Voting and Motivation

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Methodology

• The overall objective of this study was to explore how recipients of means-tested government assistance programs, who are enrolled in community colleges, make decisions about voting and how, if at all, structural factors affect their decision to vote. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze data from which knowledge emerged about how recipients make decisions about voting.

Methodology

- Participants: 28 recipients of means-tested government assistance enrolled in community college attending one of three community colleges in a Northeastern state.
- Data collection: two in-person interviews, including an electronic survey to collect demographic data and voting histories and a semi-structured interview using an interview guide. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and uploaded to NVivo10.
- Data analysis: Researcher and a co-coder developed a codebook and reviewed transcripts to come to an understanding about themes and subthemes. A co-coding strategy was developed that added to the trustworthiness of the study. By using NVivo’s coding comparison feature, kappa scores were generated and indicated high inter-coder reliability.
FOUR VOTER TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dedicated Voters</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Nonvoters</th>
<th>Dedicated Nonvoters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting is important</td>
<td>Not sure if voting is important</td>
<td>Do not care about voting</td>
<td>Voting is useless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Not based on frequency of voting, but general patterns and commonalties that emerged from data
- The identification of voter types is not meant to suggest the traits associated with each group are exclusive to each group.
- Voter types exist on a continuum and are fluid.
VOTING PROCESS

COMMON OBSTACLES: TIME, LONG-LINES, CONFUSION ABOUT WHERE TO VOTE IN DIFFERENT ELECTIONS, LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHO TO VOTE FOR (ESPECIALLY IN LOCAL ELECTIONS) AND TRANSPORTATION.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Found ways to overcome obstacles</td>
<td>Discouraged from voting if it is a “hassle”</td>
<td>Does not affect decision not to vote</td>
<td>Does not affect decision not to vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t vote because I just go about my day” Joy, nonvoter, twenty-eight years-old, Hispanic/white, female</td>
<td>“I do not feel like it [voting] is beneficial to me.” Daryl, dedicated nonvoter, 23 years-old, African American, male, human services major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL PROCESS

No campaign or candidate contacted any of the participants.

“Elected officials do not care about people like me.”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust in democratic process/elected officials</td>
<td>Lack sense that voting is important</td>
<td>Disinterested</td>
<td>No trust in democratic process/elected officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of responsibility to vote</td>
<td>Voting is not their first priority</td>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>Alienation/Resignation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote strategically</td>
<td>Vote “in the spirit of voting”</td>
<td>Never thought about voting</td>
<td>Voting is pointless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CRITICAL AWARENESS

**UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELECTORAL POLITICS, POLICY, AND THEIR LIVES**

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understood the relationship between electoral politics, policy, and their lives</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of relationship between electoral politics, policy, and their lives</td>
<td>NEVER thought about relationship between electoral politics, policy, and their lives</td>
<td>Understood the relationship between electoral politics, policy, and their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote to protect self-interests (government assistance)</td>
<td>Their vote is “just their vote”</td>
<td>Never thought about voting</td>
<td>Politicians are puppets and controlled by outside sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting is a resource to impact policy</td>
<td>Voting to pick a candidate</td>
<td>Dialogue triggered interest in voting</td>
<td>Voting is pointless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IMPLICATIONS
HOW TO INCREASE INFORMED VOTING DECISION MAKING

**Dedicated Voters:** Encouragement; Provide resources to vote in local elections

**Voters:** Indirect interventions to increase critical awareness about importance of elections; Non-partisan information

**Nonvoters:** Opportunities for critical dialogue about voting; Non-partisan information

**Dedicated Nonvoters:** Address structural issues related to strong feelings of alienation and resignation; Create opportunities for interaction with elected officials
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS & EDUCATORS

(NOTE: NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ATTITUDES OF HUMAN SERVICE MAJORS AND OTHER MAJORS)

• Reinforce the connection between the personal and the political and importance of voting
• Reframe the importance of voting in terms of affecting policy not just who gets elected
• Indirect interventions to increase critical awareness about importance of elections; Critical dialogue matters
• Provide non-partisan information
Structural barriers are *designed* to limit participation and power.

- Confusing and complicated rules, deadlines and processes;
- Inconsistent and discriminatory election administration, including cutting polling locations
- Restricting who can vote:
  - Felony disenfranchisement;
  - Strict voter ID rules
  - Purging voter lists
  - Throwing out registrations with identical match and challenging student registration
  - Drawing barriers that dilute power through “packing” & “cracking”
What information/tools do people need to vote?

REGISTRATION: processes & opportunity

CULTURE: People encouraged to vote & participate in civic life

VOTING RIGHTS & ACCESS: Felony voting rights, incarcerated, students, military, language/hearing/reading/physical accommodations

PARTICIPATION: Same day registration, ID laws, early voting, no excuse absentee, mail in ballots, nonpartisan, fair districts

KNOWLEDGE: how, when, where to vote

INFORMED VOTERS: People know who represents them, who is on the ballot AND who represents their interest.
CONTACT INFORMATION

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