

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Active and equitable participation is an essential component of a well-functioning democracy. For many, pathways to participation start early in life as children model their political behaviors after those of their parents and guardians (Berelson et al. 1954, Campbell et al. 1960, Verba et al. 1995, Torney-Purta et al. 2002). In fact, political identities form long before people are even eligible to vote. This is true when it comes to the comprehension of political information (Druckman and Lupia 2016), partisan identity (Niemi and Jennings 1991), and political interest (Prior 2018). Yet, remarkably little is known about how young people come to participate in politics and how political institutions shape these processes across racial and ethnic groups (Sapiro 2005). In particular, we know little about how one of the most pervasive and intensive state institutions, schools, shapes political behavior (Hochschild and Scovronick 2003). While existing work has examined the impact of civic education on the acquisition of political knowledge (Niemi and Junn 1998, Gainous and Martens 2012, Martens and Gainous 2013, Niemi and Campbell 2016), levels of political interest (Neundorf, Niemi, and Smets 2016), the development of certain political attitudes (Langston and Jennings 1968, Martens and Gainous. 2012, Hope and Jagers 2014), and political participation (Campbell 2006, Kahne and Sporte 2008, Levinson 2012, Callahan and Muller 2013), less is known about the extent to which the precise *content* of these courses shapes civic outcomes. While there is some evidence to suggest that course curricula ultimately do shape the political attitudes and behaviors of young people (Torney-Purta 20012, Green et al. 2011), these studies do not explore whether course content yields heterogeneous participatory effects across racial and ethnic groups. This is a critical lacuna, particularly as the United States becomes increasingly diverse and as technology transforms how we interact with one another and engage in politics (Cohen 2010). With these changes occurring, are schools capable of living up to one of their primary responsibilities: forging young citizens? (Du Bois 1903; Dewey 1916). Or, instead of serving as cradles of democracy, do schools exacerbate existing inequalities and constrain participation, especially among young people of color?

These questions comprise the core of my current dissertation research. Furthermore, they cohere with my broader research agenda, which spans beyond schools and socialization to address the politics of race and place. My work examines understudied forms of political expression such as youth-led political protests and non-citizen voting initiatives as well as attitudes such as white rural consciousness and the political preferences of gentrifiers. The underlying theme of my research is that the study of political behavior must pay careful attention to racial and ethnic identity *as well as* institutional and geographical contexts. These contexts fundamentally shape how people participate in politics.

DISSERTATION DESCRIPTION

My dissertation examines how one pervasive state institution—schools—shapes the political behavior of young people. I make three primary claims. First, I show that the content of traditional civic education courses privileges the political experiences of white political actors. Second, I argue that this phenomenon contributes to divergent political attitudes and behaviors across racial and ethnic groups – most notably contributing to a racial gap in political engagement across a range of measures. Third, rather than viewing traditional civic education courses as a way to jumpstart youth political engagement, I find that other educational approaches that have been

advocated for, but not widely used, can close the aforementioned gaps. The approach I focus on is critical pedagogy, an educational philosophy that centers the agency and grassroots political action of marginalized groups (Freire 1968, bell hooks 1994, Giroux 2011, Apple 2011, Seider et al. 2017). My dissertation is written as a book manuscript, divided into four sections, and utilizes a mixed-methods approach. The introduction of the manuscript situates my work within the political behavior and socialization literatures more broadly. Specifically, I demonstrate that political socialization encompasses both micro- and macro-level processes (Sapiro 2005, 2). At the micro-level, the study of political socialization examines how individuals engage in political development and learning at home, in neighborhoods, and within civic and religious institutions (Hyman 1959; Sapiro 2005, 3). Hyman (1959, 18) provides an early micro-level conception of political socialization, defining it as an individual's "learning of social patterns corresponding to [their] societal positions as mediated through various agencies of society." Contrastingly, macro-level studies suggest that political socialization is a mechanism through which a nation is able to forge a political culture which in turn fosters democratic functions and institutions (Almond and Verba 1963; Easton 1965; 1967; Sapiro 2005, 3). While examining micro-level sources of political socialization such as families, neighborhoods, and community organizations is crucial, this approach risks overlooking the role of state institutions in shaping political behavior. I argue that examining the development of civic education policy and its subsequent effects on the political behavior of young people allows for both a macro- and micro-level account of political socialization. Citizenship education programs enable political institutions to forge a political culture (macro-level) through state-mandated instruction in schools (micro-level). Given that American political institutions have historically underwritten and reproduced social inequalities, the role of such institutions in socialization processes raises major normative concerns regarding equitable outcomes.

