

Democracy at Risk

Renewing the Political Science of Citizenship

Report of the
American Political Science Association's
Standing Committee on
Civic Education and Engagement

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**DEMOCRACY AT RISK:
RENEWING A POLITICAL SCIENCE OF CITIZENSHIP**

*Report of the American Political Science Association's
Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement, August 2004*

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The opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the authors. No opinions, statements of fact, or conclusions in the report should be attributed to the American Political Science Association.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	i
Chapter I. Toward a Political Science of Citizenship.....	1
A. The State of American Citizenship: Why Care?.....	1
B. Our Report and the American Political Science Association.....	4
C. What is Civic Engagement?.....	5
D. What Dimensions of Civic Engagement Should We Care About?.....	7
E. Can Civic Engagement Be Bad?.....	9
F. Roadmap to What Follows.....	11
G. Conclusion.....	13
Chapter II. Electoral Processes.....	15
A. Basic Trends.....	16
B. Diagnosis.....	21
C. Personal Factors.....	23
D. Structural Factors.....	31
E. Cultural Factors.....	40
F. Recommendations.....	43
G. Conclusion.....	52
H. Recap of Recommendations.....	53
Chapter III. The American Metropolis.....	59
A. Local Opportunities and Obstacles to Civic Engagement.....	60
B. Avenues of Civic Engagement in Metropolitan Areas.....	75
C. Recommendations.....	101
D. Conclusion.....	111
Chapter IV. The Nonprofit, Voluntary, and Philanthropic Sectors.....	113
A. Associations and Civic Engagement.....	113
B. Two Positive Trends.....	118
C. Regulation.....	124
D. Reshaping the Civic Context for Associations.....	127
E. Conclusion.....	143
F. Summary of Recommendations.....	143

PREFACE

The genesis of this report was the formation, in the summer of 2002, of the American Political Science Association's first Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement. Our idea from the start was to operate for two years as a task force and to produce a report that would bring the insights of political science to bear on the problem of civic engagement as we see it. This report tests the proposition that modern social science has useful things to say about the state of democratic life and what might be done to improve it. We know that this is no small task, and we have tried to be scrupulous about what we know and the limits of what we know. We seek mainly to speak to the public – to everyone who is interested in democracy in America – but we also address our fellow researchers in pointing out the many questions on which more work remains to be done.

We, as authors, speak only for ourselves, and not for the American Political Science Association and its members. This collective effort is, however, part of a renewed commitment on the part of the American Political Science Association to take civic education and civic engagement seriously, and also to encourage political scientists to work together to address important public issues.

We seek to cast light on the ways in which the design of institutions and choices about public policies – other than schools and educational policies – influence patterns of civic engagement and the capacities, dispositions, and identities of citizens. Our central concern, in effect, is the educative or formative impact of institutional design and public policy broadly construed. This is one of the oldest themes in political science: Plato and Aristotle sought to analyze how the laws as a whole form the character of citizens, and many modern political thinkers have also pursued this project.

We do not disparage the role of schools in forming citizens; indeed, a number of us have worked and will continue to work on schools and education, and we are all educators. It seems to us a mistake, however, to ignore the formative dimension of the laws as a whole, including collective choices about institutions and policies of many sorts. Even in a liberal democracy that avoids objectionable forms of paternalism, public policy is pervasively educative. A clearer recognition of this should help support rather than demean the important work of schools.

We split our large theme into three more manageable topics and divided into working groups. Several of our original committee members – all of whom made important contributions and offered valuable support – were not able to participate in our discussions and writing. Several co-authors were added, for their expertise and commitment to the project.

The principal co-authors of Chapter II, on the electoral process, were David E. Campbell, William A. Galston, Richard Niemi, and Wendy Rahn. The principal co-authors of Chapter III, on American metropolitan areas, were Yvette Alex-Assensoh, Luis Fraga, Stephen Macedo, and Kathy Cramer Walsh. Robert D. Putnam also worked with this group throughout. The principal co-author of Chapter IV, which takes the nonprofit and voluntary sectors, was Jeffrey Berry, with substantial contributions from the beginning by Michael Brintnall, Margaret Levi, Meira Levinson, and Rob Reich, all of whom also contributed to other parts of the document. These were all original members of the first APSA Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement (Putnam and Brintnall, *ex officio*), and they participated fully over two years.

The original group was joined in mid-course by Archon Fung and Todd Swanstrom, who worked closely with the Metro Areas group. Chris Karpowitz and Rob Rodgers worked closely with Macedo for many months as roving editors and contributors; they worked especially closely on Chapters I and III. Keena Lipsitz joined us toward the end and wrote material on participatory inequalities that became part of Chapter II.

The foregoing paragraphs do not do justice to the degree of collaboration that went into every aspect of this report, from its initial conception to its final stages. Suffice it to say that every co-author made important contributions and every one – most especially the members of the original committee who stayed on to the end – contributed in many ways and at many different stages.

In addition, we had substantial help and contributions from many not on the committee. [*What follows is provisional, obviously. Fuller acknowledgments to be supplied later.*]

E.J. Dionne, Pamela Johnston Conover, and Keith Reeves made important early contributions as members of the original committee.

Jane Junn supplied several very useful pages of text on immigrants and civic engagement, some of which is incorporated into our text.

We received significant comments and suggestions from many colleagues; these improved our text substantially. At a Princeton workshop, we heard from Richard Alba, Larry

Bartels, Miriam Galston, Donald Green, Fredrick C. Harris, Michael Jones-Correa, Michael Lipsky, Nolan McCarty, Tali Mendelberg, and Iris Marion Young. At a daylong workshop at the Kennedy School of Government, we were joined by David Barron, Gerald Frug, Xavier de Sousa Briggs, and Edward Glaeser. Barron and Frug supplied detailed comments over several months. At other meetings or via email, we received comments and suggestions from Alan Abramson, Elizabeth Boris, Jeffrey Brudney, James Jennings, Juliet Gainsborough, Martin Gilens, Michael Jones-Correa, Greg Markus, Eric Oliver, Douglas Rae, Lester Salaman, Bruce Sievers, Steven Rathgeb Smith, Clarence Stone, and Sidney Verba.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Princeton University's University Center for Human Values and the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics (and its Director, Larry Bartels) for co-sponsorship of a two-day meeting at Princeton University in February 2004.

We are grateful to the Midwest Political Science Association and its Annual Meeting Staff, especially Director William D. Morgan, for twice giving us several panels at the last minute.

We are, finally, grateful to the officers and members of the American Political Science Association for giving us the opportunity and the support to undertake this effort. Thanks to Executive Director Michael Brintnall and staff assistants Kelly Baden and Corinne Ferrara for their logistical support. Thanks especially to APSA Past President Robert D. Putnam, and successive teams of APSA officers, for their leadership role in establishing this committee and for naming us to it.

Princeton, August 25, 2004

CHAPTER I

TOWARD A POLITICAL SCIENCE OF CITIZENSHIP

A. THE STATE OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP: WHY CARE?

Americans have turned away from politics and the public sphere in large numbers, leaving our civic life impoverished. Citizens are participating in public affairs less frequently, with less knowledge and enthusiasm, in fewer venues, and less equally than is healthy for a vibrant democratic polity. While some aspects of civic life remain robust and some citizens still participate frequently, we are concerned about the current state of affairs. As political scientists, we also believe we can use our disciplinary knowledge to offer useful guidance for understanding and responding to some of the political and institutional causes of civic disengagement and for building a richer civic life. The goal of this report, therefore, is to bring the expertise of political science to bear on the task of improving the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement – and hence of improving democracy itself – in the United States. Our political science of citizenship is centrally concerned with enlivening civic activity, exciting interest in politics, and enhancing the capacities of citizens.

Our argument in the pages that follow is grounded in the firm belief that citizen engagement is fundamental to healthy democratic politics. First, though democracy is supposed to promote the interest of the people as a whole, political institutions are, in fact, most responsive to those who mobilize. Robust democracy requires not only institutional mechanisms to mediate conflicting interests but also a means for giving voice to the whole range of legitimate political viewpoints. It depends on effective voice by all those who have a stake in the outcome of politics. Government “by the people, for the people” founders when only narrow and particularistic interests are mobilized.

