

REPORT

Understanding the costs and benefits of politics among adolescents within a sociocultural context

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Abstract

Politics entails personal costs and benefits, which may differ for youth from different sociocultural backgrounds. The *at-stake* hypothesis proposes that politically marginalized youth experience greater costs (e.g., stress, conflict) and benefits (e.g., empowerment) related to politics, whereas the *at-risk* hypothesis proposes that politically marginalized youth experience greater costs but lower benefits. In Study 1, we examined the factor structure of a new political costs and benefits measure among youth ($N = 1,056$, $M_{\text{age}} = 15.91$ years) and tested mental health and demographic correlates. Consistent with the *at-stake* hypothesis, marginalized youth experienced greater political costs and benefits than non-marginalized youth, although findings were nuanced. In Study 2, a sub-sample of participants ($N = 191$, $M_{\text{age}} = 16.05$ years) were recontacted from Study 1 to provide written explanations for why specific findings emerged. Adolescents' reasons indicated that laws and policies disproportionately affect youth from marginalized populations, thus producing both negative and positive political experiences

KEYWORDS

adolescence, empowerment, health, politics, stress

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by substantial personal and social changes. During adolescence, youth are becoming more aware of social and political issues and engaging within the political system (Yates & Youniss, 1998). Political engagement among youth has been traditionally viewed as an aspect of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005) that enhances well-being through dynamic connections with positive contexts and

developmental competencies (Metzger et al., 2018). However, politics may also entail personal costs, including increased stress, negative affect, and disturbances to peer and familial relationships (Smith et al., 2019). Little research has examined the array of costs and benefits that are affiliated with politics among youth. Further, adolescents from minority gendered, racial, ethnic, and sexual identity backgrounds experience greater political marginalization relative to majority youth and may therefore have differing levels of political costs and benefits. Understanding the costs and benefits of politics therefore requires careful consideration and incorporation of youths' sociocultural context and personal experiences.

Empirical research supports the concept that political engagement can be beneficial for youth (Malin et al., 2015). Voting and protesting longitudinally predict greater physical health during the transition to young adulthood (Ballard et al., 2019) and adolescents who attend youth activism programs report higher empowerment (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). Politics provides youth with a sense of purpose and a positive social identity (Malin et al., 2015) and can help strengthen social relationships with peers and adults (Baker-Doyle, 2016). Politics may therefore provide youth with important intrapersonal benefits, including greater feelings of pride, self-expression, empowerment, and purpose, as well as interpersonal benefits including enriched family relationships and friendship, all of which may support healthy development.

Although political engagement is commonly considered a developmental asset (Ekman & Amnå, 2012), politics may also entail potential costs. Politics can produce feelings of stress, anger, and frustration with the status quo (Ballard, 2014), which may be amplified if acts to change political systems are ineffective. Political engagement also places personal demands on time, resources, and emotions (Ballard & Ozer, 2016). Further, voicing political opinions entails navigating potentially contentious situations (Oosterhoff & Wray-Lake, 2020), which may interfere with familial and peer relationships. Adults report a wide range of perceived political costs related to mental health (e.g., depression), physical health (e.g., stress), compulsion (e.g., obsessively checking news) and disruptions to social life (e.g., family conflict; Smith et al., 2019). Political engagement therefore entails a variety of costs that vary across conceptually distinct dimensions.

Political costs and benefits may vary by sociocultural demographic characteristics, including gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference. The *at-risk* hypothesis proposes that politically marginalized youth incur greater costs and fewer benefits from political engagement due to low efficacy that politics can produce social change. This hypothesis is based on research indicating that youth from marginalized backgrounds—including women, non-white youth, those who identify as homosexual or bisexual, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds—are politically disempowered (Levinson, 2012), which may manifest as exclusion from the political system. In contrast, the *at-stake* hypothesis proposes that marginalized youth incur greater costs and *greater* benefits from being politically active due to exclusion from the political system and potential of high rewards for effective political engagement. This hypothesis is based on critical consciousness research indicating politics facilitates feelings of empowerment and enhanced well-being among youth, particularly those from racially marginalized backgrounds who have been structurally excluded (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Heberle et al., 2020). Political costs and benefits may therefore vary across sociocultural demographic characteristics in systematic ways.

The current research had three aims. In Study 1, the first aim was to examine the psychometric properties of the political costs and benefits measure. We expected that youths' reports of political costs would consist of the following domains: mental/physical health, obsession and hindered social relationships. We also expected that adolescents' reports of political benefits would consist of domains related to feelings of purpose/meaning, self-expression/personal identity and enhanced social relationships. The second aim was to test sociocultural differences in political costs and benefits. We expected that youth from politically marginalized backgrounds (women, non-white, non-heterosexual) would report greater political costs and either fewer benefits (*at-risk* hypothesis) or greater benefits (*at-stake* hypothesis) than non-marginalized youth. Given that political costs and benefits may vary based on levels of political engagement and mental health symptoms, political interest, anxiety symptoms, and depression symptoms were included as covariates to isolate group differences in political costs and benefits. Models also accounted for age and political ideology, which may be linked to political costs and benefits given that older youth

may more frequently engage with politics and liberal youth may feel like they have less political control as Republicans hold office during the time when data was collected. In Study 2, our third aim was to contextualize the results from Study 1 by having youth provide their own interpretations of key findings based on their personal experiences.