Section I consists of two chapters that interrogate the content of civics and American government courses and explore how this content contributes to distinct attitudes and behaviors across racial and ethnic groups. *Chapter 1* uses archival research to trace the development of civic education policy in the United States. By examining state legislative histories, education standards, curricula, textbooks, and newspapers, I analyze the political motivations of those seeking to teach civics to young people in schools. In particular, this chapter assesses the extent to which alternatives to traditional civics curricula have been considered or implemented in schools. This chapter identifies a link between political institutions and the content of civic education courses specifically. While extant analyses of dozens of textbooks demonstrate that course content overwhelmingly promotes a narrative that centers white political actors and downplays the role of American political institutions in perpetuating injustices (Loewen 1995, Moreau 2003, Levinson 2012), less is known about how institutions have contributed to the development of this content. Overall, I find that efforts to incorporate resistance narratives and stories about racial and ethnic minorities specifically (key aspects of critical pedagogy) have tended to result in highly contested legal battles (see also Levinson 2012). Moreover, these debates tend to become more pronounced when race is a particularly salient political issue (e.g. Reconstruction, The Civil Rights Movement, and Arizona Senate Bill 1070). Analyzing the origin and content of these policies helps to explain the ways in which state institutions contribute to macro-level socialization processes, promoting approaches to civic learning in schools that preference narratives, values, and institutions that have tended to benefit white Americans at the expense of people of color.

Chapter 2 will be adapted from a completed paper forthcoming within the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*. This paper argues that civic education courses and their curricula are associated with distinct attitudes and behaviors across racial groups using statistical analyses of a nationally representative sample of 15-25-year-olds. Using data from the Black Youth Project (Cohen 2005), I find that civic education courses are associated with higher rates of external efficacy among white youth, but not for black and Latinx youth. Contrastingly, civic education courses appear to increase acts of public voice (i.e., protests and boycotts) among black and Latinx respondents, but not for their white peers. In other words, this chapter argues that civic education does matter, but a standardized approach to civics courses should not be assumed to yield consistent outcomes across diverse student populations. Most importantly, it appears that *traditional civic education courses may contribute to racial gaps* in both political efficacy and multiple forms of political participation, including voting and contacting public officials. This clearly reflects the aforementioned narratives that pay little attention to the histories and experiences of marginalized groups (see Lowell 1995).

Section II consists of two chapters that present findings from an experiment I conducted in 24 classrooms across 10 Chicago-area high schools between September 2017 and April 2018. I made multiple visits to each school and classroom during this period, taking the time to meet with teachers to discuss their teaching practices, course syllabi, and to observe their classroom environments and their interactions with students. Prior to beginning the study with students, I explained that I was asking them to participate in survey about an American history textbook that might be used in a Chicago area high school in the future. Specifically, I told students that I wanted to know what they thought about textbook excerpts pertaining to three historical topics—Abolition, the United Farm Workers Organization, and Chinese Exclusion. However, I did not tell students that they were being randomly assigned to read different texts. One condition – the control – featured text from a commonly used American history textbook, typifying those covered in the aforementioned analysis of current practices. The other – the treatment – featured text from a more critical take on the same historical events. For example, the control text compares how a white abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, and Frederick Douglas contributed to the abolitionist cause using traditional participatory avenues such as the ballot box and newspaper publications. Meanwhile, the treatment text focuses on how enslaved black people resisted the institution of slavery using a number of tactics while also emphasizing that black abolitionists, and especially women of color, faced discrimination from white abolitionists as well. In other words, the treatment text is reflective of critical pedagogy: it places greater emphasis on people of color; (2) downplays the role of individuals while elevating the movement as a whole; and (3) pays greater attention to the power dynamics black folks had to navigate within the abolitionist movement. I created my own textbook templates to ensure that the students were unaware that they were reading different texts. While these pages looked identical, the text in each condition varied. After reading the excerpts, students were asked a series of questions about their political attitudes as well as their willingness to participate in a variety of political activities.

