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**Who Belongs in American Democracy? The importance of belonging to political
engagement for underrepresented groups**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science and International Affairs

by

Kristy M. Pathakis

Committee in charge:

Professor Zoltan Hajnal, Chair
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Professor Molly Roberts

2020

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The dissertation of Kristy M. Pathakis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

DEDICATION

For my mom, who has found her political voice, and is using it to improve her community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Vita	xii
Abstract of the Dissertation	xiii
1 Introduction: The implications of belonging on political engagement for underrepresented Americans	1
2 Who Belongs? How political belonging uncertainty stifles the political voices of minorities in America	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Literature Review	10
2.3 What is belonging uncertainty?	11
2.4 The role of political belonging uncertainty in decreasing expression: Theory	12
2.5 Identifying political belonging uncertainty as a culprit in decreased opinion reporting	16
2.5.1 Establishing the race gap in opinion reporting: Data and results	16
2.5.2 A sense of political belonging matters for engagement in politics	23
2.6 Discussion	27
3 In my Humble Non-Opinion: The gender gap in opinion reporting	28
3.1 Introduction	28
3.2 The impact of information thresholds on reporting opinions: Theory	32
3.3 Exposing the Role of Information Thresholds: Research Design	34
3.4 Results	38
3.5 Discussion	47
4 Conclusion	50

A	Supplementary Tables and Figures	52
A.1	Questions used to create “Don’t know” variable	52
A.2	Supplemental tables and figures to Chapter 3	59
A.3	Supplemental Tables and Figures to Chapter 2	64
B	Robustness checks	68
	Bibliography	71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1:	Effect of race on non-opinion response rate	19
Figure 2.2:	Race gaps in raw means of education, political knowledge, attention to politics, and age	20
Figure 2.3:	Responses to belonging questions by race	24
Figure 2.4:	Reported level of acceptance in politics by race	25
Figure 2.5:	Predicted non-opinion response rate, race interacted with acceptance	26
Figure 3.1:	Information Thresholds for Reporting Opinions	33
Figure 3.2:	Distribution of non-opinion response rates in the 2016 ANES	35
Figure 3.3:	Raw means of non-opinion response	37
Figure 3.4:	Effect of gender on “don’t know” rate	39
Figure 3.5:	Predicted non-opinion response rate by interview type and gender	44
Figure 3.6:	Gender gap in information requested before offering opinions	45
Figure A.1:	Reported opinions (gender)	62
Figure A.2:	Attention to politics	62
Figure A.3:	Effect of gender on non-opinion responses to fictitious questions	63
Figure A.4:	Reported opinions (race)	64
Figure A.5:	Mean non-opinion responses by reported opinions	64
Figure B.1:	Findings from 2012 ANES data	69

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	Don't Know Rates by Race	18
Table 2.2:	Effect of Race and Belonging on Don't Know Rate	26
Table 3.1:	Average Don't Know response rate by gender (Reykjavik)	42
Table 3.2:	Average Don't Know response rate by gender (interest rate restructuring) . .	43
Table 3.3:	Percent of respondents who report participating	47
Table A.1:	2016 ANES Questions (Pre-election wave)	52
Table A.2:	2016 ANES Questions (Post-election wave)	55
Table A.3:	DK variable	59
Table A.4:	Effect of Gender on Don't Know Rate	60
Table A.5:	Effect of gender on "don't know" answers to fictitious policy questions [†] . .	61
Table A.6:	Effect of Race on Don't Know Rate	65
Table A.7:	Effect of Race on Don't Know Responses (Poisson distribution)	66
Table A.8:	Summary statistics by race	67
Table B.1:	Effect of Gender on Number of Don't Know Responses (Poisson distribution)	68
Table B.2:	Effect of gender on non-opinion responses, 2012 ANES	70

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Of course, I have to thank my mother, who has made countless sacrifices for me. When my mom was nineteen years old, she was becoming a mother. When I was nineteen years old, I was pursuing a college degree, and it is in large part because of how she handled the challenge of becoming a mother at such a young age. Her pride in me kept pushing me to do more, and my biggest motivator from the time I realized the incredible courage, determination, and sacrifice she has made in her life, has been to make sure that all the work she had to do was not in vain. My mom is, and always has been, proud of me and all of my siblings, and it didn't take a degree to make her proud. More importantly, she has given me a blueprint for the kind of person I want to be. Everyday, I aspire to be as compassionate, self-sacrificing, resilient, and kind as she is. And let's just be honest, she's not mad about the bragging rights she's gained in having a daughter

with the title "doctor." She has recently become very politically active in her community and has made real improvements for her neighbors, which has earned her well-deserved recognition and praise. And so my mom continues to show me how I can be a better person and make positive change in the world.

Instead of individually thanking the many, many friends who have supported me, some since childhood, I will just say that I have been incredibly fortunate in my life to have built up a coalition of wonderful, supportive, truly exceptional friends. The list includes some of the strongest, hardest-working women I've ever met. And, of course, my biggest fan and supporter, Chris, whom I was fortunate enough to meet and marry during grad school—none of this would have been possible without him.

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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Who Belongs in American Democracy? The importance of belonging to political engagement for underrepresented groups

by

Kristy M. Pathakis

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and International Affairs

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor Zoltan Hajnal, Chair

The history of exclusion and discrimination in American politics makes it difficult for the targeted groups to realize a sense of political belonging. This creates a barrier to political expression that exacerbates resource-based barriers, like education and income. I draw from theories of stereotype threat and belonging uncertainty in social psychology to introduce a theory of *political belonging uncertainty*. One important way that political belonging uncertainty manifests is in a preference to know more about a topic before reporting opinions. As a result, opinion surveys underrepresent the opinions of minorities and women. First, using data from nationally representative surveys, I show that, even holding constant education and political

knowledge, women, African Americans and Latinx Americans offer fewer opinions than white Americans. I develop a measure of political belonging uncertainty and I show that political belonging uncertainty contributes to lower expression. I also present results from a survey showing that, when given the option, women and black Americans ask for more information before offering opinions—even when starting from the same level of political knowledge and education as white men. In contrast to activities that require more effort and more time, responding to a political opinion question should be relatively low-effort, and also comparatively private. Thus, I argue that this applies to lower levels of political engagement generally. This paper contributes to literature on non-response to opinion questions and minority political behavior, specifically from a political psychology perspective.

1 Introduction: The implications of belonging on political engagement for underrepresented Americans

One need not look very far to find examples of gender and racial discrimination in America. The outbreak of widespread protests following the murder of George Floyd by police in May 2020 has made it impossible for any American to ignore the racial injustice in the United States. And the #MeToo movement shined a spotlight on abusive men, but these are not new problems, by any means. American politics has been an upper class white man's game since the first Western explorers set foot on the New World. This historical truth has led to centuries of oppression. Europeans in the New World oppressed the people who were already there, brought people whom they then enslaved in order to profit off their labor, and oppressed—and do so even today—new arrivals. First, Native Americans were excluded from the government of the land they had inhabited for centuries. Then, Africans were forcibly brought to the territories and sold as property, without even a semblance of political personhood. Throughout all of this, and dating back as long as dating goes back, women were subservient to their fathers and husbands, with little say in how policies were made. Fast-forward to today and we see the effects continuing to permeate American society. Native Americans are all but gone; black Americans continue to face systemic racism, and women have yet to achieve parity in most of society's institutions. The institutional disadvantages faced by groups that remain underrepresented in American political life are often blamed for the perpetuation of this reality, however I will argue that there are also psychological effects that create further barriers to political participation for members of these

groups. As outsiders to the system, women, minorities, Americans from low-income backgrounds, and immigrants don't have a sense of belonging that would fuel a motivation to participate. The psychology that grows from social experiences is different for each of these groups, but I will show that despite this difference, it manifests itself in similar ways. The social experience of marginalized groups leads to a lack of a sense of political belonging that the dominant group takes for granted. Many women and, to a much larger degree, minorities, know what it feels like to be the only person in a room "like them;" they experience this in school, especially in higher education, in the workplace, particularly at the executive level, and in all the halls of political power in America. All of these social experiences translate into an increased feeling of exclusion from mainstream politics.

That racial and ethnic minorities and women enjoy a lower status than white men is well-recognized by the literature—I do not dwell on convincing the reader of that. What I contribute here goes beyond typical resource arguments of political underrepresentation and explores the psychological barriers and how they are built in the minds of the individuals who comprise these groups. In the American system of government, all citizens have a right to express their views. This right is protected by the US Constitution and is one of the cornerstones of American democracy. A citizen has a variety of options from which to choose when she wants to make her preferences known. She can write her elected representatives, donate money or time to campaigns, vote, sign petitions, take to the streets in protest, run for office herself, or, when asked, respond to political surveys. Political voice is how citizens communicate their preferences to those in power and also how they provide them with the incentives to listen—an unresponsive politician can be kicked out of office or supporters can stop volunteering for campaign efforts and donating money. In order to formulate responsive policy—and understand how to win reelection—politicians rely on constituents to communicate their preferences. One common source of information on policy preferences is the public opinion survey. Large, nationally representative surveys frequently go out to the public in order to gauge its views on myriad topics. When citizens express their

opinions on a survey, then, it follows that the results should be as free of bias as possible; it should not systematically underrepresent some opinions and privilege others.

Nevertheless, not all voices are equally expressed or responded to. Schattschneider (1960) pointedly critiqued the “upper class accent” of the American pluralist choir, and many studies have confirmed that the affluent tend to be better positioned to express their voices and to have their preferred policies enacted (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 2012, for example). Racial and ethnic minorities in America are also underrepresented on both the participation and the representation side of politics (Griffin and Newman, 2008), and they comprise a disproportionate share of the bottom quintile of the income distribution, so they may face higher barriers when attempting to have their voices translated into policy and representation (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). Indeed, Hajnal (2009) finds that African Americans end up on the losing side of elections more than any other group. Not only are they the group that loses the most, blacks are also the only group that loses the majority of the time in the majority of elections, whereas most whites win in most elections. This is not to discount the importance of recent victories, nor to understate the importance of voting as a direct way that citizens make their voices heard—the last several Congresses have set records for diversity.

The 2018 election resulted in a Congress that is twenty-two percent non-white; twelve percent of elected House members are black, almost on par with their proportion of the US population (13.4 percent). A record thirty-eight Latinos and Latinas were returned or newly elected to the 116th Congress—8.7 percent of the House. If these numbers were on par with their proportion of the US population (around 17 percent), however, we would have approximately 77 Latinx representatives. Contrast this with the seventy-eight percent of the House that is white, compared with their sixty-one percent of the US population. In the Senate, there are three black senators currently serving, important because it is the first time in history that this many black senators have served at the same time, but this is nowhere near representative of the black population, and there are no sitting black governors (Brown and Atske, 2019). There are four

Latinx Senators and one sitting governor, and forty-seven of the country's fifty governors are white.¹ All of these signals could be construed as confirming a hypothesis of non-belonging. Certainly, in the 2008 and 2012 elections, African Americans turned out in record numbers, even surpassing white turnout in the 2012 election. Since then, however, turnout rates have declined. In the 2016 presidential election, turnout among African Americans fell 7.1 percent to 59.6 percent, compared to 66.6 percent in 2012 (Frey, 2017). Hispanic turnout was also at record levels in 2008, with half of eligible voters in that group going to the polls, up over two percentage points over 2004 (Lopez and Taylor, 2009). This share fell slightly in 2012, but remained comparatively high, at 48 percent of eligible Latinx voters (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). Voters from these groups have shown promise in recent elections, but their presence at the polls has not stayed constant.

Demonstrating the depth and contours of these gaps, and understanding what drives them, is important because lower rates of opinion reporting can impact how academics, politicians, and others involved in formulating public policy read public opinion. The problem is not simply that the opinions come disproportionately from white men, but that women and minorities have systematically different opinions than men on a variety of policy issues. Women comprise half of the population, and more than half of the electorate. So if women's opinions are underrepresented, the resulting picture of Americans' policy preferences will be distorted. Scholars have found, for example, that women tend to be less likely to support belligerent policies than men; such as wars of conquest and unilateral wars (Brooks and Valentino, 2011; Conover and Sapiro, 1993), so if women are more likely to respond "don't know" to questions about US military involvement in the world, the government may get a more aggressive read of the public and receive a softer check on intervention than it should. Gender gaps have also been demonstrated on issues such as gay rights, and social welfare spending (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999), so skewed equal rights policies and less redistribution and spending on the poor than the public desires may result.

¹The remaining two are Asian (HI) and Cherokee (OK).

Women also tend to be more protectionist on trade policy (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009; Mansfield, Mutz and Silver, 2014), more pessimistic about nuclear war (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach, 1991), prefer stricter gun laws (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986), and favor more environmental protection (Wirks, 1986). If the gender gap extends to “don’t know” responses on these issues, biases are likely to exist. And opinions are radically different on many issues between black and white Americans. So, aside from the broader argument that political expression is skewed in favor of the dominant group in American politics (i.e. white men), even in this relatively low-effort area of political participation the gaps are potentially quite meaningful.²

In each chapter, I will argue and show, that even when we control for the resource barriers that we know exist and prevent marginalized groups from achieving their full political potential, there are insidious psychological barriers that decrease their motivation to participate. In Chapter 2, I show that African-Americans’ lower propensity to offer opinions is rooted in the psychological effects of not feeling a full sense of belonging in political life. These effects are distinct from those of women, but are even more pernicious, especially in light of research showing that black Americans end up losing in politics more than any other group. It is not hard to imagine why African Americans and Latinx Americans may not feel a strong sense of inclusion in the decision making in US politics, or why they may feel uncertain about the potential reactions to their self-expression, and are thus hesitant to speak up, whereas their white counterparts do not experience this same uncertainty, instead feeling entitled to speak up freely. I rely on survey data and my own experiments to show that African Americans and Latinx Americans report a lower sense of political belonging than white Americans, even controlling for factors like political knowledge, education and others. I also show that respondents who do not feel welcome in the political discourse are less likely to offer opinions or seek to learn more about becoming politically active.

²I extend “political participation” broadly to include responding to political opinion questions in surveys. As Althaus (2003) points out, responding to these types of questions is one manner of opinion expression, as are voting and donating money (p. 77).

In Chapter 3, I will use observational data from large-n representative studies to show that the typical explanations for lower participation by women do not fully explain why women continue to participate in many activities at lower rates than men—even in the era of #MeToo and with record numbers of female candidates for political office. Relying on my own surveys and experiments, I argue that women, because of differences in socialization stemming from childhood, are hesitant to speak up, whereas men feel some amount of pressure to have and express opinions, leaving many female voices stifled.

