

WHAT MOTIVATES SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS TO BE
POLITICALLY ACTIVE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Members of countries with democratic governments rely on the political involvement of its citizens to elect individuals to positions of power as well as to approve legislative initiatives that are presented for voter approval on ballots (Hahm, 2000; Mayer, 2011). However, voting is just one of many examples of political activity (Wiltfang & McAdams, 1991). This qualitative study was designed to address a gap in the research by analyzing factors that motivated secondary, social studies teachers to become politically active. Teachers are overwhelmingly absent from political activities other than voting (National Teacher Association, 2010). Even though they teach a subject that stresses the importance of civic responsibility across time, social studies teachers are not more likely to participate in politics than teachers of other content areas (Fowler, 2006; Lavine, 2014). While researchers have explored the obstacles teachers face in becoming politically active, very little attention has been paid to exploring the minority of teachers who engage in politics within their communities. There is minimal interaction between

teachers and policymakers, which results in miscommunication between those who write education policies and those who implement education policies (Pustka, 2012). Schools would benefit from open communication between policymakers and teachers since those in the classroom are considered to be experts in their field (Burns, 2007). Teachers could provide accurate and current insight into the successes, challenges, and failures of schools (Burns, 2007, Pustka, 2012). However, drafting education legislation often involves policymakers and teachers working as separate entities with policymakers drafting legislation and teachers implementing policies (Pustka, 2012).

Using cognitive mobilization theory as a conceptual framework, this study included an investigation of the motivating factors of politically active teachers. Face to face interviews allowed teachers to reflect on previous events that they believed contributed to their decisions to engage in politics. Teachers also were asked to speak about personal perceptions of their own political activity in terms of how their involvement in politics affected policy as well as their classroom pedagogy and student learning. Whether it was the influence of a politically involved parent, friend, or teacher, through school or an organization, or because of a significant event, participants in this study were exposed to politics and motivated to become politically active at some point in their lives prior to teaching. Additionally, political policy as well as personal, political activity affected the participants' pedagogies. Finally, social studies teachers play an important role in modeling civic responsibility to their students. The findings of this study will be useful for teachers who wish to become more politically active and for

politicians who wish to increase communication with teachers who are directly affected by education policy initiatives.

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DEDICATION

I have wanted to pursue a doctoral degree for as long as I can remember, and I could not have made it this far without my faith, family, and friends. First, I want to thank God for all He has done in my life and in my pursuit of this degree. He blessed me with time when I thought time was running out, patience when I felt like there were too many obstacles in my way, and stamina when I did not have any more of my own, personal strength. I daily spend time with Him, and He faithfully addresses all of my known and unknown needs. In my diligence and recognition, I want to glorify Him.

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final chapters and edits of this dissertation, I never wanted to give up because I wanted him to be proud of me. He is my biggest fan and one of my greatest inspirations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of American democracy rests on the assumption that citizens will participate actively in their government (Hahm, 2000; Mayer, 2011). Whether people voluntarily engage in political activity or are coerced into political activity by an interest group, American citizens are encouraged to become involved in the political process to exercise their rights as citizens (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014; Salisbury, 1975). Education is one of the many political issues in which citizens can become involved (Weigand, 2006). Members of federal and state governments consider education legislation each time they convene (Morton & Staggs, 2001; Weigand, 2006). Education and politics are intertwined as legislatures pass laws that directly affect public schools as well as administrators, teachers, students, and parents (Fowler, 2006). However, teachers are overwhelmingly absent from the legislative process (National Teachers Association, 2010). Aside from voting in general elections, teachers have low levels of civic participation as they typically do not write to legislators, participate in campaigns, or testify in committee hearings (Burns, 2007; Morton & Staggs, 2001; National Teachers Association, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). As of 2016, the political climate in Texas's education policy could benefit from the input of teachers as education policy directly impacts teacher instruction and classroom procedures ("Teachers Share," 2016).

Briefly reviewing an education policy that had significant implications for teachers will allow a better understanding of the lack of dialogue occurring between those

who write education policy and those who implement education policy. The 84th Texas Legislative Session (2015) saw a dramatic change to the accountability schedule for Texas public school students. Senate Bill 149, authored by Representative Kel Seliger of District 143 (Houston) required the establishment of a campus graduation committee comprised of an administrator, counselor, teacher, and parent. The purpose of these committees was to decide whether or not students who have failed up to two attempts of one or more of the five required exams should be eligible for graduation. To qualify for graduation in spite of failing End of Course Exams (EOCs), SB 149 included a requirement that the committee analyze a student's extracurricular activities, extenuating circumstances, discipline, and attendance records. Eligibility for a waiver from the committee depended on students passing the course(s) as well as completing remedial work and tutorials to be decided upon by the teacher(s) of the core subject(s) in question. SB149 was rushed through committee hearings and signed into law (Smith, 2015). Students were not the only ones affected by this legislative change as Texas public schools were expected to follow each of these changes after they were signed into law; teachers were required to adjust their instruction according to the newest piece of legislation (TEA, 2016c). In the almost twelve hours of debate and discussion surrounding SB149 in committee, only one teacher (who taught English) gave a testimony regarding the bill.

Even though the subject content for social studies addresses civic knowledge and responsibilities such as political participation, social studies teachers are not more likely to participate in politics (Journell, 2013; O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). Aside from

voting, the majority of social studies teachers are not politically active within their respective communities (National Teacher Association, 2010). Politically active, secondary, social studies teachers are in the minority, and it is this group that needs to be studied more because an increase in the political involvement of social studies teachers could present massive implications for education policy (Fowler, 2006; Morton & Staggs, 2001; Pustka, 2012). The purpose of this study is to determine and analyze factors that motivate secondary, social studies teachers to become politically active. In exploring these motivating factors, I will consider teachers' perceptions of three elements of their political activity: (1) how previous events influenced their decisions to participate in politics, (2) how the political involvement of teachers impacts policy, (3) how political involvement impacts classroom instruction and student behavior.

Statement of the Problem

While insight from teachers could be valuable to those with a vested interest in education, the majority of teachers are absent from the political process (Hipple, 1986; National Teacher Association, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The lack of political participation among teachers is not necessarily a result of teacher apathy (Morton & Staggs, 2001). While some teachers follow education legislation and rarely question its meaning or implications, the majority of studied teachers genuinely care about the policies created in congress and experience frustration when considering the process of education policy implementation (Morton & Staggs, 2001). In actuality, many teachers cite time constraints brought on by the demands of high-stakes testing in combination with other professional responsibilities such as discipline, parent contacts,

lesson planning, and grading (National Teacher Association, 2010). Other teachers have referred to a general lack of knowledge about how to become politically involved and/or a lack of confidence when it comes to contacting a legislator (Morton & Staggs, 2001).

Another theory that some researchers have dismissed is that policymakers do not wish to hear from teachers (Fowler, 2006, Pustka, 2012). Pustka (2012) found this to be false after spending a legislative session under the direction of a legislator on the education committee in the Texas House of Representatives. While some lawmakers have admitted that it is easier to pass education legislation without the involvement of teachers as too many opinions and suggestions can complicate the progress of education reform (Fowler, 2006), many lawmakers claim education legislation is more likely to be successful if teachers offer insight and direction (Fowler, 2006; Pustka, 2012). Burns (2007) posited that teachers inserting themselves in the discussion of policies that will directly affect classroom procedures and pedagogy is the only way for policymakers truly to understand the underlying issues affecting education as well as the real effects of their passed legislation on those involved in education.

When considering the political inactivity of teachers, the other notable point is that social studies teachers are not more likely to be politically active than teachers of other content areas (Journell, 2013). The content of social studies curriculum specifically addresses the importance of awareness and civic engagement throughout government systems around the world and especially in the United States (Journell, 2013; O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). Each teacher holds a captive audience of students and has a platform for advocating the importance of political participation in a democracy

(O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). If social studies teachers lecture on the importance of citizens participating in politics yet fail to do so themselves, students may receive a mixed message and not recognize the true importance of political participation (Fermen & Green, 2004).

Education and politics are intertwined (Fowler, 2006) and both entities could benefit from open communication between those making the policies and those implementing the policies (Pustka, 2012). The fundamental dilemma is that teachers need to be present in political discussions directly affecting education policy, yet the majority of teachers are not active participants in conversations with policymakers (National Teacher Association, 2010; Pustka, 2012; Silberberg, 1996). Teachers and policymakers recognize the benefit of open communication, and both groups have expressed interest in working together (Burns, 2007; Lee, 2006). Yet, the reality is that there is disconnect between congressional offices and the classroom (Vincent, 2013). Even though social studies teachers address the importance of civic responsibility as part of the social studies curriculum, these teachers are not significantly more likely to interact with politicians (Lavine, 2014). This disconnect between politicians and teachers presents obstacles for all of those involved with education (Weigand, 2006). These two professions have the most potential to affect public schools, yet both groups operate in isolation, creating separation and inaccurate understandings of reality within the classroom (Burns, 2007; Pustka, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what social studies teachers perceive motivated them to become politically active. Areas explored included (1) motivating factors that influence political involvement among social studies teachers, (2) how teachers see their own political involvement impacts policy, and (3) how teachers see their own political involvement impacts instruction and subsequent student behavior.

Education legislation is decided at the local, state, and federal levels of the government. Education policy is a topic of debate every time policymakers at each of these levels convene in a legislative session (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006). The designated education committees in the state and federal congress are comprised of legislators who are assigned to the committee, regardless of their professional background in the field of education (Burns, 2007). Given that the legislators' only experience with education issues might be limited to their own experiences as a student in the K-12 education system, Burns (2007) and Pustka (2012) posited that many legislators on education committees should not be considered experts in the field of education. These legislators rely on teachers to be their eyes and ears in the classroom so that those deciding education policy will be more aware of pressing educational issues (Pustka, 2012). Therefore, it is up to teachers to inform lawmakers of the education issues they experience on a daily basis (Pustka, 2012). It is imperative for teachers to recognize their role as advocates for the interests of other teachers, students, and parents (Hipple, 1986; Lee, 2006). Hipple (1986) argued that if teachers' voices are not being heard, policymakers are left to decide

education policies without input from the ones who could provide the most helpful insight into current needs for education reform.

Researchers have addressed motivating factors of political participation as they pertain to the overall population (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Djupe & Grant, 2001; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Mayer, 2011; Putnam, 1995; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993). However, this study included an analysis of the motivating factors behind social studies teachers' decisions to become politically active. According to Fowler (2006), some teachers were unaware of their own potential for impacting education policy. Via this study, I sought to identify the motivating factors that led teachers to become politically active in an effort to understand what sets these teachers apart from the majority who refrain from political activity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens through which I approached this study was cognitive mobilization theory. Cognitive mobilization theory was first identified and described by Inglehart (1970). The theory originally was used in European politics to outline political behaviors toward European integration (Gabel, 1998). According to cognitive mobilization theory, populations find themselves engaged in the political arena once they are equipped with general political knowledge and have developed skills integral to political participation such as communication and confidence in their own acquired understanding of political issues (Gabel, 1998; Inglehart, 1970). Dalton (1984) wrote, "Cognitive mobilization implies that citizens possess the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged with little dependence on external cues" (p. 267). People who

choose to be politically active do so on their own volition and rely on their own abilities to engage effectively with political policy (Dalton, 1984). Dalton posited, “Cognitive mobilization index was constructed by combining education (to represent the skill component) with interest in politics (to represent the political involvement component)” (p. 267). This is important because cognitive mobilization theory operates under the assumption that in order for a citizen to be politically active he or she must harbor a strong enough interest in politics to wrestle with the political and social issues within the community (Inglehart, 1970).

While researchers have agreed that in order for a person to be politically active there must be some level of cognitive interest in politics manifested in his or her psyche, researchers have engaged in debates about the varying degrees in which mobilizing factors most directly affect a person’s actions (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Dalton, 1984; Gabel, 1998; Inglehart, 1970; Luskin, 1990). Cognitive mobilization theory implies there must be some kind of experience in a person’s life that triggers his or her drive to become politically involved in the community (Luskin, 1990).

Many researchers have argued that education is the most influential trigger (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Converse, 1964; Dalton, 1984). The more education an individual has, the more likely he or she is to be *politically literate* and the more likely he or she is to be involved in politics (Cassel & Lo, 1997). This interpretation of cognitive mobilization could be useful in analyzing the levels of political activity among teachers since teachers generally are required to have some kind of college or university degree with a specialization in an area of study (Lesley, 2014). Teachers’ expertise levels vary

greatly throughout the professional field. A teacher hones his or her craft over time through gaining knowledge and experience, which explains why novice teachers sometimes react to situations differently than experienced teachers (Gu, 2014). Using the lens of cognitive mobilization theory allows part of the focus to be on the role education plays in the life of an educator who has chosen to be involved in politics.

The importance of education in political involvement as it applies to cognitive mobilization was a focal point in the literature due to researchers who have linked higher education to higher levels of political involvement (Inglehart, 1970; Luskin, 1990; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). However, for the sake of this study, it was important to recognize the interpretation that education was not as important in this regard as some may think. Inglehart (1970) first offered other that factors such as media, age, and gender could substitute for education in determining cognitive mobilization and political involvement. According to Luskin (1990), researchers may be too quick to credit education with a person's political involvement when, in actuality, overall political knowledge and understanding is not dependent on how many years a person spends in school. Cassel and Lo (1997) also found education's influence on cognitive mobilization in politics ranked at the same level of importance as other factors such as grade point average (GPA), socioeconomic status (SES), gender, parental political involvement, and parental political literacy.

Other points of interest when researching factors that affect political activity in teachers are age and levels of education (Converse, 1964). Converse (1964) posited that according to cognitive mobilization theory, people who are *politically sophisticated* are

classified as such partly due to their ages since they have benefitted from extra time spent interacting with politics and their communities. However, Dalton (1984) presented evidence that contradicted Converse's findings. According to Dalton, younger generations of the late twentieth century typically have more formal education than those in previous generations. To take the theory at face value would be to assume older generations would not strive to be as politically active as younger generations since older generations historically did not have as much education on political issues as their younger counterparts. However, Dalton argued that younger generations have been exposed to more mass media (for example, television, magazines) and are, therefore, more exposed to political issues in spite of their lack of real world experience in politics.

Regardless of what researchers have said is the specific catalyst for political involvement in cognitive mobilization theory, many have agreed with Inglehart's (1970) overall assumption that in order to engage in political activities one has to be aware of political issues and the political process (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Gabel, 1998; Luskin 1990). Luskin (1990) stated,

People somehow kept from birth from all political information will not know anything about politics, no matter how cognitively able they are or how interested in the subject they might (hypothetically) be. Neither will people who have no reason or desire to give politics their attention, no matter how able they are or how much political information there is about them. (p. 349)

Therefore, if a person does not consider or interact with politics and/or political issues in thought, conversation, or activity, he or she would not be driven to participate in politics

because there would be no opportunity for a motivational trigger (Luskin, 1990). The other end of the political involvement spectrum includes those individuals who are very active in politics. In this study I will interview social studies teachers who choose to be politically active in order to explore how and why these teachers have made the choices to devote time and energy to engage in the political process.

Using cognitive mobilization theory allowed for the assumption that an individual elects to be involved in politics because he or she has a general knowledge of and interest in the subject. I referred to the research of other researchers who have used cognitive mobilization theory and cited motivating factors such as education, age, race, gender, SES, and parental involvement as guidelines to explore what best applies to politically active teachers who are daily affected by political decisions in their professional lives (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Dalton, 1984; Inglehart, 1970; Luskin, 1990).

Research Questions

In this study the following research questions were addressed:

1. What do secondary social studies teachers perceive as influences of their political involvement?
2. How do the teachers perceive that their political involvement impacts teaching and learning?
3. How do teachers perceive that their political involvement impacts policy?

Significance of the Study

Teachers who discuss the importance of political involvement with students yet refrain from political activity may be unaware of how they are affecting student behavior

outside of the classroom (Fermen & Green, 2004; Tonga, 2014). Teaching students about political participation is the most effective way to encourage political participation among students (Lavine, 2014). The best way for students to learn about a topic or behavior is not by reading about it or by listening to someone lecture on it (Tonga, 2014). Instead, students learn best by watching others participate in an activity or by actively participating in an activity themselves (Tonga, 2014). Tonga (2014) grouped discussions and behaviors of teachers together in terms of effective teaching techniques and learning models by advocating for teachers' words in the classroom and actions outside of the classroom to match. Teachers pass on their attitudes and beliefs to their students and, since the nature of social studies deals with values and social behavior, it is less likely for students to fully understand political experiences if the teacher is only talking about his or her beliefs and not acting upon his or her beliefs (Tonga, 2014). School is often the only exposure students have to political involvement (Kam & Palmer, 2008). While many teachers feel that participating in politics is an important civic duty (Morton & Staggs, 2001), political participation rates are likely to continue to decline among young adults if teachers continue unknowingly to send mixed messages by not acting upon their convictions (Morton & Staggs, 2001; Tonga, 2014).

Researchers have indicated that while it is important for teachers to be politically involved, many teachers consistently abstain from political activities other than voting (National Teachers Association, 2010; Pustka, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Researchers also have cited issues such as lack of time, intense stress involving standardized testing, being uninformed about the issues, and/or a lack of knowledge

regarding how to get involved in politics as contributing factors to the low rates of politically active teachers (Burns, 2007; Journell, 2013; Morton & Staggs, 2001; Weigand, 2006). Even social studies teachers who teach about the political process and the importance of political involvement are only slightly more likely to be politically active than teachers of other content areas (Fowler, 2006; Long & Long, 1974). Yet, researchers have suggested there has been a very small percentage of teachers who do overcome such obstacles and insert themselves in political activity in spite of the many issues that could hold them back (Fowler, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The goal of this study is to attempt to fill a gap in the literature by addressing specifically the motivations of current, social studies teachers who are politically active. The teachers who engage in political activity would be the exception in their field, and this study will include an exploration of the factor or combination of factors that teachers perceive motivate them to participate in politics.

The significance of this study lies in an analysis of the factors that set these social studies teachers who are in the minority apart from those teachers who chose not to be politically involved. While Burns (2007), Lavine (2014), and Morton and Staggs (2001) found that teachers believe that political involvement is important in a democratic government; understanding why some teachers follow through with their political convictions could prove to be useful for teachers and policymakers who are interested in establishing open communication with each other. Exploring why social studies teachers are politically active also is important because the knowledge gained from understanding these teachers' motivating factors in participating in politics would impact policy,

teaching, and learning (Morton & Staggs, 2001; Tonga, 2014). Hearing why social studies teachers in the same field become politically active in spite of facing similar professional and personal challenges could become a motivating factor for other teachers of the same content area to initiate their own political involvement. Having more politically active teachers could enrich the discussions involving education and politics and provide a sense of collective strength and unity among teachers (Morton & Staggs, 2001). If teachers are consulted in the conceptualization of education policy, they may have more of a vested interest in ensuring the policy succeeds due to a key democratic principle; those who participate in the political process being more committed to the success of policy implementation (Fishkin, 2011). Teachers could find themselves having more input in education policy while also teaching about and modeling civic involvement for students who are influenced by their actions (Tonga, 2014).

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used to examine the motivations and perceptions of teachers who were politically active. The goals of this study were to tell the stories of ten secondary, politically active, social studies teachers employed in north Texas public schools and to provide detailed explanations and understandings of how and why these teachers decided to become involved in political activities other than voting (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Male and female social studies teachers participating in the study were current educators with a minimum of three years of teaching experience. The phenomenological tradition of qualitative research was utilized; individuals were encouraged to reflect upon the similar experiences relating to being politically active

(Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). To tell the teachers' stories, I used Heidegger's (1962) assumption that people are able to understand their experiences in the past, present, and future. Teachers were asked to reflect upon what factors influenced their decisions to become politically involved in the past and/or present in addition to how they perceived their political involvement affected or will affect policy and student behavior. Triangulation; peer review; clarifying research bias; member checking; and rich, thick description were used to validate this study (Creswell, 2007).

Collection of Data

The researcher serves as the *instrument* in a qualitative study as it is the researcher who collects the data (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I created an interview protocol that addressed the research questions in order to interview participants and draw conclusions based upon their responses to the questions (Creswell, 2013). I included 13 open-ended interview questions which encourage a semi-structured interview while also allowing the participant to expand their answers as needed to produce a better understanding of their experiences with political activity (Creswell, 2013; Kvale, 1996). A panel of experts made of three people with no involvement in this study reviewed the interview protocol and provided suggestions as to how to amend interview questions to better address the research questions (Creswell, 2013).

The data for this study included responses to the pre-interview questionnaire as well as interview protocol responses, documents, and analytic memos. The pre-interview questionnaire provided background information about each participant including his or her demographic information, education, and professional background (see Appendix B).

One-on-one interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes were conducted at a location of each participant's choosing.

The interview questions allowed the participants to reflect on their political activity, how their political activity has changed over time, and what factors motivated them to become politically active (see Appendix C). The participants also were asked to give their opinions on the importance of civic involvement and how their civic involvement has affected classroom instruction and public policy. The face-to-face interactions (Creswell, 2007) coupled with the casual and conversational tone of the interviews were expected to allow each participant to reflect upon his or her experiences in a comfortable and informal environment (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were recorded so that I could revisit and analyze the entire responses of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Documents were collected and analytical memos will be used in order to tell a detailed story of the participant and their experiences with political involvement (Creswell, 2007). Prior to or following the interview, participants were asked to provide items from their time spent participating in political activities. Items could include but were not limited to copies of legislative testimonies, brochures or pamphlets from a political rally or demonstration, campaign memorabilia, articles of clothing, emails corresponding with legislators or legislative staffers, ticket stubs from a political event, and notes taken during a phone call or meeting with a legislator. Analysis of these documents was expected to provide understanding of the type of political activity with which each participant was involved (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Analytical memos comprised of my reflections regarding the interview responses as well as possible themes that emerged both during the interview and then again during analysis of the transcripts (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2013). Yin (2013) described analytic memos to be made of “hints, clues, and suggestions” that would help interpret the responses in order to draw final conclusions (p. 135). These analytic memos were comprised of (1) personal notes, which included my feelings about the responses; and (2) theoretical notes, which reflected my theories or hypotheses regarding the findings and implications of the data presented in the interview responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Treatment of Data

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that each point made by the teachers was recorded for further analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2007). Analytic memos written during and immediately following the interview and in the margins of the transcribed interviews allowed me to capture initial reactions to and thoughts about the participants’ responses which aided in my understanding and interpretation of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2015). The analytic memos also were used to aid in the formation of codes and hypotheses regarding the interview data (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2015). The documents were used to validate the experiences of the participant while providing additional information regarding the type of political activity in which the participant was involved (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Coding the transcriptions was a critical step in assigning meaning to the responses; coding helped me organize the interview responses into themes (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman’s (1994) steps to coding were

followed throughout the coding process. During *open coding*, meaning will be assigned to categories. In *axial coding*, the interview responses will be organized into categories. Finally, *lean coding* will require themes to be extracted from the categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Upon completing the coding process, I shared my analysis, codes, and themes with the participants to confirm that I correctly understood and expressed their interpretations of experiences as politically active teachers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on my analysis of the participants' responses, I transferred the transcribed interviews, memos, and codes into a document that included information pertaining to the motivating factors that contributed to the teachers' decisions to become politically involved and how the teachers felt that policy and student behavior were shaped by their political involvement (Creswell, 2007).

Definitions of Terms

The following section provides a list of definitions of terms that will be used throughout the study.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is an instrument used to help determine the success of public schools by measuring attendance, grade completion, and standardized test scores (Hall, Wiener, & Carey, 2003). Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001, all American public schools are required to make AYP or risk intense investigations into the procedures and inner workings of schools in order to determine why they are failing (Dever & Carlston, 2009). AYP is used to consider the overall scores of individual students in a school and measure the proficiency rates of student groups

broken into subcategories such as ethnicity and SES (Davidson, Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2015).

Educational Economic Policy Committee (EEPC). The EEPC in Texas makes all of the education policy decisions for the Educational Economic Policy Center (Educational Economic Policy Committee, 2015). While the EEPC works to ensure that Texas is able to compete with other states' educational systems, the EEPC also guarantees that Texas maintains a quality educational system that adequately addresses the demands of modern students and schools (Educational Economic Policy Committee, 2015). The EEPC is comprised of nine members; some of the members are elected by the people and some are appointed by the Texas governor and the Texas Speaker of the House (Educational Economic Policy Committee, 2015).

Extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is a type of individual motivation that is contingent on external influences (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Goals of extrinsically motivated individuals include achieving external outcomes separate from a task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This type of motivation often is associated with some kind of positive reward or negative consequence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). People who are motivated extrinsically to do specific tasks or engage in certain behaviors are enticed with attaining recognition among their professional community or peers (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Paige, 2011). When a person feels compelled to perform a certain task or act in a certain manner, he or she sometimes acts upon his or her feelings begrudgingly or reluctantly if he or she is solely motivated by the

outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Other times a person may attempt a task willingly if he or she believes the promised reward is worth his or her effort (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is an internal feeling or interest that results in an external behavior to fulfill an inner desire or goal (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). Since this type of motivation is derived from within a person's psyche, intrinsic motivation often is associated with self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People who are intrinsically motivated act on internal emotion and often disregard the possibilities of reinforcement and/or recompenses (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation often is linked with both academic achievements and professional success (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001. In 2002, President George W. Bush signed NCLB of 2001, which was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Davidson et al., 2015; Terry, 2010). The primary goals of NCLB were to (a) improve student performance, (b) reduce achievement gaps between students, and (c) meet 100% proficiency on student assessments by 2014 (Davidson et al., 2015; Terry, 2010). In effect, NCLB represented a transition in education policy to incorporate state assessments into federal funding distribution in order to hold schools and students accountable for student knowledge (Vinovksis, 2009). Under NCLB, federal Title I funds were directly tied to students' state assessment scores (Davidson et al., 2015). These monetary rewards were determined by having students take state-designed, standardized tests to ensure students had mastered content objectives in math and English language arts (ELA) (Davidson et al., 2015). Although NCLB of 2001 was a federal mandate,

states maintained some autonomy by determining the standards and creating the assessments (Choi, 2011; Davidson et al., 2015). NCLB has been under intense scrutiny since its implementation due to its reliance on standardized tests to determine the distribution of federal funding (Davidson et al., 2015).

Political participation. Political participation is a major component of a democracy (Mayer, 2011). It is difficult for countries with democratic governments to be effective if citizens are not actively engaged in the political process and decision making (Mayer, 2011; Verba et al., 1993). The definition of political participation is divided into two parts: (1) political participation is a way for private citizens to hold their government accountable for policy decisions (Verba & Nie, 1972) and (2) political participation is a manner through which private citizens can influence public policy for personal or group interests (Milbreth & Goel, 1977). In American democracy, political participation can take the form of any or all of the following activities: petitioning, protesting at or attending a demonstration, writing letters to a government official, voting, answering hotline phone calls, and attending community events (Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991).

State Board of Education (SBOE). In Texas, the SBOE meets quarterly in Austin, Texas (TEA, 2016b). The SBOE is responsible for establishing policies and standards for public schools in Texas, designating curriculum expectations and standards, analyzing and deciding which materials should be used for instruction, setting requirements for graduation, and allocating public school funds (TEA, 2016b).

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). STAAR is a statewide, content exam designed to increase rigor and raise testing standards in Texas

(TEA, 2012). The STAAR exam requires schools to administer end-of-course exams in designated subjects. The required, tested content areas have changed since its implementation in the spring semester of 2012. As of 2016, the following tested areas are reading and math in grades three through eight, writing in grades four and seven, science in grades five and eight, and social studies in grade eight. English I, English II, Algebra I, biology, and U.S. history are the required exams in grades nine through 12 (TEA, 2016c).

Standardized tests. Throughout history, standardized tests have served as a way to gauge student achievement and overall, schoolwide performances (May & Sanders, 2013). While the United States public education system was still in its infancy, the American public pleaded for reform in hopes of challenging young students to perform to the best of their abilities (Gallagher, 2003). In 1845, Horace Mann administered the first standardized test in the Boston public schools with the intention of raising the bar of student expectations (Gallagher, 2003). Standardized tests are comprised of the same questions and are expected to be given to all students under the same conditions (Popham, 1999). The uniformity of standardized tests is important because it is seen as the most efficient way to compare student achievement and school district scores (Wilde, 2004).

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). From 1994-2002, Texas used TAAS as the primary state assessment and accountability scale (Lorence, 2010). Similar to its successor, TAKS, TAAS was criterion-referenced, and it tested on grade level, subject content (Jennings & Beveridge, 2009; Lorence, 2010). While overall school

accountability ratings were accessible to the public, students' individual scores were only made available to teachers, parents, and students (Lorence, 2010).

Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). TABS was the first statewide, high-stakes assessment that held school districts and students in Texas accountable for their performance (Cruse & Twing, 2000). The introduction of this standardized test marked the shift from norm-referenced exams to criterion-referenced exams (Cruse & Twing, 2000; Texas Education Agency, 1984). TABS required students in grades 3, 5, and 9 through 12 to demonstrate their proficiency in mathematics, reading, and writing (Austin Independent School District, 1983; TEA, 1984). This measurement of school and student achievement was used in Texas from 1980-1985. Student results were made available to the public beginning in 1983.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). When it replaced TAAS in 2003, TAKS was considered a criterion-referenced, high-stakes test (Corcoran, Jennings, & Beveridge, 2011; Jennings & Beveridge, 2009). Students and schools in Texas were held accountable for passing and failing scores (Corcoran et al., 2011; Jennings & Beveridge, 2009). Students and school districts received financial aid as well as statewide recognition for passing scores (Jennings & Beveridge, 2011). Students who failed TAKS in grades 3 or 5 were held back while students in secondary grades were forced to take the test until they passed in order to graduate (Jennings & Beveridge, 2009). TAKS was replaced by STAAR in 2012 (TEA, 2016).

Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS). In the 1985-1986 academic year, TEAMS was instituted in response to complaints that TABS was not

sufficiently rigorous (Austin Independent School District, 1987; TEA, 2010). Texas students in grades 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 were required to take this criterion-referenced assessment (Austin Independent School District, 1987). TEAMS was the first statewide assessment in Texas that implemented an exit-level exam (Austin Independent School District, 1987). Students in grade 11 were required to pass TEAMS in order to receive a high school diploma (Austin Independent School District, 1987; TEA, 2010). TEAMS was replaced by TAAS in 1994 (Lorence, 2010).

Texas Education Agency (TEA). TEA is an organization that makes decisions regarding standards and accountability for public primary and secondary schools in Texas (The Texas Tribune, 2016). Other TEA responsibilities include deciding which textbooks to use for each content area, supervising curriculum writing and planning across Texas, making decisions regarding Texas state assessments, using the state accountability system to rate and compare schools, and overseeing state and federal fund allocation (About TEA, 2016).

Limitations

In this study I sought to address the motives and perceived impact of politically active, secondary, social studies teachers in northern Texas public schools. While Texas is a large state with a diverse population (Campbell, 2003), Texas teachers do not represent teachers in every state of the United States. Additionally, North Texas teachers do not represent all teachers in the state of Texas.

Delimitations

Participants included only secondary, social teachers in public schools who have participated in political activities other than voting. Only current teachers in north Texas were interviewed. Teachers in this study must have taught for a minimum of three years. In addition, I focused on teachers in north Texas, which further contributed to limiting the scope of this research since north Texas teachers also are not representative of all teachers in Texas. Another delimitation of this study was that it excluded elementary teachers and teachers of other subjects and focused solely on secondary, social studies teachers.

Assumptions

Since I gathered data through interviews, important assumptions were made in this study. I assumed that each participant was being honest in discussing his or her levels of and experiences with political activity. In interpreting participants' responses, I assumed that the participants did what they said and did not participate in more or less political activity than what they stated. This study included the requirement that the participants not only remembered what they did, but also how they felt. I assumed that each participant accurately remembered events and feelings. Finally, I assumed that the participants understood the purpose of this study and the accompanying interview questions.

Role and Background of the Researcher

Qualitative research sometimes raises questions of reliability due to potential researcher bias that can interfere with objectivity (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

However, in the interest of attempting to explain potential biases and my role within the study, this section will briefly address my interaction with and interest in exploring this research topic.

