

Setting the PACE: An Assessment of Political Engagement and Motivations Among Students at Indiana University

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Abstract

In the months leading up to the 2020 U.S. presidential election, researchers surveyed IU students in the Political and Civic Engagement (PACE) certificate program in order to understand how PACE students were engaged politically, what motivated them to engage politically, and how those motivations were shaped by the changing political landscape. Using primarily quantitative methods, researchers utilized Cabrera et al.'s (2017) ten student activism and engagement premises as a foundation for their research. Researchers further worked to establish a spectrum of political engagement which ranged from slacktivism to activism, a scale that became more evident and applicable throughout the analysis. Through both a quantitative and qualitative analysis, researchers found that there was not a strong connection between the years of involvement in the PACE program and the number of ways a student is politically engaged. Additionally, researchers found that there was a wide array of motivations for students joining the PACE program which could be leveraged by PACE administrators in programming or curriculum. Our findings revealed that PACE students are very altruistic in their vision and hopes for society.

Keywords

Political engagement, student activism, political motivations

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Abigail Gschwend Harris (she/her) is an alumna of the University of Tulsa where she received her B.M. in Piano Performance in 2016. For the past two years at Indiana University, she has worked as the Graduate Assistant for Strategic Initiatives in the Office of the President, primarily serving as the Board of Aeons advisor. Additionally, she worked with Union Board as a Graduate Programming Advisor with both the Concerts and Canvas Creative Arts committees. In May 2021, Abigail will receive her M.S.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs and a Graduate Certificate in Institutional Research. Post-graduation, Abigail will serve as the Assistant Director of Admissions for the Kelley Direct Online MBA and MS Programs where she looks forward to growing as a professional.

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Suggested citation:

Beach, E., Carlberg, R., Gschwend Harris, A., Henry, J., & Kuepker, S. (2021). Setting the PACE: An assessment of political engagement and motivations among students at Indiana University. *Journal of the Student Personnel Association at Indiana University*, 53-67.

Introduction

Student-affairs educators in the United States (US) today assert that meaningful engagement in co-curricular activities increases the success rate of students' academic performance and personal and professional development (Patton et al., 2016). Throughout the Fall 2020 semester, ongoing current events—including the run-up to the US presidential election, the worldwide health crisis caused by COVID-19, and calls for racial and social justice following instances of police brutality, among others—continued to develop while the frequency of meaningful interactions and student-oriented developmental activities, co-curricular or otherwise, dwindled. With this in mind, our research team sought to examine political engagement among Indiana University (IU) students during the fall 2020 semester—specifically students who have proven to be invested in politics prior to and amid the convergence of the aforementioned politicized events.

Generation Z (i.e., current, traditionally-aged undergraduate students) comprises an estimated 20.3% of the American population (Frey, 2020). These students are nearing and passing the voting age at a time when Americans' trust in establishment and government is incredibly low, no matter party affiliation (Jackson, 2020). Across the US, reactions to the global pandemic and entrenched systems of oppression have amplified feelings of discontent, distrust, and disrepute in the lead-up to a presidential election and political season unlike any other (Ingraham, 2020). With uncertainty abound, institutions of higher education have not been spared from strife, and, in fact, 2020 has seen colleges and universities centered in a political and ideological discussion. These times have posed existential questions related to how colleges and universities operate and how they serve to develop political and civic engagement among their primary constituencies: students. While the interests that led to this study and the proceeding implications are aimed at the institutional level, the research was done at the student level which comprised our sample population. This confluence of events combined with the current semi-volatile, uncertain environment of college and university campuses all but ensures “young people could wield significant political power” in the 2020 election and the direction of American politics going forward (Sprunt, 2020).

This quantitative study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are Political and Civic Engagement (PACE) students at Indiana University Bloomington (IU) engaged politically?
2. What motivates them to engage politically, and how are these motivations being shaped by the changing political landscape?