Civic engagement also enhances the quality of democratic governance. Democratic decision-making requires knowledge of the interests of the people. It is through the various forms of civic engagement – casting a ballot, attending a rally, writing a public official, volunteering time, or showing up at a meeting – that citizens make their preferences known. While there surely is a role for expertise in politics and public administration, citizen input has the potential to improve the quality of public decisions by mustering the knowledge and taking

stock of the preferences of the entire community. As Gregory B. Markus puts it, “[W]hen 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.”¹

More civic engagement can, thirdly, enrich the polity. Some evidence suggests that higher levels of civic engagement, especially membership in groups, are associated with greater individual satisfaction with the quality of community life. Beyond formal institutions of government, voluntary and nonprofit organizations, supported in part by the contributions and participation of individuals, provide a wide variety of goods and services that neither state nor market can replace. Quite simply, when citizens are involved and engaged, our communities are better.

Finally, political and civic activities can make for better citizens. We believe that civic engagement is valuable in itself: that popular self-rule involves the exercise of distinctive human capacities, and is an intrinsically noble enterprise. John Stuart Mill famously argued that participation has the potential to educate and invigorate citizens, and we agree that certain forms of engagement in the life of the polity have the potential to expand the political understanding and capacities of citizens. We know, however, that the goods of political and civic activity often compete with other good things in life. There may be direct tradeoffs between time spent at a political meeting and the joys of private life, including time with family and friends. While acknowledging the existence of important tradeoffs, and allowing that people frequently lead good and fulfilling lives without engaging in political activity, we maintain that civic engagement is part of the good life.

To help Americans better understand the plight and the promise of civic engagement, this report undertakes three tasks:

- (1) Documents recent trends in civic engagement;
- (2) Explores the influence that the design of public policies and political institutions has had on these trends; and

¹ Gregory B. Markus, “Civic Participation in American Cities,” Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, draft February 2002, pp. 42-43.

(3) Recommends policies and institutional reforms to increase the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement in the United States.

Our first task – documenting trends in civic engagement – is more complex than it would appear to be. Significant forms of civic and political engagement include a diverse array of activities that are influenced by a host of other factors. Further complicating the task is the fact that reliable measures are often hard to come by and some important aspects of public life have not been studied with any thoroughness. Nonetheless, it is clear that many forms of engagement have declined and many participatory inequalities have persisted or worsened.

Although understanding causal connections can be especially challenging, our second task is to explore the ways in which past political choices have shaped civic dispositions and fostered or inhibited political and civic activity. This report marshals political science research to help us understand the effect of policy choices upon civic engagement.

Because carefully crafted policies and institutions can lead to more and better participation, our third task is to consider what might be done constructively to foster civic engagement. Given the insights political science can provide, we ask how various institutions and public policies should be enhanced, protected, reconsidered, or reformed. We assess the state of our knowledge and also acknowledge that there may be difficult tradeoffs between desirable ends. We also know that some causes of civic disengagement are deeply entrenched. We therefore give particular attention to policies and institutions that are amenable to reform.

Schools clearly have played and will continue to play an essential role in promoting civic education and engagement in the United States. Here, however, we focus largely though not exclusively on the educative impact of institutions other than schools and practices other than the directly and specifically educative. We chose this course for several reasons. Many others have long focused on the most direct means of civic education in schools, and excellent summaries of the state of the knowledge concerning civic education are already available. Indeed, ever-increasing numbers of organizations and groups focus attention on school-based civic education.² Much less attention has been given to the many ways in which institutions and policies, other than those concerned directly with schools and education, shape civic life and educate citizens in

² These include: the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) (www.civicyouth.org), the National Alliance for Civic Education (www.cived.net), the Center for Civic Education (www.civiced.org), the Education Commission of the States (www.ecs.org), and the National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org), among numerous others.

critical ways. The first political scientists, Plato and Aristotle foremost among them, recognized the importance of viewing all political institutions as educative. We believe that modern political science has often neglected the formative dimension of politics as a whole.

We also wish to emphasize that schools are part of the larger political order: they respond to imperatives set forth by the polity and work hand-in-hand with other community institutions, from parents and families to the federal government. Hence school-based efforts to foster civic engagement should be placed within a broader political framework. Schools did not create the problem of citizenship single-handedly (if they contributed to it at all), nor can they solve it on their own.

B. OUR REPORT AND THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

The collective endeavor that has produced this report is part of a recent effort by the American Political Science Association (APSA) to enhance the contributions of political scientists to our nation's conversation about democracy. This may seem anything but novel – political scientists talking about government – but in truth, while individual political scientists routinely comment in the press or in popular writings about the wisdom of this policy or that reform, as a profession we are silent.

We have not spoken collectively in large part because we political scientists – like the rest of the public – disagree on many issues of the day. In spite of our expertise, or because of it, political scientists disagree not only about the way the world ought to be, but also about how it is, and why it is that way. Given our disagreements, it seemed inappropriate for a committee of the American Political Science Association to speak on matters of policy or institutional practice. Indeed, the belief that we should be neutral as a profession is so ingrained that APSA has not published a set of public policy or reform recommendations since 1950. In that year the APSA Committee on Political Parties issued a report advocating a more “responsible” party system.³ That study proved highly controversial, and the APSA has subsequently refrained from issuing prescriptive reports.

Recently, however, the officers and council of the Association reexamined this matter and decided that the inhibition against collective contributions by political scientists to national discussion of issues on which we have some expertise has been overly broad. Especially when

³ Committee on Political Parties. 1950. “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,” supplement to the *American Political Science Review* 44: 1-99.

we work together, collaborating across sub-disciplinary boundaries, we are well positioned to present the state of knowledge in an informed and nonpartisan manner. Nonetheless, we do not speak for the APSA as an organization, or for its membership as a whole. As authors of this report we speak only for ourselves: we have, under the auspices of the APSA, tried to discern what political science has to tell us about citizenship – the sources of its current plight and the means of its possible renewal – but the judgments that follow are those of the co-authors alone.

Whenever possible we have tried to rely on evidence backed by a strong consensus among our peers. However, here as elsewhere in life, evidence is often conflicting, uncertain, and subject to competing interpretations. A further complexity is that there are many worthwhile political values, and these often conflict (for example, the goals of securing more, versus more equal, participation). Very frequently our judgments are based on the preponderance of the available evidence, and it is rare that we can claim to have proof “beyond a reasonable doubt.” There is, for example, broad agreement in the profession that many forms of civic engagement have declined and there is a substantial body of excellent research that we can draw on to describe the problem. There is less agreement on the exact dimensions of civic disengagement and on the ways in which it should be measured, and even less agreement on the causes of the decline. We ourselves do not always agree. We try, in what follows, to be scrupulous in emphasizing the limits of what we know and the limits of what we agree upon. We hope to help clear a path along which a great deal more work remains to be done.

Most importantly, we agree that Americans are less involved in civic life than they should be, and that inequalities of involvement reflect persistent hierarchies of wealth and privilege to a disturbing degree. No doubt, many Americans remain active in civic affairs. Some forms of participation – notably volunteering – remain robust. But the overall health of our democracy has been compromised by a decline in participation across a broad range of activities. From neighborhood life to city politics to state affairs to matters involving our whole nation, we believe expanded and improved participation will strengthen our democratic way of life.

C. WHAT IS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Citizens grapple with public affairs in many ways and many arenas. They may act to seek information about candidates or policies, or to express support for, or opposition to, particular

candidates or programs. They may seek to extend their own or others' rights, or to protect their own interests, or to promote what they view as the public good. They may be moved by a sense of civic duty: the belief that it is an obligation to volunteer, to vote, to serve. Or the motivation might be the desire to build a community or network in support of some cause or to address some common problem.

To encompass this range of motivations we favor a capacious understanding of civic engagement. For us, civic engagement includes any activity, individual or collective, devoted to influencing the collective life of the polity. This includes the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills as well as a wide range of acts. We do not draw a sharp distinction between "civic" and "political" engagement because we recognize that politics and civil society are mutually interdependent: a vibrant politics depends upon a vibrant civil society.⁴ Political voice can, for example, mean participation in formal government institutions, but it may just as easily involve becoming part of a group or organization or even simply talking to a neighbor across the back fence.

Civic engagement most obviously includes activities associated with elections: voting; working for an organization on behalf of a candidate or campaign; attending a political rally, speech or dinner; contributing money to a campaign or cause; displaying a campaign button or bumper sticker; even trying to persuade friends or neighbors why they should vote for or against a party or candidate. Scott Keeter and colleagues label these the "electoral indicators" of civic engagement.⁵ We should never forget that the electoral process includes far more than the act of voting. The moment when a vote is cast is, as John Dewey reminded us, the culmination of a much richer process that includes a host of prior conversations, judgments, and actions.