1 | STUDY 1

1.1 | Methods

1.1.1 | Participants and procedures

Participants were 1,054 adolescents aged 13–18 years ($M = 15.91$, $SD = 1.15$) recruited via paid advertisement on social media from across the United States. A minimum sample size of $N = 400$ was required to perform multi-group CFAs with two groups. To maximize representation from politically marginalized groups, recruitment continued past the minimum sample size until project funds were expended. The sample was primarily 10th (23.5%), 11th (29.8%) or 12th (28.4%) graders with some eighth (2.2%) and ninth (8.3%) graders. Some youth (7.6%) stated that they were not currently in high school. The sample was composed of slightly more females (48.9%) than males (47.5%) with 3.6% indicating a gender other than male or female. The sample was primarily non-Hispanic White (67.8%), followed by Hispanic/Latino(a) (11.4%), African American/Black (6.7%), Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI; 9.1%) and American Indian/Alaskan Native (4.4%). A total of 4.2% indicated a race or ethnicity other than those listed including Indian ($n = 14$), Jewish ($n = 15$) and Middle Eastern ($n = 13$). Most participants identified as heterosexual (57.6%) or bisexual (25.8%), followed by homosexual (10.0%) and other sexual preferences (6.1%). Youth ranged in their political beliefs, with 10.2% identifying as very conservative, 17% identifying as conservative, 18.7% identifying as moderate, 22.4% identifying as liberal and 18.4% identifying as very liberal. A total of 7.2% of youth identified as a different ideology, and 5.8% did not know their ideology. As a proxy for family income (Galinsky, 1999), youth were asked whether their families had: enough money to buy almost anything they wanted (8.1%), no problem buying the things they need and can also sometimes buy special things (59.5%), just enough money for the things they need (24.0%) or a hard time buying the things they need (8.4%).

This study was advertised on various social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit). To limit selection bias, multiple advertisements were used, and a general study description was provided concerning interest in psychological research more broadly. Participants self-selected into the study and completed a 10-minute survey. All youth who provided informed assent were invited to participate. Items for the survey were presented individually (i.e., one item displayed at a time) to limit data 'straight lining'. After completing the study, participants were asked for consent to be re-contacted via email once preliminary results were available. The study was selectively advertised to youth between the ages of 13 and 18 years using Facebooks' audience application. This study involved no more than minimal risk, and thus, passive parental permission was used. Upon survey completion, participants were given a link to a letter explaining their participation in the study and asked to provide this letter to their parents. Those who completed the survey were entered into a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the first author's institution.

Data verification and quality checks

Demographic information was verified by re-contacting a subsection of participants and cross-referencing multiple reports of demographic profiles. A subsection of participants (20%) was randomly selected and emailed a short demographic questionnaire asking them to report their age, gender and race/ethnicity. Results of this screening indicated a high degree of agreement between the two demographic reports, with only a few cases where age differed by 1 year likely due to birthdays. Data were screened to ensure that participants did not take the survey multiple times by identifying duplicates in Internet Protocol (IP) addresses (see Kennedy et al. 2018). Per recommendations

by Kennedy et al. (2018), data quality was also assessed by evaluating responses to open-ended questions unrelated to this study. Data 'straight lining' was tested to identify undifferentiated response patterns using the 'careless' package in R (Yentes & Wilhelm, 2018). These screening procedures resulted in the omission of 10 participants. Robustness checks were conducted, and the pattern of significant results did not change when including these participants in our primary analyses.

1.1.2 | Measures

Political costs

The Smith et al. (2019) political cost measure was used to assess political costs. The political costs scale consists of 32 items capturing multiple ways that politics may affect personal and social health (see Table S1 for item wording of final solution). Youth rated their agreement with each statement on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Smith et al. (2019) proposed that the political costs scale has four conceptual subscales (i.e., mental health costs, physical health costs, obsession, and social costs). However, little research has examined the empirical factor structure of the political costs measure, especially among youth. Thus, subscales were determined based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analytic approaches reported in the results.

Political benefits

The political benefits measure was created for the purpose of this study and based on prior research and theory (Ballard & Ozer, 2016). Past research has highlighted that political action can provide youth with important intra-personal (e.g., feelings of meaning, purpose, and fulfilment) and inter-personal (e.g., social support) benefits. Based on this research, we composed 12 items capturing a variety of intra- and inter-personal benefits that may stem from being politically active, including six items assessing feelings of *political empowerment and purpose* (e.g., 'Being politically active has made me feel empowered'), three items assessing feelings of *political pride and self-expression* (e.g., 'On occasion, I have been proud of comments I made during a political discussion'), two items assessing *enriched family relationships* (e.g., 'Similarities in political views have brought my extended family closer together'), and one item assessing *enriched friendships* (e.g., 'Similarities in political views have strengthened a friendship I valued'; see Table S2 for item wording). Items were developed by reframing the language used in the political costs scale to reflect potential benefits that are theorized to be a result of political engagement. Similar to political costs, youth rated their agreement with each statement on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Anxiety symptoms

Anxiety symptoms were assessed using the 6-item ($\alpha = .90$) anxiety subscale of the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). Youth rated their agreement with each item (e.g., 'During the past two weeks, how much were you feeling tense or keyed up') on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Mean scores were calculated with higher values indicating greater anxiety symptoms.

Depressive symptoms

Depressive symptoms were assessed using the 6-item ($\alpha = .89$) depression subscale of the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). Youth rated their agreement with each item (e.g., 'During the past two weeks, how much were you feeling blue') on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Mean scores were calculated with higher values indicating greater depressive symptoms.

Political interest

Political interest was measured with a single item taken from past research (Oosterhoff & Wray-Lake, 2020), which stated, 'Some people think about what's going on in government very often, and others are not that interested. How

much of an interest do you take in government and current events?’ Responses were provided on a 5-point scale from 1 (*no interest at all*) to 5 (*a very great interest*), with higher values indicating greater political interest.

Demographic characteristics

Participants reported their age, gender, race, sexuality, income and political ideology. Political ideology was measured through self-reported identification on a scale from 1 (*very conservative*) to 5 (*very liberal*).