For the purposes of this research, individuals included in the study sample are defined as currently enrolled undergraduate students earning a certificate in PACE through the College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University Bloomington. Political engagement among these students will be defined broadly using a lightly modified version of Cabrera et al.'s (2017) ten student activism and engagement premises. In this framework, political engagement (1) embodies an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective; (2) involves developing and exercising power; (3) considers the vision of what social progress looks like; and (4) seeks to change the political landscape. The setting of this study is the hybrid/virtual environment on and around the IU Bloomington campus during the fall 2020 semester. The study concluded in early December 2020, which means the US presidential election took place during the course of our research. We incorporated three phases of data collection and subsequent data analysis: 1) a review of current literature within our theoretical framework and a scan of national student voting trends, 2) an analysis of publicly available PACE program data, and 3) a survey. In addition to the internal PACE program data, our survey included a block of demographic questions.

In sum, this assessment was broached for the purposes of better understanding how students enrolled in the PACE certificate program engage politically. Prior to analyzing final results, the researchers hypothesized that COVID-19 and the national Black Lives Matter movement would be motivating factors for political engagement among the sample of students. This untested assumption was informed by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks discussed elsewhere in this text.

Positionality Statement

Collectively, all of the researchers conducting this environmental assessment personally identify as “active” in the political engagement continuum based on how we define political engagement in this study, grounded in Cabrera et al.’s (2017) engagement premises. This engagement takes the form of voting regularly, donating time and resources to political campaigns and causes, and remaining informed of current events and trends that affect not only their most salient identities but those of individuals with differing viewpoints and personal characteristics. With this in mind, the researchers support candidates associated with the Democratic Party and their positions within the party range from centrist to progressive. In addition, the researchers identify as White, cisgender, and heterosexual. Three researchers identify as men and two as women.

Because our research team consists of five student affairs professionals who are concerned about and engaged in social justice and inclusion issues, we have a concern for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all students with whom we work. Our perspective leads us to hypothesize that COVID-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and other recent national developments will be motivating factors for college student political engagement. Researchers found it important to disclose these identities and perspectives as they could be sources of bias through the data collection and analysis process. Researchers will utilize external entities and authentication methods to ensure their positionality does not influence results.

Literature Review

To better understand the underlying motivations explored in the subsequent research, this literature review seeks to develop a definition of political engagement and examines broad categories of political engagement among traditionally aged college students. Additionally, the literature review includes the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation, which defines how students are motivated to be involved.

Political Engagement Premises

Cabrera et al.’s (2017) ten student activism and engagement premises laid the foundation for the research’s definition of political engagement. Political engagement refers to interest and engagement with political issues and topics. Our research will analyze how PACE students’ engagement with various activities are expressions of slacktivism or higher on the spectrum towards activism. This definition and Cabrera et al.’s (2017) premises regarding slacktivism vs. activism drove the creation of our survey instrument and analysis.

Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation

Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation operates on the belief that “individuals’ choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity” (Wigfield, 2000, p. 68). Values are influenced by “task-specific beliefs such as ability beliefs, the perceived difficulty of different tasks, and individuals’ goals, self-schema, and affective memories,” which allows the motivation of the PACE program students to be measured through an academic and involvement lens, including their personal beliefs around this motivation. Through utilizing Cabrera et al.’s (2017) differentiation between slacktivism and activism behaviors and activities, the questions asked in the survey had a centralized focus on what is motivating PACE students to get involved in certain aspects of political engagement.

Conceptual Framework

Black Lives Matter

With the recent murders of Black individuals such as Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, and countless others, the Black Lives Matter movement and a call for racial justice, system reform, and fund reallocation in the country has grown tremendously in the past six months. In 2018, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life predicted a politically active generation was on its way; from 2018 to June 2020 (months before the election), the percentage of youth that claimed to partake in convincing their peers to vote increased from 33% to 50% (2020). As the youth were already paying increased attention to the political landscape in the country, the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, causing more of the country to be at home and locked into social media and news outlets more than ever. Between May 27, 2020, and June 10, 2020, American voter support of the Black Lives Matter movement “increased almost as much as it has in the preceding two years” (Cohn & Quealy, 2020). The Black Lives Matter movement has the potential to serve as a motivating factor for students’ increased and crystallized political engagement in the ongoing existence of police brutality and inequities against Black people in the United States.

COVID-19

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), and specifically, the impact it has had on the US, also brings about the motivation for increased political engagement. The World Health Organization declared this pandemic as a “public health emergency of international concern” (Zhou et al., 2020). In addition to the ways in which COVID-19 has caused increased isolation in communities everywhere and directed attention towards media outlets, the pandemic has been greatly politicized along party lines and was a major talking point leading up to the 2020 election. The political landscape, in general, has additionally seen major changes, from senate meetings moved to virtual formats to the current presidential campaigns’ lack of events. Lastly, COVID-19 has a direct impact on the current higher education landscape including campuses holding classes and extracurricular programming in a hybrid or entirely virtual format. This new virtual educational environment has forced much political engagement to be conducted online instead of in person.