Important as they are, elections are only one aspect of political activity. Protesting and marching; attending a public meeting; lobbying a government official; writing to a newspaper about a public issue; signing an email or written petition; boycotting; canvassing a neighborhood; or engaging in political mobilization and debate are all forms of civic engagement. Beyond these well-established methods of advocacy, non-electoral political involvement can also include new avenues of engagement, such as the growing number of

⁴ See Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁵ Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Moly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, "The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait," The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, 2002.

deliberative forums where private individuals can meet face-to-face to talk about public problems.⁶

If politics includes far more than elections, it is also true that “civic” activity includes more than electoral and pressure politics. Citizens frequently gather either formally or informally to address collective problems themselves, sometimes but not always with the support of public institutions. Civic activity includes public service and collective actions to improve our society: serving one’s country in civilian or military capacity when needed, volunteering for VISTA or AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps, or participating in a neighborhood watch. Numerous Americans volunteer their time or give money and support to groups and organizations that are concerned with serving the disadvantaged, correcting inequities, protesting injustices, protecting the environment, or improving our cultural institutions, schools, and communities. Voluntary and community groups of all sorts, including nonprofits, labor unions, and churches, often help citizens mobilize on behalf of matters of common concern.⁷

Civic activity also includes civic education – an increase in understanding of our political system and the issues of the day. Civic education takes place in schools, unions, voluntary associations, the media, and places of worship, among other venues. Campaigns and elections are educative exercises in important respects. Citizens acquire knowledge about political affairs by reading the newspaper, watching the news, surfing relevant internet sites, studying the League of Women Voter pamphlets, talking to friends, undertaking internships, and in a host of other ways.

D. WHAT DIMENSIONS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT?

Given that such a wide range of activities qualify as civic engagement, we need to pick out those aspects of civic engagement that matter most for the health of American democracy. Throughout this report, we concentrate on three critical dimensions of civic engagement:

Quantity: We care about the overall amount of civic engagement. Democracy is better, we assert, when more people participate. Generally, though not always, the problem is to get

⁶ Michael X. Delli Carpini, Fay Lomax Cook, and Lawrence Jacobs, “Talking Together: Discursive Capital and Civic Deliberation in America.” David M. Ryfe, “The Practice of Deliberative Democracy: A Study of 16 Deliberative Organizations,” *Political Communication* 19(2002): 359-77; James S. Fishkin *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁷ The forgoing three paragraphs are informed by the work of Gregory B. Markus, “Civic Participation in American Cities,” Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, draft February 2002, p. 10; and Keeter, et al.

citizens interested, to encourage them to turn out in an election, or to get them involved with an organization or group. Many ordinary citizens express a lack of interest in politics at all levels and an extreme hesitancy about playing a role in democratic decision-making. We are especially worried about declining involvement among the young – a tendency that may portend an even greater impoverishment of democratic life in the years ahead. Whether or not one believes that there is a crisis of civic engagement, a concern with encouraging an interest in, and capacity for, active citizenship runs through many reflections on modern mass commercial society, from Adam Smith, to Benjamin Constant, to Alexis de Tocqueville.⁸ We agree that the sheer numbers of participants (or non-participants) is important, and we believe that institutional and policy choices can increase these numbers by influencing the environment within which individuals develop and act upon their civic interests and identities.

Quality: Of course, sheer numbers of participants is not in itself enough to ensure the legitimacy, stability, or health of a democratic government. The quality of participation matters, too. In a large, diverse, extended republic, citizens need to learn to cooperate across lines of racial, religious, political, social, and economic differences. Political engagement is not confined to the first Tuesday in November; it extends beyond the ballot box to a myriad of other opportunities for expressing one's voice. It requires learning about public issues and understanding the political system. It means being heard as well as being able to explain and justify one's opinions in civil dialogue. It encompasses the capacity to affect the agenda and not only to respond to given choices. Quality civic engagement takes up important issues on which people of good will disagree. Such political discourse finds points of common agreement but recognizes that conflict will persist, and it seeks ways of dealing with conflict productively. Quality civic engagement maintains bonds of political community even after the votes have been counted and the majority has spoken. While acknowledging that qualitative judgments about civic and political activity are often controversial, we worry that political activity is increasingly uninformed, fragmented, and polarized: the quality of participation is not what it could or should be.

⁸ See Adam Smith's discussion of the public responsibility for education in *The Wealth of Nations*, Part III; Benjamin Constant's famous speech defending modern liberty – understood as “negative” liberty or freedom from interference -- “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns,” closes with a call for public action to promote citizens' capacities; Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is a monumental account of the role of institutions and public policies of all sorts in promoting capable and active citizenship.

Equality: Implicit in the idea of governance by and on behalf of the people as a whole is a concern with who participates and who does not. We realize that distributive concerns are often controversial and partisan, and we recognize that inevitably some people will choose not to get involved. Nevertheless, we share a concern about the uneven distribution of civic participation. The young, the poor, the less educated, and many minorities participate far less than the population as a whole; these persistent or even increasing inequalities impoverish our civic life and call into question the democratic credentials of our politics. Of course, we must be careful to understand correctly the explanations for these patterns: differences in income and education explain much of the variation in participation across racial and ethnic groups. Since 1960, however, political scientists have worried that the political chorus “sings with a strong upper-class accent.”⁹ We share this worry, and add to it the concern that the chorus is older and whiter than American society as a whole.

Ultimately, we believe that improving the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement will improve the quality and legitimacy of self-governance. Improving these three dimensions of civic engagement should increase our collective capacity to pursue common ends and address common problems. There is, of course, a great deal of disagreement about what our most pressing problems are and how we should address them; improved civic engagement will not end disputes about what our common ends should be. But we will be better off as a nation and as individuals if more Americans participate in an informed and capable manner.

The promise of democratic life is not simply that government by the people yields the most excellent governance, it is also – and perhaps mainly – that government is legitimate only when the people as a whole are agents of their own self-rule. Insofar as important classes or groups of citizens are considerably less active and influential than others – and especially when this is itself a consequence of the design of the political system – then the reality of collective self rule is doubtful, and the political order’s legitimacy is compromised.

E. CAN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BE BAD?

Popular political activity is sometimes worrisome. Political action often issues from and provokes conflict, and intense conflicts arrayed around deep divisions may destabilize and derail normal politics and may even lead to violence. Even normal and relatively tame political

⁹ E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

conflict can prove unsettling for some citizens. However, despite the dangers, public debate, contention, and mobilization are essential to a well-functioning democracy. It is wide-spread non-voting and disengagement that restricts debate to the issues that concern only the active citizen and, more perniciously, permits the tyranny of the minority to emerge. The only corrective to apathy is to create reasons for engagement through education, incentives, and institutions that promote public debate and citizen involvement.

There is, obviously, no guarantee that political activity will be directed toward good, just, and inclusive outcomes. Citizens sometimes become mobilized in order to defend an unfair privilege or to deny other citizens their basic rights. If the civil rights movement was an exercise in political engagement, so were many aspects of the massive resistance to it. Much civic activity connected with local issues concerning development may be characterized as “NIMBY-ism” (as in, “Not In My Back Yard!”). Voluntary associations – praised for their contribution to civic life by political scientists such as Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol– sometimes foster racism rather than tolerance, insularity rather than bridges across particular identities, or sectarianism rather than a commitment to a larger public good. Democracy allows citizens to organize on behalf of particular interests averse to “justice and the public good”; as Madison warned, “freedom is to faction as air is to fire.”¹⁰

Even when they participate on behalf of ethically laudable causes, citizens may emerge from attempts to participate feeling frustrated at the inefficacy of their efforts or dismayed by the disharmony and disagreement that is a natural part of any diverse democracy. We take seriously the cautionary observations of John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, who argue that many citizens recoil from the disagreements and differences that naturally emerge in any open democratic forum concerned with important issues. Political participation can spark feelings of powerlessness and frustration.¹¹ What are we to do, then, about these potentially negative effects of popular involvement in political and civic life?

¹⁰ See, esp., Jason Kaufman, *For the Common Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Also, see the critiques of Putnam’s version of social capital by Margaret Levi, “Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam’s Making Democracy Work,” *Politics & Society* 24 (1996):45-55; Sidney Tarrow, “Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam’s Making Democracy Work,” *American Political Science Review* 90 (1996):389-397. And See Madison, Federalist #10.

