04/29/2022
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Tyeese Braslavsky

(Student's Name)

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"AmeriCan I...?"

THE EFFECTS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY ON CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN SECOND-GENERATION ANERICANS

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

APPROVED BY   Cara Wong

(Instructor in Charge)

APPROVED BY

(Head of Department/Academic Unit)

Department of Political Science

(Department/Academic Unit)

"AmeriCAN I…?" : THE EFFECTS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY ON CIVIC PARTICIPATION

IN SECOND-GENERATION AMERICANS

BY

TYEESE E. BRASLAVSKY

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Political Science in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences as

part of an undergraduate research program

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2022

Urbana, Illinois

Faculty Advisor/Mentor:

CARA WONG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

ABSTRACT

Past studies have shown national identity to be a significant predictor of civic participation, with stronger attachment to national identity leading to higher levels of civic participation. Previous research has also brought to light the process of segmented assimilation in which groups who experience significant marginalization while assimilating into a host country may reject some of their host country's customs and instead identify with their marginalized identity. These divergent processes intersect for second-generation Americans, American-born children of immigrants, who tend to identify both as American and as another (often marginalized) ethnic identity, creating a unique civic socialization experience. And in this thesis, I explore the connection between second-generation Americans' perception of their American identity and subsequent levels of civic participation. I hypothesize that a weak perception of American identity will cause second-generation Americans to be less likely to be civically engaged than their third, fourth, fifth, etc. generation American counterparts. However, when second-generation Americans' ethnic identity is politicized, I hypothesize that the likelihood of second-generation Americans engaging in civic participation will increase.

Keywords: civic participation, national identity, generational status, immigration

DEDICATION

My senior thesis is dedicated to the 30th anniversary of my father's, Vladimir Braslavsky, and grandmother's, Bella Braslavskaya (of blessed memory), arrival in the United States of America as Ukrainian Jewish refugees. Without you there would be no me, in every sense imaginable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my incredible advisor, Professor Cara Wong, my Senior Honors Seminar instructors, Professor Matthew Winters and Professor Aleksander Ksiazkiewicz, and graduate students James Steur and Lucie Lu without whose support this thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for your guidance and your unwavering faith in this project, helping take it from barely an idea to a full-fledged paper. Thank you for making sure I never felt lost.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor Benjamin Miller who provided me with my first research opportunity in Political Science. Your mentorship during an especially difficult time has encouraged me to think deeper, explore intellectual territory outside my comfort zone, and has instilled in me a confidence in my academic abilities that I will always be grateful for.

A very special thank you goes out to my friend Aishwarya Shekara. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader, for being by my side through every crazy idea, and for always pushing me to be the best version of myself (including applying for the Political Science Honors Program).

I would like to thank the New American Welcome Center at the University YMCA for the opportunity to serve the immigrant community of Champaign County and always supporting my interest in the immigration field.

And finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents and my sister, for everything. I love you!

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Introduction

Former president Jimmy Carter once said of the United States, "We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams" (as cited in Ghattas & Moretti, 2006, p.98). And his words ring still truer as the nation's population gets more and more diverse with each coming generation. As of 2019, over 50% of the U.S. population under the age of 16 identified as a racial or ethnic minority, and as each new cohort replaces the old, the nation's legislative leadership becomes increasingly diverse as well (Frey, 2020). This is clearly seen with the inauguration of representatives like Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), and Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) among others and the fact that the number of minority legislators in both the House and Senate has more than doubled over the past 20 years, rising from 63 members in 2001 to 128 members in 2021 (Schaeffer, 2021).

Unfortunately, though the nation's population continues to diversify at an ever-accelerating rate, its policies are not keeping pace. Discriminatory measures such as the infamous "Muslim Ban," with which former president Donald Trump forbid travel to the United States from seven majority-Muslim nations and the (albeit failed) attempt to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, perpetuate the nation's extensive history of marginalizing racial and ethnic minority groups.

And as these policies make their way from the President's desk to news outlets and finally to public discourse, they shape citizen socialization, including members of the younger generation who are coming of age in this time and are still forming conceptions of who is considered "American", who is welcomed in this country and whether they themselves fit that mold. Which inevitably raises the question: what will happen when these young people reach

adulthood? Who will they perceive themselves to be and what impact could that have on how they engage with society at large?

The topic of civic participation is especially important to consider given that the United States' democracy relies so heavily on citizen engagement and citizen leadership to function, and soon it will be the most ethnically diverse generation's turn to take on these critical responsibilities. But will they? This, I believe, is a particularly interesting decision to study in second-generation Americans[1], children born in the United States to immigrant parents. These individuals often grow up "between two worlds", that of the country they were born in (the United States) and that of the country and culture their parents came from, a circumstance that could shape their sense of national identity in a unique way, particularly if their ethnic community is marginalized.

Although anti-immigrant policies do not impact second-generation Americans directly, they may impact their family members, friends, and community members whom they feel close to and the rhetoric politicians and the general public use to discuss said policies often fosters hate toward those immigrant ethnic groups generally, irrespective of generational status. And after years of seeing an ethnic group that they belong to systematically ostracized through laws, ordinances, and executive orders and being labeled as "not American enough" or "not American at all", will they feel as though it is their right to take up space in American politics? Will they fight to keep the interests and well-being of their communities on the Congressional agenda (as diverse representation has been proven to do), or will they avoid these opportunities because they feel they're "not American enough" and therefore it is not their place to meddle in American

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[1] In this work, I will be using the terms "second-generation American" and "second-generation immigrant" interchangeably.

affairs, leaving their voice out of the conversation (Minta & Sinclair-Chapman, 2013; Minta, 2019)?