In 2007, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science. I immediately began working on a Master's of Arts Degree in Education. After completing my coursework, I began my career in education teaching world history at a Title I high school. The position enabled me to combine my passion for social studies and education. When I began teaching, the general understanding was that TAAKS soon was going to be phased out and replaced with a more rigorous standardized exam. It was not until 2010 that school personnel knew details about and implications of STAAR. Being a Title I school meant that teachers and administrators had to ensure that certain preparatory measures were in place for this new, more rigorous assessment as the school had a significant population labeled *at risk*. As the world history curriculum liaison for my district, my summer of 2010 was spent at the district's central administration office rewriting the world history curriculum and creating assessments to be used by each district high school for each unit of the year. Since world history was a sophomore-level course and the first year of social studies to be tested was freshman geography, we had a transition year in which we could pilot the new curriculum and address any issues before students were tested on the STAAR standards.

STAAR standards changed again when the number of required exams for graduation was cut from 12 to 5. Teachers who were bothered by this change were encouraged to contact our legislators and voice our concerns. I was frustrated that all of

the work I had done with other teachers to prepare for the new standards seemed to have been for nothing, as our subject was no longer tested. I was frustrated and found myself discussing my feelings with other teachers about the swift pendulum swings between testing and no testing. I was making valid points; I just was not making them to the right people.

During my time as a doctoral student, I enrolled in a class that required us to travel to Austin, Texas, to meet with legislators from around Texas to discuss education policy. I began the trip with the assumption that policymakers drafted education policy with little thought given to the educators who would be responsible for ensuring the policies were successful in the schools. However, it soon became very clear to me that, through meeting with education policy leaders and their staffs in the Texas state congress, these legislators had the teachers' and schools' best interest in mind. The legislators collectively expressed that they would love to hear from more teachers, yet they rarely are contacted by those who are the most affected by their enacted, education policies. Teachers do contact them, yet the percentage of teachers who have contacted the policymakers is very small.

Because of my personal and professional background experiences, I have reflected on the important, potential relationship between policymakers and teachers. I decided to explore the motivating factors and perceptions of teachers who are politically active. The findings in this study will be used to provide valuable insight into understanding why some teachers deem political involvement worth the time and effort. The conclusions of this study are expected to assist me in helping teachers realize their

potential strength in influencing education policy since open communication between policymakers and teachers is important to education.

Organization of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes a discussion of the impact of education policy on schools, teachers, and students and why it is important for educators to be involved in the decision-making process when considering policies that directly affect their profession. This chapter includes the foundation for the study and a brief description of the procedures for conducting the research, limitations, and key terms. Cognitive mobilization theory is introduced as the theoretical lens through which this study will be analyzed. Contained in Chapter 2 are relevant literature that centers on teacher disposition, political behaviors of the general population, and teachers' roles in politics. Each section of the literature review is broken into subsections that serve to provide context and further background behind the central focus of the study involving the motivations of politically active teachers. In Chapter 2, I also explain that while there are many studies about teachers who believe in the importance of political activity yet refrain from participating in politics, minimal attention has been given to exploring the reasons behind a teacher's decision to become politically involved. Chapter 3 includes details about the qualitative method of the study including how participants will be selected, how data will be gathered and interpreted, and how findings will be validated. Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the study. Chapter 4 begins with an introduction to the ten participants which includes a brief personal and education history as well as a description of each participants' feelings regarding the importance of political activity.

The rest of Chapter 4 contains the four themes and 15 subthemes that developed as a result of this study. Finally, a discussion and interpretation of the results as well as implications for research, practice, and theory is presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The connection between education and politics is often felt strongly by teachers; teachers are responsible for implementing legislative mandates in the classroom (Burns, 2007; Lee, 2006). However, political involvement among teachers is low, which indicates that there is disconnect between legislators who draft initiatives and teachers who implement education policy in the classroom (Pustka, 2012; The National Teacher Association, 2010). Even if social studies teachers emphasize the importance of participation in democratic governments, Lavine (2014) argued they are not more likely to engage in political activity than teachers of other content areas. Chapters 1 and 3 outlined how this study will use a phenomenological approach to study the motivating factors of teachers who have chosen to become politically involved. Interviews will be conducted to explore motivations of politically active teachers as well to analyze how teachers' perceptions of citizenship duties impact their behaviors inside and outside of the classroom. The interviews will be transcribed, coded, and organized into themes in order to understand the motivations and behaviors of teachers who are in the minority based on their greater levels of political involvement.

In this chapter, existing research pertaining to the motivations of politically involved, social studies teachers will be explored. The review of the literature is divided into three sections: (1) teacher dispositions, (2) political behaviors, and (3) teachers and politics. As a person's disposition affects his or her actions (Sockett, 2009), the first section includes a discussion of how teacher dispositions affect classroom teaching

practices and style. Background information about why teachers act in certain ways or make particular decisions will provide a foundation upon which the rest of the study is built.

The second section in this chapter includes a discussion pertaining to which individuals in the general population are most likely to be active politically based on personal attributes such as education levels, religious affiliations, gender, race, marital status, and socioeconomic status. I will explore reasons why individuals who chose not to participate in politics have made the decision to refrain from political activity. The final segment of this section will include a discussion of the levels of political involvement of multiple segments of the American population and how the levels of political involvement have changed over time.

The third section includes an analysis of the political participation rates of teachers, literature regarding teachers' personal political beliefs, and the extent to which these beliefs should be shared with students. The importance of teachers and politicians participating in an ongoing, open dialogue about what works in classrooms will be explored so that stakeholders can be better informed about both education and politics. This section also will include literature pertaining to how teachers become more politically active.

Teacher Dispositions

In order to understand better what motivates teacher behaviors, it is important to review existing, key points in the literature regarding teacher disposition. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) defined disposition as a “trait

or characteristic that is embedded in temperament and disposes a person toward certain choices and experiences that can shape his or her future” (NCATE, 2006, p. 30). Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007) explained how NCATE’s adoption of this definition sparked a debate among those involved in education regarding how dispositions influence teacher behaviors. Borko et al. focused primarily on how dispositions should be considered in teacher preparation programs to maximize teacher performance in the classroom. The authors concluded that there is empirical evidence on both sides as to whether or not a teacher’s disposition affects his or her classroom effectiveness; therefore, teacher preparation programs should consider teacher disposition when designing program materials for teachers of all grade levels (Borko et al., 2007).

Teacher disposition is an integral part of the discussion about teacher motivations; this issue has dominated the literature pertaining to teacher traits and effectiveness. This study will include an exploration of how a teacher’s disposition may inspire him or her to take political action regarding legislative policies that would directly impact his or her role as a teacher. The existing literature indicated that personality traits act as an umbrella that covers a person’s disposition as well as his or her actions (Sockett, 2009). Sockett (2009) divided human behavior into five, separate classifications: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. A person may or may not be aware of his or her personality traits, yet awareness leads to a better understanding of why he or she acts in a certain way in different situations and circumstances (Sockett, 2009). Dispositions, however, are more constricted than personality traits and generally embody three characteristics (Sockett, 2009). One

characteristic is for a person to engage actively in and with his or her environment as opposed to existing passively. The second characteristic is to possess a level of awareness of an action. The last characteristic is to act with a self-defined intention (Sockett, 2009). Specifically, a person's internal disposition motivates him or her to be aware of his or her actions as he or she is engaging in certain behaviors or practices. It is important to understand these aspects of disposition when discussing how such characteristics are applied to teachers. If a disposition is not recognized as premeditated and deliberate, then it would be difficult to comprehend how a teacher could understand motivations guiding his or her actions in and out of the classroom (Sockett, 2009). Sockett also explained how a disposition is not a solitary entity but rather a person's pre-thought to an action deemed appropriate in the context of any given situation.

Some researchers have suggested that teachers are likely to be influenced to act in a certain manner or participate in certain activities based upon their moral convictions that are reflections of their dispositions (Damon, 2007; Diez, 2007; Oja & Reiman, 2007; Wasicsko, 2007). According to Damon (2007), a teacher's disposition is engrained in his or her internal psyche, and he or she is predisposed to making certain decisions or acting in a certain way that would provide a window into his or her character. Diez (2007) also discussed how teacher dispositions are instilled in their character, yet they can be altered with exposure to new and different experiences. Wasicsko (2007) explained, "Core attitudes, values, and belief systems that lie beneath teacher behaviors and characteristics, such as self-concept, seeing students as able, a people-centered orientation, and so forth" (p. 54). Oja and Reiman (2007) expanded the notion of teacher character development by

stating, “Development is not automatic. Development occurs when there is optimal interaction with the environment” (p. 95). While these authors were addressing specifically how teachers could further perfect their practices and areas of expertise in the classroom, understanding how teacher dispositions are related to internal character and how disposition affects external action is important in order to narrow the lens and focus on what motivates teachers to become politically active in policies that directly affect education.

Political Participation

Determining who is participating in politics among the general population is the first point of interest that is explored before reviewing the existing research on teachers who are politically active. First, the trends in political participation across time are analyzed. Second, the literature is used to select and explore subcategories of the population such as education levels, gender, race, religion, and age in order to provide a more clear understanding of what helps or hinders a citizen from participating in politics.

Status of Political Participation

When dissecting a concept as complex as political participation, it is first necessary to assess the levels at which people participate in politics. Although there have been numerous fluctuations of the data since the 1970s, in 2006 the National Conference on Citizenship (NCC) reported that the overall number of those actively participating in the political process had declined (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006).

Researchers from the NCC examined data from 1975-1998 and reported a sharp decrease

in the numbers of those who were politically active (NCC, 2006). The authors of the report from the NCC indicated,

Despite some signs of hope, most indicators are on the decline. Trust in one another has steadily declined over the last 30 years; connections to civic and religious groups are consistently down; people are less connected to family and friends and more Americans are living alone; people are less well informed about public affairs; and our trust and connection to key institutions have been largely on the decline. (p. 5)

Political scientists have noted that political participation typically increases after a national crisis (NCC, 2006; Salisbury, 1975). For example, the years immediately following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, saw a rise in volunteering, especially among younger citizens. However, volunteering is just one of many aspects of political participation, and the rise in volunteer rates was not sustained throughout the decade (NCC, 2006). Another area that has seen a slight rise in political participation is voter turnout for presidential elections (Hansford & Gomez, 2010; NCC, 2006). In order to understand fully this statistic, it is necessary to note that, in general, more people vote in federal elections than in local elections. Voter participation is cyclical and wanes in non-federal election years (Hansford & Gomez, 2010; NCC, 2006). Overall, the NCC report painted a picture of Americans as *spectators* in a system that was designed for active participants. Since a democracy operates under the assumption that people can and will participate in various parts of the political process (not just voting), then over time citizens have failed to meet America's democratic requirements (NCC, 2006).

In addition to voter turnout, researchers have analyzed motivating factors behind a person's decision to be politically active or refrain from some or all types of political activity (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993). Verba et al. (1993) described how even though political participation is necessary in a democracy, citizens have the freedom to be as inactive as they wish. The authors referred to this as *voluntary abstention*, and posited that it was a possible explanation as to why some citizens choose to refrain from political activity (Verba et al., 1993). Understanding *why* some decide to abstain from political participation is worth reviewing on a deeper level as it directly impacts the purpose of this study. Verba et al. (1993) stated,

If some citizens opt not to take part in politics because they do not care about public affairs, then there is less reason for concern if their views do not receive proportionate attention from political elites. But if they do not take part because they lack the resources that facilitate political activity, then these departures from the norm of political equality may pose a more serious challenge to democracy.
(p. 456)

Reviewing the literature pertaining to hindrances or factors that promote a person's level of political participation is important because it provides explanations of the population not analyzed in this study. Researchers have analyzed political participants' motivations or obstacles that interfere with political activity (Tam Cho & Rudolph, 2008), and these factors will be explored further in the following subsections.

Education. Researchers have focused on education and whether or not it plays a significant role in political participation (Mayer, 2011). The NCC (2006) asserted the

importance of education on political activism by stating, “One of the most dramatic divides in civic health is dependent upon levels of education” (p. 10). The organization’s observation was that people who have a college degree were more likely to interact with their local community through political action or civic engagement (NCC, 2006). Verba et al. (1993) and Putnam (1995) also found a connection between education and political activity. Putnam described the relationship between education and political participation by stating, “Highly educated people are much more likely to be joiners and trusters, partly because they are better off economically, but mostly because of the skills, resources, and inclinations that were imparted to them at home and in school” (p. 667). Putnam ventured so far as to say that education is the strongest predictor of political involvement. While these claims later were called into question by other researchers (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), those who argued the importance of education in determining levels of political participation among citizens supported their claims by referencing ways in which education can help develop skills utilized in political involvement (Putnam, 1995; Verba et al., 1993).

Verba et al. (1993) conducted a survey with a large sample of American participants in order to measure levels of voluntary political participation. One finding was that the level of education an individual had completed affected his or her level of political participation because being educated offers certain advantages and opportunities in society that promote and foster the development of useful skills in the political arena. For example, those who are educated are more likely to be able to speak and write with persuasion, clear focus, and intent. These skills are vital to those who are participating in

or want to participate in the political process; writing letters, presenting speeches, and taking a stand all are helpful strategies when trying to impact policy making and/or policymakers (Verba et al., 1993). Those with a higher level of education also are better able to adapt to their surroundings and navigate through different organizational settings. Likewise, participating in politics requires that a person knows his or her environment, role in that environment, and how to work with others within that environment (Verba et al., 1993). Those who obtain a college degree are more likely to be involved in politics because education promotes political awareness as well as the skills necessary to influence the political process (Verba et al., 1993).

While Verba et al.'s (1993) study and findings implicated a strong connection between education and political participation, not all researchers have concurred with their interpretation of education's influence on political involvement. Kam and Palmer (2008) agreed with Verba et al. (1993) and the NCC's (2006) statement regarding how education affects political participation, however the researchers offered a different explanation based upon their own empirical analysis. Kam and Palmer drew on existing literature regarding how education affects political participation and conducted an empirical analysis to challenge previous findings. Their study indicated that it was not education per se, but rather *pre-adult characteristics* that were more likely to be the root cause of a person's motivation to participate politically in his or her respective community (Kam & Palmer, 2008). According to Kam and Palmer, politically active people chose to be so based on their innate personality traits rather than their educational background. Kam and Palmer explained that their assessment required, "a reconsideration

of how scholars interpret the empirical relationship between higher education and participation: that higher education is not cause, but proxy” (p. 613). The foundation of their argument was based upon the similarities between intrinsic motivators to achieve a degree of higher education and participate in politics. According to Kam and Palmer, “parental characteristics, individual abilities, and predispositions” (p. 612) are identified as vital to an individual’s want to pursue an education as well as his or her drive to be active politically within his or her community. Therefore, one does not (and cannot) cause the other as education and political participation build on each other to influence a person’s attitudes and subsequent actions (Kam & Palmer, 2008).

Kam and Palmer (2008) were neither the first nor the only ones to question the effect education has on political participation. Nie et al. (1996) posited that people with more education are more likely to find themselves with skills valuable to politics working in careers and professional communities that promote both political awareness and involvement. Yet, they also agreed with Kam and Palmer when they argued that education is not necessarily a cause of political involvement (Nie et al., 1996). According to Nie et al., there is nothing embedded in education that is linked directly to political participation; education is more of an indirect means through which people can develop certain skills that would be useful when participating in politics. Education also provides people with an opportunity to interact professionally with others who also are more likely to be politically active (Nie et al., 1996).

The implications of Kam and Palmer (2008)’s study challenged many researchers’ claims that education is the most important factor in determining political participation.

While Kam and Palmer did not discredit the work of researchers of this subject such as Verba et al. (1993), they questioned the level of importance placed on education as well as the role education plays in determining political participation. As Kam and Palmer shed doubt on some studies, Mayer (2011) questioned the validity of the data presented in Kam and Palmer's study. Mayer acknowledged that there still were many questions about education's impact on political participation, and the understanding remains *clouded*, at best. Proponents for both sides of the argument backed their findings with empirical data indicating the need for further study of the topic (Kam & Palmer, 1993; Mayer, 2011; Verba et al., 1993).

Race and ethnicity. In striving to portray accurately the general characteristics and motivations of political participants, it is important to note how a person's race or ethnicity affects his or her likelihood of political participation. While historically minority populations (Blacks, Latinos/as, and Asians) have made significant progress in terms of becoming politically involved in some way, empirical researchers have shown that from the 1960s to the early 1990s, Whites have had the highest levels of political activity (Verba et al., 1993). Verba et al. (1993) offered two explanations for this trend. First, even though the education disparity was not as dramatic as in years preceding the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, levels of education completed still were higher on average for Whites than Blacks (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013; Verba et al., 1993). Second, Blacks and other minorities may have been deterred from contacting a political official (Verba et al., 1993). The composition of Congress has consistently featured White males as the majority of office holders (Tausanovitch & Warshaw, 2013); Blacks

and other minorities may not have communicated directly with members of congress because it often required them to go outside certain innate comfort zones and converse with someone of a different race who holds a position of political power (Verba et al., 1993). Data indicated that by the end of 2010, voting rates were not drastically different between Blacks and Whites (Logan, Darrah, & Oh, 2012). However, in terms of other modes of political participation, researchers have shown that Blacks were more likely to participate in protests while Whites were more likely to contact political officials or testify at political hearings (Verba et al., 1993). Policymakers have encouraged the Black community to vote in general and midterm elections in spite of historical obstacles and other hindrances that produce lower voter turnout numbers among Blacks than Whites (Logan et al., 2012).

When considering other minority populations, the issue of how race and ethnicity affect political participation becomes more complicated. The topic of education was revisited in the literature from a racial and ethnic perspective through Citrin and Highton's (2002) study of trends among California's White, Black, and Latino/a populations. Among these groups, "a relatively small set of background factors—age, educational attainment, income, and residential stability—account for most of the turnout differences" (Citrin & Highton, 2002, p. iii). Citrin and Highton posited that if Whites, Blacks, and Latinos/as in California had the same education level and social status, the voter turnout rates would not vary between the racial groups. Socioeconomic status and education were important factors in political participation in California. This was supported by finding a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and political

participation in addition to a positive correlation between education and political participation in Whites, Blacks, and Latinos/as (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Jackson, 2011).

Historically, lower political participation rates among the Latino/a populations reflected lower citizenship rates as well as lower socioeconomic status (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Jackson, 2011). Asians often have had even lower political participation rates than Latinos/as and, unlike Latinos/as, their lower rates cannot be explained by a lower socioeconomic status (Citrin & Highton, 2002, Lien, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to examine what is happening within the Asian community that would yield the lowest rates of these listed groups.

There is a sense of commonality between Latinos/as and Asians in terms of first generation immigrant status; Citrin and Highton (2002) stated, “Political participation helps immigrants become accepted as members of the political community and provides representation for the racial and ethnic groups to which they belong” (p. 5). Therefore, as immigrants become citizens of the United States, they are generally encouraged to become politically active in order to give their racial and ethnic groups a voice in policy making.

Another issue of importance as reflected in the literature was the concept of *nativity* (Logan et al., 2012). Although some researchers have confirmed that Latinos/as vote in higher numbers than Asians (Jackson, 2011), this claim has been disputed in some cases because it did not take into account the amount of time spent in the United States or the amount of time spent as a legal U.S. citizen. In other words, voter turnout among these groups is *conditional* on how long an immigrant has been in the United States as a

citizen recognized by the government (Logan et al., 2012). Central to this point is the acknowledgement and understanding that among Black, White, Latino/a, and Asian immigrants, the Latino/a voter turnout rate is almost as high as Black immigrants', while Latinos/as vote in higher numbers than White and/or Asian immigrants (Hero, Garcia, Garcia, & Pachon, 2000; Logan et al., 2012). One explanation is that more and more ballots are being produced in Spanish as well as English whereas other native, non-English languages of White, Black, and Asian immigrants are not represented on ballots nationwide (Logan et al., 2012). Whatever the reason, the longer an immigrant has lived in the United States, the more likely he or she is to exercise his or her right to vote (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Logan et al., 2012).

One of the obstacles to being politically active that Latinos/as encounter is the language barrier (Hero et. al., 2000; Panagopolous & Green, 2011; Verba et al., 1993). To understand fully what is happening in American politics, it is helpful to be proficient in English. Those who are not fluent in English may find it difficult to understand American politics (as well as voting ballots) well enough to vote on a given issue (Hero et al., 2000; Panagopolous & Green, 2011; Verba et al., 1993). Hero et al. (2000) and Verba et al. (1993) found that very few Latinos/as who were not fluent in English contacted American public officials because they lacked the confidence in their communication skills and they felt unprepared to draft a formal letter to a policymaker. While being exposed to political situations has been found to increase a person's likelihood of being politically active, researchers have shown that Latinos/as do not often find themselves in situations that would equip them with skills deemed useful in the

American political arena. Therefore, they are less likely to acquire the knowledge about American politics as well as the confidence to get involved in any capacity (Hero et al., 2000; Verba et al., 1993).

Whatever the reason, the overall trend was that Whites were the most politically active, Blacks were just below Whites in levels of political activity, and Latinos/as were considered the least politically active of the three groups (Verba et al., 1993). Verba et al. (1993) posited that this disparity in rates of political participation among different, demographic groups can be “Attributed almost entirely to the unequal political resources at their disposal rather than to rational abstention” (p. 494). The authors alluded to various reasons for the disproportions between racial groups, but the rankings of the groups in terms of most politically active to least politically active remained the same (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Logan et al., 2012; Verba et al., 1993). Verba et al. (1993) discussed how this imbalance could negatively affect these groups:

Whether the disparities in participatory resources result from social class difference associated with race and ethnicity or from attributes more fundamental to group identity does not change the fact that policy makers are hearing less from groups with distinctive needs and concerns arising from their social class and group status. (p. 495)

The implications of this prove to be problematic for Blacks and Latinos/as since the populations of these two groups are rising, yet the groups are underrepresented in politics (Jackson, 2011; Verba et al., 1993).

Religion. When determining the role religion plays in a person's motivation to become politically active, Wald (1987) listed religious motivation, organizational motivation, and social interaction as the three main resources upon which a politically active person might depend. Religious motivation garnered the most attention as some people may feel a moral obligation to act upon their intrinsic, religious beliefs in a political setting in hopes of affecting legislation dealing with a certain issue. Wald described how people may feel an internal drive to act upon legislation dealing with abortion because their inner religiosity motivates them to do so. In this case, the religious world and the secular world impact each other and may even cause people to unite for or against a candidate or piece of legislation based upon their religious convictions (Wald, 1987). Harris (1994) and Verba et al. (1993) provided empirical support for the theory that those who choose to be politically active as well as active in their church or place of worship overwhelmingly do so because of an innate sense of moral obligation to impact the secular and religious spheres simultaneously. Djupe and Grant (2001) echoed this when they stated, "Religious people are likely to be involved in politics if their political activity becomes infused with religious motivations and symbols" (p. 310).

Organizational motivation has been an often-studied topic of researchers trying to determine the effects of religion on political participation (Djupe & Grant, 2001; Greenburg, 2000; Harris, 1994; Robnett & Bany, 2011; Verba et al., 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Greenburg (2000) and Wald (1987) described how a person may be inspired to become politically active through organizational motivation because a church or religious institution is a type of organization that can hone a person's skills that

are deemed important in the political world. Churches offer people the opportunity to serve on a council and represent other members of the congregation (Greenburg, 2000; Wald, 1987). Churches also foster an environment in which other politically relevant qualities can be developed such as working with others, managing a budget, giving speeches, writing with a clear focus, and fact finding (Verba et al., 1993; Wald, 1987).

Djupe and Grant (2001) and Greenburg (2000) questioned the notion of Greenburg, Verba et al. (1993), and Wald (1987) that religion acts as an organizational motivation for political involvement. Djupe and Grant's study found that "church gained civic skills do not increase political participation" (p. 310). Djupe and Grant added, "Opportunity to gain civic skills in church is superfluous and becomes a chance merely to practice skills gained elsewhere" (p. 310). Their findings directly challenged Verba et al.'s (1993) findings that church involvement did not serve as much of a motivational factor of political activity, but as more of an outlet for people to practice their civic skills learned somewhere else (Djupe & Grant, 2001).

Wald's final resource for political participation was social interaction; it highlighted the fact that in churches, religion offers people an opportunity to engage with each other socially. Since social interaction was found to encourage political participation, Greenburg (2000) and Wald argued that this was the perfect social environment to instigate a political movement due to the fact that churches generally host at least one meeting each week with various opportunities for social events in between. Harris (1994) reported a positive correlation between church attendance and voter turnout. Wald posited that regularly attending church promoted voter turnout because

people adopted a sense of *obligation* to perform their duties as citizens, and this sentiment was likely to spread throughout the social atmosphere of a church. While the connection between church attendance and voter turnout is quantifiable, Harris noted that the number of active, church going political participants was not as substantial when considering other forms of political participation such as working on campaigns, giving speeches, attending a rally, or signing a petition.

After acknowledging the debate on how church attendance affects political activity, Djupe and Grant (2001) shifted focus to look specifically at churchgoers who were politically active in hopes of gaining insight as to the reasons behind their choices. They found that those congregants who were aware of their church's stance on political issues were 8% more likely to participate in politics (Djupe & Grant, 2001). To support this finding, Djupe and Grant alluded to the social aspect of church as described by Wald (1987) and how social connectivity affected political participation (Greenburg, 2000). While uncommon, Djupe and Grant found that churches that delivered more political messages when church members were gathered together for worship or for a social activity were more likely to have congregants who were politically active. If a person chose to be active in his or her church with the motivation of influencing politics, then he or she was more likely to become involved in politics because his or her political involvement would be seen as a *natural extension* of his or her church involvement (Djupe & Grant, 2001).

When analyzing religious factors that did not have a substantial effect on political participation, Djupe and Grant (2001) found that a person's religious customs (for

example, their denominations/affiliations) had minimal effects on the levels at which they were politically active. Djupe and Grant explained how Evangelicals and Protestants were slightly less likely to be involved in politics, mainly because the two denominations seemed to emphasize a more religious focus on activity than a political focus. Verba et al. (1995) also suggested that religious denomination might qualify as a predictor for political involvement, yet other researchers such as Becker and Dhingra (2001) refuted their arguments concerning denominational importance. There also were conflicting studies regarding the role of Catholic traditions in political participation. Coffe and Bolzendahl (2010) wrote that Catholics were less likely to be politically engaged; Ruiter and DeGraaf (2006) stated that Catholics were more likely to be politically engaged. Those who were both politically and religiously active cited that their motivations for political involvement were derived from a feeling that political participation was a *natural extension* for religious participation. Djupe and Grant recognized that religion could affect a person's motivation to engage in political activity, but that it did not play as important of a role as argued by Verba et al. (1993).

Religion and race. Researchers also have highlighted how religion and race work together to affect political participation (Harris, 1994; McClerking & McDaniel, 2005). Black churches once discouraged political involvement, citing the view that *turning the other cheek* was a more moral way to handle political and social injustices forced upon them due to their race (Harris, 1994). Pre-Civil Rights Movement Blacks were encouraged to turn inward and rely on their faith in the face of adversity instead of turning outward to rely on political activity (Harris, 1994). During the years of and

following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Black churches began encouraging their members to vote for civil rights issues (Greenburg, 2000; Harris, 1994; McClerking & McDaniel, 2005).

Reporting on a study on Black church members, McClerking and McDaniel (2005) and Harris (1994) posited that there was enough evidence to support the claim that religion served as a political mobilizer rather than as a political deterrent. The findings of the study echoed previous findings that there was a positive correlation between church attendance and regularity of voting for Blacks and for Whites (Harris, 1994; Verba et al., 1993). Harris highlighted the importance of religion as it applied to race:

The path models linking dimensions of religious involvement with modes of political action support the view that both for whites and for blacks religion performs as a resource for political action but in different ways. Both organizationally and psychologically, religious beliefs and practices promote religious involvement. (p. 5)

While Djupe and Grant (2001) questioned the impact membership in and experience with religious organizations within a church had on political participation, Harris concluded that among Blacks and Whites, being involved in a church directly prepares members for political activity. Having such contradictory data impacts the ability of researchers to draw significant conclusions. The findings indicated a need for further research (Djupe & Grant, 2001; Harris, 1994).

Gender. When considering gender, researchers have shown that men participate in politics more often than women (Putnam, 1995; Robnett & Bany, 2011; Verba, Burns,

& Schlozman, 1997). Even when controlling for educational attainment and household income, men are more likely than women to be politically active (Kittilson, 2010; Robnett & Bany, 2011). Robnett and Bany (2011) cited gender as one of the most substantial predictors of political participation. Verba et al. (1997) hypothesized that the gender gap in political participation that they explored in their study was not as much a gap in ability as it was a gap in interest. This lack of interest (as well as institutional barriers still in place in spite of progressive, gender reforms) could be reflected in the overrepresentation of men in positions of political power (Kittilson, 2010; Verba et al., 1997). In spite of researchers' suggestions that women have been pigeonholed into traditional gender roles, Verba et al. (1997) held on to their claim that the general lack of women's interest in politics was more of a reflection of women's choices than a reflection of their insufficient abilities.

Robnett and Bany (2011) concluded that in almost every aspect of political involvement, women were less likely to be politically active than their male counterparts. Men were found to be more likely to reach out to a public official, donate money to a political campaign, and participate in protests and/or marches. The one exception was in the category of signing a petition; Robnett and Bany found that men and women had the same chances of feeling driven to participate in the activity. The inconsistencies across genders were the same among men and women, even when accounting for differences in income, education, and age (Robnett & Bany, 2011).

Kittilson (2010) and Verba et al. (1997) suggested the reason behind the gender gap in political involvement could be due to the fact that participating in politics has

traditionally been a male-dominated activity. Due to the impact of such *gender socialization*, Verba et al. (1997) posited that women were found to be less knowledgeable about politics than men, and that historically women have been inhibited by their lack of knowledge regarding political issues (Robnett & Bany, 2011). Verba et al. (1997)'s study offered several explanations for this historical trend in the second half of the 20th century. First, men seemed to be more interested in national and local politics than women. Second, men were reported to be more likely to interject political discussion into daily, casual conversations. Third, while women were just as likely to watch the news as men, men were more likely to interact with other news media outlets such as the newspaper or public access television channels that regularly broadcast political events from the local community (Verba et al., 1997).

Putnam (1995) also referenced explanations related to gender socialization in his explanation of political participation in regard to gender. The post-World War II generation witnessed women entering the workforce in greater numbers than the previous generation. More women were being exposed to politics and politically relevant issues in the workplace. While the entire population had experienced an overall downward trend in political involvement in the last 40 years of the 20th century, the number of politically active women with full-time jobs did not drop as much as the number of politically active women who were not active members of the workforce. Therefore, while men participated in politics in higher numbers than women, working women participated in politics more than non-working women (Putnam, 1995).

Gender and race. While researchers have supported and refuted various claims on the impact of race and gender on different civic activities, their findings have supported the claim that race plays a key role in determining levels of political participation (Robnett & Bany, 2011). In Robnett and Bany's (2011) study, Black men participated in politics at a higher rate than Black women. The explanation that was offered dealt with the role that the Black church played in politics. The Black church proved to be an important factor in political participation in regard to gender, as church involvement was tied to political involvement for men more than women (Robnett & Bany, 2011).

After establishing that church attendance had an effect on Black male and Black female political involvement, Robnett and Bany (2011) narrowed their scope of analysis by examining the different methods of political involvement as it pertained to the different genders and their church participation. While the number of Black women voting in elections was greater than or equal to that of Black men, the researchers ultimately validated the previous studies of researchers who found that Black women were less likely to participate in most other forms of *direct contact activities* such as attending a protest or signing a petition (Robnett & Bany, 2011). Robnett and Bany concluded that while Black women tend to vote at a comparable rate to Black men, they are less likely to engage in other types of political participation that require straight interaction or contact with either the policy or the politician formulating the policy.

Age. While the literature pointed to education as one of the biggest factors in determining a person's level of political participation, age is another factor that researchers have agreed upon as an influential determinant (Putnam, 1995; Salisbury,

1975; Verba et al., 1993). Putnam (1995) and Rosenstone and Hanson (1993) found that older citizens were more likely to be politically active than their younger counterparts. Older citizens have higher voting rates, are more likely to contact their congressmen/women, and more often read the newspaper. This was found to be true across race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Journell (2013). The exception to this was the decrease in political participation rates of citizens 85 and above who claimed transportation and mobility as factors hindering their ability to be politically active (Rosenstone & Hanson, 1993). Journell (2013) stated that adolescent Americans in the early 2000s were less politically active than adolescents from previous generations. Findings from the 2012 U.S. presidential election supported claims of discrepancies in age and political activity; about one half of *eligible voters* between the ages of 18 and 29 did not turn out to vote (Journell, 2013). There also have been disputes about how political activity can look different at different ages, and people may find themselves involved in different activities as they progress through life's various stages (Salisbury, 1975). For example, some people may have been active in marches and protests in their younger years and their political activity evolved into participation in organizations such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as their children entered grade school (Salisbury, 1975). Whatever the motivating factors or shift in activity, Putman posited that age is an agreed upon predictor of political participation because of its relevance to the measured behavior.