¹¹ John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans’ Beliefs about How Government Should Work*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Tali Mendelberg, “The Deliberative Citizen: Theory and Evidence,” in Michael X. Delli Carpini, Leonie Huddy and Robert Y. Shapiro, eds., *Political Decision-Making, Deliberation and Participation, Research in Micropolitics*, vol. 6 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 2002); Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

We would say, first of all, that the form of civic engagement does matter: we can sometimes agree on better and worse forms of civic engagement, and institutions and policy choices may be designed so as to enhance the quality (as well as the quantity and equality) of engagement. This is a central theme of our report. The insight that participation is structured by institutions is at least as old as Madison, who argued that the most effective way to control the effects of factional activity is to include as many different interests as possible in a large and diverse constitutional republic. Much modern political and social theory emphasizes the importance of “cross-cutting cleavages” and multi-faceted identities, which may enhance the tendency for citizens to practice generalized forms of reciprocity, cooperativeness, and trust. In line with this thinking, we advocate institutions that encompass many interests and that favor broader over narrower constituencies.

Second, we believe that citizens can be educated to participate in civic life in healthy and productive ways. This education can come from a variety of sources – from schools, from home life, and from properly structured democratic institutions. As we seek ways to increase public participation we must also educate citizens about the inevitability and legitimacy of disagreement in a diverse democracy: “people need to understand that disagreements can occur among people of good heart and that some debating and compromising will be necessary to resolve these disagreements and come to a collective solution.”¹² Citizens who are averse to political conflict often misunderstand the nature of democratic politics. Many wrongly assume a greater level of consensus about the common good than may, in fact, exist.¹³ Indeed, civic educators and public actors need to make it clear that disagreement and public debate is often an excellent way of discerning the truth.¹⁴ When democratic institutions are properly designed, citizens who participate in political activities and civic groups can be expected to learn that disagreement and contention is a salutary part of democratic life.

F. ROADMAP TO WHAT FOLLOWS

¹² Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy*, p. 10.

¹³ Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*.

¹⁴ See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, eds. David Bromwich and George Kateb, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

The concerns at the center of this report are large ones, but in the chapters that follow we try and deal with several important but also manageable aspects of the problem of American citizenship.

Chapter II discusses engagement with electoral politics at the national level. We consider some debates about the degree to which voting has declined, but emphasize that, given increasing education and wealth, voting and other forms of political activity are far lower than they should be. Political participation among the young, moreover, has not held steady but has decreased; this bodes ill for the future of democracy. We also canvass the inequalities of participation across various demographic groups, and emphasize that civic inequalities among Hispanic and non-Hispanic white Americans – for example – are important in their own right, even if they are largely explained by differences in income, education, and citizenship status. Our central argument is that important features of the political process itself depress turnout: these features include partisan districting and the interminable nature of presidential campaigns. We agree with those who observe that our national politics is excessively polarized, and we identify a variety of likely causes. Most importantly, we argue that there are practical reforms that could improve the prospects for more widespread, representative, civil, and well-informed campaigns and elections.

Chapter III takes up a very different set of institutions and policies that shape political and civic engagement: those that structure American metropolitan areas. Here we confront the fact that political scientists have lately given far less attention to local and regional politics than they have to national electoral politics. We must often acknowledge that we have far less evidence than we would like, and both our critical analysis and our recommendations in this domain are tentative. We argue, nevertheless, that local and regional political structures often have profound effects on the composition and form of political communities, and this in turn has significant implications for political interests and identities, the ways in which citizens act in their communities, and the winners and losers in metropolitan political life. Because of the relative dearth of research, and because especially difficult and complex tradeoffs seem to confront metropolitan civic reformers, our practical recommendations in Chapter III must often include calls for more research.

Chapter IV examines policies and institutions that influence the health of a domain that has recently been at the center of discussions of citizenship: the voluntary and nonprofit sectors.

Here we report both encouraging and discouraging trends. As is well known, participation in many voluntary organizations has declined considerably over the last forty years. On the other hand, volunteering has increased, especially among the young, and many voluntary associations remain vibrant – notably churches and religious institutions. In addition, the sheer numbers and resources of nonprofit organizations in the United States are nothing short of astonishing. No nation rivals the U.S. with respect to the extent of the resources and responsibilities we assign to nonprofit organizations. A great deal of responsibility for the delivery of social welfare has devolved to the nonprofit sector. These organizations interact extensively with disadvantaged segments of the population, and they should be capable of playing a role in enhancing the political voices of the disadvantaged. However, as we discuss, various rules unnecessarily inhibit the political activity of nonprofit organizations.

G. CONCLUSION

Our overall aim is to argue that the amount, quality, and distribution of political and civic engagement are themselves largely the product of our political choices. For this reason, the future of American democracy is, in important measure, up to us. Although there are significant limitations to political scientists' understanding of why some people are actively engaged in civic life while others are not, sometimes we know enough not only to describe and diagnose, but to, with a degree of confidence, prescribe.

We seek in what follows to clarify the nature and limits of what we know about our collective civic and political lives: we offer a portrait of important aspects of American citizenship, a diagnosis of our ills, and some prescriptions for improvement. We fully recognize that, as a founder of our discipline observed nearly 24 centuries ago, politics is often not an exact science. We hope to clarify the vision of political reformers, and to refocus the energies of political scientists themselves. We offer no blueprint for a democratic utopia, but we have labored to produce a rough and far from complete sketch of where we succeed and where we fall short as a democratic community. We offer these results not as the best that can be done but as the best we have been able to do, in the hope of helping our colleagues and our polity to do better.

CHAPTER II

ELECTORAL PROCESSES

- In 1960, America faced one of its closest presidential elections ever. Voter turnout that year was 63 percent. In 2000, Americans again experienced a presidential race that went down to the wire. Forty years later, turnout had fallen to 51 percent.¹
- In 1972, the first year in which eighteen year-olds nationwide could cast a ballot in a presidential contest, 55 percent of 18 to 24 year-olds voted. In 2000, their turnout fell to 42 percent.²
- In the 2002 congressional midterm congressional elections, only 15 of 435 races were decided by four percentage points or less. In California, the two parties engage in such effective incumbent protection when redistricting that when fifty members of Congress ran for re-election in 2002 (out of 53 congressional seats), all fifty won, and in the closest of these contests, the incumbent won with fifty-eight percent of the vote.
- From the mid 1970s to recent years, the number of adolescents who said they could see themselves working on a political campaign dropped by about half.³
- Since 1960, the number of newspaper subscriptions per household has declined by nearly half.

This chapter focuses on elections and the ways in which people get involved in the electoral process. We devote considerable attention to voting, of course, but also discuss the wide range of other activities that lead up to elections. We draw upon a voluminous and venerable literature within political science, and our discussion by necessity reflects the strengths and weaknesses of generations of work on electoral participation. For example, we focus mainly (though not exclusively) on presidential and congressional elections because they have been subject to the most scrutiny by political scientists. Along the way, we draw attention to topics that deserve greater attention from researchers.

¹ These figures taken from Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter," *American Political Science Review* 95 (2001): 963-74.

² Peter Levine and Mark Hugo Lopez, "Youth Voter Turnout Has Declined, by Any Measure," Center for Information and Learning on Civic Learning and Engagement Fact Sheet, 2002 [accessed 21 February 2004]. Available at http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/fact_sheets_outside.htm.

³ Based on the authors' analysis of Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth.

We do not pretend to be morally neutral about civic engagement. In contemporary America, we believe, virtually all indicators of involvement are lower than would be ideal, and many are declining. We therefore start from the premise that under our current circumstances democratic politics would become healthier with increases in the *quantity*, *quality*, and *equality* of political participation. We also recognize, however, that the pursuit of these three goals may involve some painful trade-offs. Political scientist Adam Berinsky, for example, has argued recently that electoral reforms that make voting easier, thereby boosting by a few percentage points the “quantity” of participation, may actually exacerbate underlying inequalities in the composition of the electorate.⁴ Therefore, even though in the extreme we can imagine a world in which maximum participation would yield perfect equality, at the margin it is not perfectly clear that we can always get everything we want.

We begin by describing some basic trends, and then try to diagnose some of the causes of low, uneven, and declining levels of electoral involvement. In the end, we offer some recommendations on ways to improve the overall amount, the distribution, and the quality of voting and other forms of electoral engagement.

A. BASIC TRENDS

We begin with voter turnout, the bellwether of electoral engagement. Consider the contrast between the elections of 1960 and 2000, two presidential contests that have a lot in common. Both races featured a vice-president who had served for two terms facing a relatively young and unknown opponent. More importantly, both elections featured a photo finish, as voters were split evenly between the two candidates. In 1960, 63 percent of eligible Americans came to the polls. In 2000, that percentage had dropped to barely half of eligible Americans – 51 percent. Voting in congressional midterm elections has followed a similar downward path over the last fifty or so years.

