

## ABSTRACT

An inequality of political participation is an inherent problem in any democratic political system because democratic equality requires that all stakeholders affected by political decisions be included in making them. Thus, this study aims to increase knowledge related to the impact of socioeconomic factors on the perception of an individual's capacity to enact change in one's community. The hypothesis for this study is that adults from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) are less likely to perceive having the civic power to make change. Data collected from the "Soul of the Community 2008-2010" dataset were used. The sample consisted of a random, representative sampling of 13,822 men and women aged 18 years or older who resided in a Knight Foundation community across the United States. Logical regression analyses were conducted. The results revealed that education was positively associated with civic engagement but negatively associated with participant engagement in working with other residents for change. Further research on community factors that impact civic engagement can help to inform decision-makers and leaders of essential features for equitable civic participation. The findings of the current study highlight the importance of making higher education accessible and attainable for all inhabitants of the United States to warrant a true democratic process.

## INTRODUCTION

### Significance of Study

- Higher education and higher-income individuals are consistently more likely to engage in civic participation than their counterparts.
- Disparities in civic engagement can be exacerbated by exclusionary practices like inequity in political deliberations and decision-making processes but are consistently united by patterns of low SES.

### Purpose of Research

To increase knowledge related to the impact of socioeconomic factors on the perception of an individual's capacity to enact change in one's community.

### Research Question

What is the effect of socioeconomic status on the perception of civic power among adults?

### Hypothesis

Adults from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) are less likely to perceive having the civic power to make change.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A Rational Choice Perspective on Civic Engagement

- Rational choice theorists posit individuals as rational, purposeful agents who are motivated to make decisions that maximize rewards or realize interests as well as recognizes that individual decisions are always under the influence of collectivist aspects of social order like norms, networks, and access to resources.

### Factors Influencing Perception of Civic Power

- Higher levels of education and income have been consistently associated with higher levels of political participation.
- Having a sense of connection and solidarity with other people from the community has been shown to greatly influence an individual's willingness to engage in civic action.

### Civic Engagement and Wellbeing

- Individuals and their communities can fundamentally advance health equity and improve their well-being by engaging in civic action.

### Gaps in Current Research

- Levels of civic engagement can also help to illuminate the communities most subjected to political oppression.

## METHODS

### Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- The current study is a secondary analysis of data from "Soul of the Community 2008-2010."
- The Soul of the Community study was a cross-sectional study consisting of five comparison groups based on their urbanicity and relative adult population size:
  - 1) very large population- very high urban, 2) large population- very high urban, 3) medium population- very high urban, 4) medium population high urban, and 5) medium/low population- medium/low urban.
- Respondents in the original study were recruited based on a random sampling of individuals residing in each of the 26 Knight Foundation communities across the United States.

### Sample and Sampling Method

- A random, representative sampling method was utilized in this study.
- The random sample consisted of at least 400 respondents per community, aged 18 and older for a total of 13,822 respondents.

### Measures

#### Socioeconomic Status

- The construct "socioeconomic status" was based on the conceptualization of variables including income range, education level, and employment status.
  - Income ranged from \$15,000 to \$100,000 or over
  - Education ranged from grade school or less to post-graduate work or degree
  - Employment ranged from unemployed and not looking for work to employed full-time

#### Civic Power

- The construct "civic power" is based on the conceptualization of variables including attending a local public meeting, voting in the local election, and working with other residents for change.
- Each variable is determined by participation within the last 12 months.

## RESULTS

### Analysis of Logistical Regressions

#### Attending a Local Public Meeting

- The occurrence of attendance was found have a **significantly positive** relationship to educational attainment
- Income and employment had an insignificant relationship to attendance

Table 1: SES Variables Predicting Attendance of Public Meeting

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	OR
Education Level	0.28	0.02	< 0.00	1.32
Employment Status	- 0.01	0.00	0.11	0.99
Income Range	- 0.00	0.00	0.30	1.00

#### Voting in the Local Election

- The occurrence of voting was found to have a **significantly positive** relationship to educational attainment
- Income and employment had an insignificant relationship to attendance

Table 2: SES Variables Predicting Voting in the Local Election

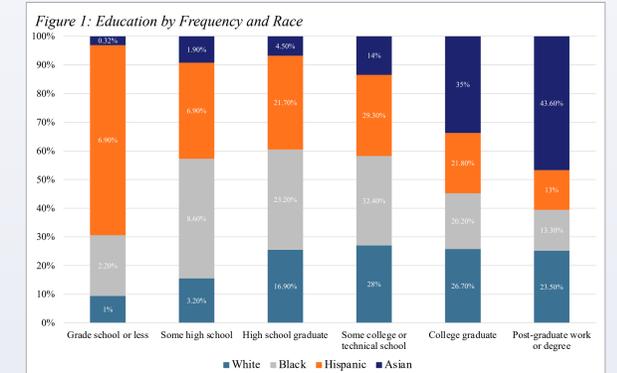
Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	OR
Education Level	0.32	0.02	< 0.00	1.38
Employment Status	- 0.01	0.00	0.08	0.99
Income Range	0.00	0.00	0.21	1.00

#### Working With Other Residents for Change

- The occurrence of working with others was found to have a **significantly positive** relationship to income
- The occurrence of working with others was found to have a **significantly negative** relationship to educational attainment
- Income had an insignificant relationship to working with others

Table 3: SES Variables Predicting Working With Other Residents for Change

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	OR
Education Level	- 0.26	0.01	< 0.00	0.77
Employment Status	0.00	0.00	0.16	1.01
Income Range	1.56	0.07	< 0.00	1.00



## CONCLUSIONS

### Summary of Findings

- The study's results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between education level and local public meeting attendance and voting in a local election.
- Income and employment showed no statistical relationship with meeting attendance and voting.
- Education showed a significant negative relationship with working with other residents for change while income showed a significant positive relationship.

### Implications for Practice & Policy

Common limitations of being low-income, uneducated, and unemployed leave many socially marginalized groups who have had negative experiences with governmental systems to be mistrustful of civic engagement and less likely to engage in civic participation.

- *On a policy level*, social workers working in disadvantaged communities can enhance collective efficacy by advocating for and prioritizing initiatives to improve educational opportunities and accessibility to higher education.
- *On a practice level*, clinical social workers can implement Macro therapeutic interventions (MTIs) to bridge the gap between micro and macro lines by using structural interventions that target community, organizational, systems, and policy-level change, to increase civic safety and provide direct clinical benefit to clients.

### Strengths and Limitations

- Strengths of this study include a large sample size from a variety of locations and environments
- Limitations of this study include a cross-sectional design that only accounts for civic engagement within the past 12 months without detail on frequency of engagement nor if they were planning on continuing to participate.

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