

Calls of Community How Racialized Social Norms Shape American Political Participation

Book Prospectus

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Overview

A few short months after the 2012 election, the *New York Times* reported a historic figure: for the first time on record, the turnout rate of Black Americans had exceeded that of Whites. Political pundits debated the origin and implications of this fact but few noted that Black over-performance on measures of political participation has in fact long existed. Indeed, for decades political scientists have shown that after controlling for income and education, Black Americans participate in politics at higher rates than Whites while Asian Americans and Latinos often lag behind. These patterns challenge traditional theories which center costs and resources in participatory explanations, and raise questions about how community – especially racial community – influences political involvement in the United States.

In this book, *Calls of Community: How Racialized Social Norms Shape American Political Participation*, I advance an inclusive theory of political involvement that explains these racial differences by connecting social norms – that is, the unspoken rules and habits of a group – with the structural features of American society. I argue that norms powerfully motivate political behavior but their form and enforcement hinge on social contextual variables like the composition of peer networks, neighborhood demographics, and group history. A structural feature of American society is the persistence of racial segregation, which continues to separate racial groups at all levels of social interaction. When combined with historical differences in access to the franchise and circumstances of arrival, segregation creates the opportunity for norms about the value and meaning of political participation to develop differently across race in America.

Over eight chapters, I employ a mixed methods approach to determine whether racial community changes the substance and enforcement of participatory social norms. I begin with in-depth interviews designed to examine which norms, exactly, matter for political participation. Combining principles of social psychology with grounded theory that forefronts the experiences of everyday people, I find that two norms fundamentally shape individuals' obligations to their community: the honoring ancestors and helping hands

norms. These two norms are widespread in the United States, but their attachment to political participation varies systematically by racial group and social embeddedness with broad reaching consequences for who shows up at the polls, who protests in the streets, and who organizes in local communities. Using my original Participatory Social Norms Survey, which includes large samples of Asian, Black, Latino, and White Americans, I employ both observational and experimental methodologies to show that politicized versions of the honoring ancestors and helping hands norm shape involvement in both conventional and contentious political participation. My findings explain across-group variation in national turnout, show how community influences the distribution of social rewards from peers, and demonstrates that both norms can be primed by elites to mobilize.

The evidence compiled in *Calls of Community* determines that social and psychological motivations shaping political participation have their origins in norms of obligation that develop uniquely depending on a group's community context. Understanding variation in these norms explains large-scale patterns in political participation past extant theories and models, and uncovers promising avenues for activists and organizers interested in mobilizing traditionally inactive groups. My findings show that in the absence of traditional resources, Black Americans have cultivated strong participatory social norms that help group members confront and overcome the entrenched costs of political involvement. The foundations of these norms – commitments to honor the past and take care of those in need – are prolific in minority communities, suggesting an asset-based organizing approach that couples these norms with participatory expressions can lead to political mobilization of even inactive groups. But, any political entrepreneur seeking to mobilize racial minorities must be cognizant of the context in which they work: after all, duty may be a fundamental component of the American participatory process, but the content and effectiveness of her call depends on the racial features of one's community.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 - The Value and Meaning of Political Participation

In 1968, scholars Riker and Ordeshook introduced a game-changing variable to the study of political participation – the civic duty term – representing all the social and psychological pressures encouraging individuals to engage. Since then, scholars have shown time and again that social pressure is a central motivator of political participation, yet a survey of America's social landscape suggests the value and meaning of political participation likely varies across racial communities in the United States. In this introductory chapter, I use data from the Current Population Survey to show how racial groups diverge in their participatory choices and set up a fundamental puzzle: Black Americans are disadvantaged with respect to all the resources that are supposed to matter for political participation, yet on many metrics, participate more often than Whites. The opposite is true for Asian Americans who, despite high levels of resources, are rather dismally inactive. Social norms, I argue, developed and enforced in distinct racial contexts, explain both of these phenomena. Introducing the honoring ancestors and helping hands norm, and familiarizing readers with my unique data set, the Participatory Social Norms Survey, I argue that understanding participatory social norms can teach us a lot, not just about

the political behavior of Black and Asian Americans, but the mainsprings and meaning of political activity for all groups in an increasingly diverse America.

Chapter 2 - The Contextual Influence Model

Political participation is difficult. It is costly, complicated by the uncertainty of outcomes, and rife with coordination problems. In the face of these challenges, scholars have increasingly shown that social motivations like expectations of acceptance, friendship, and respect can facilitate political action, gesturing to a civic duty norm assumed to pervade society. Yet, a survey of America's social landscape suggests there is likely no monolithic civic duty norm, but rather many, distinct calls of community that drive people to the polls, into the streets, and to city council meetings. Developing a theory of *contextualized influence*, I argue that distinct racial histories and continued racial segregation provide fertile ground for norm divergence in the United States. The content of these norms reflects the narratives of what it means to be part of the group, timing of arrival, and incorporation into the American political process. If norms about the value and meaning of political participation diverge, as basic social and psychological principles suggest they should, than individuals in different racial communities will systematically confront different levels of social motivations to participate. This *Contextual Influence Model* of political participation joins existing theories on the micro-mechanisms of social pressure with the macro-realities of the American social environment, and produces a number of testable hypotheses explored in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 3 - Which Norms? What Contexts?