Political Engagement: Activism v. Slacktivism

Activism in higher education has a long history and remains a critical way in which students, faculty, and staff can advocate for local and global issues. While modalities of activism have evolved over time, today’s activist movements continue to raise awareness and demand change for issues regarding equal rights, social justice, and identity advocacy (Altbach & Peterson, 1971; Ince et al., 2018; Greene II, 2016). Many researchers use the terms advocacy, engagement, activism, and interchangeably to discuss participation in political issues. Our team sought to define political engagement based on Elliott and Earl (2018) and Cabrera et al. (2017), pulling pieces from each source to create a definition that could be quantifiably measured amongst IU PACE students.

Elliott and Earl (2018) claim that modern activist groups and organizations who want to initiate real change in the political landscape should direct attention to engaging the younger population in order to find success in implementing actionable change. The fusion of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement have brought increased political engagement in the youth, 79% claiming that COVID-19 crystallized the way politics impacts their lives (Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, 2020). Social media platforms have the ability to connect people and ideas more often than ever, and younger people engage with online platforms arguably the most of any generation. This study offers that youth participation and engagement with political organizations and conversations are the early stages of activism; once individuals are interested and begin participating in political discussions, they enter the spectrum of political engagement (Elliott & Earl, 2018). Furthermore, our team was inclined to

view political engagement as a spectrum in which students fall depending on the ways in which they engage.

As activism moves to an online format, Cabrera et al. (2017) point out the danger of practicing “slacktivism”, a lackluster version of supporting political issues, disguised as activism but requiring little effort on an individual’s behalf (p. 2). Therefore they distinguish slacktivism from activism—the latter of which where political engagement will ideally occur. Our team recognizes that even the practice of slacktivism shows effort in political engagement. This occurs through signing petitions or liking a post on social media. While these activities are easy to do and require little risk, they show that an individual has an interest in political issues and has a vision for a better society (Cabrera et al., 2017).

If we view political engagement as a spectrum where behaviors fall in various places, slacktivism exists on one end and activism exists on the opposite. Activism involves the following or is described as: an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective; developing and exercising power; the description of behavior and not the description of an identity; some level of risk; a hope to change the political landscape; rarity, and few students engage in true activism (Cabrera et al., 2017)

In this study, political engagement refers to interest and engagement with political issues and topics. Our research will analyze how PACE students’ engagement with various activities are expressions of slacktivism or higher on the spectrum towards activism.

Methods

Contextual Background

The PACE program at Indiana University Bloomington is a 22 credit hour certificate that gives undergraduate students opportunities to engage in political and civic studies as a supplement to any degree. Before being admitted to the program, students must meet with a PACE advisor and complete a prerequisite class, PACE-C 250 Leadership and Public Policy. Our team is interested in PACE students specifically because their participation in the program shows they are interested in and are enacting political engagement simply by being in the program.

Admitted students must maintain a 2.7 GPA in the program’s courses while, at the same time, shaping the program requirements to their individual interests. PACE courses promote role-playing exercises to deepen student learning about historical events. All certificate-bound students are required to complete an internship in which they will be able to exhibit how they have applied the knowledge gained in PACE courses, build relationships with those unlike themselves, and “clarify [their] values, interests, and personal and career goals” (PACE, 2020). Many PACE students participate in local community service. They can engage in an Issue Forum course where they moderate a panel on a current issue with experts in the field and then facilitate a productive dialogue across differences. In Fall 2020, PACE partnered with peer institutions in the Big Ten Academic Alliance and the IU Student Government to lead the Big Ten Voting Challenge, an effort to encourage civic engagement through competition (PACE, 2020).

Student testimonies on the PACE website delve into the skills built and commendations earned through participation in the program. Students mention gaining the following through their time in PACE:

- ability to engage in dialogue with others who hold different perspectives
- listening and empathy skills as ways to get to know new people and cultures
- empowerment to vote and engage with politics in the country
- confidence to seek leadership roles within student organizations (2020).