There is consensus among political scientists that voter turnout has dropped since the 1950s. More contentious is what has happened in between. The conventional wisdom had long been that turnout has been declining more or less steadily, with occasional blips upward, as in 1992 and, to a lesser extent, 2000.⁵ More recently, however, Michael McDonald and Samuel

⁴ Adam J. Berinsky, “The Perverse Consequences of Electoral Reform in the United States,” *American Politics Research* (forthcoming).

⁵ Richard A. Brody, “The Puzzle of Political Participation in America,” in *The New American Political*

Popkin have argued that the decline since 1972 has been more apparent than real.⁶ We know that since the 1970s the number of non-citizens in the adult population has increased due to higher rates of immigration, and we know that an increased fraction of the population has been incarcerated. Since non-citizens, felons in prison (in virtually all states), and felons who have completed their terms (in some states) cannot vote, their increasing numbers result in lower estimates of turnout in recent years unless we recalibrate for the number of eligible voters in the adult population base (the denominator). When McDonald and Popkin make these and a few other small adjustments (like accounting for U.S. citizens living abroad), it appears that turnout in congressional elections has fallen from an average of 44 percent in the 1950s and 48 percent in the 1960s to just over 40 percent in the 1990s. In presidential years turnout has been relatively flat since 1972.⁷

<Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here>

It is fair to ask why we should be concerned about voter turnout in presidential elections if it has remained flat for roughly thirty years. One answer is that, trends aside, American voter turnout ranks near the bottom among democratic nations. Only the Swiss have a lower level of turnout. Even the 1960s' rate of turnout – high by American standards – is low when compared to the average rate of voter participation in other democratic nations. A second reason to be concerned with the level of turnout since 1960 is that there is every reason to expect turnout to have risen sharply over that period. For one, this period represents a time when the education

System, ed. Anthony King, 287-324 (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); Richard Boyd W., "Decline of U.S. Voter Turnout: Structural Explanations," *American Politics Quarterly* 9 (1981): 133-50; Stephen D. Shaffer, "A Multivariate Explanation of Decreasing Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1960-1976," *American Journal of Political Science* 25 (1981): 68-95; Paul R. Abramson and John H. Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation in America," *American Political Science Review* 76 (1982): 502-21; Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Ruy Teixeira, *Why Americans Don't Vote: Turnout Decline in the United States 1960-1984* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Carol A. Cassel and Robert C. Luskin, "Simple Explanations of Turnout Decline," *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 1321-30; Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1992); Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995): 65-78; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Martin P. Wattenberg, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁶ McDonald and Popkin, "Myth of the Vanishing Voter."

⁷ McDonald and Popkin's estimates have met with criticism. See, for example, Richard B. Freeman, "What, Me Vote?" Paper for the Russell Sage Foundation Project on the "Social Dimensions of Inequality," 2001. While further refinements of their estimates will undoubtedly be made, their basic point remains a valuable one: a proper accounting of changes in voter turnout requires careful attention to who can vote, and who cannot.

levels of Americans rose dramatically – and education has long been recognized as having a huge impact on whether people turn out at the polls, not to mention participate in myriad other political activities. In addition, the 1960s were a period in which African-Americans began to register and vote in large numbers. In 1960, registration rates were below 25 percent in several southern states; by 1968, none were below 50 percent.⁸ This was also a period in which voter registration, long considered a major impediment to higher turnout, became notably easier. Similarly, the effort required to cast a ballot has been reduced.⁹ Indeed, whether turnout had declined at all, the very fact that voter participation has not increased in the wake of these massive changes within the American electoral environment is cause for concern. In this case, even a flat line represents a net loss.

Yet another reason that we are troubled by trends in voter participation is that levels for the population as a whole mask changes within important sub-groups of the electorate. In particular, young people have experienced a steady decline in turnout. Among 18 to 24-year olds, the percentage voting in presidential elections has dropped from 55 percent in 1972 to 42 percent in 2000 (adjusting for non-citizens), while registration among this segment of the population has dropped by a similar 14 percentage points.¹⁰ Voting in congressional elections in non-presidential years has undergone a similar decline (see Figures 3 and 4). It is striking that a number of political scientists working independently have converged on the common conclusion that young people today are less likely to turn out than people their age in previous generations,¹¹ an especially portentous development given that electoral engagement is largely rooted in habits

⁸ Herbert B. Asher, *Presidential Elections and American Politics*, 5th ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1992), 50.

⁹ Registration and voting have become easier over the past generation, with the introduction of the so-called “motor-voter” law, unrestricted absentee voting, vote-by-mail, and same-day registration. None of these innovations has reversed the decline in turnout. See Michael J. Hanmer, “From Selection to Election and Beyond: Understanding the Causes and Consequences of Electoral Reform in America,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2004; Benjamin Highton and Raymond E. Wolfinger, “Estimating the Effects of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993,” *Political Behavior* 20 (1998): 79-104; Stephen Knack, “Does ‘Motor Voter’ Work? Evidence from State-Level Data,” *Journal of Politics* 57 (1995): 796-811; J. Eric Oliver, “Effects of Eligibility Restrictions and Party Activity on Absentee Voting and Overall Turnout,” *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996): 498-513; Robert M. Stein, “Early Voting,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62 (1998): 57-69; Michael D. Martinez, and David Hill, “Did Motor Voter Work?” *American Politics Quarterly* 27 (1999): 296-315; Staci L. Rhine, “Registration Reform and Turnout Change in the American States,” *American Politics Quarterly* 23 (1995): 409-26; Staci L. Rhine, “An Analysis of the Impact of Registration Factors on Turnout in 1992,” *Political Behavior* 18 (1996): 171-85.

¹⁰ Levine and Lopez, “Youth Voter Turnout.”

¹¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

developed in one's youth.¹² In fact, the main thing holding turnout up is the fact that Americans born between roughly 1910 and 1940 vote at high rates and, as a group, constitute a large portion of the electorate. But they will not live forever. At current trajectories, as they become an increasingly smaller share of the population, voter turnout will decline.

<Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here>

One central focus of our report will be on generational differences in political activity, since we believe these are key to understanding why overall participation rates have stagnated in the United States. We are also concerned about the persistence of other inequalities: between whites and non-whites, the wealthy and the poor, and men and women. Such inequalities are pernicious because they lead to what have been called "participatory distortions" in which the voices being heard through political channels are unrepresentative of the public at large.¹³ Some of these inequalities have lessened since the 1960s. The participation gap between African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites is far less than it was. Though African-Americans still vote at somewhat lower levels and contact public officials less frequently than whites, they engage in some other forms of participation at higher rates than whites. There is a greater gap between whites and both Latinos and Asian-Americans – two groups whose numbers are growing. These differences can largely be explained by differences in education, income, English proficiency, and recent immigration status, but they are still important. Even though women now vote at the same rate men do, they engage in other forms of political activity at significantly lower rates and consistently demonstrate lower levels of political knowledge that cannot be explained by differences in education, income, and political interest.¹⁴ While these inequalities are important, it is not easy to say how they should be addressed.

Voting is the most visible indicator of political participation, but it is not the only one. In fact, the declines in other forms of engagement are even more precipitous than the drop-off in voting. From 1974-1994, the Roper Center conducted roughly ten surveys a year in which people were asked whether they had engaged in twelve key political activities, such as writing

¹² Eric Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood," *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002): 41-57.

¹³ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985): 178-182.

¹⁴ Those interested in the relationship between inequality and participation should also read the report of the APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy.

letters to the editor, participating in rallies and demonstrations, and volunteering in campaigns. Engagement in every single one of these activities fell over this twenty-year period, most by about half.¹⁵ The steepest declines were observed for those activities that are done in tandem with others, like belonging to groups and attending meetings. Not only are Americans pulling out of the political process, they are also pulling away from one another. As with voting, the most dramatic declines of all are found among the young.

