

RACE, INCARCERATION, AND INMATES'
POLITICAL MOTIVATION

By

ROSHAUN COLVIN

Bachelor of Science in Sociology

Harris-Stowe State University

Saint Louis, Missouri

2019

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 2021

RACE, INCARCERATION, AND INMATES'
POLITICAL MOTIVATION

Thesis Approved:

Matthew Motta

Thesis Adviser

Joshua Jansa

Rebekah Herrick

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to start by thanking all of my committee members. Your guidance for these last two years has shaped me as an academic and improved me as a person. Dr. Herrick, I learned immensely in your identity politics course, and it has shaped my research interests. Dr. Jansa, I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to write my first article for the Monkey Cage, and I also forgive you for being a Cubs fan. I want to give a special thanks to Dr. Motta, someone who never shot down an idea, no matter how ambitious it was. The mentorship you provided allowed me to be confident in my career choices.

Next, I would like to thank my cohort and friends. Bobby, Seth, Eden, Mackenzie, Aubrey, and Mike. The life of a graduate student can be stressful, but you all alleviated that pressure. Bobby, Seth, and Eden, I will miss our competitive Monopoly game nights.

I also want to thank Cindy. Your office door was always open, and you kept me on track. You were like a second mom to me during my time here at Oklahoma State University.

Last, I would like to thank my mother, Rosland Taylor, and father, Christian Hill. Mom, I am glad I was able to make you proud. Dad, all the life lessons you gave are the reason I am a success.

All of you have contributed to my success.

Thank You

Name: ROSHAUN COLVIN

Date of Degree: MAY, 2021

Title of Study: RACE, INCARCERATION, AND INMATES' POLITICAL
MOTIVATION

Major Field: POLITICAL SCIENCE

Abstract: How does race affect an inmate's intention to vote? The effects of incarceration on the political motivation of current and former inmates have not received sufficient attention in scholarly literature. My research adds to this limited work by showing motivation among inmates regardless of structural barriers prohibiting them from political participation. The survey conducted in my research (N = 8,000) recorded the responses of current inmates. I find a significant difference in how incarceration affects black and white inmates' political motivation. For black inmates, incarceration boosts their political motivation, while white inmates are more likely to be demobilized. Additionally, black inmates are more likely to experience aspects of group consciousness and linked fate compared to their white counterparts. This study provides insight into how incarceration has increased inmates' intention to vote, noting that structural barriers to voting may inhibit turning these motivations into political action.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Mistreatment of Blacks and Interference with Voting Rights	6
The Negative Effect of Incarceration on Voting.....	8
Group Consciousness and Linked Fate	11
Learned Helplessness.....	16
III. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES	17
IV. METHODS.....	25
Independent Variable	26
Dependent Variable	27
Control Variable.....	29
V. RESULTS	30
VI. LIMITATIONS.....	37
VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	41
REFERENCES	44

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Restoration of Voting Rights after Felony Convictions	3

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
The Effect of Incarceration on How often Inmates Discuss Politics	31
Interactive Model between Black Inmates' Motivation to Vote and Incarcerated Over Ten Years	32
Interactive Model between White Inmates' Motivation to Vote and Incarcerated Over Ten Years	33
Incarceration's Effect on Inmates' Motivation to Vote	34
The Effect of Incarceration on Whether the Inmates' Race Informs Their Political Views	35

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Incarceration has left a lasting effect on politics that goes unnoticed by the public. State felon disenfranchisement in the United States takes away millions of citizens' voting rights, leaving their political opinions void in numerous elections. This decision by states affects our elections because it devalues the preferences of specific citizens.

Preuhs (2001) detailed the disproportionate effect of Florida's felon disenfranchisement laws on the black population in the 2000 presidential election. Using Fellner and Mauer's (1998) estimates of the felon population in Florida, Preuhs concluded that had just eight-tenths of 1 percent of adult male felons voted in the 2000 election; Vice President Gore would have had the 538 votes necessary to win the state and the presidency (Preuhs 2001, 734).

The disproportionate effect on African Americans in Florida is still present as Wood (2016) finds that 20% of the voting-age population is disenfranchised, despite African Americans making up only 16% of the voting population. The problems that persist in Florida are validating the structural barriers in America for African Americans and the felon population in general. You may ask: do formerly incarcerated persons *actually* turn out to vote on election day? Literature is unsettled on whether they do turn out or not, although current research suggests they do not turn out on election day (Gerber et al. 2017; Hjalmarsson and Lopez 2010). For example, Georgetown University associate professor Dr. Sukhatme and colleagues from

Free Our Vote (2020: hereafter FOV) disenfranchised voters in Florida, only 85,000 were completely enfranchised by registering to vote.

It is clear that the involvement of ex-felons is prohibited in elections by structural barriers, but extant research is yet to ask how motivated these citizens may be to participate in elections. Attributing noninvolvement to structural barriers such as felon disenfranchisement *alone* may cause us to disregard how a lack of political motivation from this population can stifle turnout. Conversely, if these ex-felons *are* politically motivated, structural barriers imply their political preferences are disparaged. With my research, I contribute a new perspective to studying why these individuals turn out less than other Americans. I study how linked fate and group consciousness affect inmates, offering a new perspective on unsettled literature. The root of this issue begins with inmates in prison and how politics operate within the prison. My contribution helps to answer whether these former inmates were politically motivated before they became eligible.

Structural barriers include laws put into place by bureaucracies that involuntarily limit the involvement of currently incarcerated persons and former felons in elections. Table 1 provides examples of structural barriers in state disenfranchisement laws that cause more difficulty for ex-felons. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) provides a table detailing the variation of severity in each state's felon disenfranchisement laws¹. Severity is nonexistent in Maine and Vermont, where ex-felons never lose the right to vote; states with a milder severity, such as Colorado, prohibit ex-felons only during their sentence. States in the third level of severity (i.e., Alaska) require ex-felons to complete their sentence, including parole or probation, fully. The harshest states (i.e., Alabama) require completion of sentence and additional actions

¹ NCSL Table 1 Restoration of Voting Rights After Felony Convictions.
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights.aspx#Table%20One>

for restoration; there may even be a post-sentence waiting period. Ex-felons from different states may have the same level of desire to be involved in politics, but the variation in state law makes the hurdle for particular ex-felons much more difficult². Without a standard procedure for regaining voting rights, ex-felons cannot work as a collective on a national level (i.e., it may be easier to educate ex-felons in Colorado that they can vote versus helping ex-felons in Alabama complete their additional requirements to restore voting rights).

TABLE 1

Restoration of Voting Rights after Felony Convictions			
Never Lose Right to Vote	Lost Only While Incarcerated Automatic Restoration After Release	Lost Until Completion of Sentence (Parole and/or Probation) Automatic Restoration After	Lost Until Completion of Sentence In Some States a Post-Sentencing Waiting Period Additional Action Required for Restoration
Maine	Colorado	Alaska	Alabama
Vermont	District of Columbia	Arkansas	Arizona
Washington	Hawaii	California	Delaware
	Illinois	Connecticut	Florida
	Indiana	Georgia	Kentucky
	Maryland	Idaho	Mississippi
	Massachusetts	Kansas	Nebraska
	Michigan	Louisiana	Tennessee
	Montana	Minnesota	Virginia
	Nevada	Missouri	Wyoming
	New Jersey	New Mexico	
	New Hampshire	New York	
	North Dakota	North Carolina	
	Ohio	Oklahoma	
	Oregon	South Carolina	
	Pennsylvania	South Dakota	
	Rhode Island	Texas	
	Utah	West Virginia	
		Alaska	
		Iowa	

^{2 2} It should be note that states do change in severity, such as: Washington, Iowa, New Jersey, and Nevada.

When discussing prison and the effects of incarceration, we cannot avoid what those effects may be doing in minority communities. The expanded presence of incarceration throughout the previous decades has brought the expansion of racial disparity as well. When presented with numbers from the Department of Justice, the disparity becomes evident among the ratio of incarcerated citizens. 1 in every 3 African American males is expected to become incarcerated versus 1 in 17 White males (Mauer 2011). Due to these glaring racial issues, the disproportionate effect of incarceration for minorities has received a copious amount of research (Jeffers 2019; Massoglia 2008; Mauer 2011). However, given the known effect, not enough research has looked at inmates and politics, precisely their intention to vote.

Findings from previous research offer an essential puzzle: if we as scholars know incarceration disproportionately affects a particular portion of the population, why are we not talking about its implication on politics? Specifically, while the aggregated effects of incarceration on disenfranchisement are well studied, far less is known about how the *experience* of being incarcerated might influence inmates' *motivations* to participate in politics for years to come. Research has overlooked the possibility that incarceration has an immediate effect on political behavior, that left untreated, can leave a more permanent effect.

Previous research has documented a negative effect of incarceration on voting (Gerber et al. 2017; Western 2006; White 2019). Not only does the evidence show the negative effect of incarceration, but even coming into contact with the criminal justice system has serious negative consequences for political participation (Weaver and Lerman, 2010). While research has provided us with a great understanding that incarceration stifles political participation, this is where research has ended. The political motivation of these inmates has mainly gone unstudied in research concerning the carceral state. States that are letting formerly incarcerated citizens vote are experiencing an insurgence of freshly eligible voters via mass incarceration (Shannon et al. 2017).

We know that current and formerly incarcerated citizens struggle to vote due to systemic barriers. However, may it be possible that their experiences with the carceral state nevertheless *motivates* them to vote. To answer this question, we need to systemically study inmates' political ambitions, political stances, and how they plan to become politically active. Scholars have not adequately dedicated research to figuring out how incarceration has affected inmates' political motivations.

The research in this thesis is dedicated to determining whether incarceration increases or decreases an inmate's motivation to vote. To shed light on how politics operate within these facilities, I rely on inmate survey data from the Marshall Project Study (MPS). I hypothesize that there is a fundamental difference in the perception of incarceration and politics between blacks and whites. For black inmates, incarceration is a mobilizer to become politically active, suggesting they realize politics are the answer to fixing their situations. While for white inmates, incarceration demoralizes their optimism that politics is the answer for their situation. I postulate that because black prisoners were more likely to experience systemic racism before incarceration, they view incarceration as a symbolic representation of their mistreatment. As a result, they are fed up with their mistreatment and seek change through politics.

