



The Association Between Race/Ethnicity and Political Efficacy in 2012 within the Lower-, Working-, and Middle-Class

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Introduction

- Individuals with lower incomes face greater barriers to political participation, while wealthier individuals have disproportionate influence in the U.S. political system. As a result, lower- and working- class individuals have lower political efficacy (Laurison, 2016).
- Individuals who have a common identity with officials in office have positive political efficacy. However, there is debate as to whether this attitude is only toward local or federal government (West, 2017; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990)
- Income predicts White voting (participation) but is not a statistically significant factor among Black voters (Laurison, 2021). The relationship between income and political efficacy is unexplored across racial groups.
- Political efficacy is crucial to the American political process, as it contributes to greater political participation and more legitimate democracy. The lack of political efficacy among certain groups in 2012 may point to reasons behind the election of a populist president in 2016.

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between race/ethnicity and political efficacy within the lower-, working-, and middle-class?
- Is there any statistically significant difference between White political efficacy and POC political efficacy within these classes in 2012?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=2294) were drawn from the August 2012 Outlook on Life (OOL) survey, which represented non-institutionalized adults across the U.S.

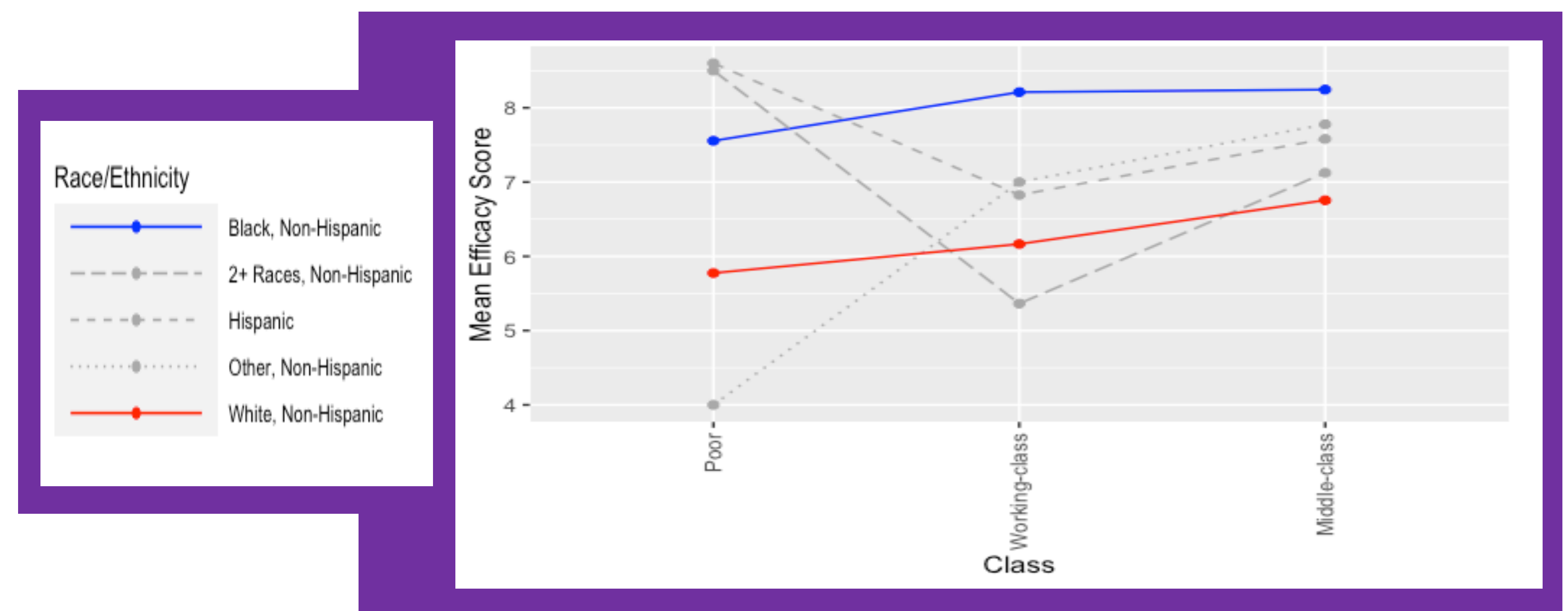
Measures

- Participants self-selected their socioeconomic class and race/ethnicity
- Political efficacy was measured through a "Political Efficacy Score". This was the sum score of the answers to three questions measuring both external and internal political efficacy:
 - "How much do government officials care what people like you think?" (external: care)
 - "How often does the federal government do what most Americans want it to do?" (external: responsiveness)
 - "How much can people like you affect what the government does?" (internal: influence)
- Respondents answered the above questions on a scale of 1-5
- The Political Efficacy Score ranges from 3 (lowest political efficacy) to 15 (highest political efficacy)