Of particular relevance to a discussion of engagement in the electoral process is the dramatic decline in the percentage of Americans who get involved in political campaigning. Even the simple act of wearing a campaign button or displaying a sign has become less and less common. In the 1950s and 1960s, fifteen to twenty percent of Americans would display their political allegiance during a presidential campaign season. Today, that has dropped to roughly ten percent (see Figure 5).¹⁶ The young seem especially disconnected from political campaigns, as evidenced by the percentage of high school seniors who report that they envision themselves volunteering to work on a political campaign. In the mid-1970s, roughly one in five adolescents said that they could see themselves working on a campaign, but in the last few years that has dropped to only one in ten (see Figure 6).¹⁷

<Insert Figures 5 and 6 about here>

Trends in attentiveness to and knowledge of public affairs are consistent with the story of declining participation. The events of September 11 and their aftermath only temporarily interrupted a long-term decline in the percentages of Americans who regard politics as important and follow it closely. Again, this decline is particularly acute among the young. In the mid-1970s, more high school seniors said that they had “a lot” or “very great” interest in current events than had “none” or “very little” interest. As shown in Figure 7, when we plot trends in political interest among adolescents from 1976 to 2001, we see a startling change. By the mid-1990s, more young people expressed a lack of interest in current events than said they follow public affairs.¹⁸ Even during the presidential election campaign season, when we would expect attention to politics to be greatest, few Americans report paying much heed to this most

¹⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

¹⁶ National Election Studies, 1948-2000 Cumulative File.

¹⁷ Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

important political contest. In 1952, 37 percent of Americans said that they were “very much interested in following the political campaigns this year.” By the 2000 election, its historic closeness notwithstanding, the corresponding figure was only 26 percent.

<Insert Figure 7 about here>

No group is more aware of Americans’ declining interest in current events than the nation’s newspaper publishers. Newspapers have traditionally served as a principal source of civic information, but newspaper circulation has declined from about 35 percent of the population in the early 1950s to under 20 percent in the early 2000s.¹⁹ Even during presidential election campaigns, fewer and fewer Americans are turning to newspapers for information about the race. In 1952, 79 percent of Americans reported that they read a newspaper during the presidential campaign, compared to only 57 percent in 2000.

Once again, the decline is steepest among the young. Thirty years ago, newspaper reading among young adults was roughly where it is for their elders now: 44 percent of young people regularly read a paper. Today, according to a recent Pew Research Center Report, only 23 percent of those under thirty said they read a newspaper “yesterday.”²⁰ Nor does it seem to be the case that either television or “non-traditional” sources such as the Internet have come close to filling the resulting information gap.²¹ Despite a huge increase in median levels of formal education over the past fifty years, today’s young adults know no more about politics than did their parents and grandparents.²²

B. DIAGNOSIS

As mentioned above, Americans have a low rate of voter turnout when compared to citizens of other nations, owing in large part to long-standing features of the electoral system. They include the simple fact that Americans are asked to vote a lot – in staggered elections for multiple offices at different levels of government, not to mention referenda and initiatives in

¹⁹ Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics 2003-2004* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004), 174-75.

²⁰ Pew Center for the People and the Press, “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized,” <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=215> [accessed 26 July 2004].

²¹ Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, “The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait,” The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education (2002), www.civicyouth.org.

²² Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), Chapter 3.

many states. The sheer number of elections in which the American voter can participate deflates the number of voters who participate in any given election. Also dampening turnout is the fact that the United States makes voter registration relatively complex, by putting the onus for registration on the individual rather than the state.²³

While we do not dismiss the importance of international comparisons, our attention here is focused on addressing the *decline* in electoral engagement within the United States. It may be unrealistic to expect Americans to participate at the same levels as nations with totally different electoral systems and constitutional frameworks. But we know that Americans enjoy more years of schooling and higher levels of income than they once did, and that many hurdles to participation have been lowered. And yet participation is in many ways lower than it once was. Returning overall levels of electoral involvement among Americans to where it was a generation ago is the least we should strive to do. As an initial matter, therefore, we focus our attention on downward trends over the last generation and what might be done to reverse them.

Prescription, however, can only follow explanation. It is nearly inevitable that explanations of key trends will be more contested than are the trends themselves. For example, it is easy to speculate about the long-term impact of events such as Vietnam and Watergate on political participation but hard to be precise about their effect. Nonetheless, social scientific research has helped narrow the range of indeterminacy and identify the more plausible causal hypotheses. Such explanations must meet two criteria. First, they must be factors that, independent of other influences on the vote, are known to be related to electoral engagement. Second, they must be factors that have undergone change over the past generation.

By narrowing our attention to factors that meet both criteria, we have been able to eliminate some that might, at first blush, appear to be relevant. Thus, we do not devote much attention to a sense of political efficacy. While people who are politically involved have higher levels of political efficacy than those who do not, past research has suggested that efficacy itself is largely the product of other factors known to influence engagement, and thus has little independent impact on whether people get involved in political activity.²⁴ Similarly, Americans' trust in their government has declined dramatically over the previous thirty years, suggesting that it might be a large part of the explanation for the decline in engagement over the same period.

²³ G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (1986): 17-43.

²⁴ Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy*.

However, on its own, government trust turns out to have little direct impact on whether people get involved in political activity.²⁵ While pervasive distrust of government has other consequences, there is no simple, straightforward connection between it and a decline in participation. Given the state of research on the subject, we are also unable to offer any firm conclusions about an oft-mentioned damper on electoral engagement – negative campaign advertising. Laboratory experiments suggest that exposure to negative campaign advertising drives turnout down, while studies outside of the lab provide contradictory results. In the absence of a consensus on the question, we simply note that the sheer volume of political advertising compels further research on the subject.²⁶

In outlining the causal factors that we think are the most plausible explanations for the trends in electoral involvement, we have divided them into three categories:

Personal: Those that reflect the characteristics of individual voters

Structural: Those that reflect the characteristics of America's political system and institutions

Cultural: Those that reflect the characteristics of American society and culture

We acknowledge that there are not necessarily bright lines between these categories, as some of the factors we discuss straddle more than one. Nonetheless, this tripartite division helps us impose some structure on what otherwise risks being a deluge of facts and figures.

C. PERSONAL FACTORS

1. Political Knowledge

While political knowledge is important in its own right, as a dimension of engagement it is also linked to both the quantity and the quality of participatory activities. By quantity, we

²⁵ Jack Citrin, "Comment: The Political Relevance of Trust in Government," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 973-88; and Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy*.

²⁶ Stephen D. Ansolabehere, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino, "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 4 (1994): 829-38; Stephen D. Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*, (New York: Free Press, 1995); Larry M. Bartels, "Review of Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1996): 456-60; Steven Finkel and John Geer, "A Spot Check: Casting Doubt on the Demobilizing Effect of Attack Advertising," *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (1998): 573-95; Richard R. Lau, Lee Sigelman, Caroline Heldman, and Paul Babbitt, "The Effects of Negative Political Advertisements: A Meta-Analytic Assessment," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 851-76; Kim Fradkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, "Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship between Negativity and Perception," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 877-90; Martin P. Wattenberg and Craig Leonard Brians, "Negative Campaign Advertising: Demobilizer or Mobilizer?" *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 891-900; Stephen D. Ansolabehere, Shanto Iyengar, and Adam Simon, "Replicating Experiments Using Aggregate and Survey Data: The Case of Negative Advertising and Turnout," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 901-10.

mean simply that people with a higher level of political knowledge are more likely to engage in every type of political activity. The quality of that participation is enhanced because knowledge increases the consistency of views across issues and time, facilitates the acquisition and comprehension of new information, and enhances individuals' ability to see the connections between public policy and their own interests.²⁷ Moreover, better-informed voters are more likely to rely upon sophisticated criteria, such as a candidate's issue positions, and less upon simple cues, such as partisan identification, when making voting decisions.²⁸ In addition, politically knowledgeable voters are less likely to cast their ballots for incumbents than their less informed counterparts, suggesting that they rely on more than mere name recognition or comfort with the status quo in making their voting decisions.²⁹

Despite the dramatic rise in individuals' average education levels in the post-war period, Americans' political knowledge has not kept pace. It is difficult to make over-time comparisons in the political knowledge of Americans; reliable data, however, indicate that the average current college graduate knows only as much as the average high school senior did fifty years ago.³⁰ Possible explanations for this disparity between individuals' general level of education and their specific political knowledge include the decline in newspaper readership and in school-based civic education. As indicated above, the reach of traditional sources of political information (especially newspapers) has declined significantly during the past generation. During this same period, public high schools have retreated from their historic mission of civic education, substituting more professionally-oriented social science content and reducing by fully *two-thirds* the median number of civics and government courses taken in the high school years.³¹ For both of these reasons, political and civic knowledge may have stagnated.

²⁷ Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know*; Samuel L. Popkin and Michael A. Dimock, "Political Knowledge and Citizen Competence," in Stephen L. Elkin and Karol Edward Soltan, eds., *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Chris Chapman and Richard G. Niemi, "The Civic Development of 9th- Through 12th-Grade Students in the United States: 1996," NCES 1999-131 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999); Henry Milner, *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002).