These are the exact questions I explore, asking whether a connection exists between a second-generation American's perception of their American identity and their level of civic participation? I will begin by addressing the current state of the literature, followed by a delineation of the proposed theoretical framework and consequent hypotheses, a description of the survey experiment conducted to address this question and the findings produced, and finally a discussion of the implications and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Current Literature

Civic participation is a socialized behavior, adopted in the course of the individual forming relationships with society, its members, and its institutions. It follows, then, that the individual's social networks play a large role in determining whether and how this behavior manifests. In studying church-goers, for example, Putnam & Campbell (2010) find that the community those individuals built within their religious space effectively both enforced the norm of civic participation and provided its members with the necessary information to participate effectively (e.g., what the voting process looks like, where to find information about the candidates). And each of these, information access and socialization of norms, is absolutely crucial in cultivating an individual's resolve to participate. The former is key for increasing the likelihood of civic participation since it increases the individual's levels of confidence in participating (Jones-Correa, 2010; McClurg, 2006). And, arguably more importantly, the latter ensures that the individual has a sense of efficacy (i.e., a belief that their participation matters)

and perceives participation to be an important, even necessary, part of their role as a member of society (Cho, 1998). In short, education provides individuals with the skills they need to participate, and socialization ensures that these skills are put to good use. And both are provided through the social networks with which the individual engages.

The process of socialization into civic participation within a particular country proceeds differently for native-born individuals than it does for immigrants and, consequently, for the children that they raise - second-generation immigrants. This is not because immigrant families refuse to integrate into their host country's culture and accept its practices, however (Diehl & Schnell, 2006). In fact, over time immigrants begin to increasingly identify with their new nationality, and their children identify much more frequently and strongly with the host country than they do with the country of their parents' origin (Diehl & Schnell, 2006). Rather, the culprits behind the potentially decreased levels of civic participation observed among second-generation immigrants seem to be twofold. First, their own and their community's inexperience with the American political system which impacts the ability to acquire the information necessary for participation. And second, segmented assimilation which impacts the adoption of norms through socialization.

Lack of experience with the American political system works both to immigrants' own detriment as well as to that of their children. Because members of the immigrant community may face a language barrier and are relatively inexperienced with the new country's political system, acquiring information becomes a significant burden that adversely impacts the likelihood of their civic participation (Cho, 1998; Jones-Correa, 2010). And this can directly impact their second-generation immigrant children: parents will not be able to provide them with the required knowledge or set an example of what civic participation looks like for their children and instill in

them its value by participating themselves, which Gidengil, Wass, & Valaste (2016) argue is a

strong predictor of a child's likelihood of future civic participation. And because immigrants

from similar ethnic backgrounds often form close-knit, relatively isolated communities due to

considerations of comfort and as a result of de facto segregation, second-generation immigrants'

immediate social networks will be unable to make up for this gap either.

  The other factor contributing to possible civic engagement hesitancy in

second-generation immigrants is segmented assimilation which, Lajevardi et al. (2020) argue,

occurs when persistent discrimination of a particular group during their assimilation into a new

country makes them acutely aware of their marginalized status. This, in turn, leads to the

rejection of some aspects of the new country's customs and "leaning into" their heritage and their

marginalized identity (Stronge et al., 2005; Lajevardi et al., 2020). Support for this is clearly

displayed in the findings of Citrin, Wong, & Duff (2001), where Latino-Americans didn't rate

"being an American" as being as important to them as did native-born Black and white

Americans. They were also more willing to move to another country and to state that being a

citizen wasn't a crucial part of being a true American (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001). This

weakened sense of national identity becomes a problem for civic participation in light of Huddy

& Khatib's (2007) argument that greater group identification leads to greater norm adherence and

greater civic involvement. They find that a strong national identity among Americans was

closely related to increased attention to politics, increased knowledge, and increased likelihood

of voting (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). This means that, with segmented assimilation in place,

immigrants (and other marginalized groups) that face persistent discrimination will become

aware of their marginalization and may opt to "lean out" of their American identity, thus

"leaning out" of keeping up with the political scene, missing out on critical opportunities to

acquire knowledge and, consequently, becoming less likely to be civically active (Schildkraut, 2005; Becerra, 2012; Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2016).

This discrimination to disengagement pipeline, however, is not an absolute formula, and in some instances discrimination actually does seem to generate greater levels of civic participation of a slightly different kind. In Mattila and Papageorgiou's (2016) work on civic engagement rates within the disability community, they find that marginalization of disability decreases members' voter turnout but at the same time increases rates of contact with government officials and participation in political demonstrations. One contributing factor for this effect could be group consciousness which, when activated through policies and discussions that politicize a group's identity, can increase political participation (Miller, Gurin, & Malanchuk, 1981). Schildkraut (2005) finds support for this in her study of Latino-Americans: those that have strong ties to their ethnic identity and ethnic community actually participated more when they experienced discrimination.

An alternative explanation for this observed increase in civic participation in response to increased marginalization, proposed by Lajevardi et al. (2020), is a sense of cognitive dissonance between the discrimination that the individuals are currently experiencing and the values of equality (for all, citizen and non-citizen) with shich they have been socialized. As such, increased civic participation could be a way to right that wrong and ensure that this value is manifested accurately in their lives.

And finally, it could just be a simple sense of duty. Becerra (2012) found that as levels of perceived discrimination against them in the U.S. increased, immigration intentions substantially decreased for Mexican adolescents unless they believed that immigrating to the U.S. was something they had to do in order to support their family. Though the aforementioned study

focused on migrants rather than native-born citizens, individuals who are consistently discriminated against and labeled as "not American" enough may, in similar fashion, still perceive it as their duty to participate in order to support their ethnic community, even in the face of adversity.