In addition to showing a lower sense of political belonging among members of these groups, I also develop a theory of informational thresholds. I argue that one way that women and minorities can overcome their insecurity about belonging is by becoming even more informed than white men. It is not the case that more informed women express their opinions as much as men, rather, at every level of education or political knowledge, even the very high levels, women are less willing to give their opinions. When I give women and African Americans the chance to become more informed about a policy, they want to become more informed than their white male counterparts do before offering their views.

What I will show in this research is that there are under-appreciated and under-explored psychological factors deterring those who are not part of the dominant group from participating in politics. A strictly rational choice approach to studying political behavior—one primarily motivated by material concerns—misses the non-material barriers that marginalized groups face. I rely on survey data from a variety of sources, including the American National Election Studies, the Cooperative Congressional Election Studies, and others, as well as surveys and experiments of my own design to build a strong empirical foundation for my theoretical approach. One upshot of my work is that men, and especially white men, may be giving less informed opinions than others, which may have implications for the way we use survey data to take the public's temperature. Women and African Americans seem to be holding back their opinions, even when their white male counterparts, equal in every other way, are offering them. Especially in today's climate, with

calls coming from all over the country to reform—even abolish—the police, to make access to voting easier, to hold men accountable for their inappropriate behavior, and to acknowledge that black lives matter, this work can help to shed light on some of the ways that American society might be able to begin to remedy some of the evils that have been festering for centuries.

2 Who Belongs? How political belonging uncertainty stifles the political voices of minorities in America

2.1 Introduction

We care about having all voices represented in political discourse because the policy outcomes that result affect everyone. Dawson (2011) argues that “politics is fundamentally shaped by a racial order, which both substantially influences life outcomes based on race and conditions the kind of attention that is paid to that fact” (p. xi). Schlozman, Verba and Brady (2012) point out that those who do not speak loudly enough for politicians to hear leave politicians no way to gather the information they need to enact responsive policy and leave them with no pressure to act in their interest. Thus, the distribution of participation is important and it should be representative regardless of whether overall levels of participation are high or low.

In this chapter, I argue that one determinant of political expression is the extent to which one feels they are welcome in the political discourse, in other words, whether an individual feels a sense of belonging in American politics. I argue that in the domain of politics, African Americans and Latinx Americans may not feel like they belong and this discourages them from fully engaging when asked about their opinions on these matters. To make this argument, I leverage observational data from the 2016 American National Election Study to show that Black and Brown Americans express their political views less than white Americans. Black respondents offer about 1.9 percent more “don’t know” answers, and Latinx respondents offer about 1.4

percent more, than white respondents when asked for their opinions about policies, all else equal. I also develop a measure of political belonging and show that African Americans and Latinx Americans do feel less welcome in the political discourse, and that this has an impact on their willingness to report opinions and their interest in learning more about being politically active. Further, I show that one way this political belonging uncertainty manifests is in a desire to be more informed before offering opinions. Feeling more informed about the political issues in question may offset political belonging uncertainty by increasing the individual's perceived qualifications for political expression.

In the pages that follow, I introduce a theory of *political belonging uncertainty*. I argue that American politics has not fostered a feeling of inclusion for African Americans or Latinx Americans, and feeling like outsiders creates a psychological barrier to political engagement that leaves them less willing to voice their opinions than whites. Specifically, I show that there is a large and statistically significant race gap in political opinion reporting, despite the absence of a gap in how many opinions and how important respondents report having opinions is to them. I use data from large, nationally representative surveys and my own surveys to rule out other potential explanations and to show that political belonging uncertainty has explanatory power. By controlling for theoretically important demographic and resource variables, this analysis shows that other explanations cannot fully explain the race gap in responsiveness. Instead, I argue that feeling excluded from the politics of their country discourages members of these groups from fully engaging. Beyond these findings, I argue that this phenomenon contributes to lower levels of engagement across the political spectrum. This analysis provides a more complete understanding of “don't know” responses to opinion questions on surveys. Importantly, though, I go beyond typical explanations of lower political engagement and incorporate the important, yet largely overlooked, role of political belonging into the analysis.

2.2 Literature Review

There are a number of explanations for respondents' propensity to give a "don't know" response on a survey. In addition to simply not having an opinion, ambivalence about an issue may lead a person to choose the non-opinion option (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002). Participants may try to give an opinion that is socially desirable, even if that is not their true opinion. We know from Berinsky (2004) that people holding racist views often hide behind the "don't know" response. Berinsky (2004) finds that those holding unpopular opinions on racial policies, like segregation and busing, were reluctant to express those opinions to interviewers. He finds that support for policies like desegregation were exaggerated because of this "exclusion bias." On the other side of that, we do not know much about how racism may affect the propensity of discriminated groups to give "don't know" responses. Althaus (2003) argues that it is the ill-informed that give "don't know" answers more often. He shows that the opinions we get in surveys come disproportionately from white, male, affluent respondents. I will show the voices of Black and Brown Americans are partially and disproportionately silenced in opinion polls, and I will also show that in this case, it is not simply a matter of ambivalence, social desirability bias, or low information, but that there is a deeper psychologically-rooted explanation.

As Berinsky (2004) cautions, "the very process of measuring and collecting individual attitudes through opinion surveys may foster biases. We must therefore be attentive to precisely which groups of individuals pay disproportionate (albeit small) costs to answer such questions" (p. 33).

Stereotype threat influences how survey respondents answer questions. Davis and Silver (2003) find that Black survey respondents give fewer correct answers to political knowledge questions when asked over the phone by an interviewer whom they perceive to be white. When a stereotype is made salient (and often when it is not), stereotype threat has been shown to hurt the performance of the stereotyped group in many contexts. Women perform worse when

a gender stereotype is made salient on math tests (Spencer, Steele and Quinn, 1999), and on political knowledge questions (McGlone, Aronson and Kobrynowicz, 2006), and individuals from low-SES backgrounds perform worse on the GRE (Croizet and Claire, 1998).

2.3 What is belonging uncertainty?

Humans are social animals. As such, we need to feel connected to others. Social connection is a fundamental need (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and is linked to positive outcomes in academic settings (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; Walton and Cohen, 2007) and better health outcomes (Bolger, Zuckerman and Kessler, 2000; Spiegel et al., 1989), whereas social exclusion is correlated with worse outcomes, including with physical pain (MacDonald and Leary, 2005). In the workplace, the extent to which a person feels they belong has implications for their psychological health and is an important correlate with depressive symptoms (Cockshaw and Shochet, 2010). In the academic setting, this can undermine motivation and achievement, and the uncertainty around belonging can stem from social fit or academic capabilities (Lewis and Hodges, 2015). It is well-established that feeling welcome at work or at school is important for outcomes in those domains, so why should politics be different? We choose parties, we rally around candidates and ideas, we try to advocate for our preferred policies—all things that are helped if we feel a social connection.

When belonging uncertainty is related to capabilities, we call this ability uncertainty and it is closely linked to self-efficacy, which has long been measured with respect to politics (Beaumont, 2011; Philpot, Shaw and McGowen, 2009). People low in self- or internal-efficacy do not generally feel like anything they do can have an impact on political outcomes.

Belonging *uncertainty* is present when a person is particularly prone to perceiving threats in the environment. She forms a hypothesis that she does not belong in the domain in question (Walton and Cohen, 2007), and then interprets the signals around her as confirmation of that

hypothesis. This is especially true for marginalized and stereotyped groups. In a domain where their identities are activated, for example in an academic domain where African Americans are negatively stereotyped, they are likely to doubt their belonging and interpret external cues as being targeted at their identity. American political discourse is rife with identity-engaging cues and discussions. Politicians across the political spectrum appeal to identity politics in attempts to make inclusive appeals as well as to stoke fear of the “other”. When identity is engaged in this way, it can trigger a process of vigilance, whereby individuals look for cues that either confirm or dispel their hypothesis that they do not belong. People who are high in belonging uncertainty are likely to find and interpret cues as confirmatory (Cohen and Garcia, 2008). When caught in this recursive cycle of feeling alienated from politics and then finding confirmatory evidence, I argue, people become further disillusioned and unmotivated to engage in the political process. This is more likely for Americans of color, for whom politics has historically never been a particularly friendly domain. Imagine, for example, you hear news stories about people being prevented from voting. Many Americans would feel that is unfair. If you are an African American, however, and have learned about efforts to block voters “like you” dating to the founding of the country, or if you are a Mexican American and you hear a presidential candidate disparaging Mexicans, you may see that as confirmation that you are not welcome in American political life.

2.4 The role of political belonging uncertainty in decreasing expression: Theory

In this section, I will lay out my theory that a sense of *political belonging uncertainty* is responsible for the decreased willingness of African Americans and Latinx Americans to offer opinions on political matters in response to questions on public opinion surveys. Research in social psychology has shown that feeling like one does not belong in a domain can hurt performance in that domain. As Steele (1997) points out, in order for a person to incorporate a

positive identity in a particular domain, that person “must perceive good prospects in the domain, that is, that one has the interests, skills, resources, and opportunities to prosper there, as well as that one belongs there, in the sense of being accepted and valued in the domain” (p. 613). I argue that those conditions do not obtain for Black and Latinx Americans in the political domain. Additionally, when a stereotyped group has a stereotype activated in some context, members of this group can experience decreased performance because the cognitive costs associated with performing the task are increased (Steele, 1997). I combine the ideas of stereotype threat and political belonging uncertainty and show that these two phenomena contribute to a psychological barrier to opinion expression among African Americans and Latinx Americans. I will also discuss the implications for other forms of political engagement.

Past work on belonging uncertainty has largely been done in academic settings. The present theory of *political belonging uncertainty* makes at least one subtle deviation. By definition, Americans “belong” in all aspects of US politics. But one may acknowledge that they have the right to participate without feeling they are welcome in the political life of the nation. It is this feeling of unwelcomeness that I assert is a cause of lower political engagement among the groups under study here. Schlozman, Verba and Brady (2012) identify three ingredients that are necessary for any individual to participate in politics: the motivation, access to relevant resources, and connection to social networks that foster participation. We know that African Americans and Latinx Americans have less access to the types of resources that increase participation, like income and education, and Dawson (2011) identifies a decline in participation in the types of institutions that foster social networks traditionally linked to Black political activism. This paper will shed light on uncertainty about belonging, which undermines the motivation to participate.

We know that in other domains, racial and ethnic minorities assess their qualifications differently than whites and can “perform their identities” differently as well. For example, members of negatively stereotyped groups often alter their identities in the workplace and overburden themselves with work relative to their white counterparts and attempt to behave more

in line with what they perceive to be the valued qualities of the organization (Carbado and Gulati, 1999).

If members of marginalized groups doubt that their voices are welcome in the politics of their country, this doubt might be confirmed by a variety of policies and institutions. King and Smith (2008), in their argument that no political science question can be adequately addressed absent a consideration of America's racial orders, observe that "many of the institutionalized inequities in schooling, jobs, education, and political offices created by the Jim Crow order still endure" (p. 93). Writing about hurricane Katrina and its impact on Black politics, Dawson (2011) asks whether the reaction to the disaster was merely that of an unprepared or incompetent government, or if it was "proof, once again, that some Americans count for more than others, and that skin color provides a brutally direct indication of who does count and who does not" (p. xv). Criminal justice policies may also reinforce a sense of political belonging uncertainty. For example, one in nine men born in 2001 living in the United States can expect to be imprisoned at some point. If we subset this statistic by race, the disparity is glaring: one in seventeen white men compared to one in three Black men will be incarcerated at some point in their lives (The Sentencing Project, 2019).

Even the rules once at the polls leave Black Americans behind, as Trebbi, Aghion and Alesina (2008) show in their study of southern cities using winner-take-all rules. Hajnal (2009) suggests that these rules contribute to the finding that Blacks lose in elections more often than any other group. Voter ID laws have recently gained a foothold in some states and Hajnal, Lajevardi and Nielson (2017) find that they disproportionately depress turnout among minorities. Even mobilization efforts neglect minorities (Ramírez, Solano and Wilcox-Archuleta, 2018). One experimental study also found that when legislators received requests for help with registering to vote, white legislators from both parties were more likely to reply to the white alias, while minority legislators were more responsive to the Black-sounding alias, more evidence that the white political establishment is unwelcoming to minorities (Butler and Broockman, 2011). And

the inequality in communication goes both ways. Broockman (2014) finds that constituents are less likely to contact legislators who are of a different race, potentially exacerbating the gap in representation. All of these things serve as exclusionary signals, which may confirm already-held beliefs about belonging in politics.

If Black and Brown Americans perceive that they are unwelcome in politics, and have this belief repeatedly confirmed, it is likely to have an impact on their engagement in politics, just as it has been found to do in academic environments (Walton and Cohen, 2007). Hearing from all Americans is important because people hold a variety of positions on different political policies. For example, we know that opinions differ systematically between Blacks and whites on important social issues such as welfare spending, health care, crime, affirmative action, job discrimination, civil rights (Griffin and Newman, 2008), and questions of war and peace (Dawson, 2011). Not only is this difference substantial, the ordering of priorities is also different between these two groups (Griffin and Newman, 2008). The systematic difference in opinions on many issues may be exacerbated by the finding that “the politically relevant resources—such as education and income—that facilitate the formation of coherent and consistent opinions on social welfare policies also predispose citizens to oppose the maintenance and expansion of welfare state programs” (Berinsky, 2004, p. 11). Following hurricane Katrina, there were stark racial divides on a number of policy issues, including the war in Iraq, and Dawson (2011) argues that Blacks were left feeling “politically isolated and bitterly disillusioned about the state of affairs of the nation” (p. 4). This crisis highlighted the difficulty that African Americans have in “injecting their viewpoints on a sustained basis” on issues important to the majority of African Americans (p. 13). And the frustration stemming from this continued even during the candidacy of Barack Obama.

The next section will put my theory to the test in several ways. First, I will show that is a gap in opinion expression between white respondents and African American respondents, and between white respondents and Latinx respondents, and that these race gaps are not eliminated

by controlling for material and political resources or demographic characteristics. In addition to confirming that minorities are less willing to offer opinions, I confirm, using surveys, that Americans of color do report feeling lower levels of belonging in politics than white Americans.

2.5 Identifying political belonging uncertainty as a culprit in decreased opinion reporting

The first goal I laid out in the beginning of this paper is to demonstrate that Americans of color express their political opinions less frequently than white Americans. To accomplish this first goal, I use data from the 2016 American National Election Study. The second goal is to establish and validate a measure of political belonging uncertainty and show that Black and Brown Americans are more likely to report higher levels of uncertainty about whether they belong and lower levels of political belonging than whites. Further, I set out to show that if I experimentally threaten political belonging, it has a stifling effect on political opinion expression and on a desire to become more engaged in politics generally. This section will explain the approaches and data used to achieve each of these goals.

