

# Is Civic Engagement Linked to Discrimination and Anti-racism Activism Among Diverse Young Adults?

Maura Shramko, M.P.P. & Andrea J. Romero, Ph.D.,  
 Family Studies and Human Development, The University of Arizona

## Literature Review

- **Civic engagement** is protective, and promotes positive youth development (Sherrod, 2015). Civic behaviors among youth commonly include electoral activities, volunteerism, and exercising their political voice (Keeter et al., 2002).
- Another aspect of civic behavior is **youth activism**, which involves organizing for change and promoting social justice. Activism is less frequently studied; yet, it has been identified as critical to the development of youth of color (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2007). Given that young people of color face systemic racism (Rothenberg, 2002; Sanchez & Romero, 2010), activism may be influenced by experiences of discrimination.
- **Anti-racism activism** is defined here as a way to cope with discrimination and create societal change for social justice. This argument is based on Garcia-Coll and colleagues (1996) Integrative Model for the Developmental Competencies of Minority Children, which argues that **coping with discrimination is a developmental competency for minority children and youth**.

**Hypothesis:** Higher rates of civic engagement (electoral activities, volunteerism, and political voice) will be associated with higher frequency of discrimination and more anti-racism activism.

## Methods

- Undergraduate students (n=146) completed an online survey (51.4% Mexican descent, 26.0% multiethnic, 8.2% African American, 7.5% Asian American, 3.4% non-Mexican Latino, and 3.4% Native American; female 75.3%;  $M = 20.25$  years,  $SD = 1.77$ ).
- Measures included **discrimination** (Williams et al., 1997), **anti-racism activism**, and **civic engagement: electoral, volunteerism, political voice** (Flanagan, Syvertsen, & Stout, 2007).

Table 1. Multiple Linear Regression Models of Civic Engagement (Electoral, Volunteerism, and Political Voice)

Model and Variable	B	SE B	95% CI	B	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>Adj</sub>
<b>Electoral</b>	-	-	-	-	.26	.24
Gender	.09	.09	(-.10, .27)	.07	-	-
SES	.01	.04	(-.07, .08)	.01	-	-
Discrimination	.04	.04	(-.05, .13)	.08	-	-
<b>Anti-Racism Activism</b>	<b>.16</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>(.08, .25)</b>	<b>.32***</b>	-	-
<b>Discrimination*Anti-Racism Activism</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>(.03, .18)</b>	<b>.25**</b>	-	-
<b>Volunteerism</b>	-	-	-	-	.23	.21
Gender	-.18	.14	(-.46, .10)	-.10	-	-
SES	.00	.05	(-.11, .10)	-.01	-	-
Discrimination	-.03	.06	(-.16, .09)	-.04	-	-
<b>Anti-Racism Activism</b>	<b>.35</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>(.24, .47)</b>	<b>.47***</b>	-	-
<b>Political Voice</b>	-	-	-	-	.37	.34
Gender	-.06	.08	(-.22, .10)	-.05	-	-
SES	.00	.03	(-.06, .06)	-.01	-	-
<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>(.00, .15)</b>	<b>.16*</b>	-	-
<b>Anti-Racism Activism</b>	<b>.21</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>(.14, .28)</b>	<b>.45***</b>	-	-
<b>Discrimination*Anti-Racism Activism</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>(.00, .12)</b>	<b>.16*</b>	-	-

Note: Gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male); \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 and highlighted in orange.

Figure 1. Interaction between Discrimination and Anti-racism Activism by Electoral Activities

