



IRLE WORKING PAPER
#120-15
October 2015

The Inequality of Politics: Social Class Rank and Political Participation

Michael W. Krauss

Cite as: Michael W. Krauss (2015). "The Inequality of Politics: Social Class Rank and Political Participation". IRLE Working Paper No. 120-15. <http://irle.berkeley.edu/workingpapers/120-15.pdf>

The Inequality of Politics: Social Class Rank and Political Participation

Michael W. Kraus

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Cameron Anderson

University of California, Berkeley

Bennett Callaghan

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

Perceived lower rank in the social class hierarchy reflects an individual's relative lack of perceived social and economic worth in society. In the current study we tested the predictions that lower perceptions of social class rank elicit both reduced political participation and lower political self-efficacy. Study 1 found that students with lower perceived social class were less likely to seek information about student government. Study 2 found that perceptions of political self-efficacy accounted for the relationship between perceived social class rank and political participation. Study 3 established causal associations between perceived social class and political participation—a momentary manipulation of elevated perceived social class increased political efficacy and intentions to participate in politics. In Study 4, affirming the self reduced social class disparities in both perceived political participation and efficacy. Throughout the studies, perceptions of social class were consistently related to political participation, and these associations occurred after accounting for political ideology and objective indicators of social class. Discussion focused on the understudied psychological barriers that perpetuate voter inequality in society. (171 words)

Keywords: social class, socioeconomic status, political psychology, self-efficacy, self-affirmation

The Inequality of Politics: Social Class Rank and Political Participation

In the last 50 years, economic and social resources have become increasingly concentrated in the United States among only a few individuals (Domhoff, 1998, Norton & Ariely, 2011). These unequal economic conditions adversely impact the lives of the people with the fewest material resources—lower-class individuals—who must contend with increased poverty, unemployment, reduced health and social support, and increased homelessness (Wilkinson, 1996). Though opportunities for individual American citizens to influence social and economic policy are rare, each citizen has the option to participate in the political system and affect policy collectively. Yet those at the bottom of the class hierarchy—despite having so much to gain from political participation—tend to participate in politics at consistently lower rates than their relatively upper-class counterparts (e.g., Gelman, 2009; Krosnick, 1991; Lijphart, 1997). In the present research, we examine the psychological factors that limit political participation among those relatively lower in social class. In particular, we examine how relative perceptions of one's position in the social class hierarchy reduce political participation among lower-class individuals because these perceptions affect beliefs about personal control over social and political institutions.

Social Class and Political Participation

Consistent data on American voting patterns suggests that those from relatively lower-class backgrounds—with lower income, education, and occupation status—tend to vote less than their more advantaged upper-class counterparts (Brady et al., 1995; Gelman, 2009; Krosnick, 1991; Lijphart, 1997; McDill & Ridley, 1962; Scott & Acock, 1979). A lack of participation

among relatively lower-class voters is a potential threat to the American democratic system because it suggests that government is systematically biased against less-well-off citizens (Lijphart, 1997).

Social scientists studying this inequality of politics have focused on how reduced political participation among lower-class individuals is driven by a lack of social or economic resources: That is, resources such as time, money, and civic skills that are essential for political activity are reduced in communities of lower-class individuals, and it is these deficits in resources that are responsible for lower voting rates in these communities (Brady et al., 1995). In an examination of a Tennessee initiative to create a larger metropolitan government, lower educational attainment was associated with lower voting rates on the initiative (McDill & Ridley, 1962). Explaining this voting trend, the authors claimed that a lack of education causes a “paucity of understanding of community problems,” (McDill & Ridley, 1962, p. 213). As well, elevated levels of social and economic resources are theorized to provide people with politically relevant skills and facilitate direct contact with politicians (Scott & Acock, 1979). As a result of this persistent focus on resource explanations for voter inequality, proposed interventions—such as voter-friendly registration rules, more infrequent elections, weekend voting, or compulsory voting—tend to address low voter turnout among lower-class individuals by solving some of these resource-related problems (e.g., Lijphart, 1997).

As this past research suggests, resource scarcity is certainly an important deterrent to political participation. Yet there may be other powerful *psychological* factors, derived from environments of scarcity, that shape patterns of political participation such that those at the bottom of the class hierarchy are systematically under-represented in the political process. In this research, we examine one way in which a person’s social class influences political participation:

through perceptions of one's position in the class hierarchy relative to others. We contend that people with lower perceived social class participate less in politics in part because these perceptions elicit feelings of a lack of personal control in political contexts. In the sections that follow, we detail our logic and prior support for this prediction.

Perceptions of Social Class Rank

In the social sciences, social class (socioeconomic status or SES) is typically defined as contrasting levels of objective economic and social resources, and measured using indices of educational attainment, annual income, and occupation status (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012; Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Oakes & Rossi, 2003; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). Together, education, income, and occupation status represent the material substance of social class and shape the life-trajectories of individuals in profound ways—even shortening the life course for those at the bottom of the class hierarchy, relative to those above them (Adler et al., 1994).

Recent theoretical advances reveal that the objective material aspects of social class shape how individuals perceive their own rank in the class hierarchy vis-à-vis others. Specifically, individuals perceive their social class position within their small social groups, local community, and society at large by comparing their own income, education, and occupation status to that of others (for a review, see Kraus, Tan, & Tannenbaum, 2013). Perceived social class is correlated with objective material resource measures of social class (e.g., Adler, Epel, Castellazo, & Ickovics, 2000; Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg, Kay, & Payne, 2015), and in some cases, predicts class-based psychological patterns more strongly and consistently than these objective indicators. In the realm of health and well-being, perceptions of lower social class rank, assessed by placing an “X” on a ten-rung ladder representing ascending levels of income,

education, and occupation status in society, were associated with reduced self-esteem (Kraus & Park, 2014), elevated blood pressure (Adler et al., 2000; Wright & Steptoe, 2005), greater susceptibility to cold-causing viruses (Cohen et al., 2008), and increased risk for mortality (Kopp, Skrabski, Rethelyi, Kawachi, & Adler, 2004) relative to perceptions of upper-class rank, and these associations were independent of objective material resource measures of social class (i.e., annual income, educational attainment). Perceived social class is also related to a broad range of political beliefs that include preferences for economic redistribution (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015), attitudes about wealth inequality (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009), and lay beliefs about the causes of social class (Kraus & Keltner, 2013) even after accounting for measures of objective material resources.

Based on the above research, we focus our analysis of social class and political participation on the unique effects of perceived social class, above and beyond actual objective material resources. For our first hypothesis we predict that perceptions of one's lower rank in the social class hierarchy will reduce political participation, and do so even after accounting for objective material resource measures of social class. We expect *perceptions* of social class to be powerful in shaping political participation because these perceptions directly elicit beliefs that the self is unable to effectively influence the political process.

Social Class Rank and Political Efficacy

Conceptions of the self are shaped by a variety of social factors including cultural background (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), significant others (Baldwin, 1992; Bosson & Swann, 1999; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008), and personal goals (Shah, 2003). Though much research suggests that social class profoundly shapes aspects of the social self (c.f., Kraus et al., 2012; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg,

2012), how social class influences the self-concept in the political sphere is not yet understood by research.

