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## **Civic Participation in American Cities**

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The purpose of this study is to shed new light on how local institutions can facilitate—and in some instances hinder—effective civic participation on the part of urban residents. Civic participation is important for (at least) three reasons. First is its transformative effect upon the residents themselves. It is through involvement in public life that individuals come to understand their own political interests and how their interests connect to those of their neighbors, and it is through engaging in meaningful civic activity that individuals develop self-identities as public citizens. Second is the societal benefit. Civic participation uses social capital—relationships of trust, respect, and reciprocity among citizens—to perform political work, and it in turn creates new social capital by bringing new combinations of citizens together. Third, participation is conducive to good governance, enhancing the quality of life in a city by producing wiser public policies, enhancing the legitimacy of those policies, and increasing their effectiveness. The broader objectives of our research project are: (1) to gain insight into ways that collective action is initiated and sustained in real-world settings, and (2) to inform the work of organizations that promote political empowerment and social justice for and with marginalized groups in America's cities and elsewhere.

### **1. Background**

In 1960, E. E. Schattschneider pointed out that, contrary to the prevailing pluralist myth, marked disparities existed in the extent to which Americans were organized into—and organized out of—politics. “The flaw in the pluralist heaven,” he wrote, “is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent. . . . The system is skewed, loaded and unbalanced in favor of a fraction of a minority.” Forty years and a Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, 18-year-old-vote amendment, and “Motor Voter” law later, the chorus sounds pretty much the same. In the 2000 presidential election, for example, the reported turnout among households earning less than \$15,000 a year was 35 percentage points below that for households earning \$95,000 or more a year, according to data from the American National Election Studies.

Indeed, in some respects the political chorus's upper-class accent is stronger than ever. The reported turnout rate among high school dropouts was 15 percentage points lower in 1996 than it was in 1960 (52 percent versus 67 percent), while reported turnout among college graduates held steady at approximately 90 percent. In terms of income levels, reported turnout among adults in the bottom third of the household income distribution was 10 points lower in 1996 than it was in 1960 (55 percent versus 65 percent), but it was unchanged for adults in the top third of the household income ladder, at 87 percent. Six percent of adults lacking a high school diploma reported having attended a campaign meeting, rally, or dinner during the year that Schattschneider's book was published. Small as that number is, by 1996 it had shrunk to a barely detectable 3 percent. By comparison, one in ten college graduates reported attending a

political function in 1996, essentially unchanged from 1960. Slicing the data by income categories reveals similar results: Americans in the top one-third of the household income distribution were roughly five times as likely as the hoi polloi in the bottom one-third to have contributed money to election campaigns during the 1960s, and the gap in giving persisted through the 1990s (American National Election Studies 2001).

As Schattschneider asserted back in 1960, and as more recent empirical studies have confirmed, the explanation for the gaps in activism that separate the socioeconomically well off from their less advantaged compatriots is not simply (or even primarily) that the latter are less concerned about public matters or less willing to put out the effort. Instead, the explanation has a lot to do with (1) differences in the possession of politically valuable resources and (2) the carefully targeted efforts of other people—increasingly, political hired guns and professional lobbyists—to activate the citizens possessing those resources (Goldstein 1999; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995).

The personal resources that matter most in this regard are education, money, and what political scientists refer to as a “sense of political efficacy”—which, in turn, tends to be highly correlated with having been raised in a household that had plenty of, well, education and money. It should surprise no one that the political contributions of financially comfortable individuals dwarf those of less well-heeled citizens; nor should it come as a revelation that one is far more likely to draft a finely honed letter to the editor on some matter of public concern if one possesses a university education than if one never made it through high school. As for the efforts of others to coax you into the game, data from recent ANES surveys reveal, for example, that college graduates are roughly twice as likely as high school dropouts to be contacted in an election year by party activists urging them to vote, the odds being approximately one in three for college grads versus one in six for dropouts. Roughly the same odds of being contacted during a campaign distinguish people residing in households in the top one-third of the income distribution from people ensconced in the bottom one-third. The crucial implication of these statistics is that, contrary to the way mobilization works in many healthy democratic systems around the world, activation efforts in the United States tend to amplify rather than mitigate the political ramifications of resource inequalities among citizens (Lijphart 1997; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995).

A great deal has been written about the likely causes of persisting—and even increasing—inequalities of participation in the United States. The withering away of labor unions and the demise of political parties (in particular, the Democratic Party) as meaningful institutions for connecting citizens to politics are surely at the top of the list (Edsall 1984; Eldersveld and Walton 1999; Goldfield 1989; Kuttner 1987; Greider 1992; Wattenberg 1990). That participatory inequalities have increased at the same time that income inequalities have ballooned (Phillips 1990; Levy 1998) is surely more than coincidental, especially now that the raising and spending of money has become the overriding concern of political campaigns. Candidates, lacking any strong relationships to grassroots party organizations, find themselves locked in a financial arms race fueled by spiraling costs of campaign strategists, direct mail operatives, media tacticians, and television airtime (Gais 1998; West 2000). Political entrepreneurs employ increasingly sophisticated—and expensive—technologies to micro-target “likely voters” who might be stimulated to cast their ballots for the client/candidate. During the

off-season, those same consultants are available to fabricate “grassroots” phone, fax, and mail blitzes on behalf of—or, more often, against—legislative proposals or ballot initiatives (Broder 2000; Goldstein 1999; Lupia 1994).

The result is a tragedy of the commons in which the proliferation of well-heeled, well-connected interest groups and their increasingly frequent activation of the usual suspects has resulted in a growing sense of disconnection and powerlessness among most Americans. Many Americans at the lower end of the socioeconomic continuum—and, increasingly, those in the middle, as well—have concluded that government is really not much concerned with their interests and aspirations and that the public sphere is open to citizens “by invitation only” (Schier 2000). In the 1996 ANES survey, for example, 69 percent of Americans with less than a high school education agreed with the proposition, “People like me don’t have a say in what the government does.” Nearly as high a proportion of high school graduates—62 percent—agreed, too. A solid majority (57 percent) of Americans in the bottom *two-thirds* of the household income distribution agreed with the proposition, as well. By way of comparison, only four in ten college graduates or upper-income survey respondents agreed with the statement.

### **Why Should We Care?**

The benefits of an active, engaged citizenry may seem self-evident. Participatory democracy has never wanted for thoughtful critics, however. Indeed, in his series of published arguments on behalf of the founding of the United States, James Madison was far more concerned about the possibility of too much popular involvement in politics rather than too little. Nearly two centuries later, a leading scholar who would later become president of the American Political Science Association concluded that despite Madison’s best efforts to insulate government from the demands of its citizens, “problems of governance in the United States today stem from an ‘excess of democracy’” (Huntington 1975). “The effective operation of a democratic political system,” wrote Huntington, “usually requires some measure of apathy and disinvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups.” Lippmann (1922; 1925), Schumpeter (1943), Berelson (1952), and Sartori (1962), among others, also asserted that it is easily possible to have too much of a good thing when it comes to the involvement of ordinary citizens in political affairs.

As Warren (1992) explained, these critics raise some important points that champions of “expansive” participatory democracy would do well to bear in mind. In particular, the sheer volume of civic participation in a society is not necessarily diagnostic of its political health. The content and consequences of that participation—whether it is thoughtful, respects and reflects diverse interests, is sufficiently mindful of long-term collective goals, and actually accomplishes worthwhile objectives—matters at least as much. Moreover, a model of civic engagement that is to be applicable to real people in the real world must not expect more of them than is reasonable. Politics matters, but it is not the only thing that matters. A vital and equitable society is surely not one in which politics—even democratic politics—dominates private life, leaving little room in which individuals may pursue their own conceptions of a good life.

That said, the literature on participatory democracy advances three cogent arguments for why we should care about low levels of civic participation among all but the most advantaged

layer of the American public. First, participation makes for better citizens. Second, it makes for better societies. Third, it makes for better governance.

### **Participation Makes Better Citizens**

The first argument, articulated by Mill (1861), Dewey (1927), Kaufman (1960), Pateman (1970), and Barber (1984), among others, is that by participating in public life citizens broaden their knowledge and understanding of issues that concern them, become better able to perceive their own interests and how their interests relate to those of others, come to appreciate more deeply the interdependence of individuals in society, increase their capacities for deliberation and negotiation, and become more tolerant toward others yet at the same time better able to assert their own values and individuality. As Sen pointed out, not only is participation in democratic processes instrumental in communicating citizens' interests to government officials, it is essential to citizens coming to know their interests in the first place: "these processes are crucial to the formation of values and priorities, and we cannot, in general, take preferences as given independently of public discussion" (2000, 153). In the same vein, Sunstein challenged the "thin" conception of democracy as preference-aggregation mechanism by arguing that citizens' policy preferences (and those of public officials, as well) are not things that somehow exist prior to and independent of the political process but are instead fundamentally "endogenous" to that process. One goal of democracy, therefore, is to foster circumstances that "promote processes of preference formation" (Sunstein 1997, 20).

Not the least important of those circumstances is the opportunity to participate in public discourse. Habermas (1981; 1989) has developed this line of argument most extensively, although as Sanders (1997) noted, he does so in a way that reflects a pristine, abstract vision of deliberation in the public sphere rather than one that is complicated by the sometimes unjust, often frustrating, usually messy, and always fundamentally political nature of deliberation in the world as it is. And, of course, politics is not only about talk; it is also about action—doing "public work," as Boyte and Kari (1996) emphasized. These are important caveats, but they ought not obscure the key point on which there is broad agreement and which Warren summed up thusly: "Participation completes individuals, in part by enabling them to discover and develop their public dimensions, in part by providing the kinds of interactions that develop capacities for autonomous judgment" (1992, 12).

### **Participation Makes Better Societies**

The second rationale traces its roots back at least as far as Tocqueville (1969) and figures prominently in theory and research on social capital by Putnam (1993; 2000) and others. It focuses less on the power of civic involvement to enhance the capacities of individuals and more on its ability to develop and strengthen relationships among citizens, foster norms of trust and cooperation, and bolster the ability of a society to coordinate individual action in order to provide valued collective goods. The robust engagement of citizens in public life can serve as a countervailing force to the socially indifferent impulses of the market and to the politically expansive impulses of government. Taking Putnam's thesis another step, Sen (2000) argues that when a society provides widespread opportunities for people to exercise agency in shaping their shared future, not only is that conducive to development, it *is* development. "[T]he liberty of

political participation,” Sen wrote, is “among the *constituent components* of development” (2000, 5; his italics).

### **Participation Makes Better Governance**

While the expansive argument for participation hinges upon the potential of civic engagement to transform private individuals into public citizens, the adversarial model of democracy rests on the idea that, as in an economic market, a vigorous competition among diverse interests over “who gets what” is the best hope for arriving at efficient political outcomes (Mansbridge 1983). Many—perhaps most—empirical studies of participation operate, at least implicitly, within the framework of this adversarial model and are motivated by the presumed value of participation as a means of communicating information to public officials and holding those officials accountable, primarily via elections. For example, in the opening paragraph of what is arguably the definitive contemporary investigation of civic participation to date, Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995, 1) wrote: “political participation provides the mechanism by which citizens can communicate information about their interests, preferences, and needs and generate pressure to respond.” A few pages later, they reiterated: “Our principal focus is on the role of participation in communicating information about citizen preferences and needs to policymakers and creating pressure on them to heed what they hear” (p. 12).

The means to communicate interests of the citizenry to official policymakers and to pressure the latter to be responsive to the former are undeniably essential properties of a healthy democratic system. If categories of citizens having distinctive interests are unequally involved in the political process, not only are the less-involved in danger of having their interests represented inadequately, democracy itself is at risk owing to distortions in the political market. The arithmetic of one person, one vote in the democratic process is intended to serve as a counterweight to the one dollar, one vote logic of the economic marketplace, and therefore to the degree that the tension between the two is slackened, the collective enterprise suffers.

Civic participation is useful to democratic governance beyond its role as a medium of communication and pressure, however. It can also contribute directly to the crafting and implementation of sound public policy. Governmental institutions at the city, state, regional, and even national level have found that citizens’ knowledge and experience are valuable resources to be tapped in formulating policies on everything from mass transportation to regional land use to public education to healthcare provision (Reich 1988; Ingram and Smith 1993; Moore 1995; Boyte and Kari 1996). The point here is not solely a utilitarian one, i.e., that citizen participation enhances opportunities to formulate smarter policies. It is also an ethical one: the active and widespread involvement of citizens can promote more just policies. Citizens can—and do—also play a valuable role in implementing policies as well as formulating them (Benest 1996). At the local level, that includes everything from governing schools, to promoting neighborhood safety, to assisting in disaster recovery. Moreover, the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation are bolstered by the legitimacy and popular support that decisions enjoy when they are grounded in public deliberation and reflect public judgments (Mansbridge 1983).

As things now stand, however, American government is largely unable to draw upon the public’s experience, insights, and aspirations in crafting solutions, and it is equally unable to

utilize public energy and commitment in implementing them. Greider (1992, 12) summarized the vicious circle this way:

Disconnected from larger public purposes, people can neither contribute their thinking to the government's decisions nor take any real responsibility for them. Elite decision makers are unable to advance coherent governing agendas for the nation, however, since they are too isolated from common values and experiences to be persuasive. The result is an enervating sense of stalemate.

What Greider wrote with reference to the national government applies also at the state and local levels—and also to private and nonprofit institutions that affect communities and their capacities for effective action. At all levels and across all sectors, public debate has become dominated by professionals possessing specialized knowledge and speaking in arcane jargon and by interest groups capable of marshaling impressive amounts of money and expertise to bend policy their way. Social agencies, charitable organizations, and philanthropic foundations have further complicated the situation. Intending to serve communities, human and social service professionals have frequently disempowered them instead through their “disabling help.” In his book *The Careless Society*, John McKnight (1995, ix-x) argued that:

The most significant development transforming America since World War II has been the growth of a powerful service economy and its pervasive serving institutions. Those institutions have commodified the care of the community and called that substitution a service. As citizens have seen the professionalized service commodity invade their communities, they have grown doubtful of their common capacity to care, and so it is that we have become a careless society, populated by impotent citizens and ineffectual communities dependent on the counterfeit of care called human services.

The inadequacies of governmental policy and the disabling help of service agencies have spurred an impulse to rely on market-based solutions to public problems. Markets can increase the cost-effectiveness of public services and they can enhance choice. Yet some of the pressing problems affecting communities today—from environmental pollution to economic disinvestment in central cities to urban sprawl to overstressed families—arguably have been exacerbated by leaving too *much* latitude for the operation of market principles (and the attendant supremacy of commercial values over ethical ones) rather than too little (Gaventa 1980; Skocpol 1996; Kuttner 1997). And the ways in which markets can sometimes aggregate individually sensible choices into collectively tragic outcomes is sufficiently well documented as to require no reiteration here (Olson 1965; Schelling 1978; Barry and Hardin 1982). Although ideologues of various persuasions will disagree, the American public has indisputably reached a rough consensus that neither big government nor big markets offer a panacea for the problems that most concern them (Dionne 1991). For that matter, no combination of government and market will likely prove effective in addressing common concerns unless it is grounded in the practical wisdom of the same ordinary citizens whose informed consent and active collaboration are essential to public problem solving.

As for the claim that an “excess” of participation has overloaded the American political

system, that argument is vulnerable in at least two respects. First, it is hardly the great majority of Americans who can be held culpable for any alleged “demosclerosis” (Rauch 1994; Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki 1975), since their involvement is quite meager on the whole. Second, if there is any overload, it is arguably as much a consequence of an insufficiency of democracy as from too much of it. That is because our political institutions rely almost exclusively upon the adversarial model of democracy, a model that invites—indeed, virtually demands—overload because it essentially limits citizen participation to the voicing of demands and the application of pressure. Increased participation within a less relentlessly adversarial framework, one that takes citizenship seriously and share the work of democracy more broadly, offers far better possibilities for finding or creating common ground (Barber 1984; Boyte and Kari 1996). But even if citizens fail to achieve a meeting of the minds, they are at least likely to learn something about reciprocity (Gould 1988); “and failing that, they may learn about tolerance” (Warren 1992, 12).

### **Determining What Works**

There is also one very practical matter that motivates our research. Substantial resources—including many millions of dollars in tax revenues, philanthropic funds, and private contributions of individuals, organizations, and corporations—have been directed at myriad efforts to build the civic capacities of citizens and communities, as have been the countless hours of equally countless community volunteers. Although case studies abound, relatively little systematic research has been directed thus far at determining what lessons may be learned from those efforts, and how value (measured in both dollars and time) may be maximized (see Schorr 1997; Lappé and DuBois 1994). If the intention is to encourage civic engagement, what approaches are most likely to tend toward success? What can we learn from studying instances of “best practices” in civic engagement that may be transferable to other settings?

## **2. The Civic Engagement Study**

### **The Cities**

To gain insight into the factors that promote civic engagement and the consequences of such activity, we have devoted the better part of four years (so far) to collecting quantitative and qualitative data in 14 U.S. cities with populations greater than 100,000 (as of 1996). The sample of cities was selected to balance a number of considerations, conceptual and practical. First, because one focus of the study is institutional practices that facilitate effective civic engagement, we wanted to ensure that our sample contained cities that were likely to provide examples of such practices. One hunts where the ducks are. That said, if one is interested in why ducks tend to flock *here* rather than *there*, one must also spend time where the ducks aren't. So we built in opportunities to do some of that, too. Also, because prior research suggested that there are substantial regional differences in civic culture and practice, we wanted the sample to be distributed across the entire country. Finally, we wanted the cities in the sample to vary in terms of population size and demographic composition.