Survey Distribution

The PACE program coordinators served as partners in distributing our survey to participants. The 22 question survey instrument was distributed electronically through the PACE listserv and Instagram

page four times from October 8, 2020, and closed on October 27, 2020. The PACE Political Engagement Motivations survey posed questions related to politically-based engagements and motivations for political engagement. The survey also contained questions regarding demographic information, engagement with the PACE program, political identity, voting methods, and other voting-related information. Demographic information depicts respondents' aggregate data categorized by race, gender, class standing, years in PACE, and interest in PACE. Disaggregated demographic data was not used in the analysis due to homogeneity.

Before analyzing motivations for political engagement, we found it important to understand how our participants engage politically. To do so, we asked participants to select all that apply from a list of 13 activities that they have engaged in within the last 60 days. Each activity is considered one that shows political engagement, but some exemplify behaviors of those who are nearing activism as opposed to slacktivism. Among surveyed PACE students, political-engagement levels were measured using a select-all-that-apply response format. This design allowed respondents to indicate which of 13 predetermined activities they engaged in (defined for the purposes of this research study as "within 60 days of participating in the survey").

The question "Which of these statements most aligns with your motivations for political engagement?" gauges how PACE students visualize how social progress plays out in relation to their actions in society. Based on the ideas of Cabrera et al. (2017), students were able to choose from the options "I have a vision for a society in which it progresses from the current state" and "I seek to contribute to society's social progress".

Respondents were presented with pre-written options which included ways that Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) regard as factors that yield more success in engagement and activism—if an individual is motivated by experiencing oppression or seeing loved ones experience oppression, for example. When understanding why PACE students engage in some ways more than others, or at all, is significant to take into account their motivations.

Within the survey introduction text, participants were given thorough informed consent content as dictated by the IRB. The survey was developed and distributed using the survey software Qualtrics, had several internal and external reviewers, and took about five minutes for participants to complete. The survey was anonymous other than if students volunteered to be reviewers or wished to be entered into a random drawing for five, \$10 gift cards to local Bloomington businesses. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the survey data was conducted using SPSS and Excel. The goal of the survey response rate was 15%. We received 14 responses out of the 52 survey recipients yielding a response rate of 27%. Our aim was to gather a diverse and representative sample of IU's PACE program with the threat of data saturation in mind (Boddy, 2016). The 15% response rate goal was set with the knowledge that there are 50-60 students currently enrolled in the PACE certificate program.

The guiding survey framework was Cabrera et al.'s (2017) student activism and engagement premises which informed the development of survey questions and how we analyzed PACE students' engagements. While the following does not represent the order in which questions in the survey were posed to participants, we have divided our results into 5 categories, listed below.

Results

Our survey results were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The regression analysis examined the relationship between the number of ways participants are engaged politically (independent variables) and the number of years in the PACE program (dependent variable). The research team also created summarizations of the quantitative information provided from the survey results.

Category 1 – Demographics

During the three weeks that the Political Engagement Motivations Survey was open, 14 unique respondents accessed the questionnaire with 12 individuals from the PACE program recording completed entries. Materials submitted in the two incomplete entries were reviewed and included in the subsequent findings. In terms of race, eight identified as White, two as Asian, and two as multiracial. Respondents also largely identified as female (ten) versus male (two). Responses came from juniors (three) and seniors (nine). Their time in the PACE program ranged from one to four years with two each in the program for 1, 2, and 4 years, and eight respondents in the program for 3 years. Participants identified with a range of motivations—options of which are listed as learning outcomes for the program on the PACE website.

The majority (83.3%) of participants affiliate with the Democratic Party. When asked to describe themselves using a range of politically descriptive terms, participant responses were more evenly distributed with *liberal* earning the highest degree of association among survey participants after garnering 9 self selections. Individuals who indicated their ballot-casting method of choice planned to utilize early-voting methods such as by-mail or in-person prior to November 3. These additional indicators of left-leaning tendencies (Parks, 2020) are present here and elsewhere in the collected data.

Category 2 – Political Engagement Level

A linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of the levels of political engagement from the number of years enrolled in the PACE program. The model, estimated from a sample of $n = 14$ subjects, was not statistically significant, $F(1,14) = 9.47$, $p > .001$, therefore the number of years enrolled in the PACE program was not significantly related to the levels of political engagement. This confirmed that students enrolled in the PACE program are overall engaged politically through multiple areas, not dependent on the number of years spent in the program.

