

Understanding Black Women's and Latinas' Perspectives about Political Giving

Kira Sanbonmatsu, Rutgers University, USA

ABSTRACT Giving money to candidates is an important but unequal form of political voice. Among those Americans worst represented as campaign contributors are Black women and Latinas. Although inequalities in income and wealth fuel inequalities in campaign contributions, resources are an incomplete explanation. This study investigates, for Black women and Latinas, whether their views on donations to candidates differ from their views on other forms of civic and political engagement. The results, including the absence of a shared norm about giving to candidates, illuminate the challenges and opportunities of mobilizing a more representative group of campaign contributors.

Campaign contributions provide one site to probe the state of democracy for historically marginalized communities. Contributing to candidates is an integral part of electoral politics; yet, a “racial contributions gap” (Aneja, Grumbach, and Wood 2022) threatens the democratic inclusion of communities of color. White men dominate as donors whereas women of color are especially underrepresented.

The creation of race- and gender-conscious political action committees (PACs) such as the Higher Heights for America PAC, which supports Black women candidates; the Collective PAC, which elects Black candidates; the PODER PAC, which helps elect pro-choice Democratic Latinas to Congress; and the Nuestro PAC, which directs election resources to Latinos, speaks to the need to better understand attitudes toward political giving. As the co-founder of the Collective PAC, Quentin James, stated, “If our community wants to be fully taken into account in this political system, our dollars have to matter as much as our votes” (Beachum 2018).


The analysis in this article centers on two groups of women who are starkly underrepresented as political donors: Black women and Latinas. I used surveys to study Black women's

and Latinas' attitudes toward political giving. I investigated whether their attitudes toward political giving differ from their attitudes toward other forms of civic and political participation, including charitable giving. I found that a shared norm of political giving does not exist for Black women and Latinas in contrast with the norms surrounding other forms of political and civic engagement. This result was more pronounced for Latinas, who make more distinctions than Black women about political giving compared to other activities.

These results have implications for Black women's and Latinas' political representation more broadly because an increase in the financial means of launching and winning campaigns could expand opportunities for women of color candidates. Studies have shown that a *donor's* gender and race predict political giving based on a *candidate's* gender and race (Grumbach, Sahn, and Staszak 2022; Sorenson and Chen 2023). As Aneja, Grumbach, and Wood (2022) observed, inequalities in campaign finance impact all aspects of the electoral process with cumulative, negative effects.

BACKGROUND AND EXPECTATIONS

Participation theories that posit a universal model and emphasize resources may fail to capture the experiences of people of color; indeed, studies typically are based on samples of whites (Brown 2014; Junn 2007; Junn and Brown 2008). Anoll (2018, 498) found that “rather than a monolithic civic duty norm, racial group membership moderates perceptions of political activity and the

Kira Sanbonmatsu  is senior scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics and professor of political science at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. She can be reached at kira.sanbonmatsu@zoho.com.

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underlying construct of what civic participation means and why it matters.”

However, studies of women of color have not been especially attentive to campaign contributions as a form of participation. Compared with white women, scholars have found that Black and Latina women are less likely to report giving to politics (Brown 2014; Holman 2016).¹ Numerous campaign-finance studies indicate that being white and being a man predict political contributions (Francia et al. 2010; Grumbach and Sahn 2020; Grumbach, Sahn, and Staszak 2022). The strong relationship with family income separates giving from other political activities (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). Yet, the stark imbalances in giving and the resulting inequality of political voice (Aneja, Grumbach, and Wood 2022) are cause to further investigate the nature of this underrepresentation. Moreover, critiques of resource models of participation have been advanced on race, gender, and intersectional grounds (Brown 2014; Holman 2016; Junn and Brown 2008).

Research has shown that people of color outgive whites in charitable giving (W. K. Kellogg Foundation 2012) and that women outgive men in charitable contributions (Mesch et al. 2015). Gender differences for single people are evident across race and ethnicity in charitable giving, with women being more participatory (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy 2019). These studies suggest that there is more involved in the giving decisions made by women of color than resources alone, thereby creating space for an attitudinal approach.