1.1.3 | Analytic technique

The first aim of this study was to examine the factor structure of the political costs and benefits measures in a large sample of US teens. To address this aim, we performed a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to characterize the factor structure of each measure. Exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) were performed on a randomly selected subsample ($n = 527$) of youth using maximum likelihood estimation and promax rotation. Factor enumeration was determined based on theory and model fit comparisons, with a significant improvement in model fit indicated by $\Delta CFI > 0.01$ (Kline, 2005). Items with factor loadings lower than .30 were dropped and the EFA was re-estimated (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Cross-loaded items were retained if there was strong theoretical relevance for one of the cross-loading dimensions. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were then performed on the second subsample of youth ($n = 527$) that were based on the EFA solutions. A separate series of models were performed for the political costs and benefits measures, respectively. These models were estimated separately because some items assessed costs and benefits in similar contexts, which may produce shared measurement error across the separate scales. Once the factor structure for each scale was established, model comparisons were used to test for measurement invariance across demographic characteristics. Multi-group models were specified across age (13–15 years, 16–18 years), gender (male, female), race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic/Latino(a), AAPI), sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) and ideology (conservative, moderate, liberal). Measurement invariance was indicated by $\Delta CFI < 0.01$ (Kline, 2005).

The second aim of this study was to test demographic differences in political costs and benefits. Two structural models were estimated to examine demographic differences in political costs and benefits. For the first model, latent variables were specified representing each dimension of political costs characterized in the EFA/CFA. These variables were regressed onto exogenous observed variables representing gender (binary codes for not female, female),¹ race (binary codes for Black, Hispanic/Latino(a), AAPI, and Other race/ethnicity) and sexuality (binary codes for heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual). Political interest, political ideology, age, anxiety symptoms and depressive symptoms were included in all models as covariates. A similar model was then estimated with dimensions of political benefits specified as the endogenous variables. Model fit was evaluated with standard metrics, and acceptable fit was indicated with $\chi^2/df < 3.0$, confirmatory fit index (CFI) > 0.90 , root-mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08 and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) < 0.08 (Ullman & Bentler, 2003).

1.2 | Results

1.2.1 | Factor structure of Youths' political costs and benefits

Exploratory factor analyses

An EFA was used to explore the factor structure of the political costs scale using a randomly selected subset of youth ($n = 527$). Fit statistics from models estimating two to nine factors are presented in Table S3. The eight-factor solution provided an excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2(245) = 404.22$, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.04 [0.03, 0.04], that was statistically better than the seven-factor solution $\Delta CFI = 0.015$. However, upon inspection of the factor

loadings, two of the eight factors only contained a single-item and multiple factors were conceptually similar. The seven-factor solution provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(245) = 506.53$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.04 [0.04, 0.05] that was statistically better than the six-factor solution $\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.024$ and produced seven conceptually distinct dimensions of political costs that all contained multiple items and were consistent with an expanded version of the characterization presented in Smith et al. (2019). Thus, the seven-factor solution was retained for further analyses. Standardized factor loadings for the EFA are presented in Table S2. The seven-factor solution consisted of the following dimensions of political costs: *political mental health costs* (6 items; $\alpha = .82$), *political anger* (5 items; $\alpha = .75$), *political regret* (5 items; $\alpha = .72$), *political family disruptions* (3 items; $\alpha = .82$), *political obsession* (3 items; $\alpha = .68$), *political distraction* (2 items; $\alpha = .68$), and *political financial/legal problems* (2 items; $\alpha = .78$). Four items had factor loadings below .30 and thus were omitted from further analyses at this stage. Additionally, the item assessing friendship disruptions significantly loaded onto the political family disruption dimension. This item is theoretically distinct from family disruptions, especially in youth. Thus, we modelled it separately as a single item.

A second EFA was used to explore the factor structure of the political benefits scale. Fit statistics from models estimating two to four factors are present in Table S3. The four-factor model did not converge and model fit statistics indicated that a three-factor model provided the best fit to the data, $\chi^2(245) = 99.48$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06 [0.05, 0.08]. Standardized factor loadings for the EFA are presented in Table S2. Examination of the three-factor solution supported our theoretical characterization, with one factor representing *political pride/self-expression* (6 items; $\alpha = .81$), one factor representing *political empowerment/purpose* (3 items; $\alpha = .80$) and one factor representing *enriched family relationships* (2 items; $\alpha = .68$). The item assessing enriched friendships significantly loaded onto the political pride/self-expression dimension. This item is theoretically distinct from all identified dimensions in the EFA. Thus, we modelled it separately as a single item assessing *enriched friendships*.

Confirmatory factor analyses

CFAs were performed on the second subset ($n = 527$) of youth to evaluate the factor solutions produced by the EFAs. Factor loadings for these CFAs are displayed in the Supplemental Material (Tables S4 and S5). For the political costs scale, item-level indicators were specified for latent variables representing the seven factors identified in the EFA. Latent variables were allowed to covary. The model provided an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(302) = 690.99$, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.05 [0.05, 0.05], SRMR = 0.05, and latent variables were moderately and positively correlated (β s range: .20 to .67). A second CFA was performed for the political benefits scale. Item-level indicators were specified for latent variables representing the three factors identified in the EFA. The model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(41) = 125.90$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.06 [0.05, 0.08], SRMR = 0.03. The latent variable representing *enhanced family relationships* was moderately correlated with *political empowerment/purpose* ($\beta = .42$) and *political pride/self-expression* ($\beta = .43$), and the latent variables representing *enhanced family relationships* and *political empowerment/purpose* were strongly and positively correlated ($\beta = .92$).

1.2.2 | Measurement invariance

Multi-group models were used to test whether the political costs and benefits measurement models varied by age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality and ideology. Fit statistics for these comparisons are available in the Supplemental Material (Table S6). These comparisons supported metric invariance across all demographics for both political costs and benefits, with $\Delta\text{CFI} < 0.01$ for all models. Scalar invariance varied depending on the model. For political costs, scalar invariance was violated for gender ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.014$), sexuality ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.012$) and ideology ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.036$). Modification indices indicated that items assessing political anger were higher for boys and youth who identified as conservative. Relaxing constraints on no specific items across sexuality drastically improved model fit, suggesting that model misfit may be due to the accumulation of several minor differences. For political benefits, scalar

invariance was violated for gender ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.011$) and ideology ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.014$). Relaxing constraints on no specific items across gender or ideology drastically improved model fit.

