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AUTHOR Allen, Richard L.; Chaffee, Steven H.
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ABSTRACT

Data from personal interviews with 268 black adults living in predominantly black neighborhoods of San Francisco, California, were used to examine the relationships among political participation, media exposure, and various individual characteristics. Results showed that reading general news magazines had the strongest interaction with the three political involvement variables, reaching statistical significance in every equation. Another consistent predictor was the reading of black-oriented news magazines. Viewing black-oriented public affairs television programs was specifically associated with campaign participation. Exposure to general public affairs on television was notable for its consistent lack of association with any of the political participation variables. The only noteworthy predictors of media use were age and education, while news magazine and newspaper use are associated with higher income, but not significantly so. Psychological measures in the study made minimal contributions to the understanding of blacks' political participation. These findings suggest that media exposure, rather than being an independent variable, facilitates the activation of background and psychological variables into political participation. (RL)

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MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF BLACK AMERICANS

Richard L. Allen
Department of Rhetoric and Communication
State University of New York-Albany

and

Steven H. Chaffee
Mass Communication Research Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison 53706

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MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
OF BLACK AMERICANS¹

The potential role of mass communication has been neglected in accounting for the rising levels of political activity among black Americans since the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In the past two decades a number of social researchers have sought social-structural and psychological explanations for black political participation, often including exposure to the news media as one of many dependent variables, rather than as an important intervening variable in the process linking antecedent conditions to participation. The empirical picture that has emerged from these studies has been weak and inconsistent in most respects. This paper proceeds from the assumption that mass communication can be viewed as an agent, rather than simply as one of many indices, in the fostering of black political participation.

Several bodies of data document the recent historical increase in overt black political activity. Verba & Nie (1972: 258) found that blacks had trailed whites at each educational level by 2-1 and 3-1 ratios in the mean number of campaign acts reported in the 1952 and 1956 national election studies; but in the 1968 and 1970 studies these differences had disappeared at every educational level and blacks slightly exceeded whites in all except the college-educated stratum. Pomper (1975: 121) found that 35% of whites but only 22% of blacks reported attempting to influence someone else in the 1960 campaign; in 1968 the corresponding percentages were 33-32, and in 1972 32-32. In 1960, 69% of whites but just 48% of blacks said they cared much

about the election; in 1968 this expression of interest was given by 59% of whites but 76% of blacks. Some gaps, though closing, remain. For example, 82% of whites but only 53% of blacks reported voting for President in 1960; in 1972 this was reduced to a 74-65% difference (Pomper, 1975). Olsen (1970) compared data from a 1957 Detroit sample and a 1968 Indianapolis sample; not only were black-white differences smaller in 1968, but when he controlled for socio-economic status, black participation in most respects exceeded that of whites in the 1968 survey.

The finding that socio-economic differences account for the observed black-white differences, and even mask a greater propensity toward political activism among blacks within the lower SES levels (see also Orum, 1966; Antunes & Gaitz, 1975) is one simple demographic approach to the question. At least two others, of a more theoretical character, have also occupied research attention. One is Myrdal's (1944) "compensation" hypothesis, which assumes that political participation is one of the few activities from which blacks would not find themselves blocked due to discrimination. It hypothesizes that they consequently channel their energies disproportionately into that line for lack of an alternative outlet. What is thought to be a competing hypothesis has been advanced more recently, that of an "ethnic community" growing out of strengthened identification with blacks as a separate race in American society. Black identification is hypothesized to lend social support to the person's inclinations toward political activism.

Neither the compensation hypothesis nor the ethnic community

hypothesis has fared very well in recent analyses. Myrdal's formulation has been attacked both for its normative assumptions (Medalia, 1962), and because, for example, it fails to account for the fact that Mexican-Americans (who are subject to racial discrimination too) are much less active politically than are either blacks or whites (Antunes & Gaitz, 1975). Geographical differences do lend some support to the compensation notion, however. Marvick (1965) found that in 1960 only 5% of southern blacks reported having tried to influence a local policy decision, compared to 29% of whites; in the North, however, the figure was 24% for each race. Identification with one's ethnic group seemed a promising predictor of approval of black militancy, in a 1967 survey of Berkeley, Calif., blacks (Dizard, 1970). But in the Indianapolis study (Olsen, 1970), with SES controlled black identifiers exceeded black non-identifiers by only .25 to .21 on a measure of political organization participation, and 1.80 to 1.48 on partisan political activities-- to cite the smallest and largest differences reported. Antunes & Gaitz (1975) concluded from their study of blacks, whites and Mexican-Americans in Houston that there were so few differences attributable to ethnic identification that it was at most a minor factor.

Indeed, none of the evidence based on SES, compensation, ethnic identity, or other factors is impressive in the extent to which it accounts for differences in political participation among blacks. Antunes & Gaitz (1975: 1198) could account for only 16% of the

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variance in voting and political discussion, and 8% of the variance in mass media exposure, by a formula that included the person's age, SES, ethnicity, and the interaction of the latter two variables. It has been suggested that the compensation and ethnic community hypotheses should operate mainly to reduce differences in the lowest SES strata, because high status blacks already participate at about the same level as high status whites (Williams, Babchuk & Johnson, 1975; Kuo, 1977). In all, the picture to date is one of theories of limited applicability and minor empirical import, with a great deal of observed variation left unexplained.