²⁸ Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, *The Spectacle of U.S. Senate Elections* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²⁹ Larry M. Bartels, "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996): 194-230.

³⁰ Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know*, 196.

³¹ Research concerning trends in civic education and the efficacy of various civic education strategies is summarized in "*The Civic Mission of Schools*," Center for Information and Learning on Civic Learning and Engagement. See also Richard G. Niemi and Julia Smith, "Enrollments in High School Government Classes: Are We Short-changing

Some argue that the rise in education has not led to a rise in political knowledge because education serves primarily as a social sorting mechanism. It is one's level of education relative to others that determines social status, and thus one's level of political engagement³² (including one's political knowledge, which is one of the best indicators of engagement with the political process).³³ By this reasoning, an overall increase in education would not be expected to lead to overall rises in political participation or knowledge. While research continues on the utility of this "sorting model," it seems clear that upgrading the educational attainment of the American public is not likely by itself to "fix" current trends in political attentiveness and knowledge.³⁴

It is worth noting that political knowledge also affects the *equality* of individuals' civic engagement, in addition to the *quantity* and *quality* of their participation. Political knowledge is extremely unequally spread among the population, with poor, nonwhite, and immigrant people on average possessing far less political knowledge than their middle class, white, and native-born counterparts. As early as fourth grade, for example, African-American, Hispanic, and poor students perform worse on the civics test of the "Nation's Report Card" (the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP) than white, Asian, and middle-class students.³⁵ These gaps were also evident among ninth grade students in the U.S. on an international test of civic knowledge and skills.³⁶

Unsurprisingly, racial and income-related disparities in political knowledge among children mirror similar disparities among adults. In a comprehensive study of adults' civic and political knowledge, political scientists Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter conclusively demonstrate that "men are more informed than women; whites are more informed than blacks; those with higher incomes are more informed than those with lower incomes; and older citizens are more informed than younger ones." These disparities are not small: out of the 68 questions

Both Citizenship and Political Science Training?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 34 (2001): 281-87. On the changing content of courses, see Nathaniel Leland Schwartz, "Civic Engagement: The Demise of the American High School Civics Class," unpublished honors thesis, Harvard University, 2002.

³² Norman H. Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Berry, *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³³ John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁴ Wattenberg, *Where Have All the Voters Gone*.

³⁵ Patricia L. Donahue, Robert J. Finnegan, Anthony D. Lutkus, Nancy L. Allen, and Jay R. Campbell, "The Nation's Report Card: Fourth-Grade Reading 2000," National Center for Education Statistics, 2001. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2000/2001499.pdf>.

³⁶ Stéphane Baldi, Marianne Perie, Dan Skidmore, Elizabeth Greenberg, and Carole Hahn, "What Democracy Means to Ninth-Graders: U.S. Results From the International IEA Civic Education Study," *Education Statistics Quarterly* 3 (2001). Available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_3/3_2/q5-1.asp.

Delli Carpini and Keeter asked, “in no case was the percentage correct for blacks as high as for whites or for low-income citizens as high as that for upper-income ones.”³⁷ To the extent that political knowledge is correlated with civic and political participation, as we discussed above, these knowledge gaps presage worrisome inequalities in political participation as measured by age, class, race, ethnicity, and immigration status.

2. Partisanship

Elections are inherently partisan affairs. As a consequence, the people most likely to turn out to vote are partisans – people who identify with a political party. While the term “partisan” may have a negative connotation to a general audience, among political scientists it does not meet with such opprobrium. Voters who identify with a party are the most likely to vote and otherwise engage in the electoral process. Beginning in the 1970s, scholars spoke of declining partisanship in the United States. Rather than an electoral *realignment* – a periodic reshuffling of the coalitions supporting America’s major parties – some political scientists instead described the partisan environment in the United States as being in a period of *dealignment* – mass disaffection from the parties all together.³⁸ More recently, however, partisanship has taken on renewed importance in American elections. For example, Larry Bartels has shown that party identification is a more reliable predictor of someone’s presidential vote than at any time over the last fifty years.³⁹ In other words, people who identify themselves as Republicans are more likely to cast a ballot for a Republican today than in the 1950s, while Democratic identifiers are more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate. As the parties have become more ideologically cohesive over the last generation, voters have responded by pulling the lever more consistently for candidates of one party over another.

In and of itself, the fact that party identification has become a more reliable predictor of how someone votes is not necessarily a troubling development. In fact, many scholars of American politics have long lamented the ideological incoherence of the U.S. party system.

³⁷ Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know*, 157.

³⁸ Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties: 1952-1994* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

³⁹ Larry M. Bartels, “Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996,” *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2000): 35-50.

When the parties do not have sharply differentiated policy positions it is difficult for voters to hold elected leaders accountable for their policies, hindering responsible government.⁴⁰

This rise in partisanship, however, is a double-edged sword. One person's ideological cohesion is another's polarization – the former may be lauded, but the latter is lamented. While much of the rhetoric from political pundits about the divide between the “red and blue states” is overblown, it is nonetheless the case that ours is an era of sharp partisan differences and increasing political rancor, at least among the nation's political elites.⁴¹ The most worrisome development in the wake of partisanship's resurgence is that independents – those who do not identify themselves as either a Democrat or Republican – are less and less likely to vote and otherwise engage in the electoral process. Independent voters serve as a centripetal force, holding the parties from drifting toward the extremes. As independents exit the electoral process, we fear that the parties will not stop at offering clearly delineated political choices, but diverge so far from one another as to become increasingly unrepresentative of mainstream voters' preferences, driving overall levels of electoral engagement down even further.

3. Political Interest

One especially important indicator of electoral engagement that has dropped precipitously is Americans' interest in political campaigns. Campaigns are supposed to make noise, and the more noise the better, for political interest is without question the single most important factor influencing political participation, even when accounting for other demographic factors. For example, consider the comprehensive model that Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady have developed to describe the factors that lead people to become engaged in political activity. Among the many factors that they examine, political interest heads the list, topping even political knowledge and education.⁴² In an exhaustive model of turnout and campaign participation in the 2000 election, accounting for past political participation, political knowledge, party mobilization, and organizational involvement – all factors which have been the subject of much scholarly attention – Joanne Miller and Wendy Rahn come to similar

⁴⁰ Committee on Political Parties, “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,” supplement to the *American Political Science Review* 44 (1950): 1-99.

⁴¹ Philip A. Klinkner, “Red and Blue Scare: The Continuing Diversity of the American Electoral Landscape,” *The Forum* 2 (2004): 1-10; Morris P. Fiorina with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Longman Publishing, 2005).

⁴² Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 353.

conclusions.⁴³ Interest in the campaign is a powerful antecedent of turnout, second only to habit (i.e., previous turnout); for expressive political acts, such as attending a campaign rally or wearing a button, it is the most powerful.

Given that political interest, or “the degree to which politics arouse a citizen’s curiosity,”⁴⁴ is tremendously important as an explanation of political participation, it is perplexing that political scientists have not shown more interest, as it were, in political interest. Instead, they have preferred to concentrate on less proximate independent variables such as political knowledge⁴⁵ or political mobilization.⁴⁶ Political interest typically is seen as such a “close” or “obvious” precursor to political participation that analysts have not wasted time in conceptualizing or explaining it in its own right, other than to note that resources, such as education and income, play their usual roles as determinants.⁴⁷ We do know whether some component of adult political interest is a legacy of pre-adult experiences,⁴⁸ including the stimulation provided by frequent political discussion at home and participation in high school activities.⁴⁹ But the role of parental transmission of political interest is modest in comparison to other political orientations, such as partisanship.⁵⁰ Furthermore, these pre-adult experiences do not change rapidly enough to account for the difference between the 1992 presidential election, where 39 percent of Americans reported being very interested in the fall campaigns, and the subsequent election of 1996, where only one-quarter felt similarly engaged. To a large degree, then, levels of political interest hinge on the stimulation provided (or not) by the political environment.

4. Group-based Inequalities in Participation

⁴³ Joanne Miller and Wendy Rahn, “Identity-based Feelings, Beliefs, and Actions: How Being Influences Doing,” Paper presented at the 25th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, Berlin, July, 2002.

⁴⁴ Jan W. Van Deth, “Interest in Politics,” in M. Kent Jennings, et al., eds., *Continuities in Political Action: A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in three Western Democracies*, (New York: De Gruyter and Aldine 1990): 278.