1.2.3 | Demographic differences in youths' political costs and benefits

Table S7 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables. A latent variable structural model was estimated to examine associations between political costs and sociocultural demographic characteristics. The model provided an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(505) = 1,501.68$, $\text{CFI} = 0.92$, $\text{TLI} = 0.90$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.04$ [0.030, 0.05]. Model estimates are displayed in Table 1. Greater political interest was associated with greater political mental health costs, political anger, political family disruptions, political friendship disruptions, and political distraction. Additionally, youth who were more liberal reported greater political mental health costs, political anger, political regret, political family disruptions, and political obsession and older youth reported greater political mental health costs and legal/financial issues than younger youth. Greater anxiety symptoms were associated with greater political mental health costs, political anger, political regret, political family disruptions, political obsession, political distraction, and political financial/legal problems. Greater depressive symptoms were associated with greater political mental health costs, political anger, political regret, political family disruptions, and political obsession. After accounting for political interest, political ideology, age, anxiety symptoms, and depressive symptoms adolescent girls reported greater political mental health costs, greater political family disruptions, and greater political friendship disruptions than adolescent boys. Youth from lower income families reported less political anger and greater political financial/legal problems. Black youth and those from another race/ethnicity reported fewer political family problems relative to non-black and non-other race youth. Youth who identified as another race also reported greater political legal/financial problems because of politics than non-other race youth. Youth who identified as homosexual reported greater political mental health costs, political regret, and political familial disruptions than heterosexual youth.

A second SEM model was estimated to examine associations between political benefits and sociocultural demographic characteristics. The model provided a good fit to the data $\chi^2(177) = 508.42$, $\text{CFI} = 0.94$, $\text{TLI} = 0.92$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.04$ [0.030, 0.05]. Model estimates are displayed in Table 2. Greater political interest was associated with political benefits across domains. More liberal youth reported greater political pride/self-expression and political empowerment/purpose but lower enhanced family relationships and older youth reported greater feelings of political empowerment/purpose but lower enhanced family relationships than younger youth. We did not find any significant associations between anxiety symptoms and political benefits. Greater depressive symptoms were associated with lower political empowerment/purpose and lower enhanced family relationships. After accounting for political interest, political ideology, age, anxiety symptoms, and depressive symptoms, adolescent girls endorsed greater political pride/self-expression and political empowerment/purpose than adolescent boys. Youth from higher income families and Black youth endorsed greater enhanced family relationships relative to youth from lower income families and non-Black youth. Hispanic/Latino(a) youth reported less enhanced friendship benefits relative to non-Hispanic/Latino(a) youth. Bisexual youth reported greater political pride/self-expression and greater enhanced friendship benefits relative to non-bisexual youth.

1.3 | Discussion

Findings from this study indicate that youth experience a variety of political costs and benefits across conceptually and empirically distinct domains. The multi-faceted nature of political costs and benefits aligns with theory (Smith et al., 2019) and was found to be invariant across a variety of demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and political ideology. Sociocultural differences highlight specificity in the way political costs and benefits vary across politically marginalized backgrounds.

TABLE 1 Estimates for structural model predicting adolescents' political costs

Political costs																													
Mental health			Anger			Regret			Family disruptions						Friendship disruptions						Obsession			Distraction			Legal/financial issues		
β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE			
Covariates																													
Political interest	.23**	0.35	0.04	.17**	0.20	0.04	-.04	-.04	0.04	.11**	0.13	0.04	.19**	0.2	0.04	-.06	-.07	0.04	.33**	0.37	0.04	.05	0.05	0.05					
Political ideology	.36**	0.41	0.04	.24**	0.22	0.04	.09*	0.07	0.04	.14**	0.13	0.04	.02	0.02	0.04	.13**	0.11	0.04	.08	0.07	0.04	-.04	-.03	0.05					
Age	.07**	0.09	0.03	-.02	-.02	0.03	.00	0.00	0.03	.03	0.03	0.03	.01	0.01	0.03	-.01	-.01	0.04	.06	0.06	0.03	.09*	0.09	0.04					
Anxiety	.25**	0.37	0.06	.17**	0.19	0.06	.18**	0.19	0.06	.25**	0.3	0.06	.03	0.03	0.05	.24**	0.26	0.06	.25**	0.27	0.06	.22**	0.23	0.08					
Depression	.10**	0.15	0.05	.12**	0.14	0.05	.10*	0.1	0.05	.05	0.06	0.05	.17**	0.18	0.05	.16**	0.17	0.06	-.02	-.02	0.06	.02	0.02	0.07					
Sociocultural characteristics																													
Female	.15**	0.40	0.08	.06	0.13	0.08	-.06	-.012	0.08	.17**	0.36	0.08	.16**	0.3	0.07	-.03	-.06	0.08	.05	0.11	0.09	-.03	-.06	0.1					
Income	.00	-.01	0.06	.08*	0.12	0.05	.05	0.08	0.05	-.05	-.08	0.05	.04	0.06	0.05	.04	0.06	0.05	.06	0.09	0.06	-.09*	-.012	0.06					
Black	.01	0.04	0.14	.02	0.11	0.15	.01	0.06	0.13	-.13**	-.63	0.16	.00	0.02	0.15	.00	-.01	0.16	-.01	-.03	0.16	.02	0.06	0.17					
Asian	.01	0.04	0.13	.03	0.10	0.14	.03	0.13	0.86	-.07	-.25	0.14	.02	0.10	0.15	-.05	-.18	0.15	-.02	-.010	0.13	.06	0.20	0.13					
Hispanic/Latino(a)	.00	0.00	0.12	-.02	-.06	0.11	.00	0.01	0.12	-.03	-.01	0.12	-.03	-.01	0.11	.00	-.02	0.13	-.01	-.005	0.13	.06	0.2	0.13					
Other race	.00	-.01	0.10	-.03	-.09	0.1	.00	0.00	0.1	-.09*	-.27	0.11	.01	0.02	0.09	-.01	-.02	0.11	-.01	-.003	0.11	.08*	0.23	0.11					
Homosexual	.10**	0.51	0.14	.03	0.10	0.13	.08*	0.29	0.13	.06	0.23	0.14	.04	0.14	0.13	.01	0.03	0.14	.02	0.07	0.14	.02	0.08	0.15					
Bisexual	.05	0.18	0.10	.00	0.00	0.09	.02	0.04	0.09	.07	0.19	0.10	.01	0.03	0.09	-.08	-.02	0.11	-.07	-.018	0.11	-.02	-.04	0.12					
R ²	.56			.26			.10			.29			.09			.19			.17			.07							