2.5.1 Establishing the race gap in opinion reporting: Data and results

To demonstrate that Black and Latinx Americans offer fewer opinions, and to show that this is the case even when accounting for education, income, age, and other theoretically relevant variables that might influence how a person approaches reporting her opinions, and to illuminate other patterns in the data that highlight the puzzling nature of this race gap, I use data from the 2016 American National Election Study.¹ The dependent variable is the rate of non-opinion responses to political questions in the ANES. To construct the dependent variable, *Don't know*, I aggregate eighty-five questions from the 2016 ANES that ask for opinions about political matters.

¹Results are confirmed in the 2012 study, and several other studies I have run. See Appendix ?? for those results.

For each respondent, each of these questions gets either a 1, if they gave a non-opinion response (e.g., “don’t know”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “neither favor nor oppose”), or a 0, if they gave an opinion.² I turn this count variable into a rate of non-opinion responding. For the analysis, I use OLS regression with robust standard errors.³

There are three explanatory variables in this analysis. One is *Black*, one is *Latinx*, and the last combines the two, *BlackLatinx*. To construct the first two, I create dichotomous variables that take on a value of 1 if the respondent reported being African American or Latinx American, respectively, and a value of 0 if the respondent reported being white. The third variable has a value of 1 if a respondent reported membership in either of the two groups. For the purpose of this analysis, I only compare each group to white Americans. I make this choice based on the role of whites in the political history of America as the dominant group.⁴

For most respondents, the rate of non-opinion responding is less than ten percent—most respondents give substantive opinions to most of the opinion questions they are asked. On average, respondents give 6.88 non-opinion responses to eighty-five opinion questions, which is an average rate of just over eight percent. If all respondents reported not having, or not knowing their opinions at the same rate, there probably would not be cause for concern; after all, not everyone has an opinion on every political question. If we disaggregate this rate by race, we see that this is not the case. Table 2.1 shows the rates of non-opinion response by race. Black respondents are almost two percentage points more likely than white Americans to offer a non-opinion response when asked about political matters, and Latinx Americans are about 1.5 percentage points more likely than whites to do so. We might not be concerned by such a gap if there were no systematic differences in the types of opinions these groups hold, however, as Kinder and Sanders (1996)

²I code the DV in several different ways to check for robustness: using all categories, using only the “don’t know” option, and using only the “neither/nor” option. FINDINGS ARE ROBUST TO ALL CODING APPROACHES.

³Results are substantively unchanged using Poisson, see Appendix ??.

⁴The absence of other racial and ethnic minorities from this analysis should not be interpreted as a lack of importance to the author, but only a lack of data. The history of political exclusion and discrimination for other groups, including, but not limited to, Native Americans and Asian Americans is just as relevant as it is for the groups under study here and I hope to address the role of belonging for these groups in future work.

put it, the difference in opinions between Black and white Americans is “a divide without peer,” (p. 27) and not only are the differences in opinion vast, the ordering of policy priorities is also different (Griffin and Newman, 2008). If, as Berinsky (2004) argues, “public opinion polls are commonly viewed as a balm that, while imperfect, complements the more restricted and biased forms of participation,” we would certainly want these polls to be as free of the biases that pollute other types of political action as possible (p. 34). These data, however, expose that opinion polls may not be this complementary balm.

Table 2.1: Don’t Know Rates by Race

Race	Rate
Black	9.49%
Latinx	9.01%
White	7.59%
Overall	8.09%
Differences for <i>Black</i> vs. <i>White</i> & <i>Latinx</i> vs <i>White</i> significant at $p = 0.000$	

To show that race is a statistically significant predictor of non-opinion responses, I use OLS regression.⁵ I add controls for a number of demographic and resource variables, including the respondent’s highest level of education, self-reported frequency of attention to politics (never=1, always=5), political knowledge (as measured by the number of correct responses to fourteen political knowledge questions), party identification, age, employment status, gender, income, and marital status.⁶

Figure 2.1 plots the coefficients of OLS regression of *Don’t know* on respondent race, with controls. The coefficients on the race variables are significant and substantively large. The variables that are typically pointed to when explaining gaps in political engagement, such as education, age, income, and party ID, do not come close to the substantive effect of race.

⁵Results are the same using Poisson.

⁶See Table A.8 in Appendix A.3 for a balance table. Whites in the sample, on average, are older, more educated, make more money, are more likely to be Republican, report paying more attention to politics, answer more political knowledge questions correctly, and are more likely to be married.

Respondents' level of attention to politics is the only other variable with as strong an effect as race, but it does not eliminate its impact.⁷

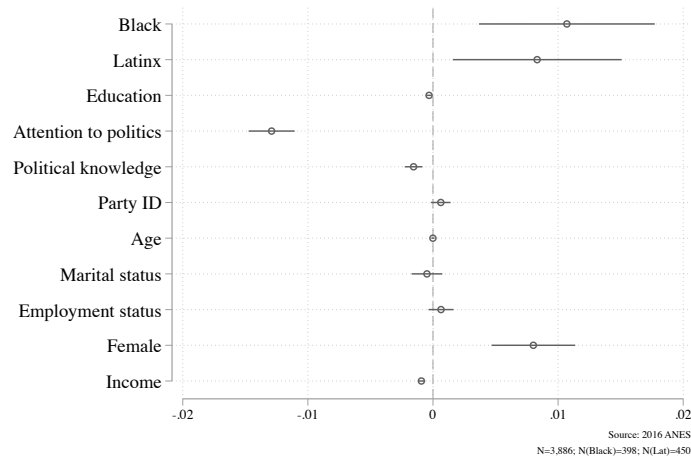


Figure 2.1: Effect of race on non-opinion response rate

To unpack the different contours of this race gap, the graphs in Figure 2.2 isolate the opinion gaps by race for four variables. The top left graph of Figure 2.2 illustrates a couple of interesting things. First, for whites, as education increases, the rate of non-opinion responding decreases in a fairly linear way. This is not so for African Americans. There is a drop for those who complete high school, but then education does not make a difference until a four-year degree is attained, and at higher levels of education, the rate increases again, leaving the gap quite large between Blacks and whites with more than a bachelor's degree. For Latinx respondents, attaining some college education correlates with a steep and steady decrease in non-opinion responding, even to to levels lower than whites after attaining a bachelor's degree.

The top right graph shows that the gap between white and Black Americans is the smallest for those with mid-levels of political knowledge, but, interestingly, grows for those with high levels of political knowledge. The decline in “don't know” responses from middle to high scores on the political knowledge questions is sharper for whites than it is for Blacks, leading to this larger gap for higher-knowledge individuals. And the gap between Latinos and Whites disappears

⁷See Appendix A.3 for full regression tables.

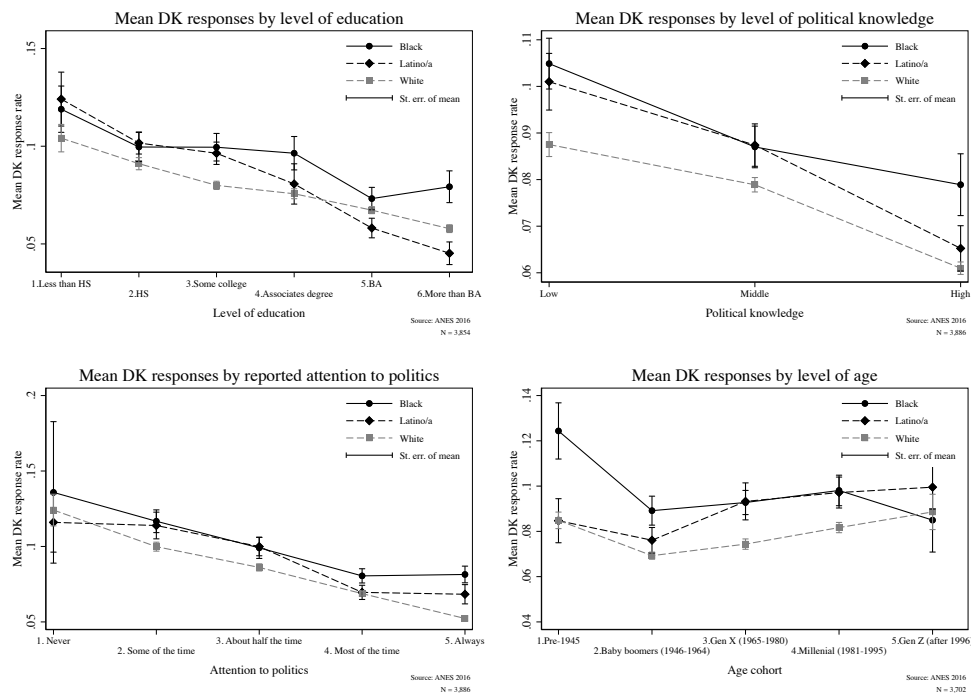


Figure 2.2: Race gaps in raw means of education, political knowledge, attention to politics, and age

at high levels of knowledge. One potential explanation for Black-white pattern is that Blacks who know more about politics are more likely to feel alienated. And this pattern also holds for political attentiveness—the bottom left graph of Figure 2.2 shows a widening of the race gap for those who report that they always pay attention to politics and elections. It seems that, at least for African Americans, being well-educated, well-informed about and attentive to politics is correlated with *increasing* reluctance to report opinions, unlike for white Americans, and with more mixed results for Latinx Americans. Perhaps a light at the end of the tunnel, the bottom right graph of Figure 2.2 shows that for each successive age cohort, the race gap in non-opinion reporting narrows, if only slightly, until it disappears with the youngest cohort.⁸

The 2016 ANES also asks several questions about opinions, which reveal a puzzling contradiction. Instead of reporting holding fewer opinions than average, or that holding strong

⁸Although interpretation should come with some amount of caution, given the small sample of respondents in this group. Of the 75 respondents born after 1996, 66 were white, 37 were Latinx, and only 9 were Black.

opinions was not particularly characteristic of them, both Latinx and African American respondents either did not differ from whites, or were more likely to report having *more* opinions, and they reported that those opinions were more important to them than whites did. For example, the survey asked whether a respondent “likes to have strong opinions even when not personally involved.” There is not a very large or statistically distinguishable difference between Black, Latinx and white respondents. Similarly, when asked to report whether they felt that the statement “I form opinions about everything” was characteristic of them, Black, Latinx and white respondents did not report large differences. When asked whether they had more opinions than the average person, Blacks were more likely to report that this statement was characteristic of them.⁹ Both African American and Latinx respondents were also more likely than whites to say that it is important to hold strong opinions. This is striking because even though Latinx and African Americans report that they have more opinions than average, and that it is important to them to hold strong opinions, and show no differences from whites on the other opinion-related questions, they are systematically more reluctant to report those opinions. And irrespective of whether respondents reported that having more opinions than average was extremely or somewhat uncharacteristic, or extremely or somewhat characteristic of them, Black and Brown respondents offer fewer opinions than their white counterparts.¹⁰

There are several potential explanations for the race gap in opinion reporting. It could be the case that Black respondents decline to give opinions to specific questions, the answers to which may be socially undesirable. Instead of giving an opinion that is different from their true opinion, they may simply decline to answer. In fact, in his study of “don’t know” responses to racially charged questions in surveys conducted during the 1990s, Berinsky (2004) finds that support for policies like desegregation were overestimated due to a systematic reluctance to offer opinions by people who held the socially undesirable opinions and did not want to incur the disdain of the interviewer. If social desirability bias is driving up non-opinion responses in

⁹See Figure A.4 in Appendix A.3.

¹⁰See Figure A.5 in Appendix A.3.

the 2016 ANES, I should find the largest rates of “don’t know” answers on questions that are divisive, politically charged, or personally uncomfortable to answer. But, if it is to explain the race gap, this should only be the case for Blacks, or at least they should be more subject to social desirability than whites.

As an example of a question that may elicit social desirability bias, when asked whether they favored or opposed universities admitting more Black students by considering race in the admissions process, overall, 37.6 percent of respondents declined to offer an opinion. Black and white respondents gave about the same percentage of non-opinion responses to that question, overall (36.4 and 36.2 percent, respectively). Online, white respondents give a non-opinion response (“neither favor nor oppose”), on average, about 37.7 percent of the time while when talking to a person only 32.2 percent of the time ($p = 0.0053$). And Black respondents give a non-opinion response online at a rate of 41 percent versus just under 26 percent when face-to-face ($p = 0.0038$). And white respondents are more likely to say they favor (17.2 percent) affirmative action in university admissions when asked by a person than when asked online (12 percent, difference significant at $p = 0.0002$), while there is no difference in support for Black respondents between the two interview contexts. However, Black respondents are more opposed to this policy when asked by a person and there is no difference in opposition for whites. So white respondents are more favorable toward affirmative action when they have to give their opinion to a person, and Black respondents are more opposed. Sample sizes constrain the analysis by race of interviewer for Black respondents, however, white respondents being interviewed by Black respondents are about twice as likely to favor affirmative action as when they are interviewed by white respondents (31.1 vs. 16.1 percent, respectively, $p = 0.0027$). When interviewed by Black interviewers, white respondents are almost twice as likely as Black respondents to give a non-opinion response. White respondents give the non-opinion option about 38 percent of the time while Black respondents only about 19 percent of the time when interviewed by a Black

person.¹¹ So this one snapshot indicates that if anything, white respondents are pushed toward the non-opinion response *more* than Black respondents by social desirability bias, which does not explain a higher rate of non-opinion responding overall by Black respondents.

I now turn to one factor that I believe does contribute to a higher propensity among Americans of color to select the non-opinion option: belonging.

2.5.2 A sense of political belonging matters for engagement in politics

First, I will demonstrate that there is a difference in how much uncertainty racial minorities and whites report about their belonging in politics. Drawing from research in social psychology on belonging uncertainty in academic settings, I adapt several approaches to the political context (Good, Rattan and Dweck, 2012; Walton and Cohen, 2007).

In an online survey with 632 respondents recruited by Qualtrics¹², I asked respondents several questions about how welcome they feel in US political discourse. I included two items which were designed to measure political belonging uncertainty. When asked "When you hear about people being prevented from voting, how much does it make you feel your voice is unwelcome in politics?" Black respondents were much more likely, and Latinx respondents slightly more likely (although not statistically significantly) than white respondents to say it made them feel that way "A great deal," while white respondents were much more likely than either group to respond that it made them feel that way "Not at all," as Figure 2.3 shows. On the right panel of Figure 2.3, we see a similar pattern in response to the statement: "I feel unwelcome in politics when politicians say negative things about people like me," with both Black and Latinx respondents more likely to report feeling that way "a great deal" than whites.