What is Missing

Even with the progress enumerated above, a substantial component yet to be addressed is the impact these factors have on second-generation Americans specifically. The studies above largely examined samples of ethnic communities without regard to their classification as a naturalized citizen, a native-born second-generation citizen, native-born third-generation, etc. Different experiences across these groups, however, can potentially yield dramatic disparities in these individuals' socialization and deserve to be studied individually. The work that has been done to distill out second-generation Americans from immigrants does suggest that the factors mentioned above do not apply to second-generation Americans and that their civic socialization proceeds just like that of any other native-born American (Cho, 1998; Citrin, Wong & Duff, 2001). These works, however, are over 20 years old, conducted and written before the adoption of the heavy load of anti-immigrant policies in that period of time which may very well have disrupted this pattern of similar socialization of second-generation Americans and native-born individuals of further generational statuses. Additionally, the relatively recent study by Gidengil, Wass, & Valaste (2016) displays a strong argument for a connection between parent and child civic participation which differs significantly between second-generation American with immigrant parents and third-generation + American children whose parents, grandparents, etc. were born in the United States. This development has yet to be accounted for.

Additionally, the samples studied focused heavily on Latino-Americans and very infrequently on Asian-Americans and Muslim-Americans. Though these samples are incredibly valuable, they do not represent the full spectrum of immigrants and socialization experiences within the U.S. These studies also did not account for age or time spent within the U.S., significant confounds that could impact the amount of knowledge or experience the individual has with the United States political system and participation. The following study seeks to address these shortcomings.

Theory

Broadly speaking, there are three factors that, when present simultaneously, produce an environment conducive to civic participation: the motivation to participate, the opportunity to participate, and the ability to obtain the required information to participate (Harder & Krosnick, 2008). In the following study I focus specifically on individuals' motivation to participate, which can be heavily influenced by the socialization of national (American) identity.

Voting and other forms of civic engagement are socialized phenomena, meaning that they are practices that individuals internalize through the interactions they have with societal institutions, norms, and fellow community members. Simply put, an individual engages in activities like voting because from a young age they have seen and been told at their school, at their place of worship, and by their family and friends that it is the right thing to do as an American citizen. It follows logically, then, that the individual's social networks (family, friends, community figures, etc. that help socialize the individual) and their levels of political involvement are strong predictors of that individual's civic participation (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Social networks establish norms for their members to adhere

to both verbally with members telling one another about the norms and practically with members' actions reflecting and reinforcing these norms. This means that the more politically active the individual's social network is, the stronger the norm of civic participation will be, and the more likely it is that the individual will take part in civic engagement-related activities (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

In the case of second-generation Americans, however, this social network, their family and family friends who are shown to have the strongest influence on their civic participation, will likely be less active (Gidengil, Wass, & Valaste, 2016; Muddiman et al., 2019). Even as second-generation Americans' immigrant parents and grandparents integrate into American society and possibly even begin identifying as American, it would still take a substantial amount of time for them to "lead by example" and participate themselves because of the host of information and language barriers that they would still have to overcome (Cho, 1998; Jones-Correa, 2010). Certain immigrant parents might nonetheless be eager for their children to "be American" and become civically engaged, even if they (the parents) cannot participate themselves. However, it is unclear whether this excitement alone will be able to overcome the absence of behavioral modeling; from the existing literature (most of which focuses on substance abuse and other health outcomes), parental behavior rather than their words or wishes appears to be the stronger predictor of the child's future actions (Ebersole et al., 2014; Bingham et al., 2015). Consequently, the norm of civic participation is less likely to take hold in the second-generation American's immediate family. And given that the communities these families are part of are also likely to be saturated with immigrants with similar ethnic backgrounds and generational statuses, it is uncertain whether they would be of any more help in encouraging civic participation as a "norm" (Cho, 1998; McClurg, 2006; Jones-Correa, 2010).

Thus, given that their immediate networks are unlikely to provide them with a sufficiently strong rationale to participate, second-generation Americans can look to two other sources: the socialization they receive from other, broader social networks and institutions (e.g. schools, the government) and their own resolve to participate. To address the former, social networks and institutions outside of the family appear to be a much weaker influence on civic participation and are unlikely to trump the participation hesitation instilled in second-generation Americans by their parents (Muddiman et al., 2019). And even if outside institutions are able to compensate somewhat for a lack of parental socialization and instill the value of civic participation, the process takes significantly longer for children whose families are not already politically active (Neundorf et al., 2016).

As such, second-generation Americans are left to find motivation within themselves and their own individual resolve to participate and it is at this stage that national identity (or alienation from it) comes into play. Persistent discrimination of the second-generation American's ethnic group creates a sense of mistrust of other Americans because of the consistent mistreatment and exclusion second-generation Americans' ethnic communities experience at their hands. This also produces the perception of the host society's impermeability, the feeling that the individual will always be "stuck" a member of their minority group (e.g. Latinx) and will never fully be a part of the host society (e.g. American), which pushes the individual to avoid the host society in favor of the minority community (Ramos et al., 2016). These sentiments result in the second-generation American not perceiving themselves as "American" and "leaning out" of that identity; they fail to keep up with the political scene and, consequently, to gain the required knowledge to participate, thereby lowering their likelihood of civic participation (Schildkraut, 2005; Pearce, 2008; Becerra, 2012; Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2016; Ramos et al., 2016; Huddy &

Khatib, 2017). After all, why would an individual participate in a system that they regard as not being meant for them? Why would the American norms of civic engagement or any sense of duty toward American society motivate them when they do not deem themselves to be "American" to begin with? With this in mind, we arrive at our first hypothesis:

H1: A weak perception of American identity will cause second-generation Americans to be less likely to be civically engaged than their third, fourth, fifth, etc. generation American counterparts.

This effect could very well be influenced by the particular racial group that the second generation American's ethnic group belongs to and its proximity to Anglican/Western European culture, since the level of discrimination that, for example, white German immigrants and their children face upon arrival in the United States is undoubtedly lower than that experienced by Chinese or Nigerian immigrants. This could result in varying levels of attachment to American identity among second-generation Americans of different races and specific immigrant ethnic groups and, thus, in varying levels of civic participation. This potential within-generation variation, although important and certainly present, is beyond the scope of the current study.