The Functional Role of Mass Communication

The idea that exposure to public affairs content via the mass media could facilitate the process of increased black political participation seems not to have been considered by previous investigators. Treating media use measures simply as dependent variables, both Antunes & Gaitz (1975) and Olsen (1970) were unable to account significantly for media activity on the basis of race, ethnicity, SES, or age (although some of the interactions among these variables were a bit more encouraging). The question remains whether media use can be considered a behavior that contributes to various forms of black political participation. There are a number of reasons to hypothesize that it does.

Olsen's (1970) rejection of Myrdal's compensation hypothesis was based partly on his assumption that it could not account for black-white differences in a number of "activities [that] bring blacks into

closer contact with the white community." He included attention to the news media among these activities. This categorization seems erroneous, however. Attendance to mass media, while it may occur in the "social" context of the family, rarely involves direct personal interaction with persons of other racial or socio-economic groups. Chaffee (1967) concluded on the basis of a national survey that the mass media served to bridge uncomfortable social and educational gaps, in that less-educated people were more likely than others to rely on the media for their communication from and to local schools; only the better educated citizens interacted directly and often with school personnel, who were their peers. The impersonality of mass communication, while it has some manifest social drawbacks, can be a positive factor ("eufunctional") in providing access to information for people who would be at a social disadvantage in direct interaction with personal sources. Seen in this light, the mass media provide an alternate route in the direction of political participation, for those who find some forms of direct social interaction blocked by racial discrimination, as the compensation hypothesis would argue.

In the case of black Americans, both the mass media available and the typical patterns of their use differ in some important respects from the media world of the white majority. For one thing, there has long been a "black press" in the United States, which includes some rather successful magazines (both news and general) as well as a dwindling urban black newspaper industry. Secondly, since the civil rights movement of the 1960s the general-audience media (especially



television) have institutionalized features and programming directed at black audiences and the problems of blacks. Both the established black press and the recent black-oriented general media features tend to center around political themes, and consequently should be examined separately from garden-variety media exposure in an assessment of the contribution of mass communication to patterns of black political participation.

The electronic media, and especially television, might well play a more important role in connection with political activity among blacks than for other people. One obvious reason is that blacks rely more on television for all purposes, and hold more favorable opinions of TV, than do other Americans (Greenberg & Atkin, 1978; Bower, 1973). Although black-white differences in newspaper and radio use disappear when geographical and income disparities are controlled, the heavier use of television by blacks does not (Bogart, 1972). Blacks' reliance on television, rather than on newspapers, as a source of political information is also well documented (Comstock & Cobbey, 1978). A comparison of the 1952 and 1964 national election studies showed that in that period blacks sharply increased their attention to TV for political information while whites did not; this finding survived a variety of controls for black-white educational differences (McCombs, 1968). While whites tend to feel that they spend too much time with TV, blacks often say they do not watch as much as they should (Bower, 1973).

Television, as an information source has not in past research been found to relate nearly as closely to political activity as has use of

print media. For example, a number of studies have found a relationship between interpersonal political discussion and attention to media public affairs content. Where comparisons between media could be made, it has been the print sources that are the stronger correlates of interpersonal political activity (Atkin, 1972; Kuroda, 1965-66). In a longitudinal study of young adults over an eight-year period, print exposure predicted gains in political knowledge and activity while exposure to electronic media news did not (Chaffee, Jackson-Beeck, Durall & Wilson, 1977). Patterson & McClure (1976) found in a presidential election campaign that newspaper reading was associated with greater knowledge of the issue positions of candidates, but frequency of watching television network news was not. There is reason, though, to hypothesize that blacks would constitute an exception to this general rule of greater political import of print over electronic media, if only because of their greater reliance on television. There is, in fact, a good deal of political information on television if one looks long enough; Patterson & McClure (1976) found, for instance, that exposure to televised advertisements was a significant source of political knowledge.

In considering the political functions the mass media might serve for a person, we are not assuming a unidirectional "media effects" model. Media exposure can be a consequence, as well as a cause, of political participation. Purposeful exposure to mass-produced political material due to anticipated interpersonal political activity has been demonstrated experimentally. (Atkin, 1972; Chaffee & McLeod,



1973). These two classes of behavior seem to be mutually sustaining. In this paper, however, we will treat media exposure as theoretically antecedent to political participation for both substantive and procedural reasons. On the substantive side, such evidence as exists on the point indicates that the media-to-politicization sequence is stronger than the reverse sequence. Chaffee, Ward & Tipton (1973) compared the two processes over a six-month period with two panels of adolescents. Using political knowledge as a dependent variable, they found that the time-lagged coefficients representing both the media-knowledge and the knowledge-media sequences were higher than a "baseline" estimate representing the null hypothesis; but the media-to-knowledge partial correlations were .33 for each sample, while the knowledge-to-media coefficients were only .22 and .23. Procedurally too, we prefer to treat political participation as our dependent variable, because it is the consequential behavior that is of central focus both in this study and in prior research we have cited. We will treat media exposure as an endogenous variable so that we can examine its contribution to an explanation of participation after other antecedent variables, which are generally associated with participation more than with media exposure, are controlled. (It might be noted that the temporal ordering of participation vis-a-vis other factors examined in previous studies, such as black identity, is at least as ambiguous as is the media-participation ordering).