In a separate study, I asked a battery of questions aimed at measuring respondents' levels of belonging in US politics. I asked ten questions gauging how accepted respondents felt in

¹¹ Again, small sample sizes constrain the analysis. These differences do not reach traditional levels of significance, at $p = 0.0934$. The figures for white interviewers are 31.2 percent and 30 percent, respectively, with $p = .7966$.

¹² 82 Black, 368 white, 36 Latino, 225 male, 261 female

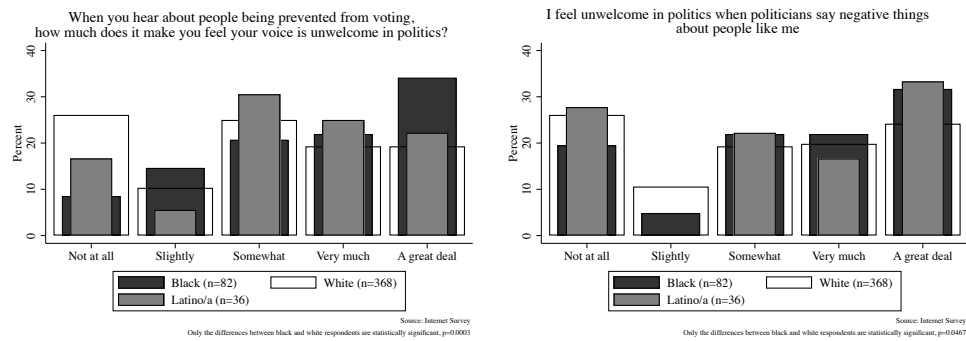


Figure 2.3: Responses to belonging questions by race

politics, and the results follow the pattern I expected. Black and Brown respondents were more likely to report lower levels of acceptance than white respondents, who were more likely to report high levels of acceptance. As Figure 2.4 shows, about 68% of Black and Brown respondents reported low levels of acceptance in US politics compared to only 51% of white respondents. Conversely, 31% of whites reported high levels of acceptance, while only about 17% of Blacks and 13% of Latinx did so. I also find that reporting higher levels of acceptance made respondents more likely to ask for information on becoming more politically active ($p = .011$). The scale of acceptance ranges from 0, meaning a respondent did not feel at all accepted in politics, to a 10, indicating a very high level of acceptance. The overall mean score is 3.32. Broken down by race, Whites have a mean score of 4.14 compared to 2.9 ($p = .0391$) for Blacks and 2.6 ($p = .0355$) for Latinx respondents.

With this analysis, we can conclude first, that Americans of color report lower levels of belonging in politics than Whites and, second, that how much a person feels accepted in this domain has an impact on how likely they are to request information on becoming more politically active. It also highlights that, beyond the structural and institutional constraints on minority political engagement, there are psychological factors that may be holding people back from fully expressing themselves politically. To explore that idea a bit more, let us turn to the effect of feeling accepted on willingness to offer opinions. As my theory predicts, feeling higher levels of acceptance correlates with lower rates of “don’t know” responses to opinion questions. As

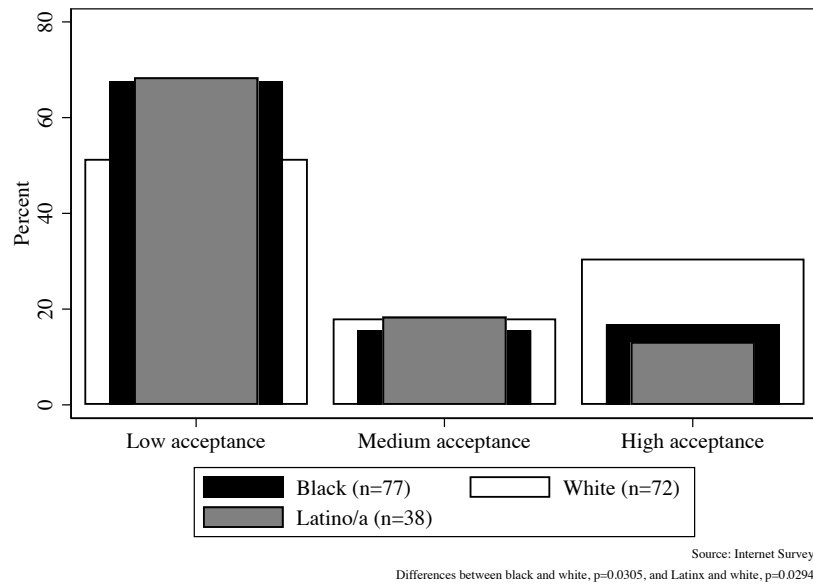


Figure 2.4: Reported level of acceptance in politics by race

I showed earlier, Black and Brown respondents offer significantly more non-opinion responses than white respondents. In another online sample, I asked 225 subjects to answer questions about political belonging, as well as about their political opinions.¹³ When I aggregate the opinion questions in the same way as above, I find the same pattern—Black respondents give more non-opinion responses than white respondents, as Table 2.2 shows. In my online sample, I find that Whites give just under 12% non-opinions to the questions I asked, while Blacks give about double that—just over 22% non-opinions. Table 2.2 shows that, independently, both being Black and acceptance predict non-opinion responses in the direction I expect.¹⁴ In the third column of that table, we can see that when I include both race and my acceptance measure, the gap between Black and white respondents is reduced from over 10 percentage points to less than 8 percentage points.

What is striking, shown in Figure 2.5, is that there is not a big difference race between subjects who report high or medium levels of acceptance, but at the low levels of acceptance,

¹³Only respondents self-identifying as Black, white, or hispanic are included in this analysis due to data limitations for other groups.

¹⁴Further work is needed to investigate the patterns for Latinx respondents.

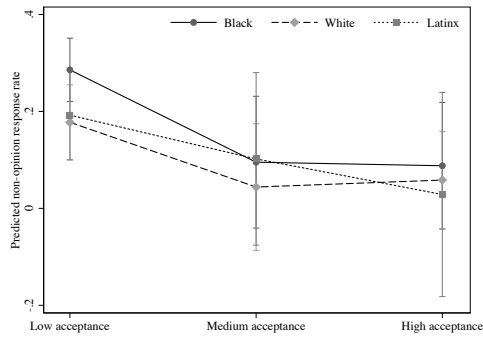
Table 2.2: Effect of Race and Belonging on Don't Know Rate

	Don't know rate		
White	omitted category		
Black	0.1056** (0.0404)		0.0788* (0.0389)
Latinx	0.0371 (0.0495)		0.0037 (0.0476)
Accepted		-0.0244*** (0.0046)	-0.0217*** (0.0048)
Constant	0.1171*** (0.0291)	0.2564*** (0.0216)	0.2071*** (0.0340)
Observations	187	225	187
R^2	0.036	0.110	0.134

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Blacks—and only Blacks—are much more likely to give non-opinion responses than either Latinx or white respondents. There is no detectable difference among African Americans reporting mid- and low-levels of acceptance, either from each other, or from their non-Black counterparts, and feeling a strong sense of acceptance in politics does not seem to matter for whites or Latinos when asked for opinions, but does for Black respondents.

**Figure 2.5:** Predicted non-opinion response rate, race interacted with acceptance

2.6 Discussion

What I've shown in the preceding analysis is that feeling a sense of belonging, or acceptance, in politics matters for at least one type of engagement—offering one's opinions. While the results for Latinx Americans need further development, what is clear is that, for Black Americans, feeling accepted is important and, particularly for those reporting low levels of belonging, correlates with lower opinion expression. This chapter has laid a foundation for exploration into other forms of political engagement. If simply offering one's opinions on a survey is impacted by belonging, more public, demanding forms of political expression are certainly subject to the same problem. I now turn to the impact of belonging on women's propensity to express themselves.

3 In my Humble Non-Opinion: The gender gap in opinion reporting

3.1 Introduction

Since the election of Donald Trump, women have been dramatically energized in the realm of politics. Record numbers of women are running for political office (Kurtzleben, 20 Feb 2018), women have turned out in droves for various protests across the country (Summers, 20 Jan 2018), and they are demanding equal treatment in other areas as well (Garber, 2 Jan 2018). While women have made great strides in politics, gender still very much matters. And everyone in our democracy—not just women—loses out as a result of disparities in participation and representation. In this paper, I highlight an important, ongoing and largely overlooked gender inequality in political expression. If women express fewer political opinions than men, there is potential for bias in the interpretation of public opinion surveys. This bias can negatively impact elected representatives who seek to respond to constituents' desires as well as academics who seek to understand and solve problems related to participation, representation, and other important political issues confronting American society. Depending on the sample, I find that women decline to offer opinions between 1.4 (2016 ANES) and 5.5 percentage points (2016 CCES) more than men. Previous research has shown that women answer factual questions about politics less often than men (Jerit and Barabas, 2017), but the gender gap in political opinion reporting remains

underexplored.¹ While some work investigates the gender gap in attempts at political persuasion, for example, trying to convince others to vote a certain way (Hansen, 1997; Rapoport, 1981), this type of expression is distinct from reporting opinions in at least two ways. First, responding to a request for opinions is largely private and anonymous. Second, reporting one's opinion in response to a direct request by a survey taker carries no risk of confrontation, which is significant because women are known to be more averse to confrontation than men are (Belenky et al., 1986). In the absence of the contextual factors that may drive the persistent hesitance to influence the votes and politics of others, women's unwillingness to report opinions on a poll is puzzling. After all, women turn out to vote—a private, anonymous political activity—at higher rates than men.

I develop a novel theory to explain the gender gap in opinion reporting that draws from literature in psychology, sociology, and political behavior. I posit that women need more information than men do before being comfortable expressing their opinions; in other words, women have a higher threshold for information that they need to cross before feeling informed enough to report their opinions. To test this information thresholds theory, I use data from large, nationally representative surveys and surveys of my own design to show that a gender gap in opinion expression exists, that resources like education, income, and political knowledge do not explain it, and that women do request more information than men before expressing their opinions on policies.

Important work on gender gaps in answering political questions explores why women score lower on political knowledge tests (Wolak and McDevitt, 2011) and why they answer “don't know” more often to this type of question (Jerit and Barabas, 2017). This line of work attributes the gaps either to actual differences in political resources such as education, employment, knowledge, and income (Lehman Schlozman et al., 1995; Verba, Burns and Lehman Schlozman, 1997; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011) or to problems in measurement and design (Lizotte and Sidman,

¹ Although Althaus (2003) identifies and addresses the gender gap in DK/NO responses, he specifically explores the role of political information in causing non-response more broadly. Here, I deal specifically with gender and the psychology that underlies women's higher propensity to offer the “don't know” option.

2009; Mondak and Anderson, 2004). In the former case, increasing access to resources, such as information, should help—indeed Jerit and Barabas (2017) find that exposing men and women to the same information dramatically reduces the gender gap in political knowledge, with women responding more to the information treatment than men. Dolan (2011) shows that the content of the questions matters. The gender gap in political knowledge disappears when the content of the measures of knowledge are reflective of women’s experiences with the politics of the country. There is also a substantial body of literature that explores differences in the opinions that men and women do express (some of which is cited herein), and there is important work that looks at overall differences between those who offer opinions and those who do not. Although his work does not focus on gender, Berinsky (2004) explains that “don’t know” responses can be driven by social desirability bias, resulting in what he terms “exclusion bias.” In his examples, groups holding unpopular opinions are more likely to respond that they do not know or do not have an opinion on a particular topic. For instance, opinion polls overestimated support for school desegregation because people who held segregationist views were systematically more likely to give “don’t know” responses due to a fear of reporting an unpopular opinion.

Althaus (2003) argues that political knowledge is the most important contributor to gaps in opinion responses. He shows that the opinion-givers tend to be from the more privileged demographic groups (white, male, educated, affluent), and that the non-opinion givers are not necessarily well-represented by those who do offer opinions. Althaus argues that ill-informed respondents are more likely to give “don’t know” and “no opinion” responses. The work here adds to Althaus’s analysis of some of the “micro-level behavior[s] giving rise to collective preferences” (p. 59). I argue that it is not just that people are ill-informed, but that, women particularly, *feel* they are ill-informed relative to what they think they should know before reporting opinions. Indeed, I will show that, at every level of political knowledge, women give opinions at lower rates than men.

Atkeson and Rapoport (2003) investigate the gender gap in the expression of political

attitudes towards the president and political parties, linking the propensity to respond to open-ended questions to political communication of other forms (e.g., trying to persuade others to vote a particular way). These authors argue that psychological resources (operationalized as internal efficacy, political interest, and partisan intensity), in addition to material resources, may be lower for women given the traditional dominance of men in politics. They find that as psychological resources increase, so does political communication. Although they find that differences in psychological resources explain part of the gap, they also find that being female continues to predict fewer responses to open-ended questions and more “don’t know” responses. In this paper, I document an additional factor that explains the pervasive tendency of women to engage in this type of political expression at lower rates than men: women, even when they have the same *level* of information as men, are hesitant to offer opinions because they have higher information thresholds than men. This addition to our understanding complements the findings of previous research and helps complete the story of why women do not offer their opinions as readily as men.

In addition to what we know about gender gaps in answering questions, other research explains gender gaps in other forms of participation. Fox and Lawless (2014) show that gender gaps in political encouragement at home result in decreased levels of political ambition later in life. In their work, these authors consider the role that confidence plays in shaping decisions about running for office (see also Fox and Lawless, 2011). They argue that socialization contributes to women being under-confident in their qualifications and men being over-confident in theirs. Using a self-assessment of qualifications to run for office as a measure of confidence, they find this to be a significant factor in the lower rate of female high-school and college students who are open to running for political office later in life. And economists have found that more over-confidence by men explains a substantial portion of gender differences in women’s willingness to enter competitive environments (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007). In short, women face obstacles to feeling qualified that men do not face, and that are orthogonal to whether they actually are

qualified. Building on these authors' findings, I argue that a similar psychology discourages women from even offering opinions on a survey. Later, I will discuss the role of socialization and gender norms as a potential cause of the higher information threshold, and I will offer some suggestive evidence that this is a reasonable explanation. I leave a more complete interrogation of this explanation for future work.

Even accounting for disparities in resources, there is a substantial gender gap in opinion reporting that merits explanation. I contend that the gender gap is driven by psychology. Even when women are as informed as men, the average woman requires more information in order to feel informed enough to start offering opinions—she has a higher information threshold. I use large-n datasets as well as surveys of my own design to test this theory of information thresholds. Instead of operationalizing psychological resources with questions about political interest or how complicated politics is, which are self-reported and so are imperfect measures due to the very problems I point to here, I design surveys to hold constant all of the traditional explanations so that I can isolate the psychological elements at play.

