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# The Effect of Social Class on Political Party Affiliations in the African American Community

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Running Head= POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATIONS AND RACE

**The Effect of Social Class on Political-Party Affiliations Among African-Americans:  
An Exploration into the Rise of Republicanism Among African-Americans\***

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Effect of Social Class on Political-Party Affiliations among African-Americans: An Exploration into the Rise of Republicanism among African-Americans**

Does social class affect political party affiliation in the African-American community?

Drawing on two contrasting theories: the theory of group interests and class-based theories of stratification put forth by Wilson and Shelton (2006), I propose that African -Americans who report being of a high socio-economic class are more likely to be Republican than African Americans of a lower socio-economic class. Through secondary analysis of data provided by the General Social Survey (GSS), I investigate the relationship between political party affiliation and social class in the African-American community. By combining data across 20 years between 1996 and 2016, the sample size is 1557 African-Americans. Measures of socio-economic status are limited to a single variable that asks respondents about their subjective social class, while the dependent variable was operationalized by a variable that inquires the respondent's political party affiliation. Multiple regression analysis reveals that there is no statistically significant relationship between social class and political party affiliation. There is however, a relationship between political party affiliation and another measure of social class, specifically the respondents' level of education. The strongest predictor of political party affiliation is the age of the respondents which gives insight on future voting patterns in the African-American community. While the hypothesis is not supported, the results shed light on the potential reasons for increased support for the Republican Party among African-Americans and could be used to predict voting outcomes among African-Americans for future elections.

## **The Effect of Social Class on Political-Party Affiliations among African-Americans: An Exploration into the Rise of Republicanism among African-Americans**

Social movements and revolutions crystalize the formation of a community that shares the same beliefs and strives to achieve a goal. The civil rights movement exemplifies this phenomenon; during this period in American history there was a strong sense of solidarity within the African-American community especially in their political views. The civil rights movement required collective action to guarantee the African-American community essential pieces of legislation, and because of this shared interest in racial equality and civil rights, voting behavior was, and to some extent, still is homogenous in the Black community. This trend in political party affiliations has been offset in recent years and it seems that the change in political party affiliations may be due to increased social mobility among African Americans. Wilson and Shelton (2006) give merit to the notion that social class affects political views by asserting that upward mobility has a conservatizing influence: it incentivizes individualism and erodes group solidarity. This calls into question the future of voting patterns in the African American community. It also suggests that the dispersion of Blacks across the American class structure could result in reduced racial solidarity, and introduce attitudinal variation concerning racial ideology in the African American community (Wilson and Shelton 2006). The implications of decreased solidarity bear significance on race-related policies such as affirmative action and welfare programs.

According to Shelton and Wilson (2006) research on the relationship between socio-economic status, group interests and racial ideology remains unsettled. Investigating this relationship is pertinent to social policy makers. The theory of group interests put forth by Shelton and Wilson (2006) asserts that group based racial sentiments predominate over social class in the formation and composition racial ideology. This is in stark contrast to intersectionality theory that asserts that social identities are neither exclusive nor discrete (Mattis et al. 2008). In a study of altruism in low-income urban communities Mattis et al. (2008: 419) found that, "identities, and the beliefs, myths and emotions attached to them, function differently at different times in national as well as personal history, and in different geographic, institutional and social organizational settings." This suggests that it is impossible to predict trends among intersecting identities. The recent emergence of Black Republicans in the political sphere is a cause for concern in Black racial ideology because according to classical sociologists, political parties are foundational aspects of social life. A shift in political party affiliation among Black people therefore speaks to greater changes within Black social life (Jacobs and Dirlam 2016).

Shelton and Wilson's (2006) research on the relationship between socio-economic status and racial group interests suggests that we can observe changes in racial group interests by looking into changes in political party affiliations. Because upward social mobility has an individualizing effect and a subsequent conservatizing effect, I would like to uncover whether race or social class most consistently affects political party affiliations in the African American community. If political party affiliations are based on shared socio-economic status, I would expect the greatest variation in political party affiliations to be between respondents who consider themselves to be lower class, and respondents who are upper class. If race affects

political party affiliations, I would expect to see little to no variation in political party affiliations across the different class structures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The election of Barack Obama in 2008 reported the highest levels of voter turnout in the Black community. In addition, the election and re-election of Obama brought to light the agency of Black people in the political sphere (Fairdosi and Rogowski 2015). This necessitates the study of political party affiliations among Black people as they are a community in transition.

According to Wilson and Shelton (2006) the Black middle class has tripled in size in the last 40 years. The emergence of the Black middle class has sparked debate over the extent to which Black people espouse similar beliefs and values about contemporary political issues in light of their improved position on the American class structure. This phenomenon will be investigated through the following research question: does class position or racial identity most consistently influence political-party affiliations among African-Americans?

### *Race and Class*

Many sociologists agree that social class is not only an economic category, it is also a cultural category (Ginwright 2002; Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Social class speaks to occupational identities as well as the intellectual labor performed in occupations. Ginwright (2002) notes the importance of making a distinction between type of labor, and amount of income in defining social class, this is because income alone can obscure conceptual differences between working class and middle-class culture. The distinction between the two is vital for understanding the shift in racial conflict from the economic sector to the socio-political order in society (Wilson 2014; Wallace and Lewis 2007).

The effect of changing economic and political arrangements in society has become a contentious issue for sociologists who study Black social life. This is because class cleavages have become more pronounced over the years as the conditions of the Black poor have deteriorated, while those of the Black middle class have improved (Wilson 1978). This phenomenon is referred to as the racial structure of inequality. The racial structure of inequality is the notion that income inequality within racial groups has a considerable impact in determining a person's life trajectory. This is because it affects the implementation of social policies geared toward reducing income inequality for that racial group. Therefore, "class issues compete with race issues in the development and maintenance of a sense of group position among African Americans" (Wilson 2015). It is for this reason that income differentials have become the dominant cleavage in U.S politics (Hero and Morris 2016; Jacobs and Dirlam 2016).

Renowned sociologist William Julius Wilson (1978) referred to this phenomenon in his book titled *The Declining Significance of Race*. Wilson (1978) asserts that race still has an effect on the life chances of African-Americans, however, there is a shift in the relative importance of race in favor of class for Black occupational mobility, as well as job placement. There are several factors that inform Wilson's theory concerning the declining significance of race. Firstly, income inequality is now greater among Black people than any other racial group (Wilson 2014). Secondly, poor Blacks are entrenched in poverty as the power and negotiation position of labor unions has weakened, the criteria for welfare eligibility has toughened and penalties for financial instability have become more severe (Wilson 2014; Mattis et al. 2008; Wallace and Lewis 2007). The relationship between one's ranking on the American class structure and their vulnerability to

changes in socio-political policy, highlights how economic inequality and politics are interrelated (Jacobs and Dirlam 2016).