Childhood. When determining the likelihood of political activity in adults, it also is necessary to consider their upbringing as many childhood experiences influence a

person's adult behavior (Kam & Palmer, 2008; NCC, 2006). The NCC (2006) reported that American adult behaviors are widely shaped by their adolescent civic experiences. Kam and Palmer (2008) echoed the findings of the NCC and asserted that parental influence is a huge factor in determining whether or not an adult will be politically active. The more a parent values political activity, the more he or she will speak in favor of or model politically active behaviors for his or her children (Kam & Palmer, 2008). Children who hear the positive sentiments toward political activities and see that these sentiments transform into actions are more likely to adopt similar beliefs and practices (Kam & Plamer, 2008). While Kam and Palmer also recognized some individuals are more predisposed to certain personality traits than others, a sense of civic responsibility that often leads to political involvement is frequently a characteristic passed down from the parent. While not as commanding as parental influence, Kam and Palmer also posited that schools, neighborhoods, and peer groups can affect a person's opinions of and actions toward political activism. Environmental factors such as these are important determinants that should not be overlooked when discussing the probability of a person's political activity (Kam & Palmer, 2008).

Reasons for the decline. Compared with other countries, America had a higher rate of political participation among its citizens in the latter part of the 20th century, which also indicated that Americans generally interacted with their community more than those in other countries (Putnam, 1995). However, researchers have not overlooked the fact that in spite of ranking ahead of other countries in political participation, America's rate of citizens who were politically involved in their communities in the 1980s and

1990s was on the decline from rates of previous decades (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

Putnam (1995) clarified that these trends were widespread in America:

The downtrends are uniform across the major categories of American society—among men and women; in central cities, in suburbs, and in small towns; among the wealthy, the poor, and the middle class; among the Blacks, Whites, and other ethnic groups; in the North, in the South, on both coasts, and in the heartland. (p. 673)

Even though Gallup polls have measured America's interest in politics growing steadily over the last 40 years, rates of political participation have fallen drastically (Putnam, 1995). However, while political participation in America seems to be on the rise, voting rates do not appear to follow this trend. McDonald and Popkin (2001) explained how declining voter turnout since the 1960s in America is a *myth*. McDonald and Popkin calculated the voter turnout rate as the total number of votes divided by the number of citizens who are eligible to vote. A rise in immigration rates supported their argument that it only appears that voter turnout is declining since the 1970s (McDonald. & Popkin, 2001). At the beginning of the 21st century, the number of immigrants who were not eligible to vote was growing faster than the number of citizens who were eligible to vote (McDonald & Popkin, 2001). If the interest was there, then there is question as to why people were not participating in political actions other than voting.

Time constraints. Since the 1970s, Americans have been working more hours than ever before (Dembe, 2009; Kleiner & Pavalko, 2010; Putnam, 1995). As technological advancements made accessing one's office easier from home, people began

to work later into the night from a home office (Putnam, 1995). As a result, the traditional, nine-hour workday became a thing of the past as people began working overtime without pay (Kleiner & Pavalko, 2010). However, researchers found that the increase in the number of hours worked did not contribute to the decline in political participation (Putnam, 1995). However, Putnam (1995) found that people who were actively employed and worked more than eight or nine hour workdays participated in more community interest groups than those who were unemployed. Putnam also reported that there was a positive correlation between the number of hours a person worked and his or her level of political activity.

By narrowing the scope of investigation even further to analyze specifically how money, time, and race work together in enabling or hindering a person's political activity, we are better able to understand how these factors operate together to determine levels of political participation. Verba et al. (1993) highlighted a few accepted ideas regarding the background story behind a person's decision to be politically active. First, people who are employed tend to have more expendable money. Second, money is helpful for those wishing to become more politically active since it costs money to make financial contributions toward campaigns. Third, attending campaign rallies, marches, and protests; writing letters; and voting take time; an individual either had to have that free time or be willing to sacrifice other activities to free up time to participate in such activities. Fourth, the income for minority households tends to be less than for White households (Verba et al., 1993). Verba et al. (1993) refuted the claim that each of the abovementioned economic influences was a singular factor acting on its own and

outweighing the other factors in importance. According to their study, Whites, Blacks, and Latinos/as have similar amounts of free time in which to participate in politics (Verba et al., 1993). Verba et al. (1993) concluded, “If the dominant political resource is money, political participation will be more stratified than if the dominant political resource is time” (p. 470). Therefore, each of these factors was related to the others, and did not stand alone as a singular determinant of political action (Verba et al., 1993).

Divorce rates. Beginning in the 1960s, society saw a change in the composition of American households (Ellman, 2000; Putnam, 1995; Yodanis, 2005). Putnam (1995) explored the possibility of a link between the general rise in divorce rates and the decline in political participation. Between the years of 1974 and 1994, divorce rates in America rose from 28% to 48% (Putnam, 1995). Since divorce rates have affected other aspects of society, Putnam explored the possibility of a correlation between the rise in divorce and steady fall of politically active citizens. He found that there may be a connection between the two measured phenomena, but his findings only resulted in an assumption instead of an empirical conclusion (Putnam, 1995). He determined that across education, age, race, and gender, those who were single typically participate in politics less than those who were married or in a long term relationship (Putnam, 1995). Therefore, according to Putnam, individuals who are married are more likely to be politically active than those who are single. Putnam also explored the possibility that rising divorce rates could have contributed to the decline in political participation since there was a recognized level of community disengagement among single men and women. However, Putnam also recognized that political participation has declined among married couples. Therefore, if

marital status is a contributing factor, it is not the only contributing factor of declining political participation.

Behaviors and sentiments. In a society where individuals are more connected to the world than ever before, it is tempting to assume that people are more informed about current events than they were before the advent of the internet and smart phone (NCC, 2006; Sarwar & Soomro, 2013). The NCC (2006) stated that while those who read the newspaper are more likely to be politically informed and involved, the number of Americans who regularly read the newspaper has declined since the 1970s. The NCC posited that it would be logical to question if the means of acquiring information affected political participation rates since both newspaper reading and political involvement have declined since 1970. The NCC concluded, “Despite the decline in news consumption, the measures that have been collected show Americans, if anything, apparently are better informed about current politics and civic principles than in the recent past” (p. 14). With political information readily available, Americans can find informational avenues other than newspapers through which to gain knowledge of community happenings (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013).

The NCC’s (2006) findings were conflicted. Data presented did not result in a definitive conclusion about motivations and actions. The authors of the NCC report posited:

Many political scientists would argue that the increased ideological polarization of the two major parties actually contributes to citizens’ knowledge by sending clearer signals about what their votes are likely to mean in practice. On the other

hand, American's decreasing ability to name their own congressional representatives may be an indicator of disengagement from the news or declining electoral competition at the congressional level. (p. 14)

This also raised the question of whether or not the feeling of disengagement stemmed from a lack of connectedness or a level of mistrust. The 1970s was a decade that broadcast the highly publicized Watergate scandal to the televisions and radios of Americans across the country (Kellner, 1995). The Watergate scandal corresponded with a time when there also was a measurable and noticeable decline in trust in the government (Maier, 2011). The NCC suggested this mistrust was a possible reason for the decline, as people might have felt an institution flooded with incompetence and corruption was not worth their time and energy. While researchers have indicated American political participation has declined, yet researchers do not definitively know why (Maier, 2011; NCC, 2006).

Teachers and Politics

In order to assess the relationship between teachers and politics, political issues that directly affect education will be explored. My goal was to understand the current education issues at the forefront of political discussion so that it could later be determined how teachers were reacting to these policies. The majority of this section contains a discussion of the extent of teachers' involvement in politics both inside and outside of the classroom. The findings in the existing literature regarding teachers and politics frame my study.

Political Issues that Affect Education

While the world of education and the world of politics have been intertwined throughout American history, the major infiltration of the government into the states' domain of education gained momentum in the 1950s (Finn & Porter-Magee, 2012). The Russian launch of the satellite *Sputnik* in 1957 increased pressure felt by Americans to be the best in the world in terms of science. As a result, the world of science education felt the most pressure, resulting in a push to get Americans back *on top* in science (Finn & Porter-Magee, 2012). Nachtigal (1994) wrote about how political entities and governments around the world believed that in order to be considered globally competitive, the United States had to rank first in math and science. Therefore, the U.S. government was motivated to get involved in education to ensure that America surpasses other countries in math and science (Nachtigal, 1994). In addition to math and science, politicians also have been focused on English/language arts and social studies. The better schools perform in these core subjects, the more likely the schools are to receive state funding. States generally use one of the four methods to provide funding for public elementary and secondary schools (Verstegen & Jordan, 2009). States distribute money through: (1) foundation programs, (2) district power equalization systems, (3) full-state funding, or (4) flat grants.

Aragon and Rowland (2015) summarized the key *takeaways* from the State of the State addresses at the 2015 Education Commission of the States which focused on contemporary points of discussion in education and politics. The listed three points were the most referenced issues by the 50 governors in attendance:

1. Ensuring the school systems adequately prepare students for the needs and demands of the workforce.
2. College and university affordability is essential for underrepresented students.
3. More widespread early childhood education opportunities are needed in all states.

Using the summary of Aragon and Rowland as a guide in evaluating political matters of greatest concern to teachers, the literature involving education funding, early learning, and Texas accountability will be explored.

Financial. One of the most pressing issues for those on the education committee in the Texas legislature is how to handle resource allocation for the growing number of students in the state (Pustka, 2012). As summarized by Aragon and Rowland (2015), education finance issues of utmost importance to state governments around the country also revolve around local control and allocation of funds. In 2015, governors from each of the 50 states advocated for funding increases as opposed to decreases (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). These governors overwhelmingly supported an increase in federal and state money (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). The governors felt that the extra money could go toward building improvement, as many schools needed money to remodel and/or expand (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). Other states advocated either for simplifying or reconfiguring the states' funding formulas (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). While Aragon and Rowland's report might be a current representation of the most debated issues in

education finance, funding for education has been an issue of both recent and historical importance (Finn & Porter-Magee, 2012; Psacharopoulos, 2006).

Education as an investment. The citizens of many countries around the world believe that educating their populations is a worthy investment, and trillions of dollars are spent on education globally (Psacharopoulos, 2006). With over \$750 billion spent on education in the United States in 2005, Psacharopoulos (2006) argued that the world of education should be seen as a *big business* with many working parts and areas of concern. According to Psacharopoulos, governments spend money on education because they expect a reward. They expect citizens to take what they learned in school to become contributing members of the community and, ultimately, advance society as a whole (Psacharopoulos, 2006).

It is not just the national government that has high expectations from the schools in which they invest. The Texas Business Leadership Council (TBLC) echoed the national government's concerns regarding returns on their financial investments by stating that the ability in Texas "to create an education system that delivers on workforce and post-secondary readiness for all students is crucial to our long-term prosperity" (Texas Business Leadership Council, 2013, p. 1). If people see their money being spent on something, they are going to want to see that their money is making a difference (TBLC, 2013). If state governments are funneling money through the education system, citizens will expect high performing, successful students (Geske, 1983). The benefits of spending more on education are often "realized in terms of the presumably higher productivity of the more educated worker" (Psacharopoulos, 2006, p. 116).

The idea of channeling money into education expecting a big return in the form of productive citizens of society is called the *output method* (Psacharopoulos, 2006). In the realm of education policy, Geske (1983) argued that people ultimately want to see maximized efficiency in schools. Geske defined efficiency as when “the potential for achieving increases in the outputs of schooling without incurring increases in the physical qualities or quantities of the resources used” (p. 85). Something is deemed efficient if it reaps a great reward. In education, this can be measured by the number of degrees a person is able to earn, the amount of money a person makes in a year, and/or a person’s overall quality of life (Geske, 1983). The most challenging obstacle to overcome for teachers and anyone else who is lobbying for money for education is that it is difficult to determine and measure efficiency (Geske, 1983).

As identified by Blankenau and Camera (2009), the government needs to recognize that students who do not do well in school might “stem from inadequate incentives for academic achievement” (p. 505), and their subpar performances in school may not just be a reflection of a “misallocation of resources” (p. 505). Even though federal and state governments want to get the most out of their investments after funneling a substantial amount of money into education, money does not fix everything (Blankenau & Camera, 2006). Money is just one of many factors that affects student output after students complete their time in school (Blankenau & Camera, 2006).

Education as an equalizing, economic factor. American’s Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s ignited a sense of responsibility for the government to ensure academic equality for all students (Geske, 1983). Early in the 1970s, Geske (1983) wrote,

“policymakers and policy analysts were concerned about both equity and equality of educational opportunity in educational financing systems” (p. 83). In 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *San Antonio Independent School District vs. Rodriguez* that wealth-related differences in spending among schools districts within a state did not violate the equal protection amendment of the United States Constitution (Geske, 1983). In this landmark case, the Supreme Court, in effect, passed to the state courts the responsibility of deciding what should be done about the disparity in the amount of money spent on students in wealthy school districts versus that spent on students in poorer school districts (Geske, 1983; Sutton, 2008). The state courts addressed issues regarding school inequality and “focused considerable attention on the vast disparities in per pupil expenditures created by unequally distributed property wealth among school districts” (Geske, 1983, p. 84). Equalizing education for all students despite income inequality became the obligation of the state, and there have been extensive debates on how states should appropriately exercise this responsibility (Aleman, 2007; Hoff, 2004).

Psacharopoulos (2006) addressed the changing roles of states in education politics by arguing that when education funding became tied to taxes, the resulting debate surrounded financial equality and equitable distribution of resources among schools and school districts. Geske (1983) explained how states felt inclined to increase the financial support given to school districts in order to make education programs equally accessible for all students regardless of their families’ household income. According to Vertegen and Jordan (2009), most states (40 in 2007) used Foundation School Programs (FSP) to address the issues of unequal property values and subsequent unequal funding for school

districts. FSP involved taxing households based on the value of the property owned (Vertegen & Jordan, 2009). In effect, schools in areas with higher property values benefited from receiving more money than schools in areas with lower property values (Vertegen & Jordan, 2009). In a process called *equalization*, states provided money to schools in areas with lower property values to account for the deficit (Vertegen & Jordan, 2009). Those who disagreed with this practice claimed that it had centralized education, which had not benefitted students. Those who supported this practice claimed it was a necessary step in tackling the disparities in the distribution of funds based on property taxes (Geske, 1983). Both Texas and California have a sizeable population with vast differences in the socioeconomic status of their citizens and have garnered much attention as they have worked to address and eradicate the issues of low property values and disproportionate funding in school districts (Geske, 1983; Hoff, 2004).

California attempted to reform their tax formula with the hope of eradicating issues that arose in the public schools due to the disparities in property taxes across the state (Hirsch, 1981). The intent of Proposition 13 was to lower property taxes for California residents to a more flat rate (Hirsch, 1981; Shoemaker, 1980). The state government was supposed to equalize the money allocated to school districts to make up for drastic deficits between school districts (Hirsch, 1981). Although Proposition 13 originally was a proposal to limit property taxes to respond to the economic woes of the California population, it had a ripple effect that decreased various city and county funds (Calfee & Pessirilo, 1980). California schools experienced the most change in their funding; the drastic cut in funding of California schools that resulted from Proposition 13

forced the California government to bail out public education during the 1978-1979 fiscal year (Calfee & Pessirilo, 1980). It appeared to be a quick fix, and educators in the late 1970s were feeling increasing uneasiness and a sense of foreboding about the future of California public schools (Calfee & Pessirilo, 1980). According to Calfee and Pessirilo (1980), many California public school teachers recognized that Proposition 13 was a temporary solution and would not fix the underlying issue of income disparity among California residents.

In response to Proposition 13, groups with a special interest in schools (parents, teachers, and other members of the community) organized themselves into tax-exempt, nonprofit corporations (Shoemaker, 1983). These corporations were separate from the government and focused on raising money that would go directly to a school district (Shoemaker, 1983). As the proposition bypassed the government, it only added to unequal distribution of funds because the wealthier communities raised the most money, which only added to the economic gap between wealthier school districts (Shoemaker, 1983).

Funding in Texas. Proposition 13 in California impacted the entire country as many states adopted similar tax and spending limitation policies (Geske, 1983). In Texas, over half of the state funding designated for public schools is taken from local property tax (Loubert, 2005). In 1997, Loubert (2005) reported a resulting achievement gap on test scores and graduation rates between schools whose students resided in areas where the property was more valuable than students who lived in areas where the property was less valuable (Loubert, 2005). Parents with children in school who could afford the higher

taxes would likely desire a high performing school district and these parents would be more likely to select a neighborhood tied to a high performing school in spite of the higher property tax associated with the area (Loubert, 2005).

The Texas school finance system was changed in 1993 in response to Supreme Court rulings of unconstitutionality regarding income disparity between wealthy and poor school districts with the ultimate goal of being able to cater to minority and underperforming school districts along varying property value lines (Aleman, 2007; Hoff, 2004). The *Robin Hood Act* was an attempt by the legislature to give financial aid to schools in lower income areas, but it still was not close to solving the problem (Aleman, 2007). Since Texas does not have a state income tax, the *Robin Hood* formula required affluent school districts to share the revenue collected from local property taxes with districts in lower income areas (Associated Press, 2016). In response to the rulings, the Robin Hood Act put a cap on taxable property values above \$305,000 (Hoff, 2004). Anything above this cap was given to the state that would then distribute it among school districts in an equalizing manner (Hoff, 2004). In effect, wealthy districts were funding poorer school districts with the excess tax collections from those in the wealthier areas (Hoff, 2004). Vermont also adopted a similar policy with a *sharing pool*. The state government redistributed money from wealthy districts to poorer ones (Hoff, 2004). The *sharing pool* policy did not last in Vermont; many citizens did not agree with it (Hoff, 2004). The Robin Hood Act still exists in Texas, however in 2004 it underwent modifications when the Texas legislature decided that only approximately 20 school districts in the state had to pay their excess funds to the state government (Hoff, 2004).

The 2003 regular legislative session ended in deadlock over tax reform that forced a special session in 2004 to address some of the unresolved issues including those dealing with education funding (Cortez, 2004). There was an overall sentiment that Texas needed to allocate more money for schools, but there was disagreement over which other state funding program would be cut to make this idea come to fruition (Cortez, 2004). In terms of school funding, property taxes were at the forefront of discussion while many communities voted for legislators who had run on the platform of reducing property taxes (Cortez, 2004). Many constituents did not want to live in a failing school district, therefore if the state were to reduce property taxes, revenue would need to be pulled from other areas to make up the difference (Cortez, 2004).

In 2011, the Texas government voted to cut drastically education funding, and over 600 public school districts came together to request more money to educate the state's growing school age population (Associated Press, 2016). Two years later, the Texas District Judge found the 2011 budget cuts to be unconstitutional, and the government reinstated over \$3 billion to public schools (Associated Press, 2016). In 2015, the Texas Legislature restored another \$1.5 billion to public schools (Associated Press, 2016). In May of 2016, the Texas Supreme Court ruled the Robin Hood Act constitutional and defended the current Texas school finance system (Associated Press, 2016). This decision outraged many who felt that Texas was in the process of equalizing education funding with the state's reallocation of billions of dollars back into public schools (Associated Press, 2016). Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick stated that in spite of

the *Robin Hood Act* being deemed constitutional, it was not effective and needed reform (Associated Press, 2016).

Early learning. Legislation regarding early learning is gaining more attention and support as post-millennium data indicated that students who attended educational programs prior to kindergarten were less likely to be academically behind throughout their years in elementary and secondary schools (Aragon & Rowland, 2015; Howes et al., 2008). During State of the State addresses, governors advocated for three and four year olds to attend pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs in hopes of addressing the issue of students not being ready academically for public school on the first day of kindergarten (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). As many governors also supported full-day kindergarten, questions and concerns involving lack of funding for pre-K and full-day kindergarten were brought to the forefront of the discussion (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). The ultimate goals of the governors were not only to provide more access to pre-K programs but also to improve the quality of already existing early learning programs (Aragon & Rowland, 2015). Organizing and funding early childhood education programs pose exceptional challenges to states like Texas and California because of the sheer number of students needing services and the large numbers of teachers and other personnel required for such programs (National Center for Early Development & Learning, 2002).

The Kids Count Data Center (2016) calculated the number of U.S. school aged children living in poverty to be 15,686,000, which is approximately 22%; students who live in poverty frequently suffer from developmental setbacks (Hormuth, 1998). More affluent parents often ensure that their children receive early childhood education by

enrolling them in preschool (Hormuth, 1998; Howes et al., 2008). Not only do preschools foster education growth in children, they also encourage parental involvement, which helps children throughout their years in school (Hormuth, 1998).

There are other options for families who cannot afford traditional preschool programs to consider while preparing their children for elementary school (Hormuth, 1998). Head Start is a pre-K program that has shown much success in adequately preparing *economically disadvantaged* children for the social and academic demands of kindergarten (Love et al., 2005). Access to early education programs impacts children's education careers from kindergarten to high school graduation and beyond (Hormuth, 1998; Love et al., 2005; MDRC, 2015). Many parents, teachers, and education policymakers are proponents of early childhood programs designed to level the playing field for students as they approach kindergarten (Love et al., 2005; Mendez, 2010; Vinovskis, 1993). Educators have voiced their opinions regarding early learning programs by advocating that all students should have an equal chance to succeed in the American school system (Gichuru, Riley, Robertson, & Park, 2015; Vinovskis, 1993). When the Head Start Program began in the 1950s, teachers voiced concerns about not having enough teacher preparation materials to help them meet the demands of the program (Vinovskis, 1993). Since Head Start is a federally funded program, states have avoided dipping into their state education funds by petitioning for federal financial support (Ludwig & Phillips, 2007; Vinovskis, 1993). Educators often appealed to state legislatures by presenting the importance and benefits of early learning programs such as Head Start so that legislatures were more inclined to allot money for Head Start over

programs not dealing with education (Vinovskis, 1993). However, teachers must proceed with caution when describing the positive and negative effects of programs like Head Start because legislators may have unrealistic expectations of educational pre-K programs and they might decline to redistribute funds invested in Head Start (Ludwig & Phillips, 2007; Vinovskis, 1993).

Accountability. While education policy is fundamentally an issue left to the states, the education system in Texas is considered particularly more centralized than other states due to the presence of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the State Board of Education (SBOE) (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010). The accountability spotlight also shone on Texas as TEA developed more state standardized tests with the creation of the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) in 1979, the Texas Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) in 1985, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in 1991, the TAKS in 2001 and the STAAR in 2011 (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010). In 1989, the Education Economic Policy Commission (EEPC) was created by the Texas legislature. The EEPC's work paved the way for more high-stakes testing to become a critical part of the education process (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). When the EEPC was created in 1989, only three of the nine members of the EEPC were educators (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Together, the Select Committee on Public Education (SCOPE), Texas Business Education Committee (TBEC), and EEPC were tasked with creating the objectives and even some of the questions for the standardized tests administered to students in Texas public schools (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). In 1989, there were no public school teachers who were members of SCOPE and TBEC (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Therefore, the individuals who

had significant say about what should and should not be tested were not public school classroom teachers (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). This did not mean that teachers were not interested in participating in the process, it just meant that they were not asked to participate (Salinas & Reidel, 2007).

The perceived successes of these standardized tests in Texas motivated President George W. Bush to champion the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation in 2001. With bipartisan support, NCLB called for more high-stakes testing starting in 2002 with accompanied published accountability ratings of the schools and other requirements such as graduation requirements and teacher quality (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010; Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Huddleston (2015) described the origins of Bush's federal NCLB legislation as dating back to the Clinton Administration when President Clinton passed a mandate in 1999 with the intent to end social promotion to the next grade level if a student failed to meet specified standards. Under NCLB of 2001, states were made responsible for creating standards on which to test as well as the actual test questions for each of the core subjects across grade levels (Dever & Carlston, 2009). NCLB of 2001 further ensured that schools and students would be held accountable for what students learned and that students' knowledge retention would be tested regularly (Dever & Carlston, 2009). The goal of the legislation was that by 2014, all students would be deemed *proficient* in the tested subjects (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Proficiency was just one of the categories under NCLB of 2001's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report (Dever & Carlston, 2009).

Prior to NCLB of 2001, Alabama, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia administered high-stakes tests (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003). States with moderate or low-stakes testing were Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming (Abrams et al., 2003). When all 50 states adapted their testing policies to fit the federal legislation, the effects were felt in most U.S. school districts (Abrams et al., 2003). Specifically, 76% of the teachers in the original high-stakes testing states and 63% of teachers in the moderate to low-stakes testing states reported a difference in the way they taught post-NCLB as opposed to pre-NCLB (Abrams et al., 2003). Teachers reported that their intent had never been to leave a child behind and that their goal had always been to ensure the success of every child who walked into their classroom (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Aside from those overarching sentiment among teachers, reviews of the legislation were mixed and offered opinions for and against NCLB (Dever & Carlston, 2009).

In terms of support, those in favor of the changes to education brought on by NCLB of 2001 often argued that the education system was broken and in need of a dramatic transformation (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Supporters also said that, to a certain degree, schools should take responsibility and be held accountable for the successes and failures of their students (Dever & Carlston, 2009). NCLB of 2001 brought attention to subjects and issues that previously had been neglected or passed over in education policy discussions (Abrams et al., 2003; Dever & Carlston, 2009). More time was spent on

tested subjects with high standards to determine passing rates (Abrams et al., 2009). Therefore, subjects such as math, science, and reading underwent a shift, as these subjects were increasingly considered more important based on the amount of attention given to them by the states (Abrams et al., 2003). Teachers also received more opportunities for professional development, as they needed new and different training to address teaching strategies that would ensure student success on the states' tests (Dever & Carlston, 2009).

While there were some advocates of NCLB of 2001, the literature focused on common complaints and issues regarding the changes brought on by the legislation (Dever & Carlson, 2009). There was uncertainty as to whether the questions on these state tests were inaccurate, inadequate, or even racially biased (Bernstein, 2004). As some subjects were gaining more attention by the state, other subjects (the most notable one being social studies) quickly were losing perceived importance as they fell to the bottom of priority lists in school districts (Abrams et al., 2003). Abrams et al. (2003) and Dever and Carlston (2009) found that many teachers felt that too much of their time in the classroom was spent on test preparation for both teachers and students and not enough time was spent on exploratory learning and application lessons. Teachers felt added pressure from the federal government, the state government, the local school district, and the administrators of their schools when it came to preparing students for their subject tests (Dever & Carlston, 2009). The standards under NCLB of 2001 were not flexible and many teachers felt that they were being held accountable for issues in a student's life that were beyond their control such as a student's low socioeconomic status, limited English

proficiency (LEP), or learning disability (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Some teachers also felt *marginalized* and were unable to differentiate instruction like they had in the past to accommodate the individual needs of their students (Dever & Carlston, 2009). According to Abrams et al., teacher and student morale decreased in many schools across the country as individuals felt an increasing amount of pressure to perform well on the state tests. Abrams et al. argued that teachers overwhelmingly agreed with the mission of NCLB of 2001. However, many teachers questioned the implementation and implications of the piece of legislation (Abrams et al., 2003; Dever & Carlson, 2009).

Even though Texas took a central role in the conceptualization of NCLB of 2001, the state has since referred back to its strong sense of independence by refusing to adopt President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative and the Common Core Standards Initiative which were supported by many on the federal level (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010). Race to the Top was part of Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and it allocated over \$4 billion in grants for states that set their own, individual goals pertaining to "college readiness, the creation of new data systems, teacher effectiveness, and persistently low-performing schools" (Howell, 2015, p. 58). The Common Core Standards Initiative was an attempt to create a "common set of rigorous standards" to connect and equalize students' education expectations across state borders (Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014, p. 3). While former Texas Governor Rick Perry adamantly opposed the imposition of federal standards of programs such as Race to the Top on the students of Texas, many in the Texas legislature thought Texas should have applied for Race to the Top in order to benefit from the federal money granted to those who adopted

the policies and were successful (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010). Adding to the controversy of what was and was not adopted as education policy in Texas was the recognized assumption by many that Texas leads the nation in education change; the federal government braced for pushback on these federal policies from other states who likely would follow the example of Texas (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010).

Teachers' Political Involvement

A report from the Center for Educational Involvement (1973) indicated that the majority of teachers in the United States were generally absent from political activity. Four decades later, while more teachers were recognizing the need to be politically active citizens due to the interconnectedness of politics and education (Fowler, 2006), teachers consistently showed low levels of civic participation (National Teacher Association, 2010). There have been teachers who desperately want to improve the country's education system exist, but these teachers are overwhelmingly absent from politics (Collins & Cook, 2001; Hipple, 1986; National Teacher Association, 2010).

Overall, the literature pertaining to teacher political participation rates was scarce. The few studies that have been conducted on this topic reflected the findings of studies regarding the political activity levels of the general population (Atwell, 1973; Henderson, Czaja, & McGee, 1996). Atwell (1973) conducted a study of 24 public high schools in Missouri with a sample size of 202 social studies teachers. The older teachers were more involved politically than the younger teachers (Atwell, 1973), which echoed Putnam's (1995) findings of older generations being more politically active than younger ones. Other studies of teachers' levels of political participation corresponded with assumptions

regarding political participation rates of the general population (Henderson et al., 1996). The NCC (2006) reported that those individuals with higher levels of education would be more likely to vote than those with lower levels of education. Henderson et al. (1996) also recognized that political participation rates directly corresponded with levels of education. According to this theory, teachers should be more likely to vote because the profession requires teachers to have at least a college degree (Henderson et al., 1996). However, this is not always the reality (CEI, 1973). The results of the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) survey from 1995 synthesized data collected over ten years in order to develop a profile of an average Texas teacher voter (Henderson et al., 1996). The voting teacher in Texas was married (74%), female (86%), in her 40s (36%), and had more than 20 years of experience in education (36%). These teachers were more likely to vote in the national elections than in state and local elections (Henderson et al., 1996), which paralleled the voting patterns of the general population (NCC, 2006).

In general, in the 1990s, most Texas voting teachers were absent from political campaigns (Henderson et al., 1996). They identified themselves as moderate and did not align themselves with extremely liberal or extremely conservative candidates. The voting decisions of the teachers in the study of Henderson et al. (1996) were identified as *personal*; the teachers' voting behaviors were not based on the influence of interest group lobbyists or the recommendations of other professional organizations of which they were members. Teachers were not likely to support political campaigns (either with their time or with their finances) and/or political action committees, and teachers in the study had not run for any type of political office (Henderson et al., 1996). Henderson et al. found

that information on politically active teachers was very limited, and the studies that were available led to the further exploration of how teachers who were (or were not) indirectly influenced by politics.

The Role Teachers Play in Politics

Since the purpose of this research is to investigate why social studies teachers choose to become politically involved, it is necessary to explore ways in which teachers can become involved in politics. The teaching profession offers a unique perspective on education policy in that teachers experience the effects of political policy on a daily basis (Lee, 2006). Therefore, teachers possess the potential to have sweeping changes on policies as professionals in the classroom and as citizens outside of the classroom (Burns, 2007; Niemi & Niemi, 2007).

Political roles of teachers in the classroom. One of the roles of a teacher is to facilitate an environment in which students can grow intellectually and socially (Thornton, 1991; Reich, 2007). According to Thornton (1991), teachers often are seen as *gatekeepers* in the sense that they have authority over content and dissemination of content. Encouraging classroom interaction and discussion is ultimately the task of teachers as they are in a position to control who gets to speak, the topic of discussion, and the timeframe of the activity (Reich, 2007). As many social studies discussions involve political topics that invoke passion in students, it is important for the teacher to act as a referee should a conflict arise (Reich, 2007). However, regardless of the subject, teachers

have a captive audience and potentially can impact students' beliefs (Niemi & Niemi, 2007).

Teaching social studies is unique in that it offers opportunities for teachers to impact the political system, whether it is inside or outside of the classroom (Silberberg, 1996; O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). Inside the classroom, "teachers have an opportunity to guide their students to becoming not only politically aware but also responsible adults who value and honor their right to vote in a democratic country" (Fermen & Green, 2004, p. 220). Specifically, social studies teachers traditionally have been tasked with the responsibility of teaching students about useful behaviors in a democratic society. Examples of instruction include questioning policies or politicians' beliefs before voting for their candidate of choice (O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973; Thornton, 2005).

