

The Effect of Intergenerational Poverty on Political Participation

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Introduction

While socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of political participation, this approach to measuring status is incomplete for it lacks a measure of how income and status accumulated over time, or lack thereof, influence current political behavior among Americans. Therefore, I invite the question: Does living in family poverty over generations impact current day electoral political participation?

Puzzle

Among racial and ethnic groups, African Americans have the highest poverty rates. Does intergenerational poverty depress political participation among African Americans? Relative to White American youth, are African American youth less likely to vote the longer their *families* have lived in persistent poverty?

Relevant Literature

Neighborhood Poverty and African American Politics

- ▶ Broadly, living in severe neighborhood poverty increases social isolation and weakens poor resident's political efficacy and decreases political participation compared to non-poor neighborhoods (Cohen and Dawson 1993).

Socio-Economic Status

- ▶ Those with higher levels of income and educational attainment participate at higher levels than those with lower levels of these attributes (Verba and Nie 1972).

Data & Methods

To understand how the processes of socialization impact current day levels of participation for youth, analysis of longitudinal data allows for both individual and aggregate effects of longstanding poverty.

- ▶ Panel Study of Income Dynamics (1968-2013)
- ▶ Transition to Adulthood Supplement (2004-2013)
- ▶ General Linear Model with Fixed Effects
- ▶ Observations: 18-27 year old individuals who are children of PSID panel participants
- ▶ Intergenerational Poverty: Combined years of *family* under federal threshold (0-45)
- ▶ Turnout: Voting in an Election (2004 - 2012)

Main Hypothesis

African American youth are less likely to participate as compared to their white counterparts due to higher levels of intergenerational poverty.