Social norms about political giving may not resemble other aspects of involvement because of negativity associated with money and politics. At the same time, race- and gender-based economic inequalities may have implications for how giving to political candidates is perceived by women of color, as well as how women are perceived in financial matters.

Contributing to campaigns is one of the most unequal forms of political participation (Scholzman, Verba, and Brady 2012). In studies of political giving, Black women and Latinas typically are the worst-represented groups. The Grumbach, Sahn, and Staszak (2022) analysis of congressional campaign contributions by race and gender groups between 1980 and 2010 found that Black women and Latinas gave less overall, gave less per capita, gave fewer contributions, and comprised a smaller number of donors than Black men, Latino men, white men, and white women. The authors stated that “Black and Latina women *combined* have only recently begun to comprise more than 1% of individual contributions” (Grumbach, Sahn, and Staszak 2022, 330; italics in the original). Meanwhile, a Center for American Women and Politics (2024) press release identified current inequalities: Black women and Latinas provided substantially fewer dollars to 2024 congressional candidates than white women.²

Other studies show that Black women’s political behavior departs from Black men and other women (Philpot and Walton 2007; Simien 2005; Slaughter, Crowder, and Greer 2023). Black women are loyal Democrats and turn out to vote at high rates (Smooth 2022). However, their voices are less likely to be heard due to the campaign contribution deficit. Organizations such as the Higher Heights for America PAC are seeking to remedy these unequal giving patterns by creating a network that can help to

elect more Black women. Studies have found campaign-finance inequalities for Black women candidates as well (Bryner 2021; James 2022; Scott 2022; Sorensen and Chen 2021).

Like Black women, Latinas are underrepresented in elective office. They also occupy unequal positions in society and the economy and have diminished access to income and wealth (Insight Center for Community and Economic Development 2010; Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2021). Latinas currently run for and hold office at greater rates than in the past but below their proportion in the population (Bejarano 2013; Dittmar 2022; Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016; Sampaio 2022). Compared with Black women, the political incorporation of Latinas is more likely to depend on factors such as nativity, generation, and language, as well as their reasons for immigration (Bejarano 2014). Latinas also may be more constrained by traditional gender roles (Bejarano 2013; Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016). Moreover, although Latinas are more Democratic, the major parties have not sufficiently incorporated them into party politics (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Sampaio 2022).

Race, Gender, and Inequality

Although political involvement is held in a positive light (Dalton 2008), views about the value of different aspects of participation have been found to vary by race. Anoll (2018) identified racial differences in the social valuation of political participation. These beliefs are important because—as Cialdini and Trost’s research

(1998) demonstrated—political behavior can be influenced by social norms: as individuals seek the respect of others, they have incentives to act in line with the expectations and values of their communities. Social group norms lead to “steadfast” Black support for the Democratic Party through a process of “racialized social constraint” (White and Laird 2020, 15).

Social norms about political giving may not resemble other aspects of involvement because of negativity associated with money and politics. At the same time, race- and gender-based economic inequalities may have implications for how giving to political candidates is perceived by women of color, as well as how women are perceived in financial matters (Abrams 2019).

Together, these existing studies led me to hypothesize that Black women and Latinas may value giving to political candidates less than they value other forms of political and civic participation.

RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA, AND ANALYSES

A national sample of Black women (N=650) and Latina women (N=655) participated in my original online surveys through Qualtrics (Sanbonmatsu 2024). Although they were opt-in panels, the two samples were similar to nationally representative samples.³ The research design encompassed three strategies to test my central hypothesis that women place less value on political giving as an activity compared to other acts of political and civic

engagement. The design was modeled on prior research about norms and political participation (Anoll 2018; Dalton 2008; Gerber et al. 2016; White and Laird 2020).

First, respondents were asked whether individuals who are engaged in various civic and political activities were good community members. Second, they were asked whether they would share information about their own hypothetical participation with their networks. Third, to more surreptitiously gauge norms, they evaluated ingroup members portrayed as participating in different civic and political acts via a between-subjects vignette experiment. Following Anoll (2018), the experiment asked respondents to assess a hypothetical neighbor’s likability and respectability and manipulated the civic and political activity of their neighbor. By manipulating the activity, this experiment complemented the first two aspects of the design. It provided an additional test of whether Black women and Latinas place less value on the act of making a campaign contribution to political candidates than they place on other acts.

