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Underrepresented: Descriptive Representation and Political Interest of African Americans and Women in the 2008 Election

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Representing the Underrepresented: Descriptive Representation and Political Interest of African Americans and Women in the 2008 Election

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In this article, we examine the effect of the presidential candidacies of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and the vice presidential candidacy of Sarah Palin on change in political interest among African Americans and women over the course of the 2008 election. We also examine the effects of these candidacies on intra-group characteristics in these marginalized groups. Consistent with the descriptive representation literature, we find that descriptive representation has a positive effect on African American's and women's levels of political interest. Unlike previous studies, we find that there are intra-group differences in change in political interest among African Americans and women. In particular, we find that age is negatively associated with growth in interest among African Americans and women, indicating that younger African Americans and women experienced the largest growth in interest over the course of the 2008 election. These results suggest that African Americans and women who are not fully socialized into the political system may benefit the most from descriptive representation.

The historic nature of the 2008 presidential election illustrates the significant progress African Americans and women have made in American politics. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's presidential candidacies and Sarah Palin's vice presidential candidacy made critical inroads toward achieving the highest office in the United States and changing the

face of political power. Though these candidacies are indicative of the substantial progress African Americans and women have made in the political arena, the political incorporation and engagement of these marginalized groups remain incomplete, particularly with regard to political interest.

Previous research finds pervasive disparities in political interest between African Americans and Caucasians, and between men and women (Atkeson 2003; Bennett and Bennett 1989; Burns et al. 2001; Tate 1993; Verba et al. 1997). These gaps are cause for alarm, considering that political interest feeds into several other political attitudes and activities (Carpini and Keeter 1996; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997). Therefore, examining disparities in political interest is important to understand potential gaps in political participation between dominant and marginalized groups.

Two predominant approaches have focused on explaining differences in levels of political interest between dominant and marginalized groups. The first approach argues that gaps in political interest are due to disparities in socioeconomic resources (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 1997). The second asserts that disparities are attributed to lack of descriptive representation (Atkeson 2003; Bobo and Gilliam 1991; Burns et al. 2001; Gay 2001; 2002; Lublin and Tate 1995; Tate 2003). While the former approach leads to inconclusive findings, the latter has more consistently shown that descriptive representation matters even after controlling for resources (Atkeson 2003; Bobo and Gilliam 1991; Burns et al. 2001; Gay 2001; 2002; Lublin and Tate 1995; Tate 2003).

Previous research broadens our understanding of how descriptive representation¹ affects political interest, but there are several shortcomings in this literature that we address in this article. First, due to data limitations, prior studies fail to examine the effect of descriptive representation on individual *change* in political interest. Previous studies examine only levels of political interest among groups; therefore, they provide little insight into the effects of descriptive representation on the trajectory of political interest. Second, most of these studies assume that all African Americans and women are equally affected by descriptive representation. The few studies that disaggregate racial and gender groups encounter cross sectional data limitations. These studies only demonstrate which factors are associated with higher levels of interest instead of which segments of each population experience the most growth from descriptive representation. By overlooking the relationship between descriptive representation and *change* in political interest, prior studies miss the complete effect of descriptive representation and provide an incomplete understanding of this relationship.

To address these shortcomings, we examine the effect of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's presidential candidacies and Sarah Palin's vice presidential candidacy on levels of political interest over the course of the 2008 election. To accomplish this goal, we first identify the weaknesses in descriptive representation literature and thoroughly discuss our contribution. Second, drawing on previous research, we construct two hypotheses testing the relationship between descriptive representation and growth in political interest over the course of the 2008 election. To test these hypotheses, we employ the 2008-2009 American National Election Study Panel Survey, which enables us to analyze individual change in political interest over the course of the election. Using latent growth curve models, we estimate the trajectory of change between (i.e., African Americans vs. Caucasians, men vs. women) and within (i.e., *Caucasian* women vs. *African American* women, *young* African Americans vs. *old* African American) racial and gender groups.

Our results indicate that political interest among African Americans and women grew at a significantly higher rate than political interest among Caucasians and men. We also find that younger African Americans and younger women experience the most growth in political interest, suggesting that the historic candidacies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin has the strongest impact on these groups. Our findings have important implications for descriptive representation. First, the presence of minority candidates may have a gradual increasing effect on political interest that could mitigate disparities between Caucasian men and underrepresented and marginalized groups. Second, African Americans and women who are not yet fully socialized into the political system may benefit the most from descriptive representation.

Prior Research on Political Interest and Its Shortcomings

Scholars have noted the significance of political interest on political behavior and attitudes, and a great deal of research has focused on why some groups are more interested in politics than others (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1997). Of particular concern is the persistent racial and gender gap in political interest (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Tate 1993), and prior studies theorize that these disparities stem from political resources and opportunities. This approach contends that differences in education, income and occupation between African Americans and Caucasians and men and women lead to racial and gender gaps in political interest (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1997). In spite of this claim, others have argued that even after political resources and political socialization are controlled, the gender gap in political interest persists (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Burns et al. 2001; Schlozman et al. 1994).

Subsequent research finds that the political environment affects political interest and engagement (Atkeson 2003; Tate 1993). More specifically, this approach contends that descriptive representation influences the political interest and participation of underrepresented populations, such as women and African Americans (Atkeson 2003; Burns et al. 2001; Steinem 1986; Tate 1993; Verba et al. 1997). Previous research shows that high profile African American and women candidates can increase political interest among African Americans and women (Burns et al. 2001; Steinem 1986; Tate 1993). Furthermore, the presence of an African American or woman candidate on the ballot can help erase racial and gender disparities in political interest (Burns et al. 2001; Tate 1993).