To inform our selection process we surveyed 125 scholars, civic leaders, national community organizers, reporters, and other knowledgeable individuals, soliciting their nominations of cities that offered examples of effective civic engagement. We also reviewed the

relevant scholarly literature and conducted a comprehensive computer-based search of news archives for stories of civic successes. In an effort to unearth hidden gems of participation that might have been missed by the literature, we analyzed data from the series of American National Election Studies conducted by the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies, pooling the data from recent election years to provide geographically defined subsamples of reasonable size and searching for cities that were unusually more participative than would have been predicted on the basis of their demographic profiles. Finally, the sample of highly "civic" cities was supplemented by a least one city in each of four major U.S. regions that was not particularly distinguished in terms of its known civic profile.

By region, the 14 cities in our study are as follows. In the Northeast: Boston, Mass.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Manchester, N.H. In the Midwest: Dayton, Ohio; St. Paul, Minn.; Chicago, Ill. (West Side only)<sup>1</sup>; and Madison, Wis. In the South: Savannah, Ga.; Jacksonville, Fla.; and Birmingham, Ala. And in the West: Phoenix, Ariz.; Santa Ana, Calif.; Portland, Ore.; and Seattle, Wash. These cities encompass substantial variation in an array of potentially relevant characteristics, including region, population size, education, income, age, and racial heterogeneity, as shown in **Table 1**. In terms of population, the sample includes three very large cities (Chicago, Philadelphia, and Phoenix), six large cities (Jacksonville, Seattle, Portland, Santa Ana, Saint Paul, and Birmingham), and four medium-sized cities (Madison, Dayton, Savannah, and Manchester). One of the cities is the hub of the fastest growing metropolis in America (Phoenix), while another has experienced one of the sharpest population declines of any large American city (Philadelphia).

The cities also differ greatly in racial and ethnic composition: the Chicago West Side, Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Boston, Birmingham, Dayton, and Savannah all have large African-American populations; Santa Ana, Phoenix, and the Chicago West Side have substantial Latino populations; Asian populations in Seattle and Santa Ana have attained double-digit size in percentage terms; Madison and Manchester are overwhelmingly white. Educationally, the cities range from Madison and Seattle, in which two-thirds of the populations possess some post-high school education, to Philadelphia and Santa Ana, in which two-thirds do not. Household poverty rates range from well below the national average in Manchester (9 percent) to approximately double the national average in Dayton (26 percent).

## **Data Collection**

To date, we have conducted in-person interviews with more than 200 civic and religious leaders, public officials, reporters and editors, and other knowledgeable individuals within the 14 cities, and we have attended dozens of meetings of community organizations, citizen boards, and commissions in those places. In addition, we contracted with a polling firm to conduct a telephone survey of randomly selected samples of approximately 400 residents per city: 5626 respondents altogether. We have also gathered news stories, historical information, and statistical data from local sources, computer-based news archives, the US Census, FBI crime statistics, and the Internal Revenue Service's public listings of nonprofit organizations.

Finally, we established informal partnerships with local groups or organizations in each of the 14 cities. Those partners provided us with valuable access to their communities and advice

to help guide our research. We have shared our initial findings with them, soliciting their insights, interpretations, and critical comments. Dialogues with community organizers and citizen leaders about what they and we are doing have been extremely valuable to us.

In Dayton, results of our study were featured in a three-part series published in the *Dayton Daily News* promoting citizen involvement in hearings being conducted by the local school board. In Seattle, we provided the city planning department at their request with a copy of our initial report to inform their citizen involvement processes. We assisted local organizations in Jacksonville and Santa Ana in joining a national partnership sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts, and in the Twin Cities we presented findings about the benefits of civic involvement to journalists and community activists at a conference on civic journalism. We are developing a variety of materials in collaboration with our local partners so that the findings of our research may be of practical use to local governments and community-based organizations nationally. Much of this work remains to be done, however, and our efforts to date have been fairly modest, as both we and our community partners operate in environments in which money and time are perennially in short supply. That said, our experience so far has made it abundantly clear that community groups possess practical wisdom and insights that can advance scholarly research; and we, in turn, have information, studies, and other resources that can be of use to them.

### **Survey Measures of Participation**

To facilitate analysis of the survey data, we constructed two indexes of political participation. The first a measure of non-electoral civic involvement. It consists of six survey questions that ask respondents whether they had performed any of the following actions in their current cities of residence: attended a public meeting about a community issue or concern; contacted an elected city official about an issue or problem; done any work for an organization in support of a particular cause or issue; served on a local government board or council; served on a nonprofit organization's board; taken part in a protest or demonstration. For purposes of index construction, activity within the past four years was counted. In four of the sampled places—Portland, Seattle, Madison, and the Chicago West Side—42 to 43 percent of respondents reported having performed two or more of these activities in the preceding four years. In seven cities, between 35 and 39 percent of respondents reported having engaged in two or more civic activities in the preceding four years; those cities (listed in descending order) were Boston, Philadelphia, Savannah, St. Paul, Manchester, Jacksonville, and Birmingham. Thirty-three percent of Dayton respondents met that criterion, as did 30 percent in Phoenix and 26 percent in Santa Ana.

The second index gauges election-related activity. It is based on four survey questions asking whether the respondent had done any of the following actions in the current city of residence: contributed money to a candidate or political party; displayed a campaign button, bumper sticker or campaign sign; gone to any meeting, rallies, speeches, or dinners in support of a candidate; or done any (other) work for a party or candidate. As with the other index, actions taken within the past four years were counted. In five cities—Portland, Seattle, Madison, Boston, and Birmingham—24 to 25 percent of respondents reported having done two or more electoral activities in the preceding four years. In five other places (listed in descending order), 19 to 21 percent of respondents reported having engaged in two or more electoral actions in the

preceding four years: St. Paul, West Side Chicago, Manchester, Jacksonville, and Dayton. Seventeen percent of Savannah respondents met that criterion, as did 14 percent in Philadelphia, and 12 percent in Phoenix and Santa Ana.

### 3. Demographics Matter

As have many other studies, data from our 14-city survey reveal strong relationships between education, income, age, and ethnicity, on the one hand, and civic and electoral activism, on the other. As noted above, education and income are potent political resources. Only 18 percent of survey respondents with less than a high school education had engaged in two or more non-electoral civic acts in the preceding four years, as compared with 49 percent of the college graduates; and only 10 percent of high-school dropouts had participated in two or more electoral acts (beyond voting) in the preceding four years, as compared with 28 percent of college graduates. As for income, 27 percent of respondents living in households with total annual incomes under \$20,000 reported performing two or more non-electoral activities, versus 54 percent of respondents with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or more; and only 13 percent of the lower-income respondents had engaged in two or more electoral activities, as compared with 37 percent of individuals in the upper-income category.

Age is a proxy for political experience, particularly with regard to electoral politics. Older residents also tend to be more elaborately linked into politically relevant social networks than younger residents are, other things being equal. Our survey found that respondents aged 18 to 25 were less than half as likely as respondents aged 46 to 65 were to have performed two or more non-electoral civic acts in the preceding four years, and they were only one-third as likely as the older residents to have engaged in two or more electoral activities during that time period.

As for ethnicity, Latino respondents in the sampled cities—and particularly in the Sunbelt cities of Santa Ana and Phoenix—were comparatively inactive politically, owing to language or official citizenship obstacles in some cases (cf. DeSipio 1996; Verba et al. 1993). (Our survey interviews were conducted in Spanish when required.) Respondents of Asian descent, particularly ones who were recent immigrants, also tended to be politically inactive (cf. Junn 1999).

### 4. Attitudes Matter

#### Political Interest

Other things being equal, people take part in activities that interest them, and the same is true with regard to political involvement. This is not to say that interest in politics is accounted for entirely by intrapersonal factors, however. To the contrary, people often *become* interested in something because they have been recruited or invited to take part by a person or an organization, or their interest has been stirred by a salient exogenous event. Moreover, interest in an activity is likely to be as much a consequence as a cause of participating in it, once the cycle has been kick-started. The linkage between interest and action is thus not always a straightforward or unidirectional one, and this is particularly true with respect to politics. That said, some minimal degree of cognitive engagement in politics is almost certainly a common if

not absolutely essential precursor to active involvement in public life.

With this in mind, we asked respondents whether they followed what was happening in local government and on community issues “most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all.” Expressed interest was highest in Portland, Seattle, and St. Paul, where 40 percent of residents in each city said that they followed local politics “most of the time.” At the other end of the spectrum, only 18 percent of Santa Ana residents said they followed local politics “most of the time,” and nearly half (47 percent) said they monitored local government and issues “only now and then” or “hardly at all.” Interest in local politics was strongly related to active involvement in it. Fifty-four percent of residents who expressed high interest in local politics had participated in two or more non-electoral civic activities in the recent past, as compared with only 12 percent of persons who expressed low interest. Similarly, 36 percent of high-interest city residents had taken part in two or more electoral activities, as compared with only 4 percent of low-interest residents.

### **Political Efficacy**

People are also unlikely to get involved in politics if they believe that their participation would probably be ineffectual—either because they see themselves as being insufficiently competent politically or because they perceive public officials as being unresponsive to the expressed interests of ordinary people such as themselves (Abramson 1983; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Evidence from our survey is in accord with this generalization. Using an additive index of political efficacy based on three standard survey items employed in the ANES and in other research, we find that respondents at the high end of the efficacy scale were twice as likely as those at the low end of the scale to have engaged recently in two or more non-electoral civic activities (60 percent versus 30 percent) and nearly four times as likely to have engaged recently in two or more electoral activities (46 percent versus 12 percent).<sup>2</sup>

Seattle ranks highest among the 14 cities in our study in terms of political efficacy, with 43 percent of surveyed Seattleites scoring among the highest levels of our efficacy index. Bostonians are just behind, at 39 percent. At the other extreme, only 19 percent of Birmingham residents scored highly in terms of political efficacy.

### **Trust in People**

Democratic politics is an essentially public enterprise. Not only does it take place in public, it involves people operating collectively, as a public, rather than as isolated individuals. If city residents distrust one another, if they believe that their fellow citizens are generally looking for opportunities to take advantage of them, that presents a significant obstacle to discovering shared interests and mounting effective collective action to achieve those interests. Trust in one’s fellow citizens is the linchpin of Putnam’s (1993) theory of “making democracy work,” and Putnam (p. 89) quotes Poggi (1972) in asserting that “interpersonal trust is probably the moral orientation that most needs to be diffused among the people if republican society is to be maintained.”

We combined responses to two standard survey items used in ANES and other research

to form a five-point civic trust index.<sup>3</sup> The percent of respondents in our 14-city survey who reported having engaged in at least two non-electoral civic activities in the recent past increased steadily from 29 percent to 44 percent as one moved up the civic trust index from low to high. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who had participated recently in two or more electoral activities increased steadily from 14 percent to 26 percent. Aggregate civic trust varied substantially across the 14 cities, from 61 percent in the high-trust category in Madison to only 23 percent in that category in West Side Chicago.

## 5. Organizations Matter More

### The Case of West Side Chicago

Some of the observed variation in participation across cities is thus due to differences in the aggregate resources (e.g., education, income) and beliefs (e.g., interest in local politics, sense of efficacy, and civic trust) of their populations. Demography is not destiny, however, and “bad attitudes” are not necessarily an insuperable bar to political involvement. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is the case of the Chicago West Side.

One in three residents in our Chicago survey area lived in a household with an annual income below the federal government’s officially established poverty level, making the Chicago West Side easily the most impoverished place in our study. In the heart of the West Side—the communities of East and West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, and the Near West Side—the poverty rate approaches 50 percent. With only one in three adult residents possessing some education beyond high school and only one in ten holding a bachelor’s degree, the West Side also ranks near the bottom of the 14 places in our study in terms of formal education levels.

West Siders fare no better on indicators of social capital than they do on indicators of financial and human capital. As noted above, West Siders as a group were the *least* trusting of the residents we encountered in our 14-city study, as gauged by survey items that inquire about trusting “most people.” West Side Chicago also scored very low in terms of political efficacy, virtually tied for last place with Birmingham in our study. The roots of the prevailing sense of high mistrust and low political efficacy among West Siders are hardly mysterious. Any fair reading of the history of social injustice and political betrayal that this community has endured more than justifies residents’ wariness and their sense of estrangement from political powerbrokers.<sup>7</sup> The fact remains, however, that such attitudes are, in general, hardly conducive to robust civic involvement.

Yet robust civic involvement is precisely what one finds on the West Side. West Siders were less than half as likely as Seattleites to possess a college education or live in a household with an annual income of \$75,000 or more, for example. They were five times as likely as Madison residents to score at the bottom of the survey index that gauges trust in people (40 percent versus 8 percent). Yet West Side residents matched residents of Seattle and Madison in terms of their non-electoral political participation and trailed only slightly in terms of electoral involvement. In fact, after controlling statistically for the effects of education, income, and age, the Chicago West Side is easily the most active place in our study on both the non-electoral and electoral participation indexes (see **Appendix 1**).

What it is about the West Side that makes it so politically alive despite the prevailing culture of cynicism and mistrust, not to mention the daunting obstacles of widespread poverty and low levels of formal education? To a person, the community leaders whom we interviewed in Chicago said that the answer to the puzzle of participation on the West Side is its tradition of strong community-based organizations (CBOs), along with the presence of a number of key citywide institutions that facilitate local participation. The history of CBOs in Chicago stretches back to the pioneering efforts of Saul Alinsky beginning in the late 1930s and, in some respects, even back to the Chicago settlement-house movement that Jane Addams launched in the late 1800s (Addams 1990; Alinsky 1946; Fisher 1994; Horwitt 1990). As for the key citywide institutions that facilitate civic involvement, they include nonprofit organizations and foundations, local universities, and two significant public institutions, the Local School Councils (LSCs) and the regular police-beat meetings conducted as part of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS).

When we asked West Side residents in our survey whether anyone had personally contacted them in the past few years “to take part in any community or citizen group or neighborhood organization,” 38 percent recalled having been contacted. That percentage is slightly above the average across all 14 cities in our study, but it is not particularly remarkable. In Seattle, for instance, 45 percent of surveyed residents recalled being contacted. As Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) showed, organizations tend to focus their contacting efforts upon upper-income and more highly educated individuals. Such people are relatively scarce in many of the West Side neighborhoods that comprise our Chicago sampling area, which could explain why the rate of organizational contacting in those neighborhoods is not as high as one might have anticipated. When we examine organizational contacting rates for respondents stratified by their level of formal education, it turns out that West Siders with no formal education beyond high school are more likely to recall having been contacted by a local organization than are comparably educated people in other cities. Still, the difference is not dramatic. Thirty percent of West Side Chicagoans with no post-high-school education reported having been contacted recently by a local civic organization, as compared with an average rate of 25 percent for comparably educated respondents across all 14 cities.

Other survey findings provide clearer evidence of organizational impact in Chicago. For example, West Side respondents had the highest rate of recent service on local governmental boards or councils (“such as a city council, a school board, a planning board, or something like that”), with 1 in 12 of them reporting that they had served on such a body within the past four years. In addition, West Siders tied with Bostonians in having the highest rate of recent service on boards of local nonprofit organizations, with better than 1 in 6 reporting such involvement. Additional corroborating evidence is presented below. We precede that, however, with a brief discussion of (1) ways in which organizations can facilitate effective participation and (2) an overview of the organizational infrastructure of the Chicago West Side.

### **How Organizations Foster Participation**

Organizations facilitate political involvement in a number of ways. First, they provide a vehicle for initiating and sustaining collective action. Politics is essentially a public activity,

something that is conducted in the company of others. Effective political action is almost always coordinated, facilitated, *organized*. After all, one cannot attend a community meeting about a public issue until some group has convened the meeting. Local organizations not only create opportunities for participation, they communicate information about those opportunities, and they coordinate activity to enhance its likely effectiveness.

Organizations not only provide a vehicle through which citizens may act upon their political interests, they can provide the space and occasions within which ordinary people can *discover* what their political interests are in the first place, and how their interests relate to those of others around them. Contrary to the presumptions of so-called rational-choice models of politics, democratic practice does more than merely aggregate pre-existing interests of citizens. Rather, citizens' interests are often as much the *results* of democratic political processes as they are the *inputs* for them. Furthermore, if an individual intends to engage in political action with others, it is not sufficient that she know her own interests, she must also know how broadly those interests are shared and the extent to which other individuals who share them are predisposed to act in their behalf. Bowles and Gintis (1989, 149) summed it up this way: "Interests are not causally prior to practices. Rather, the interests of a group will in general depend, among other things, upon the membership of the group, its internal discursive and structural organization, and its location in an ecological system of social actions."