The widening class-cleavage in the Black community raises questions about how class ideology translates into class action in the form of political party affiliations (Ginwright 2002). Partisan preferences are class-based, meaning social class provides an ideological framework by which it's members interpret the world (Ginwright 2002; Staples 2009). It is for this reason that lower class Black people, who are preoccupied with materialist needs such as housing conditions in urban communities, have divergent ideological positions on racial equality from their middle-class counterparts (Ginwright 2002). A longitudinal study of ideology patterns revealed that former low-income Black student activists, experienced a shift in their views, strategies and tactics for improving the conditions for Black people upon achieving middle class social status (Ginwright 2002). Even though this cohort of people was still committed to racial equality, their approach to achieving racial equality changed; which highlights how social class affects internalized beliefs about achieving social change in the Black community.

Not all Sociologists agree that differences in class ideology could cause a rift between lower class and middle class African Americans. Shelton and Wilson (2006: 188) for example, put forth the theory of group interests in their analysis of the effect of social class on racial ideology. This theory states that, "for African-Americans group based racial sentiments predominate over social class in the formation and composition of racial ideology." The shared experience of racism has inspired a sense of collective fate for African Americans across the class structure. Therefore, regardless of class, Black people remain committed to their minority group concerns (Shelton and Wilson 2006; Kidd et al. 2007).



In addition, there is a unique aspect to Black social life that transcends social class which is the Black church. African Americans are the most church going people in the United States, and the Black church serves as a powerful socializing agent and acts as an institutional foundation for Black group consciousness and collective action (Kidd et al. 2007). Although the Republican party has tried to exploit the socially conservative values of Black people to gain support for their party in the past, conservatism translates into socially progressive values in the Black community (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008).

### *Race and Political Party Affiliations*

Historically electoral politics have been of little interest to the majority of Black Americans. This is because Black people were treated as pawns in the struggle of Whites for political power (Staples 2009). This was especially evident in the South where Black men were denied the right to vote until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Although the desire to maintain White supremacy is less pronounced, the politics of race are still evident in Southern states where Black people are in the majority. According to Mckee and Springer's racial threat hypothesis, efforts to maintain political control are more aggressive and pronounced in areas with higher concentrations of African Americans (Staples 2009; Rosino and Hughey 2016; Mckee and Springer 2015).

A number of factors cemented the alignment of the Republican and Democratic Party with their current racial bases. Firstly, the Democratic party supported the civil rights movement, and since then, Black people have voted homogenously for the Democratic Party; secondly, and more importantly, since the 1980's Reagan era, the far right has had a vested interest in advancing White interests as national interests. Therefore, any policies geared toward racial

equality are framed as threats to traditional American values of self-reliance, individualism, work ethic and discipline (Rosino and Hughley 2016; Jacobs and Dirlam 2016, Trent et al. 2010). In order to conceal the racist nature of the far right's policies, the Republican party has depended on a handful of Black conservatives who served to legitimate these policies as 'colorblind'. It is for this reason that Black Republicans are considered 'racial strays' who perhaps have a different racial ideology from most other Black people (Wallace and Lewis 2007; Staples 2009).

Although the Democratic party consistently wins the Black vote, Wallace and Lewis (2007) point out that before the election of Barack Obama in 2008, Black people were beginning to re-think their loyalty to the Democratic Party. This is because there is a feeling in the African American community that the Democratic party takes them for granted and only needs African-Americans during elections. (Wallace and Lewis 2007; Baldassari and Gelman 2008). This unhappy alliance has caused speculation about increased support for Independent Parties among African Americans (Rosino and Hughey 2016). These debates have been exacerbated by how political parties have become increasingly ideological and more likely to take extreme positions on social issues, which has had a polarizing effect on the American population. Tucker-Worgs and Worgs (2014) found that in recent years there has been a rise in African-Americans mobilizing themselves around 'morality politics'. The most prominent issues to date being same-sex marriage and abortion rights. In recent years this has bridged a gap between liberal Democrats and socially conservative African-Americans. On one hand their racial identity makes them unwilling to support the Republican Party, on the other hand their personal convictions inspired by the church are challenged by the Democratic party's liberal stance on morality

politics, leaving African Americans in want of a political party that can represent all their social identities.

In Summary, the current literature on political party affiliations of African-Americans is split between two camps: on one hand there is reason to believe that race is the most salient social identity for the African American community which would justify homogenous political party affiliations. On the other hand, there is a chance that the improved position of African Americans on the American class structure will inspire attitudinal variation among African Americans and result in divergent political party affiliations. The present study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge concerning partisan preferences of African Americans by considering the relationship between social class and political-party affiliations.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Theory of Group Interests*

Past research on the relationship between social class and political-party affiliations by Shelton and Wilson (2006) states that attitudes in racial ideology among African-Americans can be understood through the theory of group interests. This theory asserts that for African Americans across all class structures, “group based racial sentiments take precedence over social class in the formation and composition of racial ideology” (Shelton and Wilson 2006: 188). This is because racial discrimination inspired a sense of collective fate for Black people. Mattis et al. (2008) note that Black people are motivated to behave altruistically towards members of the same racial group because doing so promotes genetic survival. This theory suggests that as long as racial discrimination affects Black life-chance opportunity, Black people will continue to

consider the collective wellbeing of the Black community before considering individualistic needs. If this theory holds true I would expect to see little to no variation in political party affiliations across the different class structures in the Black community.

### *Class-based Theory of Stratification*

The second theory Wilson and Shelton (2006) used in a bid to understand changing political party affiliations among African Americans, is a class-based theory of stratification. This theory operationalizes individualism and aims to investigate the belief that America is a meritocratic society. A Class-based theory of stratification is grounded in the notion that socio-economic position is the principle source of attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, Black people who manage to achieve economic success by overcoming structural barriers such as racism and classism, are more likely to be individualistic as they attribute their success to characteristics such as 'hard work' 'resilience' or 'persistence' (Wilson and Shelton 2006). This highly individualistic outlook is more than likely to be reflected in their political party affiliations. Therefore, according to this theory, upper class Black people are more likely to believe in individualism; lower class Black people on the other hand are more likely to believe in structuralism because, "Structuralism emphasizes the existence of institutional forces of inequality that lie beyond personal control" (Shelton and Wilson 2006: 187). This preoccupation with structural barriers such as racism and classism is likely to cause lower class Black people to value the collective advancement of the Black community through supporting a party that promotes distributive policies such as affirmative action and social welfare.