The Contextual Influence Model suggests that social norms about the value and meaning of political participation should diverge by race and racial embeddedness in the United States, but what exactly are these norms that shape participatory choices? And what are the contexts that exacerbate their divergence? I turn to original qualitative interviews and grounded theory development to uncover norms shaping American political participation. Analyzing my conversations with Black and Asian Americans – the two racial minority groups most different from each other with respect to political involvement – I argue that members of both groups feel widely compelled to honor the past and help those in need. But reflecting each group's distinct racial history and circumstances of incorporation into American political society, Black and Asian Americans, on average, honor the past and help those in need in different ways. For Black Americans, honoring ancestors means claiming political rights once unavailable to the group, and helping those in need means correcting injustices of racial discrimination and poverty through political action. Asian Americans, on the other hand, show norm compliance in distinctly apolitical ways. They honor ancestors through cultural traditions and state that helping those in need must be balanced with other obligations like family economic stability. Both groups, in addition, identify four dimensions of racial community that shape their beliefs and choices: geographic, institutional, social, and psychological. Using data from the Participatory Social Norms Survey (PSNS), I show that each of these contexts have relatively high levels of racial segregation across groups in the US.

Chapter 4 - Finding Purpose in the Past

My qualitative interviews suggest that the honoring ancestors norm is both widespread in the United States and variable in its behavioral interpretations. I use my original data from the PSNS to test these claims empirically with nationally representative samples of Asian, Black, Latino, and White Americans. My results confirm that a commitment to honor the sacrifices and struggles of those in the past is widely endorsed in the United States, crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. However, the behavioral interpretations of this norm – that is, *how* one goes about honoring the past – vary systematically by racial community. Using my novel data, I introduce and validate the *political ancestors index*, a measure designed to capture variation in the connection between honoring the past and political involvement. I show both that the measure is distinct from other predictors of political participation like racial linked fate, political interest, and partisanship, and that it is correlated with not just racial group, but geographic, social, and psychological group embeddedness. These analyses lay the foundation for using the political ancestors index to predict and explain political participation in the United States later in the book.

Chapter 5 - Taking Care of Those in Need

Honoring ancestors is not the only norm that shapes beliefs about duty to one's community in the United States. Rather, the interview data also uncovers the helping hands norm – a prescriptive commitment to help those most in need. Again turning to the PSNS, I show that the helping hands norm is widespread in the United States, but can take on a variety of behavioral forms including religious, charitable, and political activities. Like honoring ancestors, a politicized interpretation of the helping hands norm varies in its propensity and strength across both racial group and racial embeddedness, but in directions distinct from the first. In particular, Black Americans and Latinos, two relatively low-resourced groups, are more likely than White or Asian Americans to connect helping those in need to political involvement, especially high-cost, grassroots actions. Using this data, I develop the *political helping index*, a measure that parallels the political ancestors norm in construction, but is both empirically and theoretically distinct. The index captures the degree to which an individual believes helping those most in need requires political involvement, a measure I turn to repeatedly in the coming chapters.

Chapter 6 -The Importance of Norms for Turnout

Next, I shift my attention from examining political *attitudes* – the focus of the previous two chapters – to examining political *behaviors*. The first behavior under study: turnout in high-salience, federal elections like those for congress or president. Using my novel norms measures, I find that a politicized version of the honoring ancestors norm is strongly related to validated turnout in federal elections. The effect size, which ranges from 17 to 35% depending on the group, outpaces traditional explanations like education, income, racial linked fate, political recruitment, and even, political interest. Furthermore, accounting for both the prevalence and predictive capacity of these norms by group explains the participatory over-performance of Black Americans compared to other racial minorities. Next, I use two novel survey experiments to demonstrate that peer-level

social rewards for voting vary across racial community and that attempts by elites to prime the honoring ancestors norm are most likely to increase a commitment to voting among low-propensity Black voters. In combination, my results demonstrate that both personal and peer pressures to abide by community norms – in particular, the honoring ancestors norm – influence who turns out in the nation’s most salient, expensive, and studied elections.

The results in this chapter showing that peer-level social rewards for voting vary by racial group context appear in the published article, Anoll, Allison P. 2018. “What Makes a Good Neighbor? Race, Place, and Norms of Political Participation.” American Political Science Review, 112(3): 494-508.

Chapter 7 - The Importance of Norms for High-Cost Participation

Voting in federal elections may be the most common form of political participation in the United States, but it is not necessarily the most important. Rather, a persuasive literature suggests higher-cost forms of participation like involvement in local elections, protesting, and contacting government officials are both more communicative and more effective in changing policy outcomes. This is especially true for racial minorities who have lesser electoral influence in national elections due to both their minority status and *de jure* and *de facto* disenfranchisement. In this chapter, I turn to examining the relationship between participatory social norms and forms of political involvement other than turnout in federal elections. I find that *both* the honoring ancestors norm and helping hands norm shape participation in local elections and other, non-voting forms of involvement. In fact, in contrast to the analyses for federal turnout, the helping hands norm takes center stage in predicting involvement in high-cost political action. In addition to the effect of personal norms on participation, I find that peer-level social rewards for non-voting activities like political rally attendance vary by racial community, with minority Americans more likely than Whites to reward individuals involved in these high-cost, system-challenging behaviors. Finally, elite-level priming of participatory norms proves a fruitful avenue for increasing the willingness to engage in local political organizations for even traditionally inactive groups.