This hypothesized pattern of behavior where discrimination leads to disengagement, however, can shift in the event of a specific policy that threatens or otherwise politicizes that second-generation American's ethnic identity (Miller, Gurin, & Malanchuk, 1981; Schildkraut, 2005). This could come in the form of, for example, a candidate that proposes to build a wall on the border with Mexico to curb illegal immigration, a measure that politicizes the Mexican and

various other Latin American ethnic identities. At that point, the sense of duty to the ethnic community becomes the primary motivator for political participation (Blais & Achen, 2019). Though generally an incredibly important factor in civic engagement, in most instances a sense of civic duty is not a salient consideration for second-generation Americans since they have little duty to the American society at large from which they feel ostracized (Blais & Achen, 2019). But when they are faced with a policy proposal that puts the welfare of their ethnic community in jeopardy, it activates their sense of duty to a group that they *do* identify with (Becerra, 2012; Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2017; Lajevardi et al., 2020). In this situation, then, the second-generation American will likely partake in campaigns, demonstrations, and actions aimed at protecting and bringing justice to their community and ensuring that they are treated equitably as the nation's values maintain (Lajevardi et al., 2020), generating our second hypothesis:

H2: When their ethnic identity is politicized, the likelihood of second-generation Americans engaging in civic participation will increase.

Research Design

Participants

Participants for this experiment were drawn from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Political Science Department's subject pool where students enrolled in undergraduate-level political science courses serve as participants in department studies in exchange for extra credit in their courses.

Background Survey

Several weeks prior to participating in the study itself, participants were asked to complete a background survey on the Qualtrics survey platform. This assessment included a demographic battery identifying their generational status along with various other attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age. In this study, I will define a second-generation American to be a child who was born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent. A first-generation American would be a United States citizen born outside of the United States to foreign-born parents, a third-generation American would be a child born in the United States to native-born parents but who has at least one foreign-born grandparent and so forth. Given that this study focuses specifically on second-generation and third-generation Americans and beyond, if a participant self-identified as a first-generation American (or as a non-American, like an international student, for example) on the background survey, they were not allowed to complete this study. First-generation Americans and non-Americans may have a very different sense of American identity from second-generation Americans and beyond given that they were, at one point, not an American at all because they were born and lived outside of the United States. This difference, although interesting, is not the subject of the present study and would complicate the results by introducing another mechanism of national identity development. As such, for the purposes of control and clarity, first-generation Americans and non-Americans were excluded from this study's participant pool.

This background survey also took an initial gauge of participants' level of motivation to become civically involved and any initial intergenerational differences on this variable (Political Participation Index). This section consisted of 11 items, ten of which asked the participant to rank their likelihood of participating in a civic engagement-related activity on a Likert scale with

options, in ascending order: very unlikely, somewhat unlikely, neutral, somewhat likely, very

likely. A sample item would look as follows:

How likely would you be to participate in each of the following activities…

1. Vote in an upcoming election

    a. Very Unlikely

    b. Somewhat Unlikely

    c. Neutral

    d. Somewhat Likely

    e. Very Likely

We compiled the collection of activities presented for participants to rank with the goal of

covering as broad a range of means through which most citizens can participate in the American

political system as possible. As such, the assessment included the following ten activities:

1. Vote in an upcoming election

2. Attend a protest or a demonstration

3. Sign an online petition

4. Contact your representatives in Congress

5. Canvass for a political candidate

6. Run for political office

7. Join a political and/or activist group

8. Talk to someone you know about a political issue

9. Donate to a political candidate or cause

10. Post about a political candidate or cause on social media

The 11th item in this assessment was an attention check asking participants to select the "Somewhat unlikely" option on that scale.

And finally, the preliminary assessment also measured participants' baseline levels of American and ethnic identity in a set of questions adapted from the General Social Survey. The questions appeared as follows:

American Identity Index:

1. How proud are you to be an American?

    a. Not at all proud

    b. Not very proud

    c. Neutral

    d. Somewhat proud

    e. Very proud

2. How important is being an American to you?

    a. Not at all important

    b. Slightly important

    c. Moderately important

    d. Very important

    e. Extremely important

3. When discussing Americans, do you most often use inclusive (referring to Americans as "we") or exclusive (referring to Americans as "they") language?

    a. Inclusive (we)

    b. Exclusive (they)

    c. I do not know

4. How close do you feel to other Americans?

    a. Not at all close

    b. Not very close

    c. Neutral

    d. Close

    e. Very close

Ethnic Identity Index:

5. How proud are you to be a member of your ethnic group?

    a. Not at all proud

    b. Not very proud

    c. Neutral

    d. Somewhat proud

    e. Very proud

    f. Not applicable

6. How important is being a member of your ethnic group to you?

   a. Not at all important

   b. Slightly important

   c. Moderately important

   d. Very important

   e. Extremely important

   f. Not applicable

7. When discussing members of your ethnic group, do you most often use inclusive (referring to your ethnic group as "we") or exclusive (referring to your ethnic group as "they") language?

   a. Inclusive (we)

   b. Exclusive (they)

   c. I do not know/Not applicable

8. How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?

   a. Not at all close

   b. Not very close

   c. Neutral

   d. Close

   e. Very close

   f. Not applicable

Priming Treatments

Three weeks after participants completed the background survey, they were sent the study itself (also on the Qualtrics platform). In this study, each of the participants was assigned to one of three groups (a control and two treatments) to test the fit of the decision-making mechanism for civic participation proposed previously and its effects on the various generational groups. Participants in each of the groups were presented with a vignette formatted as a short newspaper clipping to prime a certain aspect of the participants' identity and given at least 30 seconds to read it ("Continue" button did not display until 30 seconds have elapsed; on-screen countdown displayed the number of seconds remaining). The dates on all three vignettes were kept constant at July 19, 2021 to avoid eliciting any additional priming as a result of the different administrations in power and the events occurring at the true publication dates of each article.