Since topics involving civic education and responsibilities are imbedded into the social studies curriculum, this core subject has been given extra attention in the literature in terms of how social studies teachers politically influence students (Broom, 2015; Long & Long, 1974). With this assumed influence comes a sense of cautiousness felt by many teachers as conflict might arise when discussing personally sensitive and controversial topics (Journell, 2011). Teachers also have varying opinions regarding whether or not it is appropriate for someone of their position in the classroom to disclose personal, political beliefs (Niemi & Niemi, 2007).

Controversial classroom topics. Teachers who have more diverse groups of students tend to debate more controversial issues (Journell, 2011). Journell (2013)

claimed that classrooms are the ideal place to have controversial, political discussions because in a classroom with many students, there likely would be many different viewpoints represented. Many secondary social studies teachers purposefully bring up controversial topics involving gender, race, and religion in order to spark a discussion from students about their feelings on the issues (Hess, 2004).

Researchers have found that the average American citizen does not enjoy thinking about, listening to, or engaging in conversation about controversial political topics due to their potential to cause friction in an already contentious society (Hess, 2004). However, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) suggested that the best way to create a public that does not shy away from heated political topics and/or discussions is to begin discussing controversial topics in age-appropriate lessons in elementary and secondary schools. Teachers can and should use these opportunities to encourage positive democratic behavior that can be carried beyond high school and throughout adulthood (Hess, 2004; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Although it might result in a tense discussion requiring lots of teacher refereeing, Hess (2004) stated,

The research about what students learn from controversial political issues discussions indicates that it is (worth the trouble). Facing challenges inherent in teaching controversial issues is essential if we take seriously the importance of teaching young people to deal forthrightly and effectively with the plethora of political controversies facing society. (p. 261).

Lavine (2014) found that the more a student learns in school about the voting process and its importance in a democratic society, the more likely he or she is to vote in an election when he or she is eligible.

Since political issues can evolve from one day to the next, it is crucial for teachers who wish to discuss such issues to remain aware of current political hot topics (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008). This also requires teachers to possess a certain amount of prior knowledge about the topic of discourse (Hess, 2004). This implies that teachers must abandon a *scripted lesson* approach to teaching and instead investigate the politics and viewpoints surrounding the topic of discussion in order to guide classroom dialogue (Journell, 2013). According to Ball et al. (2008) and Journell (2013), a well-rounded teacher has both *common content knowledge* and *specialized content knowledge*.

Common content knowledge includes basic identification of correct and incorrect answers while being able to identify inaccuracies should they occur. Specialized content knowledge is imperative for classroom teachers to draw connections between topics and approach the subject in an abstract way to develop critical thinking skills among students (Ball et al., 2008; Journell, 2013).

When classroom discussions become tense, it also is important for the teacher to help students keep the discussed issue in perspective while being mindful of its contextual significance in terms of whom the issue affects and how he or she is affected (Journell, 2011). In the event of an inappropriate or *crass* comment made by a student, Niemi and Niemi (2006) argued that the teacher either could choose to ignore the comment or deal with the student away from the situation.

Political opinions of teachers. Adding to the already daunting task of initiating discussion of controversial political topics in the classroom is the question of whether or not teachers should divulge their personal political beliefs and/or affiliations to students (Hess, 2004). Niemi and Niemi (2007) suggested that teachers can express their political opinions in one of four ways: (1) directly state their political opinions, (2) advise students on political figures or issues, (3) convey admiration or frustration with political figures or issues, or (4) provide commentary on how a government policy affects education. Sometimes the way a teacher handles various situations can come off as biased toward certain viewpoints. For example, teachers who are leading a political discussion in class may have to cut off a student's thought if it is based on incorrect facts or if it leads the conversation on a tangent that does not relate to the topic. A teacher also may have to end a debate due to time constraints or if he or she feels the debate has turned hostile or is not productive. These types of interventions should not be mistaken for partisan bias, yet teachers should consider how these interruptions may be perceived by students (Niemi & Niemi, 2007).

Teachers have varying opinions about the ethics surrounding if, how, and when it is appropriate for them to take a political stand in the classroom (Journell, 2011). Niemi and Niemi (2007) identified three main groups of teachers: (1) those who never discuss their political stance because they believe that their personal political beliefs should never be discussed; (2) those who believe that their personal political beliefs should be open for discussion; and (3) those who believe that personal political beliefs should not become common classroom knowledge yet either knowingly or unknowingly find ways to work

their beliefs into classroom discussion. Teachers in the third group generally agreed with teachers in the first group; they did not agree necessarily with announcing their candidate of choice in a national, state, or local election, however teachers in the third group often inserted indirect partisan statements such as “I think” or “I feel” when discussing politics or politicians (Niemi & Niemi, 2007). Niemi and Niemi found that teachers often joked with students about candidates, yet the teachers in their study almost always spoke ill of politicians and rarely commented about the government. In general, the teachers were cynical. The general, overarching sentiment shared by teachers in all three groups was that in no way should a teacher disrespect or try to sway a student’s political beliefs (Niemi & Niemi, 2007).

Most teachers agreed that a student’s personal, political beliefs were off limits and should not concern anyone else (Lavine, 2014; Lee, 2006). Unless a student is misrepresenting facts, teachers should be facilitators and not aggressors in classroom discussion, as their ultimate goal should be to avoid partisan bias as they guide students toward making an informed opinion about a political figure or issue (Lavine, 2014; Niemi & Niemi, 2007). According to Niemi and Niemi (2007) who recognized that debating viewpoints is crucial to the political process, “Our own view is that commentary and interpretation are necessary and inevitable in discussing contemporary leaders, events, and issues....But to think that teachers refrain from discussing their opinions is incorrect” (p. 44). A politically active and opinionated teacher has the potential to provide unique insight into the political process for his or her students; however, since there is a power relationship between teachers and students as teachers distribute grades to students,

teachers never should project their views as the only acceptable views on any given issue (Lee, 2006). According to Niemi and Niemi, teachers are allowed to have political opinions but they must be vigilant when these opinions are conveyed to the students during casual or formal classroom discussions.

Promoting political involvement. Teachers face an overwhelming amount of pressure from various organizations and entities as they strive to service the needs of their students while they challenge them academically; strive to meet school, district, and state requirements on standardized tests; bond with students on an emotional level; and provide ample feedback to parents and students on the progress of students throughout the school year (Norris & Sawyer, 2014). Yet, Cavieres-Fernandez (2014) stated, “Worldwide, political, cultural, and economic reforms primarily promoting self-interest are diminishing the spaces for civic engagement and community ties” (p. 1). Therefore, it is of utmost importance for schools and teachers to stress the importance of political knowledge and involvement to students so that students can become contributing members of society (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014).

As the world becomes more connected through globalization, social studies teachers should recognize the importance of encouraging students to fulfill their civic duties as global citizens (Rapoport, 2013). In order to inspire students to take political action, Camangian (2013) provided three methods a teacher could use in the classroom. The first method is agitation. The theory behind this method is that teachers must present controversial issues to students in such a way that students become so bothered by the injustice(s) accompanying a given issue that they are moved to take action outside of the

classroom immediately or when they reach the legal age of 18. Teachers would employ a *liberatory leadership style*, which is used to bring awareness to (often oppressed) groups and create an environment in which students can analyze how certain actions can instigate social change. However, for this method to be successful, teachers must work to create an environment where students feel safe enough to discuss their feelings about sensitive issues which they may affect them in their personal lives outside of the classroom (Camangian, 2013).

The second method of motivating students to become politically involved is to arouse a student's curiosity in the subject being discussed. Camangian (2013) advised, "To arouse students' critical intellectualism, teachers must connect learning to student's experiential knowledge and encourage them to study in the interests of their communities" (p. 437). Students are more likely to feel inspired to further explore a political or social issue if they feel a connection with the issue as it pertains to their circumstances (Camangian, 2013).

The third and final method of student motivation is inspiration. To inspire, teachers must channel the feelings of the community and make these feelings real to students. Camangian (2013) wrote, "Inspiration, as a student-learning outcome, seeks to develop in young people the ability to understand and awaken the collective consciousness of others with analysis that appeals to the moral dispositions of their listeners" (p. 443). If students feel a connection and attachment to an issue, then they are more likely to be inspired to take action within their community (Camangian, 2013).

Niemi and Niemi (2007) explored how teachers of six high school social studies classes in upstate New York incorporated current, political issues into the curriculum. Results provided insight into how teachers encouraged (or did not encourage) civic behavior and democratic values through discussions and assignments. An overwhelming realization for Niemi and Niemi was the irony that the teachers who were spending the entire semester or school year discussing political participation actually had a very weak understanding of the term. All of the teachers in the study mentioned voting as a form of political participation and all encouraged their students to vote when they became eligible. However, some teachers only mentioned voting as a way to become politically involved. If other modes of participation were discussed, it was in a historical context such as boycotting and protesting during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Only one teacher discussed how writing a letter to a political official is a way to become politically involved within the community (Niemi & Niemi, 2007). Voting was the method of political participation discussed most often by the teachers who participated in the study, and the teachers discouraged voting strictly along party lines unless the students were not informed about the candidate or the issues. The teacher of one of the classes required attendance at a community political event, yet there was no follow-up assignment as credit was given based on proof of attendance (Niemi & Niemi, 2007). While Niemi and Niemi understood that teachers are under a lot of pressure from various groups, they also believed that creating an environment where students can learn about and engage with the political system is crucial.

Political roles of teachers out of the classroom. While teachers are influential inside of the classroom (Lee, 2006), researchers also have implied that they have the potential to influence politics outside of the classroom (Burns 2007; Silberberg, 1996). The power of a politically active teacher should not be overlooked; teachers who are both aware of political issues and how to become politically involved could be the most influential advocates of civic responsibility and participation for other teachers, school administration, parents, and students (Fowler, 2006; Morton, 2001; Silberberg, 1996).

Importance of political participation among teachers. Lee (2006) posited that teachers have a responsibility outside of the classroom to become involved in politics since their vocation is shaped by political decisions made at local, state, and federal levels. Educators have a two-part job in that they must be current on public policies dealing with education while also determining how to implement government initiatives in the classroom (Dever & Carlston, 2009). In turn, it would be in the best interest of policymakers, teachers, and students if teachers were consulted or even appointed to education committees when legislators are developing policy (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Lee argued that being politically involved is an important *civic virtue*; it is especially crucial for teachers to be involved since they are directly impacted by and held accountable for education policies (Fowler, 2006). This realization was not always obvious to many teachers (Fowler, 2006). Fowler (2006) taught teachers and prospective teachers in higher education for over a decade. He claimed that the pre-millennium generation of teachers was not convinced of the necessity of politically active teachers while the post-millennium generation of teachers was more likely to question ways they

could get involved as more of them saw politics and education as being intertwined intricately (Fowler, 2006).

Educators becoming a part of the political conversation is not only suggested, it is necessary (Burns, 2007). As Hipple (1986) firmly confirmed, “No longer can teachers sit idly by, be ‘reactive’ . . . talking only to and among themselves. They must stand up and be counted, be assertive, be political, come out of their classroom closets to join the movers and shakers” (p. 388). Burns (2007) also advocated for politically active teachers by stating that becoming involved in education policy is the only way to change education policy. According to Hipple, people who wish to change education policies for the better need *education cheerleaders*, and these should be teachers. Teachers can attest to what students and teachers face in the classroom on a daily basis. It is up to teachers to express these issues to both members and leaders within the community (Burns, 2007). While many community members perceive themselves as education experts based solely on their tenure as students from kindergarten to twelfth grade, Burns argued that it is the teachers who are education experts. Devaluing and demeaning positions in education further strengthen the argument for teachers to be active politically because they can attest to what really happens in classrooms (Burns, 2007; Silberberg, 1996).

There has been an overwhelming amount of importance placed on policymakers’ previous experiences as students in K-12 education (Silberberg, 1996; Burns, 2007).

Silberberg (1996) argued that in order for education policies to be relevant, opinions such as those relying on anecdotal experience simply should be considered, however the main attention and deliberation should be surrounding those who work in education each day.

Because of their close contact with students and curriculum, teachers are tasked with juggling various responsibilities dealing with a variety of issues encompassed in education (Burns, 2007). Therefore, teachers could and should be the most reliable advocates for students due to the fact that they better understand the reality of the issues in modern classrooms (Burns, 2007).

Since the government directly funds public schools while simultaneously drafting education politics that directly affect those in the classroom, it is imperative for teachers to be aware of funding proposals and changes within education legislation (Fowler, 2006; Morton, 2001). According to Morton (2001), teachers often become aware of bills only when they are told to implement the resulting new policy after the bills are signed into laws. Teachers owe it to their fellow teachers as well as to their students to be politically active because policymakers often do not consider or understand the logistics of how to implement new policies into the education system (Silberberg, 1996). Silberberg (1996) noted, “To the extent that teachers themselves are permitted an active voice in this conversation, a major gap between the policy community and teachers, who must find ways to make policy consistent with effective practice, may be bridged” (p. 3). Silberberg also claimed that the success of an education policy initiative depends on whether or not (1) policymakers understand education issues, (2) educators understand the policy, and (3) educators agree with the policy. Burns (2007) described teachers as capable of informing the general public as well as those in the legislature of the true needs of schools. This partnership between educators and legislators is vital to the success of both the schools and the policies of education (Silberberg, 1996). Therefore, teachers should

be seen as the *middlemen* between the government and schools in policy adoption and implementation (Silberberg, 1996).

Ultimately, regardless of whether or not teachers agree with the education policies passed by the legislature, it is up to teachers to “define what information and policy recommendations are relevant and, at the same time, provide a methodologically sound basis for action in a given setting” (Silberberg, 1996, p. 4). Teachers often blindly follow policy mandates handed down to them by lawmakers who have not consulted with teachers about the implications of the policy (Burns, 2007). Burns (2007) advocated for more communication between policymakers and teachers by stating, “Our expertise is ignored while untrained politicians and laypeople make policies that discount our professional knowledge and agency” (p. 56). However, communication must be initiated by both entities; government officials and teachers should be involved in a partnership where there is transparency, understanding, and a common goal of a better system for students (Silberberg, 1996).

Pustka (2012) was a retired superintendent who was asked by Texas Representative Jimmie Don Aycock to serve as a staffer for the 82nd Texas Legislation Session. Her feelings about her experiences echoed the sentiments of Silberberg (1996) and Burns (2007). Upon concluding her service as a staffer, Pustka made it her mission to encourage teachers to get involved actively in education politics. Pustka concluded that lawmakers want to know what is happening in classrooms and teachers can best provide this insight as they are considered by lawmakers to be experts in their field.

How teachers get involved in politics. Upon realizing how intertwined education and politics are, teachers might feel that they helplessly are implementing policies with which they may or may not agree (Fowler, 2006). Sometimes this realization prompts teachers to write a few letters to influential community members about issues involving education. In other instances, teachers might voice concerns to their coworkers or even actively resist a policy. Still others might remain passive and take no action in terms of fighting a policy they believe is not in the best interest of their students (Fowler, 2006). Some teachers may be hesitant about becoming involved politically because they fear losing their jobs or losing the respect of community leaders and/or politicians (Burns, 2007). Burns (2007) attempted to dispel this argument by stating that all political involvement does not have to be a radical approach involving protests, demonstrations, or pickets. Instead, teachers can become politically involved with little disruption to daily routines as long as they have awareness, intentionality, cooperation, and organization (Burns, 2007).

Many teachers who recognize the important relationship between education and politics feel an innate desire to become politically active, yet lack the knowledge of how to get involved (Journell, 2013; Morton & Staggs, 2001). Morton and Staggs (2001) offered teachers three general steps to become involved politically. First, teachers should discover who represents the area in which they live and/or work. Teachers also should be aware of legislators who serve on education committees and are active consistently in education legislation. Second, teachers should become educated on current education legislation because legislators often are influenced by the education practices of another

state and may be under the impression that a similar policy could be successful in their district. However, teachers often hold the key in determining whether or not a policy will be successful because they work in the field. Third, should the legislators pass a piece of education legislation that is perceived as negative by educators, teachers should avoid *knee-jerk* reactions. Teachers should research the education issue and organize their information before resorting to unproductive complaining. They should attempt to change education legislation only after they have a clear mission and direction (Morton & Staggs, 2001). While they listed these steps for teachers who wish to be active politically, Morton and Staggs attested that once the desire to become politically active is recognized and the three steps have been completed, teachers are most likely to write letters or email their legislators rather than have a face to face conversation with their legislators, given their professional time constraints.

Phone calls also are a great way for teachers to establish contact with legislators, yet Morton and Staggs advocated for email as the mode of communication because teaching is a profession that does not allow for a great deal of flexibility in terms of being able to leave work or talk on the phone for an extended period of time during the workday. However, if time and schedule permit, Pustka (2012) felt that making face-to-face contact with those on the state education committee is the best way to ensure that teachers' voices are heard.

Part of the secret for educators in deciding to become politically active is to recognize that strength is in numbers, and allying with different groups around the community may be very successful in ensuring teachers' voices are heard (Burns, 2007;

Fowler, 2006; Morton & Staggs, 2001). Morton and Staggs (2001) pointed out that the education community is one of the largest communities of professionals and, if teachers stand united, they would have a tremendous amount of influence over policymakers. Fowler (2006) discussed a conversation with members of the Ohio General Assembly who expressed how educators who are divided on issues create less discussion in the state government because the conflicting teachers are so busy disagreeing with each other that the general assembly can pass an initiative unnoticed by many teachers with very little debate and full expectation of implementation. However, teachers who are united in their focus on the importance of issues in education have a stronger voice and are more likely to garner the attention of those who draft education policies (Fowler, 2006). According to Fowler, the only other factor that has as much influence as money in the political world is a large number of teachers present in political discussions. Therefore, it is in teachers' best interest to work together while creating a coalition with other community members in order to raise awareness of issues in education or fight against political policies that would be detrimental to those involved in education (Fowler, 2006).

Even though some educators fail to recognize the full potential of their ability to shape education legislation, their power is undeniable and “educators should exercise their power by speaking out” (Morton & Staggs, 2001, p. 438). According to Burns (2007), teachers should build their base by getting to know and partnering with other influential members of the community outside of education as they can help spread awareness about relevant education issues as well as the problems facing education. Burns also suggested that teachers should make their presence known at community

events such as school board meetings and legislative community meetings if their schedules permit. For teachers, the point is to get noticed. In order to do that, teachers must not shy away from venues or groups that would bring attention to their cause (Burns, 2007). One example Burns discussed was how the Florida Coalition for Assessment Reforms worked with Florida teachers to encourage teacher political involvement and provide information and suggestions about how to use political leverage to improve state-mandated tests. It is imperative for teachers to recognize their allies within the community, pinpoint who has enough political power to help them convey their message, and establish communication with said entities in hopes of forming a beneficial partnership (Fowler, 2006).

A closer look at social studies teachers. Analyzing the political activity of social studies teachers is important because these educators have the opportunity to exemplify the roles of citizenship so often discussed as part of the social studies curriculum (Atwell, 1973; Kahne, & Westheimer, 2014; Long & Long, 1974). Social studies teachers are unique in that they have the opportunity to engage in the same civic duties within the community that are identified as important citizenship responsibilities in the social studies curriculum (O’Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (1994), the main purpose of social studies is to help “young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 3). Anderson, Avery, Pederson, Smith, and Sullivan (1997) highlighted a main

goal of social studies as encouraging and promoting social and political activism within the community. Atwell (1973) also stated,

If one of the responsibilities of social studies teachers is to help students develop favorable political attitudes and clarify their own value systems, then the attitudes and values of the teachers involved will be a crucial factor in how well this task is accomplished. (p. 11)

Therefore, since the subject matter of social studies is so closely tied to political activity, it is essential to understand the unique role and influence of a social studies teacher as they relate to political activism (Anderson et al., 1997; Kahne & Westheimer, 2014).

Social studies teachers often are held to a different standard in terms of political knowledge and political involvement than teachers of other subjects (Atwell, 1973; Long & Long, 1974; O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). Atwell (1973) claimed that social studies teachers have more of an opportunity to assist in a student's development of a political and ideological identity due to the nature of the subject of social studies. Journell (2013) wrote, "One would certainly expect civics or government teachers to be socially and politically aware, since those courses are ideal for engagement with controversial public issues and democratic decision making" (p. 319). O'Hanlon and Trushynski (1973) offered examples of ways in which social studies teachers could effectively model democratic participation for their students:

1. Involvement in on-campus political and/or social organizations;
2. Participating in political party activities off campus;

3. Actively working to influence legislation either independently or through an interest group;
4. Contacting and/or providing assistance to a government official;
5. Becoming an active member of a group that supports education issues.

While providing examples of political activities available for teachers, O'Hanlon and Trushynski (1973) also advocated for social studies teachers to be *model citizens* since these teachers have a hands-on role in developing students who are well-rounded, politically active citizens. Fowler (2006) indicated that teachers who wish to be politically active must learn the history, rules, and details of political science before getting involved in politics. Since a social studies teacher deals specifically with civic, social, historical, and political issues, theoretically, social studies teachers would be *model citizens* who recognize their civic responsibility to be involved in the political process (O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973).

The nature and responsibilities of a social studies teacher are subjective and depend on how others define their role inside and outside of the classroom (Fowler, 2006; Long & Long, 1974). O'Hanlon and Trushynski (1973) posited, "The social studies teacher must above all be a model of the behaviors which it is hoped the social studies will produce in students" (p. 56). However, Anderson et al. (1997) reported that there are many conflicting ideas about the importance placed on political activism, indicating the belief of some people that political knowledge coupled with political involvement should be an expectation of social studies teachers. Others felt that it was enough for a social studies teacher to understand politics without necessarily becoming involved (Anderson

et al., 1997; Long & Long, 1974). While viewpoints varied, a common opinion was that social studies teachers have a moral obligation to be at least politically knowledgeable in order to teach a subject that is so intertwined with political and social issues in society (Fowler, 2006; Long & Long, 1974).

While each social studies teacher brings his or her own values and areas of expertise into the classroom, years of teaching experience, grade levels taught, and course content can impact a teacher's knowledge of political current events and the perceived importance of political activism (Anderson et al., 1997; Atwell, 1973; Journell, 2013). Journell (2013) found that merely finishing a teacher preparation program did not guarantee sufficient content knowledge as preservice middle and secondary social studies teachers generally were uninformed about politics and current events even though they agreed that it was important to be knowledgeable about said topics.

The preservice teachers in Journell's (2013) survey overwhelmingly responded that time constraints and extra requirements for teachers outside of the classroom interfered with their ability to follow daily, political occurrences in the news. In order to encourage students to become involved politically, the preservice teachers recognized that that they must (1) set an example of what civic behavior should look like and (2) know as much if not more about current political issues than their students (Journell, 2013). The respondents in Journell's (2013) survey advocated for the importance of students to understand current events and politics and admitted that they needed to review current political issues before entering the classroom as full-time teachers (Journell, 2013).

When studying veteran social studies teachers, Anderson et al. (1997) concluded that those who taught civics and/or government and those who taught advanced high school social studies classes were more likely to be knowledgeable and active in politics. The teachers in the study held the view that student political participation upon course completion was a desired outcome of social studies classes (Anderson et al., 1997). Journell (2013) posited that with access to current events readily available through expanding technology, lack of exposure is not be the reason why students are not getting involved in political discussions. Rather, if students are not discussing politics in school it is more likely a result of teachers not adequately facilitating these conversations in the classroom (Journell, 2013).

There must be a certain level of intrinsic motivation and overall political interest in current event issues outside of the classroom for teachers to feel it is important enough to bring political discussion into the classroom (Journell, 2013). Students are more likely to be considered *civically competent* as well as politically active if their teachers deviate from the formal curriculum and allow students to explore, rationalize, and debate political issues in a safe and productive environment created by a social studies teacher (Journell, 2013).

Summary

This chapter included an exploration of literature on teacher dispositions, political behaviors, and teachers and politics. The results of these studies indicated that there are motivating factors for teachers to adopt certain teaching techniques, styles, and behaviors. There also are motivating factors that influence political activity among the general

population. The importance of the relationship between teachers and policymakers is addressed in the existing research. However, while there are teachers who communicate successfully with their legislators, many teachers refrain from political involvement for a variety of reasons including lack of knowledge, confidence, and time. Even though social studies teachers specifically address civic engagement and responsibilities as part of the curriculum, many social studies teachers are absent from politics. While researchers have explored education issues and how social studies teachers regard political activity, there is a void in available information regarding how and why teachers decide to become involved in shaping policy. This study included an examination of social studies teachers who have decided to become politically involved and an exploration of the motivating factors that contributed to their decision.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When analyzing issues involving education and politics, it is important to recognize that these two subjects are intertwined (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Pustka, 2012). Specifically, issues involving education and politics often overlap because education policy dictates what is expected of teachers and students in the classroom (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Lee, 2006). Even though participants in both entities express a desire for open communication, often there is very little discussion between teachers and policymakers (Burns, 2006; Lee, 2006; Pustka, 2012; Vincent, 2013).

In 2010, the National Teacher Association reported that the overall rates of political activity among teachers were low. Social studies teachers discuss the importance of civic engagement with students, however Lavine, (2014) wrote that this group of teachers is no more likely to participate in politics than teachers of other content areas. In this study I will utilize the qualitative approach of phenomenology to explore what motivates secondary, social studies teachers to become politically active. I also will examine teachers' perceptions of their civic responsibilities inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers will be interviewed and their responses will be transcribed and coded according to their interview responses. As themes develop, conclusions will be drawn in an attempt to provide insight into how and why teachers who teach students about political participation become involved politically as private citizens. This chapter includes a description of the study and details about the methods planned to conduct this research.

Design of the Study

A qualitative study attempts to answer a question while trying to tell a story (Mason, 2002). While Mason (2002) indicated that researchers who adopt a qualitative approach do so with the understanding that there is no universally accepted qualitative research technique or philosophy, Creswell (2007) maintained that there are some generalizations of qualitative research that are accepted by the research community. These generalizations follow an agreed-upon introductory procedure that is applicable for qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) wrote, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Creswell (2007) recommended qualitative research when an issue is presented that needs further investigation, and solely reporting statistics would not adequately answer the research questions. Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research is conducted when “quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not *fit* the problem” (p. 40). In the current study, measuring the numbers of secondary social studies teachers who were politically active versus those who were not politically active would only provide information as to who was engaged in politics outside of the classroom and who was not participating in such activities. Instead, the intent of this study was to examine not only who was participating in politics, but also to determine why the individuals chose to be politically active. In investigating the participants’ answers to questions specifically designed to discern the motivations of their political

activity, I sought to understand their intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivations in becoming active in politics.

Qualitative researchers have designated roles and obligations in the investigative process (Creswell, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained the roles of those conducting qualitative studies: “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Marshall and Rossman (1995) recognized four reasons for conducting a qualitative study: exploration, explanation, description, and prediction. As the explanatory research category is focused on clarifying the factors and participants surrounding a particular phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), this study necessitates a qualitative approach in order to explore the motivations of politically active, secondary social studies teachers in order to understand how they interpret aspects of their pasts as influences upon their decisions to be politically active. This topic will require me to tell a story using the experiences of the teachers. The interviewed teachers will need to reflect upon their past experiences to determine how these events have impacted their decisions to become politically active.

This study was not completely void of numbers and statistics. However, I am more interested in understanding the motivations and perceptions of teachers who choose to be politically involved. Mason (2002) stated, “Qualitative research often does use some form of quantification, but statistical forms of analysis are not seen as central” (p. 4). While this study included an examination of statistical reports in an attempt to understand who was more likely to become politically active, my main focus was to

determine what social, environmental, educational, or situational factors specifically influenced the interviewed teachers to take political action.

Qualitative research requires a level of flexibility of the researcher since interviews with subjects can provide insight into areas the researcher previously might not consider (Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). Mason (2002) recognized the human factor in qualitative studies as the context of interviews can and often does change. The interviewed teachers' understandings of their own past and present contextual situations were of utmost importance, as enabled me to understand their experiences with political activity. These accounts can provide explanatory details of a story that would otherwise go untold if I were to analyze just who is more likely to be politically active or in what political activities they participate rather than why they make the choice to become politically involved.

Upon concluding a qualitative study, the researcher should not simply list a series of descriptions in his or her findings (Mason, 2002). Instead, the researcher should analyze the responses and subsequently report potential theories over the studied topic based upon explanations or arguments (Mason, 2002). Upon completing this study, I attempted to draw upon the descriptions in order to formulate explanations and arguments as to what factors are most influential in the decisions of secondary social studies teachers to be politically active.

The intent of qualitative research is to tell a story in such a way that provides insight into what was experienced as well as how people interpreted an event or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), researchers,

“seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 8). The interview questions in this study were designed to extract the respondents’ perceptions of their own political activity as well as the perceived role of events or people in their past who have played a part in igniting a desire for political involvement.

Creswell (2007) claimed that qualitative research is necessary when an issue needs to be understood on a deeper level; this can be achieved when a researcher and respondent meet face to face and connect with each other. While the interview protocol was designed to address the research questions for this study, it also was intended to promote a conversation that allowed the respondents to reflect upon and report about previous life experiences that consciously or subconsciously motivated them to become politically active. Creswell (2007) reiterated the importance of a qualitative researcher to tell a story. As such, the primary goal in this study was to tell the stories of secondary social studies teachers who not only were involved in their subject in the classroom but who also deemed it necessary to become involved in their subject outside of the classroom.

This study used the qualitative tradition of phenomenology. Phenomenology stems from Husserl’s (1991) understanding of how our brains cognitively process our surroundings from anticipating to reflecting upon our role in and feelings about an event. Husserl used sound and music as examples to illustrate how our brains understand the events of the past, present, and future. Our brains process a song’s melody in such a way that in the present moment of listening to a song, our brains simultaneously can follow

the current melody and predict the future melody by recalling the past melody within the same song (Husserl, 1991). Similarly, brains are capable of doing the same kind of action in our *lived experiences* (Husserl, 1991). In doing so, brains are in a *pre-reflective* state as they use *primal awareness* to understand an event in the present moment (Husserl, 1991). The time between the experienced event and reflection upon the event is known as *primal impression-retention-protention* (Husserl, 1991). When we reflect upon past events, our brains instinctively retrieve the feelings and actions that we experienced in our *primal awareness* state of mind which have been subconsciously stored in our long-term memory (Husserl, 1991). Husserl (1991) wrote, “When we turn toward the experience attentively and grasp it, it takes on a new mode of being: it becomes ‘differentiated,’ ‘singled out’” (p. 132). This transition between a lived experience and a memory is crucial to understanding phenomenology in qualitative research (Husserl, 1991; Creswell, 2007).

Understanding experiences in the past is a critical aspect of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 2007). According to Heidegger (1962), “The phenomenon of being-in-the-world would no more be met with than it would be by demonstrating that the physical and the psychical are objectively present together” (p. 191). One can be physically present within any given situation while a person’s subconscious is working overtime to process emotions and thoughts as he or she lives and experiences the event (Heidegger, 1962). Van Manen (2007) argued that people observe and identify things cognitively and *pathically*. Recalling things cognitively might be somewhat easier as people deal with more physical and obvious details such as the measurements of a

building or an estimated number of people present at an event (van Manen, 2007). On the other hand, pathic characteristics refer to how some characterize personal feelings and *sensuality* about an event (van Manen, 2007). These characteristics are subjective to the person and may even be perceived differently across time as feelings change (van Manen, 2007).

While cognitive details also were important in this study, I questioned the respondents on their memories of pathic details and use van Manen's (2007) assumption that pathic details provide a greater insight into the person's sense of self within a situation. I asked specific questions regarding participants' experiences with political activity, the roles they played, and what led them to an acceptance of political activity as a moral obligation. In doing so, I assumed that they can be both present in and understand a past and present situation simultaneously as indicated by Heidegger (1962). In other words, I questioned the respondents about their experiences with political activity as well as their feelings about what in their past and/or present situations motivated them to engage in politics outside the classroom.

My study was designed in such a way as to draw upon the ideas of Heidegger (1962), Husserl (1964), and van Manen (2007). Creswell (2007) wrote, "A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 57). This concept or phenomenon is likely to be the same or similar (Creswell, 2007) and, in this study, it involved secondary social studies teachers who shared a commonality in that they have participated in political activities. Since the nature of an event or action is understood through a person's

conscious experiences (Creswell, 2007), the respondents were asked questions designed to give meaning to their political involvement through recalling memories and sentiments.

