

Voting Behavior in an Era of Turbulent Race Relations: Revisiting Church Attendance and Turnout

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Abstract : A central and enduring theme in the study of American politics is political participation, which indicates the health of a democracy, citizen buy-in, and fair political representation. Though voting push factors have been thoroughly researched and are becoming better understood, the effect of those same push factors often varies for marginalized people. Black voters begun to cast votes at a steadily increasing rate following the 1996 election, gradually growing to its highest level in the 2012 presidential election, even surpassing white voter participation rates. The thirty-year growth period of Black voter engagement concluded in the 2016 election, with the number of participating Black voters stumbling by approximately 7% while other demographics remained roughly the same. Theories for the shift in Black voter behavior range from vote suppression to discouragement due to Barack Obama's concluding tenure in office. Furthermore, Black voter engagement rebounded in the 2020 election, leaving turnout and race scholars to speculate even further, predicting that disapproval of Trump energized the Black voter bloc. Though there is much conjecture regarding the changes in Black voter behavior, there is truly little empirical evidence to vet those suppositions. This study engages and quantifies speculations for the changes in Black voter engagement in recent elections using 2016 and 2020 American National Election Studies Pilot Study data. Additionally, this study expands upon McGregor's theory of political hypervigilance by exploring differences in political engagement for church-attending Black voters and those that do not.

Keywords : race, religion, evangelicalism, political engagement

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