Not only may individuals' understandings of their political interests become transformed through their engagement in civic life, their very self-conceptions may become transformed. They may well come to see themselves as *citizens*, that is as legitimate participants in the public life of their community, and others may come to see them in that light, as well. In this regard, Beckwith (n.d., 5), discussed the explicitly transformative objective of community organizing:

[P]eople are taught everyday in countless little ways that the system is not going to change, no matter what they do. We learn to stand in line and fold our hands on our desks in school. We see politicians betray promises daily, with very little regard for the faith that voters place in them before the election. We see the rich get richer, the powerful escape the consequences of wrongdoing. In all these ways, we learn that nothing we do will change the way things are. Out of simple self preservation, we begin to lower our horizons, to shrink into a world we define by our ability to have an impact. ...[C]ommunity organizing seeks to teach people, through experience, that they can be effective in a larger and larger sphere—their own block, their own neighborhood, their city, their state, and so on. In the process, we redefine our idea of self...

Organizations also actively recruit participants. Recruitment as practiced by community-based organizations (CBOs) is radically different from the kind of political mobilization (including ersatz "grassroots" mobilization) discussed by Goldstein (1999) and by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993). The former involves inviting citizens to develop and strengthen relationships with one another and to work together, typically in face-to-face settings, on an agenda that they largely shape themselves. The latter is elite-driven activation, typically achieved through targeted mailings and mass media campaigns, intended to incite a burst of individual actions (votes, faxes to elected representatives, financial contributions), and initiated

with little or no intention of promoting sustained involvement by, or relationships among, “participants.” Community organizing respects people as citizens. Elite-directed activation campaigns treat them primarily as objects to be manipulated.

Finally, organizations build the capacity of citizens to accomplish public-oriented work effectively. A number of recent studies have emphasized ways that individuals may develop politically useful skills as a byproduct of occupational employment and their involvement in nonpolitical organizations, such as churches and clubs. For example, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 17-18) emphasized that “an important part” of their research was to

. . . show how ordinary and routine activity on the job, at church, or in an organization, activity that has nothing to do with politics or public issues, can develop organizational and communications skills that are relevant for politics and thus can facilitate political activity. Organizing a series of meetings at which a new personnel policy is introduced to employees, chairing a large charity event, or setting up a food pantry at church are activities that are not in and of themselves political. Yet they foster the development of skills that can be transferred to politics.

As important as it is to acknowledge the ways that politically useful skills can develop as byproducts of nonpolitical work, it is at least as important to acknowledge the intentional efforts of community-based organizations to foster citizens’ political capacities. Most CBOs self-consciously foster a participative culture, devoting considerable time and resources to enhancing the leadership skills, knowledge, and responsibilities of their members. This distinguishes CBOs from voluntary organizations of the sort that Putnam focused upon, for example. As Borgos and Douglas (1996) noted, “It is not an accident that the injunction, ‘never do for others what they can do for themselves,’ is known as the iron rule of organizing, rather than, for example, the iron rule of bowling leagues.”

### **The Organizational Infrastructure of West Side Chicago**

**Community-based organizations.** The Chicago West Side is laced with community-based organizations, including many that are networked together through their affiliations with the Gamaliel Foundation, the Industrial Areas Foundation, or National People’s Action (all three of which are headquartered in Chicago). Examples include the South Austin Coalition Community Council (whose roots go back to Alinsky-style organizing in Chicago in the mid-1960s), the Northwest Austin Council, Northwest Neighborhood Federation, Interfaith Organizing Project, Blocks Together, Nobel Neighbors, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, and *Mujeres Latinas en Accion*. The West Side also contains an impressive concentration of established community development corporations (CDCs), including such exemplars of asset-based, comprehensive community development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Kubisch 1996) as Bethel New Life, Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation, and The Resurrection Project. Erie Neighborhood House, one of the oldest settlement houses in the U.S., has two West Side locations. It has been active as an advocate and organizer of community residents as well as providing direct services. In a similar vein, the Westside Health Authority, which was founded after the closing of St. Anne’s Hospital

in 1988, serves as a catalyst for promoting health and wellness in all its dimensions. One of its programs, called Every Block is a Village, builds relationships among residents in an Austin neighborhood, block by block.

Bringing CBOs into the West Side story helps to explain how high levels of participation co-exist there along with deep feelings of estrangement from government and mistrust of “most people.” That is because much of the community-based organizational infrastructure that facilitates civic activism there—and particularly among African-Americans, Latinos, and low-income residents of all ethnicities—arose in direct opposition to a political machine that, in concert with real-estate developers, bankers, other elite institutions, consistently—and often literally—bulldozed over neighborhood interests (Alinsky 1969; Ferman 1996; Fish 1973; Fisher 1994, esp. 51-65, 141-147; Grimshaw 1992). West Side CBOs often deal with important public matters. It is not uncommon for them, either singly or in coalition, to lobby city hall, the state legislature, and even the U.S. Congress, on such issues as predatory residential financing practices, public transportation cutbacks, and public health and safety needs. Some of the larger nonprofit development corporations there, such as Bethel New Life (in West Garfield Park), The Resurrection Project (in the Lower West Side), and Bickerdike Redevelopment Corp. (in West Town and Humboldt Park) have undertaken significant residential and commercial development projects and related activities in ways that directly involve local residents, building local political capacity as well as physical structures.

The South Austin Community Coalition Council is an exemplar of West Side CBOs that facilitate civic action and achieve tangible results. Bob Vondrasek, executive director of SACCC, has been organizing since 1964, when he signed on with one of Saul Alinsky’s projects in Syracuse, New York. After organizing in Syracuse for 13 years, he and his wife moved back to Chicago, where he became executive director of the South Austin Coalition “pretty much by default,” according to him. “At that time, anyone with six months of organizing experience became the head of something,” he said. “So, basically I’ve been an organizer for nearly all of my adult life.” Vondrasek continued:

The predecessor organization to the South Austin Coalition was the Organization for a Better Austin, which existed from 1965 to 1975. They did a lot of good organizing, led mostly by churches that wanted to promote neighborhood integration and stop blockbusting by real estate interests. We continue to work on housing issues, such as abuses involving the Federal Housing Administration. A company called Easy Life has been ripping off people in this area, and we helped figure out how to file a class-action lawsuit against the company and organized people to complain to their legislators and get Easy Life closed down (Vondrasek 1998).

In November 2000, the federal government agreed to make payments to more than 100 West Side families who lost their homes after securing loans through Easy Life. According to the *Chicago Sun-Times* (Lawrence 2000), the agreement was reached after officials of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development met with the South Austin Coalition Community Council and the National Training and Information Center, another West Side organization. HUD also agreed to “other remedies,” including reappraisals and mortgage

restructuring. According to the newspaper,

Some homeowners who obtained FHA-insured mortgages have been victims of companies that over-appraised the value of homes, performed cosmetic rehabs before selling the homes at inflated prices and promised repairs that were never delivered. Many homeowners could not keep up with their mortgage payments while making home repairs. . . . Most of the affected homeowners live in South Austin and received federally insured loans through the Easy Life real estate agency. Easy Life is named in a class-action suit brought by residents and the South Austin Coalition Community Council, who accuse the firm of inflating home values along with other “misleading schemes.”

The following April, Easy Life president Richard Nelson and six of his agents were indicted on federal charges of fraudulently obtaining more than \$ 3.2 million in federal loans between 1990 and 1998. In a newspaper account of the indictments, Theresa Welch, “a housing organizer for the South Austin Coalition Community Council, the group that has led a longtime campaign against Easy Life,” is quoted: “It’s a big victory, because Easy Life has invaded our community, preyed on the poor and those that had the dream of owning their own home” (Lawrence 2001).

Vondrasek went on to describe other ways in which SACCC has facilitated effective community action:

We’ve helped residents work with police to reduce Austin-area drug dealing—closing drug houses, launching a community-wide anti-drug campaign, and established drug-free zones around schools. Probably the biggest thing that we’re involved in now is utility advocacy. In 1984, our group and two other neighborhood groups proposed a percentage income payment plan to prevent utilities from being cut off from low-income residents. Eventually, we organized a statewide coalition and won this issue. Our members have been lobbying at the state and federal levels to restore LIHEAP [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program] funding.

We also have a very strong committee organizing seniors, holding monthly forums and doing actions and advocacy on seniors issues. Our senior advocacy project trains seniors to be community leaders. And we’re increasingly active on jobs issues. We do some work on education issues, although we don’t have a full-time staffer for that. We have a paid staff of three, including a senior advocate, a youth advocate, and one other. We have perhaps 100 seniors who meet monthly. We have 600 people who attend our meetings, and most of them pay dues if they can afford to do so. About half of them are strong, active members.

Less than two miles east of the SACCC office is Bethel New Life, a church-related community development corporation (CDC) serving the neighborhood of West Garfield Park. Since 1978, Bethel has earned a national reputation for cutting edge initiatives and pioneering

approaches to housing, employment, and development that build on the people, physical assets, and faith of the community. Bethel president Mary Nelson (1998) explained that even though they are a CDC and not a community-organizing group per se, “We know that you can’t do asset-based community development without getting people to work together. You can’t just focus on physical improvements.”

We have an arm of Bethel New Life called Community Organizing for Re-Neighboring, or CORN. It’s an attempt on our part to help get people connected. We helped to develop 12 new block clubs and work with a total of 27 block clubs. They meet on a monthly basis. There are also police-beat organizations. We serve as a resource for the clubs. For example, if an issue comes up, we help to identify which city departments or agencies should be contacted and make sure that the right people come out to deal with the issue. We also provide some funds to help support community events that the block clubs put on—to help them buy some food, for instance, because food is important if you want to get people to show up.

We also hold an annual Take Back the Streets, which is a month-long effort in which everyone gets involved. This year, we had eight churches involved, and we worked with the police on it. We had over 500 people participating. Last year we held a Men’s March, in which 300 men showed up at midnight to participate in a march against drugs. We did voter registration—as part of the march. We help support a lot of events like that, but local people plan the events. It’s a fairly elaborate structure of involvement.

We helped to organize about a dozen groups on the West Side, calling ourselves Westside Organizing to Win—or WOW—to get voters to turn out in the elections. A lot of the new voters were people who were young, first-time voters. So we tried to remove some of the intimidation of the election process by showing them how a voting machine works, showing them where their polling place was, preparing them for the possibility of having to wait in line to vote, and so forth. We also provide transportation, provide baby-sitting if they need it, whatever it takes. We make a lot of phone calls, to get out the vote on Election Day. We do all that because we recognize that the mayor and the aldermen will take more interest in West Garfield if they know that people here vote, that the accountability factor is there. It’s a strategy toward a greater end. We explain this to people in block club meetings, in churches, and in different settings.

We did a survey last fall, and we asked people three things: what were the three top assets of the community, what were the three most needed improvements, and what are you willing to work on? About 350 people participated in the survey. We went door to door over a few weekends and also surveyed people at some key neighborhood events. Things that people identified as issues to work on were drugs, cleaning up the community, and crime. Out of that, we launched a six-month-long Operation Clean Sweep, combining cleaning up the community with sweeping out the drug dealers. We helped to organize

block clubs, we got 15 block clubs to adopt a block, we held community events, we got our alderman to have a “mobile office” here—set up right outside with a card table and chairs—to help identify corners where drug dealers congregated and to work with the police to sweep those corners. We took over a garbage-strewn vacant lot across from a school, and we had the superintendent of schools and the alderman out there with all the kids and teachers after the first day of school and cleaned up the lot. The next weekend, the United Way brought in 100 volunteers from the banks to transform the lot into a beautiful garden. We got media attention, and we got the superintendent to take notice. We held a job fair, voter registration, a prayer march and vigil—all kinds of things.

Community residents get involved because these are efforts to improve their neighborhoods. When people have something vested in the outcome, when it’s something they care about, and if they see that they can make a difference, then they are more likely to get involved. For example, we’ve had great organizing success around Goldblatt Elementary School, because the school desperately needs an addition. It’s a matter of mobilizing around people’s self interests. Now there’s a big difference between self interest and selfishness, okay? Self interest includes how your interests relate to those of other people, and how they affect other people.

The offices of National People’s Action and its research arm, the National Training and Information Center, are located in the Chicago community of West Town. At the time of our visit to NPA-NTIC, the late Gale Cincotta, widely regarded as the “mother of the Community Reinvestment Act,” passed by Congress in 1977, was the organization’s executive director. NPA-NTIC works on housing, neighborhood safety, jobs, education, and other issues. The organization employs 18 staff members, who train organizers, research issues, and organize in Chicago neighborhoods. NTIC also holds two training sessions annually for people who come to Chicago from around the country to learn about community organizing, and NPA convenes annual national meetings in Washington, DC. Cincotta and Gordon Mayer, the organization’s director of publications and outreach at the time, explained how issue-based organizing creates opportunities for citizens to work together to address problems that affect their lives—and in so doing build long-term power within the community. Said Mayer (1998):

The whole idea of issue-based organizing is that you bring people together to solve these issues they have in common, and along the way as they’re resolving the issue, they’re building power and building an organization. So every organizing drive is intended to create power and create an organization of residents. And it works. For example, Blocks Together, in West Town and Humboldt Park, didn’t exist when I started here five years ago, and it is now a strong organization that drew 350 people to its most recent annual convention. We also helped start a new organization called Brighton Park Neighborhood Council less than two years ago. They had several hundred people at a meeting with Congressman Luis Gutierrez in Brighton Park earlier this week. NTIC also helped to revitalize the Northwest Neighborhood Federation, which now has five staff members and is doing really well, taking on issues like education, city

services, and community investment.

Leaders of CBOs in West Side Chicago emphasized that the key to getting people involved is capitalizing upon existing relationships among potential participants and nurturing new relationships among members. Virgil Crawford was one of those leaders. Crawford is a community organizer with the Westside Health Authority's "Every Block is a Village" program, based in the Chicago community of Austin. He said,

This is not a "trying to get a stop sign erected on a corner" type of organizing that we're doing. Our goal is building community, and to do that you have to first overcome isolation and distrust and disconnection. You have to start with building relationships—first with each other and then with institutions that affect us. You start by just going to people on blocks, meeting them where they are, and seeking to build relationships with them—to be able to say that you know me and I know you. So, a barrier gets broken down, and then out of that relationship I can begin to talk with you about some things that are affecting all of us in the community. And then, hopefully, people will turn out to a meeting with some neighbors based upon those relationships. That is how we've been able to get citizens from this neighborhood involved in leadership roles. We want to get citizens on the boards of our committees, and on the advisory council of the park district, and involved in public safety organizations, at the health center, and in the schools, so that they can play a role in reweaving the fabric of the community.

Susana Vasquez (1998a, 1998b), resource development director of The Resurrection Project (TRP), also stressed the relational basis of her organization's work:

TRP was not simply founded in May of 1990, it was *baptized* in a church ceremony complete with *padrinos* and *madrinas* [godparents]. The mission is to build relationships and challenge people to act on their faith and values to create healthy communities through organizing, education, and community development. TRP's roots go back to a group of pastors and lay leaders who made the decision to hire a community organizer, develop new leadership, and improve their community. Leaders held house meetings, organized street masses, and challenged others to participate in Christian small base communities. In these small base communities, residents' reflections on problems led to mobilizing around issues to shut down drug houses, improve garbage collection, and build new homes on vacant lots.

Chicago's CBOs do more than merely activate residents. They work self-consciously at developing citizens' political capacities. Vondrasek, of the South Austin Coalition, said:

When someone calls us up to say that they have no heat in their building, we ask, "How many people can you get together about this issue?" And so we organize and build leadership around issues that people are willing to work on. We don't just "do" for them; we develop the leadership of people, so that when the next situation arises, they know what to do, they have more confidence, and

they have relationships with each other.

**Citywide facilitating organizations.** In addition to its network of CBOs, the West Side draws upon the resources of a number of citywide organizations that promote collective problem solving at the neighborhood level. One of these is the Chicago Association of Neighborhood Development Organizations (CANDO), a coalition of more than 80 nonprofit neighborhood development organizations in Chicago and over 130 affiliate entities, that is the largest organization of its kind in the United States. CANDO promotes retail and industrial development and provides technical, financial, and other assistance to local groups involved in community economic development. In a similar vein, the Chicago Rehab Network is a coalition of CDCs that provides member organizations with training and technical assistance. It helped create the Neighborhood Lending Program, in which three downtown banks have invested more than \$570 million in low-income neighborhoods, and a program in the Cook County assessor's office that allows long-time residents of gentrifying areas to keep their homes in spite of rising property-tax burdens (Rumbler 1999). Another significant citywide institution is the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1980 to promote community involvement in public safety. Its five-year-long education and agitation campaign was instrumental in convincing the city to adopt community-oriented policing as its official policy in 1992. Since then it has trained citizens and police officers, conducted research, lobbied public officials, and collaborated with neighborhood groups in an assertive effort to make that policy work on the streets of Chicago (Friedman 1996; Skogan and Hartnett 1997).