Study Design

Survey data were collected in 1976 from a sample of black adults living in San Francisco. An area of 16 contiguous census tracts, each containing at least 20% black population according to the 1970 U.S. Census, was sampled. The result was a modified census district containing some 58,500 persons, 60% of whom were black. While representing 8.2% of the city's population, this area included 36.2% of its black population. Sample points were drawn by random numbers from a reverse telephone directory; to control biases due to unlisted phones and homes without phones, interviewers contacted the next housing unit rather than the address drawn from the directory. Across three waves of interviewing, 69% of an original sample of 391 persons contacted provided data usable for purposes of this study, yielding an N of 268.

Rather than being interpreted as an all-purpose "Black Americans" survey, this sample should be characterized more specifically as black adults living in a predominantly black neighborhood of a large western city in the period following the historical era of major change associated with the civil rights movement. The study is comparable to others based on all-black samples (e.g. Babchuk & Thompson, 1962; Dizerd, 1970), and to those in which black subsamples have been subjected to special analyses (e.g. Olsen, 1970: 692), more than it is to those based on black-white contrasts. It is also more like those set in other northern and western locales, as opposed to the South; and to those conducted since the civil rights revolution of the 1960s than to studies done during or prior to that period. In general, the setting

of this study appears to be one in which we can trace the relationships among comparatively stabilized patterns of political and media behaviors in the context of enduring social-structural and psychological conditions.

Dependent Variables: Political Involvement and Participation

The concept of political participation takes on different operational meanings in various research contexts. In the study of Black Americans it has typically been observed through a variety of separate indices, and our study follows in that tradition. Three distinct classes of political activity were asked about, each being represented by several items. One is political campaign activity, the kind of formalized behavior Myrdal and others have seen as relevant to the compensation hypothesis. Next we look at social participation, in the form of interpersonal discussion of public problems outside the ritualized campaign setting. Finally, we inquire into the person's degree of involvement in local politics, a realm that is a bit more distant from the comfortable milieu of the immediate ethnic community.

Campaign participation was measured by dichotomous items reporting concrete behaviors, phrased much like the items in standard use by such survey organizations as the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan: ". . . within the past year have you . . ."

- (a) "passed out leaflets or other materials describing any campaign?"
- (b) "wore a campaign button, or displayed a sign or bumper sticker"
- (c) "tried to convince someone to vote as you plan to vote" (d) "attended a political rally or dinner?" (e) "contributed money to a party"

or candidate?" These five items were summed to form an index with a mean of .82 and a standard deviation of 1.38.

Social participation was measured by asking, "Do you ever talk about public problems with any of the following people?" (a) your family, (b) people where you work, (c) community leaders such as club or church leaders, (d) Democratic or Republican leaders (e) friends. The number of "yes" responses was summed across the five items; the resultant index had a mean of 2.63 (s.d.=1.54).

Involvement in local politics was measured according to the reported frequency (very often, often, sometimes, rarely, never; scored 5-4-3-2-1) of each of six behaviors: (a) vote in city elections, (b) stay informed about who the local government officials are, (c) talk to family, friends and neighbors about local politics, (d) let local government officials know what you want done on issues, (e) let local officials know when you don't like something they have done or have not done, (f) work to get issues you think are important accepted as priorities by local government officials. The mean of this index was 15.86 (s.d.=6.08).

These three indices share some obvious points of overlap. Interpersonal communication, while it is the total content of the social participation measure, also occurs in both the campaign and local involvement measures, for example. But each index has a central core that distinguishes it from the other two, so that as a set these measures provide us with a diversified array of dependent variables.

Independent Variables: Background Characteristics
and Subjective Orientations

The questionnaire included four questions about personal background characteristics that can serve as indicators of some important social structural factors. The mean age was 38 years (s.d.=15). Mean reported family income was about \$5,900 (s.d.=\$1,988). Mean education level (highest year of schooling completed) was 3.19 (s.d.=1.28) on a scale where 1=8th grade or less, 2=some high school, 3=high school graduate, 4=some college, 5=college graduate and 6=advanced degree. This means that the sample was about evenly split between persons who had attended college and those who had not; this is an unusually high educational level for samples of black Americans, although not surprising in view of the educational opportunities and legal schooling requirements in San Francisco. On a scale of perceived social class the mean was 2.70 (s.d.=1.29), where 1=lower, 2=working, 3=lower middle, 4=middle middle, 5=upper middle, 6=upper. The mean, then, locates the central tendency of the distribution between the working and middle classes, which is approximately what should be expected given the locale, age and educational level. The sample included 46% males.