Independent Variable

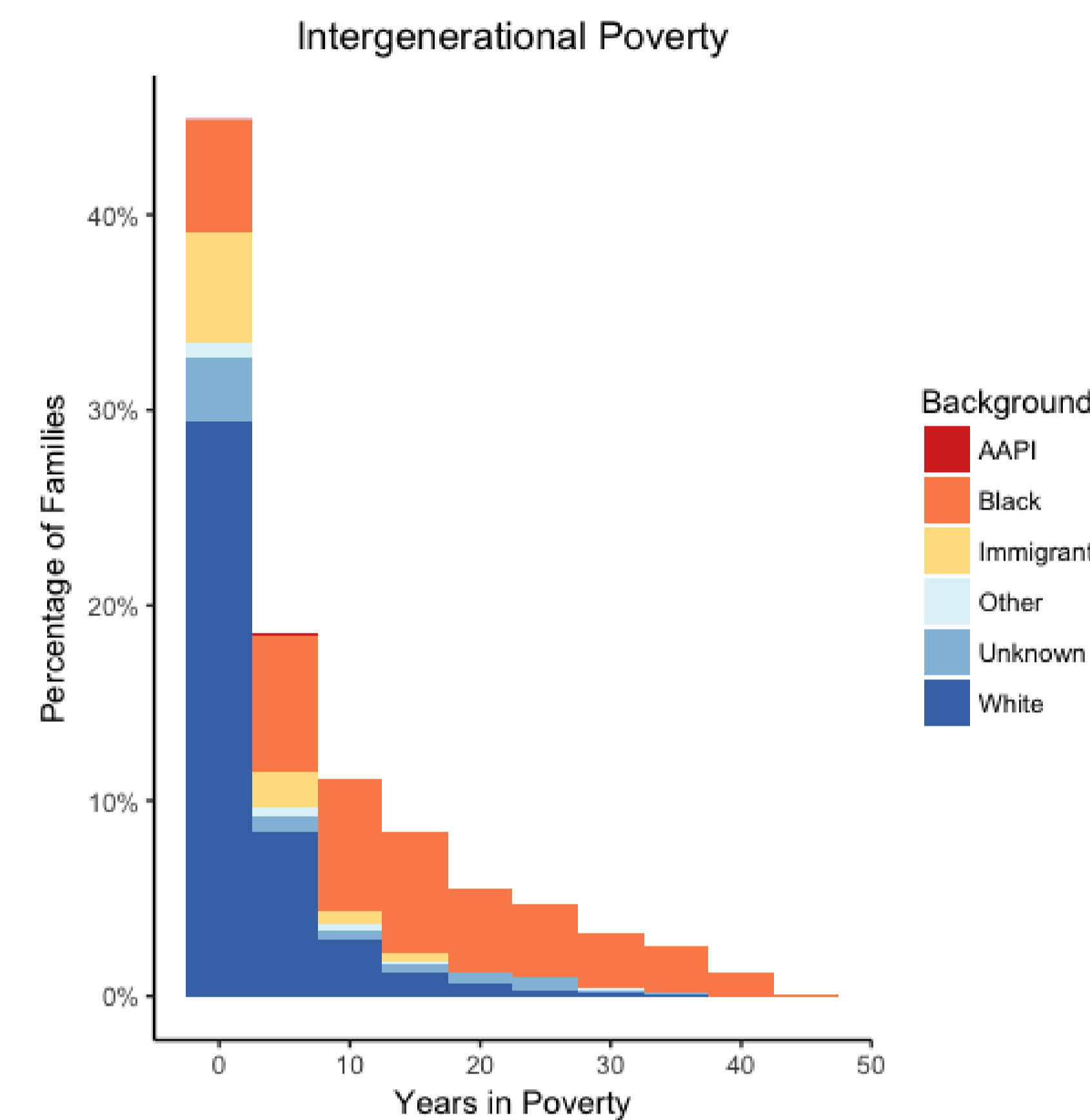


Figure: 1968-2013 Panel Study of Income Dynamics

African Americans are most likely to remain in intergenerational poverty longer relative to other racial and ethnic minority groups. White Americans in the PSID sample are less likely to be impoverished with most not experiencing poverty at all.

