracy and the government of Peron in Argentina) and he recognizes that SES, internal and external efficacy as well as cynicism contribute to normlessness.

Wolfinger, Glass and Squire add to this notion of culture as a contributor to political alienation with their study comparing American voters to other democratic states (1990). Through their research Wolfinger et al. find that the U.S., in comparison to other democratic states, has the lowest voter turnout but higher ratings of public confidence and trust in the government. What could be the cause(s) for this disparity between voter turnouts? Wolfinger et al. attribute it to the differential denominators used to measure turnout in the U.S. and Europe, and conclude that low voter turnout in the U.S. cannot be used as an indicator of political alienation. Although this may be true, I would have to argue that Wolfinger et al. failed to include nonvoters in the data assessed, and it is precisely this segment of the population that would have feelings of mistrust and low confidence in the political system, for as established earlier, it is those who benefit from the process who are more likely to have benevolent feelings towards the system and choose to participate. However, Wolfinger et al. do shed light onto an important element involved when calculating trust and confidence in the U.S. political system, perhaps even unintentionally: the expectation and belief in democracy as the basis for political engagement. Considering this element would allow us to gain an explanation as to how low voter turnout, on an international scale, allots for high confidence. Those who vote have a stake in the success of the system; they also tend to benefit the most from its process. Therefore, those who do vote would have higher confidence in comparison to those who abstain, with exception of the protest voters who enact the ritual as a result of cynicism – lack of trust in the system.

Examining political alienation through its dimensions of internal efficacy, external efficacy and cynicism allows us to explore the effects of a variety of independent variables, whether they are race, gender, age, education, or income. It also allows us to place alienation in historical and cultural contexts to better understand the change over time. Through a review of all of these previous studies it becomes apparent that alienation, manifest in not voting, is not a form of apathy – for it has been shown that cynicism leads to protest voting and nonvoting is the enactment of rational thinking - but a disconnection between the structure and its population. The norms, voting, do not meet the goals of the structure: politics are not inclusive and representative; rather the process has come to symbolize a system beneficial for a few and unresponsive to many. If we apply Merton's theory of anomie to the politically alienated Americans, we may discover two distinct categories: those who choose not to vote and those who choose to vote in protest. While they may share similar dimensions of alienation, we can also make distinctions to further our understanding and analysis.

Methods

Samples. This analysis will examine political alienation measured by efficacy for three influencing agents: income, education and race. The data used has been collected from the General Social Survey (GSS), a multi-stage cluster design, and the survey interviews are conducted by the National Opinion Research Center of persons eighteen years of age and older. Through replication the GSS monitors various social issues on the

basis of a cross-national sample to gain insight into social change and/or stability. I will be using data from the year 1996, with a sample size of 2,904 respondents.

Indicators of Political Alienation. In light of the research done by Johnson, Hays and Hays (1998) and Shienbaum (1984), a dimension of political alienation political is efficacy, either or both internal and external. Internal efficacy is measured by sample statements that probe the respondents' belief in their own individual ability to understand and have influence over the actions or policies of government bodies; examples of such statements from the GSS are: "People like me don't have any say about what the government does," or "I think most people are better informed about politics and government than I am," or "The average citizen has considerable influence on politics." The levels of measurement to these responses are nominal: "strongly agree, agree, neither disagree or agree, disagree, and strongly disagree". External efficacy is measured by questions that ask for the respondents' attitudes concerning the responsiveness of the government to the thoughts and feelings of the public as well as the respondents' attitudes towards the effectiveness of the political system. These attitudes are measured by responses to statements like: "Even the best politician cannot have much impact because the way government works." The levels of measurement for these questions are nominal as well." Answers to these survey items indicate a dimension of political alienation, a sense of powerlessness and disaffection from the political system, by measuring the level of the respondent's efficacy. The levels of efficacy will be coded from one to five, with five indicating the highest level of political alienation. The statement I will be using from the GSS to measure the respondents' level of external efficacy is: "people elected to Congress try to keep their promises." To measure the respondents' level of internal efficacy I will use the statement: "I don't have any say about what the government does."