We reason that perceptions of lower rank in the social class hierarchy elicit reduced expectations of personal control over social and political institutions. Specifically, perceptions of low social class rank elicit beliefs that society is filled with individuals with higher social and economic standing—who more effectively take advantage of the opportunities for economic advancement, provide more for their families and close others, and deftly navigate the societal institutions that determine economic success and failure (e.g., Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006; 2007). In contrast, perceptions of high rank in the class hierarchy elicit beliefs that the self is capable of personally controlling and influencing social and economic opportunities in American society (e.g., Kraus et al., 2009). Thus, whereas individuals who perceive themselves at the top of the class hierarchy feel effective and capable at navigating societal institutions, such as the political system, perceptions of lower-class rank elicit reduced beliefs in one's capability to effectively participate in politics. Based on this logic, for our second hypothesis we predict that perceptions of lower social class rank elicit beliefs in reduced political self-efficacy—defined here as perceived control over political and social institutions (Paulhus, 1983). Moreover, because political self-efficacy beliefs tend to consistently predict actual levels of political participation (see Cohen et al., 2001; Corning & Meyers, 2002), for our third hypothesis we expected political self-efficacy to mediate the relationship between perceived social class rank and political participation.

Leveraging Self-Affirmation to Reduce Voter Inequality

Up to this point, we have suggested that beliefs in political self-efficacy are the mechanism explaining why perceptions of lower social class rank elicit reduced political

participation. Applying this logic, we contend further that an intervention strategy that increases self-efficacy should improve both political efficacy and participation among relatively lower-class individuals.

Research on self-affirmation suggests that affirming the self—by thinking of one’s own positive qualities (Steele, 1988)—has the power to increase beliefs in self-efficacy and reduce self-threats stemming from beliefs that one cannot effectively navigate social and political institutions. In research on self-affirmation, participants are typically first exposed to a socially self-threatening piece of information and then asked to affirm their positive qualities by writing about an important aspect of the self that they feel positively toward (McQueen & Klein, 2006; Steele, 1988). Studies suggest that self-affirmation reduces anxiety about negative stereotypes of one’s group (Steele, 1988), increases beliefs in the predictability of social environments (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), and enhances performance on normally threatening aptitude tests (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1990; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Leveraging the vast research on self-affirmation, for our fourth hypothesis we predict that affirming the self will reduce disparities in political participation and self-efficacy between perceived lower and upper social class rank individuals. Specifically, we contend that thinking of a positive aspect of the self will lead perceived lower-class individuals—normally threatened by political contexts—to believe that they have the capability to participate in politics at levels that are consistent with their relatively upper-class counterparts.

The Present Research

In the present research, we used four studies to test four overarching hypotheses related to perceived social class rank, political self-efficacy, and political participation: In Study 1, we examined correlations between perceptions of social class rank and tendencies to seek

information about student government elections on a university campus with both behavioral and self-report measures. Several prior studies indicate that those with lower objective social class—measured in terms of educational attainment and annual income—tend to participate in politics less than their more advantaged counterparts (Brady et al., 1995; Gelman, 2009; Kay & Friesen, 2011; Krosnick, 1991; Lijphart, 1997; McDill & Ridley, 1962; Scott & Acock, 1979). However, we suggest that *perceived* (also referred to as subjective) social class affects political participation above and beyond objective social class. That is, above and beyond individuals' objective level of income or education, their beliefs about their social class independently affect the likelihood they will participate politically. Throughout the studies we examined associations between social class perceptions, political efficacy, and political participation after accounting for objective material resource measures of social class (Studies 1 through 4), and political ideology (Studies 2 and 4).

In Study 2, we examined correlations between perceptions of social class rank, political efficacy, and self-reports of national political participation. Prior studies of general evaluations of the self provide preliminary support for the link between perceived social class and political efficacy: For instance, subjective ratings of social class rank are moderately associated with general perceived control (Kraus et al., 2009), indicating that perceptions of lower social class elicit feelings of broad inability to influence change of the social environment. As well, studies link political self-efficacy to measures of objective social class: An Israeli election study found that education and income were positively associated with beliefs in the capacity to effectively participate in politics (Cohen et al., 2001). However, again, no prior work has established a link between perceived social class and political self-efficacy.

In Study 3 we manipulated temporary perceptions of social class rank (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; Emery & Le, 2014; Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010) and then examined beliefs in political efficacy and participation. These studies advance our understanding of relationships between social class and political participation because they are the first to assess the causal association between perceptions of social class rank and measures of political involvement—up to this point previous research has relied on correlational evidence to infer that social class causes patterns of political participation (e.g., Cohen et al., 2001), and thus could not completely rule out alternative explanations or third variables. An experimental approach to studying perceptions of social class has the capacity to rule out such alternatives.

In Study 4, we exposed participants to a self-affirmation manipulation before measuring political participation and efficacy. This study is important because it suggests one possible way in which political participation might be boosted among those low in perceived social class. No prior work, to our knowledge, has examined self-affirmation as a potential intervention in this domain.

Study 1: Social Class Rank and Political Participation in Student Elections

In Study 1 we examined the political behavior of University student participants. We expected that lower subjective social class rank would predict reduced participation in a student election information drive. Further, we expected this association to emerge after accounting for material resource measures of social class assessed in terms of parental education and family income (Kraus & Stephens, 2012).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 132 university students from a large Midwestern public university taking part in an introductory social psychology lecture. All students were included in analyses except in specific cases where they had missing data. Participants were each given a consent form and brief information from the instructor of the course. The instructions suggested that the university was attempting to increase involvement in student government by having students participate in an information drive. For this information drive, students were instructed that the psychology department was working with the student government to “increase university-wide involvement in future student government campus activities.” Students provided the researchers with their Email addresses and were instructed that at the bottom of the survey, they would have the opportunity to opt out of the information drive—by checking specific boxes on the survey indicating their preference to not receive emails about student government activities related to “candidates,” “senate activities,” “elections,” “student government meetings,” “opportunities for student involvement,” or “updates on university-wide policy changes.” We counted the number of these checked boxes as our measure of (lack of) political participation ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 2.25$).

In addition to opting out of Email correspondence about student government, participants were asked about their current levels of political participation on campus. Specifically, participants were asked: “How often will you vote in future campus elections?” “How important are campus elections?” “If campus elections were held tomorrow, how likely would you be to vote?” and “How likely are you to look up information on candidates for future campus elections?” Responses were recorded on 6-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The items were highly consistent and were used to create a composite measure of political participation ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.06$, $\alpha = .88$).

As in prior research (Kraus et al., 2009), we assessed perceptions of social class rank using Adler and colleagues' (2000) measure of subjective socioeconomic status. In this version of the measure, participants indicated their position on a 10-rung ladder representing ascending levels of income, education, and occupation status on the University campus ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 2.16$).

Following these measures, participants completed assessments of their family income using an 8-point scale (1) $< \$15,000$, (2) $\$15,001-\$30,000$, (3) $\$30,001-\$45,000$, (4) $\$45,001-\$60,000$, (5) $\$60,001-\$75,000$, (6) $\$75,001-\$100,000$, (7) $\$100,001-\$150,000$, and (8) $> \$150,000$. The median family income of the sample was between $\$75,001$ and $\$100,000$ which is slightly higher than US national median levels (www.census.gov; $M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.88$).

Participant parental education was assessed using three categories: (1) *high school graduation*, (2) *college graduation*, and (3) *post-graduate degree* ($M_{mom} = 1.91$, $SD_{mom} = 0.68$; $M_{dad} = 2.19$, $SD_{dad} = 0.78$). Participants were debriefed about the hypotheses of the study several weeks later, and provided with a summary of the findings from the research during a lecture later that semester.

Results

Examination of correlations between variables of interest revealed a pattern in line with our central hypothesis (see Table 1): Subjective social class rank was significantly negatively correlated with opting out of the information drive—perceptions of upper-class rank were associated with less opting out of the information drive to raise involvement in student government—and positively correlated with political participation. Income and a composite of parental education were unassociated with political participation. Our two measures of political participation were highly correlated, as were the three measures of social class.