I find that black inmates are more likely to discuss politics and be politically motivated than their white counterparts because of incarceration. Also, white inmates are more likely to develop a sense of learned helplessness while incarcerated, negatively affecting their political motivation. My results strongly suggest the prison experience differs between black and white inmates because black inmates experience higher levels of group consciousness and linked fated while white inmates lack similar experiences. Due to the heightened levels of group consciousness among black inmates, the prison positively affects their political motivation and makes them less likely to develop learned helplessness.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

MISTREATMENT OF BLACKS AND INTERFERENCE WITH VOTING RIGHTS

Klinker and Smith's (1999) research is centered on a question we unfortunately still ask today: Has the United States made meaningful progress towards equal racial justice? Historically, attempts for greater racial equality have three significant instances in U.S. history: The Emancipation Proclamation, the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, and the modern civil rights era after World War II (Klinker and Smith, 1999). However, after each attempt, the advances made were diminished with new racial hierarchies created to rival racial equality (Klinker and Smith, 1999).

Reid (1866) detailed how reconstruction saw the emergence of southern discomfort from whites, who felt newly freed blacks behaved insubordinately. From southern discomfort birthed the Ku Klux Klan in 1866, which Lawrence (1872) finds has become a faction embodying southern Democrats. That faction effectively disenfranchised blacks by defying national government and reconstruction legislation. In addition to the Ku Klux Klan, blacks experienced segregation and repression by the emergence of Jim Crow laws and lynching.

In truth, the American political structure has let down African Americans because there is continuous disregard for their rights and opinions; and the system has not protected them either

Kousser (1999) holds institutions and their rules accountable for race relations in America. He attributes blame to the Constitution, the methods for aggregating votes into legislative seats, regulations issued by the executive branch of government, the actions of political parties, and the judiciary system as responsible for the struggles of racial equality (Kousser 1999, 1). The actions of institutions matter; for instance, Gurin et al. (1980) find that African Americans have a greater consciousness of inequity. That consciousness can then lead to a greater awareness of institutions as sources of poverty (Gurin et al. 1980).

A crucial political institution that scholars must take a deeper look into is the judicial system. The judicial system is responsible for handing out convictions on state and federal levels and has used the criminal justice system as a deterrent to prevent minorities' use of their voting rights (Hench 1998). The judicial system also sets legal precedence by determining what is considered constitutional. Rulings can have unintended consequences that impact minority voting rights and their access to the ballot. Hench (1998) argues that a disproportionate criminalization of minorities is due to rulings that set legal precedence, such as the Supreme Court's "color-blind" jurisprudence, which allows for specific Jim Crow laws to survive and diminish minority voting rights. Even when the Voting Rights Act was established, Hench (1998) states that the government had no urgency to produce change that would make ballots more accessible, and they prolonged solving issues surrounding disenfranchisement.

Kousser (1999) states that minorities need protective institutions that are stable and generate incremental change. Destruction or neglect of these few institutions is extremely harmful because they are not quickly rebuilt, and minorities cannot afford the continuous change; therefore, protection is necessary (Kousser 1999). Legal precedence like "color-blind" jurisprudence is contradictory because they do not provide protection; instead, it suggests that minorities have the same rights as all other citizens, so there is no need for Congress or the courts to provide protection (Hench 1998). The Supreme Court's decision to create that precedence

makes the Voting Rights Act insubstantial (Hench 1998) because there is no need for minority voting rights to be protected by the government. Blacks suffer because the courts choose not to strengthen the minority vote and create equal representation between minority and majority interest (Hench, 1998).

Historically, the winner-take-all system of the American political structure has overlooked minority vote interests, and without provisions in place, the balance has become uneven, leaving minority groups out of the loop (Guinier 1994; Klinkner and Smith 1999; Kousser 1999). The disparity in our electoral system is evident, as Hajnal (2009) discovers African Americans are more likely to end up as losers during elections. When looking at the presidential, senatorial, and gubernatorial elections simultaneously, black voters lose 41% of the time (Hajnal 2009).

Scholarly research agrees that American political institutions have not done enough to protect minority voting rights, but could it also be argued that they have purposely diminished the minority vote through mass incarceration? I address the question below by considering incarceration's effect on voter turnout.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF INCARCERATION ON VOTING

The effects of incarceration have become increasingly prevalent in the study of political participation. The term "mass incarceration" has become synonymous with the American criminal justice system due to the institution's continued growth since the 1970s (Clear and Austin 2009; Gerber et al. 2017; Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). This growth has not been a product of more crime but policies implemented and practiced (Beckett 2018; Mauer 2011; Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). For example, Clear and Austin (2009) point out that from the 1970s to the present day, the United States has tripled the percentage of convicted felons and doubled the lengths of sentences. This growth can be traced to distinct policies like the "War on Drugs" (Alexander 2012; Mauer 2011).

Alexander (2012) argues that incarceration is the latest tactic against black Americans to ensure they cannot exercise their voting rights as citizens. Witherspoon (2007) agrees and suggests that incarceration replaces the Black Codes, which prohibited black citizens from accessing their voting rights. Alexander and Witherspoon's opinions are valid because, within this growth, the prison population has disproportionately consisted of citizens from poor and minority neighborhoods, mainly affecting America's marginalized population (Mauer 2011; White 2019).

There is a consensus among the literature that incarceration has had a disproportionate effect on black citizens. White (2019) examines the disproportionate prison population and finds black men at higher risk of incarceration, and without a high school diploma or college education, the risk increases. Pettit and Western's (2004) findings are similar as they state that 60 percent of black men born from 1965-69 with no high school diploma experienced imprisonment before age 30. Bonczar and Beck (1997) also conclude a glaring racial disparity among incarceration rates, as it is expected that 20 to 30 percent of all black adult males will experience prison compared to only 4.4 percent of their white male counterparts. Literature finds that due to the criminal justice system's disproportionate incarceration rate of minority citizens, their political power and participation have reduced (Alexander 2012; Gerber et al. 2017). An example of reduced political participation would be a state prohibiting ex-felons from voting through disfranchisement.

Additionally, incarceration not only prevents citizens from voting but also skews political participation as well. Fifteen million formerly incarcerated citizens were eligible to vote in 2010 (Shannon et al. 2017). An influx of participation from such a large group would have the ability to change the political landscape of many elections (Gerber et al. 2017). However, spending time in prison is counterproductive to this new crop of eligible voters. First, the availability of information, in general, is not as broad or assessable for inmates compared to a citizen in the outside community (Lehmann 2000). Because prison libraries operate as part of the carceral environment and not independently (Lehmann 2000; Singer 2000), prisoners cannot develop an

ideology free of interference like a regular citizen. Not only is the information limited, but an inmate's determination to gain knowledge is different from regular citizens as well. Chatman (1999) argued that inmates would only seek information outside their inner circle for three conditions: the information is critical, relevant, and their situation has become unfunctional. Most politics and laws do not affect prisoners and change regularly, so political information is more than likely not critical or relevant. These challenges make it difficult for a prisoner to fully form their political ideology or be aware of most politics when they are released. Prisoners need enough information to stay on top of policies and determine which candidates will benefit them or change the process of voting.

Second, psychologically inmates are demobilized due to feelings of mistreatment by the system that cause distrust in government (Western 2006). These feelings are consistent with previous work finding that former inmates tend to vote at lower rates than citizens who have spent no time in prison (Gerber et al. 2017; Hjalmarsson and Lopez 2010).

Moreover, several underlying issues stem from prison that inhibits people from voting once they are eligible. For example, multiple studies find that the criminal justice system can decrease political participation through reoccurring interactions, such as police stops or time in prison (Weaver and Lerman, 2010; 2014). Police interactions are highly likely, but Jäggi et al. (2016) find the threshold to be arrested as low. 35.5 percent of individuals reported going to jail upon arrest in their sample, yet only 7.7 percent served a prison sentence. These interactions tend to reduce the already limited resources that citizens have and lower commitment to norms (Weaver and Lerman 2010; Western, 2006), making these frequent interactions costly. Consequently, most citizens who constantly come in contact with the criminal justice system come from at-risk communities (Weaver and Lerman 2010). Most academic research suggests this is because the criminal justice system is more punitive (Garland 2001; Phelps 2011) rather than rehabilitative.

We can conclude that incarceration is both punitive and disproportionately affects black Americans, but is it possible these two issues affect (incarcerated) black citizen's political motivation? Depressed motivation is problematic because the makeup of future elections will be compromised for years to come if blacks decide to participate no longer. On the other hand, stimulated motivation implies these black citizens have the will to participate in politics, but structural barriers prohibit them from doing so. Therefore, I must consider whether incarceration has altered the motivation of black prisoners.

HOW GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS & LINKED FATE MIGHT IMPACT PRISONERS' INTEREST IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Previous research has not tested whether inmates experience group consciousness and linked fate. However, ample research details the effect of both on various races (Dawson 1994; Gurin et al. 1980; McClain et al. 2009), mainly black Americans. Austin, Middleton, and Yon (2012) define group consciousness based on three criteria: a common group identification as one race, a belief that their group is disadvantaged, and an abiding commitment to the race and ethnic coalitions (629). Miller et al. (1981) also distinguish that group consciousness is a separate concept from group identification because identification only indicates belonging to a particular stratum. Whereas group consciousness forms from ideological beliefs that stem from a group's social standing, and there is a recognition that elevating their status is made possible through collective action (Gurin et al. 1980; Jackman and Jackman 1973; McClain et al. 2009).

Some people take collective action because an individual's consciousness persuades them that participation in political activities is advantageous for the group (Dawson 1994). Miller et al. (1981) also argue that contrary to Verba and Nie (1972), there needs to be a distinction between group consciousness and group identification because a shared identity with a particular group does not mean that one also believes the group is lacking relevant resources compared to other groups (495).

There is a consensus in the literature that four components make up group consciousness: group identification, polar affect, polar power, and system blame (Austin, Middleton, and Yon 2012; Dawson 1994; McClain et al. 2009; Miller et al. 1981). Miller et al. (1981) offer a brief explanation of the four components (496):

Group identification: a psychological feeling of belonging to a particular social stratum. Cognitive factors are associated with these feelings that create awareness among members in the same social stratum but not with individuals in a differing social stratum.

Polar affect: a preference for members of one's own group and a dislike for those outside the group.

Polar power: expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the group's current status, power, or material resources in relation to that of outside groups.

Individual vs. system blame: the belief that the responsibility for a group's low status in society is attributable to an individual's failings or inequities in the social system. This component is closely related to an awareness of status deprivation.

Miller et al. (1981) also presumed these four components created a political ideology that led to participation. These four conditions in conjunction lead to an alliance by the group to use the election process as their means for change because they are not satisfied with their status in society (Miller et al. 1981).