Note: Female coded 1 = Not female, 2 = Female.

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

TABLE 2 Estimates for structural model predicting adolescents' political benefits

	Political benefits											
	Pride/self-expression			Empowerment /purpose			Enriched family relationships			Enriched friendships		
	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE
Covariates												
Political interest	.69**	0.98	0.05	.64**	0.87	0.05	.29**	0.32	0.04	.37**	0.40	0.04
Political ideology	.08**	0.09	0.04	.16**	0.16	0.04	-.12*	-0.10	0.04	.08	0.07	0.04
Age	.02	0.02	0.03	.06*	0.07	0.03	-.06*	-0.07	0.03	.03	0.03	0.03
Anxiety	-.01	-0.01	0.06	.02	0.03	0.06	.04	0.04	0.06	.05	0.05	0.05
Depression	-.07	-0.09	0.05	-.08*	-0.10	0.05	-.13*	-0.13	0.06	-.04	-0.05	0.05
Sociocultural characteristics												
Female	.08**	0.21	0.08	.15**	0.36	0.08	-.01	-0.02	0.08	.01	0.01	0.07
Income	.02	0.04	0.06	.04	0.07	0.06	.12**	0.18	0.05	.01	0.02	0.05
Black	-.04	-0.20	0.15	.01	0.06	0.15	.09*	0.40	0.17	-.03	-0.13	0.14
Asian	.00	0.01	0.15	.00	-0.01	0.12	-.05	-0.18	0.15	.00	-0.01	0.12
Hispanic/Latino(a)	.01	0.05	0.12	.02	0.06	0.12	-.03	-0.10	0.12	-.07*	-0.25	0.11
Other race	-.01	-0.02	0.10	.01	0.04	0.10	.00	-0.01	0.10	.01	0.03	0.09
Gay/lesbian	.04	0.19	0.13	.05	0.24	0.15	.00	-0.01	0.14	.06	0.22	0.14
Bisexual	.06*	0.19	0.10	-.02	-0.05	0.10	-.07	-0.19	0.10	.08*	0.20	0.09
R ²	0.50			0.46			0.18			0.14		

Note: Female coded 1 = Not female, 2 = Female.
***p* < .01. **p* < .05.

Understanding sociocultural differences and interpreting these findings within past research poses a challenge. Collectively, research that incorporates the perspectives of politically marginalized youth is small. This issue is further complicated by the novelty of the political costs and benefits measure, which may lead to ungrounded speculation for why specific findings emerged. One strategy to help embed findings from Study 1 within a sociocultural context would be to solicit youths' own views about why specific findings emerged. This approach is rooted in community-based participatory methodology, where communities work with researchers to ask questions that are important to them and aid in interpreting the results (Cashman et al., 2008). Presenting participants from Study 1 with the research findings and soliciting their perspective on why certain patterns emerged will allow youth who generated the data to share the personal experiences that created the observed patterns, providing a more contextually sensitive interpretation of results.

2 | STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to provide further context to specific sociocultural differences in political costs and benefits found in Study 1. Very little research has examined the political experiences of youth from varying sociodemographic backgrounds. Thus, the goal of this study was to gain greater insight into how and why youth differentially experience political costs and benefits through qualitative thematic coding of adolescents' own explanations for the results of Study 1.

2.1 | Methods

2.1.1 | Participants and procedures

Participants in Study 1 who provided consent to be recontacted were invited to participate in Study 2. Based on prior research for thematic coding (Fugard & Potts, 2015), our target goal was to recruit a minimum of 20 participants from each demographic group to provide their reasoning for why specific findings emerged regarding their demographic subgroup. This target sample size was based on the novelty of the research question and the desire to identify more common and less idiosyncratic themes (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Participants were contacted via email approximately 2 months after completing the original study. A total of $N = 179$ adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.05$ years, $SD = 1.09$; 50.6% female) from politically marginalized backgrounds responded to the invitation and agreed to participate in Study 2. This represented 16.9% of the total original sample and approximately 30% of the eligible sample (i.e., those who identify as a women, as non-heterosexual, are from a low-income family, or who identified as Black or Hispanic/Latino(a)). Although significant differences in political costs were found for youth who identified as a racial/ethnic category not listed, we did not solicit feedback on these findings given the ambiguity introduced by collapsing across races and ethnicities. Additionally, youth who identified as AAIP were not included in this study because we did not find significant differences in political costs or benefits in Study 1 among these teens. The sample size for each subgroup is displayed in Tables 3–5.