To determine the unique influence of subjective social class rank we regressed perceptions of social class rank, income, and parental education on both political participation and opting out behavior in two separate linear regression analyses. For the opting out of political Emails analysis, lower subjective social class rank participants were more likely to opt out of the political information drive than were their upper-class rank counterparts $\beta = -.30$, $t(100) = -2.26$, $p = .03$ —this result also held independently of objective resource measures of social class. In the participation analysis, a similar pattern emerged: lower subjective social class rank participants reported being less likely to participate in future elections relative to their upper-class counterparts $\beta = .48$, $t(101) = 3.84$, $p < .01$, and this result held after accounting for family income and parental education. In both of these regression analyses, education was unrelated to opting out and political participation. In the political participation analysis, after accounting for subjective social class rank, family income became significantly negatively associated with political participation $\beta = -.27$, $t(101) = -2.18$, $p = .03$. This result was unexpected, and the reversal of association with family income is likely a result of the high inter-correlation with subjective social class rank ($r = .67$).

Discussion

In this first study we found initial support for our prediction that perceptions of social class rank are associated with political participation, even after accounting for objective material resource measures of social class. Student government participation may represent an entirely distinct form of government than that of national elections—with different realms of influence and focus. As such, what we have observed in a university context may not extend to society more broadly when considering National elections. With this in mind, Study 2 was designed to assess associations between perceived social class rank and National political participation. As

well, Study 2 advances beyond this work by assessing the proposed mediator of the relationship between social class rank and political participation—perceptions of political self-efficacy (Paulhus, 1983).

Study 2: Social Class Rank, Political Efficacy, and Political Participation

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 662 adults recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk. On average, participants were 32.67 years of age ($SD = 10.96$), and the majority of the sample was male ($n = 385$). Participants were all residents of the United States and self-identified as European American ($n = 552$), African American ($n = 67$), Asian American ($n = 57$), Latino ($n = 48$), Native American ($n = 18$), or listed other as their ethnic background ($n = 17$). Participants were permitted to select more than one ethnic category. The study took approximately five to ten minutes to complete and each participant was compensated \$1 for taking part in the study.

Participants accessed a survey described as an assessment of personality and first filled out demographic information about their social class, ethnic background, gender, and age. Next participants filled out assessments of their political participation behavior and political self-efficacy. Finally, participants filled out measures of personality, were probed for suspicion, debriefed about the hypothesis of the study, and compensated for their participation.

Measures

Perceived and objective social class. We assessed participant education and income as objective material resource measures of social class (Kraus & Stephens, 2012). Perceived social class rank was assessed using the 10-rung ladder measure as in Study 1, ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.74$). Current annual family income was assessed using the same 8-point scale as in Study 1. The

median family income of the sample was between \$30,001 and \$45,000 which is consistent with US national median levels (www.census.gov; $M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.51$). Participant education was also assessed with the same scale as in Study 1 ($M = 1.71$, $SD = 0.66$).

Political participation. Participation in politics was assessed using items regarding national elections and political behaviors. The election participation items were drawn from commonly used and well-cited political attitude surveys (www.gallup.com; Krueger, 2002): For the election participation items, participants answered the following questions: “How often do you vote?” “It is worth taking part in National elections.” “I plan to vote in the upcoming National election.” “If the US Presidential elections were held tomorrow, how likely would you be to vote?” “How important are National elections?” and “I think about National elections a lot.” Participants responded to these items on 6-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*; 6 = *very much*). These items showed high internal consistency, and were averaged to create a composite measure ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .90$).

We also assessed everyday political participation items regarding daily political activities participants might engage in, again adapted from widely used political participation surveys (Krueger, 2002). These items asked participants to answer how likely they would be to: “Contact a candidate or his/her campaign.” “Register preferences in an online political poll.” “Visit a candidate’s website.” “Sign a petition.” “Place a bumper sticker on a car or a sign in your yard.” “Attend a campaign rally.” And “Donate money to a candidate or party.” These items were assessed on 6-point Likert scales (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*), and because they showed high internal consistency, were averaged to create a composite of everyday political participation ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.08$, $\alpha = .89$).

Political efficacy. We used three scales to assess political self-efficacy. Theoretical accounts of political efficacy suggest that the construct reflects both internal capabilities to influence politics (Paulhus, 1983) and the extent individuals believe that external forces render individual political control impossible (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). We selected two scales to test associations with social class rank perceptions for both aspects of political efficacy. The first political efficacy scale by Paulhus (1983), assesses the extent to which individuals feel able to personally influence political and societal institutions, and uses items such as, “With enough effort, we can wipe out political corruption.” And “In the long run we, the voters, are responsible for bad government on a national as well as local level.” The items were assessed on 6-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly agree*, 6 = *strongly agree*) and were averaged because of their high internal consistency ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.73$, $\alpha = .78$). The second political efficacy scale by Craig and colleagues (1990) assesses the extent that individuals feel their political participation is constrained by external forces using items such as “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.” and “There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does.” The items were assessed on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly agree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and were averaged because of their high internal consistency such that higher scores indicate greater efficacy ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .85$). The third measure was a single item general assessment of participants’ perceived political influence relative to average Americans. It was created for this study and was assessed on a 19-point percentile scale (5% = *way below average*, 95% = *way above average*; $M = 41.26$, $SD = 17.66$). These three separate scales correlated with each other and were thus standardized and averaged to create an overall index of political efficacy ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.80$, $\alpha = .72$). We also examined

unique associations of each of the specific facets of political efficacy in our correlational analyses.

We wanted to ensure that the relationships between perceived social class and political participation and efficacy were not somehow driven by political ideology. Therefore, we measured political ideology with two items: Participants were asked to indicate the extent their political beliefs were more liberal or conservative with respect to social ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.66$) or economic policy ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.74$) using 7-point Likert scales (1 = *very conservative*, 7 = *very liberal*). These scales were highly correlated ($r = .62$), and so we computed an overall composite indicating political ideology.

Results

Correlations between key variables are displayed in Table 2. As expected, all measures of social class were moderately inter-correlated—with subjective social class rank moderately positively associated with annual income and educational attainment. Aligning with our predictions, perceptions of social class rank were significantly positively correlated with election and everyday political participation and all three measures of political efficacy. As well, income and educational attainment were positively associated with both measures of political participation and with the single item measure of political efficacy. Income and education were uncorrelated with internal and external political efficacy scales. Liberalism was associated with lower subjective social class and lower income, as well as increased everyday political participation.

We next sought to determine if the relationship between perceived social class rank and political participation and efficacy held after accounting for objective material resource measures of social class and political ideology. For these analyses we used a single metric of political

efficacy and of participation, created from averaging each scale into a single construct. For political participation, we used a linear regression analysis predicting overall political participation with perceived social class rank, income, education, and political ideology. The analysis showed results consistent with our first hypothesis: Perceptions of social class rank were significantly positively associated with political participation $\beta = .10$, $t(612) = 2.09$, $p = .04$, even after accounting for income, education, and political ideology. In the analysis, educational attainment $\beta = .12$, $t(612) = 2.87$, $p < .01$, and liberalism $\beta = .10$, $t(612) = 2.59$, $p = .01$, were both positively associated with political participation whereas income $\beta = .07$, $t(612) = 1.47$, $p = .14$, was not.