**Local universities.** Local universities also play a role. Together with 15 community-based or community-focused nonprofit organizations, four urban universities in Chicago—Chicago State University, DePaul University, Loyola University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago—comprise the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG). Founded in 1989, PRAG facilitates collaborative relationships between universities and CBOs to conduct public-oriented research that leads to social change and leadership development (Mayfield, Hellwig, and Banks 1999; Nyden et al. 1997). PRAG connects undergraduate and graduate students with CBOs so that the students may assist the CBOs in implementing the organizations' research agendas. PRAG has also secured funding in conjunction with CBOs to plan and execute multi-year research initiatives on such topics as the impact of welfare reform on Chicago communities, the role of African-American churches in local community development, and a program to assist victims of violence and their families. The University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute also launched its Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) in 1994. As of 1998, UICNI had been involved in approximately 40 projects covering a broad range of community development issues in collaboration with more than 50 community partners (Mayfield, Hellwig, and Banks 1999). UICNI's ongoing partnership with The Resurrection Project has been particularly productive (Wiewel and Guerrero 1997). Located in the largely Mexican-American community of Pilsen, The Resurrection Project is a community-based development corporation founded in 1990 by a coalition of seven churches. It has earned a national reputation for effectively coupling neighborhood organizing and advocacy with bricks-and-mortar development and service provision.

**Local School Councils.** If this were not enough, thousands of West Side residents have

participated in working through some of the toughest public education challenges in the nation as elected members of the Chicago Local School Councils (LSCs). LSCs are a key element of what has been described as “the most radical decentralization plan ever tried in a United States school system” (Wilkerson 1989). That plan, enacted by the Illinois state legislature in 1988 and modified significantly in 1995, grew out of widespread frustration with a school system described in 1987 as the worst in the nation by then-Secretary of Education William J. Bennett.

If Bennett was exaggerating, it was not by much. At the time, the Chicago public school system—the third-largest in the U.S.—had some of the highest dropout rates and lowest test scores in the country. As white and middle-class parents fled to the suburbs or placed their children in private and parochial schools, public school enrollment fell by 18% between 1976 and 1986, yet the number of central administrators on the payroll grew by 30% (Walberg and Niemec 1994). A teachers’ strike that delayed the opening of schools by nearly a month in 1987—the ninth such strike in 18 years—was the last straw. Community groups, business leaders, and education advocates formed “an unprecedented multiracial, cross-class coalition” that shaped a sweeping plan for reform and lobbied the Illinois legislature to approve it (Katz 1992).

In addition to the school principal, each Local School Council includes six parents, two community residents, two teachers, and, at high schools, one student. Collectively, the Chicago LSCs constitute the largest elected body in the United States. When the first LSC election was held in October 1989, some 210,000 residents cast their ballots to elect 4400 parents and community residents to the councils (Fung 2001), and the number of African-American elected officials in the United States virtually doubled overnight. Each LSC deliberates upon and approves its mandated School Improvement Plan and budget, evaluates and signs a contract with the principal, and works with administration, staff, parents, and students to achieve the school’s improvement objectives. Most LSC members attend at least one meeting per month and spend additional time speaking informally with parents and others and preparing for meetings. Incoming LSC members are required to complete a three-day training program, and continuing members take refresher courses. A series of no-cost workshops is offered to prepare prospective LSC candidates. Despite a 1995 amendment that reined in some of the powers originally vested in the LSCs, the councils remain an important vehicle for meaningful citizen involvement in public matters of deep concern to them.

**Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy.** Hundreds of West Side residents have also been formally involved on beat- and district-level committees organized under Chicago’s Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), the nation’s most ambitious experiment in community policing. Thousands more have attended neighborhood CAPS meetings or participated in CAPS-related activities. CAPS was launched in April 1993 as a pilot project in five of Chicago’s 25 police districts, which are in turn divided into 279 “beats.”<sup>8</sup> The launch followed a five-year advocacy campaign by the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), an independent coalition of Chicago community organizations (Friedman 1996). CAPS, which went citywide in 1994, entails a problem-solving orientation to policing, stressing crime prevention rather than traditional incident-driven law enforcement. In addition, it recognizes that without the active cooperation of neighborhood residents and businesses, police alone cannot prevent crime. Mutually respectful partnerships are essential to success. In Chicago,

neighborhood residents help set policing priorities for the beat and get involved in their own prevention projects. Regular public meetings held in each beat serve as a forum for identifying problems and strategizing about solutions (see Fung 2001).

Citywide, monthly attendance at beat meetings averaged 6000 residents, and as of late 1999 total attendance had passed the 300,000 mark. In a 1998 survey conducted by Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, 14 percent of Chicagoans said they attended a beat meeting in the preceding year, and those who attended went an average of almost four times. Participation in CAPS has been sustained in many of the places needing it most—areas with higher crime rates, with lower average household income and formal education levels, and where test scores for public school students are low and truancy rates are high. According to Skogan et al. (1999) “Community factors play a big role in stimulating involvement: beat meeting attendance is strongly linked to civic engagement, measured by involvement in an array of local organizations.” A staff of paid, full-time community organizers encourages public attendance at beat meetings and helps organize neighborhood marches, prayer vigils, and informal and formal actions against problematic businesses and landlords (Skogan et al. 2000).

**Political party organizations.** [discussion goes here]

### **Variations in Participation Within the West Side**

Political involvement in West Side Chicago is doubly counterintuitive. First, as noted above, the area as a whole is more politically active than many other places in which residents tend to be far more advantaged in terms of personal resources and attitudes. Moreover, as we show here, the West Side neighborhoods that are among the *least* advantaged socioeconomically and attitudinally tend to have the *highest* levels of political involvement.

To investigate this phenomenon, we divided the West Side sample into two clusters according to postal zipcode. The six contiguous zipcodes lying in the southwestern half of our Chicago sampling area contain some of the most economically devastated urban neighborhoods in America. This area is overwhelmingly African-American, with concentrations of Latinos in South Lawndale and the Lower West Side.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the four zipcodes that make up the remainder of our Chicago sampling area are majority non-Hispanic white, with some sizable Hispanic neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> Many neighborhoods within these four zipcodes experienced significant gentrification in the 1990s, and U.S. Census data show that typical household income and education levels there are substantially above those for the six southwestern Chicago zipcodes in our sample. Consistent with the Census data, respondents in our survey who lived in the southwest section of the West Side had fewer years of formal education and lower household incomes on average than respondents in the northeast part had, as shown in **Table 2**. Sixty-one percent of respondents in the southwest section were African-Americans, as compared with only 9 percent in the northeast part. Roughly one-quarter of the respondents in each area were Latinos.

Residents in the two sections of the West Side also differed in terms of attitudes that are

typically associated with political involvement. As compared with residents of the more gentrified part of the West Side—or, for that matter, as compared with residents of every other city in our study—Chicagoans in the southwest section of the West Side expressed a profoundly limited sense of political efficacy. A majority of them (55 percent) agreed that “politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on,” and nearly two out of three of them (64 percent) were of the opinion that “public officials don’t care much what people like me think.” As for the bonds of trust and mutuality that presumably make democracy work, (Putnam 1983), evidence of them is hard to find in the survey responses of residents in the southwest section of the West Side. By nearly a three-to-one margin they rejected the proposition that “most people can be trusted” in favor of the view that “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people.” No other place in our 14-city study exhibited such an extreme sense of generalized mistrust. Finally, whereas a plurality of respondents living in the northeast part of the West Side agreed that “most of the time people try to be helpful,” a majority of respondents in the southwest section rejected that view in favor of the proposition that “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people.”

In terms of its socioeconomic makeup and the prevailing sentiments of its residents, the southwest section of the Chicago West Side would thus seem offer a distinctly inhospitable environment for political involvement. Despite the harsh conditions, however, the area was more politically active than the more gentrified northeast section. Indeed, it was among the most politically involved areas in our entire study. Forty-eight percent of respondents living in the southwest part of the West Side reported having engaged in two or more non-electoral civic activities in the preceding four years, as compared with only 38 percent of respondents in the wealthier, more highly educated northeastern part. Fifty-five percent reported having participated in at least one election-related activity (other than voting) in the preceding four years, as compared with only 40 percent of respondents from the northeast section. Both differences are statistically significant.

Lest anyone suspect that the highly politically involved residents of the southwest section lived in an enclave of more affluent and educated citizens there, the data categorically reject that possibility. A majority (53 percent) of the southwestern West Side activists reported that they lived in households with annual incomes below \$30,000, and one-third of them had annual household incomes below \$20,000. Only one of the 90 most active southwestern West Siders in our survey resided in a household with an annual income of \$75,000 or more, and fewer than one in five possessed a college degree. By way of comparison, two in five of the *least* active residents of the northeast section of the West Side possessed a college degree.

Subdividing the Chicago survey data by race/ethnicity as well as by area of residence reveals additional nuances in civic involvement there. As shown in **Table 3a**, non-electoral participation among non-Hispanic whites was quite similar in the two sections of the West Side. It was among African-Americans and Hispanics that non-electoral civic involvement was so much higher in the southwest section. As for electoral activism (see **Table 3b**), it differed less by area of residence within each racial/ethnic category than non-electoral activism did, being somewhat higher in the southwest area than in the northeast one for each of the three racial/ethnic categories.

Multiple regression analysis of the West Side survey data reveals that the significant effect of residential location upon participation persists when education, income, and ethnicity (Hispanic versus non-Hispanic) are simultaneously taken into account.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, income tends to be slightly *negatively* linked to non-electoral and electoral participation in West Side Chicago when the other independent variables are incorporated into the analysis. The multiple regression results (excluding the statistically nonsignificant set of income variables) are displayed in **Table 4**. The analysis shows that the incremental impact of residential location upon non-electoral civic involvement is statistically and substantively significant. To get a sense of the magnitude of this effect, consider that the difference in average participation levels of southwestern and northeastern West Side residents is nearly as large as the difference between persons with only a high school education and college graduates ( $1.184 - .619 = .565$ ), other relevant factors being equal. The impact of residential location upon participation in electoral activities is also substantively and statistically significant. Lastly, Latinos were significantly less involved in electoral politics than non-Latinos were, undoubtedly owing to citizenship or language obstacles for some Latino residents of Chicago (see Rodriguez 1999). The difference between Latino and non-Latino participation in non-electoral civic activities is not statistically significant, however, once education and area of residence are taken into account.

**Once again, organizations matter most.** Evidence from our random-sample survey suggests that differences in participation levels between the two West Side sub-areas stem from differences in organizational penetration and effectiveness. Residents of the southwest section were significantly more likely than residents of the northeast part to report having been invited to join a community or neighborhood group, controlling for individuals' education and income levels. (See **Table A3** in the Appendix for details.) Residents of the southwest section were also significantly more likely than residents of the northeast part to be members of place-based organizations (such as block-clubs and neighborhood associations), service or fraternal groups, and school-based organizations, and they were significantly more likely to have served recently as members of local government boards or councils or on boards of local nonprofit organizations, as shown in **Table 5**. Indeed, residents of the southwest Chicago West Side reported higher proportions of membership in place-based associations and higher rates of service on governmental and nonprofit boards than did residents of any other place in our study.

Places of worship can also be sites for explicit political discussion and direct involvement, particularly within member congregations of organizations affiliated with the IAF, Gamaliel, or similar entities (Warren 2001). Respondents in the southwest part of the West Side were significantly more likely than their counterparts in the northeast part to be members of religious institutions. Moreover, those institutions were also more likely to be places where political affairs were discussed, based on what their members reported in our survey, as shown in **Table 6**. The conjunction of these two factors means that fully 40 percent of respondents living in the southwest part of the West Side were members of religious institutions in which public issues are discussed with some regularity, as compared with only 22 percent respondents from the northeast part.

The survey data suggest that organizations in the southwest part of the West Side are particularly important with regard to facilitating political involvement among Chicagoans of color. Hispanics and African-Americans there were nearly twice as likely as their counterparts

in the northeast section to have served at some time on the board of a local nonprofit organization (25 percent versus 13 percent). They were also twice as likely to have served on a local governmental council or board (14 percent versus 7 percent). In contrast, rates of service on nonprofit or governmental boards did not vary materially by area of residence for non-Hispanic whites.

In addition, whereas 53 percent of African-American and Hispanic residents of the northeast section agreed that they “don’t know where to go to get involved in politics or public affairs,” only 31 percent of their counterparts in the southwest section agreed with that statement—a statistically significant difference—as shown in **Table 7**. (The response patterns of African-Americans and Hispanics did not differ appreciably from one another in this regard.) Non-Hispanic whites living in the southwestern part of the West Side were also less likely than their counterparts in the gentrified northeast section to say that they did not know where to go to get involved, but the difference was not statistically significant.

**Party mobilization.** Residents of the southwestern and northeastern parts of the Chicago West Side were about equally likely to have been asked to contribute money or work on behalf of a political party or a candidate for office. One-third of them reported having received such a request, with the vast majority of them having been contacted more than once. Just under half of the West Side respondents (47 percent) said they had been contacted at least once “over the past couple of years” by a candidate or party organization as part of an election campaign. That percentage also did not vary appreciably by sub-area within the West Side.

**Reasons to participate.** The importance of organizations for fostering civic involvement is also evident in the reasons that West Side participants offer for why they are active in public life. Rather than emphasizing private interests, they stress the relational basis of their involvement. This is particularly true among West Siders residing in the southwest zipcodes: someone asked them to take part, they want to meet people, to be with people they enjoy, and to receive recognition for their involvement. See **Table 8**.

## 6. Faith-based Institutions

As McAdam (1982), Morris (1984), and others did for the study of the civil rights movement and social movements more generally, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) expanded the scope of political participation research beyond its traditional focus upon individual attitudes and, perhaps, a few institutions (primarily political parties) to draw attention to the significant role that religious institutions can play in facilitating civic engagement. That faith-based institutions are central to the story of civic involvement in Chicago—as well as in a number of other cities in our study (and elsewhere)—is beyond any doubt. As extraordinarily valuable as Verba, Schlozman and Brady’s work is, however, we believe that it paints an incomplete portrait of the role of religious institutions in promoting civic engagement.

First, those authors emphasized the skill-building and network-elaborating aspects of participating in the functions of the church, synagogue, or mosque, and the ways that those skills and networks can be put to productive use in the political world. Although those are important considerations, they miss the essential element of faith-based institutions, which is that they are *based in faith*. This is an important point, because it is their shared principles of faith that justify

and motivate collective action for so many church members; and it is the stories, rituals, and traditions of faith that assist the faithful in making meaning of their civic work (Harris 1999; Ramsay 1998; Wood 1997). This is the point that Saul Alinsky missed when he created IAF's congregation-based organizing model—and it is precisely the point that Ernesto Cortes grasped when he helped initiate a fundamental makeover of that model (Boyte 1989; Cortes 1993; Warren 2001).

Second, and closely related, faith-based institutions often engage in work that is explicitly “political” (albeit nonpartisan) in nature, in that it directly addresses collective concerns and public priorities. The religious right and its battles on such hot-button issues as abortion, school prayer, and public funding of parochial schools garner the lion's share of media attention. At least as important if not as flashy, however, is the work of faith-based institutions from a variety of traditions on such issues as affordable housing, fair lending practices, police “profiling” of African-Americans, liberalized immigration policies, education reform, environmental justice, and economic development (Rooney 1995; Rogers 1990; Warren 2001).

These two points are illustrated by an excerpt from a conversation we had with a speech therapist in the St. Paul public schools who is also an activist with the St. Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations (SPEAC), an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation:

Seven out of every ten kids in the St. Paul public schools lives in poverty. Many of them are children of color, and many of the pre-school children have had some kind of prenatal alcohol, chemical, or drug exposure. Many have been born prematurely. Many live in absolutely dysfunctional and neglectful homes. We have three-year-olds in our program who enjoy hitting and biting teachers and students, and then they just walk away. I've had children abused at the hands of supposed caregivers. I've had kids taken out of homes because of neglect. We've had kids come to school bloody because they've been beaten. . . .

I can't live with that. I'm a good speech clinician. I can work with kids on their articulation and their language development. I can do that. That's my job. But I can't do that knowing every September that this year my caseload will be more desperate than last year. So when you ask, “Why you do this?” the question I ask is, “How can you live with yourself if you *don't*?”

Some of my colleagues burn out. They leave the field. Or they don't do the best they can, because people have told them that they can't make a difference, and so they don't try. But some of us come to understand that, “No, *I* can't, by myself. But if I and all the other people in SPEAC and Interfaith Action and other groups get together, yes, *we* can. We *can* make a difference.”

I think that most people really want to do something that makes a difference. Some of them coach their kid's ball teams. They're doing something that means something to them. For myself, I realized that one of my gifts was that I like being in the public arena. I want to be at the table. I get lots of energy from that. Some people don't. There are people in our organization who don't want to

be out there on center stage, but they'll work behind the scenes and do phenomenal things that are as important and as valuable as whatever I may do.

So do I do this out of self interest? Sure. I like being in this group. I like making decisions, struggling with whatever it is that set me off. I love it. In high school, I was in Teenage Republicans. I was chair of the Young Republicans at Iowa State. I've been president of everything. Also, part of my self interest is my Christianity, and I am not embarrassed to say that. As a woman, I have lots of issues with the Catholic Church as an institution, but one day I was standing by the cathedral that sits on the highest part of the city of St. Paul, and I looked at that dome and it was as if God had said to me, "I have called you and I have given you gifts, and I expect you to use them." And I thought, "Okay, okay. I hear you."

There was a story recently on National Public Radio. The French Catholic Church was asking for forgiveness for being silent during World War II. And I'm sitting there thinking, "Fifty years from now, are the children of St. Paul going to ask the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church and the Baptist Church, 'Why were you silent?'" So part of it is a faith walk for me, a Christian faith walk. It doesn't have to be that way for other people, but it is for me.