Adolescents who selected into the study were presented with specific study findings that concerned their personal demographic profile (e.g., adolescent girls were presented with each finding that concerned adolescent girls) and were asked to provide free response explanations for each specific finding. Question prompts were presented in the following structure: 'Why do you think [demographic characteristic] reported that [finding] compared to [reference group]?' Exact item wording is available in the Supplemental Material. Youth who belonged to multiple demographic groups were invited to respond to questions concerning each relevant characteristic. The purpose of this analysis was to provide context to the study results from the lived experiences of individuals who produced the specific pattern of findings. Participants also rated the perceived accuracy of each finding with a single item (i.e., 'How

accurate do you think this finding is?'). Responses were given on 5-point scale including: 1 (*not at all accurate*), 2 (*a little accurate*), 3 (*somewhat accurate*), 4 (*accurate*), and 5 (*very accurate*). These ratings were used to descriptively characterize the percentage of youth who viewed each finding as at least 'somewhat accurate'.

Consistent with prior research (Metzger et al., 2016), participants' responses to follow-up questions were analysed using a grounded theory approach, which sets forth guidelines for systematically gathering and organizing data to discover unspecified theory (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell, 2012). Two research team members conducted an iterative content analysis of youths' responses using open coding to identify emergent themes. This approach prioritized discovery; we therefore remained open to the emergence of concepts from the data. As themes emerged, codes were being constantly compared with one another to identify commonalities and differences. Qualitative analyses were conducted by separate researchers from those focusing on the quantitative analyses and were not privy to the study hypotheses at the time of coding.

2.2 | Results

2.2.1 | Youths' explanations for gender differences in political costs and benefits

On average, youth wrote approximately 60 words (range 40 and 250) for their responses. Table 3 displays the specific findings regarding gender differences in political costs and benefits presented to participants along with accuracy ratings and key themes that emerged from participants' explanations. Adolescent girls reported that politics caused greater mental health issues, friendship problems, and family problems relative to boys. Across all findings, a common theme that young girls stated was that laws and policies affect girls' lives to a greater degree than boys' lives (e.g., abortions, rape, reproductive health, sexual harassment, equal pay), thus making politics more salient, relevant, and consequential for young girls relative to boys. Some girls mentioned that girls are marginalized and even criticized in the political system, thus contributing to political mental health issues, while others stated that these findings may be due to gender differences in empathy. Regarding gender differences in friendships and family political costs, adolescent girls viewed peers and family as more central to girls relative to boys. Further, adolescent girls stated that age differences in political and social views towards women's rights can create family conflict for young women and that girls are often more politically marginalized within their family compared to boys.

Adolescent girls also reported greater political pride/self-expression and empowerment/purpose compared to boys. Similar to the political costs findings, many adolescent girls indicated that these political benefits are rooted in the concept that laws and policies affect girls' lives to a greater degree than boys'. For both findings, adolescent girls also indicated that these feelings may come from the political progress made by women in recent decades despite experienced hardships and disadvantage, which provides a sense of confidence, agency, and efficacy. Others mentioned that these feelings come from the visibility of women leaders in politics and social movements and the sense of solidarity obtained from having shared political goals. Overall, 64–90% of youth stating that each finding was somewhat to very accurate.

2.2.2 | Youths' explanations for income differences in political costs and benefits

Table 4 displays the specific findings regarding income differences in political costs and benefits presented to participants along with accuracy ratings and key themes that emerged from participants' explanations. Adolescents from low-income backgrounds reported less political anger, more political legal and financial issues, and less familial benefits from politics relative to higher income youth. Regarding income differences in political anger, lower income youth (i.e., those who reported they had not enough or just enough money to cover basic needs) stated that higher income families may care more about politics and have more power within the political system and may therefore feel angry

TABLE 3 Coded explanations for gender differences found in Study 1

Gender differences	N	Accuracy rating (%)	Explanation themes
1. Girls reported that politics caused more mental health issues compared to boys.	65	64.1	• Laws and polices affects girls lives to a greater degree than boys (e.g., abortions, rape, reproductive health, sexual harassment, equal pay). • Girls are marginalized and do not have autonomy in politics. • Girls are heavily criticized in politics. • Girls are more empathetic than boys. • Girls are more interested in politics than boys.
2. Girls reported that politics caused more friendship problems compared to boys.	63	74.3	• Laws and polices affects girls lives to a greater degree than boys. • Girls are more interested in politics than boys. • Peer similarities are more important to girls than boys.
3. Girls reported that politics caused more family problems compared to boys.	52	84.6	• Age differences in political (e.g., abortion) and social views (e.g., sexism) create a larger conflict between older adults and young women's political attitudes. • Family relationships matter more for girls relative to boys. • Laws and polices affects girls lives to a greater degree than boys. • Girls are more marginalized within the family relative to boys.
4. Girls reported greater political pride/self-expression (e.g., politics allow me to express myself) compared to boys.	48	90.2	• Women have made good progress politically in recent history and have overcome hardships, which provides confidence, agency and efficacy. • More women leaders are in office or are more visible today than in the past. • Women have solidarity among shared political goals. • Laws and polices affects girls lives to a greater degree than boys.
5. Girls reported greater political empowerment/purpose compared to boys.	46	72.9	• Women have made good progress politically in recent history and have overcome hardships which provides confidence, agency and efficacy. • More women are in office or are more visible today than in the past. • Women have solidarity among shared political goals. • Laws and polices affects girls lives to a greater degree than boys. • Politics allow girls to change the world and advocate and defend themselves.