While the interview questions allowed different people to reflect upon a similar experience, my role as the researcher was to consider their individual experiences, draw connections, and identify similarities and differences in their accounts. Creswell (2007) stated, “A phenomenology provides a deep understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” (p. 62). The general steps in conducting a qualitative, phenomenological study proposed by Moustakas (1994) served as a guideline for the study. I have identified the act of engaging in political activity as the phenomena or event to be studied. In-depth interviews were conducted with secondary, social studies teachers and gave participants a chance to share their experiences in politics and their perceptions of what inspired them to become politically involved. In the analysis of the data, the *textural description* is the actual account of what was experienced by the teachers. The textural description will be blended with the *structural description*. The structural description is how the respondents emotionally and psychologically perceived different parts of a similar experience (Moustakas, 1994). Blending participants’ *textural descriptions* with their *structural descriptions* will help me categorize their responses into overarching themes and, ultimately, attempt to understand better the driving force behind the decisions of social studies teachers to engage in political activities.

Some researchers argued that education was the most important factor in determining political activity (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Nie et al., 1996; Putnam, 1995;

Robnett & Bany, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 1996; Verba et al., 1993). However, others argued that if there was a positive correlation between education and political activity, then education was one of many factors that worked together to determine political involvement tendencies among citizens (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Mayer, 2011; Verba et al., 1993). Even the theoretical lens through which I conducted this study offered discrepancies about education and the likelihood of political activity (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Inglehart, 1970; Gün, 2014). Therefore, I designed the study disregarding education as a motivating factor of political participation because there was little variation between participants as each teacher had at least a bachelor's degree (as required of their profession), and half of them had earned or were in the process of earning a post-graduate degree. Additionally, the literature mentioned gender as another main determinant of political activity (Kittilson, 2010; Putnam, 1995; 2010; Robnett & Bany, 2011; Verba et. al., 1997). Since males and females were part of the sample, I was prepared to use probes to learn more about perceived effects of the participants' genders on personal, political activity; however, the participants did not identify gender as a motivating factor. Therefore, while the demographic questionnaire asked participants to provide their education history and gender, I used the data more for building a biographical background than for formulating an argument.

Research Questions

In this study the following research questions were addressed:

1. What do secondary social studies teachers perceive as influences of their political involvement?
2. How do the teachers perceive that their political involvement impacts teaching and learning?
3. How do teachers perceive that their political involvement impacts policy?

The first research question involved an exploration of what secondary social studies teachers perceived as influences of their political involvement. Since the very nature of social studies deals with social interactions and civic participation, Atwell (1973) and Long and Long (1974) posited that it would be assumed that social studies teachers would be politically active outside of the classroom, but that that assumption would be incorrect. Researchers have shown that while many social studies teachers think being politically active is important, many lack the time, knowledge, or resources to engage in political activity (Anderson et al., 2007; Atwell, 1973; Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014; O'Hanion & Trushynski, 1973). While there many social studies teachers who refrain from participating in politics, I was most interested in determining what inspired those secondary social studies teachers who were involved in politics to overcome the various barriers toward political involvement. Researchers have focused on teachers who are not more involved in politics (Atwell, 1973; Henderson, Czaja, & McGee, 1996; Morton & Staggs, 2001); explorations of the motivations of teachers who are politically active have not been found to be as prevalent in the literature.

The second research question involved an exploration of how the teachers perceived that their political activity impacts teaching and learning. Niemi and Niemi (2007) found that secondary social studies teachers often have different opinions regarding how much a teacher should share of his or her personal, political beliefs, and voting history. However, in a study of secondary social studies teachers, Anderson et al. (2007) found that many of the teachers wanted to portray political involvement in a positive manner in hopes of inspiring students to exercise their civic rights and responsibilities. I sought to examine how these politically active secondary social studies teachers portrayed their political actions and decisions to a captive audience of students (Reich, 2007; Thornton, 1991). The literature is lacking in recent studies regarding secondary social teachers and how they view the importance of their own political involvement in designing lessons and assignments. There are many opportunities for discussion regarding current political activity happenings in education (Aragon & Rowland, 2015) and other areas of policy, especially since 2016 is a presidential election year (Taugott & Wlezien, 2009).

The third research question involved an exploration of how the teachers perceived that their political activity impacts policy. Many teachers who are not involved in politics attribute their lack of political involvement to their feelings of helplessness and insignificance within the political system (Morton & Staggs, 2001). Whether or not this sentiment also is felt by secondary social studies teachers who are politically active needs more attention as, historically, part of the social studies curriculum requires students to

understand how citizens affect policy (O'Hanlon & Trushynksi, 1973; William & Maloyed, 2013).

Many lawmakers cite teachers as their biggest potential ally and asset, as the teachers are the ones in the classrooms who are responsible for enacting education legislation and producing desired results (Fowler, 2006). I sought to determine if there was a sense of camaraderie on the part of teachers where they, also, saw their involvement in politics as beneficial and influential. I investigated what propelled these teachers forward in a system in which some feel that their opinions and political efforts are cast aside by lawmakers (Eliasoph, 1998; Kelchtermans, 2005; Lawn & Grace, 2012; Sachs, 2001).

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the *instrument* because the researcher is the one collecting the data (Creswell, 2013). I interviewed the participants, analyzed their answers, and drew conclusions based upon the data. I created the interview protocol based upon issues that were raised as well as questions that were left unanswered in the literature (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) and Kvale (1996) suggested generating at least five open-ended interview questions that yield a semi-structured interview in which participants answer the interview questions while also feeling free to elaborate on any given topic. A panel of experts reviewed the interview protocol and made suggestions on ways to improve the questions (Creswell, 2013). This panel of experts consisted of three people who were not involved in the study, but have experience with both education and politics. The interview protocol was amended until

all agreed that the questions were appropriate and were aligned with the intent of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Interviews

Conducting interviews supports the importance Kvale (1996) placed on obtaining “the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning” (p. 124). Creswell (2007) also validated the importance of interviews in phenomenological research because, “The important point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who experience it” (p. 131). I was interested in specifically understanding the motivations and perceptions of teachers who were politically active; interviews were expected to serve as a tool to provide the appropriate information to tell the teachers’ stories.

Conducting an interview can be accomplished by telephone, focus group, or in a one-on-one setting (Creswell, 2007). One-on-one interviews will be conducted because they provide the most likelihood of receiving detailed accounts that would address each research question (Creswell, 2007). This study utilized in-depth interviewing which allowed the interviewer and participant to engage in a detailed conversation that ranged from very organized and controlled to very unrestricted and unstructured (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Phenomenological interviews such as this involved questions that were designed to allow the respondent to reflect on his or her experiences of being politically involved as well as the impact his or her politically active nature had on his or her teaching and on policy (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The tone of the interview was conversational, which promoted a calm, safe, and casual environment. Casual interviews typically allow the respondent to feel more relaxed, comfortable, and safe to share information about his or her experiences that would otherwise not be shared if the respondent did not feel as if he or she could trust the interviewer or be comfortable in his or her surroundings (Kvale, 1996). The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes with a brief introduction that included an explanation of the purpose of the interview. Kvale (1996) recommended this introductory step because it allows each participant to have insight into the purpose of the research as he or she is formulating answers to the questions. As suggested by Kvale, I also will *debriefed* at the conclusion of the interview to repeat back to the respondent a general summary of his or her responses to ensure I have the correct understanding of his or her experiences. The final ten minutes of the interview was also a good time to review any parts of the participants' responses on which I needed clarification (Kvale, 1996).

Interview Protocol

The interview questions were developed by reviewing the literature and were designed to address each of the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Every question and probe was designed to allow the respondents to speak openly about their history in political activity and the impact they believe it has had on their pedagogy and/or public policy. A panel of experts who have experience with education and politics reviewed the interview questions. The expert panel reviewed the questions to confirm that they reflected the purpose of the study and address the research questions (Creswell, 2007).

The interview questions were refined based upon their recommendations (Creswell, 2007).

I used two introductory questions to ask about participants' personal backgrounds, followed by 10 questions with accompanying probes that address four main areas of interest:

1. How the respondents became politically active,
2. From where/how the respondents received their political insight and information,
3. How the respondents perceive their politically active status impacts instruction,
4. How the respondents perceive their political activity has impacted policy.

Other interview questions included, "How important is it for citizens to be politically active?" "What factors in the past have influenced your decision to become politically active?", "From what sources do you get your political information?", "What have been the results of your political activity?", and "How has your political activity impacted your classroom instruction?" (see Appendix C).

Participants

Creswell (2013) recommended including between six and fifteen participants. In this study I will incorporate the experiences of 10 politically active, secondary, social studies teachers from north Texas. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached (Creswell, 2013).

In phenomenology studies, the researcher chooses to study people rather than situations (Charles, Gentles, McKibbin, & Ploeg, 2015). Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that sampling respondents for a qualitative study is not meant to be arbitrary; it should be done with purpose. I used Kuzel (1992) and Patton (1990)'s *criterion theory* to choose my participants because in this study I required that those being interviewed share different experiences with the same phenomenon.

There were four points of criteria for selecting the participants. The first criterion was that the participants include males and females. Including male and female teachers is necessary to get an overall understanding of experiences that is not limited to just one gender (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The second was that the respondents must be current, social studies teachers between sixth and twelfth grades in public schools. The literature addressed political behaviors of teachers in the past (Fowler, 2006; Morton & Staggs, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1996), however, the literature is lacking in the experiences of current teachers. The third was that the participants must have a minimum of three years of teaching experience. First and second year teachers were excluded because the intent of the study is to have teachers reflect on past experiences; teaching three years or more would allow participants the opportunity to ponder their actions over an extended period of time. The final criterion was that the teachers must have experience with political activity other than voting because voting often is seen as the easiest and most common way to be politically involved (Gallego, 2010). Political activities can include testifying in front of a legislative body, drafting a letter to a legislator or public official, participating in a political campaign, donating money to a

political candidate, holding an elected office, and organizing and/or attending a political rally.

In this study I utilized *single-stage sampling*. Names and contact information of participants were accessible and available for sampling (Creswell, 2013). Location and availability also was taken into consideration when deciding on the use of *convenience sampling* to interview teachers in north Texas (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Since convenience sampling involves the “selection of the most accessible subjects” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523), teachers who work in north Texas public schools were interviewed. Convenience sometimes lacks random variability (Kuzel, 1992; Marshall, 1996; Patton, 1990); in this study I also used *snowball sampling* that “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know cases are information-rich” (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). I began by contacting the social studies curriculum coordinator of a school district in north Texas. She was provided with explanations, purposes, and goals of the study so that she will had a clear understanding of what characteristics were needed in a participant. After the coordinator was given a list of the participant criterion, she was asked to contact five or more colleagues who were current, secondary social studies teachers with political experience. I contacted these teachers, explained the study, asked for their permission to conduct an interview with them, and asked them to refer me to anyone they might know who also fits the desired criterion. This process was repeated until I had the needed number of participants (Creswell, 2013).

Data Gathering

Data were collected via questionnaires, interviews, analytic memos, and artifacts. Prior to the interview, I asked the ten participants to fill out an online questionnaire on a survey generator (see Appendix B) in order to request demographics, education history, and professional history. Therefore, I was able to have general background information about them before they are interviewed.

The duration of each interview was 60-90 minutes and was conducted at a place of each respondent's choosing. The interviews took place at a neutral location which included the school at which the respondent worked or a public location such as a quiet restaurant, coffee shop, or bookstore. Creswell (2013) advocated for audiotaping because the researcher is more likely to record the exact answers of the respondents. Therefore, because the interviews were audiotaped, the location needed to be one that did not interfere with the sound quality of the recordings. Notes were taken during the interviews so that I can remember my thoughts after the interview concluded and so that I was not tempted to interrupt the respondents' answers and interfere with the natural flow of the interview and the audio clarity (Creswell, 2007). Following the transcription of the interview, analytic memos were used to analyze the data presented in the responses (Yin, 2015). These memos were comprised of tentative presumptions regarding emerging themes and possible codes used for analysis (Yin, 2015).

Part of the study required participants to provide documented examples of their political activities. These examples could include pictures, emails, ticket stubs, pamphlets, brochures, shirts, and/or other articles of clothing. Participants were asked to

bring these examples or copies of these examples to the interview. Participants also forwarded copies of their documented political participation to me via email prior to or following the interview.

Treatment of Data

Once each interview was completed, the data were organized and analyzed (Creswell, 2007). Upon the conclusion of each interview, Creswell's (2007) steps of data analysis and representation were used in order to evaluate each participant's responses to the interview questions. After each interview was transcribed verbatim, I listened to the recorded interview while following the transcript to ensure all responses were included and transcribed correctly (Creswell, 2007). I emailed overall thoughts and general summaries taken from the transcriptions to each of the participants. Analytic memos were written in the margins of the transcribed interview or in a separate journal; I included my interpretations and reflections of the interview responses (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2015). By taking a narrative approach in writing memos, I provided a thorough account of how I interpreted each participant's experience with political activity (Creswell, 2007). With "short phrases, ideas and key concepts" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151), I utilized these memos in order to keep track of preliminary thoughts as I reviewed the interview transcripts and organized and interpreted the data based on possible themes and codes (Yin, 2015).

Once the data had been collected and verified and after I added personal thoughts and reactions in the margins, the data and memos were coded, organized, and grouped by categories (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding was necessary to assign meaning to the information collected in the interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and

sort the points of interest into divisions as they related to one another (Creswell, 2007). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the first stage of coding where meaning is assigned to the data is known as *open coding*. In the second stage of coding, I employed *axial coding* to organize the interview responses into categories. I extracted four major themes from the transcribed accounts of the respondents' contextual experiences in a process called *lean coding*. Codes were valid, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive. To ensure validity, I cross checked the codes with the thoughts and intended messages conveyed by the respondents. Mutual exclusivity was achieved through ensuring there was no overlap between the codes. Finally, to exhaust and saturate the data collection, all relevant data collected was included in codes based on their assigned meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Classification is followed by interpretation, which required me to reexamine the phenomenon according to the decided upon themes. Creswell (2007) recommended presenting the information in a way that was clear and concise. This visual presentation of the data was in the form of charts and/or matrices, which were filled with text rather than numbers in order to describe the respondents' experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

In following Creswell's (2007) suggested steps to report a phenomenological study, the final step was to write about the findings from the interviews with the respondents. First, I referred back to my interview transcripts and memos in order to describe accurately that which was felt, endured, and experienced by the respondents. Second, I created a list of important points or statements made by the respondents

pertaining to their experiences. Third, I organized these statements into thematic categories or *meaning units*. Finally, I used the designated themes to write accounts and explanations, which report what was experienced and how the experience impacted the respondent (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were asked to bring or email copies of artifacts related to their political activity. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) recommended using the document analysis method in a qualitative study in order to access information that may not be included in interview responses. Document analysis is a process in which the researcher studies and analyzes documents in an effort to *synthesize* information presented within the documents (Bowen, 2009). Prior (2003) advised researchers not to approach document analysis as proof of the occurrence of isolated events. Documents in this study were analyzed across a larger backdrop of historical and social contexts (Miller & Alvarado, 2005). The nature and frequency of the teachers' political activities were revealed in the documents (Bowen, 2009; Miles & Alvarado, 2005). Kim, Nie, and Verba (1974) defined political frequency as, "the relative amount of activity" in which a person engaged (p. 107). Frequency in activity often is difficult to measure because the definition can be subjective to the participant (Kim et al., 1974). Therefore, I defined frequent political activity as activity in which a participant's involvement was ongoing or occurred multiple times a year. Moderate political activity was defined as activity in which the participant's involvement is seasonal or between two and four times a year. I will define minimal political activity as activity in which the participant's involvement was a one-time occurrence (Kim et al., 1974). The dates of the documents also were considered as this

information provide a timeframe in which the teachers engaged in political activities in order to determine whether participation occurred during times of historical importance such as general election years or during congressional sessions (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Miller & Alvarado, 2005).

The nature of each document also was considered in order to understand the types of political activities in which the teachers chose to engage (Miller & Alvarado, 2005; Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991; Yin, 2015). For example, a teacher who chose to engage in activities such as protests or campaign rallies may have a different perception of political involvement than a teacher whose political involvement included activities such as writing an email to a legislator or signing an online petition. The artifacts revealed the intentions of the participant as they highlighted the physical and social nature of the political activity in which the teacher participated (Yin, 2015). The teachers' interview responses should be supported by the documents; I will look for inconsistencies (Prior, 2003).

Trustworthiness

Researchers sometimes question the validity of qualitative research since during its use statistics or numerical data are not relied on to confirm or prove findings (Creswell, 2007). However, there are ways to validate qualitative findings through “equivalents that parallel traditional quantitative approaches” (Creswell, 2007, p. 202). For example, Eisner (1991) referred to semantics and advocated for the researcher to make his or her qualitative study *credible* rather than *valid*. Eisner encouraged this kind of term clarifications and/or replacements for those skeptical of qualitative research. He

affirmed the importance of qualitative studies and stated that we can use them to help “understand situations that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). While agreed-upon verbiage may be a point of contention among researchers, those in qualitative research recognize its overall place in the research field as one of importance and worth (Creswell, 2007). As with any study, the researcher must take certain steps to ensure that his or her findings will be trusted and relevant.

This study used Creswell and Miller’s (2000) definition of validity, which is “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (p. 125). In order to accomplish this, direct questions and applicable probes were used to allow the respondent to report his or her ideas, feelings, and motivations regarding his or her participation in political activity. Documentation was requested to provide proof and descriptions of the participants’ political involvement; examples of documents included pictures, campaign memorabilia, notes, and copies of letters written to legislators. These documents were expected to offer a more complete picture of the nature of the activity in which the teachers participated in order to tell a story that would reflect the participants’ experiences.

Creswell (2007) described eight validation strategies and recommended that the researcher employ at least two of them in a qualitative study. Creswell’s (2007) validation strategies include: prolonged engagement; triangulation; peer review or debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick description; and external audits. In this study, triangulation; peer review or

debriefing; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; and rich, thick description were used and are described below in further detail.

Triangulation

This study involved ten secondary social teachers from different schools and backgrounds. Therefore, triangulation was important to validate findings within the study (Creswell, 2007). Creswell and Miller (2000) defined triangulation as, “A validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). Pre-interview questionnaires explored participants’ backgrounds leading up to their political involvement. Transcribed interviews were used to understand the participants’ perceived experiences in political activity. While all of the participants were social studies teachers, they were employed at multiple schools in the north Texas area. Their responses regarding their political activity were transcribed and reviewed in order to examine the data for overarching similarities or themes between their responses and experiences.

I used document analysis as another way to triangulate the data in this study. Bowen (2009) wrote that documents can be used to “verify findings or corroborate evidence” (p. 30). The interview responses were supported by the documents presented by the participants (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, the information in the documents did not contradict the participants’ responses, and follow-up interviews were not conducted in order to attempt to determine the reason for the differences (Bowen, 2009).

Peer Review or Debriefing

Researchers bring their own set of background knowledge, previous experiences, and skills to a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that peer debriefing is essentially “an external check on the inquiry process” (p. 301). Peer debriefing can augment trustworthiness as another peer, colleague, or person of the researcher’s choosing examines the data in hopes of noticing points in need of further examination that might go unnoticed by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed the use of peer review to ensure that I was reporting and explaining in a clear and concise manner. Two colleagues who were experts in qualitative research and phenomenological studies combed through the data to confirm that I addressed the research questions and extracted logical themes and conclusions from the participants’ responses.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

This study involves an area with which I am familiar, given my educational and professional background. As I was once a member of the very group that I studied (a social studies teacher with political experience), it was vital that I thoroughly explained my role as a teacher and political participant. According to Creswell (2007), clarifying researcher bias involves the researcher explaining “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to this study” (p. 208).

Member Checking

In this study I interpreted participants' perceptions. The participants answered interview questions regarding their perceptions of their own political involvement. As the researcher, I interpreted their responses within the context of my research questions. It was vital that I accurately interpreted the participants' answers and stayed true to their intended message. Harper and Cole (2012) defined member checking as "a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview" (p. 511). Member checking involves the participants reviewing the work of the researcher in an attempt to assess whether or not participants' intended points during the interviews were sufficiently understood by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I followed Creswell's (2007) approach to member checking and refrain from giving the respondents the transcribed copy of their interviews. Instead, I presented them with my interpretations and summaries for their approval in hopes of accurately conveying their thoughts and experiences.

Rich, Thick Description

Although the participants were selected based on criteria that I established, it was important to report only on participants' perceptions and refrain from inserting my personal experiences into the study. During interviews, each participant had opportunities to clarify, explain, and elaborate his or her answers to ensure a rich, thick description was given of his or her experiences. Since qualitative research relies on the stories of the participants told by the researcher, it is imperative to provide as much detail regarding the

respondents and their experiences as possible in hopes of increasing the likelihood of *transferability* across different experiences (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I strove to convey what motivated the social studies teachers to become politically active. The information they communicated with me regarding their personal and professional backgrounds were used to understand and report on their decisions to act as civil servants in terms of participating in the political process outside of voting. I gathered these data via the questionnaire, interview questions and probes, and documents that indicated the person was involved in political activities. I used these methods of data collection to allow the participants to expand upon their answers and provide more details regarding their experiences of serving as social studies teachers while also being politically active.

Summary

Chapter 3 included a description of the methodology, selection criteria for respondents, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 4, and the findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Teachers recognize that there is a connection between education and politics, and they are aware of specific policies directly involving education (Burns, 2007; Lee, 2006). Even though teachers are cognizant of how much their profession is impacted by political decisions, they are overwhelmingly absent from politics (The National Teacher Association, 2010). In spite of the social studies curriculum in grades 8-12 stressing the importance of civic responsibility, political awareness, and political participation (O'Hanlon & Trushysnski, 1973), social studies teachers are not more likely to participate in politics than teachers of any other content area (Lavine, 2014). Ten secondary, politically active, social studies teachers were interviewed in order to understand their perceptions of and motivations behind their political activity.

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of this study. The chapter includes an introduction to and a history of each of the participants and the four major themes that emerged from the study. After each major theme is introduced and discussed, it is separated into sub-themes based on each participant's *textural* and *structural descriptions* of the political activity(ies) in which he or she was involved.

Participants

Ten secondary, social studies teachers discussed their perceptions of and motivating factors behind their political participation. The criteria for the study stipulated that I interview 1) both males and females; 2) current, secondary social studies teachers; 3) teachers with a minimum three years teaching experience; and 4) teachers who engage

in political activity(ies) other than voting such as testifying in front of a legislative body, drafting a letter to a legislator or public official, participating in a political campaign, holding an elected office, donating money to a political candidate, and organizing and/or attending a political rally.

Participant Background

In addition to gathering data through interviewing participants based on the criteria above, I conducted a pre-interview demographic survey for each participant. Nine of the participants described their race as “White” while one of the participants described their race as “mixed-more than three.” Participants ranged in age from 30-52. Seven were married and two were single (one was divorced and one had never been married). All of the participants had earned a bachelor’s degree in history, and three participants double majored in theater, English as a Second Language (ESL), and political science, respectively. Seven of the ten participants had earned a master’s degree. Six of the master’s degrees of the participants were in education while one of the master’s degrees was in political science. Each of the participants was certified in social studies composite for grades 8-12. Two of the participants also were certified in history composite. Two of the participants held a certification in ESL K-12, one of the participants was certified in speech, and one held a theater certification.

John. John was born in north Texas and, with the exception of a few years during elementary school, had lived his whole life in the area in which he taught. He described teaching as, “a family thing,” and explained how he grew up around educators who were members of his immediate and extended family. While he felt like he understood the

general content in all four of the core subjects, John said that he found social studies the most interesting. His teaching career spanned over 30 years in the same district.

When asked about the importance of being involved in politics, John stated that it was “Very important because it’s your life.” However, he recognized that this realization did not come until later in his life. John shared that his awareness of political issues deepened in eleventh and twelfth grades as he began to watch and listen to the news more than he had in previous years. Other than voting, John was not politically active as an undergraduate student. While he was not a member, he was aware of political groups such as the Young Republicans and the Young Democrats. He admitted that early in his teaching career he was not involved in politics or voicing his opinion in school-wide issues mainly because he did not like to question authority and was concerned with pleasing administrators. This changed, however, when John was affected by a campus policy that he perceived as detrimental to teachers. This motivated him to stand up for his rights along with the rights of his colleagues on campus. He could not fathom why other educators and/or administrators were not actively voicing their opinions and becoming involved with policies that directly affect their profession. John labeled himself as an advocate for teachers’ rights and has been directly involved in raising the pay scale for teachers within the school district.

Matthew. Matthew, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, shared his perceived connection between political activity and civic responsibility by saying, “Being politically active is very important. It’s the whole basis of our government. It’s all about informed citizenry.” Matthew served in the Marine Corps where he traveled the world

and did two tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Upon retiring from the Marine Corps, he decided to pursue education because it was a “family business.” His father was a teacher and principal, and his wife was a teacher prior to his retirement from the military. Matthew earned a degree in history and a social studies composite certification and had taught for eight years in the same district.

Matthew attributed Boy Scouts to his knowledge both of political issues as well as how to become involved in the political process. One Boy Scout service activity was to research a community issue, take a stand, and inform the local representatives about their viewpoints regarding the issue. Since his family was involved in agriculture, Matthew said that he always chose agrarian issues that arose within the area in which he was living at the time. Matthew’s family also was involved with the school board with his mother serving as a school board member for two years while he was in middle school. At the time of the interview, Matthew was enrolled in a university graduate program in government studies with an expected graduation date of May 2018. Part of the program was to meet with ambassadors, draft policy letters, and participate in other lobbying activities. However, even if the graduate program did not require political activity, Matthew said that he thought he still would be politically active.

Ross. Ross was born and raised in north Texas. Both of his parents were European refugees. Ross recalled cultural tension within the area in which he lived due to his parents being Catholic, European immigrants who were living in the south. He earned a double major in history and classics. His passion for academics and the learning process directed him toward a career in education. At the time of the interview, Ross had been

teaching for ten years and had experience in middle and high school teaching newcomer social studies and English.

When asked how important it was to be politically involved, Ross responded, “It is very important. Citizens need to be more active and take a bigger role at the local level.” Also, he addressed the importance of being politically informed and warned of the dangers that come with solely listening to convenient sound bites. He felt that people tend to feel overwhelmed by national politics, and their political efforts could be more beneficial at the local level.

Austin. Austin was born in north Texas and during his early childhood moved to a small, rural city in southeast Texas where he attended primary and secondary school. He earned a bachelor’s degree in history and had planned on being a museum curator; however, he realized he needed a secondary degree, and the university had a master’s program in education that required no additional courses. Therefore, Austin decided to remain at the university and received his master’s degree in education as well as his social studies composite teaching certificate because he has always had a passion for history. Over his 20 year teaching career he had taught middle and high school social studies as well as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). While Austin thought that being politically informed was the most important aspect of citizenship, his interpretation of political activity differed from the other respondents in that he saw political inactivity as an action rather than an inaction.

Monica. Monica was born and raised in west Texas but moved to north Texas where she attended college and earned a bachelor’s degree in history and a master’s

degree in education. She shared that she knew from a very young age that she would be a teacher. When asked why she chose social studies, Monica described how the subject had been a lifelong passion. Monica had taught for two school districts in north Texas over the course of 11 years. She had taught one year of science and ten years of social studies. According to Monica, political activity and political awareness go hand in hand. She adamantly advocated for citizens to only be politically active if they are politically aware; the best way to be politically aware was through education.

Ron. Ron was a native Texan who earned a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in education. Ron recalled loving history as an adolescent. His parents often would take him to historical sites, which made him passionate about history because he made a direct connection with history and could picture himself present at the historical event. While he always intended to include history as part of his degree, he had no intention of being a history teacher; however, he decided to major in history and, after that, Ron explained how teaching social studies seemed to be the next logical step. According to Ron, being politically active is the only way citizens can ensure that those who dictate political policy hear all voices.

Betty. Betty was born and raised in a small town in East Texas. Betty said she felt that she had lived in a bubble because a lot of what was happening in the world was not of utmost importance in her small hometown. Growing up in an isolated town during the Civil Rights Era meant that she was unaware of the outside social events. Her parents were not involved in political activity; however, Betty did not think her parents were deliberately shielding her from societal issues. She always felt drawn to social studies and

began her undergraduate as a pre-law major with the intention of becoming a lawyer. However, she had also always felt drawn to education. Betty earned principal certification coursework, a master's degree in history, and counseling certification. At the time of the interview, Betty had been teaching history for 17 years. When asked how important it was to be politically active, Betty immediately replied, "We have no choice but to be politically active."

Sean. Sean had strong roots in north Texas and had been teaching social studies for the past seven years at the same school from which he graduated high school. His father and brother were both first responders, and his initial career plan was to follow in their footsteps. Upon graduating from high school, Sean enrolled in and graduated from Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) school and also was a volunteer firefighter for over a year. Sean decided to change careers after September 11, 2001. This national event impacted the course of his life. Sean completed his student teaching and was hired as a full-time teacher. While recognizing a person's constitutional right to not be politically active, Sean could not imagine why a citizen would not only be inactive but also uninformed when it came to politics and the working of the world.

Nancy. Nancy was born in Florida but moved to Texas at the age of two. She knew from an early age that she wanted to go into education for two main reasons: 1) school came easy for her, and she found herself explaining concepts to classmates who were struggling to understand; and 2) she experienced a lot of family turmoil throughout her high school years, and Nancy wanted to help other students through difficult times as her teachers were "the only bright points" of her day. Nancy earned degrees in English

and history. Her first professional assignment after college graduation was teaching English. She loved teaching English and probably would have continued had a health issue not forced her to take a leave of absence for a semester. When she was ready to return, there were no English jobs available at her former school; she accepted a position teaching social studies and has taught history ever since.

Nancy expressed that in order to be politically active one must, first, be informed. As a “product of the Civil Rights and Vietnam Era,” Nancy stated that political activity was of utmost importance in a republic in peaceful as well as turbulent times. Since September 11, 2001, Nancy advocated for a nation of informed *and* active citizens as she felt that the 2016 presidential election highlighted the importance of citizens ensuring that leaders in the federal government do not act outside of the powers laid out in the Constitution by the Founding Fathers.

Ted. As the only participant who had a previous job working in politics, Ted’s perceptions afforded the ability to analyze perceptions of policymakers and teachers in terms of politically active teachers. Ted was born in west Texas and came from a family of public servants as his mother worked for a hospital and his father was a nurse practitioner at the local Veteran’s Administration (VA). Ted earned a double major in political science and history. Immediately, he wanted to get involved in politics and moved to the northwest where he ran a Senate campaign. Next, Ted moved across the country to work in the state Senate and campaign for senators, gubernatorial candidates, and local judges in his free time. He earned a master’s degree in political science. Ted spent a short amount of time working on campaigns outside of Texas and chaired a close

friend's campaign for a state Senate seat. Ted's son was born in the height of a heated campaign season for his candidate and, by the next election, Ted felt it was time to leave the "campaign world," move back to Texas, and enter education as it allowed him more time to spend with his family. He had taught social studies and AVID for five years.

According to Ted, it is important for people to participate in politics because, otherwise, the only voices heard by politicians are the ones who donate the most money to them; this isolated a large percentage of the public which meant that they may not be considered in legislation. Ted felt that it was important to participate in politics because a politically knowledgeable public would be more likely to elect qualified people into office.

Themes

There were 4 themes that emerged as a result of the participants' responses to the interview protocol. The themes included 1) politically active adults had experiences with politics in the past, 2) current political activity was inspired by past and current events, 3) current perceptions of politics were shaped by previous and current experiences, and 4) politics and political activity affected education and teacher pedagogy.

The first major theme, politically active adults had experiences with politics in the past, developed as a result of what participants shared about their history with political activity(ies). The details regarding political activity were analyzed based on the described nature, frequency, motivations, and perceptions of the political activities in which they participated in the past. From the theme, politically active adults had experiences with political activity in the past, emerged four subthemes: 1) first exposure to politics

occurred prior to attending post-secondary institutions, 2) participants became aware of politics because of the presence of politically active people in their lives, 3) specific events motivated participants to be politically active, and 4) first exposure to politics did not always occur simultaneously with first being motivated to be politically active. Each participant shared some event or circumstance that made him or her aware of politics and, specifically, political issues within and outside of his or her local community. While not all participants had a person who was directly involved in politics in their lives as an adolescent or young adult, each participant discussed the presence or absence of a politically active person with whom he or she was in close contact prior to beginning a professional career. While each participant's reflection had its distinctions, there were enough similarities between the narratives of participants who were in close contact with someone who was politically active as well as enough similarities between the narratives of participants who were not in close contact with someone who was politically active in order to draw connections between these two groups within this subtheme. As participants shared stories about the first time they became aware of political issues and events, many participants explained how there was a motivating factor that inspired them to become *involved in politics* which was different from the event or circumstance that first made them *aware of politics*.