## 7. Governmental Institutions

Throughout the twentieth century, political reforms have been implemented in American cities with the aim of altering patterns of participation in local politics. In the early 1900s the Progressive movement sought to restructure aspects of municipal government and elections in order to promote "scientific" public decision making and administration and to insulate those activities from the presumably corrupting influences of self-interested pressure groups—in other words, to rid local government of politics (Lineberry and Fowler 1967; Alford and Lee 1968; Clark 1968; Welch and Bledsoe 1988). A second wave of political reforms beginning in the mid-1960s and originating at the federal level promoted systems of neighborhood governance intended to facilitate "maximum feasible participation" by local residents, particularly ones who had been traditionally excluded from participating in governance as a result of poverty and/or racial discrimination (Peterson 1970; Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993).

A major element of our research agenda is to assess the impact of both types of reforms upon citizen participation. Two types of local political institutions are examined: structures of municipal government (and elections) and structures of neighborhood governance. As shown in **Table 9**, five cities in our study can be considered to have reform-style governmental structures, and nine cities have generally traditional structures. As for neighborhood governance, our study includes four cities with well-established formal structures of neighborhood governance (Dayton, St. Paul, Birmingham, and Portland), three cities with weaker formal governance roles for neighborhoods (Jacksonville, Seattle, and Chicago—the last through its Local School Counsels), and seven with little or no such formal arrangements (Philadelphia, Phoenix, Boston, Madison, Manchester, Santa Ana, and Savannah).

Initial results from our research indicate that local political institutions can exert a moderately important influence upon citizen participation. Residents of cities with reform-style municipal structures—city commission or council-manager forms of government, nonpartisan elections, and at-large constituencies—have significantly lower probabilities of participating in a range of electoral and non-electoral political activities than do residents of cities with traditional-style municipal governments. These results obtain even after taking into account the influence of individual-level factors such as age, race, level of income, and formal education (Schuckman 2000).

Regarding the presence or absence of official institutions of citizen participation, we find that residents of cities with formal structures for involving citizens in governance have small but significantly higher probabilities of participation across a number of political activities than do people who live in cities without them. The absence of such formal institutional arrangements does not necessarily imply that neighborhoods are politically weak in such cities, however. Neighborhood organizations are widespread, active, and influential in Madison, for example, despite an absence in that city of the kind of formal arrangements that exist in, say, Portland or St. Paul. Conversely, political participation is relatively low in Dayton despite that city's comprehensive system of citizen Priority Boards that dates back to the mid-1970s.

It is also important to note that the potential exists for official community participation structures to fragment and co-opt citizen power, and more than a few community organizers are deeply suspicious of city-organized "participation" institutions. "We try to kill those things," veteran IAF Regional Director Ernesto Cortes, Jr. replied when asked what his view was of official community participation structures" (Cortes 2000):

First of all, they don't belong to the community. They belong to City Hall. And they depend on whether City Hall is willing to continue to support them or not. In addition, there is usually no organic relationship between those bodies and any kind of community organizations, whether they be labor unions, or churches, or settlement houses, and so forth. So how do they reflect what people are interested in? In addition, the way that most representatives to those structures are chosen is by election, and elections without elaborate connections to institutions and to deliberation and conversation are no more than markets, they are no more than private consumption decisions.

City governments ought to be involved in running good cities. They ought to be involved in trying to be responsive to the organized interests of communities, but they should not try to organize those interests themselves. What they ought to do is teach their own bureaucracies how to be relational and responsible and accountable—and collaborative. Very few public-sector institutions understand how to be truly collaborative with citizens. They operate under a top-down model of unilateral power, under a cult of expertise.

I grant them their good intentions. But organizing citizens isn't the competency of government. They don't know how to do it. Beyond that, it's not what government should be involved in. They can encourage it, ask for it,

recognize it, respond to it. And they can definitely educate their own bureaucracies about how to collaborate with citizens. But they should not be doing the organizing themselves. Governments are not going to finance revolutions against themselves for very long.

### **8. Mass Media as Facilitators of Citizen Participation**

Newspaper reading is positively correlated with civic involvement (**Tables 10 and 11**), and this holds true even when level of formal education is held constant (not shown here). The causal effects between newspaper reading and civic activism undoubtedly run in both directions. On the one hand, the stories, photos, editorials, letters to the editor, sports pages, and even the advertising that newspapers publish all serve to inform readers and connect them to the larger community in which they are embedded, thereby bolstering readers' capacity and motivation to engage in civic activity. On the other hand, the more active that people are in civic affairs, the more motivated they are to keep up with news and events through the press. (Interestingly, the correlation between television news-watching and civic involvement is negative: the greater the regularity with which one watches news on television, the lower one's civic involvement.)

Local news media are increasingly coming to redefine—or perhaps restore—their mission to include providing information and commentary that helps their audience to connect with public affairs and fulfill their roles as citizens more effectively (Rosen 1996; Sirianni and Friedland 2001, ch. 5). Four cities in our sample have local newspapers and/or broadcast media that are fairly consistent practitioners of civic journalism: Madison, Seattle, St. Paul/Minneapolis, and Dayton. Civic journalism is also practiced in Santa Ana/Orange County, Savannah, and Portland, although somewhat less consistently. Philadelphia and Chicago are media markets that are too large to be characterized neatly, but newspapers in both cities have engaged in some public journalism initiatives.

We have launched a research initiative (led by Donna Wasserman) that focuses on the role of media in facilitating civic engagement. Although we do not have the luxury of a formal experimental design with pre- and post-intervention measures, there are some indirect ways that we can gauge the effects of civic journalism. For example, if civic journalism strengthens the connection of citizens to civic life, one ought to find greater differences on measures of political involvement between readers and non-readers in cities where civic journalism is practiced than in cities where it is not. That is, the strength of the relationship between newspaper reading and civic engagement should vary as a function of the degree to which civic journalism is practiced in a given media market.

To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was used to calculate the effect of survey respondents' reported frequency of newspaper reading on (1) how often they discussed local politics with others and (2) the number of civic acts in which they had engaged in the preceding four years. Several demographic control variables were included in the regression equation: race, gender, education, family income, and age. We found statistically significant effects of newspaper reading on the two participation variables in every city. More importantly, the results suggest that civic journalism matters: the effects of newspaper reading on participation were strongest in Madison, Seattle, and St. Paul, weakest in Manchester,

Jacksonville, and Birmingham, and intermediate in the remaining eight cities. This analysis is preliminary, and there is much additional research that remains for us to complete. That said, we take these preliminary results to suggest that civic journalism can increase the civic engagement of readers.

### **9. Fostering Participation: Leadership is Key**

Consider **Figure 1**. The horizontal axis in that figure shows the percent of survey respondents who rated their city as “excellent” or “very good” in terms of offering opportunities for residents “to get involved in solving important public issues.” The vertical axis indicates a given city’s ranking on an index based on respondents’ answers to the ten questions comprising the civic and electoral activism indexes, plus one additional item (asking about contributing money “to an organization in support of a particular cause or issue”). What Figure 1 shows is that civic participation tends to be highest in cities where residents perceive that meaningful opportunities exist for them to get involved.

Finding a strong relationship between perceptions of opportunities to get involved in civic life and corresponding levels of actual participation may seem at first to be unremarkable, but it carries with it an important implication: low levels of civic involvement are neither inevitable nor insurmountable; in places where residents come to know that meaningful opportunities exist for them to get involved, they take advantage of those opportunities. The questions thus become: How are opportunities for civic involvement created and sustained? How do residents learn about those opportunities and come to feel sufficiently competent and motivated to take advantage of them? Why do they heed the call?

Our research in 14 cities, as well as the accumulated experience of prior studies that we and others have conducted in cities and towns across the United States, suggests that perhaps the most important factor in initiating and sustaining effective, broad-based civic involvement is leadership. Taken by itself, this observation doesn’t get us very far: it pushes the question of explaining civic engagement back a step, leaving us to explain why leadership emerges in some settings and at some times while not in other settings or at other times. In addition, it obliges us to say more about what exactly “leadership” is. After all, leadership can facilitate authentic and effective public involvement in governance, but it can also manipulate citizens, channeling their energies into politically “safe” or largely symbolic activity, yielding what Ciulla (1996) has called “bogus empowerment.” We found that civic leadership that succeeds over the long haul entails a process of motivating, facilitating, mentoring, and collaborating in productive work involving diverse groups and interests. Sometimes these leaders were elected officials, but at least as often they were directors of nonprofit organizations, business executives, newspaper publishers, ministers, trained community organizers, block-club captains, even college professors and researchers.

#### **Leadership is Relational**

Time and again, the civic leaders we interviewed and observed in action conveyed to us through word and deed that they conceive of leadership less as a property of an individual—the leader—and more as a quality of relationships among individuals in workgroups, communities,

and social organizations generally. That is, leadership is the process through which a group of individuals comes to develop a shared understanding of what they want to accomplish together and how they may accomplish it, mobilizes resources, engages in work intended to effect desired change, monitors its progress, and adapts its behaviors, resources, and even its shared understandings to reflect new information and insights. The notion of leadership as embedded in relationships is implicit in the work of traditional “old boy” networks, such as Greater Phoenix Leadership and “The Vault” in Boston (see, e.g., Stone 1989); it is explicit in the work of grassroots organizing initiatives on the Chicago West Side, the Valley Interfaith Project in Phoenix (an IAF affiliate), and the St. Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations in St. Paul, to cite just a few examples. Lew Finfer, a community organizer with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) offered this perspective on relational leadership:

You ask, why do people bother to participate? I think it comes out of relationships—partially to an institution that has in a sense asked them to participate, and it’s also a relationship to a person who may be a leader in that institution who’s also saying, “We need you. If you care about this issue, we need you to be there, because that’s the only way that we’ll get something accomplished.”

You don’t get 4,000 people to a meeting simply by passing out fliers. They come because they are in relationship with the leaders, with each other, and with their institutions. When the message comes through the community institutions—through churches and other organizations—it carries more legitimacy than if it’s just some stranger knocking on your door or handing you a flier.

We define leadership as mobilizing others around shared goals, whereas some of the organizations in which I used to work—and, I think, other organizations, generally—define leadership according to skills: leaders are good speakers, good strategists, good listeners, good at chairing meetings—that kind of thing. Those are *skills* of leadership, but I question whether you are actually a leader unless you represent other people and can show that you represent them by getting them involved in work toward shared goals. Anyone can become a leader if they’re willing to do the work to involve people.

Data from our survey support Finfer’s assessment of the importance of relational leadership as a means for encouraging participation. Moreover, the personal invitation to get involved appears to be particularly consequential in places that are relatively less endowed with factors such as high levels of formal education and socioeconomic status that facilitate civic self-starting. In Savannah, Birmingham, and the Chicago West Side, for example, one in five respondents said that having been asked personally to take part was a “very important” reason why they had gotten involved in some form of civic activity. In contrast, only one in eight respondents in Seattle, Portland, Madison, and St. Paul said that this was a “very important” factor in their decision to become involved. We thus find a bit of a paradox—and also an opportunity: the power of the personal invitation tends to be employed least often in precisely those places where it could be most consequential in terms of encouraging civic engagement.

## Leadership Leverages Diversity

A number of the cities we visited are undergoing dramatic demographic change within a compressed period of time. Santa Ana is the seat of government for what has been long regarded as one of the bastions of white, middle-class conservatism: Orange County, California. Yet almost overnight Santa Ana has become one of the most Hispanic large cities in America (second only to El Paso, Texas) primarily as a result of immigration from Mexico and Central America. The city also includes a growing settlement of immigrants from Cambodia, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries. Other cities in our study, while not having changed as markedly in their demographic composition, have a history of uneasy—and sometimes openly hostile—relationships among racial and ethnic groups residing there. Birmingham, Ala., is perhaps the most dramatic example in our sample, but it should come as no surprise that all of the cities we studied manifest intergroup tensions to some degree, primarily but not only along racial or ethnic lines. Almost without exception, the most effective and admired civic leaders in the cities we studied were individuals who genuinely regarded diversity not as a condition to be ignored or a problem to be accommodated but as an asset to be put to productive use. From Seattle's citywide urban village planning process to the influential collaborative research initiatives of Jacksonville Community Council Inc., and in all cities in between, we observed examples of ways that a diversity of perspectives and insights can be mobilized to inform community work and make it more inclusive—and thus more effective.

To claim that diversity is an asset is not to imply that utilizing it wisely comes naturally. Diversity complicates, even if the complicating is of benefit ultimately. There is no silver-bullet technique that quickly enables groups of diverse members to collaborate respectfully and in good faith, although some useful lessons may be gleaned from successful community-based initiatives, particularly with regard to recruitment, and building trust and mutual respect (Rivera and Erlich 1995; Medoff and Sklar 1994).

The essentially relational nature of effective civic leadership and the ways that successful civic leaders leverage the asset of diversity are exemplified in dozens of stories that community leaders shared with us. To take one example, consider the following commentary by Patrick Cusick of the Southeast Neighborhood Action Program (SNAP) in Boston's South End. Cusick recounted how a coalition of mostly low- and moderate-income residents in the South End managed in the mid-1980s to prevent developers, with the blessings of City Hall, from pushing them out of their homes and obliterating their neighborhood as had been done in the West End 25 years earlier. (O'Connor 1993):

In 1985, Mayor Ray Flynn and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) decided to sell off the 60 or so publicly owned parcels of land in the South End to developers, with two-thirds of the new housing to be priced at market rate and one-third to be reserved for low- to moderate-income residents. These were vacant parcels that the City had acquired when older housing had been demolished under so-called urban renewal some years previously.

We opposed the plan. To explain our position, it's useful to understand the

history of urban renewal in Boston. Everyone knows about Boston's West End, because it got totally wiped out. But the South End also had more than half of its residents displaced as part of urban renewal the 1960s and '70s, and they were overwhelmingly people of color. The cynical view here is that the people were removed from the choicest row houses to make way for the gentry, with public housing built at this end of the neighborhood so that some of the displaced residents would have a place to stay. Whether that was the actual intent or not, it is certainly what happened demographically. As a result, there's a strong residue of suspicion and opposition to City Hall and the BRA when it comes to housing.

We formed a coalition of 27 organizations—churches, tenant's groups, neighborhood associations, human service agencies, settlement houses, and so on—to oppose the City's plan. We called a meeting of those organizations, formed a coalition, and elected a coordinating committee of 12 people. That committee, which eventually came to be known as the South End/Lower Roxbury Housing and Planning Coalition, is still in existence.

The mayor said he would be appointing a neighborhood council to oversee his proposed development and that he wanted all the community organizations in the South End to nominate people from whom he would appoint the council. We said that we wouldn't accept a council appointed by the mayor, that we wanted an elected one, and so we organized a boycott of the mayor's proposal. The mayor would call up leaders of neighborhood organizations and pressure them to join his advisory council, but we hung together and the thing went nowhere.

Eventually, we decided that rather than arguing with City Hall about appointed versus elected councils, we would simply go ahead and initiate our own community planning process. We knew that we needed people from across the spectrum to participate if we were going to succeed—progressives, middle-of-the-road, conservatives, city officials, everyone. We also recognized that if someone like [social activist and mayoral candidate] Mel King or [Democratic state representative] Byron Rushing, or I chaired the meeting, some of the middle-of-the-road and conservative residents wouldn't come. So we got a professor from MIT to chair the meeting—Langley Keyes. Langley had written a book on urban renewal, and he also had organized the first neighborhood association in the area, called the Pilot Block Association.

I'll never forget that first meeting, which was held in the settlement house. Would anyone other than the progressive activists show up for our neighborhood planning process? Well, it turned out that pretty much everyone came. Part of the reason is that we were very active in our organizing effort. Members of the organizing coalition had groups they could mobilize. They had long-standing relationships with people. Altogether, we held about eight large neighborhood planning meetings. We put out two issues of what we called the *South End News*, urging residents to come to the meetings. Pastors invited their congregations to participate. For one meeting, we filled Blackstone Auditorium, which must hold

more than 300 people.

After a year of meetings, we reached the conclusion that a viable plan was one that included one-third market-rate, one-third moderate-income, and one-third low-income for all the new housing that would be built. The fact was that it was not possible to generate enough profit with the one-third market-rate housing to cover the financial shortfall for the other two-thirds. There was a gap that had to be closed in terms of the internal financing of the plan. Our position was that if the City had the will, they could find a way. The City had found a way for the waterfront development and for the Copley Place development, and so they could find a way for lower-income housing development in the South End. And we made it clear that the South End would resist any effort by the City and developers to proceed in ways that were contrary to our plan.

No one expected us to engage in a lot of research and writing—after all, these were mostly poor people. But we ended up producing more written comments on this issue than anyone could have imagined. We helped every group in the South End to submit a written position on the plan. If a local group didn't have letterhead, we'd make letterhead for them. That, coupled with the fact that we were filling the auditorium with real live people, is what ultimately secured our victory. Also, we resisted criticizing the mayor, because we realized that in the end we would need someone with whom we could make the peace and work.

In the end, the City decided that they would close the financial gap. They didn't do that out of the goodness of their hearts. They did it because they knew we were serious and that we weren't going to back down. The development is one-third market rate, one-third moderate income, and one-third low-income, and it is deeded such that it is almost impossible to alter that in the future. We also secured an area of open space, deeded in perpetuity to a land trust that we formed.