The psychological phenomenon underlying group consciousness is a subjective class identification attributed to a person's perception of their position in a status hierarchy (Jackman and Jackman 1973). Those perceptions create group consciousness because people have the awareness to notice their similar social stratum (Gurin et al. 1980), creating a shared group identification as a race. The group's interest can be rooted in grievance, frustration, or discontent

with their status and feel structural forces are causing these emotions (Gurin et al. 1980), effectively fostering a belief that the group is disadvantaged.

Group consciousness originated as a model used to measure the political participation of minorities, specifically blacks, in comparison with whites (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999). However, there have been two main disputes surrounding group consciousness literature. First, scholars question the validity of group consciousness as a model for accurately measuring black political participation. Some scholars find that group consciousness among blacks is correlated to political participation (Dawson 1994; Miller et al. 1981), whereas others find that black group consciousness is not a predictor of political engagement (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Wilcox and Gomez 1990). Research would suggest that group consciousness does drive black participation as despite varying financial and social strata, blacks tend to vote based on the group's interest (Austin, Middleton, and Yon 2011; Dawson 1994; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989).

Secondly, research has debated whether the application of group consciousness to other races is appropriate. Sanchez and Vargas (2016) argue that using group consciousness in a multidimensional approach is acceptable when applied to blacks, but more analytical concerns arise when used for other racial and ethnic populations. Additionally, McClain et al. (2009) expressed that caution should be taken when trying to use concepts designed to understand the mindset of blacks as a result of their oppressive history in America (479). Despite some skepticism, scholars tested this question of group consciousness primarily with Latinx citizens (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Masuoka 2006; Sanchez 2008; Stokes 2003) and Asian Americans (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Lin 2020; Masuoka 2006).

Sanchez (2008) finds that Latinx citizens who experience similar discrimination as blacks establish a commonality between the races, which leads to group consciousness influencing their attitudes toward blacks. These findings mean that specific Latinx citizens are not heavily focused

on preserving their own culture and instead relate more to the black experience (Sanchez 2008). This divide creates an issue in measuring group consciousness because of the various pan-ethnic identities within Latinx culture (Portes and Truelove 1987). There is a clear divide among the Latinx community that feels a sense of commonality with blacks and experiences group consciousness versus those that do not. For instance, Stokes (2003) finds that historically in America, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have experienced discrimination at a higher frequency than Cubans and are more likely to feel a loss of opportunity. Both of which are predictors of group consciousness. Also, to further highlight the diversity within Latinx culture, research has found Latinos tend to harbor negative stereotypes towards blacks (Johnson, Ferrell, and Guinn 1997; McClain et al. 2006; Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002).

Additionally, some questions arise about the diverse pan-ethnic identities among Asian Americans as well. Research finds that Asian Americans are likely to deny experiences of discrimination (Dhingra 2003; O'Brien 2008), which is essential to measuring racial group consciousness. For example, when Masuoka (2006) used a group consciousness index to test for pan-ethnic consciousness among Asians, six out of seven ethnicities had a majority of respondents that perceived no group consciousness. Like Latinx citizens, studies show that Asian Americans harbor negative stereotypes towards blacks (Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn 1997). Still, McClain et al. (2009) note that research detailing the racial identities of Asian Americans is relatively new, so scholars must recognize the potential problems they face when using specific measures.

Though there is not much research about white group consciousness, white racial identity could affect white inmates, similar to group consciousness for minority inmates. Research on white racial identity and collective action has mainly focused on the formation of white supremacist movements (Hughey 2010; McDermott and Samson 2005). The social interactions shape interest and persuade recruits to align with the goals of an organization (McDermott and

Samson 2005). Wong and Cho (2005) address the failure of research not examining the racial identity of average white Americans but instead focusing on their racial identity as a deterrent for improving social inequality. Wong and Cho (2005) also use National Election Studies data from 1972-2000, and while most of their analyses yield no significance, they did find that a little over half of white Americans said they felt a sense of racial identity. White Americans feel some sense of closeness that may lead to collective action, but more research needs to be conducted explicitly using measures of group consciousness.

Another component to group consciousness is linked fate. Although the two terms have been used interchangeably in the past, contemporary work considers them separate measures for racial and ethnic minority populations (McClain et al. 2009; Sanchez and Vargas 2016). Linked fate is a separate measure because it refers to a phase of identification where individuals develop a sense of closeness with others who share in their group label (Dawson 1994; Simien 2005). Because individuals develop a sense of closeness, they begin to believe that one individual's actions in life are intertwined with the group as a whole and vice versa (Simien 2005). Dawson (1994) used linked fate to explain African American's "politically homogenous" support of specific political policies (6, 87). Studies also find that linked fate is more strongly associated with blacks (McClain et al. 2009; Miller et al. 1981). Even more, Gurin et al. (1980) found blacks to have the strongest political consciousness and commitment to collective action; blacks were twice as likely as whites to feel close and six times more likely to feel the closest to their racial group.

Black inmates likely experience group consciousness and linked fate due to findings in previous research, but how can a lack of group consciousness or linked fate affect white inmates? I examine the complications of mental health within prisons and white inmates that may be vulnerable to those complications.

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS DECREASES INMATE'S MOTIVATION TO VOTE

Mental health illness is a reoccurring issue when dealing with inmates. Inmates are two to three times more likely to experience mental illness than the general population (Roskes and Feldman 1999). Soderstrom (2007) found that in 2001 the Georgia Department of Corrections had 38% of all mental health cases report as depression, which led all diagnoses. Soderstrom (2007) also believed that other states would report similar findings despite not having universal statistics for all states. These findings are troubling because depression is highly correlated to learned helplessness (LP) (Miller and Seligman 1975; Seligman 1972), meaning a substantial number of inmates are at risk for developing LP. As a result, prison creates an environment conducive for inmates to experience learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness was initially used to describe a stunt in an animal's ability to develop adaptive behaviors due to uncontrollable trauma (Seligman 1972). However, research began to test whether humans were able to experience a similar loss of motivation. Miller and Seligman (1975) conducted an experiment that induced learned helplessness on depressed and non-depressed college students, finding that depressed students adapted poorly. Seligman (1972) states there are parallels between the two conditions because depression is characterized by a negative cognitive set, meaning individuals disbelieve their actions create success (411).

The learned helplessness theory posits that uncontrollable outcomes result in motivational, cognitive, and emotional deficits (Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale 1978; Maier and Seligman 1976). Maier and Seligman (1976) offer explanations for all three conditions (10, 13, 15):

Motivation: uncontrollable aversive events produce deterioration in readiness to respond actively to trauma.

Cognitive: experience with uncontrollable events produces difficulty learning that reattempts create success. These events hinder their perception of control.

Emotional: depressed affects are stemming from learning that the outcomes of a situation are uncontrollable.

CHAPTER III

THEORY

My research contributes to this literature by assessing whether inmates experience motivation due to being incarcerated, specifically the differences between black and white inmates. The struggle for black voting rights is a portion of why black inmates view prison differently than white inmates. For black inmates, incarceration is thought of as a system meant to continue suppressing black voting rights. Throughout American history, there has been a concerted effort in hindering or restricting black Americans from exercising their rights. Despite the multitude of amendments and laws passed to generate equality, we still see a loss in political power for blacks. Black Americans have concluded that American institutions are not made to help or protect them but instead oppress them. For blacks, incarceration is seen as another institution designed to restrict their voting rights. Evident by the fact that incarceration disenfranchises those imprisoned, and black Americans make up a disproportionate amount of the prison population.

Blacks are skeptical of the true purpose of the criminal justice system, especially mass incarceration. Throughout the American history of institutions, there are multiple examples where blacks were derailed from progressing as a community. Also, it would be hard to ignore the fact that incarceration is seen as the only legal justification for slavery in the Constitution, further stoking the skepticism blacks harbor for the criminal justice system. The literature suggests an

issue with the American criminal justice system, too, as prisons no longer center around rehabilitative ideals but instead punitive (Garland 2001). Prison is perceived as an institution that discourages citizens from politically participating because the system is more about punishment. However, it may be the case that discouraging minority citizens backfire once they arrive in prison. Instead, during their sentence, the minority population is motivated to participate politically and change the system.

The mistreatment of blacks as a group by institutions is a significant factor in why they experience higher levels of group consciousness and linked fate than whites (Dawson 1994; Simien 2005). Incarceration is not the only institution that makes blacks feel mistreated, but somewhat further conviction in their belief that American institutions are against them. Incarceration becomes another example of the constant effort to oppress black Americans and put them in a lower stratum. Following reference group theory (RGT), Miller et al. (1981) assume that objective deprivation promotes group consciousness when members of a subordinate stratum use the dominant stratum to compare and express discontent with their group's influence relative to that of the outgroup.

Considering the RGT and racial disparity among inmates in incarceration, I suspect black inmates compare their status within the prison to whites and notice the glaring disparities. Therefore, black inmates are more likely to experience group consciousness because of mistreatment by American institutions and their social standing within prison compared to white inmates. After mistreatment by American political institutions, it would be reasonable to expect that black inmates do not want to participate in politics. However, I employ Riker and Ordershook's (1968) rational choice theory of voting to explain their motivation. Riker and Ordershook's rational choice model builds off Down's (1957) calculus of voting theory, $R = (BP) - C$.

A brief definition of the variables is:

R: reward is given for voting.

B: differential benefits in utilities compared to the preferred or least preferred candidate winning.

P: the probability that voting will get the individual the benefit.

C: the cost of voting.

Aldrich (1993) recognizes that there is a benefit from voting, but it is rare for voting to be in an individual's best interest. Riker and Ordershook (1968) argue that the missing variable from the equation is D, being the psychological benefit of fulfilling an individual's duty as a citizen. The most important psychological benefit for individuals voting is to know they affirmed their partisan preference and stood up for the candidate they supported. If D is more than C for a voter, then R can be calculated as positive, but if C is more than D, R is considered zero or negative. The psychological benefits change how rewarding it is for an individual to vote. I assume that black inmates are motivated despite their distrust of political institutions because the psychological benefits (D) of standing for change and the reward (R) for enacting change in legislation outweigh the cost (C) associated with dealing with structural barriers.

Due to the calculus of voting among black inmates, I suspect that incarceration motivates them to participate in politics because they are less likely to develop learned helplessness and more likely to develop group consciousness or linked fate. I expect to find shared political motivation among prisoners because previous research has suggested that group consciousness increases political participation (Miller et al. 1981; Sanchez 2006; Stokes 2003). Prison is a unique environment that generally sees the formation of informal social groups (Caldwell 1955).