Three subjective orientations were measured with multiple-item indices. Two of these were specific to the black population: black identity (Marx, 1969; Brink & Harris, 1969), and the negatively charged but functionally similar concept of alienation from white society (Schuman & Hatchett, 1974). The third was anomie (Srole scale), a general variable that is often included in theoretical discussions of the frustrating character of the black experience in American society, and which has been found to be negatively related to such

participatory mass communication behaviors as writing letters to the editor and calling in to a radio talk show (Singer, 1973). Several recent studies have shown relationships between such background variables as age and education, and race-related subjective orientations (Gurin & Epps, 1974; Paige, 1970; Schuman & Hatchett, 1974).

Anomie was measured by summing five agree-disagree items: (a) "In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man or woman is getting worse", (b) "It is hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future", (c) "Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today", (d) "These days a person does not really know who he can count on", (e) "There's little use in writing to public officials because they are often not interested in the average man or woman." The mean number of agreements to these statements was 3.22 (s.d.=1.51).

Black identity was measured by five items concerning the distinctness of blacks as a group, selected by item analysis from an original list of eleven. Each item used a five-point Likert agree-disagree response scale: (a) "When any black is discriminated against, no matter who he or she is, it affects me personally", (b) "It has been said that blacks should be proud to live in America", (c) "If a black works hard enough he or she can usually get ahead in this country in spite of prejudice and discrimination", (d) "Blacks should have their own separate national anthem", (e) "Whenever the national anthem is sung, for example at sporting events, everyone should stand to show their respect for this country." With negative-facing items

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reverse-scored, this index had a mean of 16.21 (s.d.=3.17) within a possible range of 5-25.

Alienation from white society included six items dealing with both the extent of perceived discrimination and recent trends: (a) "Some people say that over the last 10 or 15 years there has been a lot of progress in getting rid of racial discrimination. Others say there hasn't been much real change for most blacks over that time, or can't say. Which would you agree with most?" (b) "On the whole, do you think most white people in San Francisco want to see blacks get a better break, or do they want to keep blacks down, or don't they care one way or the other?" (c) "Do you personally feel that you can trust quite a few white people, most white people, some white people, or none at all?" (d) "Do you think black customers who shop in the big downtown stores are treated as politely as white customers, or are they treated less politely?" (e) "As you see it, what's the best way for blacks to try to gain their rights? Use laws and persuasion, use non-violent protest, or be ready to use violence -- or can't you say which is best?" (f) "Do you think only a few white people dislike blacks, or almost all whites dislike blacks?" With "don't know" responses scored at intermediate positions, the mean on this summed index was 10.17 (s.d.=2.31) within a possible range of 6-18. Higher scores indicate greater alienation.

Endogenous Variables: Media Exposure

A total of six separate indices of the frequency of using various mass media for political or public affairs content were included in

the study, three dealing with television and three with print media. For each type of medium there was one measure concerning black-oriented content.

Public affairs viewing was a three-item index, using a response scale of 5=very often, 4=often, 3=sometimes, 2=rarely, 1=never: (a) "How often do you watch national news broadcasts, like Walter Cronkite?" (b) "How about local news broadcasts, like Six O'Clock Reports?" (c) ". . . and interview shows like Meet the Press?" A separate index of black public affairs viewing was constructed from two additional items: (d) ". . . Black Perspective on the News, that comes on Channel 9, late Sunday nights" and (e) ". . . All Together Now, hosted by Belva Davis on Channel 5 Friday evenings." The mean for public affairs viewing was 10.46 (s.d.=2.75, range=3-15) and for black public affairs viewing the mean was 4.29 (s.d.=1.89, range=2-10). Interpreted verbally, the average reported level of public affairs viewing was midway between "often" and "sometimes", and for black public affairs viewing was closer to "rarely" than to "sometimes."

News magazine reading was based simply on the number of publications the respondent reported reading, from a list of five: Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, the National Review, and the Progressive. A separate measure of black news magazine reading was created in the same way from this list: Ebony, Black World, Black Scholar, Freedomways, and Muhammad Speaks (Bilalian News).

The mean for news magazines was 1.69 (s.d.=1.33), whereas for black news magazines it was 1.82 (s.d.=1.25).

This finding of slightly higher use of black, as compared to general audience, news magazines is especially interesting because the analogous pattern did not hold for television. Print sources apparently are indexed more specifically for their ethnically relevant content, while television is watched less selectively and discriminately. This general property of print media, selection of which is under greater control by the audience member, probably helps to account for the stronger association between print media and specifically political interests discussed above.

Two other single-item media exposure measures were included, dealing with attention to political content in the daily news media: (a) "How much attention do you pay to the political issues that appear in the newspapers?" and (b) "How much attention do you pay to political issues that appear on television?". The response scale 0=no attention, 1=some attention, 2=close attention was used. The mean for use of newspapers for political information was 1.12 (s.d.=.62) and for television was 1.17 (s.d.=.61). The similarity of these two means suggests that, while exposure to different media may vary considerably because of the specific properties of presentation peculiar to each, people's self-conscious attention to political content in them is relatively consistent. The correlation between the two measures is $r=.56$.