Measures of Influencing Agents (Independent Variables). In my re-analysis of the GSS data, I will consider other factors that may have an affect upon the level of a respondent's political alienation for the year of 1996. In order to gain a better understanding of the individuals who are more likely to feel powerless within, disaffected from and dissatisfied with the American political system, I will examine the influence of income and education on both external and internal efficacy. Using the method of elaboration, race will be introduced as a test factor to see the effect on the original relationship observed at the bivariate level of analysis. Each variable will be given a code to represent the respondent's level of income, his or her level of education and race. Income will be coded from one to five, with one representing the lowest income bracket - earning an annual income of less than \$1000 per year - and five representing the highest income bracket - earning \$75000 or more a year. Education will be coded from one to five, with one representing an education level equivalent to less than a high school degree and five representing more than a college degree. Race will be coded from one to three, one indicating white; two, black; and three, other.

Results

Once the data was entered into an SPSS file and coded, a cross-tabulation was completed to test the influences of income and education on the respondents' level of internal as well as external efficacy. As indicated by the chi-square at the bivariate level of analysis (less than .005 considered significant and greater than .005 non-significant), neither education nor income appeared to have a significant relationship to the respondents' feelings of external efficacy. These relationships illustrate that neither varying levels of income nor education bear strong influence on the respondents' attitudes towards the responsiveness or effectiveness of government. As Table 1.1 shows, more respondents across all levels of income have fairly low attitudes towards the responsiveness of government; specifically 36.4% of those in the category of poor (earning less than \$1000/year) disagreed with the statement "people elected to Congress try to keep their promises," whereas 39.5% of the working poor (\$1000 to \$14999/year), 43.2% of the working class (\$15000 to \$39999), 37.8% of the middle class (\$40000 to \$74999) and 45.2% of the upper class (\$75000 and above) felt the same. Table 1.2 (Appendix A) reveals that the relationship between levels of external efficacy and the number of years of the respondent's education was non-significant as well. Attitudes towards the responsiveness of government remained low for all levels of education; specifically, 35% of the respondents who completed less than a high school degree had low levels of external efficacy, feeling that people elected to Congress don't try to keep their promises, while 40.1% of the those who finished high school, 41.8% of those who completed some college, 40.8% of those with a college degree and 33.6% of the respondents with more than a college degree had similar attitudes.

Table 1.1 The Influence of Income on Respondent's External Efficacy

			INCOM2					Total
			poor	working poor	working class	middle class	upper class	
PEOPLE ELECTED TO CONGRESS TRY TO KEEP PROMISES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	1	5	9	5	0	20
		% within INCOM2	9.1%	2.0%	2.2%	3.0%	.0%	2.3%
	AGREE	Count	3	46	85	38	10	182
		% within INCOM2	27.3%	18.0%	21.1%	23.2%	32.3%	21.0%
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	1	69	90	34	4	198
		% within INCOM2	9.1%	27.0%	22.3%	20.7%	12.9%	22.9%
	DISAGREE	Count	4	101	174	62	14	355
		% within INCOM2	36.4%	39.5%	43.2%	37.8%	45.2%	41.0%
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	2	35	45	25	3	110
		% within INCOM2	18.2%	13.7%	11.2%	15.2%	9.7%	12.7%
Total	Count	11	256	403	164	31	865	
	% within INCOM2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.964(a)	16	.527
Likelihood Ratio	14.896	16	.532
Linear-by-Linear Association	.403	1	.526
N of Valid Cases	865		

However, the influence of both education and income on the level of the respondents' internal efficacy, how much an individual feels s/he understands and has an affect over the actions or policies of government, was shown to be significant as signified by the chi-square. As Table 1.3 illustrates, as the level of the respondents' income increases, so do the levels of internal efficacy; specifically, of the respondents who fall into the category of working poor (earning between \$1000 and \$14999/year), 30.3% agreed with the statement, "I don't have any say about what the government does," whereas 18.8% of the upper class (those earning \$75000 and above/year) possessed the same level of internal efficacy.