Students who were enrolled in the PACE program for a longer period of time tended to be more politically engaged, with some outliers. In other words, for every additional (one) year in the PACE program, the predicted levels of political engagement increased by .934, on average; the unstandardized coefficient was $b = .934$ ($SE = .781$), $t(14) = 1.197$, $p > .001$. Accuracy in predicting the levels of political engagement was moderate. The correlation between the number of years enrolled in the PACE program and level of political engagement was .33. Approximately 11% of the variance of levels of political engagement was accounted for by its linear relationship with the number of years in the PACE program, adjusted $R^2 = .107$.

Activities with Lowest Engagement Levels

Out of all engagement activities, PACE students have the lowest level of engagement with politically focused community organizations (6 students) or student organizations (8 students) - the most sustainable political engagement efforts. As grounded from premise 1 of Cabrera et al.'s (2017) engagement premises, true political engagement "involves intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective" (p. 5). While a larger number of participants (12) indicated engaging with others on political topics on social media, Cabrera et al. (2017) claimed that "the online...cannot be a substitute for the in person engagement" (p. 6). These 8 students engaging in a student organization are engaging in activism-like activities that likely have more depth of engagement compared to the 12 students engaging on social media.

Activities with the Highest Engagement Levels

The survey results provided some clear activities with higher engagement levels among the participants. All 14 participants indicated that they had a plan to exercise their power to vote in November 2020 and made an effort to build awareness on political issues with both friends and family. The timeliness of the survey being implemented during an election year played a significant role in these activities being heightened. As grounded from Premise 5 of Cabrera et al.'s (2017) engagement premises,

“... risk (at varying levels) is core to anything under the umbrella ‘activism’” (p. 407) There can be a risk to having these conversations with loved ones that could have differing views from their own. An additional higher engagement activity was signing an online petition, an accessible and simple form of engagement. High engagement with online petitions aligns with the literature which tells us that “... signing petitions were not an end in and of themselves, but were the means to the end of gaining access to people in power.” (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 404)

Category 3 – Motivation Alignment

When selecting from two pre-established survey statements, 57.14% of respondents (8 students) noted they “have a vision for a society in which it progresses from the current state” while 42.86% of respondents (6 individuals) registered they “seek to contribute to society’s social progress.” This data reveals that while PACE students are indeed guided by a “vision of what social progress looks like”—Cabrera et al.’s (2017) Premise 6—the group of respondents generally do not feel empowered to contribute to said progress. One respondent stated, “my belief in my ability to make an impact has decreased. Between COVID and having a clearly white supremacist president with a scary number of supporters, it sometimes just feels like this country is too far gone and I don’t know what to do anymore,” showing a stronger alignment to the first response option to the above question. This student verbalized that they feel an inability to contribute due to not knowing how.

Category 4 – Political Engagement Motivations

Motivation for engaging in the pre-established political activities varied among participants, but the majority are motivated because of their hope for a better society (6 respondents) or a more socially just society (5 respondents). This aligns with the finding that 57.14% of respondents have a vision for society in which it progresses from the current state. Only 2 respondents designated being motivated to be politically engaged due to their identities/values being threatened and only 1 because of friends’ identities/values being threatened.

Category 5 – Change in Political Engagement Motivation

Using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed if a current event/issue motivated or demotivated them from politically engaging. Our research team hypothesized that BLM and COVID-19 were both significant in motivating our sample to be politically engaged. This hypothesis seems to be true with over 80% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing that BLM has increased their motivation and over 70% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing that COVID-19 has increased their motivation (Chart 2). However, BLM and COVID-19 were not the strongest motivators among respondents. The highest are climate change (90% strongly agree or agree), Supreme Court Justice Appointments (100% strongly agree or agree), and the presidential election (100% strongly agree or agree). Regarding BLM’s impact on motivation, it is worth noting that not everyone was motivated by it (about 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, or strongly disagreed that it had increased their motivation), yet everyone disagreed or strongly disagreed BLM demotivated them. In other words, not everyone was motivated by BLM but no one was demotivated by it. This reveals some outliers were neutral toward the movement. The fact that 100% of respondents, regardless of political party affiliation were motivated by the 2020 presidential election is congruent with the fact 100% of respondents had a plan to vote and 91.67% had decided on their candidate at the time of the survey. The data also reveals that some current issues may have both a motivating element and a demotivating element, such as Supreme Court Justice Appointments. While 100% strongly agreed or agreed Supreme Court Justice Appointments increased their motivation, about 85% strongly disagreed or disagreed it decreased their

motivation, leaving about 15% of respondents who both agree and disagree that Supreme Court Justice Appointments have motivated them to be politically engaged.