Informal social groups provide perfect conditions to foster group consciousness because they naturally form out of similar social attitudes, social values, and mutual interests (Caldwell 1955, 649). Thus, I theorize that black inmates are more likely to develop group consciousness because they have more political discussions, which I conceptualize as motivational discussion. I define motivational discussion and diagram below.

Motivational Discussion: The ability to transfer political motivation among individuals through group-based discussion. The effect is a proxy of group consciousness as it can create a collective group thinking, but the discussion is not just between individuals that are motivated to participate politically. Instead, motivation from an individual during the discussion can influence another individual who is not motivated.

An example of motivational discussion would be an inmate who is tired of the status quo but not knowledgeable about the change made through politics. During a discussion with a motivated inmate educated on politics, such as voter enfranchisement, the inmate would be presented with explanations on how politics works. That conversation leads to the inmate understanding that the status quo is only changed through legislation and is motivated to participate in politics. As you can see in diagrams 1 and 2, the inmate wants to change, but the difference in establishing political motivation is having the discussion necessary to become acclimated with politics.

Diagram 1 of Motivational Discussion

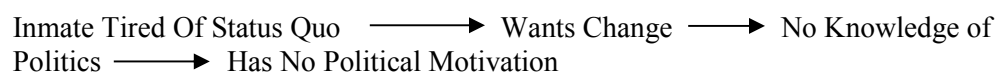
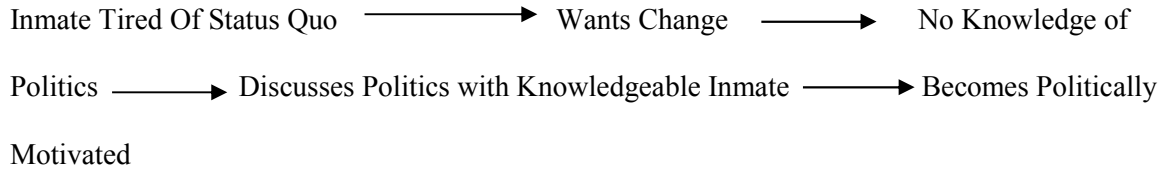


Diagram 2 Of Motivational Discussion



Motivational discussion allows for black inmates to voice their discontent with their treatment by American institutions. The discussion leads to an understanding that collective action has to be taken to improve their predicament. Therefore, black inmates do not view the experience of prison as demobilizing instead:

Hypothesis 1a: Black inmates experience increased political motivation due to political discussions throughout their incarceration experience.

Hypothesis 1b: Black inmates experience decreased learned helplessness due to political discussions throughout their incarceration experience.

While current literature posits that group consciousness is more strongly associated with blacks, I suspect that group consciousness is possible for whites in prison. This consciousness is because incarceration is a unique experience that isolates inmates from the U.S. population. However, I do not find it likely that the white inmates experience group consciousness at a similar rate to black inmates. Miller et al. (1981) distinguish between group identification and political group identification, the former being about individuals' perceived location in the social stratum and the latter being politically aware of their position and the need for collective action. White inmates may experience higher levels of group identification due to recognizing their social status as prisoners. The lack of political group identification among white inmates could be explained if white inmates do not discuss politics as often as black inmates.

As a result of white inmates not discussing politics, they do not view incarceration as a political motivator. Instead, I suspect they are more likely to succumb to learned helplessness for two reasons. First, there is a consensus among researchers that depression is correlated to learned helplessness. Inmates who deal with mental illness are likely to report dealing with depression. Thus, I assume a large portion of inmates are depressed, and experience learned helplessness. I theorize that white inmates are more likely to succumb to learned helplessness because research has found that white inmates experience more mental health issues than blacks (Johnson 1976; 1981; Jones 1976). Because white inmates are more at-risk for mental health issues, they are likely to experience depression and learned helplessness.

Second, black and white inmates do not experience similar levels of learned helplessness because of their different experiences with the criminal justice system. For blacks, the presence and confrontation with the criminal justice system are more constant than whites (White 2019). I suspect that because black inmates have experienced more uncontrollable situations, they are less likely to experience learned helplessness in prison and instead are motivated to change their situation politically. Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) find that when individuals feel helpless, they will ask themselves *why* they are helpless. The individual places the cause and blame for their situation, affecting their feelings of helplessness and deficits to cognitive, emotional, and motivational levels (Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale 1978). During their sentence, when the incarcerated population asks *why*, I suspect incarceration becomes a demobilizing effect for whites. If white inmates are developing learned helplessness, they are likely not to view incarceration as motivation to participate politically. Therefore, white inmates are not likely to engage in political discussions, and incarceration has a demobilizing effect on white inmates:

Hypothesis 2a: White inmates experience decreased political motivation due to a lack of political discussions throughout their incarceration experience.

Hypothesis 2b: White inmates experience increased learned helplessness due to a lack of political discussions throughout their incarceration experience.

I also suspect that because black inmates are experiencing group consciousness or linked fate, which leads them to discuss politics more often as a group compared to the white inmates, their political opinions are influenced differently:

Hypothesis 3a: Black inmates use their race to inform their political opinions.

Hypothesis 3b: White inmates do not use their race to inform their political opinion.

Based on extant research, these results would strengthen hypotheses 1 and 2 because if black inmates are experiencing group consciousness or linked fate, then their political opinions should be influenced by their racial self-identification in some capacity. The opposite should apply to white inmates that are not experiencing group consciousness or linked fate.

The final test for my theory that political discussions contribute to black inmates being politically motivated and white inmates experiencing no motivation is a mediation analysis. I suspect that political discussions are the medium for group consciousness to become political motivation. I already hypothesized that political discussions do affect inmate political motivation, but a mediational analysis will show how influential discussions are on political motivation:

Hypothesis 4: Discussion mediates the effect of race on motivation to participate politically, such that black inmates (compared to white inmates) are more likely to participate in political discussion and are subsequently more likely to vote.

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND METHODS

To assess the political efficacy of incarcerated citizens, I analyze data from the 2020 Marshall Project Study (MPS). The MPS collected over 8,000 survey responses using digital surveys and paper surveys from December 2019 to March 2020. The survey collected respondents' political attitudes, ideologies, motivations, voting behavior, and party affiliation. The MPS sample contains 974 African Americans, 3873 Whites, and 435 Hispanic or Latinx inmates. The sample's gender composition is 440 women and 5178 male inmates. Note that, due to missing data, the quantities do not necessarily add up to 8,000 respondents in the analysis presented here.

While this data gives us much-needed insight into the opinions of a hard-to-reach population, they are nevertheless limited in several ways. First, because the MPS were still receiving surveys when they made the data available, the data is not weighted to represent the incarcerated population. Moreover, because the survey is administered to the incarcerated, the ability to obtain a nationally representative sample of prison is much more challenging. There is no census or standard operating procedure for surveying (or sampling) inmates to break down their population accurately. Even if there were a census of American inmates, there is still no guarantee that the inmates would fill out the census.

While the incarcerated sample in the survey may not represent the inmate population generally, my intent – in this thesis – is to document differences between racial sub-groups; not to generalize to the inmate population.

Additionally, the sample size is large enough to find valid differences between black and white inmates sufficiently. Because this study focuses on white and black inmates, which are the two largest racial sub-samples in these data, I have a sufficient sample size to detect even minor effects.

VARIABLE MEASUREMENT

Independent Variable

The key independent variable necessary to test my hypotheses is inmates' racial self-identification. Race is measured as inmates answering whether they are black, white, Latinx, or other. Those that answered as other were coded to missing as there is no way to figure out their race in the sample. While I believe there is importance in including Latinx inmates, there was no large enough sample size to detect statistical significance. Another issue that arises from using the MPS regarding race is that there was no option for these inmates to identify as biracial. Previous research details the struggle with identity that bi-racial Americans deal with as they mature (Davenport 2016). Additionally, Latins may identify as black or white too (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). It would have been best not to force these inmates to pick one race because race has become more nuanced. Also, allowing inmates to select more than one racial self-identification would give a better perspective on how bi-racial inmates are accepted in prison and whether they tend to gravitate towards the feelings of black or white inmates.

Dependent Variables

The first outcome variable I study in my analyses is political motivation. MPS asked respondents whether they felt incarceration was motivating them to become politically active. The question asked: What impact has incarceration had on your motivation to vote? I recoded the survey responses to correspond with numbers which were: (0) decreased motivation to vote, (1) slightly decreased motivation to vote, (2) no impact, (3) slightly increased motivation to vote, (4) increased motivation to vote, and (5) NA. I recoded the variable such that all NA (5) responses were treated as missing. Once recoded, I translated the answers into the variable political motivation to probe incarceration's effect on inmates' desire to vote. I then used the variable to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. Political motivation is vital to understanding if these inmates want to participate in politics outside of prison. Therefore, the measurement was ideal for my hypotheses because I could get a direct answer from the inmates on whether incarceration was politically motivating. The variable shows the difference in how black and white inmates are coping with incarceration.

Second, I analyzed the outcome variable political discussions. The MPS recorded how often inmates reported they had discussions about politics with family, friends, and other inmates. Their question was: How often do you discuss politics with family, friends, or others who are incarcerated? I recoded the variable asking about discussing politics as well so they would correspond as: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, (4) frequently, (5) very frequently, and (6) NA. I placed the answer NA (6) as missing. After I recoded the answers, I converted the inmates' answers into a political discussion variable. The variable then was used to test Hypotheses 1,2, and 4. The variable is a vital component of determining group consciousness among inmates. Discussing politics among each other indicates that not only are inmates politically motivated, but they also want to change their predicament.

Next, my analysis focused on racial identity informing political opinions. The MPS gauged the influence of inmates' racial identity by asking: How much does your racial identity inform your political views in prison? For my racial identity variable, I recoded the survey answers as (0) not at all, (1) not sure, (2) somewhat, (3) a great deal, and (4) NA. All survey answers that were NA (4) were treated as missing too. After the variable was recoded, I used it to test hypotheses 3a and 3b. The data collection I recoded did not include a direct measure of group consciousness. However, because group consciousness is the commitment to collective action in the group's best interest (Miller et al. 1978, 18), racial identity influencing political opinions is necessary for a racial group to take collective action. Also, Dawson (1994) attributed political group-based interests to individuals' connectedness to their racial group. Meaning if racial identity informs your political views, then it is likely that you are more concerned with political decisions affecting the racial group rather than the individual.