3.2 The impact of information thresholds on reporting opinions: Theory

A person's willingness to answer a question depends partly on how knowledgeable she is on the issue. It also depends on how knowledgeable she is relative to how knowledgeable she thinks she should be—she has some information threshold she needs to cross before she feels that reporting an opinion is appropriate. Everyone has some threshold at which they are comfortable reporting opinions. To illustrate, at Point A in Figure 3.1, where a person is quite ignorant on the topic in question, she would not give an opinion, while at Point C, where she is quite knowledgeable, she would give an answer. I argue that the average woman's informational threshold for reporting an opinion is higher than the average man's threshold. A man will report

opinions on any topic for which his level of information falls in the gray shaded region. For a woman, it takes more information to offer an opinion.² For example, a man with information at Point B will report his opinion. A woman with the same amount of information, however, will not have crossed her information threshold for reporting an opinion. She needs to be more informed than her male counterpart to report her opinion and the upshot is that she ends up giving non-opinion responses more often than her male counterpart, even when she is just as informed. If we imagine a man and a woman who are identical with respect to every variable (save gender), the woman will be less likely to offer her opinions.

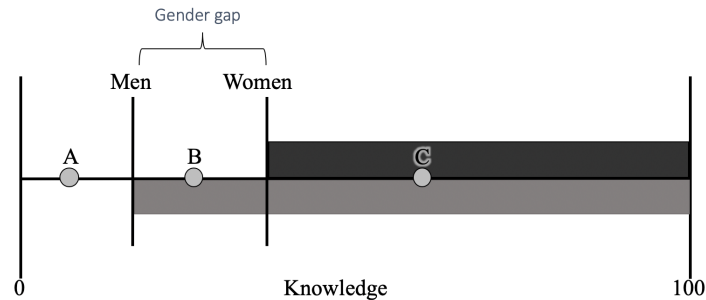


Figure 3.1: Information Thresholds for Reporting Opinions

Research in social psychology has found that there are psychological processes which cause people to internalize gender norms and to use them as “*self standards* against which they regulate their own behavior as well as their experience of other people’s *expectations*” (Eagly and Wood, 2016, italics in original). I suspect that these psychological processes are responsible for the differing information thresholds. At the core of the gender gap in opinion expression lie differences in the expectations men and women have concerning when speaking up is appropriate or expected. While this chapter focuses more on the effect on women, the social mores that are likely driving this also put pressure on men. Indeed research finds that starting early in life, girls are socialized to be quiet and compliant, while boys are rewarded for challenging the status quo and for exhibiting more assertive behaviors (Adler, Kless and Adler, 1992). In elementary

²This paper deals with the ‘average’ male and the ‘average’ female. Certainly there are plenty of very expressive, assertive women and many hesitant men.

school, children are already being rewarded for their compliance to traditional gender roles: boys' popularity is determined by their adherence to a "cult of masculinity," as displayed by their adoption of "the machismo posture through their toughness and...bragging and boasting about their exploits in sports, experiments with deviant behavior, success with girls, and dominance over other boys" (Adler, Kless and Adler, 1992, p. 183). Girls, on the other hand, gain popularity by adhering to a "culture of compliance and conformity," they are rewarded for following rules, and for being and having things that are aesthetically superior (Adler, Kless and Adler, 1992, p. 184). Certainly, identifying the precise driver of differing information thresholds is an interesting avenue for future research, but whatever causes it, the result is that men and women offer opinions at systematically different rates and if we can solve the information threshold discrepancy, we can get more representative survey results.

3.3 Exposing the Role of Information Thresholds: Research Design

Underlying the gender gap in opinion expression, I theorize, is a difference in how much information men and women need before they feel justified in reporting their opinions. I first show that the gap does not disappear, even when controlling for the things that we think should matter. Then, I use surveys of my own design to more definitively show that information does not sufficiently explain the gap, and, most importantly, I show results of a study I ran that provides direct, affirmative evidence for my information thresholds theory. Instead of relying on self-reporting to operationalize the psychological explanation, I incorporate an approach that exposes these thresholds, and rules out information on its own as a powerful explanation for the gender gap I investigate.

Prior to diving into the analyses, I use variables from the ANES dataset to describe some theoretically predictable patterns of responsiveness. The left panel of Figure 3.2 shows the overall

distribution of the non-opinion response rate. Most respondents gave non-opinion responses to less than ten percent of the opinion questions. The right panel of Figure 3.2 breaks the distribution down by gender and reveals a pattern: Men's responses are more concentrated at the left end of the distribution; they give higher frequencies of the lower rates of non-opinions than women. For example, 55.72 percent of men gave non-opinion responses to fewer than six percent of the opinion questions, whereas only 45.11 percent of women gave fewer than six percent. At about ten percent non-opinion responses, the rates are 83.6 for men and 76.01 for women.

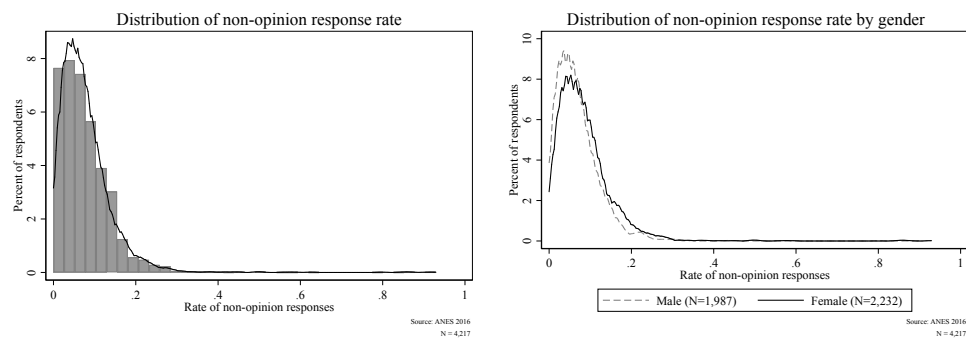


Figure 3.2: Distribution of non-opinion response rates in the 2016 ANES

In total, I coded eighty-five opinion questions. Questions were coded as policy opinion questions if they met two criteria: 1) They asked for opinions, not answers to factual questions, and 2) There was a policy (actual or potential) that corresponded to the question.³ There are statistically significant gender gaps on forty-four of those questions.⁴ Of those forty-four questions, there is only one to which men give more non-opinion responses.⁵

A nice feature of the 2016 ANES is that it asks a number of questions about opinions and political attention. For example, it directly asks respondents whether they think it is characteristic of them to have more opinions than the average person, and whether it is characteristic of them

³See Appendix A for full wording of all questions included.

⁴Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. If I relax the standard to $\alpha = 0.1$, an additional nine questions have significant gender gaps in favor of women giving more non-opinion responses and one more question to which men give more non-opinions.

⁵The question asks the respondent's opinion about requiring equal pay for men and women. See Table A.3 in the Appendix for the questions with the ten largest gender gaps.

to form opinions about everything. Slightly more women say it is not characteristic of them to have many more opinions than average, and slightly more men than women report that it is characteristic of them to have more opinions than average.⁶ More women than men feel that it is not characteristic of them to form opinions about everything ($p = .005$) and more men feel it is characteristic of them to form opinions about everything ($p = .003$). So there is some difference in how many opinions men and women report having, but these differences are not great, and when it comes to actually reporting those opinions, women report fewer than men.

The 2016 ANES also asks if politics are hard to understand and how much attention the respondent pays to government and politics. Despite no difference in the number of days respondents reported discussing politics in the previous week, there is almost a ten percentage point difference (significant at $p = .000$) in the proportions of men (25.41%) and women (16.68%) who report that they always pay attention to politics. This could be indicative of a different interpretation of what “always” means, which has implications that I will discuss later in the paper for how we might approach solving the problem of differential opinion reporting.

If women have a higher standard for being informed, I would expect men to be more likely to report that they understand political issues well, and women to report feeling that they do not understand politics as well. About 36 percent of men report understanding politics extremely or very well while only about 25 percent of women do so (difference significant at $p = 0.000$). These questions ask for a self-assessment of political attention and understanding and are thus subject to the same psychological pressures that I believe explain the gender gap in opinion reporting. Perhaps men do have a better understanding of politics, but my theory suggests that it is likely the case that men overstate their understanding of politics and women understate theirs.

It is reasonable to think that maybe this gap is driven by the women in the sample who have lower levels of education, or who do not pay much attention to politics, or maybe have fewer opportunities to discuss politics, as might be the case for women who do not work outside of the

⁶These differences are not statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$.

home. What the graphs in Figure 3.3 show, however, is that the gender gap persists in the raw data across basically any level of any of the variables that perhaps should make a difference.⁷

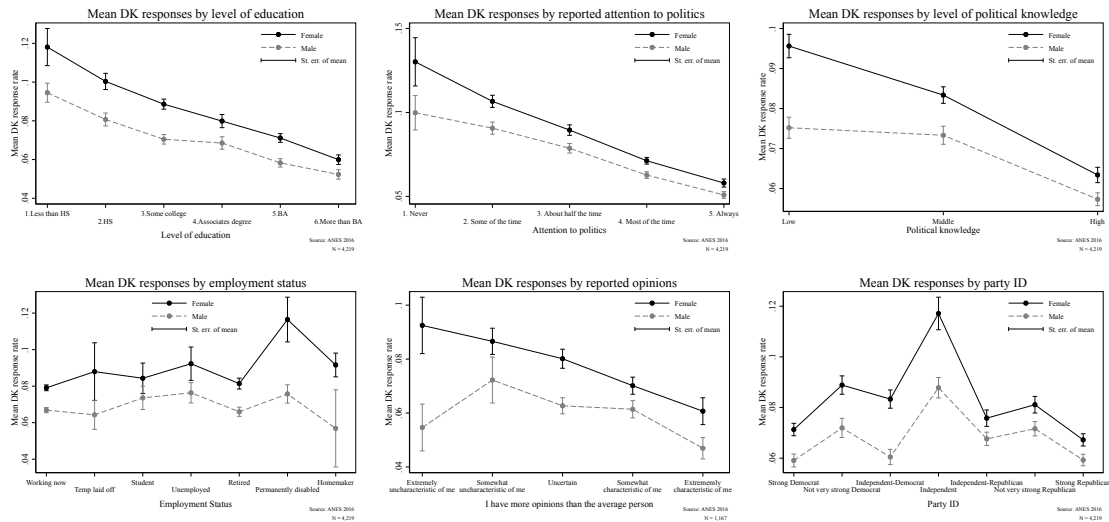


Figure 3.3: Raw means of non-opinion response

Even at very high levels of education, political knowledge, reported attention to politics, and by employment status, the gender gap persists. And there is no party with which identification eliminates the gender gap, nor does it disappear among strong partisans, who may be able to use party as a heuristic more easily than weaker partisans, as Figure 3.3 demonstrates. Another interesting finding is that among men and women who report that having more opinions than the average person is characteristic of them, there is a large gap, as Figure 3.3 shows. Additionally, men who feel that having more opinions than the average person is extremely uncharacteristic of them report opinions at about the same rate as men who feel it is extremely characteristic of them to have more opinions than average, whereas the pattern for women follows a logical decline: women who feel they have more opinions than average, offer more opinions than those who report not having more opinions than average.

This preliminary examination of the data yields patterns consistent with my theory of differing information thresholds. However nothing that I have offered so far has ruled out

⁷There are no significant effects of interviewer gender.

alternative explanations. I now move from description to analysis.

3.4 Results

I begin by showing that there is a gender gap in non-opinion responses using correlational analysis of data from the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES).⁸ Using regression analysis, I demonstrate that this gap is robust when controlling for differences in material and political resources that are the focus of traditional explanations for gender differences in political participation and expression. I then use surveys I designed to rule out traditional explanations and build an affirmative empirical case for my theory.

The 2016 ANES includes questions about elections, candidates and parties, as well as demographic variables and political knowledge questions. It also includes over eighty questions that specifically ask respondents for opinions about policies. In the analysis that follows, the dependent variable, *Don't know*, is the rate of non-opinion response. For each respondent, I created a dichotomous variable for each of the eighty-five opinion questions that takes a value of 1 if the respondent gave a non-opinion response (don't know; neither agree nor disagree; neither favor nor oppose), and 0 if an opinion was offered. I then summed these dummy variables for each respondent, and divided by the total number of opinion questions. *Don't know* can take on a value from zero, meaning the respondent gave opinions on every question, to 1, meaning the respondent did not report opinions on any of the questions.⁹ The key independent variable, *Female*, and the other demographic variables, *Age*, *Education*, *Party ID*, *Marital status*, *Employment status*, *Race*, and *Income* are taken directly from the ANES. The variable *Attention to politics* is a self-reported measure of how often a respondent “pay[s] attention to what’s going on in government and politics” and ranges from “Never” (1) to “Always” (5).¹⁰ To get a measure of political knowledge,

⁸The same analyses using the 2012 ANES can be found in the appendix and come to the same conclusions. Additionally, Althaus (2003) finds gender gaps in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 ANES datasets.

⁹In actuality, the most non-opinion responses anyone gave was seventy-nine, which is about 93 percent.

¹⁰The order of responses was reversed from the original survey to facilitate ease of interpretation of the results.

I created a count variable of how many correct answers each respondent provided to ten political knowledge questions in the 2016 ANES dataset.¹¹

The gender gap is not explained by traditional factors.

First, I regress the dependent variable, *Don't Know*, on *Female*. I add controls for a host of demographic characteristics and for traditional explanations rooted in political and material resources. In response to the eighty-five opinion questions in the data, on average, women gave non-opinion responses at a rate of 8.3 percent, while men gave non-opinion responses at a rate of 6.9 percent (difference significant at $p = 0.000$). To keep the context in mind, this means that even in a relatively private way to engage in politics, women are not offering their views as readily as men. As the analysis continues below, I demonstrate that it is not just a question of interest or education, but that something else hinders women's opinion expression.

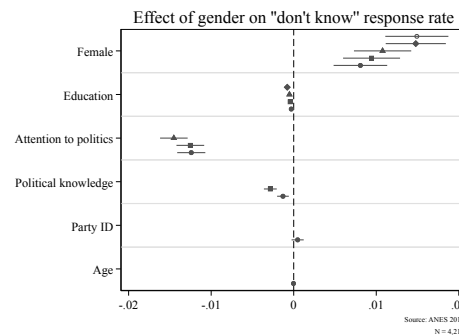


Figure 3.4: Effect of gender on “don’t know” rate

The results in Figure 3.4 show that a gender gap exists in a simple bivariate regression, and that it persists when adding controls for education, political knowledge, attention to politics and elections, party identification, age, and, not pictured, but see Appendix A for a table: employment status, race/ethnicity, family income, and marital status.¹² With the exception of attention to

¹¹It should be noted that these questions are no less susceptible to the problems addressed in my theory and that there is a large body of research, some of which is cited herein, that establishes a bias in measuring political knowledge with these types of questions. The questions used are available in the Online Appendix.