Model for Empirical Analysis

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we have organized our data analysis around the explicit model shown in Figure 1. Four sets of variables are assumed to fit a sequential ordering, with each new set dependent on those which precede it in the model. First, background characteristics (education, age, income, perceived social class, sex) are entered in regression as predictors of subjective orientations (anomie, black identity, alienation from white society). Prior literature has indicated that we should expect several significant relationships to emerge from this portion of the analysis. These variables are then entered in a two-stage hierarchical regression analysis, as predictors of the six media exposure variables. Finally, the three measures of political involvement and participation become the dependent variables, and the three preceding sets of variables are entered as predictors in a three-stage hierarchical regression.

The operational procedure in hierarchical regression is to enter only the background variables as independent variables in Equation 1

 --Figure 1 about here--

for each subsequent variable in the model. In the case of the media and participation variables, there is then an Equation 2 in which the subjective orientations are added to the set of predictors. Finally, for the participation dependent variables an Equation 3 is calculated, in which the media exposure variables are added to the background and

subjective orientation predictors of Equation 2. The most direct indicator of the empirical import of a set of predictor variables is the change in the variance explained (R^2): from Equation 1 to Equation 2 in the case of the subjective orientations, and from Equation 2 to Equation 3 in the case of media exposure.

In interpreting and presenting our results we will apply criteria of both statistical and substantive significance. For substantive significance, we will ignore any beta weight that is less than .10, on the assumption that its contribution is inconsequential regardless of statistical significance. Statistical significance will be inferred for a beta whose absolute magnitude is at least twice its standard error. Betas that do not meet our substantive criterion will not be reported. Similarly, equations that do not add significant explanatory power will be omitted from our data presentation. Application of these exclusion criteria will facilitate our concentrating on results that are of sufficient magnitude to merit serious attention.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the findings of the study. The most important results appear in the lower right-hand portion of the table, where the R^2 values of the successive equations are reported. For each of the three dependent measures of political involvement and participation, Equation 3 accounts for approximately twice as much variance as do the prior equations that do not include the media exposure measures as predictors.² Put another way, adding the mass communication variables to the factors dealt with in prior research on black political

participation doubles the explanatory power of our analysis. It appears, then, that we are dealing with a substantial set of relationships that deserve detailed examination.

The strongest findings are those dealing with involvement in local politics, where the media variables add an increment of some 22% to the total R^2 (comparing Equations 2 and 3). Three media behaviors stand out here: the single-item measures of attention to political issues on television and in the newspapers, and reading of general news magazines. The latter measure is the strongest media variable for each of the three dependent variables, being the only predictor of any type to reach statistical significance in every equation. The other consistent predictor is reading of black news magazines. Viewing of black public affairs TV programs is specifically associated with campaign participation. One item is notable for its consistent lack of relationships: exposure to general public affairs on television is not associated with any of the criterion measures when the other variables in our model are controlled.

There are several possible summary interpretations of these findings. One conclusion might be that television, despite its high use among blacks, is not nearly as important in connection with their political participation as are the print media. In Table 1 there are nine coefficients between television measures and participation measures, and another nine between participation measures and indicators

 --Table 1 about here--

of print media use. For print, seven of the nine reach our criterion level of $\beta = .10$ and four are statistically significant; for television only four reach $\beta = .10$ and only one is significant. This accords with previous research showing a closer association between print media and political activity, and indicates that the higher use of TV by blacks does not mean that they constitute an exception to the general rule.

This comparison between media is a superficial and categorical one, however. The most reasonable theoretical explanation for reliance on print by politically active people is that print media can be accessed purposefully while television viewing is predominantly a passive behavior. The measure in Table 1 that is most representative of habitual, passive use of TV is the index of regularity of viewing newscasts and public affairs programs; this form of media exposure appears to be characteristic of older persons ($\beta = .33$ with age) and is not associated with any of the three varieties of political participation. The measures of television use that suggest more active orientations toward TV content are the index of viewing of black public affairs programs and the item on attention to political content on TV. Each of these, and especially the latter, is associated with some forms of participation at a level approximating that of the print media measures. In general, then, we should conclude that politically active blacks are distinguished by more specific and motivated uses of the news media than are others, and that this principle extends to their use of television.

While media use explains considerable variance in participation beyond that accounted for by the background variables and subjective orientations, the latter are in turn not strong predictors of media use. The middle columns of Table 1 show the equations in which the media measures are dependent variables. For only two of the six media variables does the R^2 (Equation 2) exceed 10%, and one of those two is the measure of public affairs viewing, which makes no contribution to political participation. The other, however, is a key behavior, the reading of black public affairs magazines; fully 25% of the variance in this activity is accounted for by the prior variables in our model. Readership of black-oriented news magazines, which is more common than reading general-audience news magazines and which is associated with all three indices of participation when the other predictor variables in our model are controlled, is characteristic of well-educated and younger blacks, those who feel alienated from white society, and those who do not express feelings of anomie. The special nature of the audience for these magazines merits much greater research attention than we can give it with the data available here. The black magazine seems to be reaching activist readers who, far from feeling defeated by experiences of racial discrimination (anomie is low), can use the political information provided by periodicals designed for the black subculture to advance black political interests.