### *Marxist Analysis of Class*

The class-based theory of stratification echoes the sentiments of Karl Marx who noted that class structure plays a decisive role in shaping other forms of inequality (Wright 1978). As a rationalist theorist, Marx believed that all people are motivated by the promise of profit, and that all factors such as religious belief or in this case, racial solidarity come second to the rational desire to increase one's wealth (Ritzer 1983). Considering how Wright's (1978) neo-marxist analysis of class advocates for the importance of class position in determining socially produced behavior such as political party affiliations, the hypothesis is based on the class-based theory of stratification. Therefore, I hypothesize that upper class African Americans are more likely to be Republican than lower class African Americans.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### *Data*

To investigate the hypothesis, data from the 1972-2016 General Social Survey was used. The number of years analyzed was limited to a subset of 20 years that range from 1996-2016. This subset of years was selected on the basis that it could provide the most current and up to date statistics about social class and political party affiliations among African-Americans. Therefore, the population, as well as the unit of analysis in this dataset, is non-institutionalized African-Americans. The sampling method was random, and the data was collected over a series of in-person interviews among individuals currently residing in the United States of America. The GSS uses a variation of the stratified probability proportional to size method to sample the population. The response rate between 1972 and 2016 ranged from 60.2 percent to 82.4 percent. After deleting missing data, using a subset of years and restricting the population to African-Americans, the sample size was (N=1557). For further information about this data set and how data was collected, refer to <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/variables/vfilter>

## *Variables*

In order to operationalize social class in the Black community, the variable that measures subjective class identification was used as the independent variable. The exact wording of the question asked by the interviewer is **‘If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class.’** The responses are arranged in ascending order with 1 being lower class and 4 being upper class. Respondents who answered, "no class", "don't know" or "no answer" were counted as 'missing data' and subsequently removed from the study.

In order to operationalize voting behavior, the dependent variable asks respondents about their political-party affiliations. The exact wording of the question is: **‘generally speaking do you consider yourself as a Republican, Democrat or what?’** The responses are on a 7-point scale ranging from strong democrat to strong Republican. This variable is also coded in ascending order with 1 being strong Democrat and 7 being strong Republican. Those who answered, “Don’t know”, “No party” and “no answer” were counted as ‘missing data’ and subsequently removed from the study.

To control for factors other than socio-economic class that could lead to differences in voting behavior, the following variables were considered: the number of years the respondent has spent in formal education, which region the respondent currently resides in, how fundamentalist the respondent considers themselves to be, the age of the respondent and the sex of the respondent. The ways in which these variables are coded can be found in the appendix. A dummied version of the variable that asks for respondent’s region was used so that the respondents are either from the South or not from the South. The variable that measures how

fundamentalist respondents are is an ordinal measure that could not be re-coded into an interval ratio variable. This violates the assumptions of multivariate analysis and may have an adverse effect on the results.

## FINDINGS

### *Univariate Results*

Table 1 reports the means, medians and standard deviations of all variables. According to Table 1, the mean for the independent variable ‘subjective class identification’ is 2 which illustrates that the average subjective social class among African-Americans is the working class. Figure 1 also shows that only 3 percent of the respondents in the sample were upper class.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The dependent variable, ‘political-party affiliation’ has a mean of 1 which shows that on average African-Americans are strong Democrats. The median for this variable is 1.00 which shows that the middle-most political party affiliation is a strong democrat. This illustrates that political party affiliation is positively skewed towards the Democratic Party. Lastly, the standard deviation is 1 which means that 68 percent of all respondents in the sample fall in the category of strong Democrats. Figure 2 displays the frequency distribution of political-party affiliations in the African American community. There is a clear pattern in the distribution of this variable, 40 percent of all respondents are strong Democrats and there is a sharp decline in the percentage of respondents as political party affiliations become increasingly Republican. Only 1 percent of respondents are strong Republicans.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 2 shows that only 1.8 percent of respondents are strong Republicans while 40 percent of respondents are strong Democrats.

The most variation among respondents can be seen in Figure 3 that displays the distribution of the age variable. Table 1 shows that there is considerable variation around the mean of this variable as the standard deviation is 15 years. Table 1 shows that the average age of the respondents is 43 years.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 1 shows that on average African-Americans in this sample have 12 years of education which amounts to a high-school degree. Figure 4 shows that over 75% of all respondents in this sample have a high school degree or less. This again poses a challenge for studying the theory of group interests.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Table 1 shows that 77% of respondents live in the south, and that there is very little variation around the mean as the standard deviation is 0.4. Figure 5 shows that most respondents in the sample are specifically from the South Atlantic region. Another measure of socially conservative values is the fundamentalist variable. Figure 6 shows that more than half of all the respondents are fundamentalist and Table 1 indicates that the middle most category for this variable is being fundamentalist as the median value is 3.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

### *Bivariate Results*



At the bivariate level, all statistically significant relationships were significant at the  $p < .01$  level. The correlation coefficient between the independent variable and the dependent variable reveals that there is no statistically significant relationship between social class and political party affiliation as seen in Table 2.

\*\*[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE] \*\*

There is however, a statistically significant relationship between political party affiliation and education ( $r = -.089, p < .01$ ). Even though the relationship is significant, it is very weak and negative which illustrates that as one's educational attainment increases, their propensity for Republicanism decreases.

The results also show that region does not have any effect on one's political party affiliation because there were no statistically significant relationships between region and any of the other variables, with the exception of the fundamentalist variable ( $r = .070, p < .01$ ). Table 2 also shows that fundamentalism has an effect on political-party affiliations as there is a weak negative statistically significant relationship between how fundamentalist one is and their political party affiliations ( $r = -.104, p < .01$ ). Therefore, the more fundamentalist a respondent is the less likely they are to be Republican. There is also a weak to moderate statistically significant negative relationship between the respondents' age, and their political party affiliation ( $r = -.197, p < .01$ ) which illustrates that as the age of the respondents' increases, they are less likely to be Republican. Additionally, there is a weak statistically significant negative relationship between men and fundamentalism ( $r = -.068, p < .01$ ) meaning men are less likely to be fundamentalist and therefore more likely to be Republican.

There is also a weak positive statistically significant relationship between age and fundamentalism ( $r = .111, p < .01$ ). This shows that older respondents are more likely to be fundamentalist. Table 2 shows correlations between variables which does not indicate causation.

### *Multivariate Results*

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 3 shows that 6 percent of the variation between social class and political-party affiliation can be explained by the variables used in the multivariate regression ( $R^2 = .060$ ). The regression equation ( $F(6,1550) = 17.00$ ) is significant at the  $p < .01$  level, this means that the predicted relationships between the independent variable and the other six variables are generalizable to the African-American community at large. The regression coefficients for three of the control variables (age, education and fundamentalist) are statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level as well. According to the standardized regression coefficients, the variable that is the biggest predictor of political-party affiliation is the age variable ( $\beta = -.204, p < .01$ ). This means that for each unit increase in age, all things being equal, African-Americans decrease in Republican political party affiliation by .020 points on a 7-point scale. Table 3 also shows that net of all other factors, for each additional year of education attained, respondents decrease in Republican Party affiliation by .067 points on a 7-point scale. Lastly, Table 3 shows all variables being constant, for each unit increase in fundamentalism on a 3-point scale, Republican party affiliation increases by .161 points on a 7-point scale. sex and region are not statistically significant, however the regression equation is significant therefore these variables can still be used to control for the relationship between political party affiliations.