When conducting the same analysis for our overall metric of political efficacy, results supported our second hypothesis: Specifically, perceptions of social class rank were significantly positively associated with political efficacy $\beta = .27$, $t(612) = 5.67$, $p < .01$, after controlling for income, education, and political ideology. Income $\beta = -.04$, *ns*, education $\beta = -.02$, *ns*, and political ideology $\beta = .05$, *ns*, were unrelated to political efficacy in this analysis.

For our third hypothesis, we predicted that political efficacy would account for the relationship between perceptions of social class rank and political participation. To test this prediction, we conducted a mediation path analysis with perceptions of social class rank as the independent variable, overall political participation as the outcome variable, and political efficacy as the mediator (see Figure 1). As in the regression analyses, we controlled for political ideology and objective material resource measures of social class. In the mediation path analysis, the originally significant relationship between social class rank perceptions and political participation $\beta = .10$, $t(612) = 2.09$, $p = .04$, was rendered non-significant $\beta = -.04$, $t(611) = -0.96$, *ns*, after accounting for our mediator—political efficacy—which was significantly

associated with perceived social class rank $\beta = .27$, $t(612) = 5.67$, $p < .01$, and political participation $\beta = .52$, $t(611) = 14.93$, $p < .01$. A bootstrapping procedure using 2,000 re-samples revealed a positive indirect effect of perceived social class on political participation through political efficacy $CI\ 95\% [.05, .12]$ (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; 2008). This indirect effect provides correlational evidence in support of our third hypothesis—that the association between perceived social class rank and political participation would be explained, in part, by beliefs in one's political efficacy.¹

Discussion

The results of Study 2 provide correlational evidence in support of our first three hypotheses: Specifically, people who perceived their social class as lower relative to others participated less in politics and reported reduced political efficacy relative to their counterparts who perceived themselves as upper-class in rank. Importantly, these effects emerged after accounting for objective material resource measures of social class and political ideology. As well, political efficacy statistically accounted for the association between perceptions of social class and political participation. Therefore, individuals lower in perceived social class participated less politically in part because they felt less efficacious in the political sphere.

Up to this point our research has been entirely correlational, raising the possibility that unaccounted for third variables explain associations between perceptions of social class and both political participation and efficacy. To take steps toward ruling out these alternative explanations, Study 3 employed a momentary manipulation of social class rank from prior research (Emery & Le, 2014; Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011). Following this manipulation, participants filled out measures of political participation and political self-efficacy as in Study 2.

Studies 3: Manipulated Social Class Rank and Political Participation

In Study 3, we used an experimental approach to demonstrate the causal role of perceived social class rank on political participation and political efficacy. Experimental approaches to the study of social class (see also, Emery & Le, 2014; Kraus & Mendes, 2014; Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011) such as this are crucial to determine causal relationships between social class rank perceptions and political participation, given that perceptions of social class rank are correlated with a number of plausible alternative explanatory variables (e.g., neighborhood effects, objective social class, other status characteristics). Study 3 continues this experimental approach by manipulating temporary perceptions of social class rank in a paradigm in which participants compare themselves to someone above or below them in the social class hierarchy.

Method

Participants

Participants were 403 adults recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk. On average, participants were 32.35 years of age ($SD = 10.07$), and the majority of the sample was male ($n = 219$). Participants were all residents of the United States and self-identified as European American ($n = 314$), African American ($n = 18$), Asian American ($n = 28$), Latino ($n = 31$), Native American ($n = 9$), or listed other as their ethnic background ($n = 5$). Participants were permitted to select more than one ethnic category. The study took approximately five to ten minutes to complete and each participant was compensated \$1 for taking part in the study.

Procedure

Participants accessed the survey online and filled out demographic information about themselves, including measures of objective social class—assessed as in Study 1. Following these survey measures, participants' social class rank was manipulated in a procedure adapted

from prior research (e.g., Kraus et al., 2010). In this manipulation, participants were presented with a ladder with 10 rungs and were instructed to “think of the ladder above as representing where people stand in the United States” (see Adler et al., 2000). Participants were then assigned to either a low or high social class rank position, based on the following instructions: “Now, please compare yourself to the people at the very bottom (top) of the ladder. These are people who are the worst (best) off—those who have the least (most) money, least (most) education, and the least (most) respected jobs. In particular, we’d like you to think about how you are different from these people in terms of your own income, educational history, and job status. Where would you place yourself on this ladder relative to these people at the very bottom (top)?”

After the imagined interaction, participants were instructed to place themselves on the ladder relative to the person at the very top or bottom (1 = *bottom rung*, 10 = *top rung*; $M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.76$). To heighten the salience of the manipulated social class rank of the imagined interaction partner, participants then imagined themselves “in a getting acquainted interaction with one of the people you just thought about from the ladder above.” In particular, participants were instructed to “think about how the differences between you might impact what you would talk about, how the interaction is likely to go, and what you and the other person might say to each other.”

Following this procedure, participants filled out the external constraints on politics scale (Craig et al., 1990), the political self-efficacy scale (Paulhus, 1983), and four items from the political participation in National elections items used in Study 2 (the included items were “How often will you vote in the future?,” “It is worth it to take part in National elections,” “I plan to vote in the upcoming National election,” and “I think about the upcoming National election a lot.”). We shortened this scale and removed the everyday political behaviors scale from the prior

study for brevity. The external political constraints scale ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.19$, $\alpha = .86$), the political self-efficacy scale ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.86$, $\alpha = .81$), and political participation scales ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.29$, $\alpha = .90$) all showed high internal consistency as in the prior studies. As in Study 2, we created an overall standardized composite of political self-efficacy based on the high correlation between the two efficacy scales ($M = 0.01$, $SD = 0.93$, $r = .72$).

Results

As in prior research (Kraus et al., 2010), we sought to determine if our manipulation was successful in shifting participants' momentary perceptions of their social class rank. To that end, we examined participant responses on the 10-rung ladder measure of social class rank in the low and high rank conditions. Results confirmed our expectations: Low-rank participants, imagining an interaction with someone at the top of the social class hierarchy, reported being lower in social class rank ($M = 4.40$) than did high-rank participants who imagined an interaction with someone at the bottom of the hierarchy ($M = 5.39$), $t(396) = 5.87$, $p < .01$.

For our first hypothesis, we expected that manipulated perceived lower-class rank would decrease political participation relative to perceived upper-class rank. The data supported our prediction: Manipulated lower-class rank participants ($M = 4.20$) were less likely to participate in politics than were their upper-class rank counterparts ($M = 4.47$), $t(400) = 2.11$, $p = .04$ (see Figure 2, left panel).

For our second prediction, we expected that manipulated lower-class rank participants would report lower political self-efficacy relative to manipulated perceived upper-class participants. This finding emerged for the composite of the two political self-efficacy scales $t(397) = 2.21$, $p = .03$ (see Figure 2, right panel), with manipulated lower perceived social class participants reporting lower political efficacy than their manipulated upper perceived social class

counterparts. The same pattern also emerged for the political self-efficacy scale (Paulhus, 1983) $t(397) = 2.47, p = .01$, with manipulated lower perceived social class participants ($M = 3.78$) reporting reduced political self-efficacy than perceived upper-class participants ($M = 3.97$). A significant perceived social class difference did not emerge for the external constraints self-efficacy scale (Craig et al., 1990) $t(390) = 1.50, p = .13$, although the means were in the predicted direction with lower perceived social class participants ($M = 3.35$) reporting less political self-efficacy than their perceived upper-class counterparts ($M = 3.56$). As in the two prior studies, controlling for income and educational attainment did not account for the significant association between the perceived social class manipulation and political participation $\beta = .10, t(375) = 2.02, p = .04$, or political self-efficacy $\beta = .12, t(375) = 2.38, p = .02$.