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Chapter 8 - The Malleability of Norms

Collectively, the evidence compiled in this book demonstrates that social norms about the value and meaning of political participation vary by racial community in the United States with wide-reaching consequences for who engages in the political process. But norms, even deeply entrenched ones, are malleable, providing pathways for organizers and activists to change patterns of political participation in American society. Drawing from a compelling literature in social psychology on norm interventions, I propose an asset-based organizing approach to mobilize racial minorities in the United States that activates the

strong honoring ancestors and helping hands norms that exist in these communities. The vast majority of organizing and policy change focuses on decreasing the costs associated with political involvement. In contrast, my findings suggest that organizers should work to increase the benefits, using the *calls of community* to highlight the intrinsic value of political participation in relationship to honoring the past and helping those in need. While high barriers to participation in the form of unequal resources have proven remarkably persistent in the United States, norms interventions provide a grassroots opportunity to overcome these barriers and create broader community engagement.

Audience

My book, *Calls of Community*, provides insight on the dynamics of political participation in an increasingly diverse America. Using an array of methodologies and drawing from principles in psychology and sociology, I introduce a widely applicable theory of norm variation and develop, validate, and test two novel norms measures. As a result, I believe this book will be of interest to a wide range of individuals, including academics across social science fields, scholars of race and ethnicity, students studying political behavior, and political organizers and activists more broadly. As one piece of evidence of my book's broad appeal, the *American Political Science Review* published portions of the findings in 2018, and earlier versions of the project won *Best Dissertation* awards from both the International Society of Political Psychology and the Race, Ethnicity, and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association.

Within political science, my book will appeal most directly to scholars of racial and ethnic politics and political behavior. In line with the interest of race politics scholars, the project provides a unique, cross-group account of participatory norms in the United States and their effect on racial representation. I use grounded theory and qualitative interviews with racial minorities, two methodologies highly valued in this sub-discipline, to show that distinct group histories and racial segregation lead to norm variation in the United States. My unique survey data, the Participatory Social Norms Survey, includes large samples of even the hardest to reach minority groups, making it a rarity in the study of American politics. For political behavioralists, my book utilizes a number of unique experimental studies that expand our understanding of social pressure in general and challenge the field to consider how macro-structural forces like racial segregation and timing of immigration affect the content and enforcement of participatory social norms. Finally, I have designed the book so that specific chapters can stand alone as texts to be used in graduate courses on American politics, political behavior, race, and social movements. The accessible nature of the prose and straightforward statistical tests also make it a possible resource for undergraduate instruction.

In addition, I expect *Calls of Community* to interest scholars working in the robust field of get-out-the-vote scholarship, and organizers or activists who use scholarly research to refine their craft. My findings suggest that a commitment to honor the past and help those in need are two widely endorsed norms in minority communities across the United States and that, when coupled with participatory interpretations, the norms can dramatically increase the likelihood of engaging in politics. Drawing from these findings, I provide in the final chapter of the book a detailed account of how norms might be used to build

interventions that change patterns of political participation in the United States. As evidence of the book's appeal to this broader audience of organizers and activists, I have been asked to speak about my research at a number of conferences focused on relational organizing and hosted by groups like the Ford Foundation and Wellspring Philanthropic. There, I have met public-scholars including those at the Analyst Institute and organizers like Alabama's Black Votes Matter, all of whom are eager to see the final product and adapt its findings to their methods and tactics.

Further, I expect my findings and data will be of great interest to the growing field of social context scholars in the United States. Recent influential books like Jessica Troustine's *Segregation by Design* (2018) and Ryan Enos's *The Space Between Us* (2017) highlight how social context and racial segregation shape access to city services, racial animus, and partisanship. My project fits neatly into this growing body of literature, showing that racial segregation also shapes norms of political participation with consequences for racial representation in the United States. Furthermore, the PSNS includes multiple measures of racial context – geographic, social, and psychological – which I use to show how contexts overlap, diverge, and ultimately influence the strength of norms in the United States.

Finally, this book will resonate with scholars outside of political science in the fields of sociology, psychology, and anthropology. My book bridges findings developed in each of these fields to uncover unique insights about what norms are, how they develop, and when they will be enforced. In combining the micro-foundations of psychology with the macro-structural forces of sociology, the Contextual Influence Model provides a standard for determining when and where norm variation is likely to occur. Furthermore, my assessment of the honoring ancestors and helping hands norm, combined with findings in cultural anthropology, suggest these norms might be influential in nations and cultures across the world, opening a bounty of new research opportunities.