Participants in the control group were asked to read a neutral vignette adapted from the Science Magazine (2021) completely unrelated to their identity, the text of which is as follows:

July 19, 2021

By the beam of his headlamp, Carl Hutter immediately knew the frog, not much bigger than a quarter, was a special find. The warty skin and bright red eyes were unlike any he had seen in the high-elevation rainforest of Madagascar. The country has a great diversity of amphibians, but most recent discoveries are so-called cryptic species, because their appearance closely resembles frogs already known to science. Researchers have been identifying these new species by their genetic differences.

That's where Hutter and his colleagues came across the frog in question. The amphibian also has rugged skin and a unique call so quiet it can barely be heard even a few meters away. The secretive nature of the frog, which only comes out of hiding after heavy rains, meant it took several trips to collect enough specimens for the taxonomic description.

After reading this vignette, participants were asked to complete an attention check question to ensure that they have actually taken the time to read and process with the presented reading. This question will read as follows with answer choices appearing in a random order for each participant:

1. What was the topic of the news clipping you just read?
    a. A plant was found to have healing effects
    b. A new species of frog was discovered
    c. An asteroid was recently named
    d. A species of tropical lizard can glow in the dark
    e. Rugged terrain makes mountain impossible to access

The participants in the first treatment group were asked to read a vignette discussing the characteristics of an individual who is considered to be "a true American" (Christian, descendants of early European settlers) and how immigration allegedly erodes national identity adapted from the Seattle Times (2017). This vignette aimed to prime feelings of otherness in second-generation Americans, the perception that they are not "true Americans" which is hypothesized to cause increased isolation from American society and a subsequent decrease in the likelihood of civic participation. The text of this vignette is as follows:

July 19, 2021

A recently conducted national survey finds that a majority of Americans cite a culture grounded in Christian beliefs and the traditions of early European settlers as essential to U.S. identity. The participants also overwhelmingly viewed immigrants who arrived in the past decade as having retained their own cultures and values rather than adopting American ones.

While there's disagreement on what makes up the American identity, 7 in 10 people — regardless of party — say the country is losing that identity as more people immigrate into the United States. Reggie Lawrence, a 44-year-old man in Midland, Texas, who runs a business servicing oil fields, said the country and the Constitution were shaped by European Christian values. "As those slip away", he said, "so does the structure of families and, ultimately, the country's identity". "If you lose your identity," Lawrence said, "What are we? We're not a country anymore."

After reading this vignette, participants were also asked to complete an attention check question to ensure that they have actually taken the time to read and process with the presented reading. This question will read as follows with answer choices appearing in a random order for each participant:

1. What was the topic of the news clipping you just read?

   a. A recent survey about American identity

   b. An interview with a new elected official

   c. A new construction project in a community

   d. A new law about freedom of religion

   e. A businessman who lost his business in a recent crisis

And in the second treatment group, participants were asked to read a vignette adapted from CNN (2021) discussing a proposed policy that put the welfare of immigrant communities at significant risk, namely the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This vignette was used to politicize and prime the second-generation Americans'

immigrant identity and the sense that members of their ethnic community are placed in harm's way. This is hypothesized to activate the participants' sense of duty to their community and increase their likelihood of civic participation.

The issue of DACA was chosen because of both its relevance in the current political sphere as well as its applicability to a variety of ethnic groups, something many current polarizing immigration issues lack (e.g. Muslim Ban, the horrific treatment of Haitian migrants at the southern border). Although the majority (67%) of undocumented immigrants do come from Mexico and Central America, considerable percentages come from other regions of the world as well (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). For example, 15% come from Asia, 3% from Africa, and 4% from Europe, with India being 4th on the list of top countries of birth for undocumented immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

The text of this final vignette is as follows:

July 19, 2021

When federal judge, Andrew Hanen, ruled Friday that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is unconstitutional, he threw into doubt the future of an initiative that protects from deportation undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children. The future of DACA now rests with federal courts of appeals, and the legal landscape isn't promising for the program's survival -- unless Congress steps in to rescue it.

If DACA does fall, the result will be potentially catastrophic for hundreds of thousands of innocent young beneficiaries, commonly referred to as "Dreamers." DACA protects an estimated 700,000 undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States before age 16. Without DACA's protections, these young people will be subject to deportation, even if they have committed no crime and done nothing wrong.

And as with the two others, after reading this vignette, participants were asked to complete an attention check question to ensure that they have actually taken the time to read and process with the presented reading. This question will read as follows with answer choices appearing in a random order for each participant:

1. What was the topic of the news clipping you just read?

    a. A new environmental policy proposal

    b. The future of the DACA program

    c. A budget crisis

    d. A recent natural disaster in the United States

    e. Children in juvenile detention

After each of the participants read their respective vignette and answered their respective attention check, they were asked to complete the civic engagement and American and ethnic identity items that appeared in the background survey again. The American identity portion included one additional free response question that did not appear in the background survey which probed the potential reasons for participants' strong or weak sense of national identity. This question had a 30 second timer attached to it and the "Continue" button was not displayed until at least 30 seconds had elapsed, giving participants time to think over their answer and enter it into the field, thereby increasing the likelihood that they responded thoughtfully and honestly. An on-screen countdown informed participants of the time remaining before they were allowed to move on to the next question. This question read as follows:

7. What are 1-2 reasons why you feel connected to or disconnected from your American identity? (please write at least 2-3 sentences)

Results

Index Tabulation

For all items except those asking about participants' use of inclusive or exclusive language to refer to other Americans or members of their ethnic group, each option was assigned a numeric value based on its position on the scale, with the lowest value assigned being 1. For example, item 1 would be coded as follows:

1. How proud are you to be an American?

    a. Not at all proud = 1

    b. Not very proud = 2

    c. Neutral = 3

    d. Somewhat proud = 4

    e. Very proud = 5

The two items asking about participants' use of inclusive or exclusive language were coded as follows: inclusive/we = 1 and exclusive/they = 0. Non-answers or responses that indicated "Do not know/Not Applicable" were not coded for all items.