While previous studies provide a starting point in explaining the effect of descriptive representation on political interest, our research contributes to this literature in three important ways. First, due to data limitations, prior research has been able to only make comparisons across racial and gender groups. As a result, these studies provide a limited understanding of the effect of descriptive representation on changes in political interest. Unlike previous research, we examine the effect of a minority candidate's campaign on *changes* in individuals' levels of political interest over time. We use this approach because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of how descriptive representation influences change in political attitudes.

Descriptive representation can operate in a couple ways. For example, it could have a punctuated effect at the beginning or end of the election, or it could have a gradual effect that increases or decreases over time. If the former is true, a minority candidate's campaign simply has a one-time effect on the formation of African Americans' and women's political attitudes. If the latter is true, descriptive representation has an additive effect, indicating that a minority candidate's longevity is related to change in political

interest. The longer that underrepresented groups are exposed to minority candidates, the stronger the effect of descriptive representation on their political attitudes.

Second, we disaggregate racial and gender categories to investigate the effect of descriptive representation in political interest within groups. Previous studies test underrepresented groups as monolithic categories (Abney and Hutchinson 1995; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gay 2001; 2002; Lublin and Tate 1995). When research does examine intra-group differences, it focuses on party congruence between the elected official and the respondent (Griffin and Keane, 2006; Reingold and Harrell 2009) and rarely examines the effects of age and education (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Tate 1993). Consequently, these studies overlook important factors such as differences in political participation and socio-geographic characteristics that potentially enhance the effect of descriptive representation. By understanding which characteristics are most susceptible to the effects of descriptive representation, we can better predict the mitigating factors between descriptive representation and changes in the political attitudes of African Americans and women.

A final examination of previous studies is that they analyze differences at one point in time, obscuring the factors that influence the rate of change within each group. Consider the following hypothetical example: in an election with an African American candidate on the ballot, African Americans with less income may experience the largest growth in political interest over the course of the campaign. Despite this large increase in political interest, poorer African Americans may still have lower overall levels of political interest than wealthier African Americans. As a result, a cross sectional analysis that only analyzes political interest at one time point may yield a positive association between income and political interest. A researcher may then erroneously conclude that wealthier African Americans are more affected by descriptive representation because they demonstrate higher levels of political interest than poorer African Americans. By using linear growth curve models, which analyzes political interest over several points in time, we can better estimate which intra-group characteristics drive the trajectory of change in political interest.

Theories of Descriptive Representation and Hypotheses

Prior research finds that the presence of an African American or woman candidate is linked with higher levels of political interest among African Americans and women (Tate 1993; Burns et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1997; Steinem 1986). This occurs because underrepresented groups benefit from seeing one of their own vie for elected office. Descriptive representation provides minorities with a sense of inclusion into the political system (Mansbridge 1999). Furthermore, it signals to the electorate that the government cares about their interests and will work to enact policies beneficial to their community (Abney and Hutchinson 1981; Atkeson 2003; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Burns et al. 2001; Gay 2002). While minority candidates often have a positive impact on the political attitudes of African Americans and women, Caucasian and men appear adversely affected when represented by African American or women representatives (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gay 2001; Tate 1993). Based on this research, we expect that African Americans and women will experience more growth in political interest than Caucasians and men.

We believe that women's level of political interest will grow regardless of whether they supported Palin or Clinton. Reingold and Harrell (2009) show that women become more interested in political campaigns when a woman is on the ballot, even if they do not share the candidate's party affiliation. There is also evidence that the effect of descriptive representation on political attitudes is contingent on the viability of the candidate rather than

his/her partisanship (Atkeson 2003; Reingold and Harrell 2009). Therefore, we argue that preference for Clinton or Palin is irrelevant, women as a whole should become more interested in politics due to the historic nature of the candidacies.¹

Although we expect African Americans and women to become more interested in politics over the course of the campaign, we expect to find intra-group differences. First, we expect to find gender differences among Caucasians, but not African Americans. Echoing our previous discussion, Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin's candidacies should ignite more political interest among Caucasian women than Caucasian men. However, in identity formation, research has shown that race often supersedes gender (Scola and Bedolla 2005; Dawson 2001). Thus, African American women may be more likely to identify with Barack Obama, rather than Hillary Clinton or Sarah Palin. As a result, we hypothesize that African American women will not display higher levels of political interest than African American men simply because there were two women candidates.

Second, we expect African Americans and women with higher levels of education to experience more growth in political interest than their less educated counterparts. Those with higher levels of education place greater importance on elections and display higher levels of political knowledge and interest (Carpini and Keeter 1996; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997). These individuals also have a greater capacity to process political information and are more likely to discuss politics with colleagues and friends (Campbell et al. 1960; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Sapiro 1983). Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that descriptive representation has a stronger effect on educated African Americans' political interest (Tate 1993; 2003).

Third, we expect ideology to be a source of intra-group differences in political interest. As several authors argue, descriptive representation among African Americans has the strongest effect when the candidate and respondent share party affiliation (Griffin and Keane 2006; Washington 2006). Therefore, we expect Obama's presidential nomination to generate more interest among liberal African Americans than conservative African Americans. As for women, although the two women candidates are of opposing parties, we expect liberal women to have higher levels of political interest over the course of the election than conservative women. We base this expectation on previous research that finds conservative women to be less supportive of women candidates (Rosenthal 1995; Carroll 1987).