### DISCUSSION

The regression analysis in Table 3 reveals that holding all other variables constant, the relationship between class and political party affiliation is not statistically significant. This does not support the hypothesis that African Americans who self-identify as upper class are more likely to be Republican than lower class African Americans. This relationship suggests that class does not in fact influence political party affiliation in the African-American community. The relationship between the independent and dependent variable challenges the class-based theory of stratification put forth by Wilson and Shelton (2006). This finding is contrary to Ginwright (2002: 559) who notes that, "while racial identity fosters solidarity within Black communities, social class often filters how one frames community problems and conceptualizes solutions to community issues." Which illustrates that class culture plays a significant role in how community actors assign meaning to social problems, and according to Ginwright (2002) this should be evident in political party affiliations. Considering how the variable used to operationalize social class was not in line with a neo-marxist analysis of class, the discrepancy between the literature and the findings could be the result of how social class was operationalized.

Alternatively, the lack of statistical significance between social class and political party affiliation suggests that socioeconomic factors fail to promote attitudinal variation in political party affiliations in the African-American community. The lack of statistical significance between class and political party affiliations supports the theory of group interests. Shelton and Wilson (2006: 188) state that according to this theory, "racial group interests transcend individual socio-economic status in structuring attitudes and beliefs about society." In addition, Table 3 reveals that all things being equal, for each additional year of education attained, Republican political party affiliation decreases by .067 points on a 7-point scale. This finding

also supports the theory of group interests as it suggests that higher status Black people do not become more conservative and individualistic and ultimately forsake their devotion to minority group concerns.

Table 3 shows that holding all variables constant, age is the biggest predictor of political party affiliation ( $\beta = -.204, p < .01$ ). This finding gives insight to the intergenerational differences in political party affiliations in the Black community. Furthermore, Table 3 reveals that for each additional year that the respondent has lived, their likelihood to support the Republican Party decreases by .020 points on a 7 point scale. This suggests that younger African-Americans are more likely to be Republican than older African-Americans. According to Wilson and Shelton (2006) this reflects a cohort-based age gap among African Americans. Since older Blacks directly experienced the political and social turmoil of the civil rights era and younger Black people have only read about it, there is a difference in racial ideology between generations as expressed by variations in political party affiliations. The relationship between age and political party affiliation neither supports the class-based theory of stratification nor the theory of group interests because it represents a change in political party affiliations that was not caused by economic factors. However, the finding implies that younger Blacks accentuate beliefs about merit and are perhaps more individualistic than older Blacks who are more structuralist.

Lastly, Table 3 shows that net of all other factors, for each unit increase in fundamentalism, affiliation with the Republican Party decreases by .154 points on a 7-point scale. This poses a challenge for the argument put forth by Tucker-Worgs and Worgs (2014) that Republicans can incentivize Republicanism by emphasizing the socially conservative values prized by African-Americans. Table 2 shows that in spite of how socially conservative African Americans are, fundamentalism and political party affiliation are negatively correlated ( $r = .104$ ,

$p < .01$ ). This suggests that African-Americans prioritize their racial identity over other social identities which supports the theory of group interests.

The support for the theory of group interests suggests that race is still the most salient social identity in the Black community, however, as pointed out by Mattis et al.(2008) the reality is individuals are neither singularly racialized or classed beings and so it is unreliable to point to one social identity as being responsible for socially produced behavior such as political party affiliations.

The findings from this research suggest that voting patterns in the African-American community may become increasingly Republican, not due to increased individualism brought on by increased social-cultural capital, but because of generational cleavages in lived experiences of racial unrest, like the civil rights movement.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate whether class or race most consistently affects political party affiliations among African-Americans. By using a subset of years that range from 1996 to 2016 from the General Social Survey, I managed to attain a sample size of 1557 African Americans. The hypothesis states that African-Americans of a higher socio-economic class are more likely to be Republican than lower class African-Americans. However, the results show that there is no statistically significant relationship between class and political party affiliation, which does not support the hypothesis. Considering how the hypothesis was inspired by a Marxist analysis of class and the variable that was used to operationalize class did not use a neo-Marxist analysis of class; the lack of significance may be the result of how the variable was operationalized rather than a lack of a relationship between class and political party affiliations in the African American community. There was however, a statistically significant relationship

between education and political party affiliation. Considering how education is a measure of socio-economic status, it is arguable that the theory of group interests can be applied to understanding the relationship between class and political party affiliations among African-Americans.

### *Limitations*

The present study has an important limitation. Only one measure of social class was used, and while the GSS provides other measures of class such as income, a neo Marxist approach to operationalizing class as proposed by Wright (1978) would have been beneficial to this study. Wright (1978) defines class in terms of structural positions within the social organization of production. Operationalizing class in this way is paramount to this study because collective action such as voting is class-based, meaning social class provides an ideological framework by which its members interpret the world. A neo-Marxist analysis of class acknowledges how those who control the labor power of others may have different internalized beliefs, values and strategies than those who do not control the labor power of others (Ginwright 2002). The present study falls short because it uses a measure of class that is a proxy for occupation, which gives insight on the technical functions performed by individuals within the labor process instead of using variables that could illuminate the social relationships within which those technical functions are performed (Wright 1978). There are other limitations in the present study however, the operationalization of class is the most important one to consider as it has a great impact on the findings.

### *Future Research*

A neo-marxist analysis of class that includes individual's location on the authority hierarchy in the workplace would enhance our understanding of the effects of social class on

political party affiliation. Secondly, political party affiliation is only one attitudinal domain, and so this study implies that a Black Republican would ideologically resemble a White Republican, which may not be the case. Future studies might consider investigating racial ideology through other attitudinal domains such as race consciousness or support for redistributive policy (Wilson and Shelton 2006). This approach would be better at assessing beliefs across various spheres of society. Lastly, the present study omits the analysis of White racial identity in order to highlight the social identities within the African American community that affect political party affiliation. Future research on the effects of race and social class on political party affiliation should include other racial groups, this could shed light on the relationship between socio-economic status, group interests and racial ideology.

### *Implications*

Although the present study has limitations, it illuminates how age plays a significant role in political party affiliations, and hints at how there may be attitudinal variation in racial ideology among different generations of Black people. The cohort-based age gap in political party affiliations found in this study suggests that for future generations, voting behavior among Black people will become more varied, and may no longer be homogeneously Democratic. This finding has implications on political campaign strategists as it shows the importance of appealing to younger generations who cannot be presumed to have the same values and beliefs as older generations.