Lastly, I note the tradeoffs posed by measuring my dependent variables in this way. My dependent variables are not objective measures of political participation; instead, they gauge the inmate's perceptions of their future involvement in politics. Norton, Lindrooth, and Ennett (2002) find that measures of perception in survey data can lead to conflicting results. The difficulty with measuring perception is that all survey respondents do not evaluate their behavior similarly. For example, an individuals' motivation to complete a personal goal is not an objective trait. Inmates may determine how motivated they are and what constitutes motivation differently. Is an inmate with a five-year plan to regain their voting rights more motivated than an inmate with a one-year plan to do so? It is difficult to give a consistent self-review of a subjective trait. Because an inmate has to determine how motivated they are, there are inconsistencies with their perceptions as a sample, which can affect results.

Despite the possibility of inaccurate reporting, perception is nevertheless helpful because political participation is predicated on perception. Citizens perceive their status, calculate their benefits, and make political decisions, whether turning out to vote or picking a candidate to elect. Citizens have to feel a sense of civic duty to want to be involved in politics (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). These may not be objective measures, but they explain the reasoning behind why some inmates may not want to participate in politics. Their absence from politics is used to find and test a more objective measure, but we have to understand why we came away with those results.

Ultimately, I believe that the benefits of measuring perceived motivation outweigh its potential cost. My work is less concerned with these inmates' actions because they cannot act on their urges while incarcerated. Instead, my thesis is focusing on feelings toward politics and what incarceration does to those feelings. Feelings are sometimes not based on fact or an objective measure, and people establish their feelings through their perception of a situation. Therefore, it is appropriate for my thesis that I did look at inmate's perceptions of the effects of being incarcerated.

Control Variables

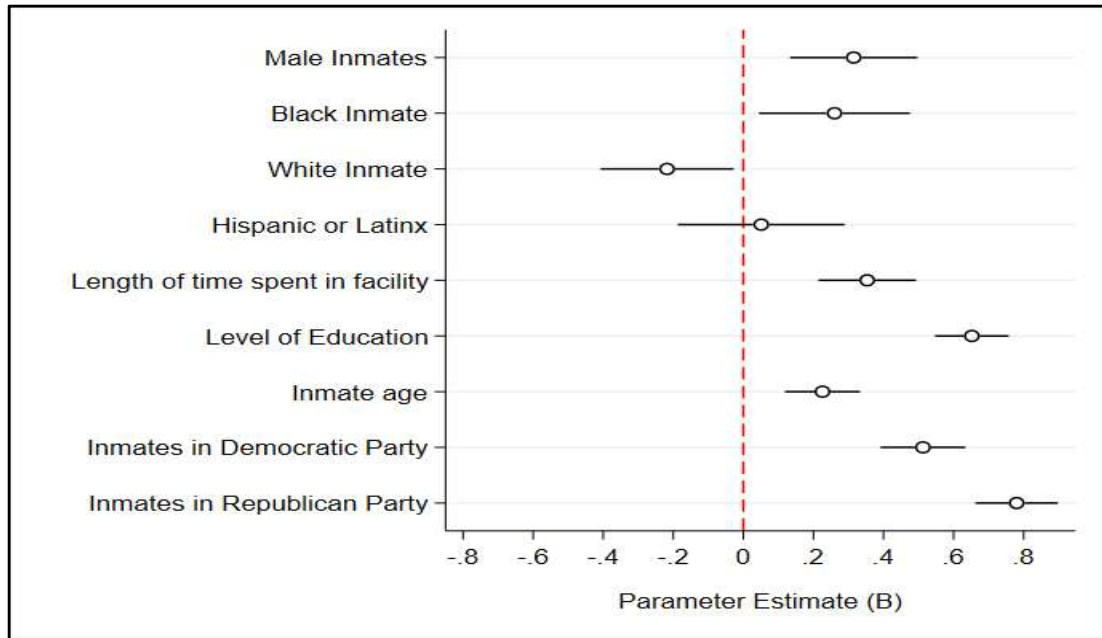
There were five demographic variables used as controls, which include the respondents' length in the facility (coded as (0) for "10 years or less" and (1) for "over 10 years"), highest educational attainment (coded as (1) for high school or GED or less, (2) for Trade/technical/vocational training, (3) is an associate degree, and (4) is a college degree or more), their age (coded as (1) for 35 or younger and (2) for 36 or older), support for the Democratic Party (coded as (0) for no and (1) for yes), or support for the Republican Party (coded as (0) for no and (1) for yes).

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

First, I will begin my analysis by offering a test of hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b. I ran an ordered logistic regression model presented in Figure 1 that assessed how frequently inmates discussed politics. I find there is a difference in how frequently black and white inmates discuss politics. Figure 1 demonstrates that black inmates are more likely to discuss politics than white inmates. The results are the first piece of evidence to support hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b. Figure 1's findings are consistent with hypotheses 1a and 1b, as black inmates (.26, $p < .05$) were positively and significantly more likely to discuss politics. Figure 1 results are consistent with hypotheses 2a and 2b as well—white inmates (-.21, $p < .05$) were negatively and significantly less likely to discuss politics. The findings suggest that black inmates are more prone to have political discussions in comparison to white inmates. Additionally, Figure 1 supports motivational discussion, as the concept is based on the notion that inmates want to have political discussions. Based on the results, if black inmates have motivational discussions as a group, they should be motivated to participate in politics.

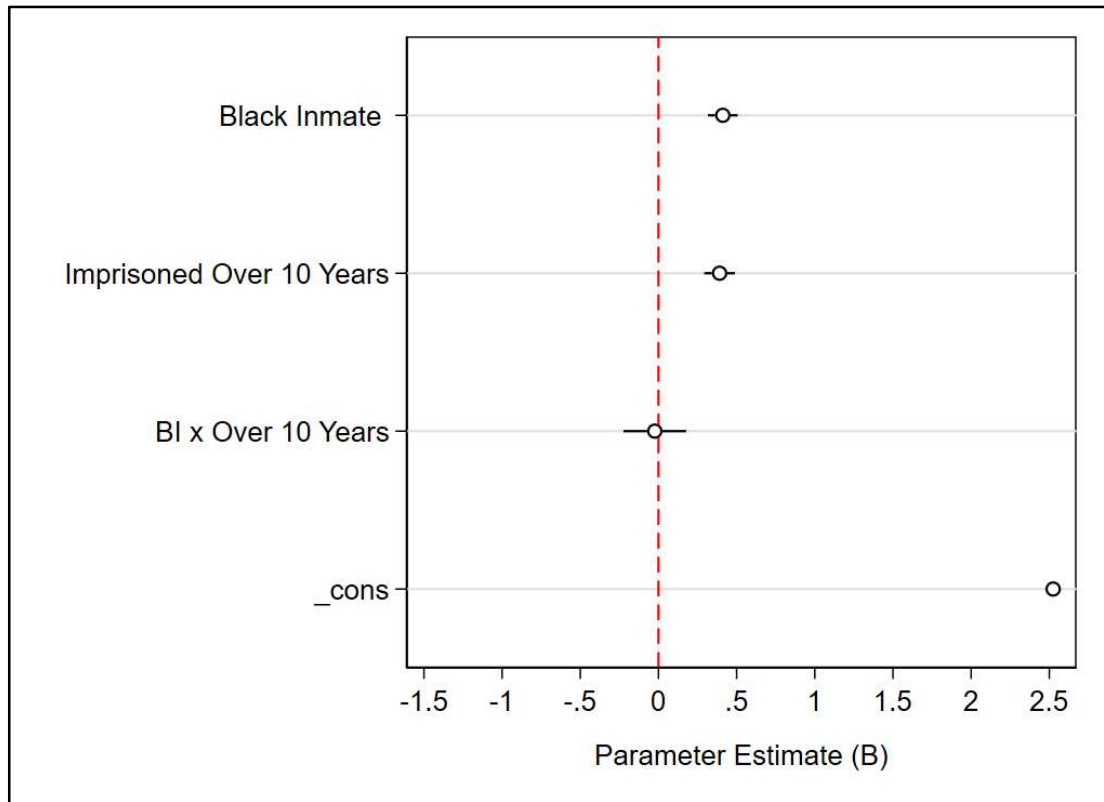
Figure 1. The Effect of Incarceration on How often Inmates Discuss Politics



Note. Estimates (dots) are ordered logistic regression model (ologit) coefficients. Lines extending out from each one represents 95% confidence intervals. The outcome variable determines the likelihood of an inmate discussing politics.

Haven given evidence in support of 1a and 1b, I continue my analysis to offer further support for 1a and 1b. To do so, I determine if black inmates were more likely to be politically motivated. I accomplished this analysis by running an ordered logistic regression model with interactive terms between race and time spent in prison. According to the results in Figure 2.1, I find that black inmates (.41, $p < .05$) were positively and significantly more likely to view incarceration as motivation to vote. The interaction between black inmates and time spent in prison is not significant, meaning black inmates do not lose political motivation regardless of serving longer stints in prison. This finding would suggest that black inmates do not succumb to learned helplessness but instead retain their motivation as a group. Based on the results provided in Figure 2.1, there is enough evidence to accept Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Existing literature posits that minority populations are negatively affected by contact with the criminal justice system (Weaver and Lerman, 2010; 2014), which may ultimately impact whether they turn out to vote. However, my findings in Figure 2.1 demonstrate that black inmates' experiences with the carceral state may lead them to be more politically motivated.