In order to ensure that each item within the index had equal weight, the values assigned to each option in a single item were divided such that the highest value in each item was 1. For example, the values assigned to options within item 1 would be recoded as follows:

1. How proud are you to be an American? (highest value of 5 → divide all values by 5)

    a. Not at all proud = 1 → .2

        b.   Not very proud = 2 → .4

        c.   Neutral = 3 → .6

        d.   Somewhat proud = 4 → .8

        e.   Very proud = 5 → 1

Items asking about participants' use of inclusive or exclusive language were not recoded because the highest value a participant could be assigned for that question was already 1. Items making up the Political Participation Index were not recoded either because all items within it had identical options with assigned values ranging from 1 through 5 and thus none had greater weight than any of the others.

After coding, the values from each of the items making up the American Identity, Ethnic Identity, and Political Participation indices were added, forming the participant's American Identity, Ethnic identity, and Political Participation scores, respectively. So a participant that selected Neutral for Item 1, Moderately Important for Item 2, Exclusive for Item 3, and Neutral for Item 4 (the items making up the American Identity Index), they would have an American Identity score of .6 + .6 + 0 + .6 = 1.8. All 3 indices had a Cronbach's Alpha Score above .7 both during the background and actual survey, demonstrating strong correlation and cohesion between the included items.

Sample

After eliminating non-responders and those who did not pass the attention check either after reading their respective vignette or at the end of the Political Participation Index set of questions, the final sample contained 279 participants. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 44

years old with the mean age being just under 20 years old. The sample was fairly evenly split between second-generation (41.6%) and third + generation participants (58.4%) and was gender (54.8% Female, 43.4% Male, 1.8% Other) and somewhat racially diverse (56.6% white, 4.7% Black, 12.2% Asian, 16.8% Hispanic or Latino, 8.6% Mixed Race, and 1.1% Indigenous American).

Baseline Differences Among Generational Cohorts

At the outset, clear differences in identity were observed between generational cohorts. Second-generation Americans displayed a significantly stronger sense of ethnic identity than did their third + generation counterparts ($p< .001$, Figure 2) and the reverse was true for American identity: third + generation Americans displayed a significantly stronger sense of American identity than did their second-generation counterparts ($p= .015$, Figure 1). However, the two generational groups did not significantly differ on baseline measurements of political participation ($p= .206$, Figure 3).
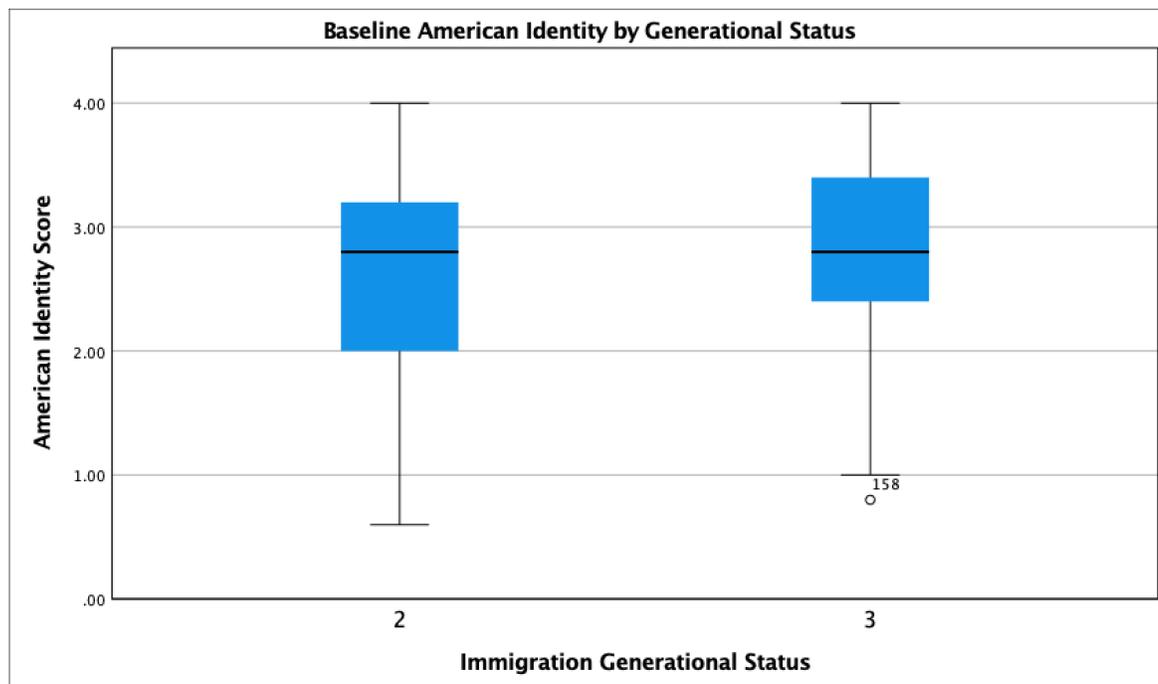
Figure 1