This finding also raises questions about the factors that make younger generations more likely to be Republican than older generations. Considering how Black people have not always had a happy alliance with the Democratic Party, perhaps the declining support for this party symbolizes how African-Americans are now more willing to align themselves with Independent

parties and the Republican Party and are less fearful of the consequences of doing so. The Democratic Party often uses tactics that cause panic about the Republican Party's ability to reverse the clock by ending affirmative action programs and other distributive policies in a bid to retain support for their party. Considering how William Julius Wilson (1978) pointed out that racial identity now has less of an effect in the sociopolitical world, it follows that these changes in political party affiliation are only beginning to take effect.



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Table 1. Means, Medians and Standard Deviations of Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>median</b>	<b>SD</b>
Class	2.26	2.00	0.690
Political party affiliation	1.32	1.00	1.508
Education	12.91	12.00	1.144
Age	43.30	41.00	15.495
Fundamentalist	2.37	3.00	0.794
South	0.77	1.00	0.417
Men	0.35	0.00	0.478

Table 2: Correlations ( $r$ ) between Political Party Affiliations and 5 Other Variables (list-wise deletion, two tailed test,  $N = 1557$ )

<b>Variable</b>	Class	Education	South	Age	Fundamentalist	Men
Republicanism	.016	-.089*	-.008	-.197*	-.104*	.048
Class		.092*	-.040	.049	-.074*	.037
Education			-.051	-.109*	-.044	-.021
South				-.002	.070*	-.006
Age					.111*	.036
Fundamentalist						-.068*

\* $p < .01$

Table 3. Regression of Political Party Affiliation on All Variables

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>β</i>
Class	.063	.029
South	-.025	-.007
Fundamentalism	-.154*	-.081
Education	-.066*	-.116
Age	-.020*	-.204
Men	.145	.046
Constant	3.226	