Chapter 3 presents results from this experiment, which was distributed to nearly 700 14-18-year high schoolers in the Chicago area. I find that content that uses a critical pedagogical approach leads young blacks and Latinxs to report greater willingness to participate in multiple forms of politics relative to those who are exposed to a traditional curriculum. The intervention has no negative effects on the willingness of white youth to participate in the same activities – it largely

does not affect their participation one way or another. Most importantly, critical pedagogy appears to close gaps in participation between white youth and young people of color across multiple participatory domains. This challenges accounts of political socialization that downplay the importance of educational content (Langton and Jennings 1968, Campbell 2006, Bruch and Soss 2018). Instead, I find that the content of civic education courses can play a formative role in processes of political socialization, especially for young people of color even when presented in a brief intervention. I believe this to be the first causal demonstration of an educational intervention that can close racial gaps in political participation. This chapter is completed and currently under review. Interestingly, however, I find that the effects of the treatment are most pronounced among participants attending schools where teachers do *not* use critical pedagogy already; in short, there is a pre-treatment effect. *Chapter 4* presents descriptions of each of the neighborhoods and schools that the experiment was conducted in. Since I see pre-treatment effects across schools, it is necessary to explore contextual factors that explain why we should expect the treatment effects to vary across communities in the first place. This foreshadows a later section of the book that investigates what leads teachers to use critical pedagogy in their classrooms.

Section III will consist of one empirical chapter. *Chapter 5* will draw from data collected in focus groups with young people in the Chicago Metropolitan Area to see what reactions each of the experimental conditions elicits. Each focus group will convene participants from the same racial/ethnic group (Asian American, black, Latinx, and white). Participants will be asked to react to the control and treatment conditions used in the experiment. They will first respond to these passages independently using an annotated reading exercise before discussing their thoughts whole group. Specifically, I am interested in whether one of the conditions elicits greater excitement among the participants with regard to political participation. While the experiment discussed in Chapter 3 demonstrates that content can bolster one's willingness to participate in politics, it is important to understand how young people process this information in order to theorize about mechanisms that contribute to this outcome. While I expect role modeling and empowerment to emerge as potential mechanisms, focus groups are essential in order to allow these ideas to emerge naturally rather than presuming their existence based on experimental results alone (Seawright 2016). I plan to conduct these focus groups during the fall of 2019 and expect to have this chapter completed by spring 2020.

Given that critical pedagogy appears to be effective in bolstering rates of political participation among racially marginalized groups, it raises the question as to why this approach is not utilized more frequently, especially in school districts with high concentrations of young people of color. Section IV explores this question using a spring 2019 survey of over 300 Chicago Public School social studies teachers. This survey identifies factors that explain how civics teachers employ certain pedagogical tools over others. In other words, in order to tell a story about how policies and course content shape political behavior, *Chapter 6* will explore the extent to which teachers serve as street-level bureaucrats, interpreting education standards in ways that ultimately affect how their students start to think about politics and government. Preliminary analyses suggest that these educators believe that social studies courses are meant to forge active citizens and are already utilizing facets of critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Specifically, these data demonstrate that educators who hold more liberal racial views and use less authoritarian child-rearing practices are more likely to utilize critical pedagogy in their classrooms. However, in-depth interviews with 30 high school social studies teachers conducted during summer of 2019 demonstrate their ability to

focus on citizenship within the classroom is seriously constrained by institutional hurdles such as College Board Standards and the desire of school administrators to use social studies courses as a space to develop close-reading skills that they believe will boost standardized test scores (see Levinson 2012). Yet, some teachers effectively navigate these hurdles, placing social justice and civic engagement at the heart of their pedagogy. I expect to have this chapter completed by October 2019.