Finally, we expect descriptive representation to have a strong effect on younger African Americans and women. Younger cohorts may be more susceptible to cues from descriptive representation than older cohorts because they are still forming their political identities (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). To bolster this hypothesis, previous research shows that the presence of women candidates increases levels of political engagement among adolescent girls (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006). Because the current cohort of young women and African Americans is being socialized into the political system during a time when viable African American and women candidates are on the ballot, they may be more receptive to the powerful symbolism of these candidacies. These candidacies demonstrate to younger members of underrepresented groups that politics is not a domain solely for Caucasian men. Compared to older generations with relatively fixed political identities, younger cohorts are more likely to be socialized into believing that someone who looks like them can have a place in the political arena (Greenstein 1969; Orum et al. 1974).

Based on this research we offer the following two hypotheses:

H1: Due to the historic nature of Obama's, Clinton's, and Palin's candidacies, African Americans and women will experience more growth in political interest over the course of the 2008 election than Caucasians and men.

H2: African Americans and women with certain characteristics will be more susceptible to the effects of descriptive representation in the 2008 presidential election.

- a. We do not expect gender differences in levels of political interest between African American men and African American women, but we expect Caucasian women to become more interested than Caucasian men.
- b. African Americans and women with higher levels of education will experience more growth in political interest than less educated African Americans and women.
- c. Liberal African Americans and women will become more interested in politics over the course of the 2008 election than conservative African Americans and women.
- d. Age will be negatively associated with growth in political interest for African Americans and women, indicating that younger African Americans and women are most affected by descriptive representation in the 2008 election.

Data and Methods

To examine the effect of descriptive representation on political interest, we use the 2008 and 2009 American National Election Study Panel Survey (ANESPS). The ANESPS surveys political attitudes and behaviors of the same individuals each month from January of 2008 to September of 2009. On January 31, 2009, the ANESPS released an advanced version of this data set to the public. It includes data from January, February, June, September, October, and November of 2008.² Its breadth allows us to estimate change in levels of political interest during the primaries and the general election. In addition to allowing researchers to estimate individual change across the election, the data also include a large sample of Caucasian (N=2,477), African American (N=266), and Latino (N=169) respondents,³ which enable us to analyze differences between and within racial groups.

We measure the dependent variable, political interest, using the following question: "How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?" The respondents place themselves on a five point scale ranging from 0 (not interested at all) to 4 (extremely interested). Respondents answered this question in January, February, September, October, and November of 2008.

Our main independent variables are gender and race, but we also include several individual-level variables in our models. We create separate dichotomous dummy variables for Caucasian, African American, Latino,⁴ men, and women respondents. We include several socio-demographic and socio-economic variables (SES) such as marital status, income, education, and age. Based on previous research, employed and married respondents with more income and education have higher levels of political interest (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1997). Therefore, we control for these variables to isolate the effect of the 2008 candidates' race and gender on inter-group differences in political interest.

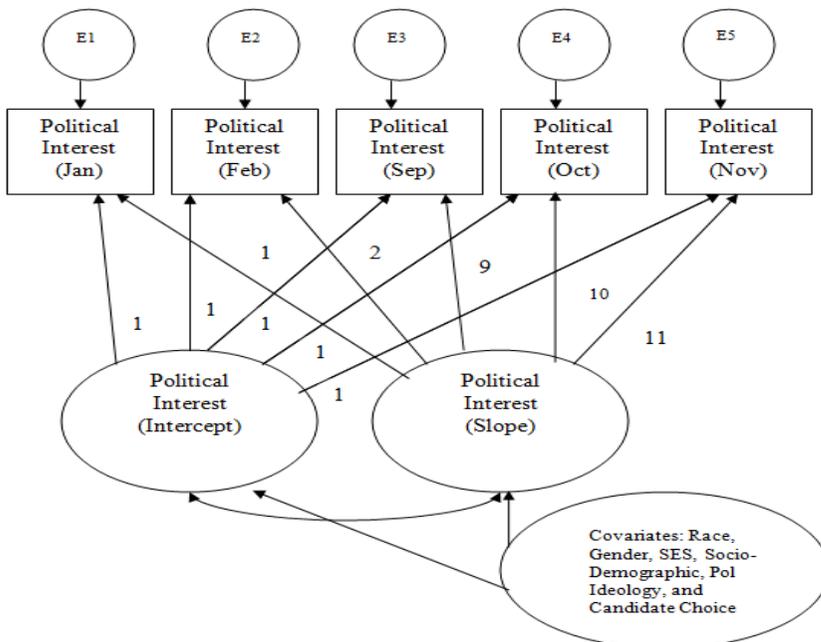
Next, we account for political orientation using several variables including levels of political efficacy, ideology of the respondent⁵, voter registration, and turnout in 2004. While we are less interested in these effects, based on previous research, we expect those who display higher levels of political participation and political efficacy to be more interested in

politics (Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1997). We also expect conservative respondents to be less interested over the course of the 2008 election because their candidates were expected to perform poorly across several facets of government.

Finally, we control for candidate support by creating dichotomous dummy variables for respondents who supported Clinton in the primaries and respondents who supported Obama in the primaries.⁶ Next, we create a dummy variable for respondents who supported McCain in the general election and we presume that this variable encompasses Palin supporters. While we anticipate that both Clinton and Obama supporters will be more interested over the course of the campaign, we expect that Obama's supporters will be the most interested because he won the Democratic nomination. Conversely, we expect McCain supporters to become less interested over the course of the 2008 election because he was consistently the underdog.