The only other noteworthy predictors of media use in Table 1 are age and SES variables. Older blacks are more likely to watch TV and read the newspaper. The well-educated make more specific use of television for black-oriented and political information. News magazine

and newspaper use are associated with higher income. And, interestingly, those who read general-audience news magazines appear to see themselves as members of a slightly lower social class. Newspaper readers, like those who read the black news magazines, express lesser feelings of anomie.

Indirect Effects

Like previous research, then, this study finds that most forms of media use are not strongly dependent on structural or psychological factors, but they do mediate some of the relationships between participation and the antecedent variables in our model. This can be seen by comparing the coefficients in Equation 3 with those for the same predictor in prior equations in Table 1, as a method of assessing indirect effects. For example, the total effect of education on campaign participation (Equation 1) is $\beta = .28$, but when the media variables are included (Equation 3), this figure drops to $.21$. Similarly, for social participation the total effect of education (Equations 1 and 2) is $.27$, but in Equation 3 it is only $.18$. These differences between successive equations can be interpreted as evidence that part of the effect of education on these forms of participation is indirect, operating through the effect education has on media use (see discussion below). Another indirect effect of some magnitude appears to be the link between income and involvement in local politics, a process in which the reading of news magazines seems to be an important element.

The only apparent indirect effect of a subjective orientation is the role of black magazines and newspapers in the negative

relationship between anomie and involvement in local politics. Overall, the psychological measures in this study make minimal contributions to our understanding of black participation, in terms either of incremental variance accounted for, or implication in processes linking background or media variables to participation. Black identity, a variable that had been thought important on the basis of research conducted during the height of the black revolution of the late 1960s, is a significant predictor here of only one dependent variable, social participation or the variety of others with whom the person discusses politics. It is unrelated to participation in election campaigns, or in local politics. Alienation from white society is characteristic of those who participate in campaigns, but is not associated with other forms of participation. Anomie is low among those involved in local politics.

The superior predictive power of the media use variables in comparison with the measures of subjective orientations cannot be attributed to unreliable measurement of the latter. The alpha coefficients representing internal consistency of multi-item indices are practically the same for the two groups of measures: .67 for anomie, .52 for black identity, .65 for alienation from white society, as compared to .73 for public affairs viewing, .63 for news magazine reading, and .57 for black news magazine reading. Reliabilities are substantially higher for the dependent variables: .82 for campaign participation, .72 for social participation, and .88 for involvement in local politics.

The background variables of age, education and income, in addition to their indirect effects via media use, have some substantial direct relationships with participation and account for nearly as much variance as do the media measures. Even with media use controlled, there are strong effects of education on participation in campaigns and via interpersonal discussion; and of income on local politics involvement. Older people are more involved in local politics and more participative interpersonally. The role of both age and education as positive predictors of social participation is particularly striking in view of the fact that these two independent variables are negatively correlated with one another ($r = -.41$). The measure of perceived social class, unlike the observed SES indicators (income and education), is not related to any form of political participation. There are also no sex differences.

The relationships between background characteristics and subjective orientations are shown in the upper left-hand portion of Table 1 for completeness but are not of particular substantive interest in this paper. These relationships have been analyzed elsewhere (Allen & Bielby, 1977; Allen & McLeod, 1978).

Our incorporation of mass media use into the model of black political participation adds considerable explanatory power, but the role of media behavior is not a simple one. Our evidence reinforces the previous emphasis on socioeconomic status variables (education and income) as important determinants of participation, and adds the media as intervening element in this process. For example, educated

blacks tend to watch television for political information, and this in turn leads to greater social participation (.21 x .15). Similarly, education leads to reading of black news magazines, which produces another effect on social participation (.30 x .14). These indirect effects increase the total effect of education by 50% over its direct effect (beta=.27 in Equation 2 vs. beta=.18 in Equation 3.)³

Age, a factor that has not loomed large in prior research, also has some strong effects in which media use can be interpreted as an intervening variable. Older blacks tend to read fewer black news magazines, which appears to retard their social participation (-.11 x .14). This negative indirect effect seems from our results to be a product of the tendency for younger blacks to be more alienated from white society (-.30 x .22 x .14). On the other hand, there is a positive indirect effect of age on social participation via newspaper reading about politics (.14 x .14). The indirect effects of age that we have identified by adding media variables to the model tend, because some are negative and others positive, to cancel one another so that the total effect of age on social participation (.20) is about the same as its direct effect (.19).

The "ethnic community" explanation of high black political participation compared to whites within SES levels does not gain much support from our data. The subjective orientations, including the previously emphasized factor of black identity, add little explanatory power when other variables are controlled here. There is, however, evidence that a component of the black population, consisting of the young, the well-educated, the alienated but not the anomic blacks,

uses the black news magazines in connection with informal social discussion of political issues.