After we got the mayor to agree with our plan, we then became active in reviewing the proposals from developers. In nearly every instance, we got a community development corporation (CDC) or a minority developer involved. In this neighborhood we have the Tenant Development Corporation. Each of the 400-plus tenants owns a share of the corporation, and they elect the board each year. The Four Corners Development Corp., which was formed to develop Langham Court, is also represented. Other organizations that are in the coalition include Peoples Baptist Church, United South End Settlements, Mandela Residence Cooperative, Val Hyman Community Development Corp., the South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (an urban gardening and open-space group), *Inquilinos Boricaus en Accion* [Puerto Rican Tenants in Action], Tent City Corp. (270 units, about 70% of which are low- and moderate-income housing), Camden Tenants Task Force, and Grant Manor (one of the first HUD demonstration-disposition projects, in which the tenants purchase the building from HUD and operate it as a limited-equity co-op). These organizations

collectively comprise thousands of residents.

Fourteen neighbors and I planned Langham Court, starting with \$100 that we turned into a \$15 million development. It's a limited-equity co-op with 84 units [see Ackerman 1991]. We won a national prize in 1990 from the American Institute of Architects for Langham Court, and we went to Chicago to receive our prize. That was particularly gratifying, because the skeptics had said that if the planning were left up to community members, it would be bound to fail and would ruin the neighborhood!

### **Leadership Builds Capacity**

Historically, community development has been concerned primarily with building the physical and economic infrastructures of communities. More recently, community developers have claimed social or civic capital as their domain, as well. Community development in this richer sense seeks to build—and build upon—the health of families, religious congregations, and voluntary and civic organizations, as well as public and private sector institutions. It emphasizes developing capacities for action: how people gain the skills, relationships, and self-organization essential for empowerment. Without that power—power in the root sense of being “able”—communities are disadvantaged in grappling with issues important to their futures, and collective efforts—however well-intentioned—are prone to fail.

In his highly influential research on the performance of democratic institutions in Italy, Putnam (1993, 144) claimed that the key factor was the degree to which citizens took part in associations that fostered “horizontal bonds of mutual solidarity,” such as “choral societies and soccer teams and bird-watching clubs and Rotary clubs” (p. 115). Without dismissing the merits of nonpolitical associational life, other observers have proposed that participation in explicitly political activity is more relevant to educating democratic citizens *qua* citizens, particularly in large cities (Foley and Edwards 1997; Fuchs, Minnite and Shapiro 1998). Lappé and DuBois (1994) argued that acquiring skill in what they called the “arts of democracy” entails exposure to certain ideas and practices that are distinctive to the messy, gritty realities of politics and are missing from—or even discouraged in—nonpolitical associational activity. As Boyte and Kari (1996, 23-24) noted, doing politics “means dealing with people who make us uncomfortable. It involves learning to think strategically, taking into account dynamics of power, interest, and the long-range consequences of one's action.”

Bowling leagues and choral groups are good things, but they typically provide little opportunity for developing one's political muscles. When citizens step into the public arena with some practical experience in expressing their interests unapologetically, understanding the differing interests of others, and negotiating from positions of mutual respect, they are less likely to be disillusioned with the process of politics and more likely to be effective. Indeed, if citizens join sports leagues and social clubs as a refuge from politics, an increase in nonpolitical associational life might actually contribute to the further decline in the effectiveness of political institutions (Hirschman 1970; Berman 1997). Nurturing in participants an appreciation and capacity for engaging in public-oriented work in the real world is an essential feature of successful community organizing efforts we observed in every one of the 14 cities in this study.

For example, in our interview with him, Jaime Huerta, a community organizer involved with the Valley Interfaith Project (VIP) in Phoenix, discussed the importance of capacity building to achieving tangible successes in a community:

In the mid-1980s when the real estate market here tanked, the City of Phoenix cut after-school programs, to the point that up until about three years ago the annual city budget for such programs was only around \$300,000. With the work of VIP leaders negotiating with city council and the mayor, that budget increased to \$1 million last year, plus another \$1 million for after-school jobs. The city government came to see that it was in the interests of the health of the Phoenix community to make an investment in youth and families. One of the school district superintendents that we work with told us that because of the increase in after-school programs there has been a marked increase in test scores at one of the schools in his district.

Successes like that are accomplished through organizing. VIP has relationships with 27 schools in 11 different school districts in the Phoenix metro area. We talk with people in our member congregations, their neighborhoods, their schools, and through house meetings, which are small-group conversations. We identify and train leaders to act on their own behalf. As an organization, we're committed to the development of human beings in the whole sense, and connecting people back to their core values and traditions. Our members become aware of their shared interests. They learn how to deliberate, how to negotiate, and they also learn some of the basic information relevant to their issue—such as how many kids have someplace to go after school, or how many kids have no parent or guardian at home when the kid comes home from school.

### **10. Why Heed the Call?**

The literature on collective action that was spawned by Mancur Olson's (1965) classic work suggests that even if leaders succeed in helping citizens come to understand the collective benefits that can accrue from their involvement in civic affairs, and even if the capacity exists to make a difference, that alone may be insufficient to get many people involved, at least in theory. That is because in certain essential respects these benefits are collective goods, and we therefore come head to head with the standard collective action dilemma: the impact of a single resident upon the overall quality of civic life in her community is typically very small; furthermore, a resident can benefit from the better schools, safer neighborhoods, healthier natural environment, wiser governance, and more prosperous business climate of a highly civic community whether or not she has contributed her time, money, skills, and insights to the collective effort that helped to bring them about. In short, incentives exist to "ride free," and thus civic engagement will tend to low in reasonably large social groups (such as a city), absent certain special circumstances.

Yet many thoughtful citizens *do* engage in civic action. Why do they bother? Finding answers to that question that are satisfying theoretically and supported empirically is a central objective of our research project. Very briefly here are some of the working hypotheses we are

exploring.

First, not all civic involvement confronts the collective action dilemma. Certainly there are many instances in which the subjective expected utility of civic action exceeds that of civic inaction for an individual, because the benefits of action are large and/or the probability of achieving the benefits depends nontrivially upon the individual's action. A good deal of citizen-initiated neighborhood improvement initiatives may be characterized in this way, for example—anti-graffiti projects, crime-watch groups, and so forth. It is true that some—or even many—neighborhood residents may choose not to participate in such an initiative and will still enjoy the improvements; but if those who *do* participate have done so because the value to them of the expected improvements outweigh their personal resource investment, then the participators are acting “rationally” in a neoclassical sense.

Second, a prominent potential solution cited in the literature on collective action consists of selective incentives (disincentives) that accrue to participants (nonparticipants), thereby securing the critical mass of participation necessary to secure the collective good. Although selective incentives, which may be material or nonmaterial, appear to provide a powerful solution to the collective action problem, in truth they merely push the problem back one step: the institutions or arrangements required to provide to selective incentives (and/or disincentives) are themselves collective goods. How do we account for *their* existence? Some conception of civic entrepreneurialism typically enters the story at this point (Bianco and Bates 1990; Schneider and Teske 1992). Similar to the workings of their counterparts in the private sector, civic entrepreneurs (or leaders) are individuals who see opportunities to exploit in the status quo and are willing to accept the risks associated with absorbing short-term costs in the pursuit of longer-term gains. Whether those longer-term gains are strictly economic is a matter of scholarly disagreement. Indeed, the question is open as to whether framing public-oriented leadership entirely in terms of self-seeking, instrumentalist motives captures what animates these leaders—or at least some of these leaders and at least some of the time. Chong (1991, 95), for example, contended that leaders of the American civil rights movement were “purists, zealots, moralists, Kantians, what have you,” who were motivated by considerations that ill fit the conventional rational choice paradigm.

Leaving to the side, at least for now, the question of what motivates civic leaders, there is some agreement about how leadership facilitates civic participation. In part, leaders can provide the selective incentives that render collective action “rational.” Civic leaders can also shape the larger strategic landscape so as to foster collective action (Moore 1995; Lichbach 1996). For example, they may encourage broad-based collaboration by providing assurances that citizens have a reasonable chance of success if they get involved and that the work will be shared fairly. They lower obstacles to participation by shouldering some of its start-up costs, capitalize upon the diverse talents and perspectives of community members, coordinate thoughtful deliberation and effective action, facilitate satisfying social interaction and personal growth among participants, foster accountability and discourage defection, and guide the effective deployment of valuable civic capital so as to advance shared interests.

The value of shared relationships in facilitating collective action ought not be underestimated. A good deal of theoretical and empirical work suggests that the actions of a

small group of well-connected and well-respected individuals can encourage others to get involved, putting into motion a virtuous cycle that greatly multiplies the impact of the germ of action that initiated the cascade of subsequent results (Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl 1988; Lohmann 1994). These processes—described alternately as positive feedback, path dependence, or tipping phenomena—constitute a rapidly expanding area of interdisciplinary inquiry (Arthur 1990; Pierson 2000; Gladwell 2000).

In this regard, a good deal of collective action may be modeled in game theoretic terms as a problem in coordinated behavior—“I will if (enough of) you will.” (Runge 1984; Schelling 1978; Taylor 1987). Furthermore, the minimum amount of assured participation by others that will induce a given individual to participate—i.e., the participation threshold for the individual—may well vary from person to person (Granovetter 1978). Under such conditions, it has been shown that a cascade of participation can be triggered if a relatively small number of persons with low thresholds can be induced to act, thereby encouraging persons with progressively higher thresholds to join in, and/or if knowledge of others’ thresholds is sufficiently widespread and dense across a community (Chwe 1999; Gould 1993; Lohmann 1993, 1994).

Some citizen activists we spoke with offered explanations for their involvement that would satisfy even an economist. For example, some had sufficient expertise, connections, or passion that their personal involvement would, at least in their judgment, increase the probability of the group’s success (and hence their own benefits) by an amount that offset the cost of their personal investment. Others said that making new contacts, learning new skills, receiving approval of one’s peers, and obtaining other benefits that economists place in the category of “selective incentives” were to them of sufficient magnitude to justify their participation. A fair proportion of respondents in our random-sample surveys also rated such reasons to be important motivating factors for them.

A different category of responses was far more common, however. Many activists told us that they derived great satisfaction from fulfilling their roles as citizens of their community, serving as role models for their children, or simply doing their bit to make their community a better place to live—not only for themselves but for their fellow citizens. For activists with deep religious or spiritual beliefs—and we met many such individuals—their decisions to participate in collective action to promote social justice transcended cost-benefit calculations: their work was literally an act of faith. Survey respondents pointed to one reason far more frequently than any other to explain for their political involvement: to try to make the community or nation a better place in which to live. Three out of four activists indicated in our survey that this was a “very important” reason why they decided to become involved in civic affairs.

Is there some degree of rationalization contained in citizens’ assessments of the motives behind their actions? Undoubtedly—although our in-depth conversations with citizen activists and our observation of hundreds of hours of meetings in cities across America lead us to conclude that a spirit of community-mindedness inspires much civic work. Also, take care not to conflate community-mindedness with purely selfless or altruistic motives. Even the activists in

faith-based community action organizations, such as the various affiliates of IAF and Gamaliel, stressed that their work was motivated by their “interests” and not by altruism (although they almost always conceived of their “interests” in ways that extended well beyond personal material gain).

For many activists we interviewed, their civic participation revolved fairly directly around property values, personal safety, local taxes, and similar earthly matters. Even in Portland, Oregon—often held up as the paragon of a progressive, civic-minded community—citizen activists told us in no uncertain terms that they and their neighbors kept a close eye on City Hall because, if they didn’t, “the politicians would try to sneak something past us.” So much for the idea that “civic-ness” and an abiding sense of trust and confidence in government necessarily go hand in hand.

We suspect, also, that the explanation for a good deal of public-oriented action on the part of citizens lies largely outside of a positivist or consequentialist paradigm entirely. Based on her intensive interviews with rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, bystanders, and Nazi sympathizers, Monroe (1994; 2001) makes a strong case for the centrality of the constructing and validating of one’s self-concept as a determinant of human action. When asked to account for their behavior, not only rescuers but others, as well, typically rejected the idea that their action (or inaction) was the result of cost-benefit considerations, even implicitly. “But what else could I do?” was the essence of many of her informants’ explanations.

In a similar vein, March and Olsen (1995) differentiate their “institutional perspective” on governance from the more common paradigm that conceives of the democratic enterprise as grounded in “exchanges among rational self-interested citizens.” They assert that the latter, although “far from foolish or malevolent,” is nonetheless radically incomplete as a basis for thinking about governance, and that, furthermore, the theory of human behavior that underlies it “is also incomplete, [in] that it reflects only a partial theory of history and human action” (pp. 5-6).

From an institutional perspective, a democratic polity is constituted not only by individual purposes and intentions, but also by basic practices and rules, which are in turn “built around ideas of identities and conceptions of appropriate behavior. It assumes that individual action depends on the answers to three questions: What kind of person am I? What kind of situation is this? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this? Collective action is based on combinations of answers to those questions” (pp. 6-7).

In such an institutional perspective, the axiomatics for political action begin not with subjective consequences and preferences but with rules, identities, and roles; and a theory that treats intentional, calculative action as the basis for understanding human behavior is incomplete if it does not attend to the ways in which identities and institutions are constructed, sustained, and interpreted (p. 30).

Cortes’s (2000) critique of the economic paradigm of democracy echoes this theme:

The “free-rider” problem, as I understand it, is this: If we live on a block, and I’m going around trying to get everyone to voluntarily contribute to hiring a

security officer to patrol our block, then it's in your interest not to reveal your true preferences to me. You say to me, "Go ahead, but I'm not going to pay for it"—even though it might be something that you really want. But what this story doesn't consider is that maybe your relationship with me is important to you. It's more than just the service that matters. The opinions of your neighbors matter to you. You don't want to be thought of—or to *think of yourself as*—a person who doesn't do his share. You want to be in solidarity with other people, to be in relationship with them.

The key question is: How do people define their interests? The word "interest" comes from *inter esse*, which means "to be in relationship with," "to be connected to." People's interests are much more multidimensional than the neoclassical economic understanding of interests, or preferences. People get things out of COPS other than the collective goods. They get personal development, camaraderie, meaning, significance.

In sum, just as our research suggests that softer versions of communitarian mythology do not account for most civic involvement most of the time, so does it indicate that the particular brand of collective-action literature that seeks to reduce political participation to a subset of microeconomics is equally off the mark: the former predicts too much civic engagement, the latter too little.

## 11. What Difference Does Participation Make?

The motivation for this study lies in the presumed benefits of participation, for individuals and for communities. We have two sources of evidence to mine in assessing the extent of such benefits. The first consists of the many examples of civic work that citizens have initiated in the 14 sampled cities and the stories that citizens tell us about themselves and their civic work. The second source consists of the data from our random-sample surveys.

We have only begun to investigate the consequences of participation in a systematic way, but an initial cut at the survey data indicates that levels of aggregate civic involvement (as measured by an index of participation in 11 activities) is reliably correlated with collective satisfaction across a range of indicators of quality of urban life.

We find, first, a strong relationship between aggregate levels of civic engagement and collective satisfaction with local government: the more that residents are active participants in local governance, the more likely they are to be satisfied with the way local government handles its job (**Figure 2**). Spend some time observing residents in action and talking with local officials in Madison, Portland, or Seattle—or even in one of the cities that may be less civic overall but that nevertheless have their own instances of citizen involvement—and the reasons for the relationship become clear. Although city officials in many places, including many highly civic cities, have been known to complain that citizen "involvement" can be a prescription for NIMBYism, inefficiency, and stalemate, there are enough counter-examples to demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt that when citizens do more than merely provide "input" to professional decisions, when they instead possess sufficient information, resources, time and

space for deliberation, and *power* to transform input into action, then the planning, the implementation, and the results can be more insightful, more legitimate, and more effective than anything that officials and planners could have devised on their own.

Furthermore, in an era of increasingly limited resources for local government, public officials are discovering that they have no other effective option than to collaborate with citizens in governance; local government simply doesn't have the resources to do everything on its own. In Seattle, residents, business owners, representatives of community-based organizations, and city planners collaborated in developing the city's plan for urban villages, a process that was broadly and genuinely praised by all interested parties. In Madison, the public school system is among the finest in America in no small part because of the active involvement of parents in virtually all aspects of school governance. In Portland, citizens play an essential role in developing and implementing the "smart growth" practices that have brought observers there from all over the world to study the "Portland process."

Residents in highly "civic" cities are also more satisfied with the quality of life in their cities than residents of less civic places are. Quality of life measures include such things as residents' ratings of how safe their neighborhoods are, the quality of education in the public schools, the degree to which residents of different races and ethnicities get along with one another, and the perceived level of pride that their fellow residents take in their city (**Figures 3 - 6**). Moreover, multivariate analysis reveals that these relationships generally persist (albeit often to a lesser degree) when statistical controls for demographic factors are introduced, as shown in **Table 12**.