Chart 1

Political Motivators

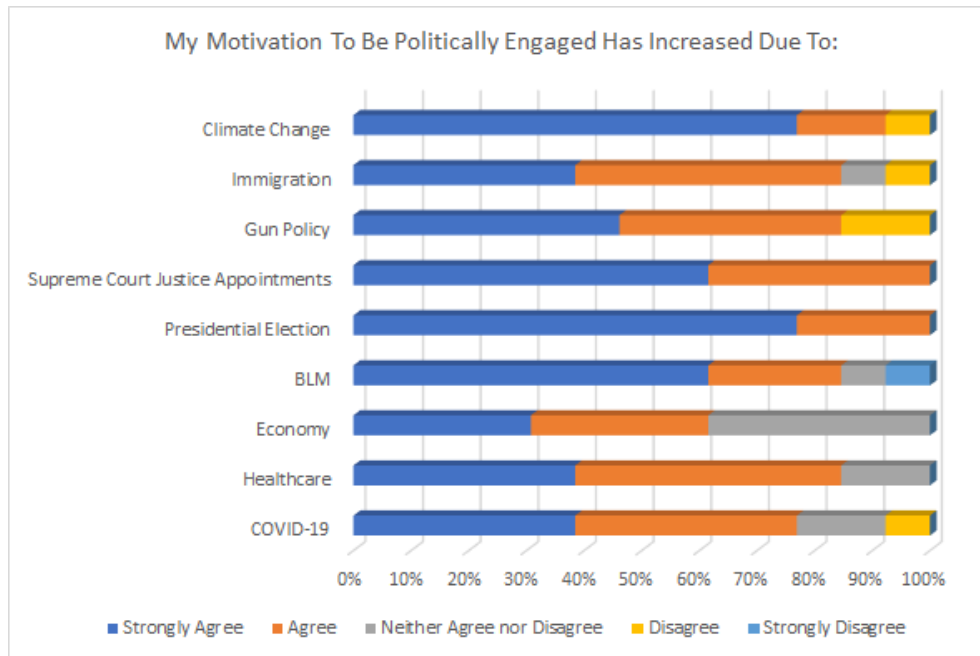
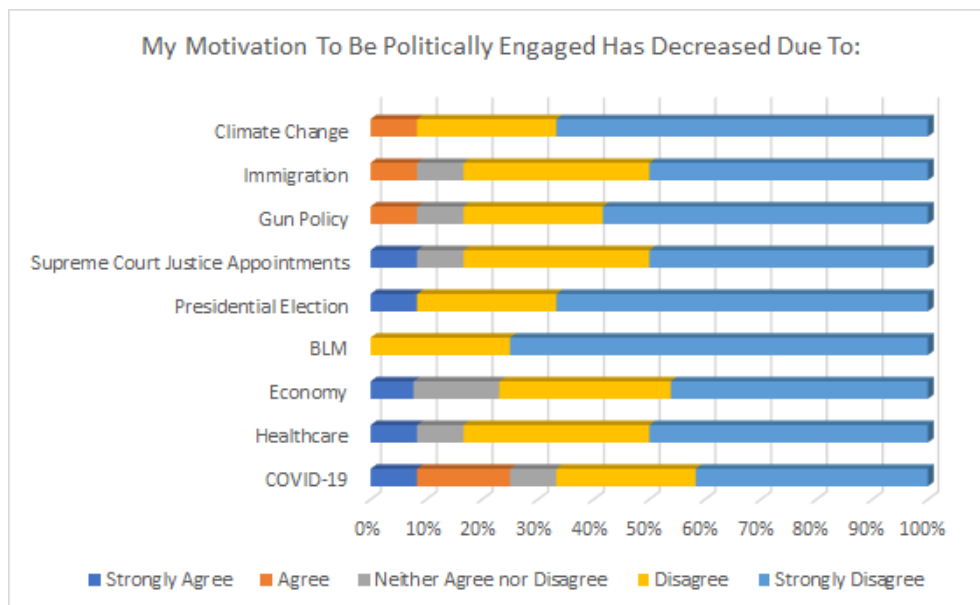