As in Study 2, overall political self-efficacy mediated the association between (manipulated) perceived social class and political participation. In the path analysis, the originally significant relationship between manipulated social class rank and political participation $\beta = .10, t(397) = 2.02, p = .04$, became non-significant $\beta = .05, t(396) = 1.07, p = .28$, when accounting for the associations between the manipulation and political self-efficacy $\beta = .10, t(397) = 2.21, p = .03$, and the association between political self-efficacy and participation $\beta = .49, t(396) = 11.18, p < .01$. The 95% confidence interval of the estimated indirect effect of manipulated perceived social class on political participation through political self-efficacy did not include zero $\{.01, .14\}$, indicating a significant indirect effect.

Discussion

Study 3 provides initial causal evidence for our first two hypotheses: Manipulated perceived lower-class individuals reported lower political participation and reduced political self-efficacy relative to perceived upper-class participants. Importantly, this study is the first to test

associations between social class and political participation using experimental paradigms that manipulate the perceived class construct—providing the first evidence, in our estimation, of causal links between perceived social class and beliefs about effective participation in politics.

Up to this point, we have shown evidence suggesting that perceptions of lower social class rank reduce political participation, in part because these perceptions elicit beliefs that one is less capable and effective at influencing politics. Importantly, we have demonstrated these effects with converging findings using correlational designs controlling for objective resource measures of social class and experimental approaches that momentarily manipulate perceptions of social class. In Study 4, we extend this work by using a self-affirmation intervention designed to enhance the political efficacy of individuals who perceive themselves as lower in the social class hierarchy.

Study 4: Self-Affirmation Reduces Perceived Social Class Disparities in Political Participation and Efficacy

In our theoretical model, we expect that perceptions of lower social class rank elicit reduced political participation because they reduce perceptions of political self-efficacy—beliefs that an individual can personally control social and political institutions. Given this theoretical prediction, it stands to reason that affirming the self by recalling one's own positive and central qualities might allay efficacy concerns experienced by lower-class rank individuals, and as a result, reduce perceived social class disparities in political participation (see Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). We tested this prediction in Study 4.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 596 adults recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk. On average, participants were 33.83 years of age ($SD = 11.21$), and the sample was equally balanced in terms of men ($n = 290$) and women ($n = 294$). Participants were all residents of the United States and self-identified as European American ($n = 446$), African American ($n = 56$), Asian American ($n = 48$), Latino ($n = 46$), Native American ($n = 19$), or listed other as their ethnic background ($n = 10$). Participants were permitted to select more than one ethnic category. The study took approximately five to ten minutes to complete and each participant was compensated \$1 for taking part in the study.

Procedure

Participants accessed a survey about their personality and political beliefs. Participants were then assigned to one of three experimental conditions—which were designed based on a review of procedures used to affirm the self (McQueen & Klein, 2006): In the non-political control condition, participants recalled all the things that had eaten or drank in the last 48 hours. In the political control condition, participants were exposed to a message from a political scientist stressing the importance of political participation, followed by a prompt to recall all the things they had ate or drank in the last 48 hours. We included this condition to test an explanatory account that is counter to our own theorizing: Prior theoretical perspectives suggest that lower-class individuals lack interest in politics (e.g., McDill & Ridley, 1962; Scott & Acock, 1979)—thus, if associations between social class and political participation were due to a lack of interest, exposure to beliefs about the importance of politics should theoretically increase political participation. Conversely, the self-affirmation literature suggests that exposure to a low efficacy domain engenders self-threat that might dampen political participation and efficacy (Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

In the affirmation condition, participants were exposed to the political science message about political participation, followed by a prompt to identify one of their positive and central personal attributes from the following list: “athletics, artistic skills, creativity, closeness and intimacy, spontaneity, honesty, work ethic, or physical attractiveness.” After nominating this attribute, participants were asked to write about why they think this attribute is such a positive aspect of their self-concept. This procedure closely follows affirmation manipulation procedures used in prior research—a person is exposed to a threat to the self in the relevant (political) domain, followed by an opportunity to affirm one positive aspect of the self (McQueen & Klein, 2006).

Following the self-affirmation manipulation, participants completed the same election political participation measure ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.27$) as in Studies 2 and 3—only this measure was tailored slightly so that responses reflected how participants felt about participating in National elections at this moment. Participants also filled out the same single item ($M = 42.71$, $SD = 17.60$), internal ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.83$), and external ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.24$) measures of political efficacy as in Study 2. Scores on the political efficacy measures were standardized and averaged to create a composite of political efficacy ($M = -0.00$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = .79$). Participant subjective social class rank ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.69$), income ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.52$), educational attainment ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 0.63$) and political ideology ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.49$) were assessed using the same scales as in the prior studies.

Results

Of the participants in the affirmation condition, participants were most likely to write about honesty ($n = 58$), work ethic ($n = 48$), and creativity ($n = 40$), and least likely to write

about spontaneity ($n = 5$) or physical attractiveness ($n = 1$). There were no social class differences in terms of the types of attributes chosen, $F_s < 1.3$, *ns*.

We conducted two linear regression analyses predicting political participation and political efficacy respectively. Our predictor variables included subjective social class rank, political ideology, income, education, two contrast codes for our three experimental conditions, and interactions between subjective social class rank and the two contrasts. The first contrast examined the effect of the affirmation condition (coded as “2”) relative to the other two control conditions (coded as “-1”), and the second contrast examined the relative effect of the non-political control condition (coded as “1”) to the political control condition (coded as “-1”) with the affirmation condition in between (coded as “0”) (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). As in Study 2, education, income, and political ideology were entered as covariates to examine the unique influence of social class rank perceptions on political participation.

In the analysis predicting political participation, perceptions of social class rank emerged as a significant positive predictor $\beta = .12$, $t(549) = 2.41$, $p = .02$ —this finding aligns with the findings from our previous studies showing that lower perceived social class rank reduces political participation independent of objective measures of social class. Importantly, and consistent with our Study 4 hypothesis, though the contrast comparing affirmation condition to the two control conditions did not relate to political participation $\beta = -.03$, $t(549) = -0.63$, *ns*, a significant interaction emerged with this contrast and perceived social class rank $\beta = -.10$, $t(549) = -2.42$, $p = .02$. This interaction is visualized in top panel of Figure 3: For the two control conditions a significant positive association between perceived social class rank and political participation emerged $\beta = .14$, $t(549) = 4.22$, $p < .01$. However, in the affirmation condition this relationship became non-significant $\beta = -.02$, $t(549) = -0.53$, *ns*. This pattern of results aligns

with our expectation that affirming the self would reduce perceived social class disparities in political participation.

The analysis also observed a significant positive association with liberalism and political participation $\beta = .11$, $t(549) = 2.61$, $p < .01$ —consistent with the correlational evidence observed in Study 2. The second contrast comparing the control conditions $\beta = .03$, $t(549) = 0.67$, *ns*, the interaction between that contrast and perceived social class rank $\beta = .02$, $t(549) = 0.40$, *ns*, income $\beta = .09$, $t(549) = 1.83$, $p = .07$, and educational attainment $\beta = .09$, $t(549) = 1.92$, $p = .06$ were all non-significantly related to political participation in the model. This suggests that the political control condition, in which participants read how important it was to participate politically, did not mitigate the impact of perceived social class on political participation.