$R^2 = .062$ ;  $F(6,1550) = 17.000$ ;  $p < .01$

\* $p < .01$

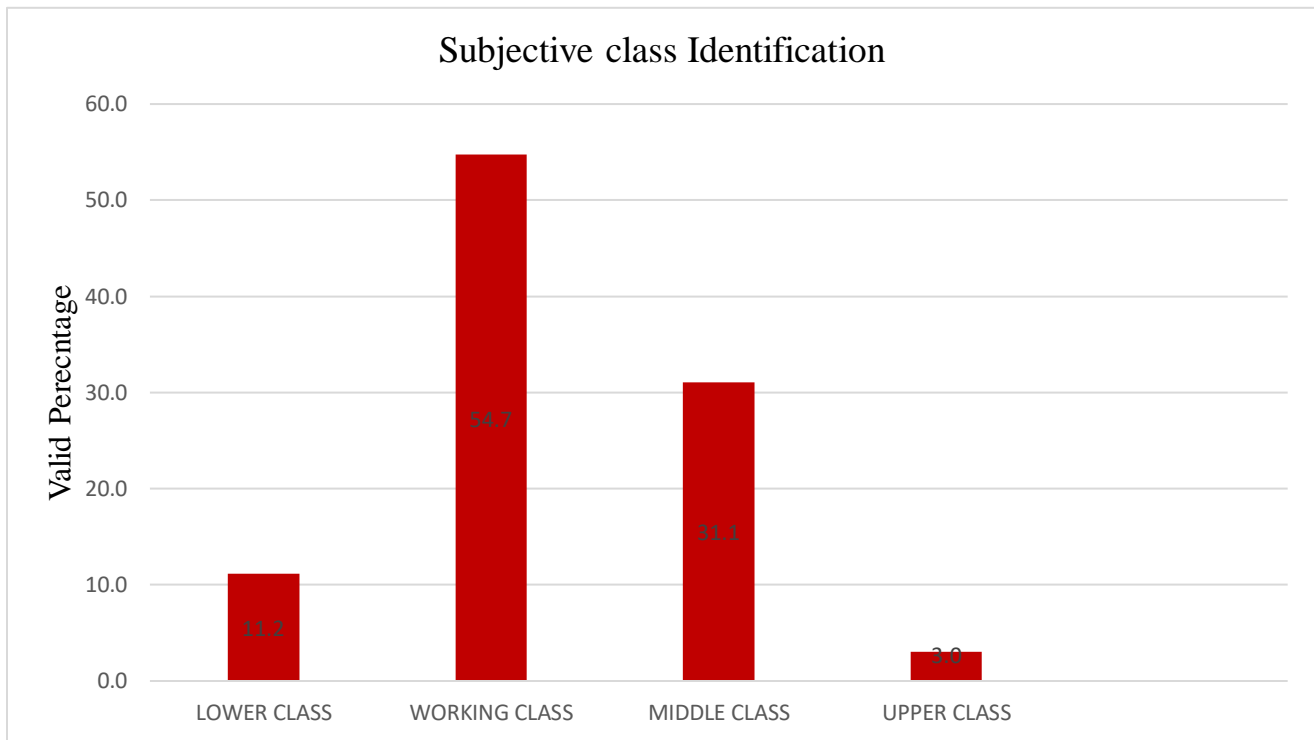


Figure 1. frequency distribution of subjective class identification



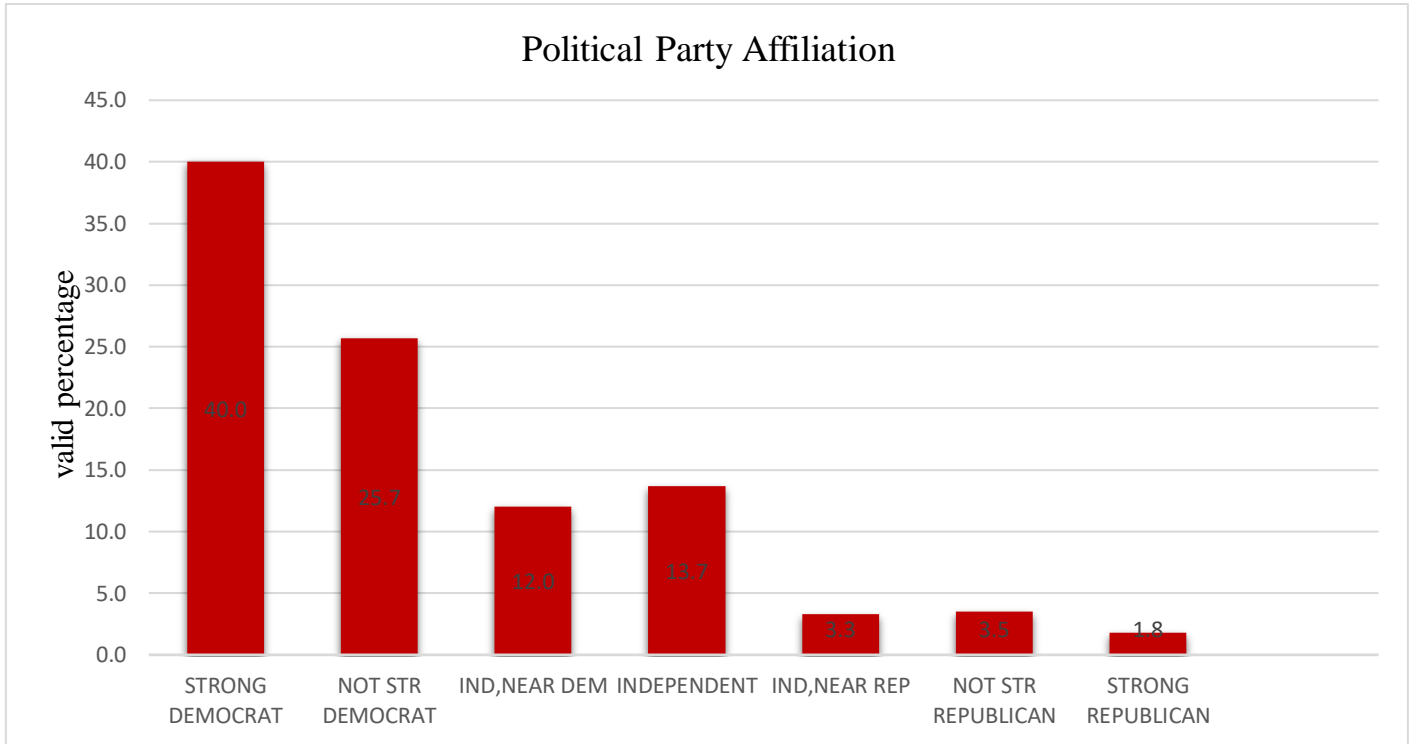


Figure 2: Frequency distribution of political-party affiliations

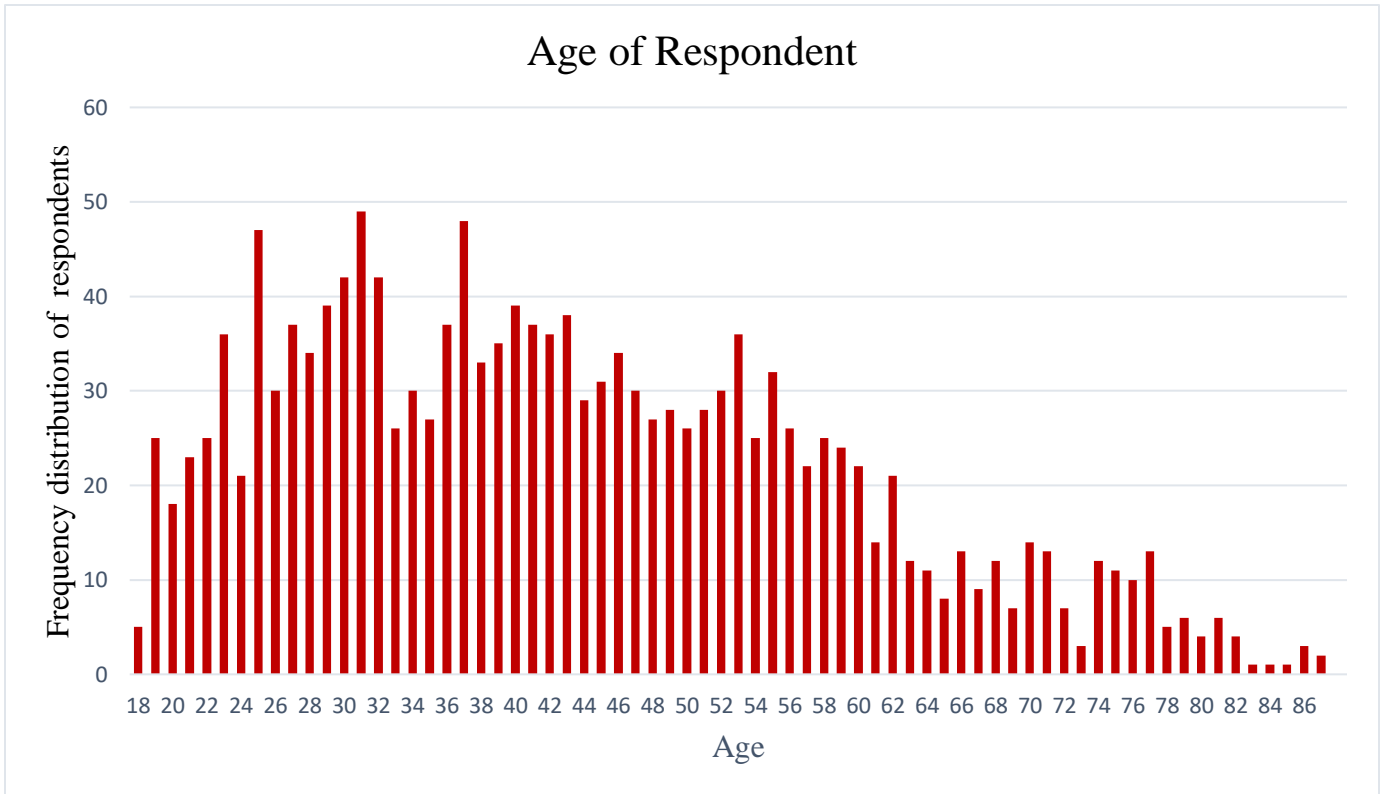