Evidence from Presidential Elections

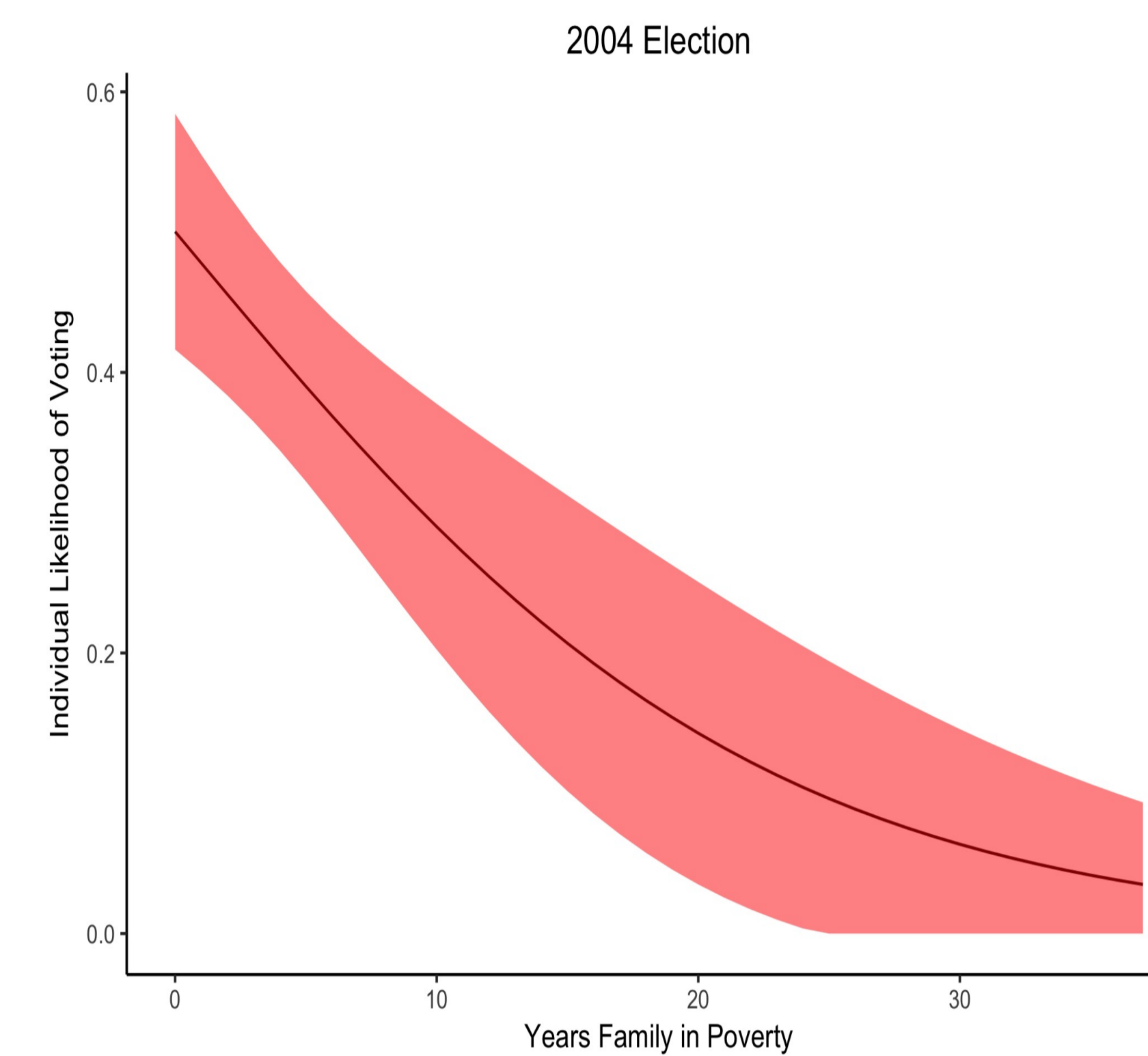


Figure: 2005 Transition to Adulthood Supplement, Predicted Probabilities. Covariates held at mean values.

Among all eligible voters in 2004, other things equal, youth living in intergenerational poverty are 40% more likely to vote than someone who has not experienced intergenerational poverty. Intergenerational poverty negatively impacts political participation, controlling for education, income, and race.

Multiple Logistic Regression

Though not a substantially large relationship, the effects of intergenerational poverty are statistically significant and robust to electoral contexts.

	Election 2004	Election 2006	Election 2008	Election 2010	Election 2012
Constant	0.611*** (0.059)	0.276*** (0.040)	0.782*** (0.042)	0.336*** (0.033)	0.798*** (0.039)
IGP 2004	-0.014*** (0.003)				
IGP 2006		-0.006*** (0.002)			
IGP 2008			-0.013*** (0.002)		
IGP 2010				-0.005*** (0.002)	
IGP 2012					-0.010*** (0.002)
White	-0.214*** (0.057)	-0.095 (0.039)	-0.222*** (0.041)	-0.095*** (0.032)	-0.269*** (0.038)
N	706	1,041	1,446	1,774	1,667
Log Likelihood	-631.180	-745.698	-1,339.932	-1,366.603	-1,575.178
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,268.360	1,497.396	2,685.864	2,739.205	3,156.356

Notes: ***Significant at the 1 percent level. **Significant at the 5 percent level. *Significant at the 10 percent level.

Key Insights:

- ▶ With changing composition of the electorate during midterm elections, IGP does not have an effect, 0.006 and 0.005, respectively.
- ▶ With African Americans as the reference category, the odds of voting in a midterm election for white Americans (white = 1) over the odds of for African Americans (white = 0) is $\exp(-0.055) = 0.81$ and $\exp(-0.095) = 0.90$.

Conclusion

- ▶ Contrary to my hypothesis, electoral participation among intergenerationally poor African Americans is higher as compared to intergenerationally poor whites.
- ▶ Overall, African Americans exhibited higher levels of intergenerational poverty consistent with existing inequality data.
- ▶ In the 2008 election, higher turnout among African Americans due to increased political efficacy with presence of a co-ethnic candidate and compared to previous elections, a more depressed turnout among intergenerationally poor Whites.
- ▶ The trend continues into the 2012 election where the marginal effect of intergenerational poverty becomes weaker among African Americans.

Next Steps

- ▶ Rule out alternative hypothesis that neighborhood context of poverty depresses turnout.
- ▶ Further examine role of political empowerment and alienation among intergenerationally poor African American voters.