Figure 2

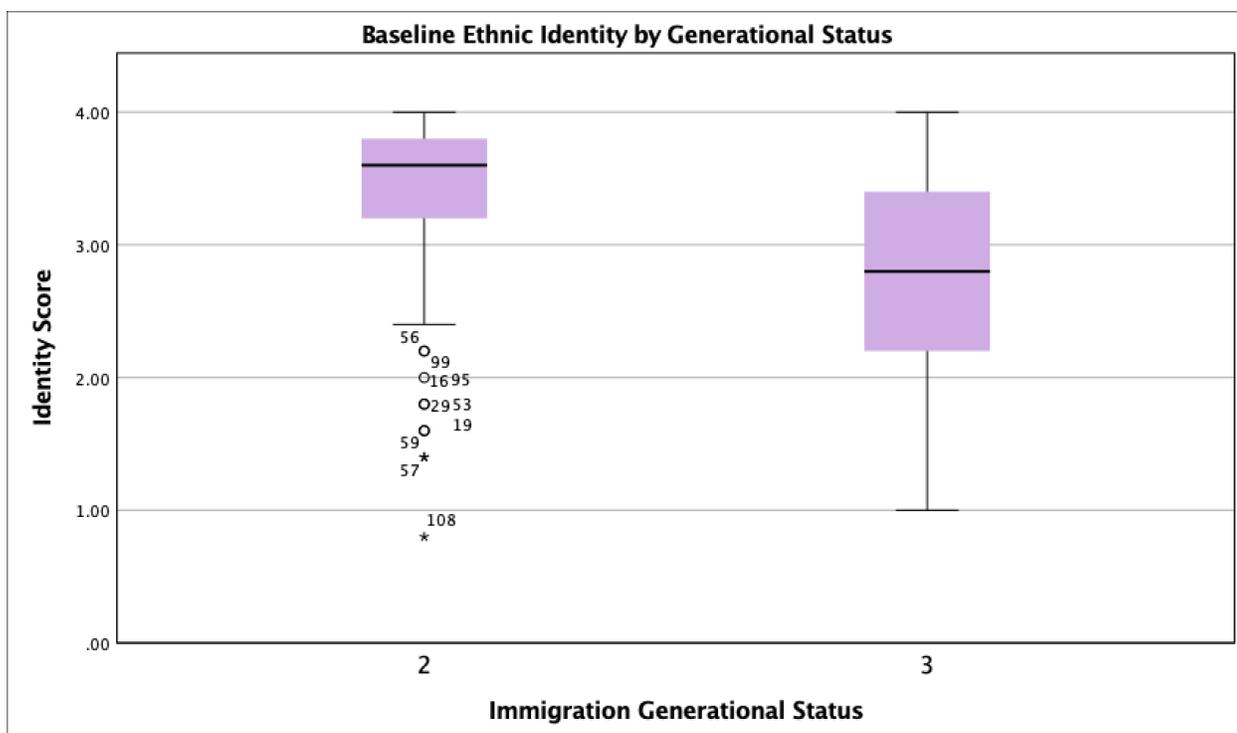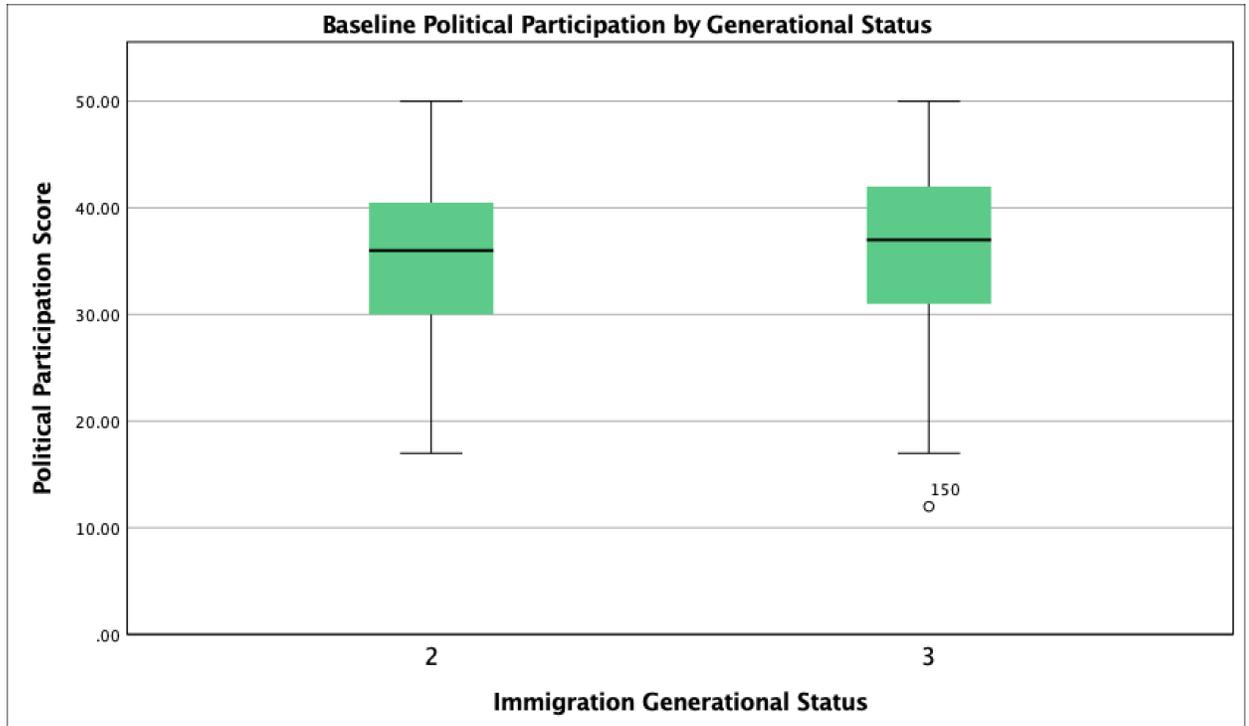**Figure 3**

Baseline Political Participation by Generational Status

Treatment Effects

Upon analysis, the priming treatments administered were not found to have a significant impact on American identity, ethnic identity, or political participation for either generational cohort. The notable exception to this was Treatment 1 which, although constructed to prime a sense of alienation from the American identity, actually caused a significant *increase* in American identity among second-generation Americans ($p= .006$, Table 1).