The book's conclusion will synthesize the preceding chapters' analyses. Overall, I present a cohesive narrative that (1) charts the development of civic education curricula and their effects on the political behavior of young people, (2) explains the role of teachers in determining how civics is ultimately taught in the classroom, and (3) explores alternative pedagogical approaches that better reflect the increasingly diverse makeup of the United States. This work reframes the political socialization literature, demonstrating that schools and teachers play an important role in shaping political behavior. While my research highlights ways in which civic education courses can be adapted to prepare an increasingly diverse generation of young people for active participation within American democracy, it also identifies institutional hurdles that would need to be surmounted in order for these changes to become a reality.

In addition to making a unique contribution to literatures addressing race and ethnicity, political socialization, and civic education, my dissertation research also speaks to my ability to effectively create partnerships with outside institutions, including Chicago Public Schools, the second-largest school district in the United States. Conducting research with minors and within schools is extremely difficult due to the various institutional review hurdles put in place by individual school districts. Yet, nearly every chapter of my dissertation utilizes data that was collected with the approval of multiple school districts in the Chicagoland area in addition to Northwestern University. The experiment in particular required four separate institutional review processes, which speaks to my ability to effectively design and implement ambitious projects that face significant logistical challenges. Furthermore, effectively conducting research of this kind requires a commitment to building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders outside of academia. I believe that research is most powerful when it is placed into the hands of individuals who are entrusted to institute policy change. The school districts and teachers that made this research possible were provided with summaries of my findings every step of the way to ensure that the knowledge produced by this project could be used to improve the educational experiences of young people in Chicago.

OTHER RESEARCH

In addition to my dissertation project, my research broadly explores the politics of place. Between 2017 and 2019, I worked with Cathy Cohen and a team of researchers at the University of Chicago on a public-facing report entitled *Race & Place: Young Adults and The Future of Chicago*. Drawing from 200, in-depth interviews with 18-29-year-olds throughout the city, the report highlights the ways in which young people experience Chicago differently across racial and geographical lines. I conducted and coded 50 of the 200 interviews utilized in this report and was the sole author on two sections: one about access to educational opportunities and a second that explores the ways in which the experiences of young people of color challenge deficit-minded portrayals of Chicago. The report gained a great deal of publicity during Chicago's 2019 mayoral

election, becoming a source of information frequently used by debate moderators to field questions to candidates.

I am also working on three ongoing projects that further explore the politics of place. The first of these projects is the "Portrait of National Protest Activity" with Northwestern Professor Traci Burch. The goal of this project is to use content analyses of newspapers from every state between 2009 and 2016 to create a database that examines and documents (1) when and where protests take place, (2) which issues spark political protests, (3) how many people attend, (4) the tactics used by protestors, and (5) whether students organized the protest. This project provides a more complete image of protest activity in the United States by enlisting a much larger database of newspapers that allows us to capture local instances of activism that never receive national coverage. Existing work addressing this topic tends to be limited to protest activity covered in national publications such as the *New York Times* (Gillion 2013). For this project, I led a large team of over 20 undergraduate research assistants who have conducted the content analyses since the spring of 2017. Upon completion, I will use these data to (1) explore contextual factors that correlate to whether young people organize protests, and (2) determine whether the tactics employed in youth-led demonstrations differ from those in other protest activity. I expect to find that youth-driven protest activity will be higher in areas where public school districts, colleges, and universities maintain institutional structures that view activities such as walkouts and demonstrations as important ways for young people to "do democracy" rather than activities that should be punished (see Bruch and Soss 2018).