This last finding, along with the indirect effects noted above,
lends some support to our assumptions concerning the always troublesome question of causal ordering. Our model is a recursive one, and we have assumed all relationships in it to be linear and additive with no reciprocal effects between groups of variables. These assumptions were based partly on evidence from prior research, and on the overriding interest many investigators have had in explaining the increasing levels of black political participation as a dependent variable. But it is conceivable that at a microscopic level of analysis one might find evidence that some of the behaviors that occur later in our model precede some of those that we have entered at earlier stages. The negative relationship between perceived social class and news magazine reading might, for example, be due to blacks receiving from general-audience magazines indications that their stratified location in American society is lower than they had thought. And we have noted earlier that there is some evidence that anticipated political activity leads to greater use of news media.

Looking at our model and the results of our analyses from a more structural viewpoint, though, the ordering we have posited makes rather good sense. In the case of the black news magazines, for example, one might consider what the participation levels of the educated, young, and alienated blacks would be without those specialized media. The same can be said about the political content provided by television, which mediates a rather strong indirect relationship between education

and involvement in local politics (.21 x .23). Given that blacks watch a great deal of television, if they did not find much political information there we might well predict a lesser degree of political activity

Conclusion

In general, media use can be seen as an important stage in the process by which education is consummated in political activity. The various media also account for differential patterns of activity by different age groups. If the news media, including specialized content designed specifically for the black community, were not available to blacks -- which was the case historically, and continues to be in some places -- we can imagine that black political participation would be significantly retarded. In the context of the "compensation" hypothesis, which has been rather thoroughly rejected in recent research, the media might be viewed as an important locus of the removal of structural barriers that at the time Myrdal (1944) was writing overly constrained black participation in societal activities. The most reasonable interpretation of media exposure, then, is not as an independent variable isolated from other social processes but as a facilitating factor that helps to explain the translation of background and psychological variables into political participation. This conclusion is in accord with the location of media exposure at an endogenous position in our model.

The special circumstances of our study should be kept in mind in drawing generalizations from it. San Francisco is a progressive city

with a high educational standard, and provides both specialized media content and political activity outlets for its black population. It is manifestly not the kind of community that Myrdal based his work on, nor is it even typical of today's large American cities, North or South, in the societal position of blacks. Further, our study post-dates the main wave of the black revolution that has led to the rise in black political participation. This means that our results should not be assumed to be directly comparable to those of prior studies. If, on the other hand, we are correct in the belief that the nation has entered an era of relative stability in racial relations, the relationships we have documented here might well represent the patterns that are evolving throughout the country. At the least, our findings support the conclusion that the role of the news media should be examined closely in future research on these processes of social change.

NOTES

1. Data for this study were collected by the first author when he was a research associate at CableCommunication Resource Center in Palo Alto, Calif., under National Science Foundation (RANN) grant no. 10757.

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2. The differences between successive equations are all highly significant by F-tests comparing the R^2 value for Equation 3 with the R^2 for the previous equation. In each case $F \geq 2.0$ ($df=251, 257$; $p < .001$).

It may be noted that we have tested here only for the linear component of each main effect; interaction terms and curvilinear relationships might increase the amounts of variance explained, but we had no theoretical reason to hypothesize such relationships even though they might be statistically significant.

3. Indirect effects consist of two-stage paths in which an antecedent variable (e.g. education) influences a dependent variable (e.g. social participation) via intervening events that are observed in the data analysis model (e.g. watching TV for political information, or reading black news magazines). In such a case, the magnitude of the indirect effect is estimated as the product of the two direct effects that link the antecedent and dependent variables via the intervening variable. For example, the link through television here is estimated at $.21 \times .15 = .03$, and the link through black newsmagazines at $.30 \times .14 = .04$.

Together, then, these two indirect paths specifically add $.03 + .04 = .07$ to the direct effect $(.18)$ of education on social participation, which is an increase of $.07 \div .18 = 39\%$ in the total effect. Other indirect effects are smaller but account for a further 11% increase over Equation 2.

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Table 1

Standardized Coefficients of a Model of Political Attitudes and Behavior among Black Adults^aDependent Variables^b

Independent Variables	Subjective Orientations			Media Exposure						Political Involvement and Participation											
	Alienation from White Society			Public Affairs Viewing	Black Public Affairs Viewing	News Magazines	Black News Magazines		Newspaper for Political Information		Television for Political Information	Campaign Participation			Social Participation			Involvement in Local Politics			
	Eq. 1	Eq. 1	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 2	Eq. 2	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 2	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 3	Eq. 2	Eq. 3	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 3		
Background Characteristics:																					
Education	-.13*	.13	..	..	.27*	..	.32*	.30*	..	..	.21*	.28	.21	.27*	.27*	.18*	..	..	..	..
Age	..	-.20*	-.20	.33*	.15*	..	-.18*	-.11*	.14*	.14*	..	..	..	.20*	.23*	.19*	.32*	.31*	.25*	..	
Income	..	..	..	.14	..	.33*	..	..	.11	.11	..	..	..	..	..	..	.25*	.23*	.14*	..	
Perceived Social Class	..	..	..	..	..	-.13	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Sex	-.13*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Subjective Orientations:																					
Academic	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	-.20*	-.15*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	-.19*	-.13*
Black Identity	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.14*	.13*	..	..	..	..	..	..
Alienation from White Society	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.22*	..	..	..	..	..	.17*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Media Exposure:																					
Public Affairs Viewing	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Black Public Affairs Viewing	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.12*	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
News Magazines	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.14*	..	..	.15*	..	..	..	.19*
Black News Magazines	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.11	..	..	.14*	..	..	..	.10
Newspapers for Political Information	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.20
Television for Political Information	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	.15	..	..	..	.23
R²	.04	.13	.10	.33	.06	.10	.18	.25	.03	.05	.05	.08	.16	.07	.09	.17	.15	.19	.41		