I first sought to identify any differences in the women’s valuation of charitable giving versus political giving. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of three activities and asked to evaluate whether or not the statement was true:

“People who *donate money to candidates* are good community members.”

“People who *donate money to organizations that take stands in politics* are good community members.”

“People who *donate money to charitable organizations* are good community members.”

Response options ranged from 1 (“not at all likely to be true”) to 5 (“extremely likely to be true”).

Black women who received the “donate money to charitable organizations” condition were more likely to offer higher evaluations of “good community members” than those who were

Women rated political giving—either to a candidate or to an organization—as the lowest with respect to whether they would share their participation.

asked whether people who engaged in political giving (i.e., “donate money to candidates”) were good community members. This effect was not significant ($F=1.85, p=0.16$) in the ANOVA analysis. However, the type of activity affected assessments of good community members for Latinas: people who donate to charity were seen as significantly more likely than those who donate to political candidates or to a political organization to be good community members ($F=8.63, p<0.01$). Latinas did not make a distinction between giving to political organizations versus candidates.

Table 1 presents the respondents’ views of the three financial activities compared with other civic and political activities. The ratings were on the same 1-to-5-point scale of being a good community member.

For both Black women and Latinas, political giving—whether to a candidate or an organization—resonated the least of all the activities in terms of being a good community member. Both Black women and Latinas viewed individuals who were active in voluntary organizations and who voted as better

Table 1
Civic and Political Activities That Help the Community

	Black Women	Latinas
Donate money to charitable organizations	3.6 (1.07)	3.7 (0.93)
Are active in voluntary organizations	3.6 (1.01)	3.7 (0.93)
Vote in elections	3.4 (1.10)	3.3 (1.05)
Serve on a jury	3.3 (1.08)	3.3 (1.03)
Volunteer on political campaigns	3.3 (1.06)	3.1 (0.98)
Donate money to political organizations	3.1 (1.06)	3.1 (1.00)
Donate money to candidates	3.1 (1.14)	2.9 (1.03)
N	650	655

Source: 2023 Qualtrics surveys.
Notes: Cell entries are means with standard deviation in parentheses. 1 indicates “not at all likely to be true” and 5 indicates “extremely likely to be true” that participants in the activity are good community members.

community members than those who gave money to politics—differences that were statistically significant. For Latinas only, serving on a jury was rated significantly higher than giving money to candidates. Whereas Latinas’ perceptions of donating to charity versus politics was a statistically significant relationship, this result was not significant for Black women. To some degree, these results are consistent with other studies of the high value placed on the vote (Anoll 2018; Dalton 2008).

Another way to determine whether there is a shared norm is to measure the likelihood that women would share information about their participation in that activity with their networks (White and Laird 2020). Black women and Latinas were asked whether they would share the information with friends and family were they to engage in various civic and political acts in the coming year (figure 1).⁴

Women rated political giving—either to a candidate or to an organization—as the lowest with respect to whether they would share their participation. For both Black women and Latinas, donating money to a charity, volunteering for a charity, and voting in the next election were the top three activities that they would be “very likely” to share with friends and family. Volunteering for a political candidate scored in the middle.

Figure 1 suggests the absence of a shared norm around political giving.⁵ The difference between political giving and other activities was statistically significant for both groups of women. Without an expected, positive valuation of political giving from friends

Figure 1a

The Social Value of Civic and Political Activities: Likelihood of Sharing Activity with Friends and Family (Black Women)