Chart 2

Political Demotivators



Qualitative Analysis

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the motivations, qualitative data analysis was done based on the four slightly modified versions of Cabrera et al.'s (2017) ten student activism and engagement premises. In this framework, political engagement (1) embodies an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective; (2) involves developing and exercising power; (3) considers the vision of what social progress looks like; and (4) is distinct from political governance, even though it seeks to change the political landscape. The survey asked a number of questions to gauge participants' alignment with these premises using both multiple choice and open response questions. Open-response questions obtained a total of twenty-two responses across three questions. This analysis focused on the two questions (questions 2 & 3 below) which garnered the majority of the qualitative responses (19 out of 22):

1. In what ways are you engaged politically? (anything not previously mentioned)
2. We would like to learn more about what your motivations are to politically engage. How did you initially get involved in political engagement and what has kept you engaged?
3. How has your motivation changed in the last year? What are some factors that have caused this change (social movements, political events, events on campus etc.)?

Through this qualitative analysis, a number of themes stood out including participants' engagement which focused on intentional and sustained efforts through on-campus and off-campus activities (Cabrera et al., 2017). Premises 1 and 2 proved to be most prominent in participants' responses on political engagement and motivation. Participants identified with being a part of something larger than themselves, and for many, this expanded well outside of the PACE program. In the open response questions, participants shared their motivations stemming from both negative and positively influenced family backgrounds, social media interactions, petition signing, and other means. One participant stated "I was always aware of the social injustices surrounding me and wanted to do something about it" which seems to highlight their recognition of the broader world and issues around them. Another student stated "I interned for a congressional campaign my first and second year at IU, and concern for the state of the country is what has kept me engaged" which highlights the sustained engagement highlighted by the premises. The common thread of these and other responses highlighted that respondents identified their political engagement in active engagement with political organizations or events that allowed for hands-on involvement and appeared to be motivated by engagement and activities that were sustained and allowed for practice and development.

The least prominent premises were premises 3 and 4. Premise 4 likely showed up as the least visible theme by the design of the research, as it attempted to gauge participants' ability to separate political governance from engagement but was not visible in participant responses. Premise 3 was directly gauged by one of the survey questions but did not appear as a common theme in open response questions except for a small handful which identified future aspirations for supporting future generations in political engagement and maintaining engagement because they feel a need to support and create change.

In addition to this analysis, the quantitative analysis did not find a statistically significant connection between the number of years in the PACE program and the engagement level of students. This aligns with our qualitative analysis as there was no apparent distinction in the qualitative responses from students based on the number of years involved in the PACE program and the level of political engagement or motivations.

Discussion

As our research team analyzed PACE student political engagement and motivations, we asked how they see themselves fitting into the political realm of society. The majority of students were more likely to indicate that they have the ability to envision a better society than feel empowered to be the change to create a better society. While both responses are on the political engagement spectrum, the latter indicates a level of true activism. Contributing to societal change is closer to the high bar of activism Cabrera et al. (2017) defined in their premises and is the level at which politically interested

students should strive to make a positive impact in their fields and in society. Because the group of students who indicated this display of activism are in the minority of our sample, the results give reason to assume the majority are lacking a feeling of empowerment to move past slacktivism towards activism. Recognizing that change needs to be made is not enough—society needs those who identify as politically engaged to move towards activism, and only 42.86% of PACE students indicated the mentality of a political activist.

Amidst the analysis of PACE student engagement activities, it was revealed that being involved in a student or community organization that focuses on political issues was the activity that the least number of respondents have participated in in the past 60 days. As Cabrera et al. (2017) emphasized, true activism is when an individual commits to sustainable, consistent engagement. Because the fewest students were engaged in arguably the most sustainable activity in the list of options, something could be said to the limiting nature of the clause that a student should have engaged in an activity in the last 60 days during a pandemic where organizations likely meet less regularly. The increase and decrease in political and general motivation is an experience shared amongst the college student population, and this could have affected our results. However, this data point could also argue that while PACE seeks to encourage political engagement, the program could build out a component of the program to support student participation in student or community organizations; this component has the potential to strengthen the sustainability of PACE students' political engagement (Cabrera et al., 2017).