The second theme, current political activity is inspired by past and current events, developed as a result of participants' responses regarding the nature, frequency, motivations, and perceptions of political activities in which each participant was currently involved. From the theme emerged three subthemes: 1) current events build on past

events to motivate current political activity, 2) participants are involved in political and non-political organizations, and 3) political involvement is a current choice as well as a future goal. Whether it was the most recent 2016 presidential election or an area of ongoing, personal significance, each participant who had recently been involved in political activity was motivated by some internal or external factor that was discussed with emotion. Each participant was involved with some kind of activity in the community. Participants described their political and non-political activities, and each participant's descriptions helped tell the narrative of how they viewed their sense of civic responsibility to the community. All of the participants mentioned that they either wished they were more politically active or that they were content and/or looking forward to future political involvement.

The first and second themes and subsequent subthemes address the first research question, "What do secondary social studies teachers perceive as influences of their political involvement" because it is asking teachers to reflect upon different experiences of their past and present which might have made an impact on past, present, and future decisions to become politically active. Since politically active social studies teachers are in the minority of social studies teachers (National Teacher Association, 2010), the first and second themes explore possible explanations for what differentiates them from their colleagues in terms of being politically involved. The subthemes of the first theme included how the participants' first exposure to politics occurred before they enrolled as an undergraduate student, how they became aware of politics due to the influence of politically active people in their lives, significant events motivated political activity, and

how becoming aware of politics did not always happen at the same time as becoming motivated to be politically active. The subthemes of the second theme included how current events together with past events motivate current political activity, how civic participation can be in political and non-political organizations, and how political involvement is a current and future aspiration. Together, the themes and subthemes specifically provide a detailed analysis of the participants' perceptions of their political involvement.

The third major theme, current perceptions of politics are shaped by previous and current experiences, addresses how the participants perceived the relationship between the government and the governed. The subthemes for this theme are: 1) gathering accurate political information is important, 2) there are varying opinions regarding perceived results of political activity, and 3) perceptions of politics and the government may or may not change over time. The word *bias* was mentioned by all of the participants when they were asked about their most trusted source of political information. This subtheme addresses how each participant forms an opinion based on fact finding, and the extent to which each participant will go in order to understand political events and issues is explored in this subtheme. As all participants were involved in a different political activity, their responses varied depending on the nature and frequency of the activity in which they were involved. However, each response generated emotion from the participant whether it was extreme satisfaction, apathy, or extreme disappointment. Political activity had the potential to affect participants' perceptions of government and politics over time. As times have changed, policies have changed, people have changed,

and experiences have changed. Each participant described how his or her perceptions of political events evolved and how his or her perceptions impacted personal, political activity.

How the teachers perceived that their political involvement impacted policy is discussed in the third theme. Since some citizens, including teachers, cite their lack of faith in their ability to impact policy and the political process as a reason for their inactivity (Fowler, 2006), the interview protocol included questions that allowed the participants to reflect upon and explore their perceived impact on politics. The subthemes that emerged from this theme directly address teachers' perceptions of the ability to impact policy prior to, during, or after engaging in political activity; they included the importance of gathering political information, perceived results of political activity varied among the participants, and perceptions of government may not change with increasing levels of political experience

The fourth and final theme, politics and political activity affects the classroom, connected each participant's political involvement with his or her teaching pedagogy and practices in the classroom. The subthemes for this theme are: 1) politics and education are connected, 2) politics affects pedagogy, 3) personal, political activity affects pedagogy, 4) teaching about the importance of political activity is a recurrent theme in class, 5) student perceptions about politics and civic responsibility change over the course of the class, 6) social studies teachers have a responsibility to model and discuss the importance of political involvement, 7) there are mixed feelings regarding teachers who share their political beliefs. Each participant shared his or her views on how education is

connected with politics. The participants conveyed a sense of urgency in terms of the necessity of open dialogue between educators and politicians. Participants related their political experiences to their classroom philosophy and teaching methods. As social studies teachers, the participants saw themselves as potential role models for their students in terms of how to be politically aware and politically involved. Each participant expressed strong opinions regarding teachers who share his or her political beliefs with students. Social studies curricula in grades eight through twelve emphasize the roles of citizens in their communities (Lavine, 2014). Participant shared opinions regarding the role of a social studies teacher in modeling acceptable civic behavior by being politically active.

How teachers perceived their political involvement impacts teaching and learning was discussed in the fourth theme. Teachers shared how politics affected their profession, overall. The proceeding subthemes narrowed to how their political involvement impacts their teaching and their students' learning and included how education and politics are connected, the ways in which politics affect pedagogy, the ways in which personal, political activity affects pedagogy, how the importance of political activity is a recurrent theme in the participants' classes, how students perceptions about politics and civic responsibility change over the course of the class, how social studies teacher have a responsibility to model and discuss the importance of political involvement, and how feelings are mixed regarding teachers who share their personal, political beliefs.

Theme 1: Politically Active Adults had Experiences with Politics in the Past

All participants described their political activity prior to beginning their careers as educators. Out of the ten participants interviewed, two claimed to be politically active and politically aware while eight classified themselves as only politically aware during their times as PK-12 students. During their time spent as undergraduate students, all of the participants were active voters while seven participants were involved in activities other than voting. Eight participants attended graduate school or were in the process of completing graduate coursework at the time of the interview. Out of the eight participants who spent time in graduate school, four said that they participated in political activities other than voting while all eight stated that they were politically aware and active voters as graduate students.

First political activity and exposure to politics. Participants described their first experiences with political activity, which, for some, began as a student in PK-12; for others, experiences with political activity did not begin until they were an undergraduate or graduate student. Each participant reflected on the first time he or she remembered realizing that there were current events, societal conflict, and political issues existing outside of his or her perceived world. For some, this first exposure to politics was directly the result of studying about historical and current events in school. For others, an important event caught their attention and made them aware of political matters while others were first made aware of politics because of the influence of a person or organization outside of school. For the participants, political awareness did not always transfer to political activity.

For the two participants who were politically active in PK-12, their political participation was tied to an organization or an organized event of which they were a part; they did not seek out political activities in which to become involved on their own. Matthew was a member of the Boy Scouts for 13 years (kindergarten through twelfth grade). He credited the organization for initiating his political involvement during late elementary, middle, and high school, as he was required to choose an issue of personal importance to research and address with a congressman or congresswoman via handwritten letters. He provided photos documenting his Boy Scout involvement throughout the years, which implied that he was a very active member for a long period of time and was involved in various activities in addition to community politics. He stated, "Boy Scouts emphasized 'We the people' and not 'They who are above us.'"

Eight of the ten participants remembered being politically aware as a PK-12 student while four participants specifically mentioned that they did not become politically aware until their later high school years. John, Betty, and Ted stated that they were not politically active in PK-12; however, they began to pay attention to political issues in high school. Sean admitted to being politically unaware until after his senior year of high school on September 11, 2001 (9/11). He explained that he became politically aware after 9/11 because it was such a devastating event that dominated the news for so long after the attacks. Austin was aware of local issues as his family members were elected to the school board, and Nancy explained how she was very aware of politics even though she was not politically active; she attributed this to the fact that she had no transportation options to attend political events.

Even though all of the ten participants described themselves as active voters when they were pursuing their undergraduate degrees, eight participants engaged in varying degrees of political activities other than voting during this time of their lives. Betty and Ross were the most politically active as undergraduate students in this study. While earning his bachelor's degree, Ross found himself involved in the College Republicans and Respect for Life as well as an organization dealing with issues that were not deemed very important in the community at the time simply because it was his personal passion. Prior to attending election night watch parties at her university, Monica volunteered with the George W. Bush presidential campaign by asking to post signs in front yards and distributing candidacy information around neighborhoods. Although he did not seek out political activity, Sean listened to speakers at his convenience on his university's quad in between classes.

This study designated "political activity" to include membership in political and non-political organizations. Nancy, Austin, and Matthew claimed to be politically active during their undergraduate careers. However, the nature of their political activities differed from Ross, Monica, Ted, Sean, and Betty. During her time in college, Nancy became a member of the Young Democrats Society; however, she did not attend any of the group's extra meetings or activities as she was unable to fit them into her full time work and class schedule. Matthew had a unique position in that he was serving in the military and certain political activities were frowned upon; however, he saw his time in the Marine Corps as voluntary political involvement.

Six of the ten participants had obtained a graduate degree and two were enrolled in a graduate program at the time of the interview. Four of the participants claimed to be politically active during their time as graduate students. Part of the program in which Matthew was enrolled at the time of the interview required students to maintain involvement with political activity. Per the program's requirements, Matthew chose political issues and activities with which to become involved and drafted letters concerning these policies to politicians. He shared copies of these letters that showed he frequently wrote to politicians and advocated for upholding individual rights. Even though Ted's master's degree was in political science, he was not required to participate in politics for any given class; however, he was very politically active because he was working for various local campaigns and interned in the senate in a northeastern state. Ron first became politically active in graduate school when he donated money to the George W. Bush reelection campaign; however, he was not politically active in any other ways other than voting. Out of the eight participants with or pending a graduate degree, each person stated that they were politically aware and voted regularly in national, state, and local elections.

The four participants who mentioned school as a reason for their initial exposure to politics discussed teachers and programs. John and Betty explained their first exposure to politics was because of the influence of their secondary, social studies teachers. Ross was an active member of the debate team in high school, and he remembered first becoming aware of politics due to the fact that he was required to choose and research political issues in order to be able to successfully debate either side of the issue. Monica

remembered becoming aware of politics as in elementary school when they performed a program for then-First Lady Barbara Bush.

Those who recalled an event that caught their political attention for the first time spoke of events that were of historical significance. John mentioned the assassination attempt of President Ronald Reagan as it was at that point that he realized the importance of political figures and the role they play in leading and shaping the direction of the country. The events that exposed Ron, Nancy, and Sean to politics were not negative or catastrophic in nature. Ron remembered the 1996 presidential race between President Bill Clinton and Bob Dole as being the event that exposed him to politics while Sean first took notice of politics during and following the tumultuous 2000 George W. Bush and Al Gore presidential campaign and subsequent uncertainty regarding the results. Nancy's memory went even further back than elementary school. At three years old, she remembered watching President John Kennedy being sworn in as the 35th president of the United States and attributed that experience to her early understanding of the conflict and mixed feelings by Americans when a new Commander and Chief takes the oath of office.

Three of the participants mentioned an organization or a group of people first introducing them to political issues and events. Matthew, a dedicated Boy Scout, became politically aware as early as kindergarten (his first year in Boy Scouts) when he became involved in the community and local politics. Even though Austin remembered his secondary, social studies teachers helping him expand his knowledge, Austin attributed his first encounter with political issues to the fact that his mother and uncle served on the school board. Ted gave credit to members of his immediate circle of friends in high

school for introducing him to politics as they would have casual conversations about politics at lunch or in the hallway.

Presence of politically active people. Four out of the ten participants remembered their family members participating in political activities other than voting. While John discussed his aunt campaigning for Congressman Jim Wright when John was in middle school, Monica shared memories of her mom campaigning for President George W. Bush as well as other Texas Republican politicians, and she remembered putting Republican candidate signs in peoples' yards with her mom. The other two participants who had family members actively involved in politics described how their parents were members of the school board of the district in which they attended school. Matthew described his situation growing up as one that promoted a sense of duty in the community as his family had active, leadership roles on the school as well as in the church and local community. Matthew and Austin remembered being young and overhearing discussions among their politically active family members either at family gatherings or during evening dinners.

All of the participants answered that their friends in PK-12 were not politically active. When it came to undergraduate and graduate school, six participants remembered having politically active friends. While Ted shared that his friends during his time as an undergraduate were politically active, his answer was slightly different from the other participants in that he was the "politically active one" out of his group of friends and would encourage his friends to participate in politics.

Six participants remembered that at least one of their teachers was engaged in politics. All but one participant stated that it was his or her social studies teacher(s) who were politically active. Matthew remembered two social studies teachers who were politically active and worked their political activities into the curriculum by describing how they registered people to vote, brought people to polling stations, and he even remembered stuffing envelopes during class. Nancy shared a story about her United States history teacher who would bring her views of politics and political activity into the classroom in seemingly unconventional ways such as setting up a mock communist regime in the classroom. Betty identified her junior year history teacher as politically active and described how this teacher valued political engagement as well as encouraged the students in the class to participate in political activities based on their interests in the community. Of the six participants who discussed the political activity(ies) of their teachers, only Ross identified politically active teachers as English and not social studies teachers.

Specific events. Two of the participants, John and Nancy, were not motivated to become politically involved until after they began teaching. The other eight participants shared various stories about being motivated to become politically active. Two participants mentioned a specific election as the event that inspired them to become active in politics. When then-Governor George W. Bush was running for president, Monica performed with her high school's cheering squad in a rally and was later involved in his presidential campaign passing out signs and information about Bush around her neighborhood. Through this, she realized how ordinary people can directly get involved

in matters that can affect the country's future. When asked about his motivations for becoming politically active prior to teaching, Ron mentioned the re-election campaign of President George W. Bush and designated this event as the one that most significantly impacted his political involvement as this was the first time Ron donated money to a political candidate.

Rather than mentioning a specific event, the majority of the participants referenced their families as the primary motivating factor behind their past political involvement. Two participants were products of military families and attributed their family's sense of service to their country as reason for their own political engagement. Even though Matthew was exposed to politics at a very young age because of his involvement with the Boy Scouts, his family also motivated him to independently pursue political activities. Ross was the product of parents who were immigrants and refugees, and he saw that as the catalyst for his political involvement prior to teaching. While he had close relatives who were active members of the school board, Austin designated his family's agricultural ties to the community in which he was raised as the motivating factor behind his decision to be politically involved.

Influences involving family issues also motivated Betty to become politically active. However, the nature of her experience differed from the other participants who referenced family involvement and/or dedication to organizations as the main motivating factor for political activity. Instead, Betty told of an event that altered her life in such a dramatic way that she would never consider abstaining from political involvement in the future. She explained how her son was kidnapped at the age of four by his biological

father. She tried consulting legal help in Texas to no avail since her child was transported outside of the state. She spent a few weeks learning everything she could about her rights and what the courts were and were not allowed to do in order to take her son back to Texas. Betty realized that she was the only one looking out for her rights as well as the rights of her son. She concluded her story by saying, “Being involved and aware is so important. Your life could depend on it.” Since then, she had been a proponent of advocacy and has spoken for the rights of those who are silenced.

Although it was the same event, both of the participants who listed the terrorist attacks on 9/11, as the factor that motivated them to become politically active shared different experiences and responses. Sean made a point each year to dedicate a day during the first week of school to explain to his students how and why 9/11, made such an impact on him. He admitted to his students that he was not politically aware or motivated to be politically active until after the terrorist attack, which was a few months after he graduated from high school. Following the attacks, he began spending time with new friends who frequently discussed current events and accompanying topics such as Islam phobia. Not only did it change his feelings about being politically active, the event changed his career as shortly thereafter he decided that he wanted to pursue a career in social studies education where he could, “talk about this stuff all day long,” rather than pursue a career as a first responder. 9/11 also impacted Ted in that he became more politically aware which made him want to become more politically involved.

Theme 2: Current political activity inspired by past and current events

A criterion for this study was that each participant was politically active at some point during his or her teaching career. All of the participants had engaged in at least one political activity while they were teaching. When it came to current political engagement, nine out of ten participants answered that they participated in some form of political activity other than voting at the time of the interview.

Current and past events. Six of the nine participants who were politically active at the time of the interview mentioned elections as one of their motivating factors. There was a general mix of discussion surrounding federal and state elections. In terms of presidential elections, five participants declared the candidate's character as a factor that motivated their political activity. John remembered feeling rage when he heard 1996 presidential candidate Bob Dole describe teachers as "evil" during a televised debate. The comment motivated him to volunteer at Democrat polling stations and register people to vote for President Bill Clinton.

The four participants who discussed the character of a presidential candidate as a motivating factor mentioned the 2016 presidential election. Nancy had limited political experience prior to her career in education and had only been politically active since she began teaching United States history in the early 2000s. Through teaching the class and becoming more familiar with the content, she had been able to recognize the important role citizens play in their government. As an avid Senator Bernie Sanders supporter, Nancy described herself as "unsettled" with the outcome of the 2016 presidential election and stated, "I'm motivated to be politically active now more than ever."

While two of the participants expressed anxious feelings regarding the 2016 presidential election, two generally were pleased with the results and were motivated to participate in politics based on their feelings of affirmation or general curiosity. Ron stated that his history in the military affected his feelings toward President Donald Trump and resulted in his support for the military strategy upon which Trump campaigned. Ron was the one participant who had been politically active in the past but did not describe himself as currently politically active. He provided a photo as an artifact for the study reflecting his commitment to civic duty from the early 2000s dressed in military fatigues in Afghanistan. He claimed that it was because of his experiences in Afghanistan and issues involving military transparency that inspired his minor, most recent political activity during the 2015-2016 presidential primaries.

Sean's motivation behind his recent political activity was different from any other answer given by a participant in this study. The reason he attended a political event in the two months preceding the interview was curiosity. He wanted to know more and experience a rally firsthand. Sean considered himself "part of the 'anyone but Hillary vote;'" yet, he attended an anti-Trump rally because he wanted to experience such an event firsthand and have conversations with people. He shared a photo of himself standing at the rally with a crowd in the background wearing Hillary Clinton campaign regalia while he was dressed in clothes that did not endorse any politician. While Sean was motivated by curiosity, it specifically was curiosity that was a result of the heated 2016 presidential election that inspired him to attend a rally.

The two participants who were motivated to be politically active because of state elections were involved in the races of Texas gubernatorial candidates as well as state representatives. Even though they did not volunteer together, John and Betty were active with the Wendy Davis campaign for governor of Texas, and they both shared different photos of them posing with other campaign volunteers. John shared photos of yard signs and informational material leftover from Davis's campaign. He allowed her campaign staffers to stay in his house while they were campaigning in north Texas, and he went with them to canvass neighborhoods. Betty also was motivated by Davis's candidacy for governor, and she campaigned for Davis in the form of passing out information in neighborhoods and volunteering at polling stations to talk to voters before they entered the voting booths. John and Betty volunteered to register people to vote during Wendy Davis's election campaign, and John offered rides to polling stations to people who did not have access to transportation.

Financial support was another way that three participants exhibited political activity due to their strong feelings regarding candidates in an election. Nancy donated almost \$1000 to the campaign of Bernie Sanders. Matthew donated money to a state senator and a state representative's campaign. John regularly donated money to the campaign of the candidate he thought was the most qualified for the office for which he or she was running. Each participant who discussed his or her experience donating money stated that he or she was motivated to contribute financially because of the candidate's message aligning closely with the participant's beliefs.

Although it was not the only motivating factor they mentioned, two of the participants referenced a violation of rights as another issue that inspired them to participate in politics during their careers as educators. Matthew described himself as a “big Constitutionalist” who held the rights granted to him by the Constitution in very high regard. He discussed how there was no mention of the separation of church and state in the Constitution, and he often became angry when “someone tries to say that violating separation of church and state is unconstitutional as nowhere in the Constitution does it specifically say church and state are separate.” Matthew was a proponent of the second amendment and was a member of the National Rifle Association (NRA). He explained his stance by saying, “Everybody who tries to hurt the second amendment, that’s going to be something that gets my goat real fast.” John described the first moment he became politically active as an educator. Prior to embarking on a phase of his career that he labeled the “rebel rousing years,” he was one who would never question authority and often opted out of attracting attention to himself in the workplace as he only wanted positive attention from administrators. As he was confident in his teaching abilities, he did not worry about losing his job when he spoke out against a principal (for whom he had the utmost admiration and respect) because she was assigning mandatory duties for teachers during their conference periods. John had assisted teachers in filing grievances when their rights were violated by the school or school district and had fought at the district and state level for a salary increase for teachers and retired teachers.

Half of the participants mentioned education as a motivating factor for their personal, political involvement, although some participants within this group of educators

motivated by education politics placed more of a value on this topic than others. Monica and Sean mentioned it as an issue that had the potential of motivating them to become politically active; however, they did not give education politics as much of their time compared to other issues. They expressed a similar approach to education policy in that they believed it changed too often to allow time for large amounts of involvement.

For the other three participants who mentioned education as a motivating factor for political activity, this topic was one that elicited strong passion and the overwhelming desire to become politically involved. Education politics was an important issue for Ross due to his professional and personal connection as his son was an elementary student with special needs, and he received services from early childhood intervention (ECI) programs. Ross elaborated, “Education is one of if not the biggest motivating factors for me. Twenty minutes ago, I was on the phone with staffers in the office of our state representative discussing funding for special education.” He shared his notes as an artifact from his conversation that included points he wanted to discuss as well as the staffer’s responses.

As someone who attended the annual Women’s March on Saturday, January 21, 2017, Betty cited education as her reason for marching. Betty and John expressed their adamant disapproval of the then-nominated and now confirmed Secretary of Education (Betsy DeVos) under President Donald Trump. Betty and John expressed similar hopes in that they both explained how education issues have and will continue to inspire them to become politically active. John also referenced his passion for being an advocate for education equality. He was very outspoken in favor of a fair, public education for all

students and described how he felt vouchers and charter schools exploited teachers and marginalized students.

Four out of the ten participants discussed the economy as one of the issues that motivated them to be politically active at the time of the interview. Matthew explained how his geography class was learning about socialist economies of Latin America and he lectured students on the dangers of socialist systems and political favors. He stated, “As President Trump has so correctly identified, we need to bring jobs back to America.” As he continued to maintain ownership of property in his east Texas hometown, Austin was motivated to stay politically active with issues concerning agricultural taxes on land. He wrote letters and placed phone calls to politicians who tried to implement too many regulations and raise taxes on his land. While he did not have copies of the hand-written letters to show, he allowed me to look through some of his notes regarding taxes and regulation. Monica explained how economics coupled with environmental regulations motivated her to be politically active since the two issues had a direct impact on her family as her husband worked in the oil field.

While immigration was not one of the most prominent motivating factors for political involvement, the two participants who mentioned immigration as a personal, motivating factor were passionate in their descriptions about how it impacted their decisions to be politically active. Matthew felt that America focused too much time and money on immigrants. He explained that he was not trying to sound insensitive; he viewed illegal immigration as a strain on the country’s economy and presents linguistic issues as well as issues large class sizes for the teachers. Nancy referred to the number of

students in her classes who were undocumented in America. Following the results of the 2016 presidential election, she found herself counseling students who were fearful about their future as well as the future of their family. Since beginning her teaching career, Nancy felt motivated to participate in politics by standing up for the rights of her immigrant students and their families.

Four of the participants cited foreign policy as another motivating factor for personal, political activity. Two of these participants had sons who were serving in the military at the time of interview, and they mentioned how their familial ties to the military affected which candidate they chose to support. Betty and Matthew said they felt that they were motivated to become politically involved due to issues relating to foreign policy because of their personal history with and familial ties to the military.

The final motivating factor of current, political involvement mentioned by one or more participants was issues involving culture. Nancy described her support of women's access to healthcare and, specifically, the various services offered by Planned Parenthood. Ted mentioned government services and its connection to cultural issues as a motivating factor behind political involvement. He expressed frustrations with the high cost of daycare and how it affects family dynamics and choices. While he said he had not become involved with this issue yet, it was an issue that, if brought to the forefront of political discussion among policymakers, would inspire him to become politically active.

Involvement in political and nonpolitical organizations. All participants except for Sean and Austin were members of at least one political organization. Four participants were members of the United Educators Association (UEA), and each participant showed

me their membership confirmations. Three of these four UEA members claimed to be a member of this union because of the guaranteed liability insurance should they need legal representation. Ross served as an executive of another teachers' union, but left that position when he and his family decided to relocate. Four of the participants were members of an organized political party. The members of the Democrat Party were John, Betty, and Ted. The member of the Republican Party was Matthew. He also was a member of the NRA. Nancy and Betty used social media to join and stay connected with political organizations. Nancy was a member of "Women Talking Politics," which was a group of women who meet once a month to discuss political issues involving women and equality. John, Ross, and Betty were active members of national, state and local campaigns and often canvassed neighborhoods and offered their assistance to phone banks. With the exception of Nancy, every participant was active in one or more non-political organizations. The most frequently mentioned non-political organization in which participants were involved was church.

Political involvement. All of the participants agreed that being involved in politics was a choice that they made in the past, present, and will continue to make in the future. Even though each participant was either politically active at the time of the interview or he or she had been politically active at some point in his or her teaching career, four of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their current levels of political involvement and wanted to be even more politically active in the future. Monica shared her feelings regarding how she felt the school district discouraged dissenting opinions or any other types of political activity other than voting. While she was

dissatisfied with her levels of political involvement, she felt that she was unable to participate in political activity due to fear of district disapproval with dissenting opinions. However, she expressed an interest and determination to be more politically active in the future.

Ron did not feel like his lower levels of political activity were a result of district pressure and did not mention that at any point in his interview. Instead, he attributed his decline in political activity over the past ten years to “overall apathy.” He explained, “Honestly, one crook is as good as another.” In addition to apathy, Ron cited a lack of knowledge regarding the specifics of the political process as another factor deterring his political activity. He admitted that he cared more about local races because of them as having a more direct impact on his daily life; however, Ron mentioned that participating in this study was motivating him to reevaluate his feelings toward national and local politics in hopes of rekindling his previous passion for political involvement.

When he was discussing his current levels of political activity, Sean explained how he felt hindered by a lack of knowledge in terms of the means by which one becomes more politically involved. He claimed, “I teach government, so I know it. I just don’t know *how* to become more involved. Where do I go? Who do I talk to? I feel like I need an ‘in.’” Sean stated that he would be more likely to be more politically active if someone gave him the “who, what, when, where, and how” information of an event or activity. He explained, “If someone were to invite me, I would say yes in a heartbeat. I just don’t know how to get started.”

Lack of resources was one of two frustrations described by Sean when discussing his dissatisfaction with his current levels of political activity. The other deterrent he mentioned was echoed by Ted and dealt with familial obligations as they were both married with small children who required an abundance of time and energy. Both Sean and Ted stated that they would like to be more politically involved when their life situations allow for more free time to dedicate to political activities.

Theme 3: Current Perceptions of Politics Shaped by Current and Previous Experiences

Understanding how a group of politically active social studies teachers perceives their political involvement and how they, being in the minority of teachers who are politically active, interact with politics and the political process were important goals of this study. By examining how the participants gather political information, view the results of their political activity, and experience changing levels of confidence in politics over time, these subthemes are organized in way that provides more political and personal insight into perceptions and motivating factors of this politically active group of teachers.

Gathering accurate political information. The participants gathered political information via five main mediums: internet, television, radio, print, and directly from the source. When asked whether or not they solicited information from opposing viewpoints while trying to gather information to become informed and form a viewpoint about issue(s), each of the participants responded that his or her process of gathering information was not limited to sources from one point of view.

When it came to consulting the internet for political information, half of the participants mentioned one or more websites that they visited on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. Monica stated that the internet was her most trusted source for learning about political information because, “it’s quick and easy.” While it was not his most trusted source because he worried about validity, John mentioned convenience as an appealing characteristic of internet information.

Six of the participants claimed to watch television news programs to receive information regarding politics and other current events. The participants acknowledged that similar to the internet, television was not without bias and slanted toward one political ideology; therefore, they agreed that fact checking was an important part of becoming politically aware and active.

Both Ross and Nancy stated that National Public Radio (NPR) was their most trusted source due to its limited bias and ideological slant. Monica and Ted stated that they got political information from sources such as newspapers and magazines. Ted combined what he read in the newspaper with what he saw and heard on television. Neither Monica nor Ted claimed only to rely on print sources to gather political information; instead, they used print sources as an additional resource or as a supplement when they were either analyzing a broad, political issue or understanding the details from a certain political issue/issues. For Matthew, getting information directly from the source was the only way to avoid bias and misrepresentation. Each of the participants expressed a desire to gather information from multiple viewpoints in order to gather all of the facts regarding an issue or issues before forming his or her own opinion. The participants

described how gathering information helped them prepare for class discussions as they knew more about current events and could encourage students to think on a deeper level by challenging their points made during debate or open discussion.

Perceived results of political activity. When asked if they thought their political activity had any effect on politics and/or policy, two out of the ten participants answered with a strong, “yes.” Three of the participants were unsure, and five of the participants responded with a strong, “no.” The two participants who answered “yes,” to the question answered in the affirmative without hesitation.

Matthew discussed how he felt his work for the Fort Worth Republican Party in the gubernatorial race helped Greg Abbott win the election. John described how a monetary donation and volunteer work for a school board member’s campaign benefitted a cause for which he was working involving teachers and finance policy. Following the election of the school board member whom he helped secure the position, the newly hired financial representative for the district started “drastically cutting funds” of services provided for teachers. John filed for a Freedom of Information Act and fought for a funding issue of personal importance. His efforts resulted in a reversal of policy, and he expressed that he believed in the power of political involvement and the power of the individual when it came to shaping policy and reform.

For three of the participants, involvement in political activity yielded ambiguous results in terms of determining if their actions made a difference in the outcome of an election or an adoption of a policy. When asked if she believed her political actions have had an impact, Monica answered that in the past when she was putting candidate stickers

and signs up around town and stuffing envelopes, she felt like she was reaching many people who did not have an opinion. However, she was unsure about the actual effect because she never spoke with anyone whose mind was changed about a candidate. Ted explained how he was unsure of his impact on policy and described how he was very active on a campaign for a Senate seat in a northwestern state, and his candidate was defeated by the incumbent whose election team was, as he described, “not nearly as hardworking or dedicated as us.” The common sentiment among this group of undecided participants was that while they might be unsure of the impact of their own political activity, there was and is always potential for people to impact the political process.

The majority of participants said that they did not believe that their political activity had had an impact on policy. Even though Matthew believed his involvement helped Greg Abbott win the governorship of Texas, when asked if his political activity has impacted *policy*, he answered, “No, actually I don’t. Not with policy. But I still write to people a lot.” Ross said that he has been told directly by various people that his phone calls to representatives “won’t do much to change policy.” He attributed the lack of perceived impact of his political activity to his financial status and claimed, “I may be a citizen, and I may have a phone, but I don’t have a couple thousand or million dollars to put as campaign donations.”

Nancy did not believe that her political activity has had an impact on politics because she voted Democrat in a majority Republican state; however, she stated, “But that doesn’t mean I’m going to shut up.” Betty echoed a similar sentiment and said, “I don’t think I have a great impact (on policy) as an individual. But, it doesn’t stop me. If

we don't get our voices out there, then they will never be heard." The participants who did not believe their political activity had an impact on politics or policy still expressed a desire to continue to be active because inaction is ineffective and does not provide a voice to all of the people living under the policies that are drafted by a few.

Change of perceptions of politics over time. Whether it had been a brief or long history with political activity, participants discussed how their political involvement had affected their confidence in government and politics over time. Half of the participants answered that their confidence levels in government and politics decreased over time while the other half of the participants answered that their confidence levels have remained the same.

The participants who experienced a change over time in their confidence regarding government and politics all answered that they experienced a sense of weakening levels of confidence. Matthew answered, "The more I know what's going on, the more afraid I am of what's going on." However, he added that it was this lack of confidence that encouraged him to stay politically involved in hopes of having a positive impact on the political process. As Sean became politically active, he realized, "Things are more divided than I originally thought. It's depressing. I don't see why we can't just figure things out and move on and not fight so much." Nancy mentioned a financial aspect of her decline in confidence when she said explained how policymakers may begin their term with a set of lofty ideals and the intent to compromise with their colleagues; however, at the federal level the priority becomes fundraising which she felt made it more likely to become entangled with corrupt deals. Ted also mentioned money when

discussing why his confidence in government and politics declined. In the past, Ted thought being politically active meant that citizens united to reach a common goal for the country or local community. As he became more politically active, his perception changed. Whether their perceptions of government and politics changed as a result of learning about the divisive nature of politics or realizing the impact of money in the political arena, each participant declared that he or she was less confidence in government and politics than when he or she first became politically active.