The second project, entitled "Race and Rural Consciousness," is being conducted with Chris Petsko, a Northwestern Ph.D. student in Psychology, and seeks to complicate conceptions of rural consciousness by making race a central component of the analysis. Cramer (2012, 2016) defines rural consciousness as a social identity that attributes "rural deprivation to the decision making of (urban) political elites, who disregard and disrespect rural residents and rural lifestyles" (Cramer 2012, 517). Specifically, Cramer finds that rural Wisconsinites harbor high levels of distrust in urban elites who "too often [aim to] cover the cost of social welfare benefits for lazy, undeserving people" at the expense of "hardworking Americans" (2012, 526). Given that racial resentment has been shown to be a powerful predictor of white public opinion on a number of policy issues (Kinder and Sanders 1996), it is surprising that Cramer downplays the role of race in her conception of rural consciousness. In fact, Cramer suggests that when rural Wisconsinites think about urbanites, they envision white bureaucrats and university professors (2016, 86).

This concept has gained noteworthy attention over the past several years. In fact, the ANES 2018 Pilot Study included three separate rural consciousness questions. While measuring urban-rural divides is certainly a worthwhile endeavor, the concept of rural consciousness would benefit from greater theorizing, especially as it pertains to race. We hypothesize that rural Wisconsinites are actually imagining black people when they talk about urbanites in certain cities, challenging the assertion that rural consciousness is not about race. Given that the modern racism/symbolic racism literature suggests that a key part of contemporary white racial attitudes is stereotypes about the undeserving-ness of black people, we infer that a racialized white rural consciousness is at play when racially diverse cities such as Milwaukee are called to mind.

Chris and I travelled throughout rural Wisconsin during the summer and fall of 2019 to conduct a reverse correlation imaging task to test our hypotheses in the field (Dotsch & Todorov, 2012). This procedure allows researchers to estimate what it is that participants envision in their mind's eye when they are thinking of a particular group of people. Reverse correlation procedures occur in two stages. In the first stage, participants are shown 300 pairs of blurry, black-and-white facial images. Their task is to choose the face in every pair that looks most like a target group that the researchers specify. For example, in our study, participants are asked to indicate which face in each pair “looks more like a Milwaukeean/Madisonian.” In reality, none of these faces looks inherently like a resident of either of these cities. However, researchers can create a morphed average of all the faces participants choose in a particular condition—for example, all of the faces participants choose that “look like a Madisonian”—and they can see if this morphed average looks any different from the morphed average from a different condition (e.g., from a condition in which participants choose which face “looks more like a Milwaukeean” in every trial). In the second stage—a rating study—naïve participants who know nothing about the origins of these morphed averages rate them on dimensions that the researchers care about. In our studies, we will have naïve participants rate the morphed averages (e.g. “Madisonian,” “Milwaukeean”) on whether these averages look more Eurocentric (white) or Afrocentric (black). Overall, we expect to find that rural Wisconsinites will harbor negative attitudes towards both residents of Madison and Milwaukee. However, we expect that individuals will think of black people when asked to imagine Milwaukeeans while individuals who are asked to think about Madisonians will think of white elites. This would demonstrate that the nature of rural consciousness must take both race and place into account rather than just urban-rural divides.

This project, like my broader research agenda, aims to enhance our understanding of how place shapes how people think about politics, especially as it pertains to race and ethnicity. We expect to find that rural resentment is more complicated than the urban-rural divide framework would suggest. Rather, we aim to show empirically that rural resentment comes in two varieties: one of distrust toward urban *elites*, and one of condemnation toward the perceived *beneficiaries* of elite decision-making. Moreover, we contend that these two forms of urban resentment are likely to be underpinned by different racial assumptions.

The third project, entitled “The Political Ideology of Gentrifiers,” is being conducted with Tom Ogorzalek and Kumar Ramanathan and seeks to identify the policy preferences of individuals moving into gentrifying neighborhoods. This project utilizes data collected from an original survey developed by Tom Ogorzalek, Traci Burch, Reuel Rogers, Kumar Ramanathan, and I as part of the Chicago Democracy Project at Northwestern University. The survey was fielded by Nielsen in January of 2019 and obtained a representative sample of 2,000 individuals living within the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area as well as oversamples of rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods, diversifying suburbs, and black suburbanites. Data analysis for this project is currently ongoing and we expect to complete a draft of the paper in September 2019. Overall, this project demonstrates that more attention must be paid to the political preferences of individuals living in cities. While urban-rural divides are frequently invoked in discussions of American politics, this study finds that there is a great deal of heterogeneity in the political preferences of urbanites. Specifically, while individuals who move to gentrifying areas desire to live in neighborhoods that are racially and ethnically diverse, they also support policies (i.e. increased development and increased police presence) that disproportionately harm marginalized groups. This

study aspires to deepen our understanding of the politics of place by exploring how individuals living in one specific type of neighborhood hold political views that differ from other residents living within the same urban center.