N = 248

For each dependent variable, the left-most column presents total effects; others present net effects, as intervening variables are introduced into the model. No separate column of coefficients is present when an entire set of variables has no substantial total or net effects.

*Isolated, at least twice as large in absolute value as its estimated standard error.

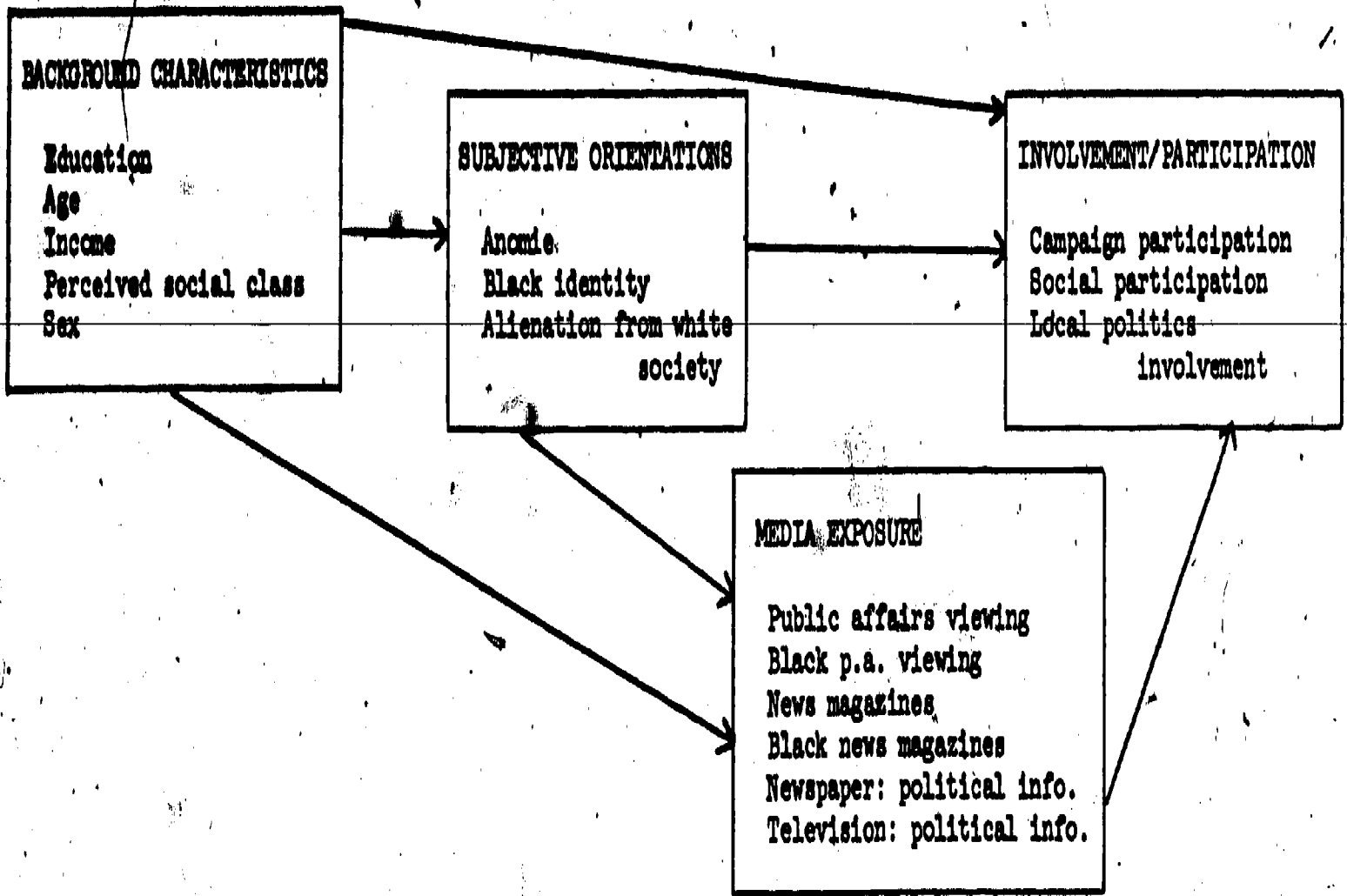


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of Conceptual Relationships