Within the group of participants who did not believe that their confidence in government and politics changed as a result of their political activity were two groups of people: 1) those who never had confidence in government and politics and 2) those who have felt that they had an accurate idea of the ins and outs of politics prior to becoming politically involved. Austin stated, “Our government is made up of individuals. Individuals are flawed. Therefore, the government will be flawed. I have always been aware of that.” Similarly, Betty confirmed her long-held, cynical view regarding politics when she said, “I don’t think I ever really did trust the government; and I sure don’t trust them now.”

Other participants approached this question with a slightly more positive tone. John explained how he had that perception of politicians throughout his experiences with political activity and that he did not “become cynical” as he became more politically active. Ron clarified that he was, “never under the illusion” that there would be a revolution because of his political activities. He believed in political activity; however, he always saw his political activity as important but not necessarily the catalyst of sweeping

change. Monica's answer indicated that she continually related her confidence level to whether or not the government was enacting policies with which she most agreed.

Whether their tone reflected cynicism or positivity, half of the participants did not feel that their political activity changed throughout their time and experiences with political activity.

Theme 4: Politics and Political Activity Affected Education and Teacher Pedagogy

The participants' perceptions of the connection between education and politics are discussed in this final theme. Specifically, participants were asked to analyze how politics affect education as well as how, as educators, they feel that they are impacted by education policy. This theme is divided into seven subthemes which explore these connections: 1) politics and education are connected 2) politics affects pedagogy, 3) personal, political activity affects pedagogy, 4) teaching about the importance of political activity is a recurrent theme in class, 5) student perceptions about politics and civic responsibility change over the course of the class, 6) social studies teachers have a responsibility to model and discuss the importance of political involvement, and 7) there are mixed feelings regarding teachers who share their political beliefs.

Connection between politics and education. One focal point of this study was to explore how teachers connect education to politics in terms of education policy.

Participants gave a variety of answers that provided clarification as to how teachers perceived their profession connects with the political world. Six participants defined the role of education and the role of politics in addition to providing explanations as to how they are connected. Betty defined one of the many roles of education as, "The vehicle by

which people learn how to resolve conflict.” According to her, the political world could be ridden with conflict, and education teaches people how to work with others, compromise, and reach a resolution. Ted expressed a similar understanding of the role education plays in preparing people for either a life in politics or for making educated, political decisions. Monica referred back to her long-held opinion that only the educated should be allowed to vote because they, “tend to be more informed.” According to Monica, education is a very valuable asset in formulating and communicating opinions as the classes and curriculum help people understand how society functions in relation to politics.

Ross described how there was disconnect between the goals of education policy and the realities of education. He saw education policy as something that should not dictate but, rather, provide a blueprint for teachers to use when designing lessons and deciding what points to emphasize as they move through the curriculum. However, while this may be the goal of those involved in education policy, he observed disconnect between education policymakers’ philosophical approaches and the teachers’ realities. Ross claimed that the goal of education had drifted away from being what is best for students. He cited the original role of public schools as making good patriotic citizens and explained how current, public schools did not exemplify that role as they had in previous years.

Six participants referenced the curriculum requirements listed in the TEKS as evidence that politics affected education. If someone was to analyze the connection between education and politics in Texas, Betty encouraged people to, “look no further

than the Texas curriculum and textbooks.” Ron said that the Texas curriculum was, “definitely a political document.” He explained how a politician’s political agenda is exemplified in the way teachers are required to teach capitalism and free enterprise. Nancy echoed Ron and Ted when she explained how politics certainly affect the trends in education as well as a politician’s bias which is apparent in that curriculum includes some names and events over others.

Each of the participants shared that teachers’ opinions were of utmost importance and should be considered by policymakers when drafting education policy. Matthew emphatically said, “Non educators governing educators is not even logical.” Nancy reiterated her view that teachers were the experts and professionals in the classroom. Monica expressed her feelings regarding teachers’ connections to relevant classroom issues as she did not discredit the abilities of politicians; however, her experience teaching inclusion classes made her realize that policies addressing special education were drafted by politicians who did not have experience working with such populations. She advocated for politicians to consult her or teachers like her who have dealt with the realities of special populations. Additionally, five participants expressed the difficulties of supporting an education policy when they did not feel part of the policy’s conceptualization.

Five of the participants felt that there were specified roles of policymakers and teachers; and these roles should work together toward a common goal of doing what was in the best interest of students. Matthew and Ross recognized politicians as consultants and teachers as practitioners when they described how politicians should provide a

blueprint of procedures for teachers to implement in their classrooms; however, politicians should respect the roles and responsibilities of teachers and, “refrain from dictating exactly what teachers should do and how they should do it.” Ron speculated that policymakers make assumptions regarding teachers; however, he encouraged policymakers to recognize the roles of teachers in producing educated, productive, young members of society. Since having an educated public was a common goal among policymakers and teachers, both entities would benefit from listening to each other.

When asked to explain *why* politicians should consult teachers when creating education policy, eight participants illustrated their point using an analogy to describe how teachers are the experts in their field. Sean’s explanation implied that even those involved in education may not be *experts* in education because a teacher knows what is best for his or her classroom. Three of the participants referred to teachers as “troops in the trenches” meaning that teachers were the ones who fight for the successes of students as well as education policy. Four participants alluded to the assumption that if they were in need of medicine or a medical procedure, they would turn to doctors or others in the medical profession over any other profession. Matthew connected teachers with other professionals when he said, “Any education policy you make, you should talk to teachers. You wouldn’t ask someone who digs ditches how to do brain surgery.” Therefore, just as those in need of a service would most likely consult the most qualified specialists, policymakers should consult teachers when creating education policy.

Ted was unique in that he had professional experience working in politics as well as education. He described the communication between members of congress and

educators as, “minimal, at best.” He recalled a time that the senator for whom he was a staffer was part of a bill that worked on joint deficit reduction. At the time of the bill’s drafting, there was a leak to the public that one of the things they were considering was a cut in social security benefits. Ted said that the calls from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) that, “they literally broke the phone lines of the US Senate.” This public response was in stark contrast to the fact that there were no phone calls in response to the same senator being active with part of a bill that addressed portions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Ted posited that the reason there was not as much input from teachers regarding education policy was that policies dealing with education were so complicated and quick to change. He compared education bills to, “Christmas tree bills where people attach so many amendments to it like they are putting ornaments on a Christmas tree.” He said that if the members of the general public were to actually read every line of an education bill, they probably would not understand the intent or the implications because it was so complicated.

Effect on pedagogy. Participants were asked to consider how much of an impact education politics had on their pedagogy. The answers varied with three participants answering “a lot of impact,” four participants answering, “some impact,” and three participants answering, “no impact.” Those participants who answered that education politics affected their pedagogy referenced political decisions in the state’s capitol, as well as curriculum restrictions placed on them by politicians who draft education policy. Nancy and Betty claimed that politics had a large impact on their classroom methods as

well as how they addressed issues such as providing an equal education for those in special education. She stated that on a national level she had to abide by national regulations while on a state level, it was more about the curriculum requirements affecting her pedagogy.

Sean and Ted referenced standardized testing as a way that education policy slightly affected their pedagogy. Even though he was held accountable for his students' scores, Sean did not see standardized testing as a huge threat to his autonomy because he covered the material on the test without letting the test take over what he considered to be "best practices." Ted expressed how some teachers immediately had a combative reaction to any piece of education legislation addressing standardized testing because they thought each education bill or amendment will dramatically infringe upon their role as teacher.

Three of the participants did not feel that education policy impacted their pedagogy. John explained why he did not perceive (or allow) a political impact on his pedagogy due to his confidence level in his own teaching abilities. Matthew acknowledged that those in education policy had good intentions; however, he said, "I am in the classroom, and they aren't. They can suggest, but they can't tell me what to do." Ross agreed and said that he found himself following the law; yet, if the law and his conscience were not in agreement, he chose to follow what he believed was best for his students. These participants who did not perceive a strong correlation between education policy and pedagogy expressed confidence in their job performance and, in effect, did not allow policy to drive their classroom procedures and methods.

Personal, political experiences. While two of the participants answered that their political experiences had not impacted their teaching and instruction, the other eight participants shared ways in which they learned something regarding politics that has transcended to their classrooms. Four participants discussed how political involvement allowed them to learn about multiple viewpoints regarding a single issue; this helped them in the way that they challenged the thinking of their students. Matthew and Betty believed that the knowledge gained from political activity allowed them to see multiple viewpoints, which was a useful skill in class discussions and debates as he could challenge whatever point they made to get them thinking. Sean described how, through his political activity, he learned how important it was to know multiple sides of an issue because, “Sitting down and talking to people who think different from you is one of the greatest tools we have to move forward and progress as a society.” Ted explained that his early career in politics forced him to see different sides of an argument, and he tried to discuss the importance of having an open mindset with his students during class.

Five participants answered that their political activity impacted that which they told students about the importance of political activity. Political experience motivated Nancy and Ron to talk more about politics with their students as well as the importance and responsibility of citizens to become politically active. Ted’s goal was to encourage political involvement among his students and, since he thought people were more likely to become involved in an issue with which they could relate, his experiences with political activity allowed him to connect real scenarios with material in the curriculum.

The participants were asked to describe conversations that they had with students inside and outside of the classroom regarding the importance of political activity. Whether it was in a formal setting such as a classroom discussion or an informal setting such as after class or in passing, all participants stated that this was a conversation topic of which they regularly engaged with students. Ross explained how he outwardly did not tell students that it was important to be politically active; rather, he stated, “I give them information *about* political activity, and I try to let them figure out how important it is on their own without me preaching to them.” The other participants explained how they either tied the importance of political activity into the curriculum or they stressed the importance of voting in an American democracy. Four participants explained how the nature of social studies curriculum allowed them to discuss the importance of political activity in every unit.

Seven participants explained how their conversations with students regarding political activity included the importance of voting. Matthew claimed that he felt so strongly about the importance of voting that he organized a school-wide mock election where voting came alive for students as students registered to vote, cast their ballots, and watched the results. John and Nancy said that they encouraged students to vote, and they both said that this was an easy topic to discuss this year because of the November 2016 presidential election. Austin had no qualms about relating voting to outward expressions of opinion. He said to students, “Don’t vote, don’t complain.” Monica and Ron gave warnings to their classes regarding the importance of as well as the act of voting. Monica reverted back to her previous point regarding the importance of an educated voter and

how she wanted her students to be *educated voters*. She said, “I take a different approach, and I tell them *not* to vote *unless* they are educated. But, then I go and say how important it is to be educated.”

All of the participants modeled civic responsibility for their students. For Ron, modeling civic responsibility was as simple as describing his time serving his country in the classroom as a teacher and on the battlefield as a soldier. Ted shared Ron’s thinking in that he modeled civic responsibility with his actions over his words. Ron stated, “I tell them what they *can* do without telling them what *to* do.” Five of the participants said that they shared their political experiences with their students and three said that they told their students that they voted in elections.

The five participants who answered that they shared their political experiences with their students described the varying amounts of details that they included in these discussions. John and Monica shared the most details with their students, and they also offered words of encouragement to accompany the stories that they shared with their students. John emphasized the importance of keeping an open mind as he has aligned with various political ideologies over the years, and Monica explained how she shared details regarding her political activity with her students in hopes of encouraging and/or inspiring them to be politically involved. While the other three participants did not go into as much detail with their students about their political experiences, they told their students the nature of political activities in which they had been involved.

Three of the participants explained that one of the ways they modeled civic responsibility to their students was by showing and/or telling the students that they voted.

Ross explained how he voted and shared photos with his classes of him standing outside of his polling station wearing his, “I voted” sticker. He admitted, “I don’t put my activity directly in their faces, but I do mention and model that I did this, and this is something they can do to get involved.” Ted and Monica passed out information about how to register to vote to students in their classes when they turned 18, and Monica even gave each student a birthday card with voter registration instructions inside.

Importance of political activity. All of the participants mentioned that they used open discussion and lectures as one of their favorite methods of addressing this issue that was so prevalent in the curriculum. Matthew was not afraid to address controversial topics and said, “I do sometimes pick a fight, intentionally, just to get them thinking and to start the conversation.” Austin was not as quick to lead the classroom discussion as he preferred the students to take control as he facilitated conversations rather than lectured. Nancy did not see lectures and discussions as separate methods, and she often blended the two teaching methods within the same lesson. Betty had a similar approach in terms of blending history with current events and frequently utilized TED talks as an opening for a discussion relating to a historical topic on which she had lectured the previous day. Ross and Ted defined the Socratic Seminar they used to help students openly and independently discuss a topic, and Ted explained how he designated every Friday to discuss and debate a current event issue that was related to the topic of which they are covering within the unit.

In addition to open discussion, Sean, Nancy, and Ted gave extra credit assignments that incorporated current events. Monica was the only one who preferred

large class projects and collaborative work as she wanted the students to interact with the issues in smaller groups where they may be more comfortable to share opinions.

Student perceptions about politics. All of the participants felt that students finished their social studies class at the end of the year with more knowledge, understanding, and appreciation regarding political issues and civic responsibility. Sean, Nancy, and Ted described how their students became noticeably more aware of the political world around them. Ted used the analogy of comparing students at the beginning of the year with camels whose heads are stuck in the sand; however, at the end of the year his students seemed to not only be more politically aware but also more inclined to interact with political issues due to their newfound realization of current events. Matthew would walk by the cafeteria and see students talking about class or overhear students who were previously not interested in politics discussing the debate topics in the hallway. Nancy was unsure if her students left her class more passionate about politics; however, she said that their raised levels of awareness were “undeniable.” Monica, Ross, and Ted believed that they only saw changes in students when the students realized that political issues were relevant to their current lives.

While Ron and Betty did not believe that they had changed political opinions regarding ideological issues, he believed that his class helped students become much more knowledgeable about political issues and the importance of political activity. Austin expressed a similar feeling when he said, “They (students) don’t necessarily switch political parties. But, they do become less narrow minded and open to other ideas after leaving this class.”

Modeling and discussing political involvement. Participants defined the role of a social studies teacher as social studies teachers were the ones who were most likely to address politics or civic responsibility given the class content and curriculum guidelines. Ted stated,

Social studies teachers have a unique opportunity in that they have a set of skills from their degrees to be able to analyze things from several points of view and to be able to argue several points of view....other teachers of other backgrounds may not necessarily have those skills or, if they do, they are not as honed as those of a social studies teacher.

Five teachers defined the role of a social studies teacher as a “model” and five teachers defined the role of a social studies teacher as an “informer.” According to the participants who answered that social studies teachers should be models of political awareness and civic responsibility, social studies teachers had the best opportunity through their actions to impact a student’s way of thinking about the political process and political activity. Ted posited that one of the best ways to model civic responsibility to students was to civically present and discuss issues where students see and understand how to present both sides of an argument and respond to opposing views calmly and not driven by emotion. Ron thought social studies teachers should model tolerance and respect, and he shared how he had a close colleague who was at the opposite end of the political spectrum, and his students often overheard the two of them discussing political issues in between classes. At the minimum, Austin said that social studies teachers should model civic responsibility by showing students that they vote.

While John argued that social studies teachers often get a “bad rap” due to the tradition of this content field being widely occupied by coaches, social studies teachers should be teachers who guide students throughout the critical thinking process which eventually leads students to reaching informed conclusions. Nancy felt that social studies teachers could truly enlighten students regarding political issues, and Betty said that social studies teachers could take on this role as an informer more than teachers of other content areas due to the nature of social studies. Matthew and Ted thought it was important to help students understand that disagreeing with a politician or fellow citizen does not make the other person evil, and Sean speculated that the more social studies teachers can successfully teach students about the importance of civic responsibility, the more likely the students are to become politically active at some point in their lives.

Teachers who share their political beliefs. The final subtheme addressed how the participants felt about teachers sharing their personal, political beliefs with their students. Four participants answered that they thought it was fine for teachers to share their political beliefs with students, two participants answered that teachers should not share their political beliefs with students, and four participants answered that teachers, “should be very careful.”

Of the four participants who were not against teachers sharing their political beliefs with students, only Monica said that she did not outwardly share her beliefs with her students even though she thought it was acceptable. Ron referenced a life-sized cut out of President Ronald Reagan surrounded by Reagan campaign posters and pro-Reagan memorabilia located in the corner of his classroom and said, “Clearly, I don’t have a

problem with it as long as it does not marginalize students.” Sean and Nancy expressed that they did not object to teachers sharing their beliefs as long as student grades and morale were not affected by ideological disagreements between teachers and students.

The two participants who felt that teachers should not share their political beliefs with students expressed their adamant disapproval of this practice. Austin and Ted mentioned the potential influence teachers can have on student beliefs, and they both believed that teachers should help students become informed of political issues rather than influencing political ideologies. Austin specifically chose to refrain from sharing his political beliefs because it was difficult for him to separate his passion from his lectures, and he preferred to influence his students’ discovery process rather than their ultimate view. Ted was firmly against teachers sharing their political beliefs with students as he saw it as a violation of ethics.

Four of the participants said they did not feel confident enough to either outwardly support or oppose teachers sharing their political beliefs with students. Instead, John, Matthew, Ross, and Betty answered that teachers should be careful about sharing the details regarding their political ideologies with students. John was careful to tell students that he has voted for Democrat and Republican candidates in hopes of establishing a bipartisan tone in his class; however, he did not have a problem telling students of the issues about which he felt the most passion. Betty said that she thought that teachers who choose to share their political beliefs should consider how they are presenting their opinions to their students. These participants who thought that teachers

sharing their beliefs was acceptable would encourage them to refrain from over sharing or being overly biased by not recognizing other viewpoints.

Summary

At the beginning of this study, I sought to understand the motivating factors and perceptions of politically active, secondary, social studies teachers. Since the majority of teachers are not politically active, and social studies teachers are not more likely to be politically active than teachers of other content areas, (National Teacher Association, 2010), I interviewed teachers who were set apart from others in their profession in order to explore what made them unique. Chapter 5 includes an examination of the participants' responses in order to provide an analysis of their understanding of the relationship between education and politics as well as the driving forces behind their political activity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Education and politics are connected due to the impact education policy has on curriculum and teacher behavior (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Pustka, 2012). Although teachers recognized the need for open communication between those involved in education and those who draft education policy (Fowler, 2006; Hipple, 1986; Pustka, 2012), researchers have indicated that teachers were overwhelmingly absent from the political process (National Teacher Association, 2010; Pustka, 2012). While the content of social studies classes requires social studies teachers to discuss the importance of political activity in a democracy (O’Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973), social studies teachers are not more likely to be politically active than teachers of any other content area (Lavine, 2014). This chapter includes conclusions drawn from responses to interview questions that focus on each participant’s motivations for, experiences with, and perceptions of his or her personal, political activity.

Summary of the Study

While researchers have addressed indicators of political activity among the general population in previous research (Citrin & Highton, 2002; Djupe & Grant, 2001; Harris, 1994; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Mayer, 2011; National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Putnam, 1995; Robnett & Bany, 2011; Verba et. al., 1993; Verba et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1997) secondary, social studies teachers had not been analyzed in terms of motivating factors and perceptions of personal, political activity. The purpose of this study was to fill a void in the research on politically active teachers as researchers have

mainly focused on explanations of political inactivity among teachers. A qualitative methodology was employed to help me examine the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of these teachers who stood out in their profession because they had been politically active. I utilized convenience and snowball sampling to select ten secondary, social studies teachers who had participated in a political activity other than voting prior to and/or during their teaching careers. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire where he or she identified personal information such as age, race, gender, education history, and professional history. Participants also were asked to provide artifacts or photos of artifacts sent electronically. I used these artifacts to analyze the nature and frequency of the participants' political activity. The interviews were held at a neutral location at a place chosen by participants, and the tone of the interviews was conversational. The interview protocol allowed each participant to reflect upon his or her history with political activity as well as how he or she perceived their political activity affecting his or her teaching and student learning. I transcribed each interview verbatim, wrote memos, and employed techniques to identify four major themes within participants' responses. As themes emerged, I contacted participants via email for clarification of certain points or for elaboration of certain ideas that related to the themes. The themes were analyzed and interpreted in order to understand what motivated these teachers to be politically active even though they faced the same professional and personal pressures as other teachers (Burns, 2007; Dever & Carlston, 2009).

Summary of the Findings

The research questions that I identified for this study were based on topics presented in the literature regarding the absence of teachers from the political process. I selected qualitative interviews in order to address why the participants in this study chose to be politically active (Creswell, 2007). The following section includes the research questions and a discussion of how each of the three research questions was answered in this study.

Research Question 1: What do Secondary Social Studies Teachers Perceive as Influences of Their Political Involvement?

While some of the participants became involved in politics in primary and secondary school, others did not become politically active until attending college or beginning their careers as teachers. Whether it was prior to or during their careers in education, their political participation was voluntary; each of these secondary, social studies teachers made a personal, conscious decision to engage in politics. Further, they shared different experiences regarding the first time they became aware of politics, the first time they were motivated to become politically active, and the presence of politically active people in their lives which all contributed to their decisions to become politically active.

Participants described their political activity during their time spent as K-12 students, undergraduate students, graduate students (if applicable), and teachers. At some point in their lives, each participant was associated with a politically active person, involved in a school organization, or experienced an event that made them aware of

politics and/or ways to become politically active. Overwhelmingly, the participants who mentioned teachers as the reasons for their political awareness identified social studies teachers over educators in any other content area as being the ones responsible for enlightening them of politics and political activity.

In terms of motivating factors for political involvement in the past and present, participants mentioned a variety of topics and described how these factors inspired them to become politically engaged. The participants identified seven major categories as motivating factors of their political activity, and many of the answers were related to the political climate of the time in which they made the decision to become politically involved.

Current political activities included a mix of political and non-political organizations that were linked to the participants' motivating factors to become politically active. As indicated by researchers, the nature of the organizations of which the participants were members also affected the participants' decisions to be politically active. For example, while there were no participants who mentioned religion as a primary motivating factor, many participants answered that they were involved in their churches that supported findings of pre-existing studies that people are more likely to be involved in politics if they are active in their church (Djupe & Grant, 2001). Additionally, participants were asked to describe their satisfaction with their current levels of political activity. In support of Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) findings, participants who were older were more politically active and satisfied with their current levels of political activity while participants who were younger were less politically active and,

consequently, dissatisfied with their levels of political activity. The findings of this study indicated that there were various circumstances associated with the participants' different life stages, which prevented younger teachers from being more politically active.

Research Question 2: How do the Teachers Perceive That Their Political Involvement Impacts Teaching and Learning?

Just as Burns (2007), Fowler (2006), Hipple, (1986), and Pustka (2012) argued in their studies, the participants of this study felt that there was a connection between education and politics. Many of the participants justified this belief by describing how the social studies TEKS were politically driven which was evident based on what was and was not included in the curriculum. Because of the perceived connection between education and politics, the participants adamantly agreed that teachers should be considered and consulted in the decision making process when it comes to drafting education policy; yet, the participants offered mixed responses in terms of the extent to which education politics affected their pedagogies. Their responses ranged from complete disregard for education legislation when designing lessons to admitting that education policy dictates how and what they teach throughout the school year.

In terms of how their personal, political activity had impacted teaching and learning, over half of the participants described how their political involvement made them aware of the importance of being able to understand and argue both sides of an argument. Whether it was a subtle action such as wearing an "I voted" sticker or discussing details of their political activity, participants described how they modeled civic responsibility for their students. The participants attested to conveying an overall

message for the students regarding the importance of political activity and, specifically, the importance of voting.

The majority of the participants cited lecture and open discussion as their preferred teaching methods when discussing current events or political activity. By being politically active, the participants felt that they were equipped with the knowledge and skills to inform students of the realities of politics as well as with the ability to inspire students' critical thinking skills by posing different viewpoints and leading debates, lecture, or open discussion. The participants cited the role of a social studies teacher as one who draws attention to and models civic responsibility; they felt that their political experiences impacted student learning because the participants could make the curriculum material relatable for students by using the lessons learned or experiences gained from being politically active. Ultimately, the participants felt that their students were more knowledgeable about and aware of politics and current events after they finished their course. In support of the literature of other researchers (Lavine, 2014; Lee, 2006; Niemi & Niemi, 2007), the participants were divided on whether teachers should disclose their political ideologies with their students. However, the point on which everyone agreed was that it was not their role as teachers to impose political beliefs on students or hold students accountable for the teachers' personal views.

Research Question 3: How do Teachers Perceive That Their Political Involvement Impacts Policy?

According to the participants, being politically involved requires awareness of and knowledge about policy and current events. In order to gather this information,

participants turned to the internet, television, radio, and primary sources. Gathering information from both sides was of utmost importance to all of the participants. Even though the participants' answers varied on whether or not their perceptions of politics or the political process have changed over time, not one participant answered that their confidence level in the government had increased since becoming politically active.

While researchers have suggested that some people are not likely to be politically active because they doubt their ability to impact the political process or they possess a general feeling of mistrust regarding the government (Maier, 2011; National Conference on Citizenship, 2011), half of the participants in this study felt that they had successfully impacted politics while the other half of the participants answered that their political activity did not have an impact on politics. However, all of the participants of this study expressed that, regardless of their feelings of whether or not their actions have impacted legislation, they were committed to political activity because of their sense of civic duty as well as a sense of hope to influence policy positively. Therefore, the participants felt that gaining personal, political knowledge and experience with being politically involved could, potentially, lead to a policy shift as a result of their actions.

Discussion

Each of the themes in this study addressed aspects of the participants' experiences with political activities other than voting. All of the participants in this study volunteered to engage in political activity which indicated a higher sense of commitment to participating in politics than if they were forced or coerced by an outside organization or group (Verba & Nie, 1970, 1973). As indicated by Verba and Nie (1973), participating in

politics outside of voting required additional time and commitment on the part of the activist. In agreement with this argument, the participants acknowledged that participating in politics required extra financial and/or time commitments that went beyond casting a ballot in a voting booth. Additionally, researchers have specified that teachers were not likely to be politically active due to various professional and personal obligations (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014); even though social studies teachers discussed the importance of political activity as part of the curriculum, they were not more likely to be politically active than teachers of any other content area (Morton & Staggs, 2001; Journell, 2013).

This section includes a discussion of the findings resulting from the analysis of data collected from the secondary, social studies teachers who had participated in political activities other than voting. Furthermore, this section contains explanations of motivations of their political activity as well as an investigation as to why these teachers acted upon their strong perceptions regarding the importance of political activity.

Factors in a Person's Past are Recognized as Influences of Political Participation

As education and gender were not emphasized as a motivating factor in this study, I focused on other possible determinants of political activity and found that the participants' answers supported what other researchers presented (Dembe, 2009; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Kleiner & Pavalko, 2010; National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Putnam, 1995; Verba et al., 1993). According to previous studies, people who were exposed to politics or heard political messages at a young age were more likely to be politically active adults (Kam & Palmer, 2008; National Conference on Citizenship,

2006; Verba et al., 1993). Sean mentioned that after becoming politically aware, he began spending time with a new group of friends who frequently discussed politics. By discussing politics and participating in political activities, this new peer group indirectly encouraged him to stay politically aware and involved to be able to participate in their political conversations. The other five participants who labeled their friends in PK-12, undergraduate school, and graduate school as politically active described how having politically active friends often enabled them to participate in politics as they would turn political activities into social gatherings.

John, Matthew, Austin, and Monica described their family members with whom they were in close contact growing up who were politically active. Not only did they describe how they were made aware of political issues through their politically involved family members, these four participants described how they observed political activity growing up. Therefore, becoming politically active as an adult was not unexpected as they were no strangers to the political process.

The idea that politically active adults also are shaped by their adolescent civic exposure and experiences (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Verba et al., 1993) was supported by eight of the ten participants in this study who answered that they became aware of and/or motivated to participate in politics due to the influence of a politically aware and/or active teacher or teachers in middle school, high school, or undergraduate classes. Matthew provided photos, awards, and documents from his adolescent years in the Boy Scouts. These artifacts supported that not only was he politically aware and an active letter writer through his membership in the organization,

but he was able to use political lessons learned as an adolescent throughout his years as an adult who still wrote letters regarding policy to policymakers.

Given what is known about the content of social studies and its emphasis on civic involvement (Lavine, 2014; O’Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973) it was no surprise that seven of the participants identified the teacher or teachers who made an impact on their future political involvement as ones who taught social studies. According to the participants, these social studies teachers were either politically active or made politics relatable in the classroom. Additionally, the National Conference on Citizenship (2006) reported a boost of political activity among young citizens following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Sean and Ted were teenagers at the time of the attacks, and they were motivated to become politically aware and involved following 9/11 while citing nationwide unity, a shift in foreign policy, cultural issues such as racial profiling, and legal issues such as surveillance in the name of national security as the main motivating factors for their motivation to participate in political activity.

Political Activity Involvement Influencers

In terms of trends in political activity, the National Council on Citizenship (2006) reported that, across time, there traditionally is a rise in overall political activity preceding and during an election cycle. Whether it was the most recent 2016 presidential election, local election, or national election from the past, seven of the participants referenced elections as a motivating factor for their political activity. Betty and John shared photos from Wendy Davis’s 2013 Texas governor race that showed their dedication of personal time, money, and energy into housing staffers, canvassing

neighborhoods, and registering people to vote. The 2016 presidential election stirred strong emotions among the participants, and half of the participants were motivated to attend rallies, donate money, or volunteer at voting stations based on their sense of duty to ensure that the most qualified candidate was elected as president. Sean and Nancy provided photos of themselves attending 2016 campaign rallies which demonstrated that they felt strong convictions regarding the presidential election and were inspired to attend related events.

Based on their responses to a question regarding motivations of political involvement at the time of the interview, I grouped their current, motivating factors into seven categories: elections, violation of rights, education, economics, immigration, foreign policy, and culture. While education was mentioned as a motivating factor of political activity, it was not the only issue that affected a participant's decision to become politically active.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I researched the most widely discussed issues among all of the governors at the annual Education Commission of the United States (2015). The three educational issues of utmost importance from the conference were funding, Texas political issues such as standardized testing and graduation rates, and early learning. My intent was to learn the background about the most pressing, educational issues facing the states around the time of the interviews in order to compare them with the participants' answer(s) should they mention educational issues as motivating factors for their political involvement. Even though education was their profession, only half of the participants listed education as one of their motivators for

political participation. Of the five participants who discussed education as an influence on their decision to be politically active, only two referenced an issue that was part of the education conference [funding]. Special education policy was the other education issue discussed as a motivating factor of political involvement. The artifact provided by Ross was a set of notes from his conversation with a representative's staffer regarding special education policy. The pre, during, and post conversation notes indicated that special education was not only a current passion, but also indicated future involvement with this issue. The prevalence of participant responses addressing special education policy implied that there might be disconnect in what the teachers viewed as important education issues and what politicians viewed as important education issues.

Communication between the two entities would benefit the overall education field as governors who sign education policy and teachers who employ education policy seem to be perceiving different issues as concerns regarding education.

In addition to elections, the participants referenced the violation of rights, the economy, immigration, foreign policy, and culture as issues that were the most likely to motivate them to become politically active. Aside from elections, out of the issues listed above, artifacts presented by participants mainly supported their commitment to foreign policy. Matthew and Ron showed photos from their years in military service in active war zones, which further explained their perceived importance of foreign policy as they were directly affected and know people who are directly affected by decisions made by the President. The Pew Research Center (2016) listed the top six voting issues for the 2016 presidential election as the following: 1) economy, 2) terrorism, 3) foreign policy, 4)

health care, 5) gun policy, and 6) immigration. There was overlap between what these secondary, social studies teachers and the general population viewed as the most important political issues. Therefore, even though the participants were a small portion of the voting population, their perceptions of important, political issues represented the general voting population.

Interfering Circumstances

Even though each of the participants discussed the importance of political activity, motivations behind their political activity, their desire to be politically active, and their experience with political activity, some of the participants expressed dissatisfaction as they were not as politically active as they have been in the past due to external circumstances. Sean, Ted, Ron, and Austin were in a similar stage of life as they had young children or were expecting more children. When asked about their current levels of political activity, these four participants discussed how the demands of raising a young family in addition to the demands of the teaching profession prevented them from being more politically active. This confirmed what Cavieres-Fernandez (2014) and Journell (2013) reported about teachers being absent from politics due to professional and personal obligations that leave little time to participate in politics.