The analysis predicting political efficacy revealed a similar pattern (see Figure 3, bottom panel): Perceptions of social class rank emerged as a significant positive predictor $\beta = .15$, $t(552) = 3.18$, $p < .01$ —this finding aligns with our previous studies showing that lower perceived social class rank reduces political efficacy independent of objective measures of social class. Importantly, and consistent with our hypothesis, though the contrast comparing affirmation condition to the two control conditions did not relate to political efficacy $\beta = .01$, $t(552) = 0.17$, *ns*, a significant interaction emerged with this contrast and perceived social class rank $\beta = -.14$, $t(552) = -3.39$, $p < .01$. Examining the simple slopes reveals a pattern that is consistent with our predictions: In the control conditions a significant positive association between perceived social class rank and political efficacy is observed $\beta = .13$, $t(552) = 4.03$, $p < .01$. In the affirmation condition, the relationship between perceived social class rank and political efficacy is rendered non-significant $\beta = -.02$, $t(552) = -0.70$, *ns*.

The analysis also observed a significant positive association with income and political efficacy $\beta = .16$, $t(552) = 3.26$, $p < .01$ —consistent with some of the correlational evidence observed in Study 2. The second contrast comparing the control conditions $\beta = .02$, $t(552) = 0.39$, *ns*, the interaction between that contrast and perceived social class rank $\beta = -.04$, $t(552) = -0.86$, *ns*, political ideology $\beta = .06$, $t(552) = 1.48$, $p = .14$, and educational attainment $\beta = .03$, $t(552) = 0.60$, *ns*, were all non-significantly related to political participation in the model. Reading information about the importance of political participation did not mitigate the impact of perceived social class on political efficacy.

Discussion

The results of Study 4 provide initial support for an intervention aimed at reducing perceived social class disparities in political participation: Participants who were lower in perceived social class tended to participate equally and feel as effective as upper-class rank participants following a task in which they affirmed a positive personal attribute. This pattern emerged after accounting for objective material resource measures of social class and political ideology. Moreover, the findings provide additional support for our overall theoretical model of relationships between social class, political efficacy, and participation in politics.

Interestingly, a closer examination of Figure 3 suggests that perceived upper-class rank participants showed decreases in political participation and efficacy in the affirmation, relative to the control, condition. We interpret this unexpected pattern of results with caution, but suggest that self-affirmation was unlikely to boost political participation for upper-class rank individuals since these individuals already feel effective in navigating politics. That affirmation reduced participation and efficacy among upper-class individuals potentially reflects that the affirmation increased a focus on non-political attributes of the self following the manipulation. More

research is necessary to better understand this unexpected finding and its implications for political participation.

Finally, we did not observe a significant main effect of affirmation condition on political participation or efficacy measures. We reason that this main effect did not emerge because only certain members of society (i.e., those from lower perceived social class positions) would feel self threat from assessing their political habits. Thus, the affirmation condition was unlikely to boost participation and efficacy for all participants, just those threatened by the political domain.

General Discussion

All Americans, regardless of their position in society, have opportunities to engage in political processes. Despite these opportunities, large representative surveys continue to reveal a lack of representation in politics among those from the bottom of the social class hierarchy (e.g., Gelman, 2009; Krosnick, 1991; Lijphart, 1997). Social scientists have proposed ways to reduce this inequality in politics, and up to this point these proposals have typically involved addressing resource disparities between relatively upper- and lower-class individuals. In this research, we suggest that psychological perceptions of one's own social class position in society are also causal in reducing political participation among the relatively lower in social class because such perceptions reduce beliefs that the individual has the capacity to personally control social and political institutions.

Across four studies, results highlighted the importance of these psychological factors: In Studies 1 and 2, perceptions of lower-class rank were associated with reduced political participation in elections and everyday political behaviors (e.g., signing a petition, opting to receive Emailed information about government activities), and reduced political self-efficacy. Study 3 provided some initial causal evidence of the link between perceived social class rank,

political participation, and efficacy—momentary fluctuations in class rank perceptions elicited corresponding changes in perceived political participation and political self-efficacy. Lastly, Study 4 provided some initial evidence indicating that self-affirmation can reduce political inequality: Thinking of positive self-qualities after exposure to a political message reduced disparities in political participation between perceived lower- and upper-class individuals. Across studies, the effect of perceptions of social class rank on political participation could not be accounted for by individual differences in objective material resources or political ideology.

Importantly, the findings from the present investigation suggest that resource scarcity is not the sole cause of lack of political participation among the lower-class members of society—As the results from Study 3 suggest, psychological perceptions of one's lower position in the class hierarchy are also causal in eliciting beliefs that one cannot influence political institutions. Given that interventions aimed at increasing voter turnout have focused primarily on solving problems of scarcity—through decreasing voter restrictions or increasing political knowledge (Lijphart, 1997)—the current findings suggest that addressing the psychological determinants of political participation remains a promising area of future research and intervention.

In this regard the data from Study 4, suggesting that self-affirmation reduces lower perceived social class disparities in political participation and political efficacy, represents a particularly promising candidate for future intervention work: Would similar interventions, that affirm the positive qualities of those with lower perceived social class be effective in enhancing political participation around National elections and for emerging political movements? As this was only a single study, additional work in this area, replicating and extending these initial findings, is warranted prior to any large scale shift in social policy.

Caveats and Future Directions

We believe this work has promise to advance research on voter inequality in many ways, but there are also several limitations to consider: First, participants in these studies were recruited using convenience sampling from a public university and from a population of online survey workers. As such, it is unclear to the extent that these data represent the larger population of politically active individuals in the United States and abroad. Future research on large representative samples is warranted in this area. In addition, more experimental work would also improve our capacity to interpret the theoretical boundary conditions of the observed pattern of results. For instance, does perceived social class rank predict political participation in very poor or very rich communities—or does scarcity and wealth constrain the influence of rank perceptions in these populations? Theoretically, perceptions of social class rank should matter even in these extreme groups (see Kraus & Callaghan, 2014), but research is necessary to test this prediction.

Across studies we have used consistent measures of political participation and efficacy, which helps us gain confidence about the direct replicability of the findings in the present research. Of course, it will be important for future research to extend these findings to new operationalizations of our constructs. In particular, future research would do well to examine a wide array of political behaviors as they shift based on perceived social class rank. As the findings in this work suggest, we would expect lower perceived social class to reduce political behavior across outcomes, including voting behavior, social protest, and campaign volunteerism.

This research is similar to other studies examining social class, which suggest that beliefs about the controllability of the social world are fundamental to how lower- and upper-class individuals see the world and relate to others (for a review, see Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015; Kraus et al., 2012). That control beliefs promote political participation suggests that

fostering social power amongst those of relatively lower-class backgrounds, who typically report lower levels of social power relative to their upper-class counterparts, might also be a promising intervention to reduce voter inequality in society.

From a theoretical perspective, this work stands in contrast to theories of class conflict, which predict that working class individuals will become frustrated with their unfair economic conditions, and eventually engage in a forceful rebellion against the ruling class (Marx & Engels, 1848). Instead, this research suggests one possible means by which lower-class individuals become less likely to act forcefully to protect their personal and political interests—through the experience of reduced political self-efficacy that accompanies perceptions of lower-class rank in society relative to others. In this fashion, the evidence aligns with research on system justification theory (Kay & Friesen, 2011; Kay et al., 2008; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002). This work adds to this literature by suggesting that perceptions of social class rank and accompanying beliefs in political self-efficacy lead lower-class members of society to decreased political participation, and by implication, more tacit acceptance of status quo.