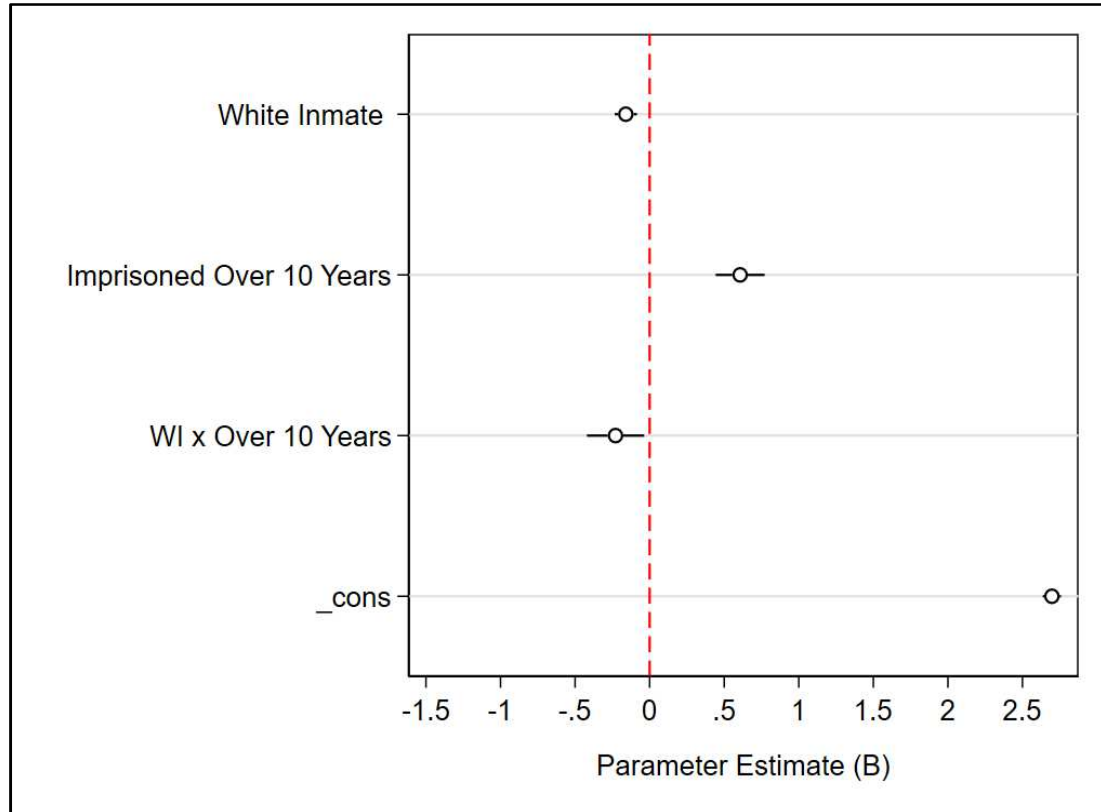
Figure 2.1 Interactive Model between Black Inmates' Motivation to Vote and Incarcerated Over Ten Years



Note. Estimates (dots) are ordered logistic regression model (ologit) coefficients. Lines extending out from each one represents 95% confidence intervals. The coefficients were put into an interactive model to highlight the direct effect of time in prison on a black inmate's motivation to vote.

Next, I test 2a and 2b using an ordered logistic regression model with interactive terms between race and time spent in prison. In my analysis, I gauge whether white inmates were more likely to be politically motivated. Based on the findings in Figure 2.2, white inmates (-0.15, $p < .05$) were negatively and significantly less likely to be politically motivated by incarceration. The interaction term between white inmates and time spent in prison worsened their motivation (-0.22, $p < .05$), as longer stints in prison decreased their political motivation. The results support 2a, and 2b, specifically that white inmates develop learned helplessness while incarcerated and become too demobilized to want to participate in politics. The longer they spend within a prison, the more learned helplessness sets in and discourage white inmates from politics.

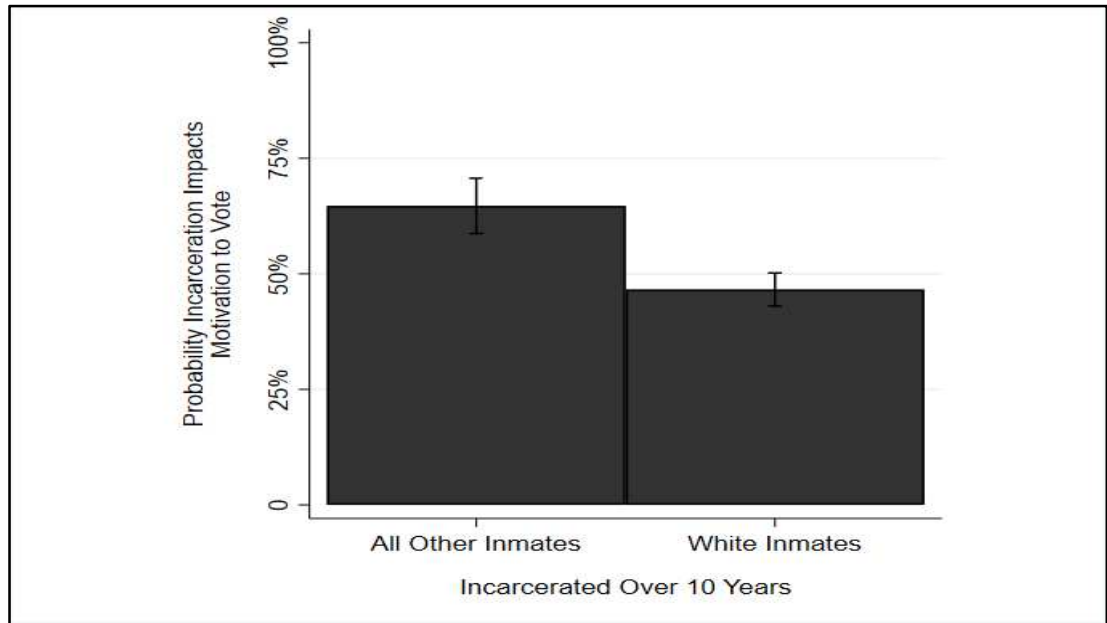
Figure 2.2 Interactive Model between White Inmates' Motivation to Vote and Incarcerated Over Ten Years



Note. Estimates (dots) are ordered logistic regression model (ologit) coefficients. Lines extending out from each one represents 95% confidence intervals. The coefficients were put into an interactive model to highlight the direct effect of time in prison on a white inmate's motivation to vote.

Also, I add to the hypotheses by presenting inmate's motivation as a predicted probability in Figure 2.3. I conducted the predicted probability model for Figure 2.3 because of well-known difficulties determining effects' substantive magnitude from logistic regression coefficients. Figure 2.3 displays the predicted probability an inmate answered that incarceration motivated them to vote. According to Figure 2.3, white inmates had different motivation levels than all other inmates when serving over ten years in prison. For all other inmates, they were predicted to say incarceration motivated them to vote 64% of the time compared to 46% for white inmates, an 18% percent difference. The results of Figures 2.3 provide further support to accept the hypotheses by showcasing the vast difference in how black and white inmates deal with incarceration, specifically white's loss of motivation.

Figure 2.3 Incarceration's Effect on Inmates' Motivation to Vote

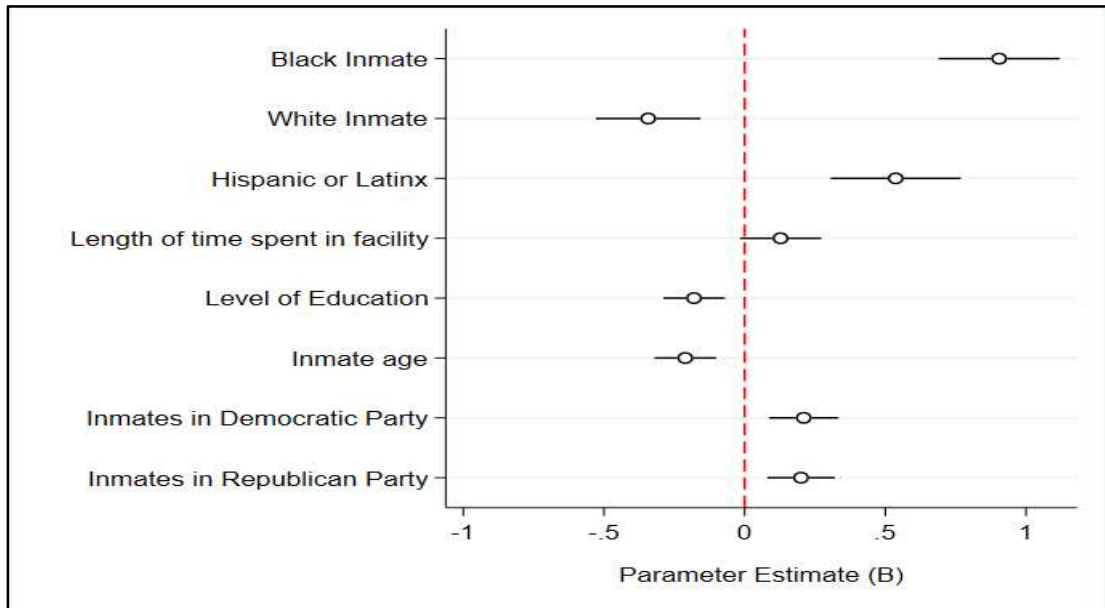


Note. Probabilities are margins plot. All other covariates in prediction model are held at their sample mean. Lines represent 95 confidence intervals.

My fourth statistical analysis uses an ordered logistic regression model, shown in Figure 3, to present support for hypotheses 3a and 3b. Figure 3 focuses on the differing viewpoints that black and white inmates have regarding identity politics. The findings from Figure 3 show that black inmates were positively and significantly (.90, $p < .05$) more likely to have political views informed by their race, while white inmates were negatively and significantly (-.34 $p < .05$) less likely to do so. The evidence from Figure 3 infers that black inmates experience some aspect of group consciousness or linked fate, while white inmates experience less of a tie to their race. Black inmates feeling that their race impacts their political opinion further explains why they are more likely to be politically motivated by prison. Linked fate influences political actions based on the perception of the racial group's interest (Dawson 1994; McClain et al. 2009; Tate 1994). The measure used in Figure 3 may capture an aspect of link fate because black inmates recognize their race must play a part in their political decisions. As a response to having more discussions, black inmates' political views are influenced by their race, whereas white inmates lack motivational discussions, and their race does not influence their political views. Since black inmates find

commonality among each other through discussion, they create a feeling of closeness that leads them to believe their fate is intertwined as a group. That closeness means black inmates want to do what is in the best interest of the group.

Figure 3. The Effect of Incarceration on Whether the Inmates' Race Informs Their *Political Views*



Note. Estimates (dots) are ordered logistic regression model (ologit) coefficients. Lines extending out from each one represents 95% confidence intervals. Outcome variables determine the likelihood of an inmate allowing their race to inform their political opinion.

Lastly, I conducted an observation mediation analysis in STATA with the package "medeff" to further test the connection between race and political motivation (H4) but explained through political discussions as a mediator. Imai and colleagues (2011) recommended that each stage of the mediation model be controlled for all variables included in the models used to produce Figures 1-3.

Mediation analyses suggest that the percentage of the total effect of being a black inmate versus a white inmate (total effect: 16.1%) explained through political discussion (indirect effect: 3.1%) was 19.7%. This is indicative of partial mediation, supporting hypothesis 4. For black inmates, their motivation to vote was partially explained through their tendency to have political discussions, which indicates some aspect of group consciousness or linked fate. As a result, black

inmates are more inclined to speak about politics, which increases their motivation to vote. Through discussions, they become politically motivated by their prison experiences.