Results

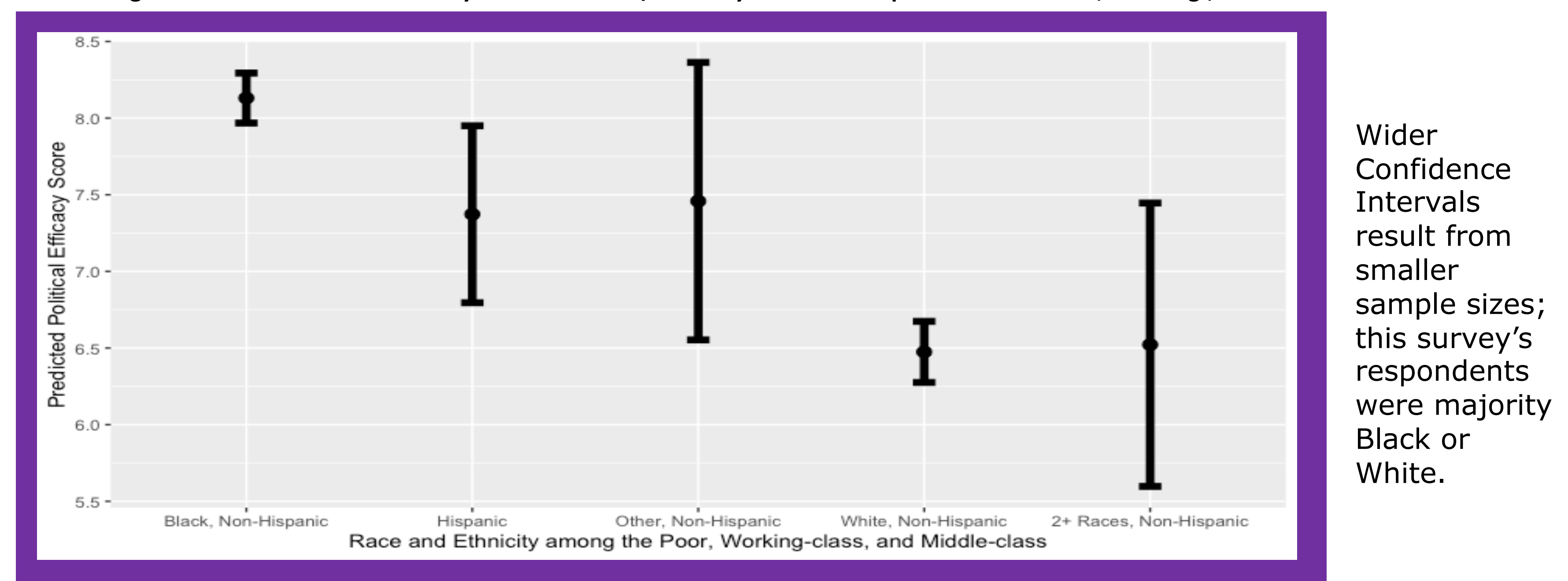
- ANOVA analysis showed that among the complete set of participants, **race/ethnicity was significantly associated with political efficacy** ($F(2294)=40.52, p<0.0001$).
- When running an ANOVA analysis on each class separately, this association remained significant for **lower-, working-, and middle-class** respondents, but not for upper-middle or upper-class respondents.
- Post-hoc analysis on these three subsets reveals that this significant relationship exists consistently between Black respondents and other respondent groups, especially White participants. For all three classes in question, **Black respondents had significantly higher mean Efficacy Scores than White respondents.**
- This relationship also existed between the scores of Black respondents and other respondent groups (Hispanic, "2+ Races") in the working-class, though these pairings had lower levels of significance.

Figure 1. Mean Political Efficacy Score by Race/Ethnicity for Lower-, Working-, and Middle-Class Participants



- Regression analysis again reveals this significant relationship. Testing the responses of all the participants from the lower-, working-, and middle-classes at once showed that **race/ethnicity is a predictor for Political Efficacy Score**. The test found significance for White respondents ($B=-1.66, p<0.0001$), respondents of 2+ races ($B=-1.61, p=0.0008$), and Hispanic respondents ($B=-0.76, p=0.01$) when compared to Black respondents.

Figure 2. Linear Regression Plot of Political Efficacy Score and Race/Ethnicity for All Participants in the Lower-, Working-, or Middle-Class



Wider Confidence Intervals result from smaller sample sizes; this survey's respondents were majority Black or White.

- A multiple regression analysis tested to see whether other variables affected this association. After controlling for political party association and level of education, the **association between race/ethnicity and Efficacy Score remained significant** [Compared to Black respondents: White $B=-1.34, p<0.0001$; 2+ Races $B=-1.28, p=0.0095$; Hispanic $B=-0.67, p=0.006$].

Discussion

- In 2012, there were significant differences in political efficacy between White Americans and POC in the lower-, working-, and middle-class. Most notably, Black Americans consistently had significantly more political efficacy than White Americans.
- Race/ethnicity was a strong predictor for political efficacy, even when considering other factors (party association, education level).
- The comparatively higher levels of political efficacy among Black Americans supports the theory that sharing a common identity with officials in office improves political efficacy at the federal level.
- The low Political Efficacy Scores of White Americans reflects a sentiment of not being valued by the federal government, and suggests a potential reason why populist president, Donald Trump, appealed to this demographic in 2016. This research can be used to further understand how politicians can win support through mobilizing groups that have a disempowered sense of political self.