¹²Because the dependent variable was created from a count variable, I include results using a Poisson distribution

politics, none of the other traditional explanations has nearly as much power in explaining “don’t know” responses as *Female*.¹³ None of the results are particularly surprising: as one becomes more educated, knows more about and pays more attention to politics, the probability of responding “don’t know” decreases, yet *Female* remains a strong predictor. While the finding that a gender gap exists in opinion data is relatively well-documented in the literature (for example, see Althaus, 2003; Rapoport, 1981), the focus on why gender might remain significant even after controlling for these other variables is not.

Building the case for information thresholds

In this section, I build the case for my theory of information thresholds using two studies I designed and leveraging the survey mode in the ANES, which was either face-to-face or online. First, I asked respondents recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) some similar questions to the ANES, but included fictitious questions to be able to control information. I know the respondents do not have any information about the policies because I made them up. I show that even when there can be no differences in the level of information, men are willing to offer more opinions than women. Next, I use the survey mode to show that differences in the rates of “don’t know” answers between face-to-face and internet survey administration are consistent with the idea that men and women face opposing implicit social pressure to either speak up or not. When men answer the survey privately, i.e. online, without a person present, they give more non-opinion responses, whereas women give more non-opinion answers when face-to-face. I also designed a more direct test for my thresholds theory. I gave respondents information about a policy, one piece at a time, and allowed them to either offer their opinion after each piece, or ask for another piece of information. The female respondents wanted more information.

in Appendix B, Table B.1. The results are essentially the same, and so for ease of interpretation, I convert the count of “don’t know” answers to a rate and present OLS results in the main text.

¹³I run the same regressions using the 2012 ANES, the 2016 CCES, as well as data I collected from a sample of 500 respondents recruited on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk and achieve very similar results, which are included in the appendix.

Men have more opinions about fabricated policies than women.

To strengthen my claim that it is a difference in the level of information *needed* that is behind this gender gap, and to further rule out the level of information and attention to politics as explanations, I asked five hundred respondents recruited on MTurk to answer opinion questions. Included in this set of questions were several asking about policies which I had made up. By doing this, I know that nobody has any real information about the policies, and no matter how much attention a person pays to politics, they could not have learned anything about my contrived policies, except to know that they are not real. If differences in information are responsible for the gender gap, when I ask a question about which respondents cannot have any information, I should see the more informed respondents (i.e. men) declining to give opinions because they should be more likely to know that these are not real policies. On the other hand, if my theory is correct and psychological differences are an important driver of the effect—women feeling less confident in the amount of information they have and men feeling pressure to appear decisive—I should find the opposite: men should continue to offer opinions and women should decline to do so. I asked about a made-up war in Reykjavik and about a non-existent interest rate policy. Table 3.1 shows the difference in the rate of “don’t know” responses to a question asking if the respondent favored or opposed sending additional ground troops to the (non-existent) war in Reykjavik. Consistent with my theory, men were more likely to report an opinion on this non-existent issue. Certainly this question is not completely information-neutral. Respondents, whether they know there is no war in Reykjavik or not, are likely to have a general ideological position on war and whether the US should be getting involved in foreign wars. Indeed we know from other studies that women are less belligerent than men (Brooks and Valentino, 2011), and consistent with this finding, men in the sample were twice as likely as women to favor sending troops. Nevertheless, the gap is significant. Table 3.1 reports that about 37 percent of men did not know whether they favored or opposed sending additional troops to the war in Reykjavik, and approximately 43 percent of women did not report an opinion—a difference of over six percentage points.

Table 3.1: Average Don't Know response rate by gender (Reykjavik)

Do you favor or oppose sending additional troops to the war in Reykjavik?

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Difference (% points)
Don't know	37.39	43.48	6.09
	Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 7.8029$		Pr = 0.020

To neutralize any partisan or ideological information being conveyed by the questions, I asked respondents if they favored or opposed the Interest Rate Restructuring Plan, which I made up and intentionally worded without a signal as to whether the rate would be increased or decreased under this plan to minimize the possibility that respondents might have an opinion based on normative considerations or ideological predispositions. When I asked a question as devoid of information as I could concoct, the gender gap more than tripled. As Table 3.2 shows, almost 80 percent of female respondents said they did not know their opinion on this program, while the rate for men is about 20 percentage points lower.¹⁴ What this shows is that even on a fictitious program about which most respondents admitted not knowing their opinion, men were much less likely to do so than women. If we wanted to draw an information-centered conclusion from this, contrary to most research, we would have to conclude that women have more political knowledge than men, or at least that women are more likely to suspect that this particular policy is invented. I suggest an alternative explanation, however, which is not that women know more, but that they *need* to know more before reporting their opinions. In this case, what that means is that women, not having information about this policy, have not crossed their information thresholds and therefore, do not report opinions as much as men, who, even though they also do not have information about this policy, have a lower information threshold and report opinions at a higher rate.

Along with the fictitious questions, I included demographic and other questions so that I could use regression analysis to hold the relevant factors constant as I did with the ANES

¹⁴Men who did have an opinion were more likely to favor the policy than to oppose it, and women were about equally likely to favor and oppose.

Table 3.2: Average Don't Know response rate by gender (interest rate restructuring)

Do you favor or oppose the Interest Rate Restructuring Plan currently under consideration by the Federal Reserve?			
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Difference (% points)
Don't know	60.54	79.71	19.17
	Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 23.3405$		Pr = 0.000

data. *Female* is the strongest predictor ($\beta = .2598, p = 0.006$) of “don’t know” responses about the fictitious policies.¹⁵ No other variable comes close to the predictive power of *Female* on non-opinion responses to the fictitious policy questions. Even when asked about fake policies, men are more likely to offer opinions and women are more likely to report that they do not know their opinions. In further support of my theory, higher levels of political knowledge significantly predict more “don’t know” responses to the fictitious policy questions, contrary to the pattern for questions about real policies in the ANES. This is consistent with the argument that respondents with higher levels of political knowledge are more likely to suspect that the issues are not real and decline to offer an opinion. However, if the prevailing effect were information, we should only have gender gaps in “don’t know” response rates on par with the gender gap in political knowledge in the data. In fact, there is not a significant difference in the number of correct responses to political knowledge questions in the data between men and women, nor is there a significant difference in the level of education.

I have argued that women hesitate to offer opinions because they have a higher threshold for information than men. I have also posited that in addition to being more confident in how informed they are, men may feel an implicit social pressure to appear knowledgeable and decisive. If this is the case, I would expect that pressure to be most evident when others are around to witness a man’s survey responses, making social expectations more salient. Below, I use the survey mode in the ANES to investigate this idea.

Men are more comfortable not reporting opinions when nobody is watching.

¹⁵The only other variables in the model that are statistically significant are political knowledge ($\beta = .1459, p = 0.000$) and age ($\beta = .0011, p = 0.031$). See Figure A.3 in Appendix A.

The 2016 ANES conducted about half of its surveys online and the other half in person. Thus, I can analyze differences in the rates of non-opinion responses in the two types of surveys for men and women. If it is true that men may feel pressure to be decisive, I expect the rate of non-opinion responses to be lower for men in the face-to-face interviews. Figure 3.5 shows that men offer slightly more “don’t know” answers via the internet than they do in person, when their “ignorance” is not being observed, although the difference is not statistically significant. In contrast, women offer more non-opinions when face-to-face with an interviewer.

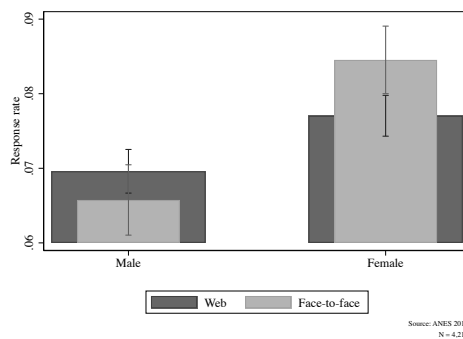


Figure 3.5: Predicted non-opinion response rate by interview type and gender

Another way of looking at this is through the difference in the size of the gender effect in each interview context. The gender gap in each interview type is statistically significant, but substantively it is much larger in the face-to-face condition. Women in the web context offer about .7 percentage points more “don’t know” responses than men, but the difference is almost three times as large in the face-to-face interviews, where they offer 1.9 percentage points more.¹⁶ I now consider whether women really do have a higher information threshold than men: Do women and men require different levels of information before being willing to offer an opinion?

Women want more information before they offer their opinions.

This section reports the results of a direct test of my argument that women have a higher information threshold than men before reporting an opinion. In other words, equally informed men and women will still differ in how willing they are to report their opinions. To get at this

¹⁶A regression table is included in Appendix A.

phenomenon, I created a policy vignette based on a real policy being piloted in some states. This policy would replace the gas tax with a per-mile tax. I offered one piece of information, after which the respondent could either offer an opinion (favor or oppose) or ask for another piece of information (“I need more information before giving my opinion”). As my theory predicts, women do ask for more information before declaring that they are ready to report opinions on the policy in question.

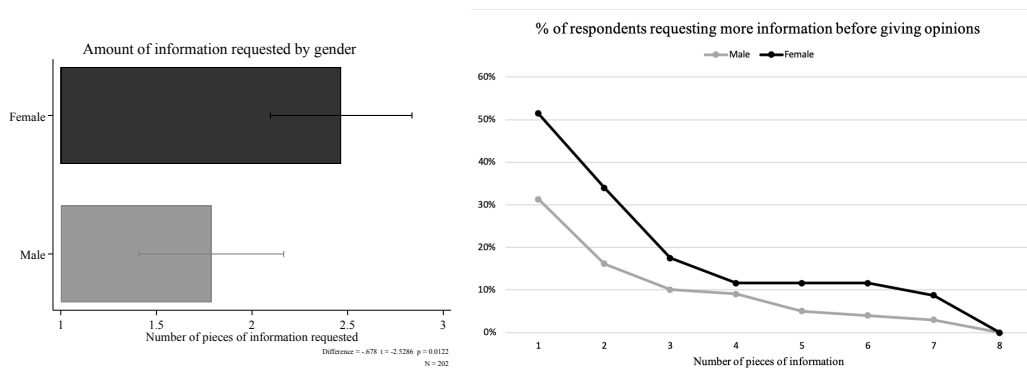


Figure 3.6: Gender gap in information requested before offering opinions

The left panel of Figure 3.6 shows the average number of pieces of information requested by gender. Men wanted an average of 1.79 pieces of information, while women wanted an average of 2.47 pieces—a difference of about 40 percent. The right panel of Figure 3.6 shows how many men and women remained after each piece of information. After the first piece of information, over half of the women in the sample wanted another piece of information, compared to only about 30 percent of men.¹⁷ After two pieces of information, 34 percent of women were still interested in learning more before reporting opinions, but for men, only about half that—16.2 percent—still were not ready to report opinions. Almost three times as many women (8.7 percent) as men (3 percent) wanted to be as fully informed as they could be before reporting an opinion, which, in this study, was eight pieces of information. After the eighth piece of information, I forced respondents to choose, and then asked them “If you didn’t feel that you received enough information to form

¹⁷I recruited a sample of 202 respondents through MTurk. 103 were men, 99 were women.

and/or report your opinion, please give us a brief idea of the type of information you would want.” Of the eight respondents who provided a substantive answer to this question, six were women and two were men—small numbers, but supportive of the overall pattern—women want more information before reporting opinions.

To further strengthen this argument, I turn to observational data from the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. In a democracy, one of the most important ways citizens express their opinions is at the ballot box. The CCES asks respondents who did not vote why they abstained. As a primary reason for not voting, just under 3 percent of men in the survey who were asked said they declined to vote because they did not have enough information. For women, the rate was more than double, at 6.25 percent.¹⁸ As a second reason for not having voted, 8.2 percent of women felt they were under informed, while again, men gave that as their secondary reason much less often, at 5.4 percent. Overall, women felt under-informed at almost double the rate of men. The fact that so many more women than men are abstaining because they do not feel informed enough is troubling, and this likely extends to other forms of participation. Opinion expression comes in many forms and degrees. Responding to a survey, and even voting are relatively low-risk, anonymous ways to express one’s views. If women are less willing to offer opinions and feel they are more under-informed than men—even when they are not—there could be major impacts on American democracy. The more visible forms of participation are likely to exhibit more extreme gender disparities, contributing to gaps in expression and in representation. Indeed, data from the 2016 CCES suggests that this is the case. Table 3.3 shows the proportion of respondents who reported having participated in any of the activities listed in the past year. We observe that women are much more likely to donate money, a private activity, versus going out and working for a campaign. Certainly one could argue that clicking a few buttons on a smart phone is not only more private, but much easier. However, the difference in effort between attending local meetings and working for a candidate are more comparable in effort. Working for a candidate or

¹⁸These numbers exclude from the denominator those respondents who said they were not registered to vote.

campaign is less private because it requires that women take a position and make that position known to others, whereas women can attend meetings and sit quietly to listen, without having to take, or voice, a position. More women—almost twice as many—report attending meetings than working for a campaign; speculative, sure, but suggestive.

Table 3.3: Percent of respondents who report participating

Activity	Women	Men
Donate money	19.17%	28.98%
Put up a political sign	14.04%	18.89%
Attend local political meetings	9.6%	14.57%
Work for candidate or campaign	5.1%	7.35%
None of the above	62.82%	50.78%

3.5 Discussion

This chapter started by highlighting a puzzle: women do not offer opinions on political matters at the same rate as men on political opinion surveys. Using data from the American National Election Studies, my own surveys, and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, the analyses I conducted demonstrated that this gender gap in political opinion reporting persists even when controlling for a host of variables associated with traditional information and resource-based explanations.

I ruled out information as an explanation and built the case for my information thresholds theory by showing that men offered more opinions—not fewer, as an informational explanation would predict—on fake issues. I also showed that men are more willing to offer non-opinion responses when surveyed online—in the absence of any social pressure that might activate their self-expectation to “have all the answers”—but that women’s rates of “don’t know” responses are higher when face-to-face. I then offered evidence of differing informational thresholds by showing that women wanted almost forty percent more information about a policy than men did before reporting an opinion.

Systematic gaps in political participation between men and women mean that half the population is not fully engaged in a policymaking process that has effects on the lives of the entire population. In a democracy that seeks to be fully representative, this is problematic. The focus for this paper was responses to survey questions, but I argue that the psychological phenomenon that I have identified is an important culprit in women's hesitance toward participation more broadly. The patterns I have identified may be indicative of a deeper socio-cultural problem that is responsible for women being less comfortable speaking up, and inversely, for men being potentially over-confident in their opinions.