Table 1.3 The Influence of Income on Respondent's Level of Internal Efficacy

			INCOM2					Total
			poor	working poor	working class	middle class	upper class	
DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	2	47	74	15	4	142
	AGREE	% within INCOM2	18.2%	18.0%	18.4%	9.1%	12.5%	16.3%
	AGREE	Count	1	79	128	30	6	244
		% within INCOM2	9.1%	30.3%	31.8%	18.3%	18.8%	28.0%
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	5	46	53	25	6	135
	DISAGREE	% within INCOM2	45.5%	17.6%	13.2%	15.2%	18.8%	15.5%
	DISAGREE	Count	1	72	119	70	9	271
		% within INCOM2	9.1%	27.6%	29.5%	42.7%	28.1%	31.1%
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	2	17	29	24	7	79
		% within INCOM2	18.2%	6.5%	7.2%	14.6%	21.9%	9.1%
Total	Count	11	261	403	164	32	871	
	% within INCOM2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52.236(a)	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	49.874	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.752	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	871		

The relationship between the numbers of years the respondent was educated and the level of internal efficacy was also revealed as significant as shown in Table 1.4 (Appendix B). Specifically, 36.6% of respondents who hadn't finished high school agreed with the statement above, whereas 18.8% of the respondents with a college degree answered the same. However, it is important to identify a change in the directional attitudes of respondents who continued education beyond undergraduate school. Table 1.4 shows that 18.8% of respondents who graduate from college felt that they didn't have a say about what the government does, in comparison to 20.2% of respondents who are continuing their education beyond college. With the exception of respondents who have

more than a college degree, it appears that as the number of years of education increases, so do the respondents' level of internal efficacy.

Test Factor: Race. After examining the relationship between education and income with both external and internal efficacy, race was selected as a test factor in order to see if the original relationships at the bivariate level of analysis remained the same. Controlling for the respondent's race will enable us to see if the relationships that existed previously are real or due to chance. Race was selected based on its perceived influence on income and education.

The relationship between levels of income and the levels of the respondents' external efficacy remained non-significant when controlled for race (Table 2.1 Appendix C). The results thus indicate a spurious relationship between the income of the respondent and her/his attitudes towards the effectiveness or responsiveness of government. The relationship between the level of external efficacy and the number of years of the respondent's education also remained non-significant when controlled for race (Table 2.2 Appendix D), signifying a spurious relationship between the respondent's education and her/his attitude toward the effectiveness or responsiveness of government.

However, the relationship between the respondents' levels of internal efficacy and income that was significant at the bivariate level of analysis appeared to change when race was controlled, indicating the occurrence of specification. The relationship remained significant for white respondents, and was less significant for blacks and non-significant for others, as Table 2.3 (Appendix E) exhibits. Specifically, 29.6% of white working class respondents agreed with the statement, "I don't have any say about what the government does," indicating a low level of internal efficacy; while 41.8% working class blacks and 40% of working class others exhibited similar attitudes towards their own abilities to effect the system of government. It is important to note that 20% of respondents who are working class other disagreed, in comparison to 25.5% of working class blacks and 30.8% of working class whites.

Similarly, the original relationship between the respondents' education and level of internal efficacy that existed at the bivariate level seemed to disappear once race was introduced as the test factor. The original relationship, again, remains significant for whites but becomes non-significant for blacks as well as others. Specifically, as Table 2.4 (Appendix F) illustrates, only 15.9% of white respondents who had finished college felt that they didn't have any say about the actions of government, while 50% of black respondents and 50% of other respondents with the same level of education has similar attitudes. Again, these results suggest that race has a stronger influence over a respondent's level of internal efficacy than education.

Discussion

A review of the related literature studying political alienation within the United States provided a framework to measure attitudes of powerlessness, mistrust and meaninglessness. From this basis, we have learned that feelings of alienation are multidimensional and can be measured in various ways. Two dimensions of political alienation, on which I have focused my research, are levels of external and internal efficacy. External efficacy measures individual attitudes toward the effectiveness or

responsiveness of government. The statement pulled from the GSS for the year 1996, “people elected to congress try to keep their promises,” probes the respondent’s level of external efficacy. Higher levels of external efficacy, indicated by answering “agree” to the statement, would suggest a belief that the U.S. government is effective in its policies or responsive to the attitudes of its citizens, whereas lower levels would represent an individual’s mistrust or lack of faith in government institutions. As the data revealed, levels of external efficacy vary across levels of education and income, as well as between races, and do not show any patterns. Internal efficacy measures individual attitudes about one’s own ability to understand the operations or affect the policies of government. The statement from the GSS for the year 1996, “I don’t have any say about what the government does,” was used to probe respondents’ levels of internal efficacy. Answering “disagree” to this statement would indicate a perception of personal power in regards to the institutions of government, a sense of meaningfulness and inclusion, a perception that how one feels about government policies or actions matters within the political system and that one has the power to effect change. As the results reveal, this relationship is more complex and worth exploring.