CHAPTER VI

LIMITATIONS

Before concluding, I must address several limitations within my thesis. First, there are the issues pertaining to my data sample. I could not conduct my own survey with incarcerated citizens, so I did not directly influence the way the data was collected. Although the research focuses on the differences among black and white inmates, I would have preferred to have analyzed Hispanic and Asian inmates more closely. Inherently, inmates are a complex population to survey, so the respondent pools are not guaranteed representative samples. The issue of representative samples becomes even more problematic with ethnicities with smaller populations than black and white, such as Asian Americans. Still, Asian Americans were not given a clear option for their race, so they likely marked themselves as others. Unfortunately, I had to treat others as missing, as there was no way to figure out what the inmate's actual ethnicity was. Due to an insufficient sample size of Hispanic inmates in the data sample, I lack the statistical power necessary to detect significant relationships within the data. It should be pointed out that the survey did not allow for inmates to mark multiple ethnicities as their race. Davenport (2016) explained in his research the emergence of multicultural citizens and how they may form their own political opinions separate from the ethnicity identified by the individual. Future research should aim to include a larger sample size of Hispanic, Asian, or multi-racial inmates.

In addition to imprecision for measuring racial self-identification, there was an insufficient sample size of women. My thesis focuses on male inmates because there were not enough women in the sample³. Although I was not able to study women, they do play an important role in elections. In general, women, specifically women of color, tend to vote Democratic. It would be intriguing to analyze whether incarcerated women of color demonstrate the same togetherness in voting for one party and if they are motivated to engage in politics. Existing literature does not exclude women from experiencing group consciousness and linked fate; therefore, I suspect that future studies will find similar results to mine about black male inmate's political motivation.

Next, another limitation I faced was an insufficient classification of inmate's conviction sentence length. The MPS separated inmates by those who served under ten years and over ten years. However, this is not enough classification to deem which prisoners serving under ten years are felons versus those serving time for a misdemeanor. There needs to be a distinction because inmates serving time for a misdemeanor do not lose their right to vote. Felonies are typically classified as a criminal offense punishable by a minimum of one year. An inmate in the survey could be serving a 9-month sentence for a misdemeanor crime, but in the MPS survey, he would be grouped in with felons serving less than ten years. My findings of political motivation among black inmates and demobilization of white inmates are still crucial for those inmates that did not lose their voting rights because that means elections will have voters highly motivated from their experience in prison. Despite the lack of clarification, Shannon et al. (2017) find that statistically, people with felony convictions account for 8 % of all adults and 33 % of the African American adult male population (Shannon et al. 2017, 1795). My findings of political motivation should

³ To clarify, Figure 1 does control for gender, which means some inmates do not identify as men. However, the sample of inmates not identifying as men either answered as other or women. Those who answered as other were set to missing because there is no way to determine their actual sex. Moreover, women were constantly omitted when running my regression models. Therefore, aside from Figure 1, all other models are restricted to just men.

apply to these large percentages of the incarcerated population. As studies continue to research inmate political opinions, there should be a precise classification of convictions.

Fourth, the measures used in the MPS do not directly measure group consciousness or linked fate. The measures do, however, uncover an aspect of group consciousness, more specifically group identification. From the results, it is clear that black inmates create their ideological beliefs based on their race. Nonetheless, if I could expand on this research, I would survey inmates with actual measurements of group consciousness and linked fate used in previous literature.

Lastly, there are two subjects that research should expand upon from my thesis. The first is group consciousness or linked fate among all prisoners as a group. It may be of interest to find whether prison has socialized inmates enough to where they believe the actions of one inmate directly change what happens to all prisoners. Socializing agents are influential to the development of political attitudes, and prison may be one of the strongest conditions that a citizen could experience. Prison is a dynamic environment that differs from the norms of the free population. Prison culture establishes an "inmate code" that forces all prisoners to abide by those norms (Tewksbury 2006), so acclimation is necessary. Due to the acclimation, inmates become somewhat uniform in their thoughts and actions, and perhaps this uniformity leads to group consciousness.

Second, my research addresses incarcerated inmates, but scholars should expand and look at formerly incarcerated citizens. Future studies could determine if there is a correlation between lack of political participation from former inmates, the severity of state disenfranchisement laws, and how that applies to former prisoner's cost-benefit analysis for engaging in politics. My research answers how inmates feel while in prison, but new studies are needed to understand what happens once these citizens are out in civilization again. Previous research has done enough to

know the system does hinder them, but not enough research asks these former inmates how they perceive their status in the system. If we could understand why former inmates' motivation is not translating to actual participation after prison, we can start to solve their low turnout.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My thesis shows that inmates are motivated to vote despite their circumstances that prohibit them from participating in voting. More specifically, black inmates are motivated to participate politically, but incarceration demobilizes white inmates politically. Both underline the more significant issue of our criminal justice system: the demobilizing, lasting, and adverse effects on former inmates. On the one hand, white inmates are developing higher levels of learned helplessness and disregarding politics altogether, and on the other black inmates are motivated. Despite immense motivation by black inmates, it does not translate to actual political participation once they are out of prison. These inmates who are psychologically motivated to vote are not able to physically act upon their desires. The criminal justice system seems like a double-edged sword, where you either feel hopeless so you give up or structural barriers outside of incarceration are hindering involvement.

Also, the findings emphasize the core psychological differences in how black and white inmates cope with incarceration. For black inmates, incarceration is symbolic of the larger biases they deal with from our bureaucracy. Black inmates view prison as the ultimate validation of the biased systems that mistreat them, so they need to find a way out. For white inmates, this is not the same reality of mistreatment or angst from our institutions. These feelings of mistreatment based on

race among black inmates are why the findings show a higher motivation to be political and discuss politics among them.

The findings in my research are relevant to contemporary issues, as the house of representatives has passed the H.R.1 bill⁴. The bill contains legislation aimed at voter restoration. Within the bill, Congress identifies the same structural barriers that I discuss throughout this paper, such as lack of uniformity in state laws governing voter restoration after conviction and state disenfranchisement laws disproportionately affecting racial minorities. If Congress agrees that these citizens are impeded by barriers and are not lacking motivation, we could see more legislation enacted to erase these barriers.

If more bills are passed similar to H.R. 1, previous electoral outcomes could become less explanatory for future elections because millions of citizens would now be eligible to vote. Incumbents who were previously safe have a new base of voters whose political preferences have to be heard, and if they cannot fulfill them, they risk losing. Some incumbents may even face retribution from these former prisoners because they provided no policies to improve the criminal justice system. Based on previous elections, we assume that states belong to either the Democratic or Republican Party, but an influx of many new voters can turn multiple states into battleground states. States such as Georgia and Florida are at risk of no longer being swing states due to the sheer size of voters that were disenfranchised.

An alternate perspective could be that citizens pressure politicians to enact legislation geared at voter restoration. Politicians want to please their constituents, and if they favor voter enfranchisement, then the politician has no choice but to grant their wishes. Future research

⁴ At the time of my thesis, H.R. 1 has not passed in the Senate yet.

should focus on the insurgence of support for voter restoration, specifically studying attitudinal ambivalence. With the constant growth of mass incarceration over the last 50 years, it would be likely that many Americans have individuals in their life that have been imprisoned. That level of proximity to the issues of former and current inmates could increase support for voter restoration. Equally, those who have been the victim of crimes would be included in the study as well, as it is likely they do not support voter enfranchisement. It would also be interesting to see how those who have close individuals who are incarcerated or have been victims of crime would support voter restoration.

The comparative field of political science would benefit from studying former and current inmates too. Future research would be able to gauge the political motivation of inmates comparatively among countries. We do not know if the American criminal justice system is the only criminal institution that has adverse effects on former and current inmates. For example, countries like Sweden do not disenfranchise citizens for incarceration. Future studies could use the average voting turnout for former inmates in countries that do not practice disenfranchisement and compare them to America. Either there is universal low voter turnout among the incarcerated population, or the low turnout is a product of how America's criminal justice system operates. The next question emerges: is there a flaw in the world's criminal justice system or just Americas'? If we are the only country that experiences low voter turnout, we should address changing the American criminal justice system and integrating a more rehabilitative system.

REFERENCES

- Abramson, L. Y., M. Seligman, and J. Teasdale. 1978. "Learned Helplessness in Humans: Critique and Reformulation." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 87: 49-74.
- Aldrich, John H. 1993. "Rational Choice and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1): 246-278.
- Alexander, Michelle. 2012. "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness." New York: The New Press.
- Beckett, Katherine. 2018. "The Politics, Promise, and Peril of Criminal Justice Reform in the Context of Mass Incarceration." *Annual Review of Criminology* 1: 235-259.
- Bonczar, Thomas P. and Allen J. Beck. 1997. "Lifetime Likelihood of Going to State or Federal Prison." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Caldwell, Morris G. 1955. "Group Dynamics in the Prison Community." *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Political Science* 46 (5): 648-657.
- Chatman, Elfreda A. 1999. "A Theory of Life in the Round." *Journal of The American Society for Information Science* 50 (3): 207-217.
- Clear, Todd R., and James Austin. 2009. "Reducing Mass Incarceration: Implications of the Iron Law of Prison Populations." *Harvard Law and Policy Review* 3 (2): 307-324.
- Davenport, Lauren D. 2016. "Beyond Black and White: Biracial Attitudes in Contemporary US Politics." *American Political Science Review* 110 (1): 52-67.
- Dawson, Michael C. 1994. "Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics." Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- Dhingra, Pawan H. 2003. "Being American between Black and White: Second-Generation Asian American Professionals' Racial Identities." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6 (2): 117-147.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy." *Journal of Political Economy* 65: 135-150.
- Fellner, Jamie, and Marc Mauer. 1998. "Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States." New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Garland, David. 2001. "The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society." University of Chicago Press.
- Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, Marc Meredith, Daniel R. Biggers, and David J. Hendry. 2017. "Does Incarceration Reduce Voting? Evidence about the Political Consequences of Spending Time in Prison." *The Journal of Politics* 79 (4): 1130-1146.
- Golash-Boza, Tanya and William Darity Jr. 2008. "Latino Racial Choices: The Effects of Skin Colour and Discrimination on Latinos' and Latinas' Racial Self-Identifications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (5): 899-934.
- Guinier, Lani. 1994. "The Tyranny of The Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy." New York: Free Press.
- Gurin, Patricia, Arthur H. Miller, and Gerald Gurin. 1980. "Stratum Identification and Consciousness." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 43 (1): 30-47.
- Hajnal, Zoltan L. "Who Loses in American Democracy? A Count of Votes Demonstrates the Limited Representation of African Americans." *The American Political Science Review* 103 (1): 37-57.
- Hench, Virginia E. 1998. "The Death of Voting Rights: The Legal Disenfranchisement of Minority Voters." *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 48 (4): 727-798.
- Hjalmarsson, Randi and Mark Lopez. 2010. "The Voting Behavior of Young Disenfranchised Felons: Would They Vote if They Could?" *American Law and Economics Review* 12 (2): 356-393.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2010. "Teaching and Learning Guide for: A Glimpse into the Sociology of White Antiracism and White Nationalism." *Sociology Compass* 4 (3): 207-214.
- Imai, Kosuke, Luke Keele, Dustin Tingley, and Teppei Yamamoto. 2011. "Unpacking the Black Box of Causality: Learning about Causal Mechanisms from Experimental and Observational Studies." *The American Political Science Review* 105 (4): 765-789.