African American Electoral Participation

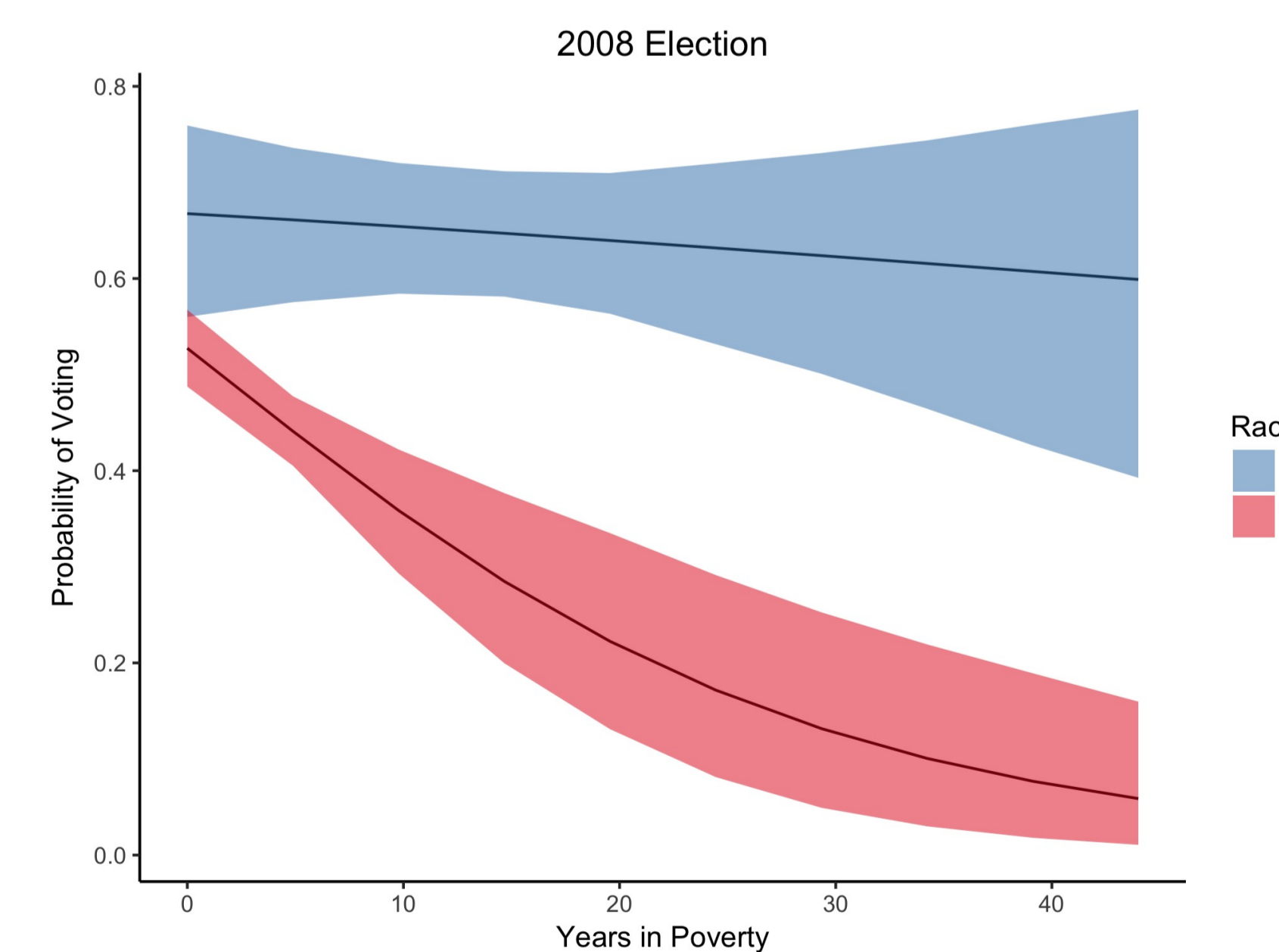


Figure: 2009 Transition to Adulthood Supplement, Predicted Probabilities. Covariates held at mean values.