People of different cultural backgrounds have considerably different ways of thinking about the self, and so it is interesting to speculate about how observed differences in the cultural contexts of relatively upper- and lower-class individuals shape political participation and efficacy (Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2007). Several prior studies indicate that whereas relatively upper-class individuals tend to behave and perceive the world as separate from the self, relatively lower-class individuals tend to view the self as tied to others and the external environment (e.g., Stephens et al., 2007). These differences in how the self is culturally defined, in terms of its connection to the external context and other individuals, might change the very meaning of

political participation and efficacy. For instance, relatively lower-class rank individuals might report lower levels of political self-efficacy, not because they perceive themselves as having low influence, but instead, because they view influence in politics as a uniquely collective action accomplished through cooperation and group effort (for a similar cultural analysis, see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This cultural analysis suggests an alternative interpretation to our findings: Namely, perceptions of lower-class rank lead individuals to *report* lower political self-efficacy, only as it is defined in independent cultural contexts. Aligning with this cultural perspective, future research would benefit from examining group-based collective actions in political contexts that are consistent with the cultural backgrounds of relatively lower-class individuals.

In this research, we have shown that perceptions of social class rank shape political participation and efficacy. In this way, perceptions of social class rank create an inequality of politics that has the potential to directly threaten the democratic principles that support society. Enhancing political participation among those from the bottom of the class hierarchy represents an intriguing line of future research, one with the potential promise to reduce voter inequality in society.

References

- Adler, N. E., Boyce, T., Chesney, M. A., Cohen, S., Folkman, S., Kahn, R. L., & Syme, S. L. (1994). Socioeconomic status and health: The challenge of the gradient. *American Psychologist, 49*, 15-24.
- Adler, N. E., Epel, E. S., Castellazzo, G., & Ickovics, J. R. (2000). Relationship of subjective and objective social status with psychological and physiological functioning: Preliminary data in healthy, White women. *Health Psychology, 19*(6), 586.
- Baldwin, M. W. (1992). Relational schemas and the processing of social information. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*(3), 461.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*(6), 1173.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497.
- Bosson, J. K., & Swann, W. B. (1999). Self-liking, self-competence, and the quest for self-verification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25*(10), 1230-1241.
- Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review, 89*(02), 271-294.
- Brown-Iannuzzi, J. L., Lundberg, K. B., Kay, A. C., & Payne, B. K. (2015). Subjective Status Shapes Political Preferences. *Psychological science, 26*(1), 15-26.
- Cohen, A., Vigoda, E., & Samorly, A. (2001). Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Personal-Psychological Variables on the Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Political Participation: A Structural Equations Framework. *Political Psychology, 22*(4), 727-757.

- Cohen, P., Cohen, J., West, S., & Aiken, L. (2003). *Applied Multiple Regression/Correlation for the Behavioral Sciences*, 3rd edn. Mahwah, New Jersey: L.
- Cohen, S., Alper, C. M., Doyle, W. J., Adler, N., Treanor, J. J., & Turner, R. B. (2008). Objective and subjective socioeconomic status and susceptibility to the common cold. *Health Psychology, 27*(2), 268.
- Corning, A. F., & Myers, D. J. (2002). Individual orientation toward engagement in social action. *Political Psychology, 23*(4), 703-729.
- Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior, 12*(3), 289-314.
- Domhoff, G. W. (1998). *Who rules America? Power and politics in the year 2000*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Dubois, D., Rucker, D. D., & Galinsky, A. D. (2015). Social class, power, and selfishness: When and why upper and lower class individuals behave unethically. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 108*(3), 436.
- Emery, L. F., & Le, B. (2014). Imagining the White Picket Fence Social Class, Future Plans, and Romantic Relationship Quality. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5*(6), 653-661.
- Gelman, A. (2009). *Red state, blue state, rich state, poor state: why Americans vote the way they do*. Princeton University Press.
- Gosling, S. D., Rentfrow, P. J., & Swann Jr, W. B. (2003). A very brief measure of the Big-Five personality domains. *Journal of Research in Personality, 37*(6), 504-528.
- James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology* (Vol. 1). *New York: Holt*.

- Johnson, S. E., Richeson, J. A., & Finkel, E. J. (2011). Middle class and marginal? Socioeconomic status, stigma, and self-regulation at an elite university. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 100*(5), 838.
- Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 33*(1), 1-27.
- Jost, J. T., Pelham, B. W., & Carvallo, M. R. (2002). Non-conscious forms of system justification: Implicit and behavioral preferences for higher status groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38*(6), 586-602.
- Kay, A. C., & Friesen, J. (2011). On Social Stability and Social Change Understanding When System Justification Does and Does Not Occur. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*(6), 360-364.
- Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., Napier, J. L., Callan, M. J., & Laurin, K. (2008). God and the government: testing a compensatory control mechanism for the support of external systems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*(1), 18.
- Keltner, D., & Buswell, B. N. (1997). Embarrassment: its distinct form and appeasement functions. *Psychological bulletin, 122*(3), 250-267.
- Kopp, M., Skrabski, Á., Réthelyi, J., Kawachi, I., & Adler, N. E. (2004). Self-rated health, subjective social status, and middle-aged mortality in a changing society. *Behavioral Medicine, 30*(2), 65-72.
- Kraus, M. W., & Callaghan, B. (2014). Noblesse oblige? Social status and economic inequality maintenance among politicians. *PloS one, 9*(1), e85293.
- Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., & Keltner, D. (2010). Social class, contextualism, and empathic accuracy. *Psychological Science, 21*(11), 1716-1723.

- Kraus, M. W., Horberg, E. J., Goetz, J. L., & Keltner, D. (2011). Social class rank, threat vigilance, and hostile reactivity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(10), 1376-1388.
- Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2013). Social class rank, essentialism, and punitive judgment. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 105(2), 247.
- Kraus, M. W., & Mendes, W. B. (2014). Sartorial symbols of social class elicit class-consistent behavioral and physiological responses: A dyadic approach. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(6), 2330.
- Kraus, M. W., & Park, J. W. (2014). The undervalued self: social class and self-evaluation. *Frontiers in psychology*, 5.
- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., & Keltner, D. (2009). Social class, sense of control, and social explanation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(6), 992.
- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., Mendoza-Denton, R., Rheinschmidt, M. L., & Keltner, D. (2012). Social class, solipsism, and contextualism: How the rich are different from the poor. *Psychological Review*, 119(3), 546.
- Kraus, M. W., & Stephens, N. M. (2012). A road map for an emerging psychology of social class. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(9), 642-656.
- Kraus, M. W., Tan, J. J., & Tannenbaum, M. B. (2013). The social ladder: A rank-based perspective on social class. *Psychological Inquiry*, 24(2), 81-96.
- Krosnick, J. A. (1991). The stability of political preferences: Comparisons of symbolic and nonsymbolic attitudes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 547-576.
- Krueger, B. S. (2002). Assessing the Potential of Internet Political Participation in the United States A Resource Approach. *American Politics Research*, 30(5), 476-498.

- Lijphart, A. (1997). Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1996. *American political science review*, 91(01), 1-14.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological review*, 98(2), 224.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). 1998. *The Communist Manifesto*.
- Mc Dill, E. L., & Ridley, J. C. (1962). Status, anomia, political alienation, and political participation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 205-213.
- McQueen, A., & Klein, W. M. (2006). Experimental manipulations of self-affirmation: A systematic review. *Self and Identity*, 5(4), 289-354.
- Norton, M. I., & Ariely, D. (2011). Building a better America—One wealth quintile at a time. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(1), 9-12.
- Oakes, J. M., & Rossi, P. H. (2003). The measurement of SES in health research: current practice and steps toward a new approach. *Social science & medicine*, 56(4), 769-784.
- Paulhus, D. (1983). Sphere-specific measures of perceived control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44(6), 1253.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 36(4), 717-731.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior research methods*, 40(3), 879-891.