To measure change in political interest over the course of the 2008 election, we use Latent Growth Curve Models (LGCM). LGCM are structural equation models that allow us to estimate the intercept (or level of interest at the beginning of the survey) and the trajectory of change for each individual's level of political interest over the course of the election cycle. This method accounts for the possibility that individuals have different initial levels of political interest. As a result, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the variables that influence growth in political interest. This is in contrast to previous methods that impose a single constant for all individuals, which assumes that everyone starts off at the same level of political interest. Finally, LGCM allow us to estimate whether the trajectory of change that occurs over time is tied to the respondent's starting position. Figure 1 display the latent growth curve model that we use in this analysis.

Figure 1: Conditional Linear Growth Curve Model Predicting Political Interest over the Course of the 2008 Election Cycle



Using LGCM, we can estimate two linear models with all racial and gender covariates so we can measure differences *between* groups. These models allow us to test our first hypothesis examining if African Americans’ and women’s levels of political interest grew at a higher rate than Caucasians’ and men’s respectively. The first between group model (Model 1A) includes the individual’s race, gender, and his/her socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The second between group model (Model 1B) includes these same individual level variables and political orientation and candidate choice variables.

Next, we test our second hypothesis by examining if certain segments of each racial and gender group grow at different trajectories over the course of the election using multiple group LGCMs. Multiple group latent growth curve models are similar to LGCM except that they also estimate differences within multiple nominal scale variables. For the purposes of this paper, we use multiple group latent growth curve models to estimate the intra-group differences among African Americans, Caucasians, men, and women.

Results

Table 1: Mean Level of Political Interest over the Course of the 2008 Election for African American, Caucasian, Women, and Men Respondents

Month/YR			Black	Vs.		
	Black	White	White	Women	Men	Men Vs. Women
			Difference			Difference
Jan. 08	2.66	2.62	0.05	2.46	2.77	-0.31*
Feb. 08	2.75	2.59	0.16*	2.49	2.76	-0.27*
Sep. 08	2.89	2.68	0.21*	2.61	2.79	-0.18*
Oct. 08	2.93	2.71	0.22*	2.66	2.81	-0.14*
Nov. 08	2.99	2.76	0.23*	2.72	2.86	-0.14*
Average						
Monthly	0.08	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.02	0.03
Change						

*P< .05 using a Two Sample difference of means test. Political interest is measured on a five point scale ranging from 0=Not Interested at all to 4=Very Interested

Table 1 displays the mean level of political interest for African Americans, Caucasians, men, and women over the course of the 2008 election and a difference of means test between African Americans and Caucasians, and women and men. As expected, African Americans and women became more interested over the course of the campaign than Caucasians and men. At the beginning of the election cycle, the difference in levels of political interest between African Americans and Caucasians is negligible. As the election progresses, Caucasians and African Americans become more interested; but African Americans political interest increases at twice the rate of Caucasians. Women’s growth in political interest follows a similar upward trajectory. Men remain significantly more interested in politics than women over the course of the election, but the gap between them decreases monthly. We find support for our first hypothesis; African Americans and women become more interested in politics than Caucasians and men over the course of the 2008

election. To ensure that these findings are not coincidental, we analyze the relationship between descriptive representation and change in political interest using LGCM.

Table 2: LGCM Predicting Political Interest over the Course of the 2008 Election

	<i>Model 1A</i>		<i>Model 1B</i>	
	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Model 1A</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Model 1B</i>
	<i>Effect on I</i>	<i>Direct Effect</i>	<i>Effect on I</i>	<i>Direct Effect</i>
	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>on S b (SE)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>on S b (SE)</i>
	-0.221*	0.011*	-0.256*	
Women	(0.041)	(0.004)	(0.040)	0.012*(0.004)
	0.233*	0.016*	0.144+	0.012+
Black	(0.075)	(0.007)	(0.081)	(0.007)
	0.342*	-0.016*	0.288*	-0.014+
Latino	(0.091)	(0.008)	(0.089)	(0.008)
	0.059*	0.001	0.026*	
Education	(0.010)	(0.001)	(0.010)	0.001 (0.001)
	-0.010	0.002	-0.046	
Married	(0.048)	(0.004)	(0.048)	0.003 (0.004)
	-0.165*	0.007	-0.172*	
Employed	(0.050)	(0.004)	(0.048)	0.005 (0.004)
	0.017*	0.001+	0.013*	
Age	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.002)	0.000 (0.000)
	0.022*	0.000	0.017*	
Income	(0.005)	(0.000)	(0.005)	0.000 (0.000)
			-0.017	
Conservative			(0.015)	0.000 (0.001)
			0.173*	-0.004*
Efficacy			(0.021)	(0.002)
			0.111	
Registered			(0.080)	0.007 (0.007)
			0.609*	-0.009
Vote 2004			(0.073)	(0.006)
			-0.057	
Clinton			(0.078)	0.001 (0.007)
Supporter			0.001	
Obama			(0.082)	0.011 (0.007)
Supporter			0.015	
McCain			(0.030)	0.001 (0.003)
Supporter				
		-0.009*		-0.008*
I With S		(0.002)		(0.002)
Y0	0.716*		0.633*	
(Mean)	(0.162)		(0.191)	
Y1	0.011		0.015	
(Mean)	(0.014)		(0.017)	
	0.621*		0.525*	
Y0 (Var.)	(0.028)		(0.026)	

Y1 (Var.)	0.002* (0.000)	0.002* (0.000)
X ² (DF)	99.3* (38)	126.46* (59)
CFI	0.991	0.991
RMSEA	.023 (.018-.029)	.019 (.015-.024)
R ²	.703-.715	.703-.714
N	2712	2703

+ P<.10. * P< .05. I=Intercept, S=Slope. Dependent Variable: Political Interest. Comparison/Omitted Variables: Men, Whites, Single, Unemployed, Unregistered, Non-Voters.