In many studies, voting has been used as a measure of political alienation. Regarded as a manifestation of political alienation, the examination of civic participation may reveal for what and whom groups vote, or why people are driven to the polls or choose to refrain. As previous studies have shown, voting can be used as a form of protest, a way of signifying dissatisfaction with the status quo, or even a means of enacting political or social change. To signify dissatisfaction with the status quo or to enact change. We have also learned that choosing not to vote can be viewed as a rational decision on behalf of the citizen. Nonvoting suggests that the voter feels excluded, detached from or powerless within the political process and therefore choose to refrain from engagement. If one feels that there are no obvious incentives or rewards to voting, as a result of historic inequality, then one will choose to ignore or not participate in the system; but those who feel that they benefit from the structure, those who have a history of power and privilege as a result of the social structure, will act to reinforce and maintain its organization. My research has focused on exploring the possible influences of such attitudes. What would contribute to low levels of efficacy in a democratic system of government where participation, representation and engagement are hallmark? Voting, an act that legitimizes the democratic system, serves to reinforce the existing political structure; therefore, nonvoting would suggest a rejection of the structure and the rituals used to reinforce and maintain it. Voting rates were not the focus of this research, but rather an exploration of the possible influences of political alienation that may lead to patterns of nonvoting. Through secondary analysis of the GSS I sought to learn the possible social factors that shape feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness or mistrust toward the government – to find the influences of political alienation. But before we attempt to pose answers to these questions it is important to recognize that attitudes, although highly influential, do not necessarily transfer into observable behavior.

The change in the relationship of respondents’ internal efficacy with income and education once race was controlled indicates specification. When race was controlled, the original relationship between internal efficacy and income disappeared for respondents in the category of other, yet remained significant for whites. As the data illustrates, the relationship between a working class black respondent and her/his level of

internal efficacy is less significant than that of a working class respondent who is white, and is non-significant for a working class respondent who identifies her/his self as other. Although the relationship did not disappear for blacks, the statistical significance was lower in comparison to that of whites. This may be due to the way in which respondents identify themselves along racial lines. The label of “other” is representative of a broad and diverse category of people, including Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, each of which represent a cluster of distinct populations. However, the changes in the chi-square suggest that perhaps race, not income, has a more powerful influence over feelings of powerlessness for minorities other than blacks. Similar changes occurred between levels of analysis when looking at the relationship between the respondent’s level of internal efficacy and her/his education, once I controlled for race. The original relationship disappeared for both blacks and others with a college degree, yet remained significant for whites who have the same level of education. This specification suggests that for blacks and other minorities within the U.S. it is not necessarily the years of formal education they receive, but the social implications of race, that strongly influence their internal sense of powerlessness toward the government.

To what can one attribute these results? How could respondents who earn similar incomes and have completed the same level of formal education harbor such different attitudes towards their own ability to effect the government; and why would income be a significant factor influencing the internal efficacy of blacks and not other minorities? By examining the social contexts in which these attitudes arise, perhaps we can gain a better understanding of how and why they occur.

The history of blacks and other minorities (“minority” referring to power differentials, not the actual numerical size of the population) living within the U.S. is intrinsically tied to, yet dramatically segregated from, that of the dominant white class. Minorities, including racial and ethnic groups other than white as well as women of all races and ethnicities, have experienced a history of systematic institutionalized discrimination, exclusion and unequal access to resources. The legacy of slavery and the implications of Jim Crow have shaped the social fabric of American culture. While the practice of overt discrimination has diminished for the most part, the effects of its accompanying ideologies remain embedded within the institutions that serve to organize social interactions, allocate and determine access to resources and shape the subjectivities of actors. The effects result in unequal access to valuable resources such as a quality education, sufficient employment opportunities, adequate healthcare and a fair amount of wealth. Recent developments in the rise of a black middle class may contribute to the difference in attitudes among blacks and other minority groups. Although prejudice and discrimination against African Americans still exists, large numbers have gained entrance into the higher strata of society and receive the power associated with those positions, while other minorities such as Latinos and Native Americans as well as immigrants remain comparatively in the lower classes. These trends suggest that perhaps access to money shapes perceptions of power within the American political system for those with relative high social standing. Also, income measures actual money earned by an individual or family, whereas wealth refers to assets, which are inherited, and old wealth in American society is predominately owned by whites. Therefore, for the dominant group of American society that has experienced a history of power, privilege and access, it may be more of a question of how much wealth and how much education that shapes

attitudes towards government. As the data indicates, a lower percentage of respondents who are white feel powerless in comparison to their minority counterparts. This, again, may be a result of the dominant position within the social hierarchy occupied by the white population as a product of the social structure that engenders intergenerational wealth and intergenerational poverty.