Note: Accuracy ratings represent the percentage of youth who indicated that the findings were at least somewhat accurate.

if that power is threatened. Further, multiple lower income youth stated that higher income families have more to lose politically with regard to taxes and power, which may create feelings of anger. For findings regarding legal and financial costs, several lower income youth stated that it is difficult for lower income families to cover any legal or

TABLE 4 Coded explanations for income, race, and ethnicity differences found in Study 1

Income differences	N	Accuracy rating (%)	Explanation themes
6. Youth from lower income families reported less political anger compared to youth from higher income families.	30	88.2	• High-income families care more about politics. • High-income families have power and feel more threatened. • High-income families have more to lose (e.g., taxes) and feel like it is immoral to give to low-income families.
7. Teens from lower income families reported more legal and financial costs because of politics compared to teens from higher income families.	27	79.4	• It is more difficult to cover any legal/financial costs for lower income families. • Laws favour the rich and disfavour the poor.
8. Youth from higher income families reported that politics strengthened their family relationships more so than youth from lower income families.	20	67.9	• Rich families have more consistent political viewpoints. • High-income families may be more politically involved with teens.
Race and ethnicity differences	N	Accuracy rating (%)	Explanation themes
9. Black youth reported fewer family problems because of politics relative to non-black youth.	28	77.4	• Black families tend to agree with family and lean democrat. • Black families experience solidarity based on feelings of injustice and support for social change.
10. Black youth also reported that politics strengthened their family relationships more so than non-black youth.	28	71.0	• Black families tend to agree with family and lean democrat. • Black families experience solidarity based on feelings of injustice and support for social change.
11. Hispanic/Latino(a) youth were less likely to feel like politics strengthened their friendships compared to non-Hispanic/Latino(a) youth.	20	70.6	• Hispanic/Latino(a) youth are viewed (or threatened to be viewed) as illegal immigrants which prevents them from talking about or identifying with politics. • Anti-immigration rhetoric may split the Hispanic/Latino(a) community, with some advocating strongly about politics and others shying away from politics. • Hispanic/Latino(a) youth have little political representation. • Hispanic/Latino(a) youth have a lot at-stake in politics because of immigration and are more cautious.

Note: Accuracy ratings represent the percentage of youth who indicated that the findings were at least somewhat accurate.

financial issues due to politics, thus creating a greater burden. Others noted that current laws more strongly favour the rich and disfavour the poor. For income differences in the familial benefits of politics, lower income youth reported that higher income families may have more consistent political viewpoints and parents from higher income families may be more politically involved with their teens. Accuracy ratings indicated that 68–88% of teenagers considered these findings somewhat to very accurate.

2.2.3 | Youths' explanations for racial and ethnic differences in political costs and benefits

Table 4 displays the specific findings regarding racial and ethnic differences in political costs and benefits presented to participants along with accuracy ratings and key themes that emerged from participants' explanations. Black youth reported fewer family problems and that politics were likely to strengthen their family relationships relative to non-Black youth. Two themes emerged for both sets of findings. First, many Black teenagers stated that Black families tend to agree more with their family's political views and lean Democratic. Second, many Black youth also reported that Black families experience greater solidarity based on feelings of injustice and support for social change.

Hispanic/Latino(a) youth were less likely to feel like politics strengthened their friendships compared to non-Hispanic/Latino(a) youth. Hispanic/Latino(a) youth reported that these findings may be due to beliefs that they are (or may be) viewed as illegal immigrants if they say something that their friends disagree with politically. Others highlighted that the anti-immigration rhetoric may split the Hispanic/Latino(a) community, with some advocating for social change and others remaining uninvolved in politics. Consistent with this theme, some youth stated that the pressures that accompany immigration laws make politics risky for Hispanic/Latino(a) teens and with little representation in government, politics are approached very cautiously. Accuracy ratings by either Black or Hispanic/Latino(a) youth indicated that between 71 and 77% of teens viewed that these findings were somewhat to very accurate.

2.2.4 | Youths' explanations for sexuality differences in political costs and benefits

Table 5 displays the specific findings regarding sexuality differences in political costs and benefits presented to participants along with accuracy ratings and key themes that emerged from participants' explanations. Youth who identified as homosexual reported greater political mental health issues and greater political regret relative to heterosexual and bisexual youth. For disparities in political mental health issues, youth who identified as homosexual indicated that this finding may be due to politicians using sexual identities as a political tool without consideration of what is best for the community, and in many cases, politics is used to degrade or minimize the LGBTQ community. Others highlighted that gay and lesbian youth experience a large degree of discrimination, suffering, and denied rights because of politics, causing greater stress, depression, and anxiety. For heightened political regret, a common theme among youth who identified as homosexual was that many teenagers have political views prior to developing their sexuality, which may lead some gay and lesbian youth to deny their sexuality and make hateful remarks about gay and lesbian people prior to discovering themselves. Others stated that gay and lesbian youth are more likely to experience backlash for speaking out about their sexuality, which may prompt feelings of regret. Accuracy ratings by youth who identified as homosexual indicated that between 88 and 94% of teens viewed that these findings were somewhat to very accurate.

Youth who identified as bisexual reported greater political pride and self-expression, as well as stronger friendships because of politics compared to heterosexual and gay or lesbian youth. For pride and self-expression, many bisexual youth stated that they can be more open about politics and that their bisexual identity provides a source of pride without experiencing the persecution faced by gay or lesbian youth. For stronger friendships, bisexual youth stated that they are able to identify and find common ground with both heterosexual and homosexual communities, which allows for greater flexibility in their friendships. Others stated that they explicitly seek out friends with similar viewpoints, thus reducing conflict and provide a sense of common political ground. Importantly, some bisexual youth stated that although this finding may be accurate, bisexual youth can still receive criticism from their peers for 'not picking a side' or committing to a specific cause. Accuracy ratings by bisexual youth indicated that between 81 and 82% of teens viewed that these findings were somewhat to very accurate.