Table 2 displays Models 1A and 1B. These models estimate differences in growth in political interest between racial and gender groups. Both models include socio-economic and socio-demographic variables, but model 1B also includes political orientation and candidate choice variables. LGCM provides two estimates for each model. The first is the direct effect on “I” which estimates the variables’ effect on the intercept. A significant intercept coefficient indicates that this variable has a strong effect on an individual’s initial level of political interest. The second estimate is the direct effect on “S” which estimates how each variable influences change in political interest over time. A significant slope coefficient indicates that this variable influenced the level of growth in political interest over the course of the campaign. Although the LGCM calculates the intercept and the slope, we are more interested in the effects of descriptive representation on the rate of change in political interest. Therefore, our discussion generally focuses on the slope estimates for each group.

Based on our findings in Table 2, we find support for our first hypothesis. At the beginning of the 2008 election cycle, women have lower levels of political interest than men. However, women’s political interest grows at a significantly higher rate than men’s when we hold several variables constant. This is presented graphically in Figure 2A, showing that as the election progresses, the gap between men and women grows smaller. On a five point scale, women experience a half point growth in political interest over the course of the election.

African Americans display higher levels of political interest than Caucasians at the beginning of the 2008 election season. When we account for only socio-demographic and SES variables (see Model 1A), African American political interest grows at a significantly higher rate than Caucasians’ over the course of the campaign. However, this relationship becomes marginally significant when we also include controls for political ideology and candidate choice (see Model 1B). Similar to women, African Americans experience approximately a half point growth in political interest over the course of the election. Figure 2B graphically displays these results. Although African Americans and Caucasians have similar levels of political interest early in the election cycle, African American political interest grows at a higher rate.

Figure 2A: Linear Growth Curve Models Predicting Change in Political Interest for Women and Men over the Course of the 2008 Election

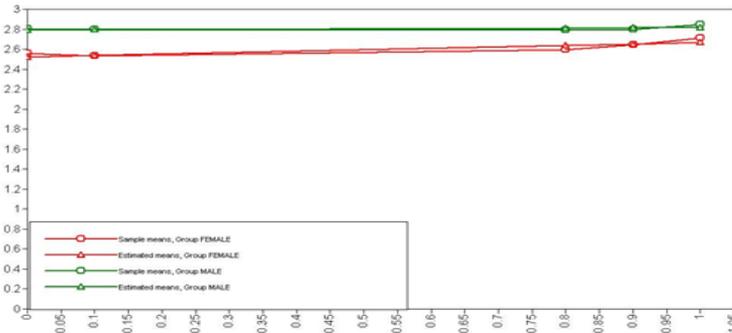
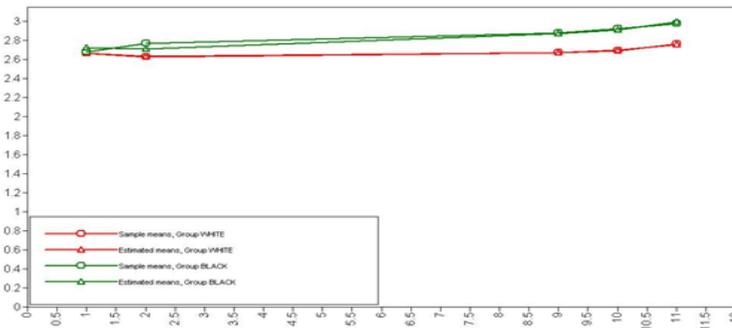


Figure 2B: Linear Growth Curve Models Predicting Change in Political Interest for African-Americans and Caucasians over the Course of the 2008 Election.



At the beginning of the 2008 election, Latinos displayed a higher level of political interest than Caucasians. Yet, as the election progressed, Latinos’ political interest grew at a lower rate than Caucasians. This finding can be attributed to the lack of competitive Latino candidates in the 2008 election. While New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson sought the Democratic nomination, he dropped out of the race on January 8, 2008 after poor performances in the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary.

When we control for political orientation and candidate choice, efficacy is the only variable that had a significant effect on growth in political interest. Respondents with lower levels of efficacy became more interested over the course of the election. Also, those with less political interest at the outset of the 2008 election became more interested as the election progressed (based on the intercept with slope estimate). These findings suggest that the historic nature of the campaign may have engaged those who are typically uninterested in politics. The model fit statistics for Models 1A and 1B indicate that our estimated parameters fit the actual data very well. The RMSEA is above 0.9 and the CFI is less than 0.07, indicating a strong model fit.

Based on these results, we find additional support for our first hypothesis, in that African Americans’ and women’s level of political interest grew at a higher rate than

Caucasians' and men's respectively. In the next step of our analysis, we examine potential intra-group differences between African Americans, Caucasians, men, and women to determine if some African Americans and women were more prone to the effect of descriptive representation.