But which comes first, a high level of citizen engagement or a high level of satisfaction with governmental performance, public services, inter-group relations, and local pride? Any general answer to the question is almost certainly impossible: the two are inextricably intertwined, and each affects the other. That said, case histories of the cities in our study indicate beyond any doubt that civic participation is much more than merely an artifact of a satisfied citizenry. There are a wealth of examples in which civic activism emerged in the 14 cities as a consequence of deep *dissatisfaction* with the status quo; and real, positive change occurred as a result of the work of citizens. However messy, time-consuming, and frustrating it may be on occasion, authentic involvement of residents in governance increases the chances for a collective outcome that reflects the interests of diverse groups of stakeholders, is informed by community knowledge and experience, achieves broad acceptance and legitimacy, and reinforces norms of reciprocity and accountability.

Participation enhances the quality of governance, which in turn encourages future participation in a kind of virtuous cycle—or a vicious one, if deliberation and decision making are closed off to public scrutiny and participation, and citizens come to believe that governance is something that is done to them rather than done by them. These are choices that cities and citizens make.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the 14 cities included in the Civic Engagement Study.**

City	1996 Pop. (1000s)	% Pop. growth 1990-96	% Afr. Amer.	% Hisp.	% Asian	% Post h. s. educ.	% H'hold income <\$15K	% H'hold income >\$35K	% H'hold pover- ty rate	% Age 18-29	% Age 65+
Phila- delphia	1478	-7	40	6	3	31	33	34	20.3	20	15
Phoenix	1159	+18	5	20	2	53	23	41	14.2	20	10
Jackson- ville	680	+7	25	3	2	45	24	39	13.0	21	11
Chicago West Side	621	-2	45	41	1	33	40	24	32.8	23	7
Boston	558	-3	26	11	5	49	28	42	18.7	30	11
Seattle	525	+2	10	4	12	67	24	41	12.4	23	15
Portland	481	+10	8	3	5	58	28	34	14.5	18	15
Santa Ana	302	+3	3	65	10	33	15	50	18.1	30	5
St. Paul	260	-5	7	4	7	50	27	36	16.7	22	14
Birming- ham	259	-3	63	0	1	43	40	24	24.8	20	15
Madison	198	+3	4	2	4	67	24	41	16.1	33	9
Dayton	173	-5	41	1	1	37	39	25	26.5	22	13
Savannah	136	-1	51	1	1	41	35	29	22.6	21	14
Man- chester	101	+1	1	2	1	45	22	45	9.0	23	14

(Source: 1990 U.S. Census and 1994, 1996 updates)

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**Table 2. Demographics of survey respondents in northeast and southwest zipcode clusters of the Chicago West Side.**

	NE cluster	SW cluster
<b>Household annual income</b>		
Less than \$20,000	25	31
\$20,000 -\$29,000	23	23
\$30,000-59,000	36	37
\$60,000 and up	16	9
	100%	100%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than 12 years	8	12
High school only	21	32
Some college	30	40
College degree	40	16
	100%	100%
<b>Race / Ethnicity</b>		
Non-Hispanic white	60	12
African-American	9	61
Hispanic	27	23
Other / NA	4	5
	100%	100%
	(N=210)	(N=191)

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**Table 3a. Percent of West Side Chicago respondents who reported having engaged in two or more civic activities within the preceding four years, by area of residence and ethnicity.\***

	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
Non-Hispanic white	44 (126)	41 (22)	43 (148)
African-American	22 (18)	54 (117)	50 (135)
Hispanic	28 (57)	43 (42)	34 (99)
Overall	37 (201)	50 (181)	43 (382)

**Table 3b. Percent of West Side Chicago respondents who reported having engaged in two or more electoral activities within the preceding four years, by area of residence and ethnicity.\***

	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
Non-Hispanic white	22 (126)	32 (22)	24 (148)
African-American	17 (18)	28 (117)	27 (135)
Hispanic	7 (57)	12 (42)	9 (99)
Overall	17 (201)	25 (181)	21 (382)

\*The sample size upon which the percentage is based is parenthesized.

**Table 4. Multiple regression analyses of effects of education, ethnicity, and region of residence upon non-electoral and electoral activism among West Side Chicago Residents.**

Dependent variable	Non-electoral activism			Electoral activism		
Range of dep. var.	0 to 6			0 to 4		
N	395			395		
F(5,389)	6.30			3.89		
Sig. level	.000			.002		
Multiple R	.27			.22		
	Coef.	SE	t-ratio	Coef.	SE	t-ratio
Constant term	.507	.252	2.02	1.39	.185	7.46
High school	.619	.269	2.30	.088	.149	0.59
Some college	.962	.260	3.70	.175	.144	1.22
College degree	1.184	.271	4.37	.041	.150	0.27
Hispanic	-.240	.168	-1.43	-.293	.093	-3.14
SW area	.411	.148	2.78	.188	.082	2.30

Note: All Regressors are (0, 1) binary variables; the lowest education level (less than high school degree) constitutes the omitted category for the set of education binary variables.

**Table 5. Organizational participation rates among Chicago West Side residents, by area of residence.**

	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
Member of association related to where you live—e.g., block club or neighborhood association	19	32	25
Member of service or fraternal organization	7	15	11
Member of parent-teachers association or organization at a local school	12	19	15
Served on local government board or council—e.g., school board, planning board	6	11	8
Served on board of local nonprofit organization	15	20	18
Sample size upon which percentage is based	210	191	401

Note: Cell entries are the percent of respondents who reported currently being an organization member, or who reported board membership within the past four years. All between-area differences are statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Table 6. Religious institution membership and political discussion among Chicago West Side residents, by area of residence.**

Are you a member of a church, synagogue, or other religious or spiritual institution in Chicago?	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
Yes	45	65	55
No	55	35	45
Total (N)	100% (210)	100% (191)	100% (401)

How often are public issues or politics discussed in your church or synagogue?	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
“Often” or “sometimes”	50	61	56
“Rarely” or “never”	50	39	44
Total (N)	100% (94)	100% (121)	100% (215)

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**Table 7. Percent agreeing with the statement, “I don’t know where to go to get involved in politics or public affairs,” by area of residence and race/ethnicity.**

	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
Non-Hispanic white	25 (126)	9 (22)	23 (148)
African-American and Hispanic*	53 (75)	31 (159)	38 (234)
Overall	36 (201)	28 (181)	32 (382)

\*Difference between Northeast and Southwest percentages is statistically significant at the .05 level.

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**Table 8. Percent of West Side Chicago respondents who said that a particular reason was “very important” in explaining their involvement in civic affairs, by area of residence.**

Reason	Northeast	Southwest	Overall
Someone asked me	14	26*	20
Chance to meet people	29	52*	40
Be with people I enjoy	38	47	43
Chance for recognition	8	24*	16
Influence policy	47	55	51
Make it a better place to live	75	79	77
It is exciting	19	26	22

\*Difference between Northeast and Southwest percentages is statistically significant at the .05 level.

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**Table 9. Municipal Government Structures in the 14 CES cities.**

City	Form of government	Election format	Election district
Chicago	mayor-council	partisan	ward
Philadelphia	mayor-council*	partisan	mixed
Phoenix	council-manager	nonpartisan	ward
Jacksonville	mayor-council	partisan	mixed
Boston	mayor-council	partisan	mixed
Seattle	mayor-council	nonpartisan	at-large
Portland	commission	nonpartisan	at-large
Santa Ana	council-manager	nonpartisan	at-large
Saint Paul	mayor-council	nonpartisan	ward
Birmingham	mayor-council	partisan	ward
Madison	mayor-council	nonpartisan	ward
Dayton	council-manager	nonpartisan	at-large
Savannah	council-manager	nonpartisan	mixed
Manchester	mayor-council	nonpartisan	mixed

\*Philadelphia can be considered to have a mayor-council-manager form of government.

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**Table 10. Relationship between newspaper reading and frequency with which one discusses local politics or community affairs. (%)**

How often read local news	How often discuss local politics					Total (N)
	Nearly every day	Once or twice/week	Few times/month	Less often	Never	
Every day	11	31	29	16	13	100% (2329)
Several x/week	8	27	36	17	13	100% (1116)
Once/week	6	25	30	20	19	100% ( 807)
Few x/month	4	18	34	25	19	100% ( 456)
Less often	6	13	26	30	25	100% ( 357)
Never	4	15	22	20	39	100% ( 455)
Total	8	26	30	19	17	100% (5520)

Kendall's tau-b = 0.18, SE = 0.01

**Table 11. Relationship between newspaper reading and number of non-electoral civic acts in which respondent participated in the preceding 4 years. (%)**

How often read local news	# Non-electoral civic acts in past 4 years			Total (N)
	None	One	Two or more	
Every day	29	25	46	100% (2363)
Several x/week	35	27	39	100% (1130)
Once/week	46	24	30	100% ( 820)
Few x/month	44	26	29	100% ( 460)
Less often	51	27	23	100% ( 363)
Never	55	23	22	100% ( 472)
Total	38	25	37	100% (5608)

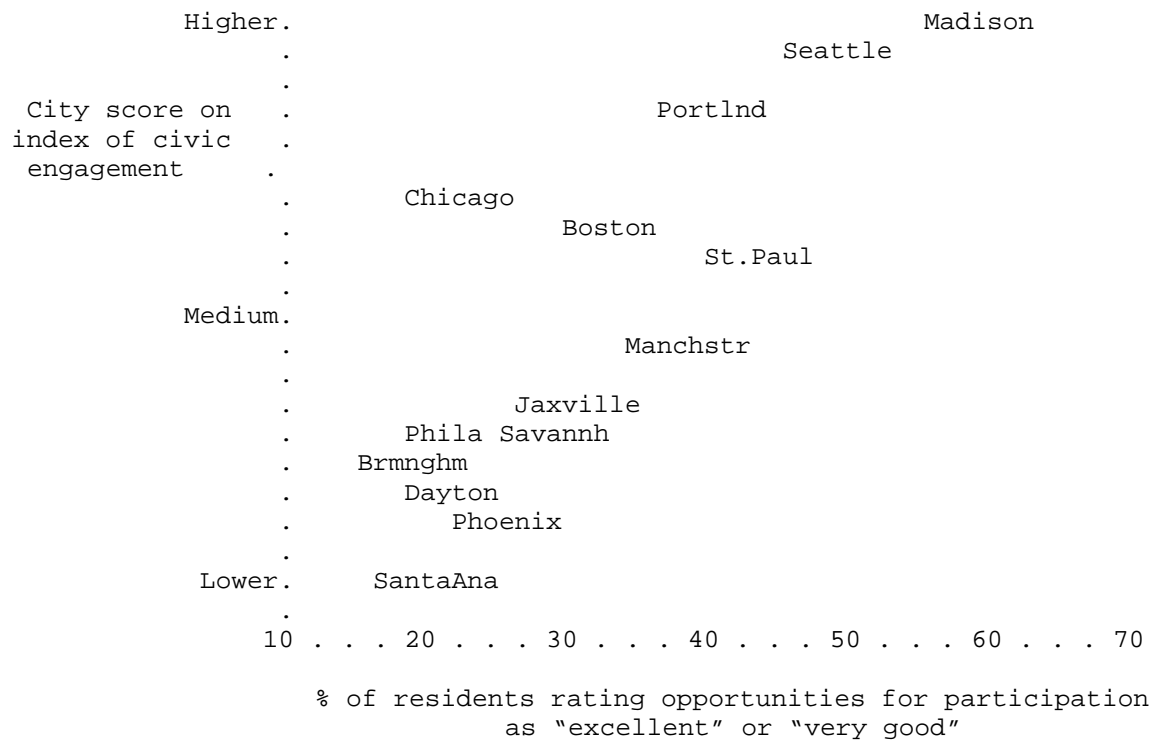
Kendall's tau-b = -0.18, SE = 0.01

**Table 12. Aggregate level correlations of activism and ratings of quality of life in sampled cities, bivariate and holding constant demographics (N=14 cities).**

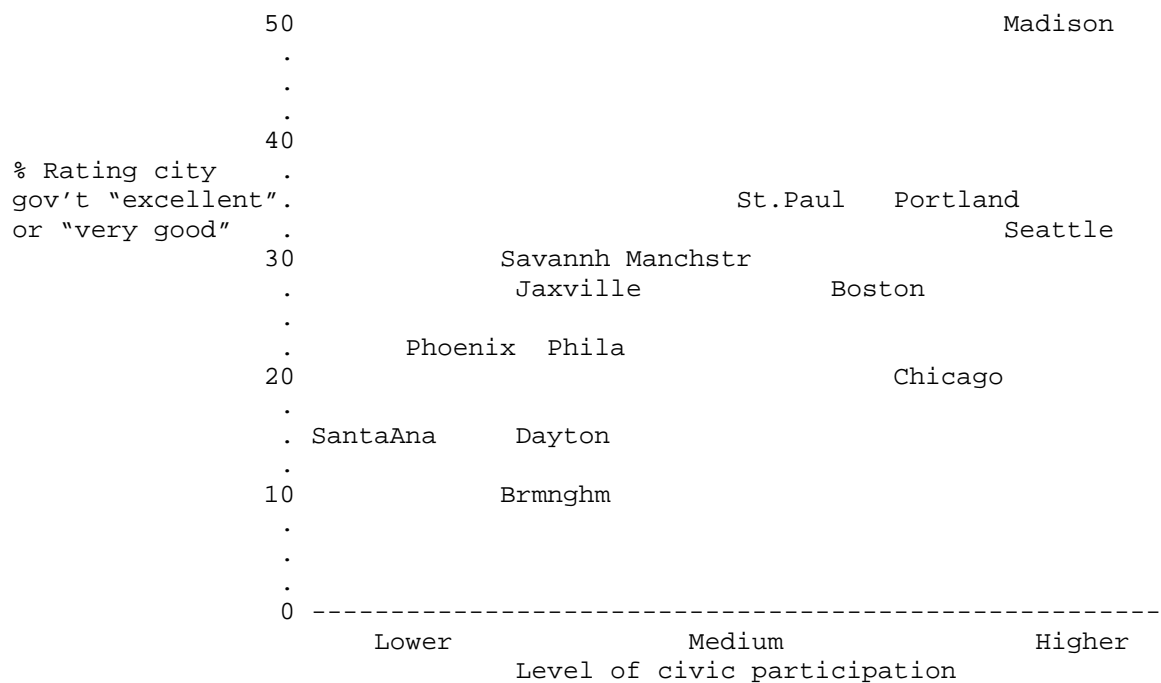
	Holding constant:					
	Bivariate Corr.	% white	% age18-25	% college	% <\$20K	% >\$75K
City as place to live	.83	.75	.82	.50	.89	.86
Diff races get along	.58	.34	.59	.08	.63	.49
Quality of public educ.	.38	.01	.36	-.06	.38	.21
Residents' city pride	.87	.81	.85	.62	.91	.89
Job of city government	.63	.40	.59	.21	.72	.56
Neighborhood living	.57	.25	.49	-.09	.61	.47
Neighborhood safety	.51	.15	.42	-.04	.54	.38
Opptys to get involved	.75	.63	.70	.34	.80	.73

Note: Correlations > .45 are sig. @ .05 level.