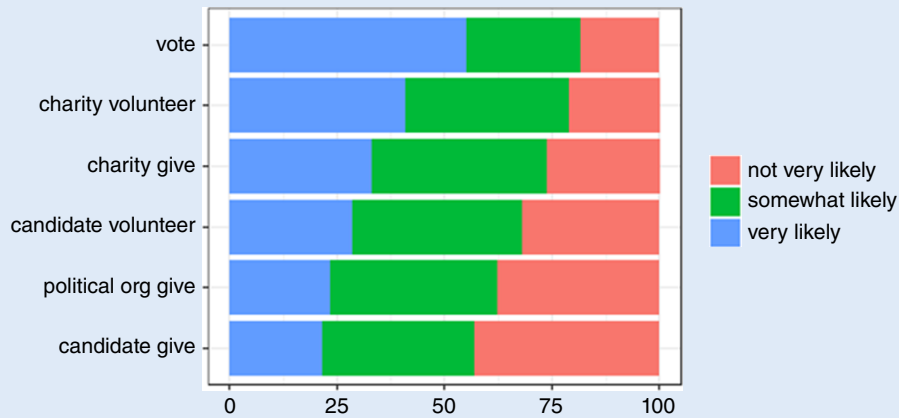
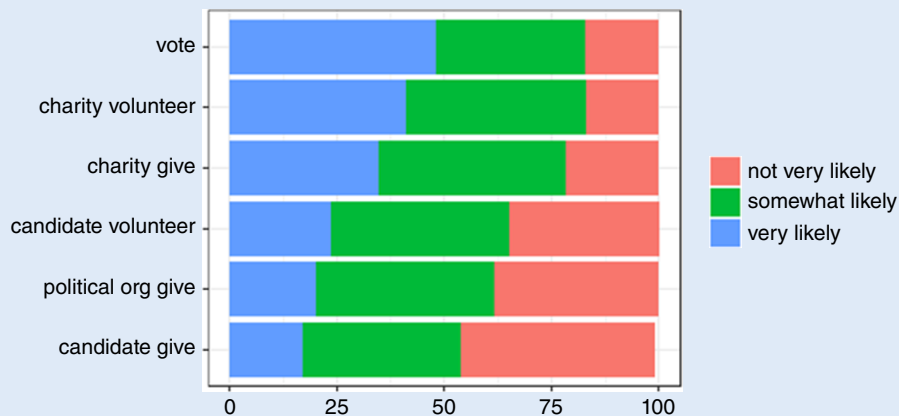


Figure 1b

The Social Value of Civic and Political Activities: Likelihood of Sharing Activity with Friends and Family (Latinas)



and family, there may be less incentive to participate as political donors in comparison with other civic and political opportunities.⁶

The third aspect of the design was a vignette experiment. Similar to the research designs of Gerber et al. (2016) and Anoll (2018), respondents were asked to rate a hypothetical neighbor on a scale of likability and respectability. The neighbor’s civic or political activity was manipulated.⁷ Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the following three conditions that described the neighbor as having:

- “Voted in the last presidential election”
- “Gave money to political candidates last year”
- “Gave money to charity last year”

I analyzed the extent to which participating in these different activities shaped assessments of the neighbor’s likability and respectability. The design portrayed an ingroup member who shared the same racial and party background as the respondent.

That is, Black women read about a potential neighbor who is Black and Latinas read about a Latino or Latina neighbor. Democrats read about a Democratic individual and Republicans about a Republican.⁸ The gender of the potential neighbor was randomized. By positing an ingroup member who shared the respondent’s racial and party background, I could isolate the respondents’ assessments of neighbors who gave to a political candidate compared with other activities.

For Black women, the experimental condition of voting compared with political or charitable giving did not yield significant differences in the evaluation of the hypothetical neighbor on the trait of respectability using ANOVA ($F=2.29, p=0.10$). The lack of a significant effect also occurred for Latinas ($F=2.09, p=0.13$). To summarize, the potential neighbor—who was a racial/ethnic ingroup member—was rated the same on respectability regardless of which of the three civic or political activities was portrayed (i.e., voting, giving to charity, and giving to political candidates).

For Black women, respondents did not differentiate across the three activities—including political giving—regarding how likable the potential neighbor was ($F=0.69, p=0.50$). The results were

Given the low giving rates of these women, the lack of a norm around political giving can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Moreover, financial resources are in limited supply. This suggests

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different for Latinas who rated the hypothetical neighbor on likability differently depending on the activity ($F=4.53, p=0.01$). The potential neighbor who gave to charity was perceived as more likable than the neighbor who gave to politics ($p=0.01$). Latinas also perceived the neighbor engaged in charitable giving as more likable than someone who votes regularly ($p=0.05$). However, the rating difference was slightly narrower than the rating between charitable and political giving. Latinas did not distinguish between voting and giving money to politics in this experiment.