Table 1

	Post-Treatment American Identity Score Shift for Second Generation		
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance
Treatment 1	0.254	0.09	0.006
Treatment 2	0.149	0.089	0.098

Table 2

	Post-Treatment American Identity Score Shift for Third+ Generation		
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance
Treatment 1	0.023	0.062	0.707
Treatment 2	-0.067	0.06	0.271

Table 3

	Post-Treatment Ethnic Identity Score Shift for Second Generation		
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance
Treatment 1	0.112	0.07	0.112
Treatment 2	0.081	0.074	0.274

Table 4

	Post-Treatment Ethnic Identity Score Shift for Third+ Generation		
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance
Treatment 1	0.05	0.096	0.604
Treatment 2	-0.128	0.098	0.191

Table 5

	Post-Treatment Political Participation Score Shift for Second Generation		
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance
Treatment 1	0.347	0.789	0.662
Treatment 2	-0.672	0.835	0.423

Table 6

	Post-Treatment Political Participation Score Shift for Third+ Generation		
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance
Treatment 1	-0.426	0.556	0.444
Treatment 2	0.41	0.541	0.45

Relationship Between American Identity and Political Participation

Although there seemed to be no relationship between American Identity and Political Participation in third + generation Americans, this study found a significant direct correlation between American Identity and Political Participation for second-generation Americans post-treatment (*p=.019*, Table 7).

Table 7

	Post-Treatment Political Participation Shift in Relation to American Identity Shift			
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Significance	
Second Genertion	2.046	0.86	0.019	
Third+ Generation	-0.659	0.796	0.409	

Reasons for Connection or Alienation From American Identity

Although responses to the open-ended question asking participants to describe 1-2 reasons why they felt disconnected from or connected to their American Identity were not calculated into the American Identity Index, they nonetheless produced invaluable insights into the cognitive processes behind identity formation.

For participants who did not feel a strong connection to their American identity, the most common reason cited was discrimination. A participant put it best, saying, "Society around me doesn't see me as American, therefore I find it hard to see myself that way". Other participants described similar feelings, stating that discrimination creates an "us vs. them" dichotomy for marginalized citizens: they are certainly American on paper, but because they are actively excluded from American society, it becomes impossible to feel both American and a part of a marginalized group. This discrimination also heavily shapes participants' everyday experiences, making this ethnic identity more salient than their American identity which they share with so

many others. Other common reasons described were American identity being inextricably tied to whiteness, cultural and value differences, and disapproval of the actions of the U.S. government.

And for participants who felt a strong connection to their American identity, the commonly cited reasons included being born and growing up in the United States, having citizenship here, sharing values, experiences, and traditions with fellow Americans, and being thankful for the freedoms that American society affords which create an experience that is one-of-a-kind in the global sense.

Discussion

Findings

Although this study did find strong support for the predicted differences in identification between second-generation and third + generation Americans with second-generation Americans having a stronger sense of ethnic identity and third + generation Americans having a stronger sense of American identity, no definitive conclusions could be drawn about differences in political participation between the two generational cohorts. The groups did not differ significantly on their levels of political participation neither at baseline measurement nor after treatment. The only clear indication of a relationship between American Identity and Political Participation can be found among second-generation Americans for whom an increase in American Identity leads to a significant increase in Political Participation.

This study also found indication of the adverse impact of discrimination on national identity formation via participants' open-ended responses. Participants explained that it's difficult to feel American when they are constantly pushed away from American society because

of their ethnic background and that the European, Christian, and white connotations of American identity make it difficult to connect with for participants who aren't any of the three.

Limitations and Future Directions

Unfortunately, one of the biggest limitations of this study was its small sample size. It is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from comparisons between groups of 30 people, which is the average number of participants from each generational cohort that were included in each of the 3 treatments.

The lack of broad applicability of the priming treatments also posed an obstacle for this study. This is especially true of Treatment 2 which did not have a significant effect on either generational cohort which prevented further investigation into the effects of the politicization of participants' ethnic identity. This could be a result of the fact that this treatment only included one issue, the potential termination of the DACA program, and wasn't tailored to each specific ethnic identity. And although DACA certainly doesn't only affect Hispanic and Latino immigrants, they make up by far the largest proportion of its beneficiaries and thus this issue is certainly more salient for them, making its termination a more significant threat to their community than to other groups. This could also be said of Treatment 1 which, despite being intended to prime a sense of alienation from American identity, actually caused increased levels of it in second-generation Americans. This effect could very well be because the sample was overwhelmingly white and priming treatment 1 explicitly characterized American identity as being inextricably linked to whiteness, Christianity, and European origin. So instead of othering participants as it was intended to, this treatment actually could have bolstered any wavering feelings of national identity for a large portion of the sample who were white, majority Christian

children of immigrants of European descent by reminding them that these are exactly the sort of people that are considered "true Americans". In future studies, it may be prudent to cater these priming treatments to at least the participants' racial identities such that they feel as strongly as possible a sense of alienation from American identity or that their specific community is being put in danger.

In a similar vein, because of the size of the sample and its lack of diversity, this study did not examine differences in American Identity, Ethnic Identity, or Political Participation along racial and/or ethnic lines. Nevertheless, this is an area worth exploring given America's history with racism and the disparate treatment it affords to white immigrants and immigrants of Color. And even among immigrants of Color, different racial and ethnic groups are treated differently as well. This may very well lead to different levels of discrimination and can affect the extent to which members of these groups feel connected to their American identity (and thus their likelihood of civic participation).

Additionally, based on the surprising reaction of second-generation participants to Treatment 1 where a treatment meant to prime a sense of alienation from American identity caused the strength of American identity to increase, this study indicates that discrimination may create within marginalized groups a desire to rebel and assert the American identity that they have been systematically stripped of. Given how disparate these reactions to discrimination can be (leaning out of American identity vs. trying to feel even more American) and the differences in civic participation levels that this can lead to, it would be interesting to probe the factors that lead marginalized individuals to pursue different cognitive routes and respond differently in the face of discrimination. Does this depend on ethnicity or race? The level of discrimination experienced? Parental influence and desire to be American?

And finally, we return to the question posed at the beginning of this study: *AmeriCAN I...?* I believe we can all agree the answer is yes. Civic participation is open to all citizens (and even non-citizens) regardless of age, ethnicity, race, gender, or other demographic factors. However, one question remains unanswered: *AmeriWILL I...?* But that is a question for further research to answer.

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