Table 3: Multiple Group LGCM Predicting Political Interest for Women and Men over the Course of the 2008 Election

DV=Political Interest	Direct Effect on I Women <i>b(SE)</i>	Direct Effect on S Women <i>b(SE)</i>	Direct Effect on I Men <i>b(SE)</i>	Direct Effect on S Men <i>b(SE)</i>
Black	0.170+(0.100)	0.009(0.009)	0.123(0.140)	0.014(0.013)
Latino	0.262*(0.113)	-0.015(0.010)	0.368*(0.146)	'-0.016(0.013)
Education	0.043*(0.010)	0.001(0.001)	0.037*(0.016)	0.001(0.001)
Married	'-0.004(0.062)	0.000(0.005)	'-0.048(0.077)	0.004(0.007)
Employed	0.119*(0.060)	0.005(0.005)	'-0.220*(0.081)	0.012(0.007)
Age	0.019*(0.002)	0.001*(0.000)	0.008*(0.003)	0.000(0.000)
Income	0.018*(0.007)	0.000(0.001)	0.012(0.008)	0.000(0.001)
Conservative	'-0.006(0.018)	0.001(0.002)	0.006(0.023)	'-0.001(0.002)
Efficacy	0.189*(0.027)	-0.001(0.002)	0.158*(0.031)	0.005+(0.003)
Registered	0.067(0.118)	0.013(0.010)	0.170(0.116)	'-0.006(0.010)
Vote 04	0.567*(0.100)	-0.010(0.009)	0.607*(0.112)	-0.009(0.010)
Clinton Supporter	0.001(0.102)	0.009(0.009)	'-0.015(0.117)	'-0.005(0.011)
Obama Supporter	0.074(0.111)	0.017+(0.010)	0.018(0.122)	0.007(0.011)
McCain Supporter'	0.050(0.048)	0.002(0.004)	'-0.004(0.039)	0.000(0.003)
I with S		0.008*(0.002)		-0.007*(0.003)
Y0(Mean)	0.630*(0.038)		0.935*(0.293)	
Y1 (Slope)	0.002*(.0000)		'-0.005(0.027)	
Y0(Var)	0.593*(0.041)		0.500*(0.037)	
Y1(Var)	0.001*(0.000)		0.001*(0.000)	
X ² (DF)	158.3*(73)			
CFI	0.988			
RMSEA	.028(.022-.034)			
R ²	.703-.714		.615-.682	
N	1495		1118	

+P<.10 *P<.05. I=Intercept, S=Slope. Dependent Variable: Political Interest. Comparison/Omitted Variables: Men, Whites, Single, Unemployed, Unregistered, Non-Voters.

Table 3 displays a multiple group LGCM predicting political interest for men and women. This method allows us to measure which factors influence growth in political interest within gender and racial groups. The coefficients are interpreted similarly to interaction variables (i.e., Age*Women, Income*Men). Based on our analysis, age and candidate choice affected women's growth in political interest while efficacy influenced men's growth in political interest over the course of the election.

First, age was negatively correlated with growth in political interest, indicating that younger women became more interested in politics than older women throughout the campaign. In contrast, age did not have a significant effect on the change in political interest for men. Second, women who supported Obama in the primaries experienced a significant growth in political interest compared to women who supported other Democratic and Republican candidates (excluding Clinton). Third, levels of efficacy are negatively correlated with growth in political interest, indicating that men with lower levels of efficacy experienced more growth in political interest than men with higher levels of efficacy. However, efficacy had no effect on change in political interest for women. Finally, women and men with lower levels of political interest at the beginning of the election displayed higher rates of growth than women and men with higher initial levels of interest.

The RMSEA (0.99) and the CFI (0.03) both indicate a strong model fit. For the most part, descriptive representation has an equal effect on women's growth in political interest regardless of income, education, ideology, and other factors. Based on this analysis, we find support for Hypothesis 2D: Younger women became more politically interested over the course of the 2008 election than older women. However, we find no evidence that education (Hypothesis 2B) or ideology (Hypothesis 2C) affects growth in political interest for women.

Table 4 displays a multiple group LGCM predicting political interest between African Americans and Caucasians. Based on our analysis, gender influences growth in political interest among Caucasians, and age influences growth in political interest among African Americans. First, Caucasian women's political interest grows at a higher rate over the course of the election than Caucasian men's. However, we do not find gender differences between African American men and African American women. Second, age is negatively associated with growth in political interest among African Americans, but it has no effect on Caucasians' growth in political interest. Younger African Americans became more interested in politics over the course of the election than older African Americans. Third, we find that political interest grows among Caucasians with lower levels of efficacy and African Americans who are registered voters. Finally, Caucasians who had a lower level of political interest at the start of the election experienced higher rates of growth than Caucasians who had a higher level of political interest in January of 2008.

Based on the results presented in Table 4, we find additional support for Hypothesis 2D. Like women, younger African Americans' levels of political interest grew at a higher rate than older African Americans'. We also find support for Hypothesis 2A. Caucasian women displayed higher growths in political interest than Caucasian men, but there were no such gender differences between African American men and African American women. Surprisingly, we find no support for Hypotheses 2B and 2C. Ideology and education had no effect on growth in political interest for African Americans. Again, the estimated parameters in our model fit the actual data according to the RMSEA (0.026) and CFI (0.985) scores.

Table 4: Multiple Group LGM Predicting Political Interest for Whites and Blacks over the Course of the 2008 Election