- Jäggi, Lena J., Briana Mezuk, Daphne C. Watkins, and James S. Jackson. 2016. "The Relationship between Trauma, Arrest, and Incarceration History among Black Americans: Findings from the National Survey of American Life." *Society and Mental Health* 6 (3): 187-206.
- Jackman, Mary R. and Robert W. Jackman. 1973. "An Interpretation of The Relation Between Objective and Subjective Social Status." *American Sociological Review* 38: 569-582.
- Jeffers, Janie L. 2019. "Justice Is Not Blind: Disproportionate Incarceration Rate of People of Color." *Social Work in Public Health* 34 (1): 113-121.
- Johnson, Robert. 1976. "Culture and Crisis in Confinement." Lexington Books.
- Johnson, Robert. 1981. "Condemned to Die: Life Under Sentence of Death." Elsevier.
- Johnson, James H., Walter C. Farrell Jr., and Chandra Guinn. 1997. "Immigration Reform and the Browning of America: Tensions, Conflicts and Community Instability in Metropolitan Los Angeles." *International Migration Review* 31 (4): 1055-1095.
- Jones, David. 1976. "The Health Risks of Imprisonment." Lexington Books.
- Klinker, Philip A., and Rogers Smith. 1999. "The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America." Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kousser, J. M. 1999. "Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and The Undoing of the Second Reconstruction." University of North Carolina Press.
- Lawrence, Eugene. 1872. "The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy." In *Civil Rights: A Reader on the Black Struggle Since 1787*, eds. Johnathan Birnbaum and Clarence Taylor, 138-140. New York University Press.
- Lehmann, Vibeke. 2000. "The Prison Library: A Vital Link to Education, Rehabilitation, and Recreation." *Education Libraries* 24 (1): 5-10.
- Leighley Jan E. and Arnold Vedlitz. 1999. "Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations." *The Journal of Politics* 61 (4): 1092-1114.
- Lerman, Amy E. and Velsa M. Weaver. 2014. "Staying Out of Sight? Concentrated Policing and Local Political Action." *The Annals Of The American Academy* 651 (1): 202-219.
- Lin, May. 2020. "From Alienated to Activists: Expressions and Formation of Group Consciousness Among Asian American Young Adults." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46 (7): 1405-1424.

- Massoglia, Michael. 2008. "Incarceration, Health, and Racial Disparities in Health." *Law and Society Review* 42 (2): 275-306.
- Masuoka, Natalie. 2006. "Together They Become One: Examining the Predictors of Panethnic Group Consciousness among Asian Americans and Latinos." *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (5): 993-1011.
- Maier, S. and M. Seligman. 1976. "Learned Helplessness: Theory and Evidence." *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 105: 3-46.
- Mauer, Marc. 2011. "Addressing Racial Disparities in Incarceration." *The Prison Journal* 91 (3): 87-101.
- McClain, Paula D., Niambi M. Carter, Victoria M. DeFrancesco Soto, Monique L. Lyle, Jeffrey D. Grynawski, Shayla C. Nunnally, Thomas J. Scotto, et al. 2006. "Racial Distancing in a Southern City: Latino Immigrants' Views of Black Americans." *The Journal of Politics* 68 (3): 571-584.
- McClain, Paula D., Jessica D. Johnson Carew, Eugene Walton Jr., and Candis S. Watts. 2009. "Group Membership, Group Identity, and Group Consciousness: Measures of Racial Identity in American Politics?" *The Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 471-485.
- McDermott, Monica and Frank L. Samson. 2005. "White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States." 31: 245-261.
- Miller Arthur H., Patricia Gurin, Gerald Gurin, and Oksana Malanchuk. 1981. "Group Consciousness and Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science* 25 (3): 494-511.
- Miller, William R. and Martin E. P. Seligman. 1975. "Depression and Learned Helplessness in Man." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 84 (3): 228-238.
- Mindiola, Tatcho, Yolanda Flores Niemann, and Nestor Rodriguez. 2002. "Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes." Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Norton, Edward C., Richard Lindrooth, and Susan T. Ennett. 2002. "How Measures of Perception From Survey Data Lead to Inconsistent Regression Results: Evidence From Adolescent and Peer Substance Use." *Health Economics* 12: 139-148.
- O'Brien, Eileen. 2008. "The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide." New York: New York University Press.

- Pettit, Becky and Bruce Western. 2004. "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration." *American Sociological Review* 69 (2): 151-169.
- Phelps, Michelle. 2011. "Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era: The Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality in U.S. Prison Programs." *Law and Society Review* 45 (1): 33-68.
- Portes, Alejandro and Cynthia Truelove. 1987. "Making Sense of Diversity: Recent Research on Hispanic Minorities in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1): 359-385.
- Preuhs, Robert. 2001. "State Felon Disenfranchisement Policy." *Social Science Quarterly* 82 (4): 733-748.
- Reid, Whitelaw. 1866. "Southern Discomfort." In *Civil Rights: A Reader on the Black Struggle Since 1787*, eds. Johnathan Birnbaum and Clarence Taylor, 135-137. New York University Press.
- Riker, William and Peter C. Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *The American Political Science Review* 62 (1): 25-42.
- Roskes, Erik and Richard Feldman. 1999. "A Collaborative Community-Based Treatment Program for Offenders with Mental Illness." *Psychiatric Services* 50 (12): 1614-1619.
- Sanchez, Gabriel R. 2006. "The Role of Group Consciousness in Latino Public Opinion." *Political Research Quarterly* 59 (3): 434-446.
- Sanchez, Gabriel R. 2008. "Latino Group Consciousness and Perceptions of Commonality with African Americans." *Social Science Quarterly* 89 (2): 428-444.
- Sanchez, Gabriel R. and Edward D. Vargas. 2016. "Taking a Closer Look at Group Identity: The Link between Theory and Measurement of Group Consciousness and Linked Fate." *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (1): 160-174.
- Seligman, Martin E. P. 1972. "Learned Helplessness." *Annual Review of Medicine* 23: 407-412.
- Shannon, Sarah K. S., Christopher Uggen, Jason Schnittker, Melissa Thompson, Sara Wakefield, Michael Massoglia. 2017. "The Growth, Scope, and Spatial Distribution of People with Felony Records in the United States, 1948-2010." *Demography* 54: 1795-1818.
- Simien, Evelyn. 2005. "Race, Gender, and Linked Fate." *Journal of Black Studies* 35 (5): 529-550.
- Singer, Glen. 2000. "Prison Libraries Inside Out." *Education Libraries* 24 (1): 11-16.

Soderstrom, Irina R. 2007. "Mental Illness in Offender Populations." *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 45 (1/2): 1-17.

Stokes, Atiya K. 2003. "Latino Group Consciousness and Political Participation." *American Politics Research* 31 (4): 361-378.

Sukhatme, Neel U., Alexander Billy, Michael Yang, Justin Lind, Gaurav Bagwe, Susan Pratt, Logan Reitz, Arturo Romero Yáñez, and Michael Rieger. 2020. "Free Our Vote: A Free Resource for People with Felony Convictions in Florida." Free Our Vote. <https://freeourvote.com/index.html#>

Tate, Katherine. 1994. "From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections." Russell Sage Foundation.

Tewksbury, Richard A. 2006. "Behind Bars: Readings on Prison Culture." Upper Saddle River: Pearson and Prentice Hall.

Travis, Jeremy, Bruce Western, and Steve F. Redburn. 2014. "The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences." Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Uhlener, Carole J., Bruce E. Cain, and D. Roderick Kiewiet. 1989. "Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities in the 1980s." *Political Behavior* 11 (3): 195-231.

Verba, Sidney and Norman H. Nie. 1972. "Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality." New York: Harper and Row.

Weaver, Velsa M., and Amy E. Lerman. 2010. "Political Consequences of the Carceral State." *The American Political Science Review* 104 (4): 817-833.

Western, Bruce. 2006. "Punishment and Inequality in America." *Socio-Economic Review* 5 (3): 569-584. New York Russell Sage Foundation.

White, Ariel. 2019. "Misdemeanor Disenfranchisement? The Demobilizing Effects of Brief Jail Spells on Potential Voters." *American Political Science Review* 113 (2): 311-324.

Wilcox, Clyde and Leopoldo Gomez. 1990. "Religion, Group Identification, and Politics among American Blacks." *Sociological Analysis* 51 (3): 271-285.

Witherspoon, Floyd D. 2007. "The Mass Incarceration of African-American Males: A Return to Institutionalized Slavery, Oppression, and Disenfranchisement of Constitutional Rights." *Texas Wesleyan Law Review* 13 (2): 599-618.

Wong, Cara and Grace E. Cho. 2005. "Two-Headed Coins or Kandinskys: White Racial Identification." *Political Psychology* 26 (5): 699-720.

Wood, Erika L. 2016. "Florida: An Outlier in Denying Voting Rights." New York University School of Law.
https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Florida_Voting_Rights_Outlier.pdf

Wright Austin, Sharon D., Richard T. Middleton, Racheal Yon. 2011. "The Effect of Racial Group Consciousness on the Political Participation of African Americans and Black Ethnics in Miami-Dade County, Florida." *Political Research Quarterly* 65 (3): 629-641.

VITA

RoShaun Colvin

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: RACE, INCARCERATION, AND INMATES' POLITICAL MOTIVATION

Major Field: Political Science

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Political Science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2021.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Sociology at Harris-Stowe State University, Saint Louis, Missouri in 2019.

Experience:

OSU Graduate Teaching Assistant, Fall 2019 – Present

Ranson Campaign Field Coordinator, May 2020 – November 2020