Identifying where these gaps exist is an important first step. In this project, I seek not only to identify where the gaps are, but also to uncover an important psychological driver of these gaps at the individual level. Knowing where the gaps exist and what is causing them will allow researchers and policymakers to design solutions that can minimize the gender differences and make everyone's opinions an important part of the political process.

A number of authors have shown that women participate in politics less than men (Burns, 2007; Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 1997; Fox and Lawless, 2004), and others argue that women participate in politics differently than men (Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010). Coffe and Bolzendahl (2010) find that women are more likely to engage in private types of activism—things like signing petitions, consumer activism (e.g., boycotts), and donating or fundraising for social and political organizations. However, in the more public forms of activism such as party membership, collective activism (e.g., attending meetings or demonstrations), and making political contact, men dominate.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) point out that "the legacy of past exclusion also has created norms and expectations that continue to serve as subtle barriers to political engagement" (p. 156). And politics is not the only area in which women are marginalized, as "[p]olitics has built assumptions about women's place into policy" (Burns, 2007, p. 107). Traces of the ways in which these policies result in disparities in political life permeate American government. The

Equal Rights Amendment, introduced almost one hundred years ago, has yet to be ratified by the requisite 38 states. Women are dramatically underrepresented in legislatures in every state and federally (Center for American Women and Politics, 2018). Women vote at higher rates than men, but there are persistent gaps in other modes of participation.

4 Conclusion

The Founders envisioned a republic that would be representative of the people. While their conception of “the people” may have been different than what ours is today, increasing the representation and participation the population gets us closer to that ideal. Descriptive representation has been shown to increase participation among those being represented in important ways (Gay and Tate, 1998). When women observe other women in political positions (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001), or as viable candidates for political office (Atkeson, 2003), they are motivated to participate. Cities run by black mayors see higher levels of political engagement among black residents, but unfortunately there have not been many of these examples. In addition to the argument that more equal participation leads to a healthier democracy, a lot of resources are at stake—millions of dollars are spent just on surveying the public. Furthermore, decisions about how to spend the staggering amounts of money that go into political campaigns and other related activities are made based on results of polling. Identifying and explaining these participation gaps, then, is important not just from a normative perspective, but also from a practical one, and provides a way forward in developing solutions, for academics and practitioners alike.

The goal of taking an approach that draws from a variety of disciplines and employs a variety of methods was to offer important insights into why women and racial minorities are reluctant to offer their opinions. Further study of the phenomenon introduced in this dissertation will move us closer to a complete understanding of what underlies the gender and race gaps in participation and, more importantly, how to overcome them. Truly representative democracy requires that those elected to represent can get an accurate picture of what their constituents want.

Not only is this question important for politicians, but academics need complete information to diagnose society's problems.

A Supplementary Tables and Figures

A.1 Questions used to create “Don’t know” variable

Table A.1: 2016 ANES Questions (Pre-election wave)

V161234	Would you say that compared to 2008, the United States is more secure from its foreign enemies, less secure, or hasn’t this changed very much?
V162153	Thinking about the relationship between the United States and Israel, is the U.S. too supportive of Israel, not supportive enough of Israel, or is U.S. support of Israel about right?
V162159	Do you think China’s military is [a major threat to the security of the United States, a minor threat, or not a threat / not a threat, a minor threat, or a major threat to the security of the United States]?
V162177	Recently, some big American companies have been hiring workers in foreign countries to replace workers in the U.S. Do you think the federal government should discourage companies from doing this, encourage companies to do this, or stay out of this matter?
V162295	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. government torturing people who are suspected of being terrorists, to try to get information?
V161141	What about the next 12 months? Do you expect the economy, in the country as a whole, to get better, stay about the same, or get worse?
V161142	Would you say that over the past year, the level of unemployment in the country has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?
V161140	Now thinking about the economy in the country as a whole, would you say that over the past year the nation’s economy has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?
V161143	How about people out of work during the coming 12 months – do you think that there will be more unemployment than now, about the same, or less?
V161144	Which party do you think would do a better job of handling the nation’s economy... [the Democrats, the Republicans], or wouldn’t there be much difference between them?

Table A.1: (continued)

V161217	Do you think that people in government [waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it / don't waste very much of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or waste a lot of it]?
V161235	Would you say that compared to 2008, the nation's economy is now better, worse, or about the same?
V161080	Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress has been handling its job?
V161081	Do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?
V161082	Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?
V161083	Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling the economy?
V161084	Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling relations with foreign countries?
V161085	Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling health care?
V161113	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the health care reform law passed in 2010? This law requires all Americans to buy health insurance and requires health insurance companies to accept everyone.
V161139	What do you think about the state of the economy these days in the United States? Would you say the state of the economy is [very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, or very bad]?
V161136	Do you think it is better when one party controls both the presidency and Congress, better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans, or doesn't it matter?
V161175	When selecting someone for the Supreme Court, how much should the nominee's legal qualifications be considered? [A great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or not at all]?
V161176	When selecting someone for the Supreme Court, how much should the way the nominee is likely to vote on controversial issues be considered? [A great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or not at all]?
V161177	The President has nominated Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court. What do you think the Senate should do? Should the Senate hold a vote on whether to confirm Merrick Garland, or should the Senate wait until next year for the new President to nominate someone?
V161178	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should provide many fewer services - 7. Govt should provide many more services]
V161181	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should decrease defense spending - 7. Govt should increase defense spending]

Table A.1: (continued)

V161184	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt insurance plan - 7. Private insurance plan]
V161187	Do you think the federal government should make it more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now, make it easier for people to buy a gun, or keep these rules about the same as they are now?
V161189	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should see to jobs and standard of living - 7. Govt should let each person get ahead on own]
V161192	Which comes closest to your view about what government policy should be toward unauthorized immigrants now living in the United States?
V161193	Some people have proposed that the U.S. Constitution should be changed so that the children of unauthorized immigrants do not automatically get citizenship if they are born in this country. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose this proposal?
V161195	What should happen to immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children and have lived here for at least 10 years and graduated high school here? Should they be sent back where they came from, or should they be allowed to live and work in the United States?
V161196	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose building a wall on the U.S. border with Mexico?
V161198	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should help Blacks - 7. Blacks should help themselves]
V161201	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Regulate business to protect the environment and create jobs - 7. No regulation because it will not work and will cost jobs]
V161204	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?
V161205	(What about) Social Security (Should federal spending on Social Security be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161206	(What about) Public schools (Should federal spending on public schools be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161207	(What about) Science and technology (Should federal spending on science and technology be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161208	(What about) Dealing with crime (Should federal spending on dealing with crime be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161209	(What about) Welfare programs (Should federal spending on welfare programs be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161210	(What about) Child care (Should federal spending on child care be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)

Table A.1: (continued)

V161211	(What about) Aid to the poor (Should federal spending on aid to the poor be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161212	(What about) Protecting the environment (Should federal spending on protecting the environment be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
V161223	'Fracking' is a way to drill for natural gas by pumping high pressure fluid into the ground. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose fracking in the U.S.?
V161224	Do you think the federal government should be doing more about rising temperatures, should be doing less, or is it currently doing the right amount?
V161226	Do you favor/oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to offer paid leave to parents of new children?
V161227	Do you think business owners who provide wedding-related services should be allowed to refuse services to same-sex couples if same-sex marriage violates their religious beliefs, or do you think business owners should be required to provide services regardless of a couple's sexual orientation?
V161228	Should transgender people – that is, people who identify themselves as the sex or gender different from the one they were born as – have to use the bathrooms of the gender they were born as, or should they be allowed to use the bathrooms of their identified gender?
V161229	Do you favor or oppose laws to protect gays and lesbians against job discrimination?
V161230	Do you think gay or lesbian couples should be legally permitted to adopt children?
V161231	Which comes closest to your view? [1. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry. 2. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry. 3. There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple's relationship.]
V161232	There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? [1. By law, abortion should never be permitted. 2. By law, only in case of rape, incest, or woman's life in danger. 3. By law, for reasons other than rape, incest, or woman's life in danger if need established 4. By law, abortion as a matter of personal choice.]
V161233	Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Table A.2: 2016 ANES Questions (Post-election wave)

V162139	When the U.S. federal government spends more money than it collects, the difference is called the federal budget deficit. The federal government currently has a deficit. How important is it to reduce the deficit? [Extremely important, very important, moderately important, a little important, or not at all important?]
V162140	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose increasing income taxes on people making over one million dollars per year?
V162148	Next, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government trying to reduce the difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households?

Table A.2: (continued)

V162152a	Some people have suggested placing new limits on foreign imports in order to protect American jobs. Others say that such limits would raise consumer prices and hurt American exports. Do you favor or oppose placing new limits on imports?
V162175	Have increasing amounts of trade with other countries been good for the United States, bad for the United States, or neither good nor bad?
V162176	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. making free trade agreements with other countries?
V162180	In your opinion, when it comes to regulating the activities of banks, should the government be doing more, less, or the same as it is now?
V162184	One, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems, or Two, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved.
V162186	How much government regulation of business is good for society? [A great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or none at all]?
V162192	Should the minimum wage be [raised, kept the same, lowered but not eliminated, or eliminated altogether / eliminated altogether, lowered but not eliminated, kept the same, or raised]?
V162193	Do you favor an increase, decrease, or no change in government spending to help people pay for health insurance when they can't pay for it all themselves?
V162276	Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels'. (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]?)
V162135	When it comes to people trying to improve their financial well-being, do you think it is now easier, harder, or the same as it was 20 years ago?
V162142	On another topic. Has the 2010 health care law, also known as the Affordable Care Act, improved, worsened, or had no effect on the quality of health care services in the United States?
V162143	Has the 2010 health care law increased, decreased, or had no effect on the number of Americans with health insurance?
V162144	Has the 2010 health care law increased, decreased, or had no effect on the cost of health insurance for most Americans?
V162146	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring children to be vaccinated in order to attend public schools?
V162149	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to pay women and men the same amount for the same work?
V162151	Since the September 11, 2001 attacks there have been changes in security at public places such as airports, stadiums and government buildings. Have these changes in security [gone too far, are they just about right, or do they not go far enough]?

Table A.2: (continued)

V162157	Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be [increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot]?
V162158	Now I'd like to ask you about immigration in recent years. How likely is it that recent immigration levels will take jobs away from people already here – [extremely likely, very likely, somewhat likely, or not at all likely]?
V162178	Have increases in the government's wiretapping powers since September 11, 2001 [gone too far, are they just about right, or do they not go far enough]?
V162179	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the use of marijuana being legal?
V162183	One, the main reason government has become bigger over the years is because it has gotten involved in things that people should do for themselves, or: Two, government has become bigger because the problems we face have become bigger.
V162185	One, the less government, the better, or Two, there are more things that government should be doing.
V162211	'Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.' Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with this statement?
V162212	'Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.' (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with this statement?)
V162213	'Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.' (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with this statement?)
V162214	'It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough, if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.' (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with this statement?)
V162234	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose placing limits on political campaign spending?
V162238	What about your opinion – are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of blacks
V162243	'Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.' Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with this statement?
V162264	'The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.' (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly]?)

Table A.2: (continued)

V162268	And now thinking specifically about immigrants. (Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with the following statement?) ‘Immigrants are generally good for America’s economy.’
V162270	(Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly] with the following statement?) ‘Immigrants increase crime rates in the United States.’
V162277	Now thinking about the performance of the government in Washington in general, how good or bad a job do you think the government has done in the last 8 years? Has it done [a very good job? a good job? a bad job? a very bad job]?
V162280	Would you say that over the past twelve months, the state of the economy in the United States has [gotten much better, gotten somewhat better, stayed about the same, gotten somewhat worse, or gotten much worse]?
V162318	In general, does the federal government [treat whites better than blacks, treat them both same, or treat blacks better than whites]?

A.2 Supplemental tables and figures to Chapter 3

Table A.3: 2016 ANES Questions – Top 10 gender gaps

Size of gap	Question
9.81%	Have increasing amounts of trade with other countries been good for the United States, bad for the United States, or neither good nor bad?
8.69%	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. making free trade agreements with other countries?
7.04%	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should decrease defense spending - 7. Govt should increase defense spending]
6.83%	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. sending ground troops to fight Islamic militants, such as ISIS, in Iraq and Syria?
6.48%	Some people have suggested placing new limits on foreign imports in order to protect American jobs. Others say that such limits would raise consumer prices and hurt American exports. Do you favor or oppose placing new limits on imports?
5.71%	'Fracking' is a way to drill for natural gas by pumping high pressure fluid into the ground. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose fracking in the U.S.?
4.34%	(What about) Social Security (Should federal spending on Social Security be increased, decreased, or kept the same?)
4.21%	Next, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government trying to reduce the difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households?
3.6%	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should see to jobs and standard of living - 7. Govt should let each person get ahead on own]
3.26%	Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [1. Govt should help Blacks - 7. Blacks should help themselves]
Gap reversed: more male dks than female	
3.62%	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to pay women and men the same amount for the same work?