	Direct Effect on I White <i>b</i> (SE)	Direct Effect on S White <i>b</i> (SE)	Direct Effect on I Black <i>b</i> (SE)	Direct Effect on S Black <i>b</i> (SE)
Women	-0.256*(0.042)	0.012*(0.004)	-0.186(0.142)	0.005(0.014)
Education	0.046*(0.008)	0.001(0.001)	0.041(0.034)	0.004(0.003)
Married	-0.045(0.050)	0.002(0.004)	-0.131(0.153)	0.017(0.015)
Employed	-0.133*(0.049)	0.007(0.004)	-0.060(0.155)	-0.008(0.015)
Age	0.015*(0.002)	0.000(0.000)	0.012*(0.006)	-0.001*(0.001)
Income	0.013*(0.005)	0.000(0.000)	0.041+(0.022)	-0.002(0.002)
Conservative	0.020(0.014)	0.000(0.001)	-0.006(0.046)	0.002(0.005)
Efficacy	0.196*(0.022)	-0.003*(0.002)	0.212*(0.063)	-0.010(0.006)
Registered	0.205*(0.086)	0.003(0.007)	-0.496+(0.297)	0.078*(0.030)
Vote 04	0.532*(0.078)	-0.009(0.007)	0.853*(0.238)	-0.035(0.025)
Clinton Supporter	0.090(0.072)	0.001(0.006)	0.168(0.537)	-0.062(0.055)
Obama Supporter	0.120(0.081)	0.008(0.007)	0.047(0.484)	0.001(0.051)
McCain Supporter	0.021(0.030)	0.001(0.003)	0.333(0.641)	-0.078(0.062)
IWITHS	-0.008*(0.002)		-0.001(0.005)	
Y0(Mean)	0.545*(0.027)		0.635(0.680)	
Y1(mean)	0.001*(0.000)		0.026(0.069)	
Y0(Var)	.450* (.077)		0.333*(0.069)	
Y1(Var)	.003*(.001)		0.001(0.001)	
X ² (DF)	218.92* (109)			
CFI	0.985			
RMSEA	.026 (.021-.031)			
R ²	.685-.715		.643-.658	
N	2214		218	

+P< .10 *P<.05. I=Intercept, S=Slope Dependent Variable: Political Interest. Comparison/Omitted Variables: Men, Single, Unemployed, Unregistered, Non-Voters.

Discussion and Conclusion

The 2008 presidential election and candidacies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin captured the attention of academics and non-academics alike. Much of this interest centers on how the nature of the election affected turnout, campaigning, and donations. While we agree that the election had multiple effects on tangible political behaviors, we argue that it also affected political attitudes. We find that the presence of African American and women candidates in the 2008 election helped close gaps in political interest between men and women, and African Americans and Caucasians. Our findings could be endemic to the 2008 election, but based on theoretical expectations, we argue that studies examining

this relationship in other contexts will yield similar results.

We use LGCM to test the effect of descriptive representation on change in political interest over the course of the 2008 election. Similar to previous research, we find that descriptive representation has a positive impact on African Americans' and women's levels of political interest. The level of political interest among women starts at a significantly lower level than men, but women's growth in political interest increases at a significantly higher rate than men's. Also, African American political interest starts at roughly the same level as Caucasians', but it grows at a marginally significant higher rate than Caucasians'.

We also find intra-group differences in levels of political interest for African Americans and women. First, we find gender differences in political interest for Caucasians but not for African Americans. Caucasian women's political interest grew at a significantly higher rate than Caucasian men's, while there were no such differences for African American women and African American men. Second, we find age to be negatively associated with growth in political interest for women and African Americans. Younger women and younger African Americans experienced higher rates of growth in political interest than their older counterparts. Finally, counter to our hypotheses, we do not find education or ideology to have a significant effect on change in political interest.

Our results contribute to the descriptive representation literature by analyzing the trajectory of change in political interest stimulated by the presence of an African American or woman candidate. According to our study, descriptive representation has a gradual positive effect on the political attitudes of minorities, rather than an instant effect that remains constant over time. This suggests that the longer a minority candidate is on the ballot, the stronger his/her impact will be on the political interest for these underrepresented groups. This area is ripe for future research, which should examine the effect of descriptive representation on change in other political attitudes and behaviors over time.

Our results also have broad implications for electoral politics and minority empowerment. Confirming previous research, we find that descriptive representation has a positive effect on African Americans' and women's levels of political interest. This suggests that efforts to politically empower minority groups should be concentrated on increasing the number of viable minority candidates, not only on increasing mobilization. Although we do not discount the efforts to increase political engagement via voter recruitment, our research implies that these efforts to politically engage minorities may be displaced.

Another way that our study contributes to the descriptive representation literature is that our analysis estimates intra-group differences in levels of growth in political interest. Echoing previous research, we find that in the identity hierarchy, race supersedes gender. One might expect African American women to experience the most growth in political interest because there were both women and African American candidates on the ballot. Yet, despite the prominent candidacies of Palin and Clinton, African American women did not experience additive effects of descriptive representation. While there were gender differences in political interest among Caucasians, we did not find this among African Americans.

In contrast to previous research, we find that age is negatively correlated to growth in political interest among women and African Americans. This is contrary to findings that descriptive representation has a strong effect on older African Americans and women (Atkeson 2003; Tate 1993). We attribute previous findings to the data limitations of cross sectional analysis. While we find that age is a strong positive predictor of political interest

(see age intercepts estimates in Tables 3, 4, 5), it is negatively associated with growth in political interest over the course of the election. Thus, we find that younger African Americans' and younger women's levels of political interest grew at higher rates than their older counterparts. By overlooking the change in political interest, researchers may erroneously conclude that descriptive representation has the strongest influence on older African Americans and women, thereby ignoring its effect on younger groups. Therefore, by using LGCM, we capture a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between age, descriptive representation, and political interest.

Moreover, while some may argue that the relationship between age and descriptive representation is spurious, we do not believe that this is the case in this study. Some may attribute this result to a "ceiling effect" whereby younger voters' levels of political interest have more room to grow. Others may argue that this finding is due to the growth of online social networks and concerted efforts to increase youth turnout. If either of these were correct, then we would see growths in political interest among all racial and gender groups, not simply younger African Americans and younger women. Therefore, consistent with our hypothesis, we argue that the non-traditional nature of the election and the historic candidacies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin engaged previously marginalized younger cohorts of African Americans and women.