TABLE 5 Coded explanations for sexuality differences found in Study 1

Sexuality differences	N	Accuracy rating (%)	Explanation themes
12. Youth who identified as gay or lesbian reported that politics caused more mental health issues (e.g., feeling stressed or depressed) compared to heterosexual or bisexual youth.	18	88.2	• Sexual identities are being used a political tool. • Gay and lesbian youth experience a large degree of discrimination, suffering, and denied rights because of politics. • Politics can be used to degrade or minimize LGBTQ communities.
13. Youth who identified as gay or lesbian reported greater political regret (e.g., regretting a political comment you have said) compared to heterosexual or bisexual youth.	18	93.7	• Some gay or lesbian youth may deny their sexuality and may make hateful remarks prior to developing your sexuality. • Gay and lesbian youth are more likely to experience backlash for speaking out about sexuality.
14. Youth who identified as bisexual reported more political pride/self-expression compared to heterosexual and gay/lesbian youth.	34	82.4	• Bisexual youth are more open about politics and can identifying with the gay and lesbian communities as well as heterosexual communities. • The bisexual identity provides empowerment from the LGBTQ movement without the persecution.
15. Youth who identified as bisexual reported having stronger friendships because of politics compared to non-bisexual youth.	33	81.8	• Bisexual youth find it easily talk to others without being judged. • LGBT people tend to band together in friend groups, and bisexuality is the most common LGBT identity. • Bisexual youth may seek out friends of any gender that have similar views so there is less conflict. • Bisexual youth can still be criticized for 'not picking a side'.

Note: Accuracy ratings represent the percentage of youth who indicated that the findings were at least somewhat accurate.

2.3 | Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide context regarding demographic differences in political costs and benefits. Drawing on community-based participatory research (Cashman et al., 2008), our approach was to solicit explanations regarding specific patterns of findings established in Study 1 from youth who generated the data. Quantitative ratings indicated that most youth viewed the findings from Study 1 as at least ‘somewhat accurate’ based on their own personal experiences, and qualitative responses revealed several themes that may explain specific differences. Youth provided a variety of different reasons for sociocultural differences that emerged from Study 1, many of which were consistent with the at-stake hypothesis that politics disproportionately affect marginalized youth relative non-marginalized youth. Importantly, findings regarding differences in political costs and benefits based on sexual orientation were somewhat different than past research. Specifically, youths’ explanations that bisexual youth may receive greater political benefits due to a shared sense of pride and identity with the LGBTQ community but without as severe costs contradicts some earlier research that indicates bisexual youth may be at greater risk than their gay/lesbian peers (e.g., Kerr et al., 2013). This may indicate generational gaps in research on sexual orientation and represents an area for further inquiry.

3 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the costs and benefits of political engagement among a large sample of youth. Findings from this research partially supported the at-stake hypothesis in that youth from marginalized backgrounds reported greater political costs and benefits, particularly for young women. Findings were less clear and consistent with regards to racial and sexuality differences in political costs and benefits, yet youths' own explanations provide valuable insight into possible personal experience and mechanism that may explain specific differences. Consistent with the specificity principle of development (Bornstein, 2017), the costs and benefits youth receive from politics are likely rooted within personal experiences. The benefits and costs of politics are likely sensitive to youths' sociocultural and sociohistorical context and result from the interaction between these macro-ecologies, ultimately producing a highly nuanced pattern of political consequences that depends on characteristics of the adolescent, their environment, and the historical period.

Results from this study have notable theoretical implications. Developmental theory is modelled based on empirical evidence from mostly white, middle-class youth (Nielsen et al., 2017). While these theories may translate to youth from different cultural backgrounds, adopting this assumption without empirical evidence ignores important systematic variability in personal experiences. These results suggest that political engagement is not universally beneficial to adolescents from different backgrounds. By examining political costs and benefits among youth from different sociocultural backgrounds and soliciting youths' own perspectives on why these differences emerged, this research provides an initial step in building a culturally sensitive theoretical model of how politics affect adolescent health, well-being, and development. Additionally, several of the explanations provided by youth regarding demographic differences in political costs and benefits raise questions for further inquiry. Addressing these questions is necessary to build a nuanced and comprehensive model of adolescent political development.

Findings from this study should be interpreted in the context of certain limitations. The study was cross-sectional and causal inferences are cautioned. Participants were recruited to participate via social media, and there may be a selection bias resulting in distinct characteristics associated with the current sample. The measures of political costs and benefits used in this study did not specify a distinct type of political engagement. This study measured how politics affect adolescents' lives at a more global level, which captured political experiences that may not necessarily be tied to a direct behaviour (e.g., overhearing a political conversation). Future research should consider charting the costs and benefits of distinct forms of political engagement and how these experiences interact with sociodemographic characteristics. The political benefits measure was adapted from the political costs measure, thus some dimensions of benefits were assessed with few items. Further, some dimensions of political benefits were highly correlated. Future research should consider expanding the political benefits measure, which may help distinguish conceptually distinct factors. While metric invariance was demonstrated for the political costs and benefits measures, both scales violated scalar invariance across gender and ideology, and the political costs scale violated scalar invariance for sexuality. While scalar invariance was generally demonstrated across other demographics, these findings indicate substantive nuance in specific indicators not being captured by the latent means and thus latent means should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, demographic characteristics were characterized as discrete, non-overlapping categories within our analytic models. Intersectionality approaches to adolescent development seek to characterize and understand how multiple social identities coalesce to influence social experiences (Rogers, 2019). It will be important for future research to examine political costs and benefits from an intersectionality perspective. Lastly, future research should consider examining political costs and benefits among other marginalized groups, including transgender and gender diverse youth.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Benjamin Oosterhoff: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project administration; resources; supervision; validation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Ashleigh Poppler:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Ryan Hill:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Holly Fitzgerald:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Natalie Shook:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was approved by the institutional review board at Montana State University.

Patient consent statement: All participants assented to this research.

Positionality statement: When the manuscript for this article was drafted, two authors were self-identified as a US White male, two authors were identified as a U.S. White female and one author self-identified as a U.S. Black female.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data, materials and code availability statement: Data, materials and code are not currently publicly available. However, these materials will be made available upon request with IRB consent from the lead authors' institution.

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ENDNOTE

¹ Sensitivity analyses tested all models with gender specified 1 = male, 2 = female and demonstrated similar results.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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