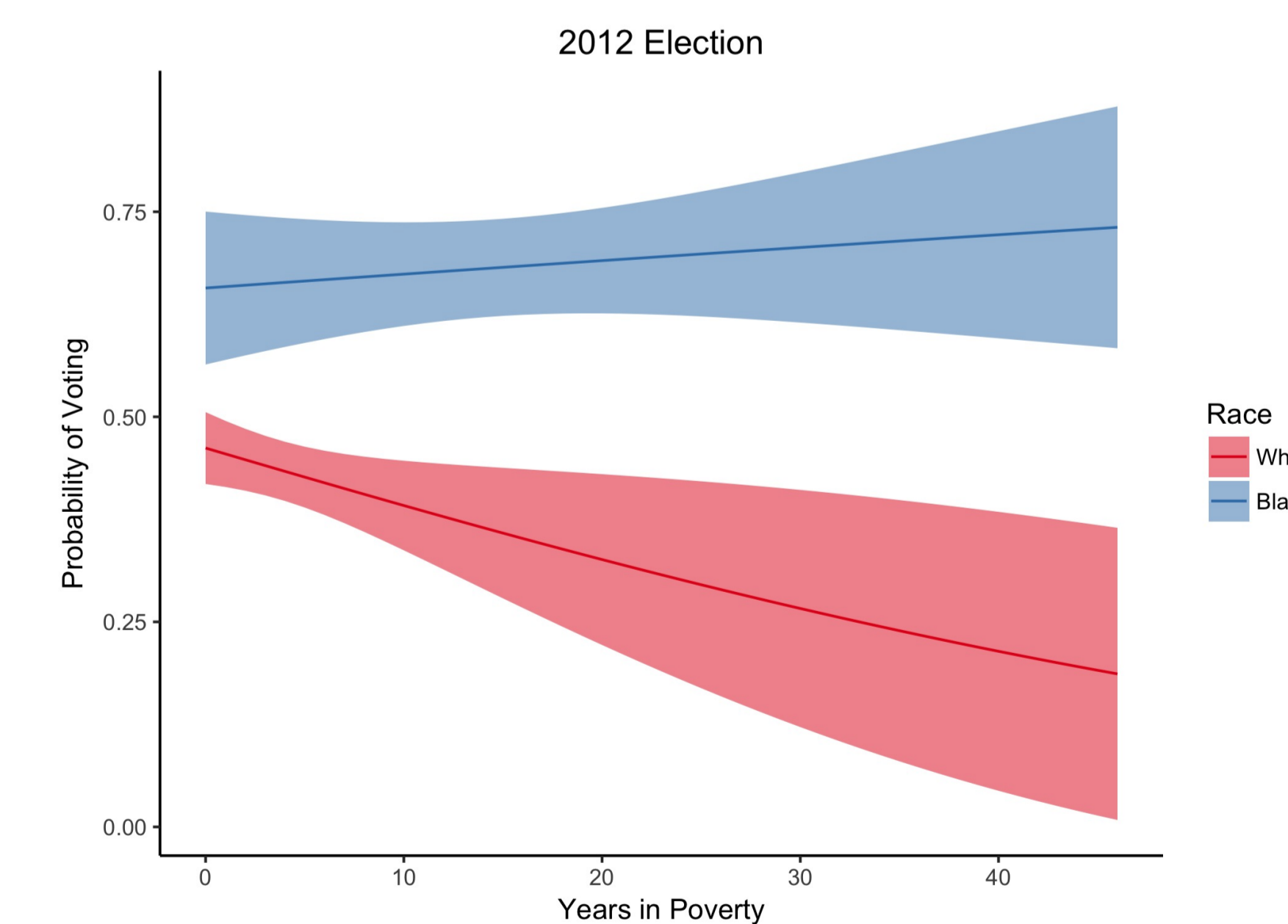


Figure: 2013 Transition to Adulthood Supplement, Predicted Probabilities. Covariates held at mean values.

Findings

- ▶ White Americans are less likely to turnout as the years their families have experienced poverty increases, consistent across two midterm and three presidential elections, only significant differences beginning in 2008.
- ▶ Significant differences between how Blacks and whites respond politically to living under extreme and persistent poverty - .2 to .6 change in predicted probability. across two general elections.

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