Our research suggests that the historic candidacies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin may have inspired political interest in this younger generation of African Americans and women in a way that candidates in prior eras were unable to do. These younger cohorts were socialized into politics at a time when African Americans and women made strong inroads into the highest bastion of American politics. As a result, they may feel a sense of inclusion into a political system that previously excluded them. Consequently, the impact of these candidacies has important implications that will endure beyond Obama's presidency. Because younger African Americans' and younger women's levels of political interest grew during the 2008 election, this cohort of underrepresented groups could pave the way toward diminishing the longstanding gaps in political interest between dominant and marginalized groups. Thus, future research should examine whether this interest in politics was temporary or if these candidacies have helped incorporate future generations of minorities into the political system.

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Appendix

Question Wording and Variable Coding (Not all variables are included)

- Political Interest:** Question- "How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?" Interest was coded as follows: 0=Not Interested at all 1=Slightly Interested 2=Moderately Interested 3=Very Interested 4=Extremely Interested. Note: All Independent Variables are measured using each respondent's initial response.
- Education:** Question- "What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?" Education was measured as years in school: No Schooling=0, 4th grade=4, 5th or 6th Grade=5.5, 7th or 8th grade=7.5, 9th grade=9, 10th grade=10, 11th grade=11, High School Graduate=12, Some College=14, Associate's degree=14, Bachelor's degree=16, Master's degree=18, Professional or Doctorate=20.
- Married:** Question- "Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married?" Married is coded as follows: Married=1, Widowed=0, Divorced=0, Separated=0, Never Married=0
- Employed:** Question- "Which statement best describes your current employment status?" Employed is coded as follows: Working - as a paid employed/Working - self-employed=1, Not working-on temporary layoff from a job/looking for work/retired/disabled/other=0
- Income:** Question- "Was your household income in the past 12 months...." Income was coded as follows: less than \$5,000=2.5, \$5,000 to \$7,499=6.25, \$7,500 to \$9,999=8.75, \$10,000 to \$12,499=11.25, \$12,500 to \$14,999=13.75, \$15,000 to \$19,999=17.5, \$20,000 to \$24,999=22.5, \$25,000 to \$29,999=27.5, \$30,000 to \$34,999=32.5, \$35,000 to \$39,999=37.5, \$40,000 to \$49,999=45, \$50,000 to \$59,999=55, \$60,000 to \$74,999=67.5, \$75,000 to \$84,999=80, \$85,000 to \$99,999=92.5, \$100,000 to \$124,999=112.5, \$125,000 to \$149,999=137.5, \$150,000 to \$174,999=162.5, \$175,000 or more=175
- Conservative:** Question- "When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?" Conservative is coded as follows: Liberal=0, Conservative=1, Moderate=0
- Efficacy:** Question- "How much can people like you affect what the government does?" Efficacy is coded as follows: Not at All=0, A little=1, A Moderate Amount=2, A Lot=3, A Great Deal=4
- Registered:** Question- "Are you registered to vote, or not?" Registered- was coded as follows. Yes=1 No=0
- Vote in 04:** Question- "Which one of the following best describes what you did in that election in 2004?" Vote 04 is coded as follows: Definitely did not vote=0, Definitely voted in person at a polling place on election day=1, Definitely voted in person at a polling place before election day=1, Definitely voted by mailing a ballot to elections officials before election day=1, Definitely voted in some other way=1. Or Question- "If you had to guess,

would you say that you probably did vote in the election held in November 2004, or probably did not vote in that election?" Again Vote 04 is coded as follows: 1=Probably Voted, 0=probably did not vote.

Obama Primary Supporter: Question- "Which presidential candidate did you vote for?" Obama Primary Supporter is Coded as Follows: Barack Obama=1, Hillary Clinton=0, John Edwards=0, Bill Richardson=0, Joe Biden=0, Chris Dodd=0, Dennis Kucinich=0, Mike Gravel=0, someone else=0

Clinton Primary Supporter: Question- "Which presidential candidate did you vote for?" Clinton Primary Supporter is Coded as Follows: Barack Obama=0, Hillary Clinton=1, John Edwards=0, Bill Richardson=0, Joe Biden=0, Chris Dodd=0, Dennis Kucinich=0, Mike Gravel=0, someone else=0.

McCain General Election Supporter: Question- "Who did you vote for in the election for President?" McCain General Election Supporter is Coded as Follows: John McCain=1, Barack Obama=0.

Notes

¹ Although descriptive representation is often associated with elected officials, in this article we also use it to describe candidates who mirror the phenotype of the population (see also Atkeson, 2003; Rosenthal, 1995).

² The current data set has not undergone normal ANES quality control procedures. As a result, ANESPS warns those who use the data set to recognize that some changes may occur when the data set is fully released in September. Possible changes include revisions to the weights, changes to the missing value codes, addition or deletion of cases, and re-computation of summary variables. However, we do not expect this to impact our analysis because we do not use weights or summary variables in our multivariate models.

³ To maximize our N, we estimated missing data using a maximum likelihood estimation in MPLUS. See <http://www.statmodel.com/discussion/messages/22/22.html> for more details.

⁴ We include Latinos in our analysis, but we do not focus on this group because there was not a competitive Latino candidate running for president in 2008. Furthermore, due to lack of data we are not able to examine levels of political interest of Asian Americans.

⁵ We also considered including party identification into the model. Unfortunately, the party identification variable was coded incorrectly in the advanced release of the data set. However, we do not expect this to significantly influence our results because we use candidate choice and ideology as proxies for partisanship.

⁶ We include only Obama's primary support in the model and not his general election support because the two variables are highly collinear.

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