APPLICATION OF RESEARCH TO POLICY

Between June of 2018 and April of 2019, I also served as a civic learning consultant at the Obama Foundation. In this role, I was entrusted to synthesize existing civic education research for the organization's staff. Though this role was originally meant to be a two-month commitment, the Obama Foundation renewed my contract for an additional eight months due to their satisfaction with my work. Like the research highlighted above, this partnership in particular speaks to my ability to deliver research that is accessible and useful to consultants, policymakers, and individuals working in nonprofits and foundations.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In the future, I plan to explore additional topics that deepen our understanding of civic learning, racial and ethnic identity, and place. There are two research agendas I seek to highlight. The first of these projects would examine the effects of new media literacy on the political attitudes and behaviors of young people. The acquisition of political knowledge has long been associated with higher rates of civic and political participation (Niemi and Junn 1998; Levinson 2012; Verba et al. 1995). However, the ways in which individuals allocate political knowledge has changed dramatically in the age of New Media (Sparrow et al. 2011). At the same time, expanded access to political information requires the development of civic skills that not only allow individuals to effectively navigate and analyze sources of information, but ultimately enhance their belief in their own ability to effectively participate in politics. In other words, rather than asking how extant political knowledge shapes behavior, I am interested in whether teaching individuals how to navigate the increasing availability of political information leads to a more fundamental shift in their political attitudes. Given that political socialization largely occurs prior to adulthood, this analysis would focus on high school students specifically (Prior 2018). Civic education courses arguably provide a promising space for exploring this topic. This study would utilize an experimental approach motivated by the following question: Can teaching high school students how to effectively navigate and discern the validity of new media sources bolster political attitudes commonly associated with higher rates of political participation? Given the increased salience of fake news and unequal access to civic learning opportunities along racial and ethnic lines, the normative stakes of this question are quite high.

The second project is being developed with Kumar Ramanathan, a Northwestern Ph.D. student in Political Science, and will examine the effects of non-citizen voting policies on the political attitudes and behaviors of non-citizens. In recent decades, several advocacy campaigns have attempted to enfranchise noncitizens in municipal elections. While the most common site for recent noncitizen enfranchisement has been school board elections, some jurisdictions have gone further. As campaigns for noncitizen enfranchisement continue, it is important to explore how noncitizens interpret and respond to enfranchisement, whether these policies influence immigrant political incorporation more broadly, and the extent to which these policies create pathways for noncitizens to participate in other forms of political participation. While the existing literature

examines policy development, legal issues, and normative considerations concerning noncitizen voting rights, the feedback effects of this form of enfranchisement remain understudied. Specifically, we hypothesize that providing non-citizens with the right to vote in municipal elections will increase their willingness to participate in other forms of politics as well. Although this policy intervention affects very few communities at present, studying their consequences is important for two reasons. First, as more jurisdictions debate extending voting rights to noncitizens, such a study can better inform advocates and policymakers about downstream consequences. Second, studying noncitizen voting can enable us to build theory about how gaining rights or resources in one domain of political participation affects individuals' and communities' engagement in other domains.

These future projects fit thematically into my research agenda by examining the ways in which institutional and geographic contexts shape political participation. Institutions such as schools will continue to be an important point of analysis as education policymakers work to prepare young citizens for active participation in a world where political information is readily available online. Similarly, as municipalities work to incorporate noncitizens into political processes at the local level, it is important to explore the downstream consequences on these policies in order to understand how they affect the political behavior of understudied groups such as immigrants.

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