History also acts as an instrument of socialization. A continuous process operating to shape the subjectivities of individuals and groups, socialization is a product of the dominant culture in order to perpetuate existing social structures. Agents of this process such as family members, peers, and coworkers as well as institutions like school, government and news media instill values, construct beliefs and establish norms instrumental to the development of the individual. If access to valuable resources has been systematically denied to minorities within the U.S. through governmental policies as well as individual actions, while images of equality and fairness continue to be projected by the dominant class, then perhaps the amount of education or level of income an individual receives is not as powerful a force as actual experience in the forming of attitudes. Another factor is that education works differently for different racial groups as well as women. Studies have shown that minorities who receive the same level of education as whites earn lower incomes, illustrating that the relationship between education and income for blacks and other minorities is more complex than it is for whites. Being conscious of these institutionalized inequalities and their impact upon one's life may attribute to the feelings of powerlessness and exclusion that are dimensions of political alienation. Feeling perpetually disadvantaged by the organizational power of government would not create an atmosphere in which one could feel that what s/he thinks and feels matters within the political system of decision and policymaking.

These findings serve to illuminate the complex and multidimensional relationship between class, education and race within the U.S., and how they relate to feelings of internal powerlessness. Further research that compares percentages of blacks and other minorities in each social class would better clarify the influence of income on levels of internal efficacy, but as a result of this study it appears that both social factors of class and race matter when exploring the roots of political alienation within the United States. We can see that for minority groups other than blacks, having money does not override the significance American society attaches to race. Also evident is the significance of money on people's sense of power in their relation to the operations of government, suggesting that one's position within the social hierarchy as a result of class influences the amount to which one feels included in and effective on the actions of the government. We are also shown that education may not necessarily change the internal efficacy of blacks and other minorities, but influences the way whites feel about their ability to effect the government. The roots of political alienation are intricate and relate to both a history of inequality and the subsequent actions to create redress; yet it is also apparent that exclusion and marginalization is still felt by minorities, fostering a sense of meaninglessness and internal powerlessness that influences political participation.

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Appendix A:

PEOPLE ELECTED TO CONGRESS TRY TO KEEP PROMISES * ED2 Crosstabulation

			ED2					Total
			less than highschool	finished highschool	some college	finished college	more than college	
PEOPLE ELECTED TO CONGRESS TRY TO KEEP PROMISES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	13	16	13	1	2	45
		% within ED2	6.3%	4.2%	2.5%	2.0%	1.8%	3.5%
	AGREE	Count	43	82	111	13	28	277
		% within ED2	20.9%	21.4%	21.3%	26.5%	24.8%	21.8%
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	43	79	110	11	28	271
		% within ED2	20.9%	20.6%	21.1%	22.4%	24.8%	21.3%
	DISAGREE	Count	72	154	218	20	38	502
		% within ED2	35.0%	40.1%	41.8%	40.8%	33.6%	39.4%
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	35	53	69	4	17	178
		% within ED2	17.0%	13.8%	13.2%	8.2%	15.0%	14.0%
Total	Count	206	384	521	49	113	1273	
	% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.427(a)	16	.494
Likelihood Ratio	15.131	16	.515
Linear-by-Linear Association	.002	1	.963
N of Valid Cases	1273		

a. 2 cells (8.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.73.

