

# The Association Between Perceptions of Representation in Congress and Political Engagement Outside of Voting



Erin Byrne, Wesleyan University

## Introduction

- Women are more likely to engage in informal political participation than men (Cascio & Shenhav, 2020).
- Income highly relates to voter turnout and the way people vote. Lower income communities have lower voter turnout than high income communities (Avery 2015).
- Young people are becoming increasingly more involved in activist movements and protests, particularly those pertaining to climate change (Schussman 2005).
- The percent of people who participate in protests steadily increased after the 1960s, and protest participants are no longer seen exclusively as political outsiders and activists because this form of political participation has become somewhat normalized (Caren, Ghoshal, Ribas, 2011).
- Individuals born between 1943 and 1954 have the highest likelihood of reporting ever having attended a protest (Caren, Ghoshal, Ribas, 2011).
- Protest participation, and by extension, other forms of political participation rely on risk-taking behaviors which are more common in young people, unmarried people, and people without children (Schussman 2005).
- Political interest and political efficacy are both important factors in taking political action (Schussman 2005).

## Methods

### Sample

- Adults (age 18+) who responded to all of the questions on the Outlook on Life 2012 (OOL) survey (n=1431).
- OOL largely oversampled Black participants and all participants were recruited through probability based sampling of adults age 18 or older in the U.S.

### Measures

- Representation in government was evaluated through the responses to the question “How well does the U.S. Congress represent you?”
- Political actions was quantified by counting the number of actions outside of voting that an individual reported participating in within the past two years. This includes activities such as protesting, marching, contacting elected officials, donating to campaigns, and canvassing.

## Research Questions

- Is there an association between perception of representation in Congress and political action?
- Does the association between perception of representation in Congress and political action differ by age?

## Results

### Univariate

- Less than 1% of the population believes that Congress represents them “extremely well”
- 41% of the population does not participate in any reported political actions besides voting.
- 55% of the population report that they always vote.

### Bivariate

- An analysis of variance proves that there is a statistical significance in the number of actions performed by participants who consider themselves extremely well represented and participants in every other representation category ( $p=0.0007$ ).

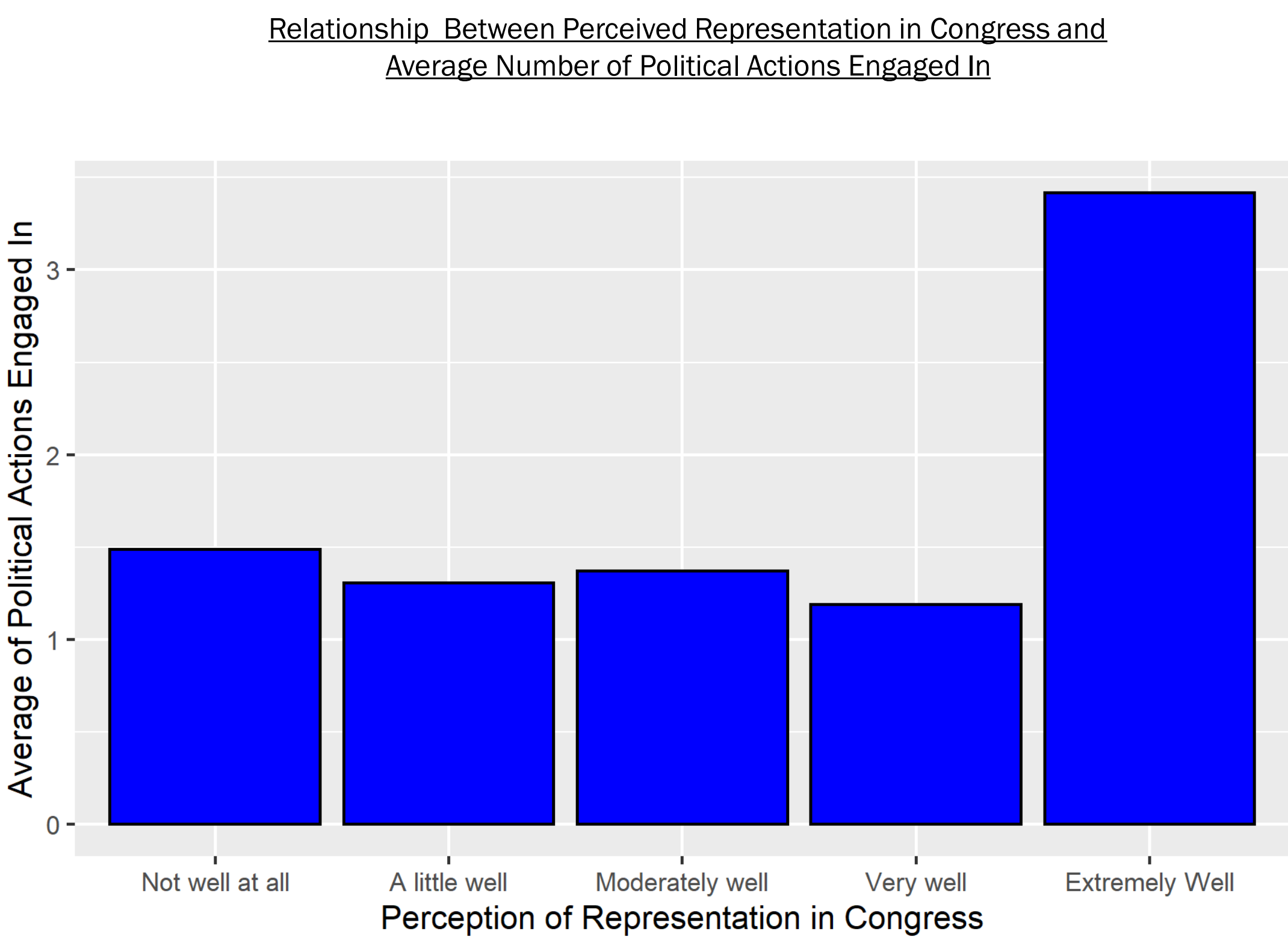


Figure 1. Average number of political actions engaged in related to perception of representation in Congress

- People in the “extremely well” represented category perform a higher number of actions on average (Figure 1).