Figure 3: frequency distribution of age

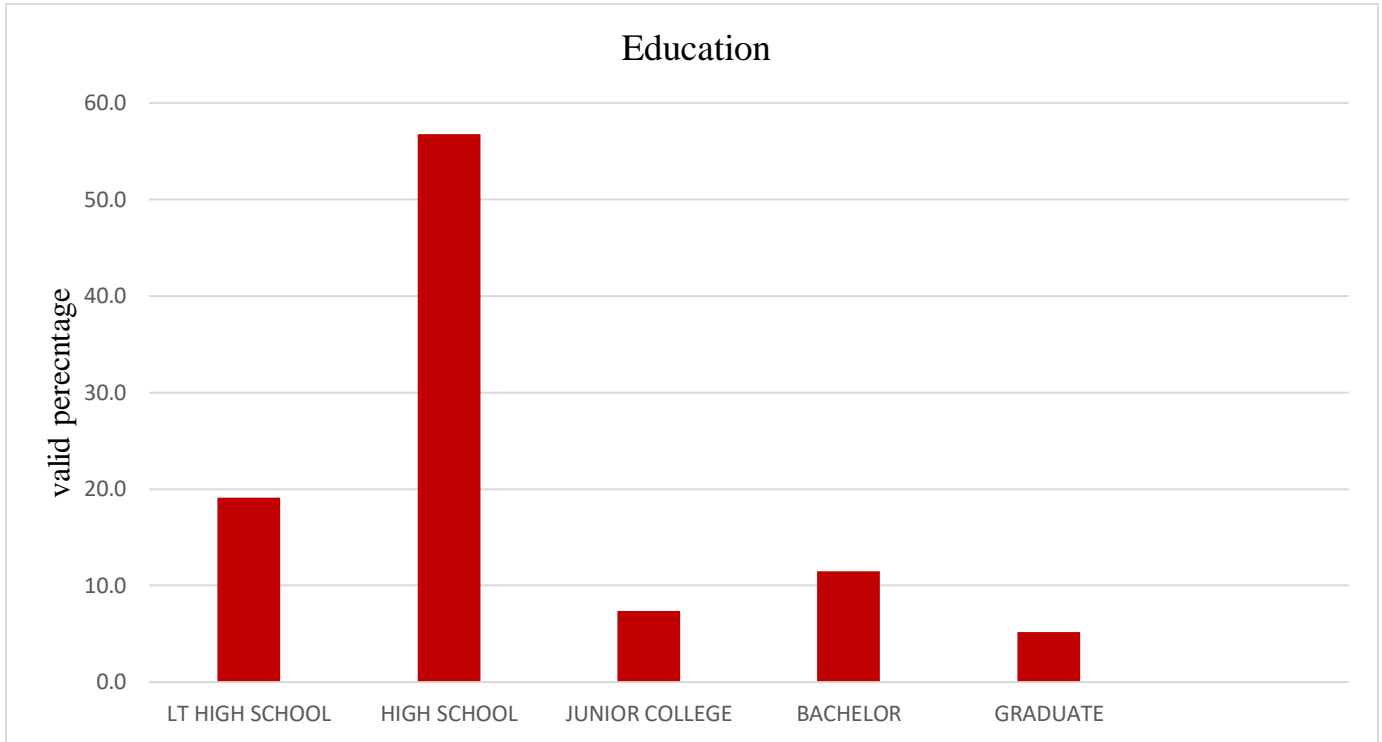


Figure 4: frequency distribution of years of education

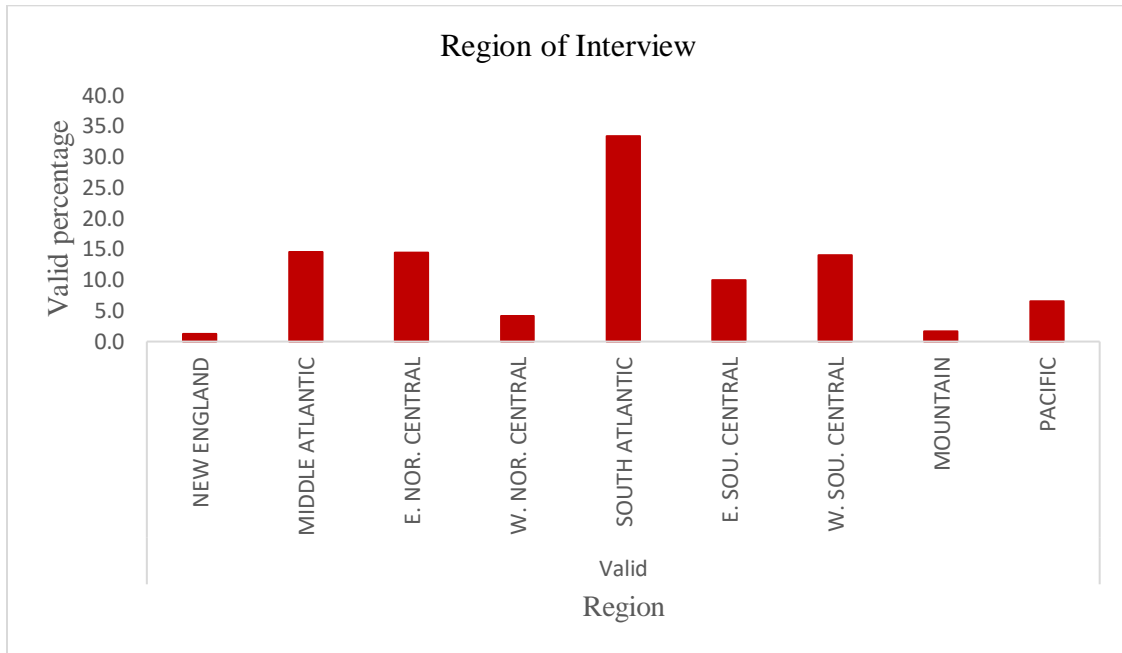


Figure 5: Frequency distribution of region

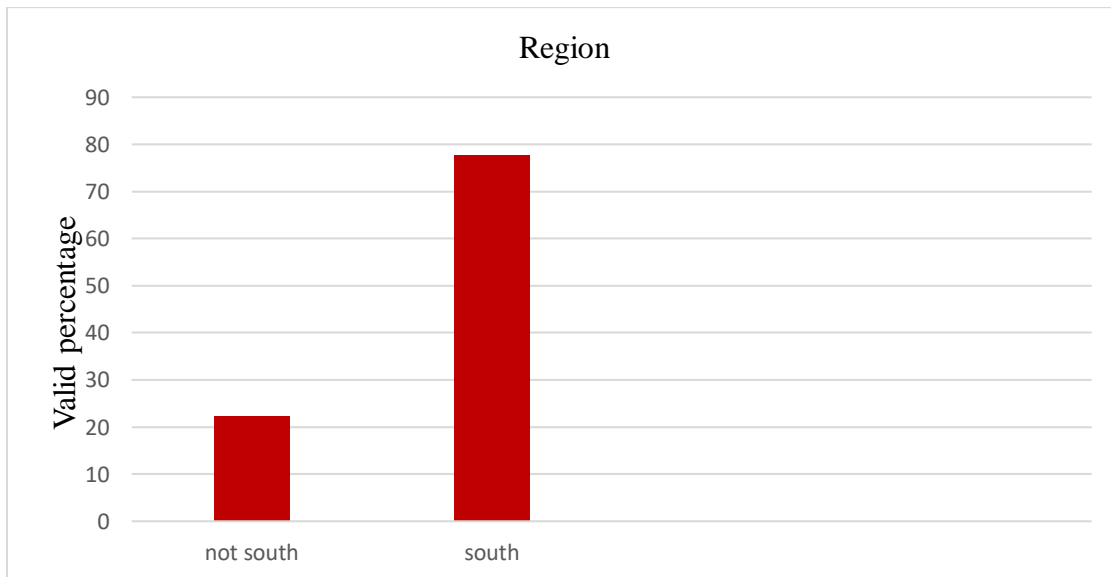


Figure 5.5: Frequency distribution of respondents' region (dummied version of region variable)