Appendix B:

DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES * INCOM2 Crosstabulation

			INCOM2					Total
			poor	working poor	working class	middle class	upper class	
DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	2	47	74	15	4	142
		% within INCOM2	18.2%	18.0%	18.4%	9.1%	12.5%	16.3%
	AGREE	Count	1	79	128	30	6	244
		% within INCOM2	9.1%	30.3%	31.8%	18.3%	18.8%	28.0%
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	5	46	53	25	6	135
		% within INCOM2	45.5%	17.6%	13.2%	15.2%	18.8%	15.5%
	DISAGREE	Count	1	72	119	70	9	271
		% within INCOM2	9.1%	27.6%	29.5%	42.7%	28.1%	31.1%
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	2	17	29	24	7	79
		% within INCOM2	18.2%	6.5%	7.2%	14.6%	21.9%	9.1%
	Total	Count	11	261	403	164	32	871
		% within INCOM2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52.236(a)	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	49.874	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.752	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	871		

a. 7 cells (28.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.00.

Chi-Square Tests

RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-2000)		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
WHITE	Pearson Chi-Square	16.809(a)	16	.398
	Likelihood Ratio	11.183	16	.798
	Linear-by-Linear Association	.291	1	.590
	N of Valid Cases	716		
BLACK	Pearson Chi-Square	14.423(b)	16	.567
	Likelihood Ratio	15.354	16	.499
	Linear-by-Linear Association	.413	1	.520
	N of Valid Cases	102		
OTHER	Pearson Chi-Square	14.801(c)	16	.539
	Likelihood Ratio	12.932	16	.678
	Linear-by-Linear Association	2.261	1	.133
	N of Valid Cases	47		

a 10 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .09.

b 17 cells (68.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .18.

c 23 cells (92.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

Appendix D:

RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-									
				less than highschool	finished highschool	some college	finished college	more than college	
WHITE	PEOPLE ELECTED TO CONGRESS TRY TO KEEP PROMISES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	10	9	10	0	0	29
			% within ED2	6.4%	2.8%	2.3%	.0%	.0%	2.8%
		AGREE	Count	30	69	86	12	25	222
			% within ED2	19.1%	21.8%	19.9%	26.7%	27.2%	21.3%
		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	34	68	87	9	22	220
			% within ED2	21.7%	21.5%	20.1%	20.0%	23.9%	21.1%
		DISAGREE	Count	56	128	192	20	31	427
			% within ED2	35.7%	40.4%	44.4%	44.4%	33.7%	40.9%
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	27	43	57	4	14	145
			% within ED2	17.2%	13.6%	13.2%	8.9%	15.2%	13.9%
	Total	Count	157	317	432	45	92	1043	
		% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
BLACK	PEOPLE ELECTED TO CONGRESS TRY TO KEEP PROMISES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	3	6	2	0	1	12
			% within ED2	7.9%	11.5%	3.2%	.0%	12.5%	7.4%
		AGREE	Count	11	9	17	0	0	37
			% within ED2	28.9%	17.3%	27.0%	.0%	.0%	22.7%
		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	8	9	17	2	3	39
			% within ED2	21.1%	17.3%	27.0%	100.0%	37.5%	23.9%
		DISAGREE	Count	13	19	17	0	3	52
			% within ED2	34.2%	36.5%	27.0%	.0%	37.5%	31.9%
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	3	9	10	0	1	23
			% within ED2	7.9%	17.3%	15.9%	.0%	12.5%	14.1%
	Total	Count	38	52	63	2	8	163	
		% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
OTHER	PEOPLE ELECTED TO CONGRESS TRY TO KEEP PROMISES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	0	1	1	1	1	4
			% within ED2	.0%	6.7%	3.8%	50.0%	7.7%	6.0%
		AGREE	Count	2	4	8	1	3	18
			% within ED2	18.2%	26.7%	30.8%	50.0%	23.1%	26.9%
		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	1	2	6	0	3	12
			% within ED2	9.1%	13.3%	23.1%	.0%	23.1%	17.9%
		DISAGREE	Count	3	7	9	0	4	23
			% within ED2	27.3%	46.7%	34.6%	.0%	30.8%	34.3%
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	5	1	2	0	2	10
			% within ED2	45.5%	6.7%	7.7%	.0%	15.4%	14.9%
	Total	Count	11	15	26	2	13	67	
		% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-2000)		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
WHITE	Pearson Chi-Square	20.942(a)	16	.181
	Likelihood Ratio	22.768	16	.120
	Linear-by-Linear Association	.022	1	.882
	N of Valid Cases	1043		
BLACK	Pearson Chi-Square	17.524(b)	16	.352
	Likelihood Ratio	19.037	16	.267
	Linear-by-Linear Association	.540	1	.463
	N of Valid Cases	163		
OTHER	Pearson Chi-Square	20.267(c)	16	.208
	Likelihood Ratio	16.191	16	.440
	Linear-by-Linear Association	2.476	1	.116
	N of Valid Cases	67		

a 3 cells (12.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.25.

b 13 cells (52.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .15.

c 22 cells (88.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .12.