### Multivariate

- In the 18-29 and 30-44 age range groups, there is not a statistically significant difference in the number of actions taken by people who consider themselves well represented when compared to other groups (Figure 2).
- For people 45+, the number of actions taken is significantly higher among those who consider themselves extremely well represented by Congress ( $\text{Beta}=1.14$ ,  $p=2.37 \times 10^{-13}$ ) (Figure 2).

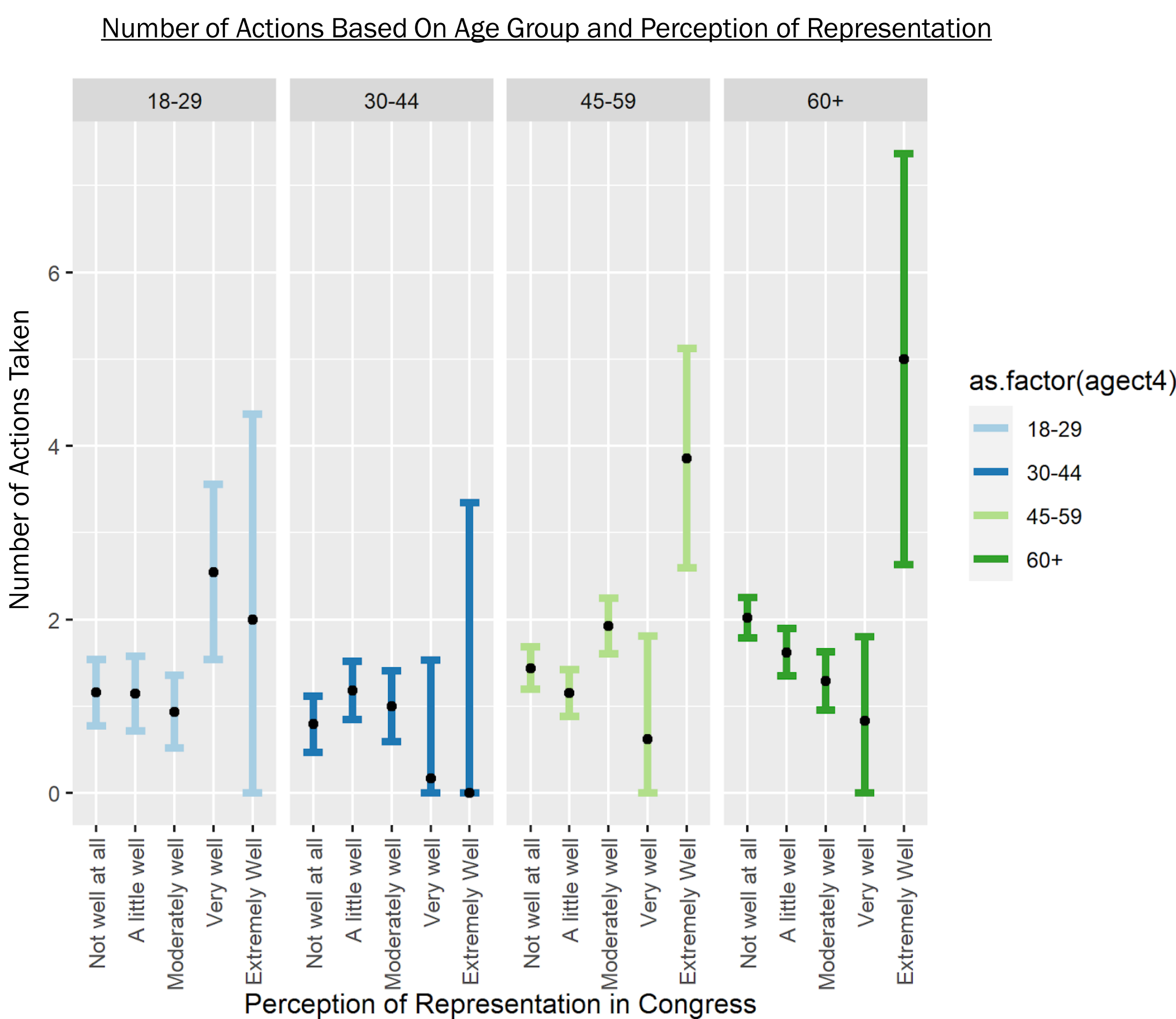


Figure 2: Actions by age group and perception of representation

- There is a positive statistical correlation between consistent voting behavior and number of actions taken related to perception of representation ( $p=.002$ )

## Discussion

- Individuals who perceive Congress as a good representation of themselves are more politically active.
- Middle-age and older adults (Age 45+) who consider themselves extremely well represented are more likely to participate in political actions than adults in any other category of perceived representation
- Older individuals may be more likely to participate in political actions due to free-time opened up during retirement, as well as higher amounts of disposable income to donate to campaigns and political organizations.
- Increased political activity in extremely well represented individuals could be accounted for due to the positive relationship between perceived representation and political efficacy, or the belief that individuals have the power to impact governmental decision-making through their political actions.
- Further research could consider a measurement for political apathy or belief that political action can create change based upon perception of political representation.

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