Table A.4: Effect of Gender on Don't Know Rate

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	0.0149*** (0.0019)	0.0148*** (0.0019)	0.0108*** (0.0018)	0.0094*** (0.0018)	0.0081*** (0.0017)
Education		-0.0008*** (0.0001)	-0.0005*** (0.0001)	-0.0004*** (0.0001)	-0.0003** (0.0001)
Attention to politics			-0.0145*** (0.0009)	-0.0125*** (0.0009)	-0.0124*** (0.0009)
Political knowledge				-0.0028*** (0.0004)	-0.0013*** (0.0004)
Party ID					0.0005 (0.0004)
Age					-0.0000 (0.0001)
Marital status					-0.0003 (0.0006)
Employment status					0.0008 (0.0005)
Race and ethnicity					0.0023** (0.0007)
Income					-0.0009*** (0.0001)
Constant	0.0685*** (0.0013)	0.0772*** (0.0022)	0.1270*** (0.0037)	0.1334*** (0.0039)	0.1312*** (0.0058)
Observations	4219	4210	4210	4210	3952
R^2	0.013	0.022	0.088	0.101	0.128
Adjusted R^2	0.013	0.022	0.087	0.100	0.126

Standard errors in parentheses

Source: ANES 2016

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.5: Effect of gender on “don’t know” answers to fictitious policy questions[†]

	Model 1
Gender	0.2421*** (0.0632)
Highest level of education	-0.1207*** (0.0350)
Political knowledge	0.1090*** (0.0129)
Party ID	0.0201 (0.0413)
Attention to politics	-0.065* (0.0327)
Age	0.0007* (0.0003)
Constant	.8445*** (0.1807)
Observations	497
R^2	0.1725
Adjusted R^2	0.1623

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[†] Aggregated responses to two fictitious policy questions

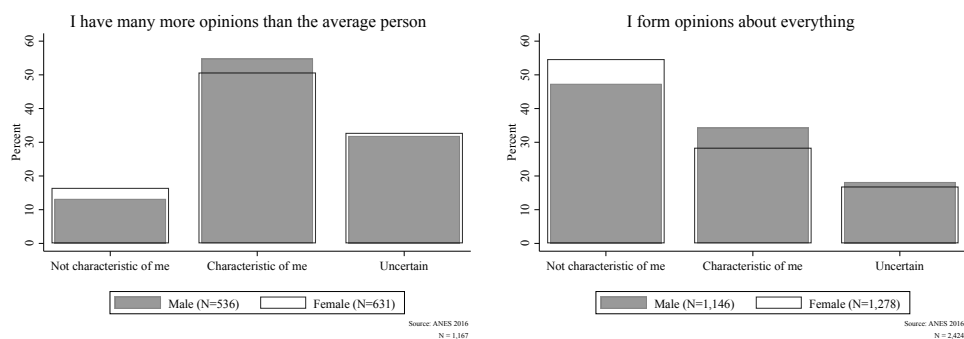


Figure A.1: Reported opinions (gender)

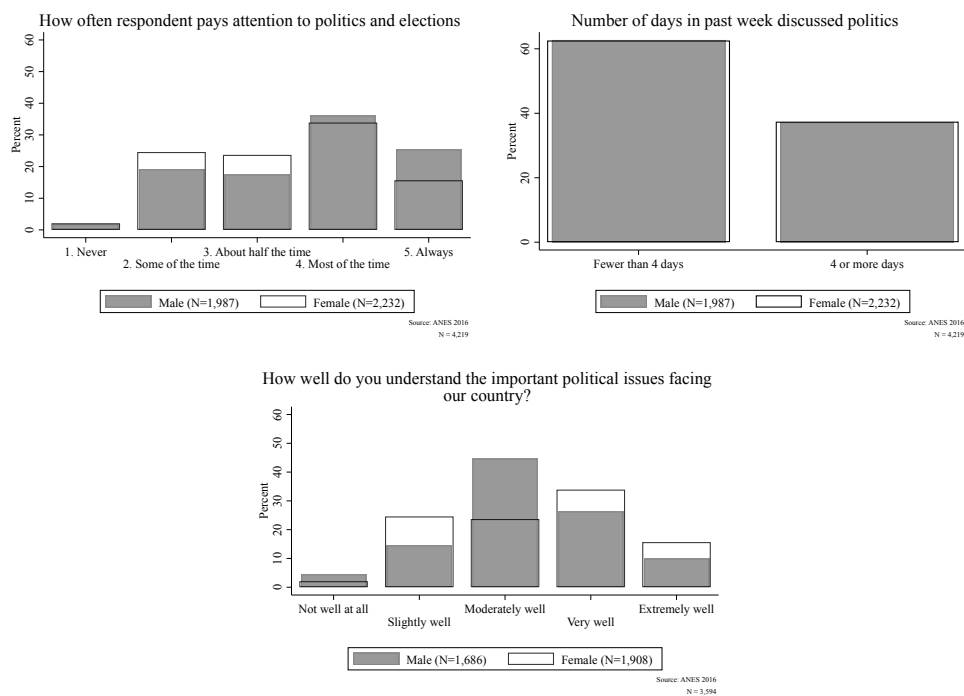


Figure A.2: Attention to politics

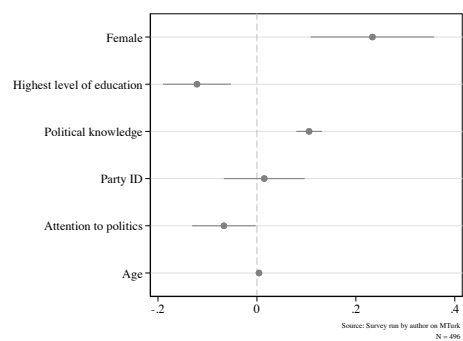


Figure A.3: Effect of gender on non-opinion responses to fictitious questions

A.3 Supplemental Tables and Figures to Chapter 2

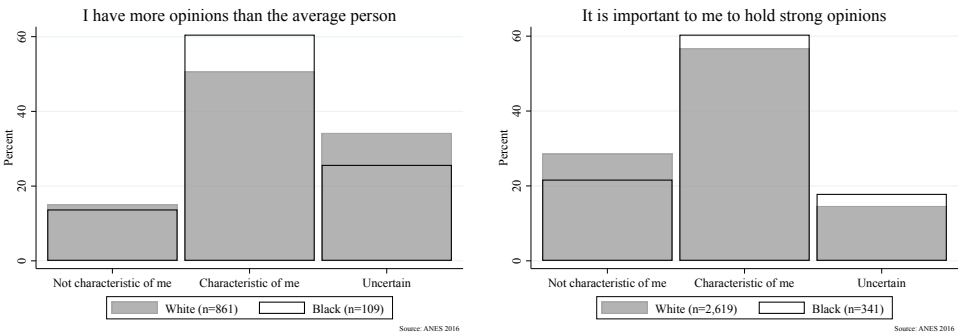


Figure A.4: Reported opinions (race)

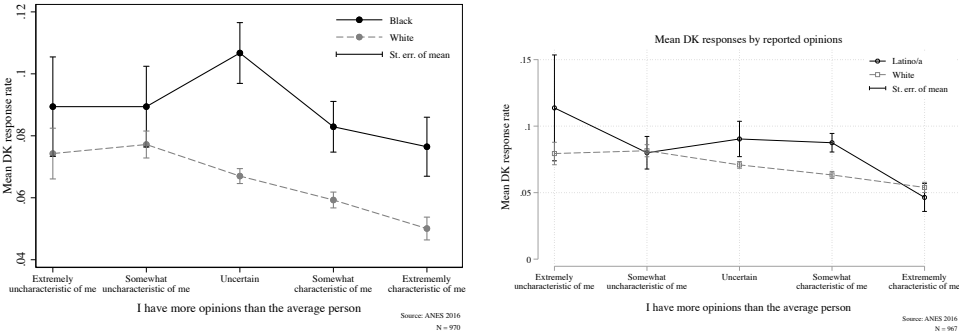


Figure A.5: Mean non-opinion responses by reported opinions

Table A.6: Effect of Race on Don't Know Rate

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Black	1.8963*** (0.3513)	1.3128*** (0.3487)	1.3453*** (0.3419)	1.1885*** (0.3600)
Education		-0.0500*** (0.0139)	-0.0342* (0.0133)	-0.0276* (0.0118)
Political knowledge		-0.4716*** (0.0436)	-0.3012*** (0.0438)	-0.1486*** (0.0371)
Attention to politics			-1.3165*** (0.0972)	-1.3221*** (0.0984)
Party ID				0.0768 (0.0411)
Age				0.0046 (0.0068)
Marital status				-0.0245 (0.0641)
Employment status				0.0620 (0.0479)
Female				0.7583*** (0.1771)
income				-0.0787*** (0.0131)
Constant	7.5894*** (0.1088)	10.5615*** (0.3309)	14.1889*** (0.4296)	13.4227*** (0.6208)
Observations	3436	3431	3431	3229
R^2	0.010	0.060	0.112	0.141

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.7: Effect of Race on Don't Know Responses
(Poisson distribution)

	Don't Know
Black	0.1408*** (0.0406)
Education	-0.0046* (0.0023)
Attention to politics	-0.1677*** (0.0120)
Political knowledge	-0.0204*** (0.0049)
Party ID	0.0109 (0.0057)
Age	0.0006 (0.0009)
Marital status	-0.0029 (0.0084)
Employment status	0.0075 (0.0060)
Female	0.1077*** (0.0236)
income	-0.0100*** (0.0017)
Constant	2.5804*** (0.0784)
Observations	3229
Wald chi2(10)	496.09
Prob > chi2	0.0000
Pseudo R^2	0.0703

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.8: Summary statistics by race

	White	Black	Difference
Education	11.889 (7.087)	10.902 (6.268)	-0.987*** (0.373)
Attention to politics	3.561 (1.077)	3.417 (1.141)	-0.144** (0.058)
Political knowledge	7.046 (3.904)	5.128 (3.594)	-1.918*** (0.206)
Party ID	4.217 (2.143)	1.990 (1.385)	-2.227*** (0.111)
Age	51.294 (17.600)	46.109 (16.548)	-5.186*** (0.936)
Marital status	2.241 (1.586)	3.224 (1.714)	0.983*** (0.085)
Employment status	2.673 (2.208)	2.668 (2.167)	-0.005 (0.117)
Female	0.528 (0.499)	0.600 (0.491)	0.072*** (0.027)
Income†	16.270 (7.870)	10.883 (7.778)	-5.387*** (0.426)
Observations	3,038	398	4,271
	Mean (sd)		(standard error)

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

† Average income for a white respondent is between \$55-\$59k, for a black respondent between \$27.5-\$30k

PID=1 for strong democrat, 7 for strong republican. More white respondents report being strong republicans than other PID.

B Robustness checks

Table B.1: Effect of Gender on Number of Don't Know Responses (Poisson distribution)

Female	0.1159*** (0.0226)
Education	-0.0048* (0.0021)
Attention to politics	-0.1631*** (0.0111)
Political knowledge	-0.0185*** (0.0050)
Party ID	0.0069 (0.0053)
Age	-0.0003 (0.0008)
Marital status	-0.0030 (0.0080)
Employment status	0.0095 (0.0064)
Race	0.0288** (0.0089)
Income	-0.0122*** (0.0016)
Constant	2.5658*** (0.0776)
Observations	3952
Wald $\chi^2(10)$	518.56

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: ANES 2016

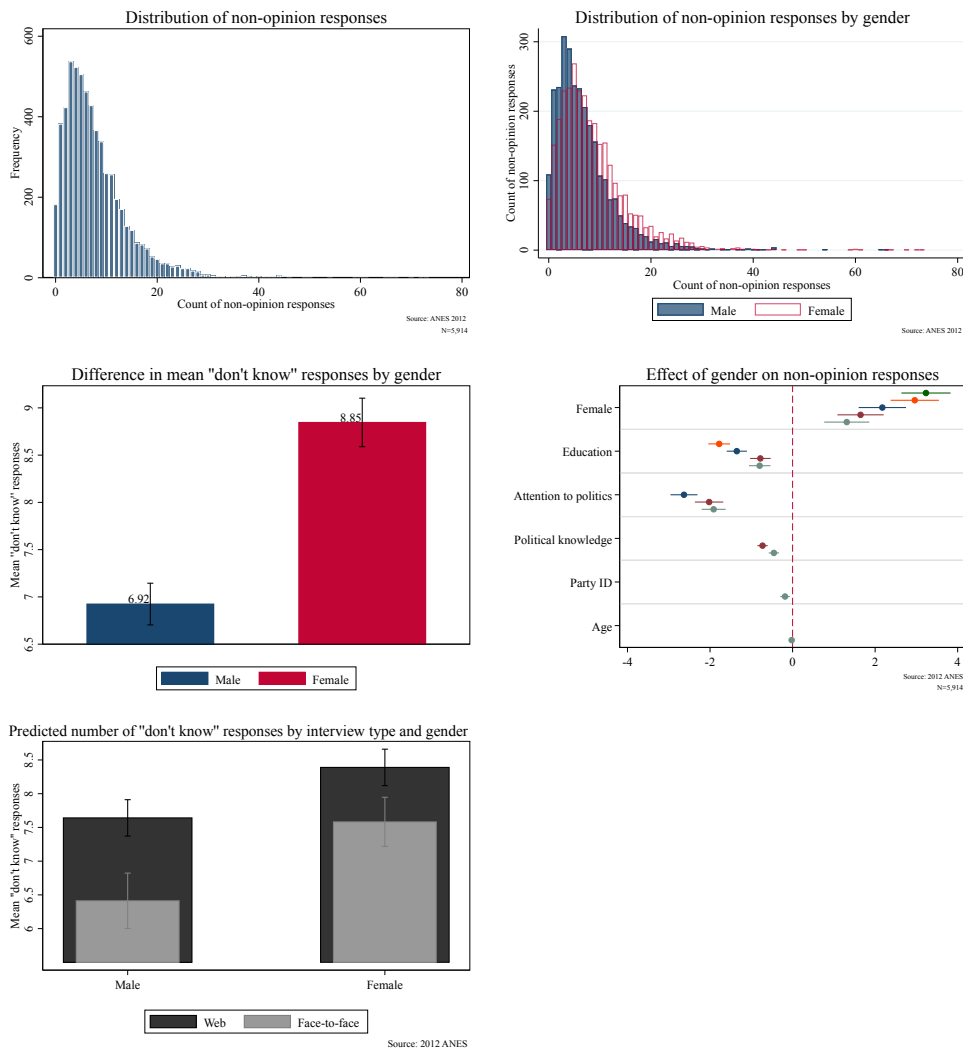


Figure B.1: Findings from 2012 ANES data

Table B.2: Effect of gender on non-opinion responses, 2012 ANES

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	1.2003*** (0.1079)	1.1117*** (0.1062)	0.8272*** (0.1044)	0.6640*** (0.1021)	0.6151*** (0.0998)
Education		-0.5807*** (0.0484)	-0.4261*** (0.0453)	-0.2496*** (0.0463)	-0.2805*** (0.0481)
Attention to politics			-0.9535*** (0.0654)	-0.7652*** (0.0693)	-0.6312*** (0.0535)
Political knowledge				-0.2246*** (0.0228)	-0.1319*** (0.0222)
Strong Democrat					0.2997 (0.1618)
Not very strong Democrat					0.3547 (0.1819)
Independent-Democrat					0.1912 (0.1879)
Independent					1.7267*** (0.2238)
Independent-Republican					0.0000 (.)
Not very strong Republican					0.3244 (0.1843)
Strong Republican					0.1271 (0.1667)
Age					-0.0116*** (0.0035)
Marital status					0.0544* (0.0268)
Employment status					0.0689** (0.0222)
Race and ethnicity group					-0.0040 (0.0320)
Family income					-0.0217** (0.0076)
Constant	4.1480*** (0.0704)	5.8912*** (0.1734)	8.7933*** (0.2758)	9.2801*** (0.2798)	8.2759*** (0.3428)
Observations	5914	5914	5914	5914	5581
R^2	0.020	0.052	0.116	0.135	0.155
Adjusted R^2	0.020	0.052	0.116	0.135	0.153

Standard errors in parentheses

Source: ANES 2012

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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