Implications for Practice

While many of these implications are focused toward the PACE program, they can be directly translated to other, similar programs, and politically and civically focused programs or courses. As mentioned in the analysis, 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that climate change was a motivating factor for their political engagement. These responses align with many reports and studies that highlight that Generation Z is extremely motivated and worried about the challenges presented by climate change. A 2019 survey conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Amnesty International surveyed 10,000 respondents ranging in age from 18-25 on major human rights issues. One of the major results was that 40% of respondents identified climate change as the most important issue facing the world (Ipsos MORI, 2019). The PACE program currently includes a variety of class options relating to the environment, but it seems worthwhile to assess how if these offerings are enough or if additional course and internship options should be provided (PACE, 2020). If not already included, programs similar to PACE should consider how climate change may be included in their curriculum and how to provide students opportunities outside of the classroom for hands-on engagement around climate change.

To the extent that PACE students engaged politically with BLM and COVID-19, engagement with other politicized topics received higher association levels among survey respondents. This may suggest that students working towards a certificate in the program have high levels of news media literacy and comprehension of current events, are exposed to a diverse range of news sources, and encouraged to remain current in their understanding of domestic and international affairs, or both.

Our findings reveal that PACE students are very altruistic in their vision and hopes for society. However, according to the survey results, empathy, learning across differences, and motivation to act out of concern for marginalized groups' are low among PACE students. Only 5 respondents were interested in PACE in order to gain listening and empathy skills as ways to get to know new people and cultures. Only 1 participant was motivated to be politically engaged because others' identities/values are threatened. These various findings reveal that growing in cultural humility is not the most popular reason for joining PACE, and advocacy type political motivation is not primary for PACE students. More research is needed to determine if this lack of empathy is a potential gap in the PACE culture/environment, or if students are indeed empathetic but it is simply not their reason for joining PACE. If needed, the program could institute programmatic and curricular changes to educate on empathy, oppression, and marginalization.

More research is needed in order to fully measure IU students' political engagement and motivations. One way to further this research could be by sampling students in the College of Arts and Sciences political science major. Since IU is a PWI and 75% of respondents are white, this resulted in a homogeneous study environment, sample, and respondents. In order to gain a more robust understanding of U.S. college students' political engagement levels and motivation at large, more research is needed at diverse institutions. Although our implications for practice are most relevant and generalizable to IU, we hope our assessment invites more scholar-practitioners interested in political engagement motivation to create their own studies.

Limitations

While researchers were excited about the partnership that was formed with the PACE program, faculty, staff, and students as well as the survey response rate, the research did not come without limitations. Foremost being the COVID-19 pandemic which inhibited researchers' abilities to advertise and directly connect with students in the PACE program. Since data was collected throughout the month of October before the November general election, some students may have felt greater salience in their political identity, however, some may have felt they needed to hide their authentic views. Another limitation is in the generalizability of our data. Data was collected from a small certificate program at a large R1 Midwest university which may not be reflective of other institutions, even with similar certificate programs. Additionally, data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic which may have also altered our results and should be kept in mind when reviewing this information.

Conclusion

The PACE certificate program at Indiana University provides students a greater opportunity to explore and engage in a variety of ways with local and national politics. Researchers sought to understand two things: How are Political and Civic Engagement (PACE) students at Indiana University Bloomington (IU) engaged politically? And what motivates them to engage politically, and how are these motivations being shaped by the changing political landscape? Researchers started out by defining political engagement which was identified on a broad spectrum from slacktivism to activism with a broad array of activities contained between. This study utilized an online survey to understand how motivations and engagement may have changed in light of recent social and political events, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Through both a quantitative and qualitative analysis, researchers found that there was not a strong connection between the years of involvement in the PACE program and the number of ways a student is politically engaged. Additionally, researchers found that there was a wide array of motivations for students joining the PACE program which could be leveraged by PACE administrators in programming or curriculum. Our findings reveal that PACE students are very altruistic in their vision and hopes for society. However, according to the survey results, empathy, learning across differences, and motivation to act out of concern for marginalized groups' are low among PACE students. These results are important to further understanding how the PACE program can support and engage PACE students as well as the greater campus community.

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