

# Friend Group Diversity and Civic Engagement Among Adolescents

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## INTRODUCTION & AIMS

- Previous research indicates that adolescents and adults (15-25 years old) from different races in the U.S (**Asian American, Black American, Latinx American, and White Americans**) participate in civic engagement activities at different rates, including community problem solving, voting, and volunteering for political groups. Therefore, diverse friend groups may influence the frequency of participating in different activities (Marcelo et al, 2007).
- Community and school settings have become more culturally and racially diverse. Therefore, students have more chances to make friends with others of various ethnicities and races in school. This poster will focus on the relationship between **adolescents' multicultural friendships and their participation in civic engagement**.

## METHODS

### Participants

- Participants were ninth-graders (N=439) from a midwestern city in the U.S and completed in-class survey.
- Participants identified themselves as female (47.4%), male (44.6%), and others (8%). The demographic percentages were White (37.1%), African American (26.4%), Latinx (19.4%), Asian (3%), Native (2.1%), Biracial (10.5%), Pacific Islander (0.7%).

### Variable Measures

- **Diversity of Participants' Friend Groups** is the **independent variable** in this study. Participants listed their five best friends and their races/ethnicities, including Asian, Somali American, Native American, etc. Two students coded these responses into 8 ethnic/racial categories (96.4% agreement). Simpson's diversity index was used to calculate the diversity within each student's friend group.
- **Civic Engagement** is the **dependent variable** in this study. Civic engagement was measured as the mean of the frequency of participating in 10 different activities in the last year (e.g., political campaign, political issue discussions, civil rights organizations) using items from the Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2017).

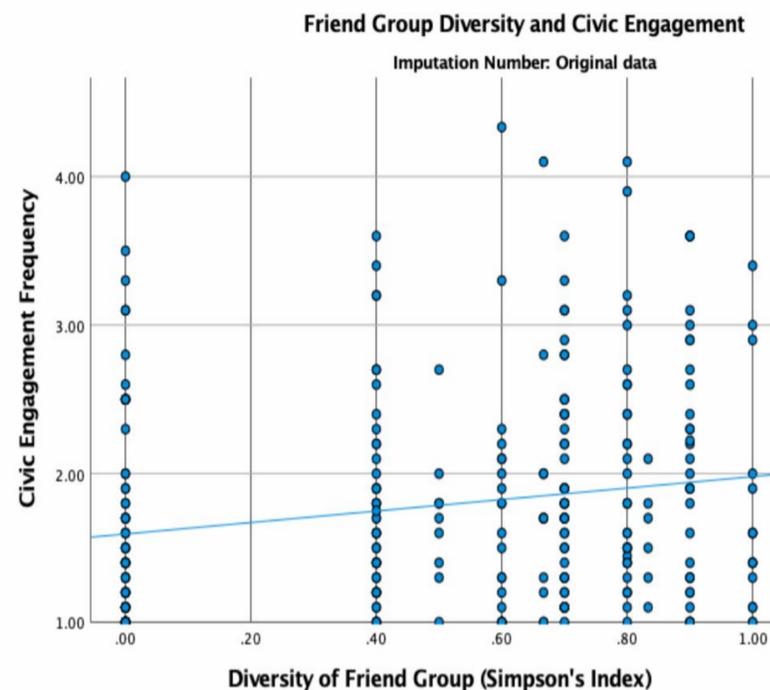
### Hypotheses

- There will be a positive association between friend group diversity and participation in civic engagement. In other words, students with more diverse friend groups will participate in civic engagement more frequently.

## RESULTS

Civic Engagement Activities  
Percent Participating At Least Once in the Past Year

Activity	Percent
Participated in a discussion about a social or political issue	71.2%
Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women's rights organization or group	53.8%
Joined in a protest, march, political demonstration, or political meeting	51.9%
Wrote or posted about a social or political issue on a social media account or blog	48.7%



Regression analyses were used to test the association between the diversity of participants' friend groups and their civic engagement frequency. Controlling for whether students identify themselves as a person of color or White, results indicate a significant association ( $B = .341, p = .004; R^2 = 0.03$ ). The results show a **positive association** between diversity of friend group and civic engagement frequency.

**Having a more diverse friend group has a significant, positive association with participation in civic engagement.**



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## DISCUSSION

- Little previous research has explored the relationship between friendships and civic engagement. This study aimed to address that research gap.
- **Our study found a positive association between friend group diversity and civic engagement frequency, which was consistent with our hypothesis.**
- Diverse friend groups could expose youth to different types of civic engagement activities (Marcelo et al., 2007) and increase their motivation to work towards racial equity.

## LIMITATIONS

- This was a cross-sectional study. Therefore, we cannot draw conclusions about the direction of the association we observed. Having more diverse friends could increase civic engagement or being more involved in civic engagement could offer opportunities to meet more diverse friends.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore:

- Other factors that influence adolescents' participation in civic engagement (e.g., family environment, school diversity, discrimination experience, etc.)
- The potential ways to encourage adolescents to participate in civic engagement, such as taking an ethnic studies course and community service requirements.

## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the teachers and students who have participated in Project UNITE this year. We also thank other members of the Culture and Family Life Lab who contributed to the project. This work is supported by a grant from the American Psychological Foundation and a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship awarded to Sarah Gillespie.

## References

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