

Study: Political parties sideline minority voters, leave other orgs to pick up the slack

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A vote is a vote is a vote, supposedly, with each citizen in our democracy having an equal say. Yet a San Francisco State University study finds that America's political parties act as though some votes are more important than others, with white voters being contacted more frequently than their counterparts in other groups.

The research, from San Francisco State Assistant Professor of Political Science Marcela García-Castañón, was published last month in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*. The study finds that nonpartisan community-based organizations are effectively mobilizing nonwhite voters in place of partisan institutions like the Democratic and Republican parties.

"Political parties make electoral calculations that create disincentives for nonwhite mobilization because they are seen as a smaller group that is less likely to vote," said García-Castañón. "It changes the relationship between the voters and the system when the two organizing parties don't include them, leaving an important civic void to fill."

García-Castañón began delving into the issue three years ago. The study, "Democracy's Deficit: The Role of Institutional Contact in Shaping Nonwhite Political Behavior," used voting data from the 2008 Collaborative Multi-racial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), a national poll of voters conducted by UCLA. The survey tracks how often, and by whom, different racial voting blocs are contacted prior to election day.

According to the data, major political parties on average contacted white voters 3 percent more frequently than Latino voters, and 6 percent more than Asian voters. The difference in voter outreach between white and black voters was not as substantial, though white voters were still contacted 1 percent more often.

The survey also logged acts of voter participation, which included activities ranging from attending rallies, donating money to a campaign, or casting a ballot. Building on that premise, the study examined how outreach from nonpartisan community-based organizations affected nonwhite voter participation.

The study found that increased contact from nonpartisan groups had a greater impact on nonwhite voters than white voters. On average, Latino and Asian voters exhibited more voter participation ? 2 percent and 6.7 percent respectively ? compared to white voters due to more frequent contact; black voters had 5.7 percent more participation than whites.

"But when [political parties](#) do reach out to nonwhite groups the impact is greater, meaning parties could actually do more with less, but choose not to," García-Castañón said. "A lot of voters or potential voters are getting ignored unless a community organization or institution steps in and mobilizes them."

U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that nonwhite turnout has recently declined, going from 56.1 percent in 2012 to 52.7 percent in 2016; white [voter](#) turnout saw an uptick going from 64.1 percent to 65.3 percent.

But with the number of Latino voters expanding 40 percent between 2008 and 2016 and Asian Americans representing the fastest-growing racial group in the country, García-Castañón says parties can't afford to overlook these voting blocs any longer.

"You cannot get voters to the polls by ignoring them or hoping that their community organizations will do the work," she said. "Just that contact from a political [party](#), being asked or being reminded—that's all it takes."

More information: Marcela García-Castañón et al, Democracy's Deficit: The Role of Institutional Contact in Shaping non-White Political Behavior, *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1017/rep.2018.24](#)

Provided by San Francisco State University

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