While Monica was in the same position as Sean, Ted, Ron, and Austin in that she had young children, a spouse, and was a full time teacher, she listed fear of district disapproval as the main reason why she is not more politically active. Reflective of what Burns (2007) cited as one of the deterrents for political activity, Monica described how her school district had undergone a recent change in administration which brought in very

authoritative figures who had a reputation of passively targeting teachers who may have differing political and district related opinions in terms of the best direction for students and teachers. Therefore, while she felt passionately about certain issues, she feared that becoming politically involved could jeopardize her job.

Consulting Media Sources

As an English teacher who switched to social studies, Nancy admitted that she was not equipped with the social studies knowledge outside of the curriculum to become politically involved or teach about political involvement until she began teaching United States history. Therefore, she reflected Journell's (2013) finding that most preservice, social studies teachers had an acceptable amount of common content knowledge yet lacked knowledge and experience regarding current events and important political issues. However, the other participants did not fit Journell's (2013) description of politically uninformed and unmotivated, pre-service social studies teachers; they seemed to be the exceptions in that the other nine participants claimed to be politically aware and active prior to beginning their social studies teaching careers.

Furthermore, the participants discussed how their political involvement either helped them acknowledge the existence of other arguments or opened their minds to understand viewpoints other than their own. The ability to see various sides of an argument prepared the participants for classroom discussions, debates, and general lessons which related curriculum content to current events. However, in order to discuss adequately current events and politics in class, all of the participants expressed the desire and need to be politically aware. All of the participants expressed how it was imperative

to acknowledge bias imbedded within news updates or to consider news stories from various points of the political spectrum to understand clearly the entire context of the news story. While the majority of participants tuned in to television programs or read internet articles to learn about current events, each participant answered that they thought it was essential to research or consider both sides to understand sufficiently the issue or issues as well as to provide informed counterarguments to a student's point with the intent of honing the student's critical thinking skills.

Hope of Affecting Policy

One of the goals of this study was to analyze how politically active, secondary, social studies teachers viewed the impact of their political activity on policy. This was identified as a research question because of the National Conference on Citizenship's (2006) data indicating that one of the reasons citizens refrained from political activity was due to the fact that they perceived their political actions as not affecting policy. While considering McAdam's (1986) risk and cost model, the National Conference on Citizenship implied that citizens believed being involved in politics may be low risk; however, the cost of political participation was perceived as high (McAdam, 1986) because being politically active took time and resources which are both scarce in the modern demands of parents and professionals (Cavieres- Fernandez, 2014; Putnam, 1995; Verba et al., 1993).

Since teachers are under intense pressure from the state, school district, and campus in terms of accountability, relationship building among students, and maintaining parental contacts (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014), I asked the participants to describe their

perceptions of the effects of their political activity as they maintained their professional and familial obligations. Half of the participants felt that their efforts have impacted policy while the other half did not believe that they have had an effect on policy. Those who did not believe that their political activity had affected policy cited lack of financial power or geographic location [being a Democrat in a current Republican majority state] as the main reason why they did not believe their efforts have yielded political results. However, each participant expressed determination to continue or increase his or her political activity with the hope of having an effect on policy in the future. This finding implied that political motivations and strong feelings of civic responsibility outweigh perceptions of ineffectiveness on political outcomes. While being politically involved is a commitment, those feeling personal convictions regarding civic participation coupled with a sense of determination and hope for their actions to impact policy will not be deterred by the perceived costs of political activity or the possibility of being overlooked by policymakers.

Changing Perceptions of the Political Process

The findings of previous studies indicated that the average American citizen did not have a favorable view of government institutions, policymakers, and the political process (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Verba et al., 1993). Moreover, the National Conference on Citizenship (2006) suggested that the more time a person spent being involved in a political activity, the more likely they were to develop a general, negative perception of politics. This study suggested that this was not always the case.

While three participants expressed that their lack of trust and confidence in the government has decreased due to their experiences with political activity, the rest of the seven described how their perceptions of the government and political process either did not change or actually improved. Based on two of the participants' answers reporting that their political activity resulted in an improvement in attitude toward politics, in general, the more time a person spends being politically active, the more politics and politicians are humanized. Instead of assuming that the political process is corrupt and that all politicians are evil, these two participants' answers implied that spending time engaged in the political process with policymakers allows those who are politically active to see a different, positive side of politics that is not as obvious to the average citizen. These findings reflect a different sentiment from the ones in previous studies (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Verba et al., 1993) in that a citizen being invested in politics allows for the politician to be seen as a person with good intentions who may or may not be impacted by the influence of financial donors or interest groups rather than an evil person looking to harm to the country. Similarly, time spent in politics helps an average citizen understand the political process as well as the deals that must be made and the promises that must be kept among politicians trying to work together for the betterment of the country rather than a corrupt system intended to harm the general public. Those who come to the realization that all government policies and government officials are not evil and corrupt are more likely to participate in politics as the participants felt that a positive, political experience would motivate them to remain politically active. Finally, the more pleasant the experience, the more likely the

participant was to remain politically active since he or she was pleased with his or her previous, political activity; they maintained hope that their political engagement would yield favorable results and policies.

Open Communication Between Policymakers and Teachers

Even though teachers are overwhelmingly absent from politics, the participants confirmed what the existing research argued which was that teachers can and should be an integral part of the education policy making process (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Hipple, 1986; Pustka, 2012). In theory, since politicians who may or may not have a background in education as a profession draft education policies, teachers should be the first ones consulted regarding education policy. The participants recognized this theoretical connection between education and politics; however, many discussed that in spite of the connection between education and politics as *institutions*, there was disconnect between the *participants* of education and politics.

When discussing the connection between education and politics, many participants cited the role that education historically has played in producing well rounded, informed citizens. Nancy referred back to the original intent of education, which was to produce members of the community who would add to the productivity of society and advance democratic ideals to withhold core, American ideals. Therefore, the participants noted that policymakers' fingerprints were left behind on the social studies curriculum as certain ideals and democratic principles are emphasized over others that may not be as prevalent in American culture. This curriculum connection was clear to the participants and, they discussed an obvious connection between ideals and events that

politicians thought were important and what ended up being printed in the social studies curriculum.

Overwhelmingly, the participants agreed that there should be open communication between education policymakers and educators which confirmed the findings of previous studies that reported the importance of a favorable relationship between these two entities (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Hipple, 1986; Morton & Staggs, 2001; Pustka, 2012; Silberburg, 1996). However, the majority of the participants felt that there was disconnect between politicians and educators because for whatever reason, conversations regarding education issues were not taking place between the two groups. The participants speculated about the reasons behind this lack of communication and offered that either politicians did not care about teachers' opinions enough to listen or teachers did not have the time or resources to be more active in politics. Ted, who worked for a state senator, inferred that politicians did not have a vendetta against teachers by forbidding their opinions from being heard or considered. Instead, he related that teachers simply were not contacting their legislators about education policy and, since becoming a teacher, he recognized that they might have felt overwhelmed with their professional and personal responsibilities to take the time to converse with their representatives even regarding an issue about which they felt intense passion. Regardless of *why* there was an absence of communication between policymakers and teachers, this conversation was perceived as vital to the success of education policy; however, this conversation was not taking place.

The participants argued that teachers should be considered experts in education just as doctors should be considered experts in medicine, lawyers should be considered experts in legal matters, and architects should be considered experts in building structures. Additionally, more than once the participants referred to teachers as, “the troops in the field” fighting an overwhelming battle of meeting and overcoming the professional and personal demands of education. Since teachers were in the classroom each day, the participants explained how they had a unique perspective of education issues that may not be realized by those who were not professional educators. The participants knew the personal struggles of their students, they felt the time crunch of getting through the curriculum by the end of course exams, and they were held accountable by their schools, districts, and by the state. Therefore, according to the participants, there was no better group than teachers to consult when drafting education policy.

Political Activity Affects Pedagogy

While the findings were mixed regarding how politics affects pedagogy, the participants answered that their pedagogy was, however, affected by their personal, political activity. Those who felt that politics affected their pedagogy referenced curriculum changes as well as changes in graduation requirements that decreased the number of social studies courses necessary in order to earn a high school diploma (HB5; SB149). Additionally, participants cited education policies addressing special education as having a direct effect on their pedagogy. Participants with inclusion classes were required to follow special education policy requirements when presenting lessons or

administering tests in order to ensure a free and appropriate public education for all students. Other participants declared that they rarely paid attention to education policies because they were confident in their teaching skills and felt that they had built a relationship with their students which enabled them to teach in a way that would be most effective for the students in their classes.

When it came to personal experiences with political activity, the participants felt that their political involvement directly and/or indirectly affected their pedagogy in two main ways. First, and the most widely discussed, teachers felt that their political activity had given them experiences to share with students in order to make political issues discussed in class relevant and interesting. Not only did the participants share the artifacts with me, but four of the participants shared photos of themselves participating in political activities with their students which enabled students to see that their teacher who discussed the importance of civic responsibility in class was, also, an active, political participant. Sharing stories and personal experiences of political involvement allowed students to not only relate to the participant but also increased the likelihood of students participating in politics in the future because they were given an example to follow which may be lacking in their lives outside of school. Participants shared stories of current and former students who approached them during and following the completion of the course to tell them how the participants' political activity motivated them to participate in politics. This finding, therefore, confirmed Journell's (2013) finding that politically active teachers were more likely to produce politically active students.

Second, participants felt that their pedagogy was affected by their political activity due to the knowledge obtained from engaging in politics and actively participating in the political process. Whether it was details about policies or realizations about the functionality of the political process, participants felt that they were able learn lessons that transcended to the classroom in the way they presented content material. The participants felt that by engaging with politics, they were able to obtain more extensive knowledge about an issue, which could then be incorporated (withholding bias) with classroom debates and discussions. Even if they wished to not disclose their political party affiliation or discuss specific details about their political involvement, participants expressed that their political involvement, ultimately, made them better social studies teachers.

Social Studies Teachers as Models of Civic Responsibility

Given the content of social studies and the passionate feelings stirred by discussing political beliefs, social studies teachers are in a unique position to affect directly or indirectly student beliefs and behavior (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014; O'Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). The participants confirmed this previous finding by arguing that more than any other content area, social studies teachers can model effective, responsible, and informed civic responsibility to their students. In the participants' social studies classes, political discussions occurred frequently. By being prepared prior to class with knowledge on both sides of an issue, the participants were able to present to their students ways to research a viewpoint and structure an effective argument. As students saw that their social studies teacher knew about an issue and was able to argue both sides in order

to stimulate students' critical thinking regarding their own views, the participants emphasized how students would see how important it was as a citizen to be informed and able to consider various sides of an argument in order to strengthen their personal, political stance.

Second, as argued by Journell (2011), Reich (2007), and Thornton (1991), the role of a social studies teacher was to create a safe environment in which students can discuss their views openly without the fear of being chastised for their opinions by their teacher or peers. Discussion and debate were the two most popular teaching techniques used to discuss politically sensitive topics [immigration, minority rights, abortion, capital punishment] as well as the importance of civic involvement. The success of a debate and/or class discussion was dependent on the teacher's ability to foster a classroom environment, which encouraged student conversation. Often, a student's only exposure to political discussions was in their social studies class (Camangian, 2013; Niemi & Niemi, 2007). The participants expressed a sense of awareness regarding their responsibility to introduce current events and political issues, and they were committed to challenge student thinking in a way that was objective and non-confrontational.

Finally, the role of a social studies teacher was *not* to force beliefs on students. While the participants advocated for the social studies teacher to argue objectively against a point made by a student in order to encourage them to think on a deeper level, unanimously, the participants thought it was never acceptable to present their personal, political convictions as the only correct viewpoints. It also was never acceptable to hold students accountable for the teachers' views and penalize them for offering a dissenting

opinion. The participants confirmed Journell's (2011) findings as they were split on whether or not it was acceptable for teachers to disclose their political ideologies; however, forcing students to agree with teachers was perceived as forbidden as the goal of a social studies teacher should be to encourage independent and informed thought.

Conclusions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the motivations and perceptions of politically active, secondary, social studies teachers using the lens of cognitive mobilization theory. Since politically active teachers are in the minority, and social studies teachers are not more likely to participate in politics than teachers in any other content area, I sought to explain what set these teachers apart from others in their profession. In spite of personal demands regarding family obligations and professional demands regarding the overwhelming pressure put on teachers, the participants of this study were motivated to participate in politics due to an intrinsic belief in the importance of civic participation as well as other motivations such as past exposure to political stimuli and/or current events. Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) argued that teachers' attitudes, values, and beliefs strongly affected their professional disposition. Whether or not the participants' dispositions and/or past experiences affected their decisions to be politically active were topics addressed in this study.

The findings of this study allow for a full analysis of political behaviors of teachers, motivating factors of political involvement, and the extent to which political activity affects teaching, student learning, and policy. Even though teachers are overwhelmingly absent from the political process (Burns, 2007; National Teacher

Association, 2010; Pustka, 2012), there is still a sense of connection between education and politics as education policy dictates curriculum, course requirements, and education initiatives. There is a desperate need for policymakers and teachers to discuss education policy with each other as teachers can provide education insight that may not be obvious to policymakers who do not spend each day in the classroom with students. Additionally, since education policy is fluid in that it is known for being amended or replaced each year, teachers may be more likely to support and promote long term policies on which their opinions were considered prior to implementation. The participants of this study recognized and acted upon their strong feelings regarding the importance of political participation in not only education concerns but also matters involving an array of political topics and current events.

Two of the central themes in this study were discovering what enlightened the participants of this study to political issues as well as what motivated the participants to become politically active (Journell, 2013). Given that the course content of social studies addresses civic responsibility and political activity (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014), many were first exposed to and became aware of political issues from the influence of their secondary, social studies teachers. Others had a more personal connection and were aware of political activity in that members of their family or close peers were politically active. At the time of the interviews, however, each participant described himself or herself as politically aware and had intentions to continue pursuing unbiased information to stay politically informed.

Aside from being politically aware, some participants were motivated to become politically active by issues involving education and/or education policy. However, the majority of participants were motivated to become politically active by other issues such as elections, current events, foreign policy, the economy, and immigration. There were varying degrees of political involvement among the participants in terms of the initial activity, frequency of the activity, and nature of the activity. All of the participants had been politically active at some point in their teaching careers; however, some were not politically active at the time of the interview. Those who were not politically active were clear to say that their absence was due to personal and professional obligations and not a perceived lack of importance of political activity and civic responsibilities, and they expressed a desire and determination to become politically active when circumstances allowed for more time and resources to be devoted to political involvement. While there were mixed feelings regarding the impact of their political activity on policy, the participants were motivated to continue participating in politics because they believed it was an important civic responsibility that should not be ignored.

Even if teachers choose not to share their political beliefs and party affiliations, teachers' political activities still affects pedagogy and learning. By being politically involved, those who are politically active are able to experience politics firsthand and learn more about the issues as well as the political process. The knowledge gained from these experiences transcends to the classroom as it gives social studies teachers the ability to relate firsthand accounts of political activity to their students and make current connections with the curriculum. Additionally, interacting with political issues and

working together with those involved with political issues allows people to understand deeply the subjects being debated or discussed. This allows teachers to comprehend multiple arguments regarding an issue, which affects pedagogy in that each participant answered that it was an important role of a social studies teacher to understand and effectively present to students multiple viewpoints of an issue. Whether it was during lectures, debates, or open discussions, each participant felt that it was vital for students to learn how to see multiple sides of a single issue before forming an opinion. Therefore, the role of a social studies teacher is to inform and encourage independent thinking rather than to coerce students into agreeing with the teachers' personal beliefs.

Implications

This goal of this study was to address a gap in the research pertaining to politically active, secondary, social studies teachers. Even though social studies teachers regularly discuss the importance of political participation as it is a prevalent theme throughout the curriculum (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014), they are not more likely to participate in politics than teachers of any other content area (National Teacher Association, 2010). As existing research focuses on why teachers are not politically active (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Journell, 2013; Morton & Staggs, 2001), the goal of this study was to address a gap in the research pertaining to politically active, secondary, social studies teachers. Findings from this study have implications for research, practice, and theory.

Implications for Research

By selecting current teachers who have been politically active at some point during their careers in education, I identified educators who faced similar circumstances that might hinder political involvement as politically inactive teachers. However, the participants of this study felt an intrinsic and/or extrinsic desire to be politically involved, and they acted upon this sentiment by engaging in political activity. Even though they were politically active at some point in their education careers, some of the participants withdrew from political activity and were not politically active at the time of the interview. I visited this trend briefly in the data analysis and findings; however, there is room for further research into this phenomenon to determine if teachers who were once politically active later abstain from political involvement for the same reasons as teachers who have never been involved in politics.

The historical timing of this study should be noted as it may have affected some of the participants' answers. Subject recruitment and interviews occurred during the 2016 presidential primaries and election. Participants were passionate when discussing motivating factors of their political activity, and many mentioned that their strong feelings regarding the Democrat and Republican presidential nominees motivated them to become even more involved in politics. Additionally, when discussing current motivating factors of political activity, the participants described similar issues to those that were listed as the average, American population's top voting issues of the 2016 presidential election (Pew Research Center, 2016). Therefore, conducting this study at a different time using the same interview protocol may or may not yield different results.

One of the results of the study that challenged previous findings stemmed from participation in religious institutions and political activity as religion was one of the most prevalent motivating factors in the existing literature regarding motivations of political involvement was religion (Djupe & Grant, 2001; Greenburg, 2000; Harris, 1994; McClerking & McDaniel, 2005; Putnam, 1995; Wald, 1987). Seven participants listed their involvement in church as either a regular church attendee, frequent volunteer, or Sunday school teacher, which seemed to support the results on religion motivating political activity. However, when discussing motivations of past and current political involvement, there was not one participant who mentioned religion as one of their motivating factors. It is unknown whether or not the participants would have mentioned religion if they were prompted in the initial interview or questioned about it in a follow up interview. Therefore, further research specifically could address religion as a motivating factor and determine which religious issues have the most political significance on a group of political participants.

Another characteristic that was prevalent in the literature as a strong motivating factor of political activity was gender (Putnam, 1995; Kittilson, 2010; Robnett & Bany, 2011; Verba et. al., 1997). Being mindful of this, I included males and females in the subject recruitment part of the study; however, there was not an equal number of male and female participants. Additionally, the participants did not mention their gender as a motivating factor of their political involvement. Future research could address the role gender plays in motivating political activity by conducting studies which isolate gender

groups, include an even mix of males and females, or include a probe about the perceived impact of a person's gender on their personal, political involvement.

Finally, demographics should be considered in this study because, with the exception of one participant, all of the participants identified themselves as White. This result was unintentional as I did not seek participants of just one race. Moreover, the participants were of the same socioeconomic status as they were employed in north Texas school districts that offered similar teaching salaries. Future research could use other sampling techniques to select participants from various parts of the state and with varying demographic characteristics in order to address trends in political activity as it pertains to race and socioeconomic status that is mentioned in the existing literature.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study confirmed what was already reported in previous studies; there is a strong connection between education and politics as education policy dictates what teachers in the classroom implement (Burns, 2007; Fowler, 2006; Hipple, 1986; Lavine, 2014; Lee, 2006; Mornton & Staggs, 2001; Pustka, 2012; Silberberg, 1996). Therefore, it would benefit both institutions for teachers and policymakers to communicate with each other regarding education and education policy as what is decided at the policy level affects teachers and students when the policy is implemented in the classroom. Without this communication between policy makers and educators, there is potential for confusion among educators as to the reasoning behind and details of the education policy. Additionally, if there is no communication between these two groups, there also is the risk of the policy being irrelevant to current, pressing issues in

education. The participants in this study acknowledged that the purpose of education policy according to policymakers is the same purpose as identified by teachers; education policy should be designed in the best interest of students and teachers. Therefore, the findings of this study reveal three valuable implications for practice involving policymakers and teachers: 1) policymakers should acknowledge that teachers *want* to be politically involved but are unable to be politically involved for a variety of reasons; 2) teachers should understand that being involved in politics is possible, and their political involvement has the potential of having the most positive benefits for students; and 3) teachers must make an effort to stay politically informed.

First, due to the scarce communication between policymakers and teachers, it would benefit policymakers to review the findings of this study as it includes the perceptions of current teachers on political involvement and policy. The reasons why some politically active teachers felt hindered by circumstances to be involved in politics was also addressed in this study. Understanding that the majority of teachers *want* to be involved in the political process could motivate policymakers to initiate communication with teachers more frequently which would result in a better understanding of the challenges faced in policy design and policy implementation, respectively.

Acknowledging that teachers are experts in their field and making an effort to consult them on matters regarding education policy could mean success for the political initiative in two main ways. First, if teachers were consulted, education policy may be more likely to address real, current issues faced by teachers and students since those who work in the classroom every day would be able to have input and be heard by those who

are responsible for creating the policy. Second, if teachers feel a sense of ownership over the policy through conversations with policymakers, they may be more likely to contribute actively to the success of the policy. Additionally, some current teachers feel that they are not powerful enough to make an impact on policy. Policymakers working with teachers in conceptualizing potential solutions with education policy would allow teachers to believe their opinion is recognized and their experience is utilized by policymakers. As indicated by the participants in this study, when teachers feel valued, they are more likely to support the policy as they have a vested interest in its success.

Second, the findings of this study prove that it is possible to be politically involved as a full time teacher. While some participants were hindered by familial commitments that accompany the responsibility of raising children, they still found time at some point in their careers to be politically active. For those whose life circumstances were such that they were not overly committed to activities outside of the classroom, political activity was as much of a hobby as it was a passion. Other current teachers who are not politically active could read the stories of the participants in this study and realize that it is possible to be politically involved and represent the interests of all of those involved in education. Additionally, current teachers could be reminded of the importance of open communication between policy makers and educators as this study provides evidence that many of those in charge of designing education policy have limited experience with current issues in education. Therefore, current teachers could develop a sense of urgency in ensuring their experiences in the classroom are considered during the conceptualization and design stages of education policy. The participants

expressed how, regardless of the issue with which they became involved, being politically active benefitted their students.

Finally, social studies teachers should become and stay politically informed because they have a unique opportunity to affect a student's conceptualization of history, current events, and political policy implications. Not only does political knowledge decrease the likelihood of misrepresenting an idea or event to students, but a social studies teacher's political knowledge also leads to rich discussions, lessons, and debates in the classroom. Therefore, since the information presented and discussed in these lessons can reach beyond the classroom walls, teachers should make sure they understand and deliver accurate, current, and unbiased information as these types of lessons have a lasting impact on students.

Implications for Theory

I used cognitive mobilization theory as the theoretical lens through which I conducted the study, and I developed the interview protocol using the lens in addition to the existing literature. It was clear from the participants' responses to the interview questions that their strong desire to participate in politics was multifaceted and encompassed three main ideas. First, the participants felt an inherent sense of responsibility to civil service. Further research could isolate this characteristic of politically active teachers to determine if some teachers are predisposed to being involved in politics based on their innate personality traits and dispositions. For the purpose of this study and the results that were yielded by the participants' answers, the theory was confirmed as each participant felt obligated to engage in political activity. Second, the

participants were guided on *how* to participate in politics at some point in their lives. This confirms the part of the theory stating that politically active citizens not only have the interest but also have acquired the research and communication skills needed to become politically aware and politically involved (Dalton, 1984). Whether it was through a parent, friend, organization, or school, the participants learned *how* to be politically active and did not describe civic skills as ones with which they were born. Finally, each participant was aware of current events and the political process which confirms Inglehart's (1970) claim that a person must first be aware of politics before making the commitment to participate in politics.

One of the most contested points regarding cognitive mobilization theory was the role education plays in a person's inclination to participate in politics (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Converse, 1964; Dalton, 1984; Inglehart, 1970). While I asked about each participant's education history, it was not a focal point of this study since each participant was a teacher and teachers are required to have obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Since all participants had a degree from a post-secondary education institution, I focused on analyzing other factors that may or may not have motivate them to become politically active. Therefore, further research could specifically analyze how a person's education level affects their inclination to be politically involved.

Summary

Even though education and politics are connected, teachers overwhelmingly are absent from the political process (Fowler, 2006; Hipple, 1986; National Teacher Association, 2010; Pustka, 2012). While the social studies curriculum affords

opportunities in nearly every unit across courses to discuss the importance of political activity, social studies teachers are not more likely to participate in politics than teachers of any other content area (Lavine, 2014; O’Hanlon & Trushynski, 1973). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze the motivations and perceptions of politically active, secondary social studies teachers as they relate to personal, political activity, teaching, learning, and policy through the theoretical lens of cognitive mobilization theory (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Converse, 1964; Dalton, 1984; Inglehart, 1970; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with ten politically active, secondary social studies teachers. The interview protocol was designed to determine motivations of current and past political activity, types of political activities with which participants have been involved, the perceived importance of political activity, and the perceived impact of personal, political activity on their pedagogy and political policy.

After collecting artifacts and transcribing and coding the data, four overarching themes and 15 subthemes emerged from the participants’ detailed responses. These themes and subthemes allowed a focused and detailed analysis of the perceptions of teachers who are in the minority in terms of being involved in politics. The participants shared how they felt about the importance of political activism, and they were serious about their perceived roles as models of civic responsibility for their students. Therefore, their political involvement has dramatically affected their personal and professional lives. While some admitted not to being as politically active as in previous years, each

participant expressed a desire to stay politically involved or increase levels of political activity in the following years.

Because of the connection between education and politics, communication between those who create the policy and those who implement the policy is vital to the success of the policy as well as the success of the students. Both policymakers and teachers face barriers when trying to contact each other; however, while difficult, being a politically active educator is not impossible. If it means that students, teachers and policy would be more successful, then policymakers who are considered experts in drafting policy and teachers who are considered experts in education must make the effort to communicate with each other regarding policies that directly affect the education system.

APPENDIX 1

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear North Texas Educator:

My name is Tracey Louth, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies within the College of Education at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Under the advisement of Dr. Casey Brown, I am working on a dissertation study that examines the motivations of politically active, secondary, social studies teachers in north Texas. I am specifically interested in your perceptions regarding: (1) motivating factors behind your political involvement, (2) how your political involvement impacts your teaching, and (3) how your political involvement impacts policy.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria: (1) are a current, secondary, social studies teacher; (2) have a minimum of three years teaching experience; (3) have experience with political activity other than voting; (4) are willing to be interviewed at a time and location that is convenient to you; (5) are willing to submit artifacts from your involvement in politics such as pictures, ticket stubs, brochures, pamphlets, and/or transcripts of legislative testimonies.

If you are willing to participate, I would like to begin this process by asking you fill out a digital copy of a demographic questionnaire. Once you have emailed this questionnaire back to me, I will contact you to set up a 60 to 90 minute face-to-face interview during which I will ask more about your perceptions of your political activity. Should we run out of time and/or if I have additional questions, a follow-up interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes will need to be scheduled. In addition to the interview, I would like to include any kind of artifact you have from the political activity(ies) in which you were involved. These artifacts can include but are not limited to pictures, ticket stubs, pamphlets, brochures, court testimonies, email or letter drafts, meeting minutes, phone call notes, and/or clothing. I would like to examine these artifacts to get a better sense of the frequency as well as the historical and social nature of your political involvement.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. I would like to assure you that any information collected in this study will be confidential. Your name, school, and school district will not be used in any portion of this study. Your personal information also will not be shared with any faculty or administration member of your school and school district.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (404) 345-4843 or tracey.louth@mavs.uta.edu. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your help in this study.

Sincerely, Tracey Louth, Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX 2

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

| | |
|--|--|
| Gender | |
| Age | |
| Marital Status | |
| Race | |
| College(s) or University(ies) | |
| Degrees received and from which college or university | |
| Content certification(s) | |
| Subjects taught | |
| Subject(s) currently teaching | |
| Subject(s) currently teaching | |

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

| |
|---|
| Participant pseudonym: Date of the interview: Location of the interview: Time interview started: Time interview finished: |
|---|

Things to bring to the interview:

Recording device

Interview protocol

Journal and pen

Completed pre-interview questionnaire

Consent form

Pre-interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This interview will begin with a brief outline of the purpose of the study followed by a series of questions and probes. I expect the interview to last between 60 and 90 minutes; however, should the interview extend longer than the allotted time, I may need to schedule a second interview to complete the questions. I will be recording your responses with an audio-recording device. Therefore, if you need to pause or suspend the interview for any reason, I will stop recording until you are ready to resume. During your responses, I may need to ask you to explain, elaborate, or clarify certain points in order to understand and report adequately your experiences with political activity. After the interview is completed and I have reviewed the recording as well as my personal notes, I would like to contact you at a later date to summarize my understanding of your responses.

During this interview I will ask about your motivations for and perceptions about your political involvement. I will ask about your past experiences with political activity throughout your K-12, graduate, postgraduate, and professional career. I will also ask about your perceptions regarding political discussions in the classroom as well as your perceived influence on the political process. Is there anything I can clarify for you before we begin?

Introductory Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.

Probes:

- Where are you from?
- Why did you go into teaching?

- How long have you been teaching?
 - What subjects have you taught?
2. How and why did you choose to teach social studies?
- Probes:
- If your major was social studies related, why did you want to stay with it?
 - If your major was not social studies related, why did you choose to teach social studies?

Interview Questions

1. How important is it for citizens to be politically active?
- Probes:
- Describe important political activities in which citizens can become involved other than voting.
2. In what ways are education and politics connected?
- Probes:
- How are your professional decisions and procedures impacted by political decisions?
 - How much emphasis should policymakers place on your input as a professional educator when drafting education policy?
3. Describe your political activity in the past.
- Probes:
- How politically active were you in PK-12?
 - How politically active were you as an undergraduate student?
 - How politically active were you as a graduate student (if applicable)?
4. How have factors in your past influenced your decision to be politically active?
- Probes:
- How politically active were members in your immediate family (for example, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, anyone with whom you were in close contact or who had primary custody of you growing up)?
 - How politically active were your friends or peer groups in PK-12? Undergraduate? Graduate?
 - How politically active were your teachers in PK-12? Undergraduate? Graduate?
 - What kinds of current events motivated you to become politically active (for example, elections, natural disasters, wars or foreign military involvement)?

5. Describe your current level of political activity.

Probes:

- Are you politically active now? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- How active are you in political organizations (for example, unions, special interest groups, political campaigns)?
- How active are you in non-political organizations (for example, church, PTA, educational activities, charitable groups)?

6. From what sources do you get your political information?

Probes:

- Why is this your most trusted source?
- Do you gather information from multiple viewpoints on an issue or issues?
- How important is it to be politically informed?

7. How has your level of political involvement changed as your knowledge of political issues deepened?

Probes:

- Were you more likely to be politically involved with an issue if you had extensive knowledge about it?
- Were you more likely to be politically involved with an issue if you were directly impacted by it in some way?

8. What have been the results of your political activity?

Probes:

- Do you believe your efforts impacted policy? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
- How has your confidence in the government changed as a result of your political activity?

9. How has your political activity impacted learning for your students?

Probes:

- In what ways has your political activity impacted your teaching/instruction?
- What kinds of discussions do you have with students in the classroom about the importance of civic responsibility?
- How important is it for students to learn about the importance of political activity?
- In what ways do you teach about civic responsibility (for example, projects, case studies, readings, lectures, open discussion)?
- What kinds of changes, if any, do you see in students before they learn about political involvement and after they learn about political involvement in terms of their knowledge, beliefs, and/or actions?

10. What role do social studies teachers play in modeling civic responsibility?

Probes:

- How can social studies teachers impact students' perceptions of political involvement?
- In what ways do you model civic responsibility to your students?
- What are your feelings about teachers who share their political beliefs with students?
- Do you discuss your own political involvement? Why or why not?

Post-interview Script

Thank you so much for your time and for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to communicating with you again to review your responses and clarify any points should they need further explanation.

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Biographical Information

Tracey E. Louth is a native Texan. She attended middle and high school in Georgia and moved back to Texas to attend Texas A&M University where she earned a Bachelor's degree in political science (2007) and Master's degree in education (2009). She moved to north Texas and taught world history and AVID in a 5A high school. In 2011 she began working on a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at the University of Texas at Arlington. During her six year teaching career, she was the coordinator for High on Life (a student organization which emphasized the importance of a drug and alcohol free lifestyle) as well as a social studies curriculum liaison for her district. In 2013 she was honored by her campus when she received the award for Teacher of the Year.

After her son was born in the fall of 2013, Tracey completed the academic year and decided to take a break from teaching in order to finish her Ph.D. and enjoy time with her son. As her passion is social studies and education, Tracey plans to extend her research by examining the perceptions of policymakers regarding teachers, teaching, and education policy. She also plans to work with secondary, social studies curriculum and develop resources for Texas teachers that align with the TEKS.