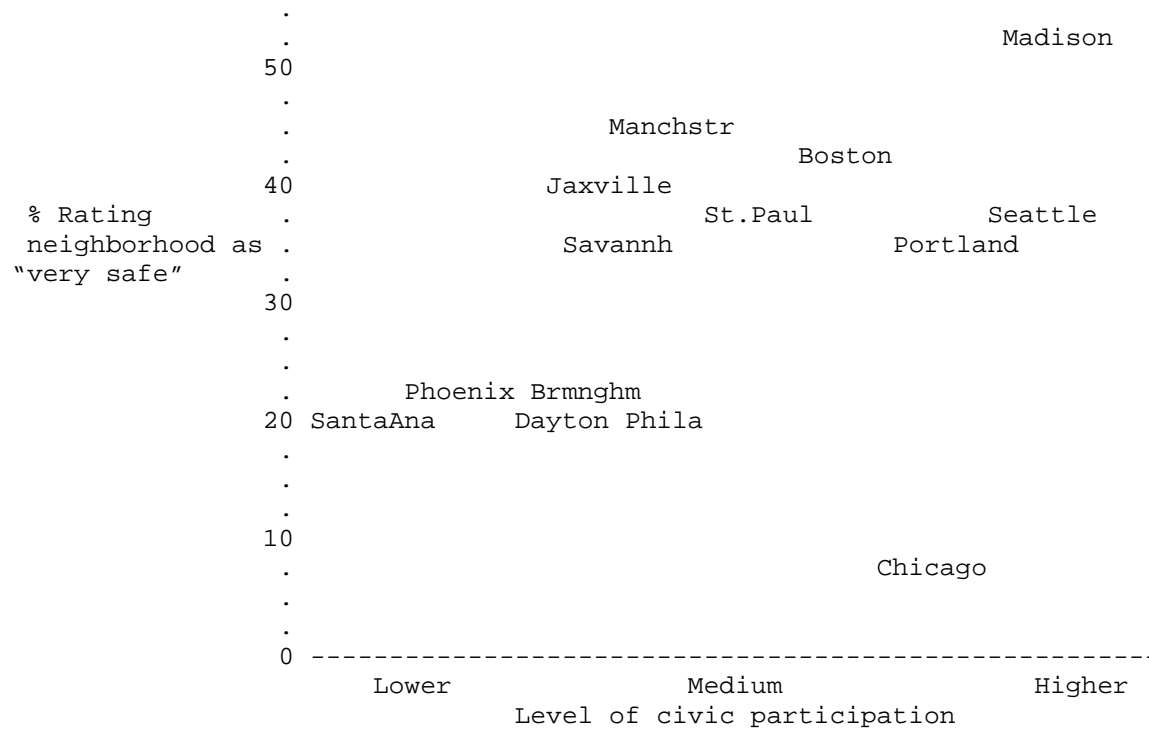
**Figure 1. Cities in which residents perceive opportunities to get involved in civic affairs also tend to be cities in which residents make use of those opportunities.**



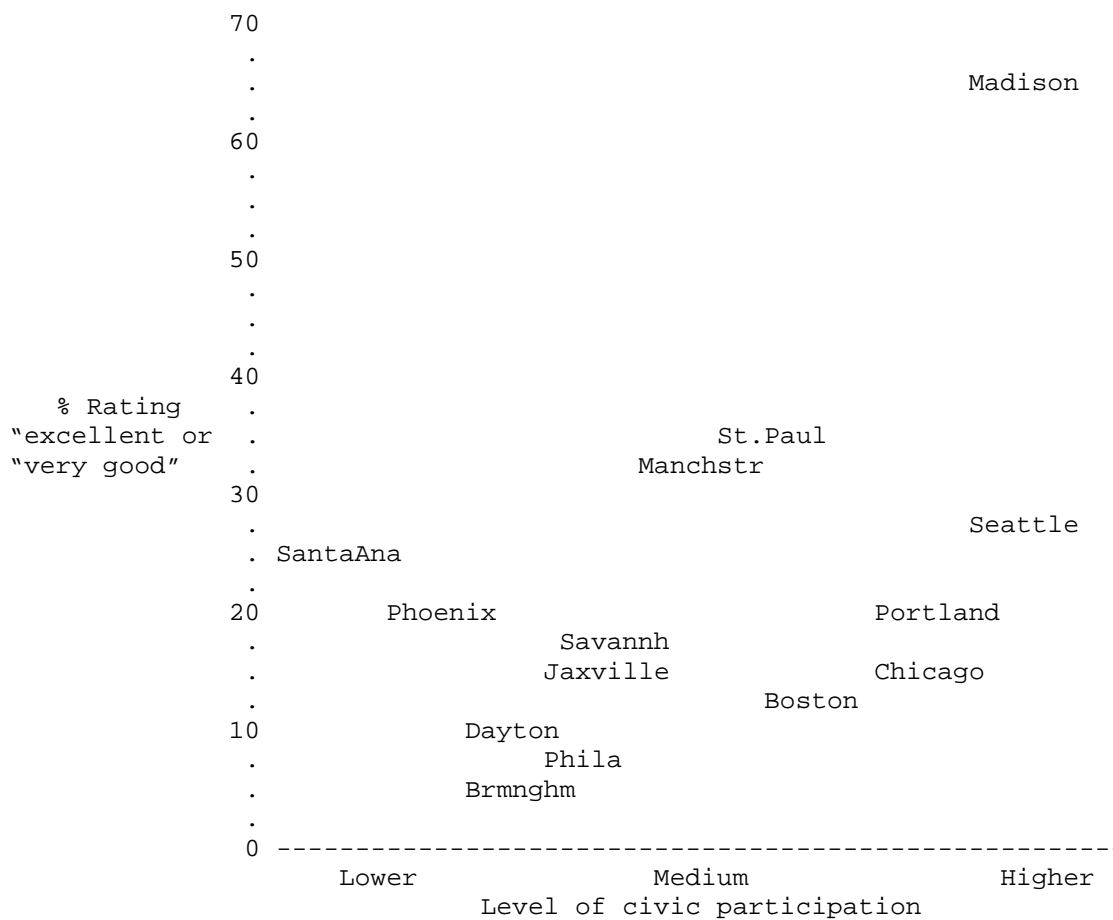
**Figure 2. All things considered, how would you rate the city government for the way it handles its job?**



**Figure 3. Generally speaking, how safe would you say your neighborhood is?**

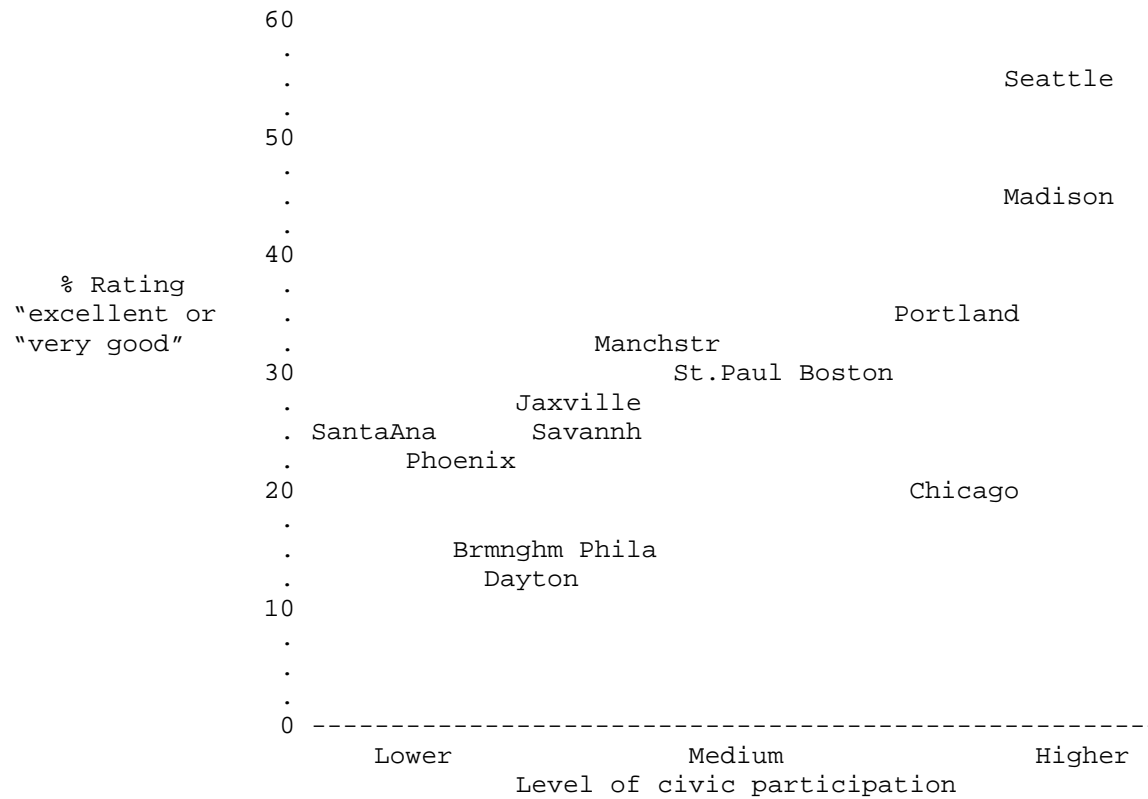


**Figure 4. How would you rate the quality of education in the (city) public schools?  
(Excluding “don’t knows”)**



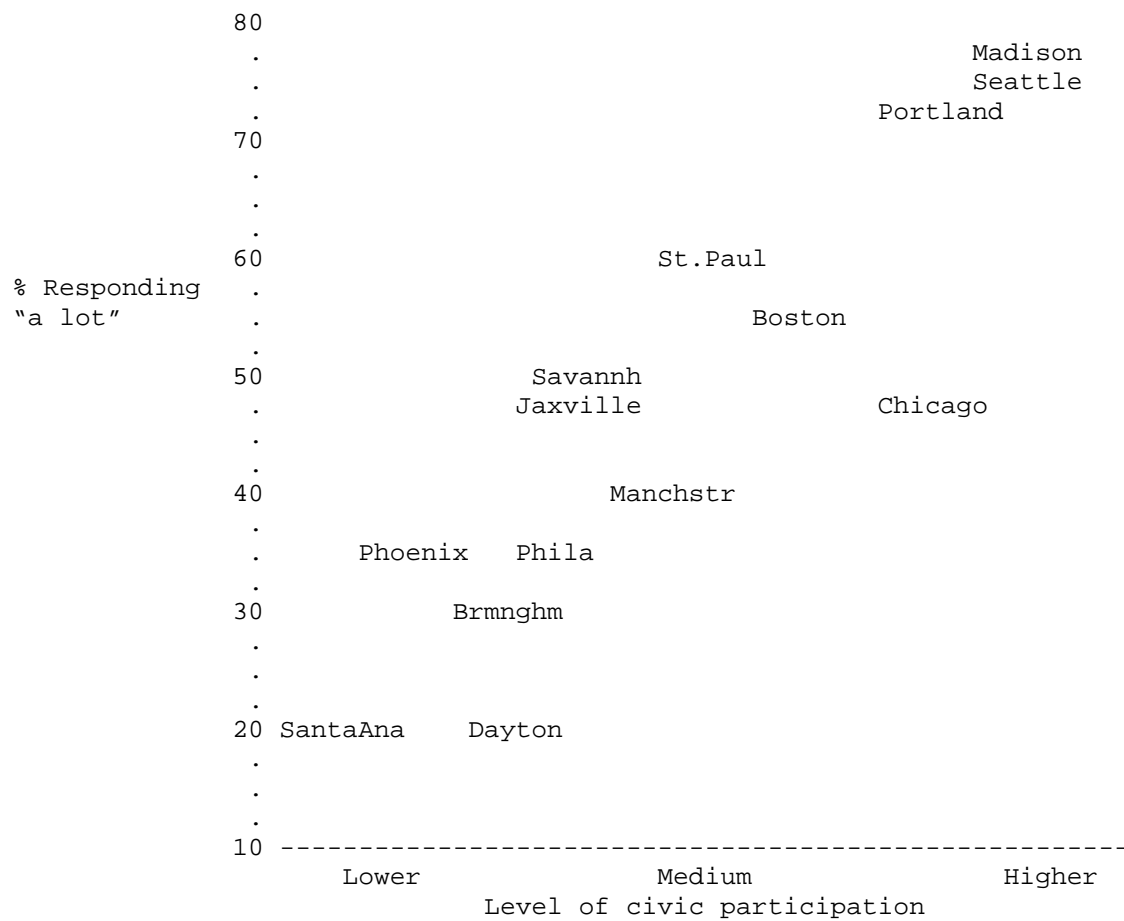
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**Figure 5. How would you rate (city) in terms of how well people of different races and ethnic groups get along with one another?**



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**Figure 6. Generally speaking, how much pride do residents take in their city?**



### Footnotes

1. Because of the sheer size of the city of Chicago relative to our available resources and because of our interest in organizational factors that can facilitate civic engagement, we restricted our study to zipcode areas on the West Side. The total population of the sampled area is approximately 500,000.
2. The three items (each with five-point “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” response options) were:
  - Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
  - Public officials don't care much about what people like me think.
  - People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
3. The two items, each with “agree, depends, disagree” response options, were:
  - Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
  - Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?
4. The southwest cluster consists of postal zipcodes 60608, 60612, 60623, 60624, 60644, and 60651. It contains the communities of North Lawndale, West and East Garfield Park, the western portion of the Near West Side, and most of Austin, Humboldt Park, the Lower West Side, and South Lawndale. See Betancur (1996) for a discussion of the origin and characteristics of Hispanic neighborhoods in Chicago.
5. The northeast cluster consists of postal zipcodes 60607, 60622, 60639, and 60647. It contains most of Belmont-Cragin, Hermosa, Logan Square, and West Town, as well as the eastern portion of the Near West Side.
6. Participation rates for African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites do not differ appreciably, once differences in education levels are taken into account. Participation rates for those two groups do differ from that for Latinos, however; hence the inclusion of the Latino binary variable in the multivariate analysis.
7. According to Ferman (1996, 61), the collusion between Richard J. Daley's political machine and real estate developers throughout Daley's reign from 1955 until his death in 1976 led many Chicago residents, particularly in the older, ethnic neighborhoods, “to conclude that the political system ... could be their biggest enemy.” Within Chicago's African-American community, “this realization came early on ... as race and economic development formed an ugly nexus.”
8. Two of the five original CAPS police districts were on the West Side: the 10<sup>th</sup> district, which covers North and South Lawndale and nearly half of the Lower West Side, and the 15<sup>th</sup> district, which is entirely within the Austin community.

## Appendix

**Table A1. West-Side Chicago residents are the most active in non-electoral civic affairs, net of education, income, and age effects.**

Dependent variable coded: 1 = no activities, 2 = one activity, 3 = 2+. Regressors are (0,1) dummy variables, with Chicago and the low categories on age, education, and income as the omitted categories.

Number of obs = 4772  
 F( 25, 4746) = 20.72  
 Prob > F = 0.0000  
 R-squared = 0.0984  
 Adj R-squared = 0.0937  
 Root MSE = .82282

	Coeff.	S.E.	t	p-level
Portland	-.1424	.0627	-2.27	.023
Seattle	-.1686	.0617	-2.73	.006
Madison	-.1935	.0628	-3.08	.002
Manchest	-.2591	.0632	-4.09	.000
Savannah	-.1891	.0620	-3.05	.002
Jacksonv	-.2846	.0632	-4.50	.000
Philadel	-.0735	.0623	-1.17	.238
SantaAna	-.3732	.0621	-6.00	.000
St. Paul	-.2887	.0625	-4.61	.000
Birmingh	-.1989	.0627	-3.17	.002
Dayton	-.1956	.0618	-3.16	.002
Phoenix	-.3767	.0616	-6.12	.000
Boston	-.1931	.0624	-3.09	.002
Age26-35	.0280	.0396	0.70	.480
Age36-45	.3091	.0410	7.54	.000
Age46-65	.3040	.0399	7.61	.000
Age66 up	.3079	.0479	6.43	.000
H school	.1136	.0559	2.03	.042
Some col	.3338	.0550	6.07	.000
College	.4453	.0564	7.88	.000
\$20-29K	.0106	.0369	0.28	.774
\$30-39K	.1192	.0388	3.07	.002
\$40-59K	.1783	.0377	4.73	.000
\$60-74K	.2600	.0540	4.81	.000
\$75K up	.2811	.0451	6.23	.000
constant	1.609	.0694	23.21	.000

**Table A2. West-Side Chicago residents are the most active in electoral affairs, net of education, income, and age effects.**

Dependent variable coded: 1 = no activities, 2 = one activity, 3 = 2+. Regressors are (0,1) dummy variables, with Chicago and the low categories on age, education, and income as the omitted categories.

N = 4772

F(25,4746) = 25.31 (sig at .0000)

R-squared = 0.118

Adj R-squared = 0.113

Root MSE = 0.752

	Coeff.	S.E.	t	p-level
Portland	-.0718	.0573	-1.25	.211
Seattle	-.1289	.0564	-2.28	.023
Madison	-.0991	.0573	-1.73	.084
Manchest	-.1579	.0578	-2.73	.006
Savannah	-.2191	.0566	-3.87	.000
Jacksonv	-.2124	.0577	-3.68	.000
Philadel	-.2087	.0569	-3.66	.000
SantaAna	-.2482	.0568	-4.37	.000
St. Paul	-.1184	.0571	-2.07	.038
Birmingh	-.0421	.0573	-0.73	.463
Dayton	-.0943	.0564	-1.67	.095
Phoenix	-.3800	.0562	-6.75	.000
Boston	-.0507	.0570	-0.89	.375
Age26-35	-.0287	.0362	-0.79	.429
Age36-45	.1858	.0374	4.96	.000
Age46-65	.3769	.0365	10.32	.000
Age66 up	.4787	.0437	10.94	.000
H school	.0540	.0511	1.06	.292
Some col	.1634	.0502	3.25	.001
College	.2329	.0516	4.51	.000
\$20-29K	.0125	.0337	0.37	.710
\$30-39K	.0978	.0354	2.76	.006
\$40-59K	.1368	.0344	3.97	.000
\$60-74K	.2761	.0493	5.60	.000
\$75K up	.3792	.0412	9.19	.000
constant	1.314	.0634	20.71	.000

**Table A3. Regression and logit analysis of West Side Chicago survey data.**

Dependent variable: "During the past few years has anyone personally contacted you to ask you to take part in any community or citizen group or neighborhood organization? (No/Yes)"

### Multiple regression results

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs = 368
Model	4.07929675	5	.81585935	F(5, 362) = 3.54
Residual	83.3527685	362	.230256266	Prob > F = 0.004
Total	87.4320652	367	.23823451	R-squared = 0.05
				Root MSE = .4799

	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t
SW Zipcodes	.0977908	.0521388	1.88	0.062
High School	.1560487	.0963383	1.62	0.106
Some college	.2120124	.0930156	2.28	0.023
College grad	.283937	.0989032	2.87	0.004
Income > \$30K	.0957976	.0522513	1.83	0.068
Constant	.096406	.088639	1.09	0.277

### Logit results

Number of obs = 368  
 LR chi2(5) = 18.15 Prob > chi2 = 0.003  
 Pseudo R2 = 0.04 Log likelihood = -236.79

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z
SW Zipcodes	.4358044	.2306426	1.89	0.059
High School	.8620116	.5037185	1.71	0.087
Some college	1.10515	.4892842	2.26	0.024
College grad	1.40848	.5099969	2.76	0.006
Income > \$30K	.4172778	.227007	1.84	0.066
Constant	-1.924393	.4831987	-3.98	0.000

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