- Sedikides, C., & Gregg, A. P. (2008). Self-enhancement: Food for thought. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(2), 102-116.
- Scott, W. J., & Acock, A. C. (1979). Socioeconomic status, unemployment experience, and political participation: A disentangling of main and interaction effects. *Political Behavior*, 1(4), 361-381.
- Shah, J. (2003). Automatic for the people: how representations of significant others implicitly affect goal pursuit. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 84(4), 661-672.
- Sherman, D. K., & Cohen, G. L. (2006). The psychology of self-defense: Self-affirmation theory. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 38, 183-242.
- Snibbe, A. C., & Markus, H. R. (2005). You can't always get what you want: educational attainment, agency, and choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(4), 703.
- Steele, C. M. (1988). The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 21, 261-302.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(5), 797.
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2012). Social class disparities in health and education: Reducing inequality by applying a sociocultural self model of behavior. *Psychological Review*, 119(4), 723.
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Townsend, S. S. (2007). Choice as an act of meaning: the case of social class. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(5), 814.
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, 331(6023), 1447-1451.

- Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. E. (2006). Income inequality and population health: a review and explanation of the evidence. *Social science & medicine*, 62(7), 1768-1784.
- Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. E. (2007). The problems of relative deprivation: why some societies do better than others. *Social science & medicine*, 65(9), 1965-1978.
- Whitson, J. A., & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception. *Science*, 322(5898), 115-117.
- Wright, C. E., & Steptoe, A. (2005). Subjective socioeconomic position, gender and cortisol responses to waking in an elderly population. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 30(6), 582-590.

Footnotes

¹ Because Study 2 is correlational, we cannot definitively claim that political efficacy leads to more political participation and not the reverse. However, we did perform a test on the reverse mediation model to determine if political participation mediates efficacy beliefs—in this model, participating in politics makes people feel more effective at enacting political change. In this reverse model the indirect effect included zero CI95% [-.001, .047] indicating a non-significant relationship between perceptions of social class rank on political efficacy through political participation. Moreover, the relationship between political efficacy and perceived social class rank remained significant even after accounting for participation $t(611) = 5.34, p < .01$.

Table 1. Correlations between perceived social class rank, voting participation, and the extent participants opted out of the political outreach campaign (Study 1)

	Voting participation	Opting out	Social class rank	Income
Voting participation	—			
Opting out	-.49*	—		
Social class rank	.32*	-.24*	—	
Family income	.09	-.06	.67*	—
Parent education	.16*	-.16	.38*	.32*

The asterisk indicates $p < .05$

Table 2. Correlations between perceived social class rank, voting and everyday political participation, political efficacy, income, education, and political ideology (Study 2)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Social class rank	—							
2. Voting participation	.17*	—						
3. Everyday participation	.13*	.59*	—					
4. Efficacy (single item)	.32*	.33*	.32*	—				
5. Efficacy (internal)	.08*	.37*	.39*	.32*	—			
6. Efficacy (external)	.16*	.49*	.38*	.32*	.73*	—		
7. Income	.53*	.15*	.09*	.14*	.01	.08	—	
8. Education	.29*	.18*	.13*	.10*	-.03	.03	.24*	—
9. Political ideology	-.14*	.05	.12*	.00	.06	-.01	-.08*	.05

The asterisk indicates $p < .05$

Figure 1. Path analysis showing the relationships between perceptions of social class rank, political efficacy, and political participation (Study 2). The top panel shows the association between perceptions of social class rank and political participation. The bottom panel shows the association between perceptions of social class rank and political participation, through political efficacy. Numbers indicate standardized beta coefficients and the analysis controls for educational attainment, income, and political ideology. Asterisks indicates that $p < .05$.

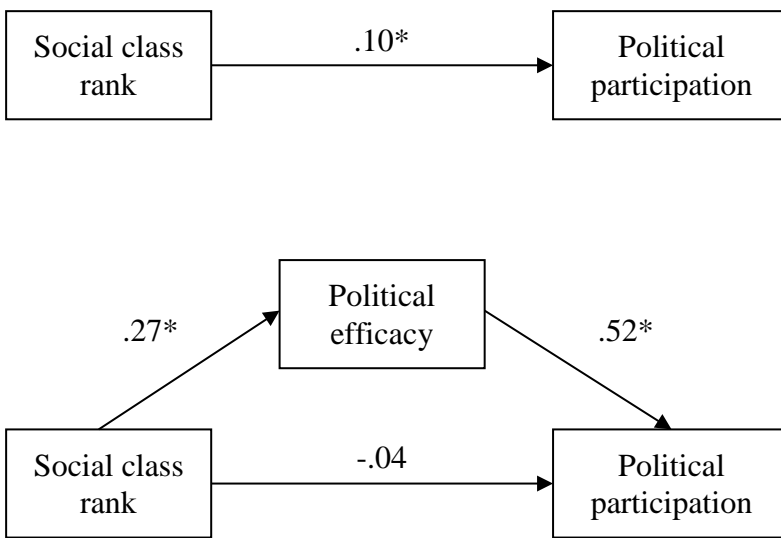


Figure 2. The influence of manipulated perceived social class rank on political participation in National elections (left panel) and overall political self-efficacy (right panel). Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

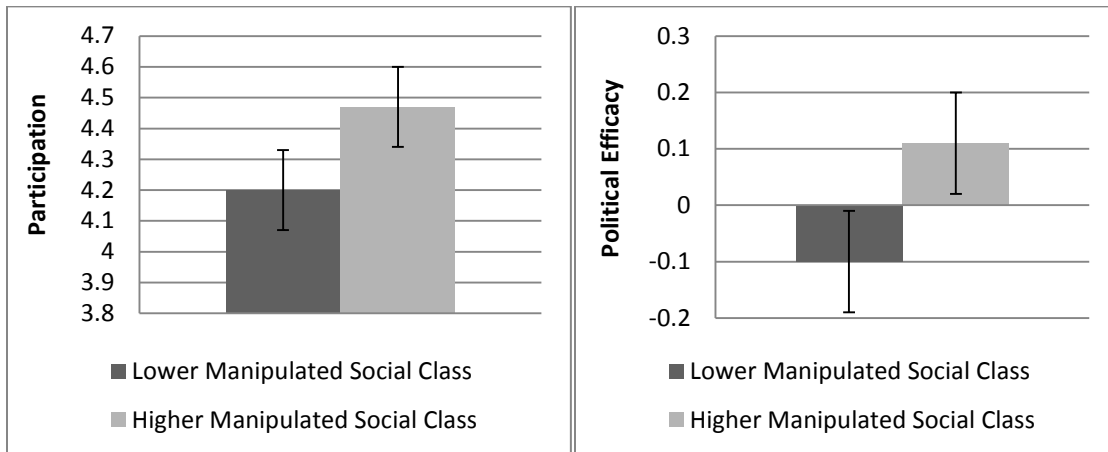


Figure 3. The results from Study 4 showing the interaction between perceived social class rank and the contrast comparing the affirmation condition to the control conditions predicting political participation (top panel) and political efficacy (bottom panel). Points are plotted at one standard deviation above and below the mean of perceived social class rank. The analysis controls for a contrast comparing the two control conditions and its interaction with perceived social class rank, along with political ideology, educational attainment, and income. Error bars indicate standard errors around the mean.