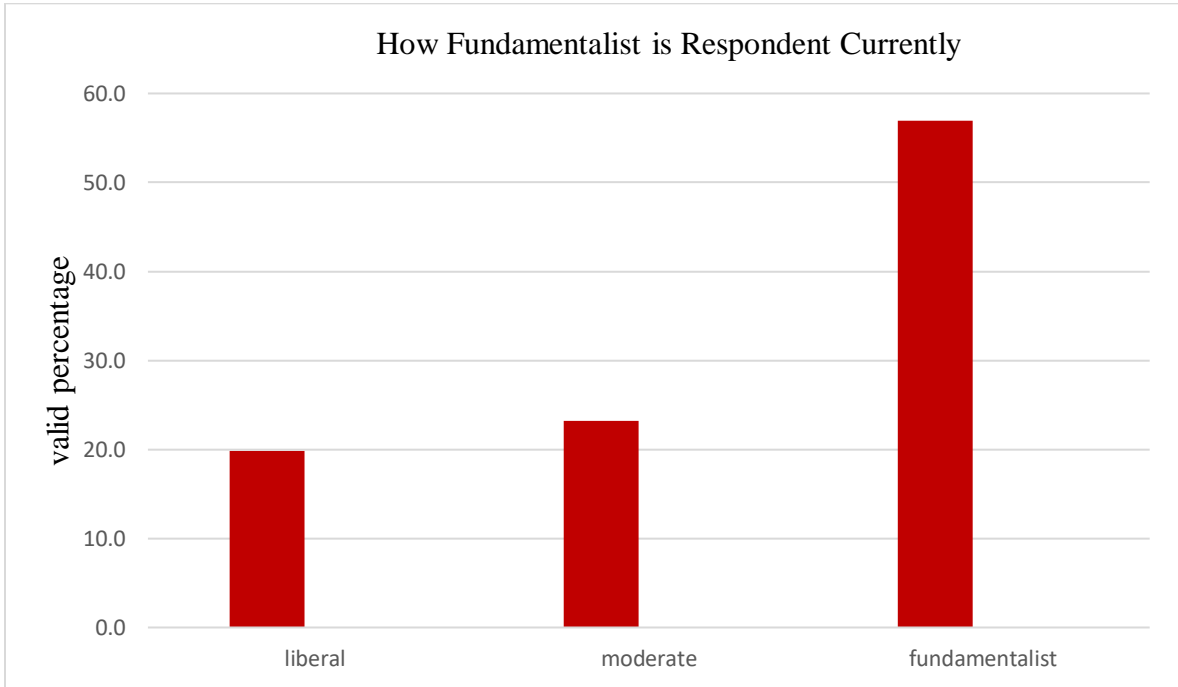


Figure 6: frequency distribution of fundamentalism among respondents

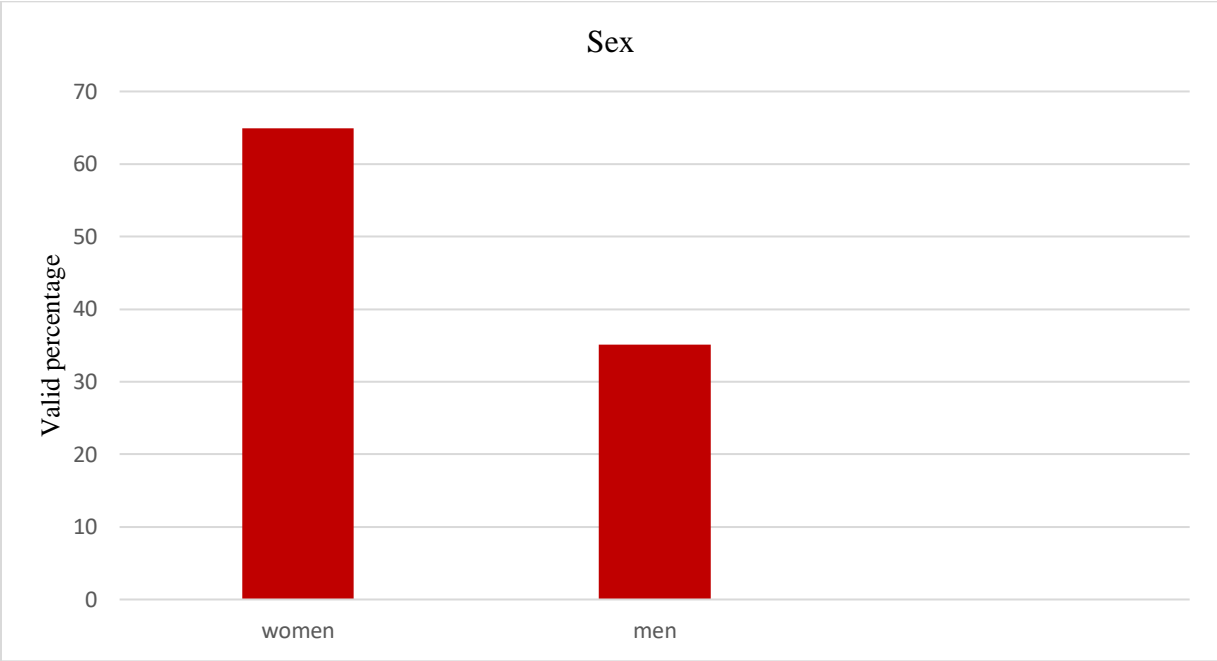


Figure 7. Frequency distribution of sex

## APPENDIX

### **Subjective class identification**

*If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class?*

- 1 Lower class
- 2 Working class
- 3 Middle class
- 4 Upper class
- 5 No class
- 8 Don't Know
- 9 No answer
- 0 Not applicable

### **Political-Party Affiliations**

*I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal-point 1-to extremely conservative-point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?*

- 0 Strong Democrat
- 1 Not strong democrat
- 2 Independent near democrat
- 3 Independent
- 4 Independent near republican
- 5 Not strong republican
- 6 Strong republican
- 7 Other party
- 8 Don't know
- 9 No answer

**Control variables used are coded in the following ways**

### **Respondent's highest year of school completed**

- 1 less than high school (0-8 years)
- 2 high-school (9-12 years)
- 3 community college (13-15 years)
- 4 bachelor's degree (13-17 years)
- 5 graduates (17-20 years)

### **Region of the interview**

- 1 New England (0)
- 2 Mid Atlantic (0)
- 3 East North central (0)
- 4 North West Central (0)
- 5 South Atlantic (1)
- 6 East south central (1)
- 7 West south central (1)
- 8 Mountain (0)

9 Pacific (0)

**Dummied into**

1 South

0 not South

**How fundamentalist is R currently**

1 fundamentalist

2 Moderate

3 Liberal

**Sex**

1 male

0 female