By conducting an analysis of Black women and Latinas, I join other scholars who illuminate the dynamics of gender and race/ethnicity in elections (Brown, Clark, and Mahoney 2022; Slaughter, Crowder, and Greer 2023). Although this analysis centered on the experiences and views of Black women and Latinas, other scholars can extend this research to determine whether these findings hold for other race and gender groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The voices of Black women and Latinas, as measured by campaign contributions, are only weakly heard within American politics. With fewer avenues to help their preferred candidates run and win, women of color may experience unequal political representation as a result of their unequal giving.

Black women and Latinas view people who vote and are active in voluntary organizations as the best community members, rating them more highly than those who give money to candidates or political organizations. Latinas, but not Black women, also distinguished between charitable giving and political giving in evaluations of the best community members. Voting, volunteering, and charitable giving were most likely to be shared with Black women's and Latinas' networks; giving to political candidates was the activity that would be unlikely to be shared. For Latinas only, a potential neighbor whose activity was political giving was viewed as less likable than a neighbor who was engaged in other activities. Meanwhile, in a separate analysis, I found that Black women and Latinas rated giving to candidates as the least effective civic or political activity.⁹

Norms can help individuals overcome obstacles to participation (Anoll 2018; White and Laird 2020). The public opinion evidence analyzed in this study reveals that a shared norm of political giving appears to be missing for Black women and Latinas, in contrast to other forms of civic and political engagement. This indicates that women, and especially Latinas, are unlikely to face a social penalty for failing to contribute to candidates. Thus, appealing to broader social conventions may be less likely to move women to become campaign contributors.

a formidable agenda for those seeking to expand the political giving of these two underrepresented groups.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096524000477>.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the *PS: Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DERZQL>.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES

1. See the online appendix for political giving rates across racial and gender subgroups from the 2020 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey and the 2020 American National Election Studies.
2. The Center for American Women and Politics (2024) press release stated: "In only one of our 10 focus states (GA) did contributions from Black women donors constitute over 2% of all money contributed to a state's congressional candidates. In the other nine focus states, Black women's contributions comprised 1% or less of all money contributed to congressional candidates. In three states (AZ, FL, and NM), Latina donors accounted for 2% to 3% of all money contributed to the state's congressional candidates. In the remaining seven focus states, Latina women's contributions comprised 1% or less of the money contributed to congressional candidates.... In all 10 focus states, white women were better represented as contributors than other racial/ethnic groups of women."
3. The data were collected in January 2023. See online appendix tables A1 and A2 for comparisons to national samples and the wording of all questions. Latina women in the Qualtrics survey were somewhat younger and slightly more Republican than national samples. Of the Black women and Latinas, 97% and 93% were citizens, respectively; 17% of the Latinas in this study were born outside of the United States. This study was preregistered with AsPredicted. The two survey instruments were virtually identical. The main difference was the race/ethnic identity of the potential neighbor in the vignette experiment. The vignette used gendered and raced names based on findings from the "predictrace" R package and the dataset of Elder and Hayes (2023).
4. The items were presented in random order. The question was worded as: "If you were to participate in this activity in the coming year, how likely would you be to tell your friends and family about it?"
5. See online appendix table A3 for difference of means tests for the two groups of women.
6. These relationships persist across low- and high-income groups (see online appendix table A4).

7. Only those respondents who passed the manipulation check following the vignette were analyzed. The online appendix contains the wording of the questions for the vignette and dependent variables. The neighbor's partisanship was programmed to match the respondent's partisanship. In the sample of Black women, the N in each condition ranged from 135 to 153. In the sample of Latinas, the N in each condition ranged from 123 to 137. The gender of the neighbor, which was not the focus of this analysis, did not have an effect on evaluations of likability or respectability for either Black women or Latinas.
8. Women who did not identify with one of the major parties were assigned to the Democratic neighbor condition, given the higher Democratic affiliation of Black women and Latinas.
9. See online appendix table A5.

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