Chi-Square Tests

RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-2000)		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
WHITE	Pearson Chi-Square	44.134(a)	16	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	41.989	16	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	12.324	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	719		
BLACK	Pearson Chi-Square	29.423(b)	16	.021
	Likelihood Ratio	30.042	16	.018
	Linear-by-Linear Association	9.552	1	.002
	N of Valid Cases	105		
OTHER	Pearson Chi-Square	19.395(c)	16	.249
	Likelihood Ratio	16.548	16	.415
	Linear-by-Linear Association	.576	1	.448
	N of Valid Cases	47		

a 8 cells (32.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .65.

b 16 cells (64.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .27.

c 24 cells (96.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .15.

Appendix F:

DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES * ED2 * RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-2000) Crosstabulation

RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-2000)			Count	ED2					Total
				less than highschool	finished highschool	some college	finished college	more than college	
WHITE	DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	40	66	52	3	13	174
			% within ED2	25.2%	20.8%	11.9%	6.8%	14.0%	16.6%
		AGREE	Count	58	113	126	7	19	323
			% within ED2	36.5%	35.6%	28.8%	15.9%	20.4%	30.8%
		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	22	48	64	9	12	155
			% within ED2	13.8%	15.1%	14.6%	20.5%	12.9%	14.8%
		DISAGREE	Count	34	73	154	22	39	322
			% within ED2	21.4%	23.0%	35.2%	50.0%	41.9%	30.7%
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	5	17	41	3	10	76
			% within ED2	3.1%	5.4%	9.4%	6.8%	10.8%	7.2%
	Total	Count	159	317	437	44	93	1050	
		% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
BLACK	DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	8	15	9	0	1	33
			% within ED2	19.0%	27.8%	14.3%	.0%	12.5%	19.5%
		AGREE	Count	16	12	19	1	1	49
			% within ED2	38.1%	22.2%	30.2%	50.0%	12.5%	29.0%
		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	8	7	5	0	2	22
			% within ED2	19.0%	13.0%	7.9%	.0%	25.0%	13.0%
		DISAGREE	Count	6	14	18	1	1	40
			% within ED2	14.3%	25.9%	28.6%	50.0%	12.5%	23.7%
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	4	6	12	0	3	25
			% within ED2	9.5%	11.1%	19.0%	.0%	37.5%	14.8%
	Total	Count	42	54	63	2	8	169	
		% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
OTHER	DON'T HAVE ANY SAY ABOUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES	STRONGLY AGREE	Count	4	3	3	1	1	12
			% within ED2	33.3%	20.0%	11.5%	50.0%	7.7%	17.6%
		AGREE	Count	4	6	6	1	3	20
			% within ED2	33.3%	40.0%	23.1%	50.0%	23.1%	29.4%
		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	Count	2	3	6	0	1	12
			% within ED2	16.7%	20.0%	23.1%	.0%	7.7%	17.6%
		DISAGREE	Count	2	2	7	0	4	15
			% within ED2	16.7%	13.3%	26.9%	.0%	30.8%	22.1%
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	Count	0	1	4	0	4	9
			% within ED2	.0%	6.7%	15.4%	.0%	30.8%	13.2%

Total	Count	12	15	26	2	13	68
	% within ED2	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

RACE OF RESPONDENT (1972-2000)		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
WHITE	Pearson Chi-Square	63.843(a)	16	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	65.218	16	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	46.182	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	1050		
BLACK	Pearson Chi-Square	18.535(b)	16	.294
	Likelihood Ratio	18.786	16	.280
	Linear-by-Linear Association	5.533	1	.019
	N of Valid Cases	169		
OTHER	Pearson Chi-Square	14.508(c)	16	.561
	Likelihood Ratio	16.077	16	.448
	Linear-by-Linear Association	6.872	1	.009
	N of Valid Cases	68		

a 1 cells (4.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.18.

b 10 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .26.

c 23 cells (92.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .26.