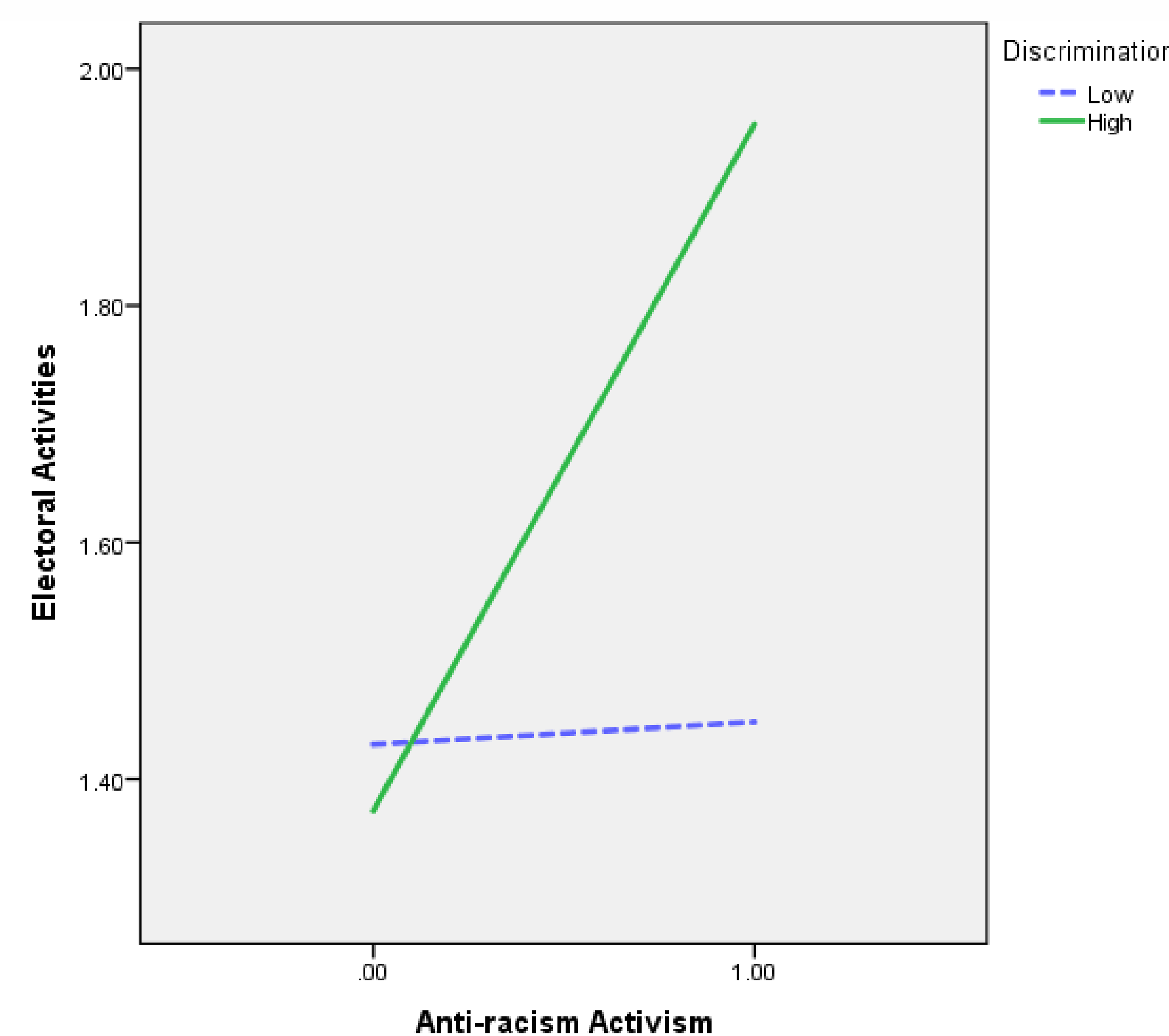
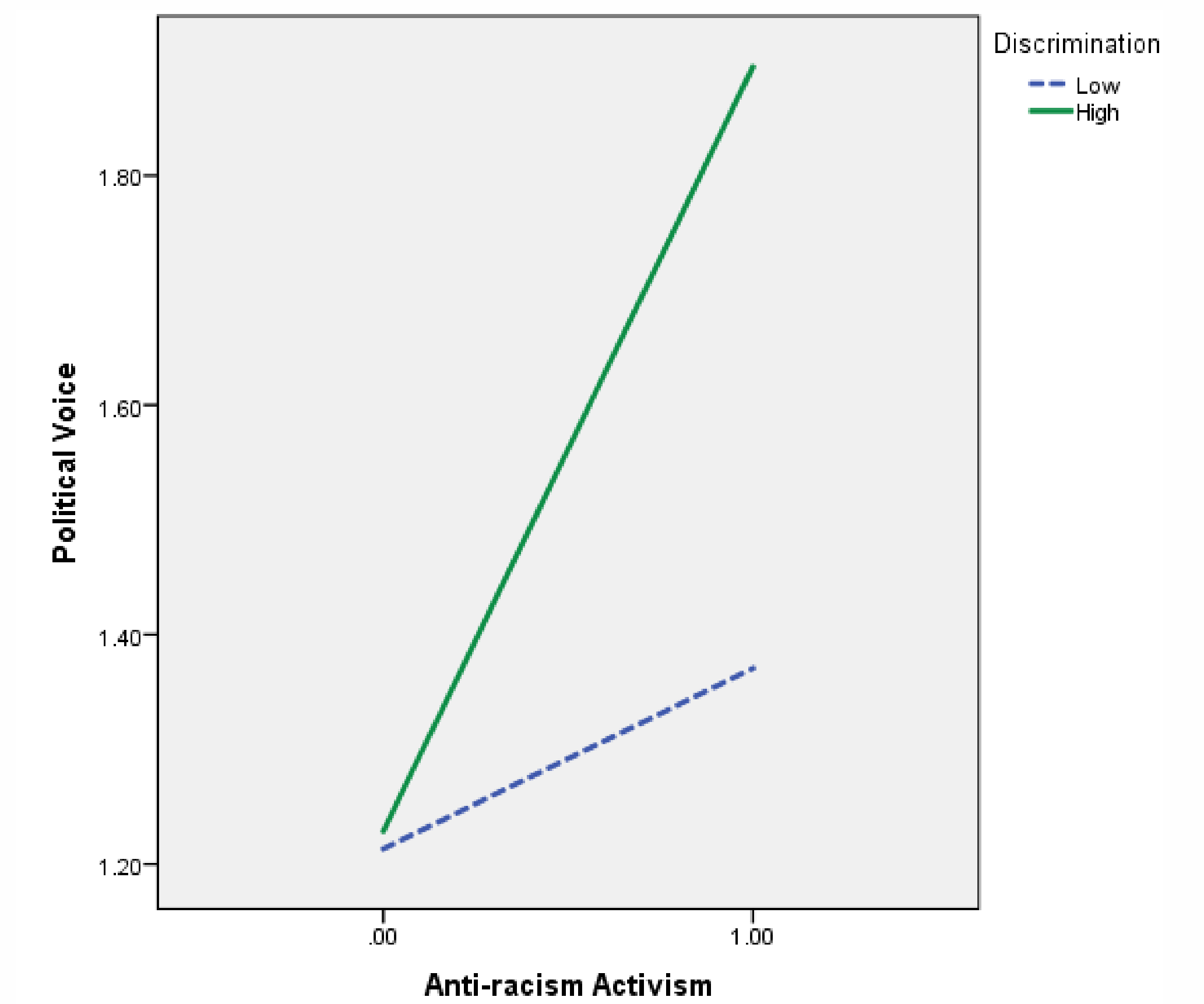


Figure 2. Interaction between Discrimination and Anti-racism Activism by Political Voice



## Results

- Multiple regression analyses were used to model relationships between discrimination, activism and civic engagement, accounting for both gender and SES (Table 1).
- **Electoral behavior** and **political voice** were both significantly associated with the **interaction between discrimination and anti-racism activism**, suggesting that youth who experience higher levels of both discrimination and activism will have greater civic engagement (Figures 1 and 2).
- **Anti-racism activism** alone was associated with more volunteerism.

## Conclusions

- Students of color who were actively engaged in raising awareness about racism to create change were significantly more likely to be engaged in electoral activities, volunteerism, and using their political voice.
- Implications of this research are that anti-racism activism may be a key component of positive youth development for youth of color.
- Future research will need to investigate how this may be influenced by intersectional identities.