⁴⁵ Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know*.

⁴⁶ Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy*.

⁴⁷ Important exceptions to this generalization include Ronald E. Inglehart, *Culture Shift* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and Jan W. Van Deth, “Interesting But Irrelevant: Social Capital and the Saliency of Politics in Western Europe,” *European Journal of Political Research* 37 (2000): 115-47. See also Miller and Rahn, “Identity-based Feelings, Beliefs, and Actions.”

⁴⁸ Robert C. Luskin, “Explaining Political Sophistication,” *Political Behavior* 12 (1990): 331-61.

⁴⁹ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

⁵⁰ Paul Allen Beck and M. Kent Jennings, “Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations,” *Journal of Politics* 53 (1991): 742-63.

The U.S. has long been characterized by unevenness in participation across different demographic groups.⁵¹ Members of some groups participate more, on average, than others. It is important that we stress, however, that these differences are not immutable. Most dramatically, African-Americans' electoral engagement used to lag far behind that of whites – understandably, given the racially discriminatory barriers to black enfranchisement in the Jim Crow South. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 worked swiftly to close the electoral participation gap between African-Americans and whites. The political participation of African-Americans is now fairly similar to that of whites: African-Americans report voting at moderately lower levels and are less likely to contact a public official or to be affiliated with a political organization; but they are more likely than whites to report doing campaign work and to participate in a protest.⁵²

America is experiencing a boom in immigration, particularly from Asia and Latin America, which has increased heterogeneity in many communities across the nation. Take California, where non-Latino whites now comprise less than half of the state's population. Changes in America's ethno-racial composition have implications for political engagement, as people who are Latino, Asian-American, and/or foreign-born participate in politics at much lower levels than whites born on American soil.⁵³ Yet it is not ethnicity per se that pulls these groups out of politics. For example, research has found that the relatively low rates of Latinos' engagement can be largely explained by other socio-economic characteristics, such as education, church attendance, and income. Even more important than these resources, however, is citizenship status.⁵⁴ Not being a citizen is obviously a barrier to voting, but is also affects variables that are themselves causes of participation, such as mobilization. Compared to citizens, non-citizens are less likely to be mobilized to contact a public official.⁵⁵

English proficiency emerges as another strong predictor of Latino participation, not only for voting,⁵⁶ but for non-electoral political activities and for school-based civic engagement as

⁵¹ Sidney Verba, Norman Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁵² Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 233.

⁵³ Jack Citrin and Benjamin Highton, "How Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration Shape the California Electorate," Public Policy Institute of California, 2002: 16.

⁵⁴ Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 358.

⁵⁵ Jan E. Leighley, *Strength in Numbers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ Wendy K. Tam Cho, "Naturalization, Socialization, Participation: Immigrants and (Non-)Voting," *Journal of Politics* 61 (1999): 1147. Her analysis reveals that the lack of English proficiency endures much longer in the Latino community than the Asian-American one. By the third generation, Asian-Americans appear to be almost completely proficient whereas one in five Latinos still is not (1149).

well.⁵⁷ While there is comparatively little research on Asian-Americans, several studies have found that a constellation of factors, including the lack of English proficiency, foreign-born status, and political socialization account for much of Asian-Americans' low participation.⁵⁸

As these immigrant groups become fully incorporated into American society – particularly as English proficiency and naturalization rates rise – we can expect their levels of political engagement to rise also. To that end, research suggests that the sponsorship of adult education classes by state and local governments increases English language proficiency and political socialization in the Asian community. Also, increasing targeted mobilization efforts, particularly among low resource Asian groups, may boost turnout.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that non-English speakers are more likely to vote when voting materials are provided in their own language. Under the Voting Rights Act, political jurisdictions are currently required to provide written and oral assistance to voters who belong to a language group that accounts for at least five percent of the voting population in a single jurisdiction and whose English literacy rate is below the national average. This provision expires in 2007 and Congress will consider its reauthorization. In the absence of any empirical research on the effects of non-English ballots, we tentatively recommend that Congress reauthorize the voting materials provision, while at the same time exhorting our colleagues to give this subject more attention.

5. Gender and Participation

The gender gap in political engagement has persisted over time. Although men and women vote at approximately the same rate, women are less likely than men to discuss politics, make campaign contributions, contact public officials, and affiliate with a political organization.⁶⁰ Research has found that these differences are explained in part by lower

⁵⁷ Louis DeSipio, "Immigrant Organizing, Civic Outcomes: Civic Engagement, Political Activity, National Attachment, and Identity in Latino Immigrant Communities," Center for the Study of Democracy (paper #0208), 2002.

⁵⁸ Citrin and Highton, "How Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration Shape the California Electorate"; Leighley and Vedlitz; Pei-te Lien, "Ethnicity and Political Participation: A Comparison between Asian and Mexican Americans," *Political Behavior* 16 (1999): 237-264.

⁵⁹ Citrin and Highton, "How Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration Shape the California Electorate," 78.

⁶⁰ Nancy Burns, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba, *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Sidney Verba, Nancy Burns, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Knowing and Caring about Politics: Gender and Political Engagement," *Journal of Politics* 59 (1997): 1051-72; Susan B. Hansen, "Talking About Politics: Gender and Contextual Effects on Political Proselytizing," *Journal of Politics* 59 (1997): 73-103; Kay Lehman Schlozman, Nancy Burns, Sidney Verba and

education levels among women, but they are also driven by the fact that women are less interested in and knowledgeable about politics and are less likely to think that they can influence government decisions.⁶¹ Several studies have found, however, that women are more likely to know female politicians than male ones, and may be more likely to try to persuade others how to vote when there is a woman on the ballot.⁶² In addition, one study found that women who live in states with at least one statewide female politician are more likely to be politically knowledgeable and to feel that they can influence government.⁶³ Similarly, adolescent girls are more politically engaged when viable female candidates run for major office.⁶⁴

D. STRUCTURAL FACTORS

1. Media Environment

The first structural factor we discuss is the news media, which is not a formal political institution in the sense of having been created or controlled directly by the government. It is nonetheless a hugely important part of the electoral process. A discussion of the news media appropriately follows directly from the one on political knowledge and interest, as there is a symbiotic relationship between individuals' knowledge of and interest in and the media's coverage of politics, particularly political campaigns. The nature of the political communication environment surrounding American political campaigns has been altered irrevocably by such technological advances as cable and satellite television and the Internet. The American viewing audience, once a captive to the three major television networks, is now free to avoid the evening news through channel surfing or logging on.

Jess Donahue, "Gender and Citizen Participation: Is There a Different Voice?" *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995): 267-293.

⁶¹ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 1052; and Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know*, 157. A recent study estimates that approximately 50 percent of the knowledge gap between men and women can be explained by the fact that men are more likely to guess when asked political knowledge survey questions, artificially inflating gender disparities in knowledge. See Jeffery J. Mondak and Mary R. Anderson, "Gender-Based Differences in Political Knowledge," *Journal of Politics* 66, no. 2 (2004): 492-512.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1064; and Hansen, "Talking About Politics." Hansen found this effect in 1992 but not in 1988, 1990, or 1994.

⁶³ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 1066. Verba and his colleagues found this effect using data from the Citizen Participation Study. They were not able to replicate these findings using NES data, but they did find that women who lived in a state where a female senator had won for the first time showed a significant gain in knowledge.

⁶⁴ David E. Campbell and Christina Wolbrecht, "See Jane Run: Women Politicians as Political Role Models for Adolescents," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 2004.

One consequence of these changes for political participation is that the audience for network news has shrunk considerably, declining from nearly forty percent of the potential viewing audience in 1980 to slightly more than one-quarter in the 2000-01 television season, prompting one former network news executive to declare that “network news is basically a corpse that hasn’t been pronounced [dead] yet.”⁶⁵ One response of the networks to this increased competition for viewers has been to scale back their election coverage and their coverage of other political events, such as presidential news conferences⁶⁶ and political party conventions.⁶⁷ For example, in 2000, the “big three” networks spent an average of only 268 minutes on the fall campaigns, down from a record high of nearly 500 minutes in 1992.⁶⁸ Larry Bartels and Wendy Rahn demonstrated that the extent of network coverage, all else equal, is strongly related to the average level of interest in the campaign reported by citizens – more coverage results in more engagement in the campaign, which in turn spurs turnout and other forms of engagement in the electoral process.⁶⁹

The change in the media environment has other consequences as well. As the audience for news has shrunk, its composition has changed. For example, Markus Prior shows that political moderates have been more likely to desert the networks than their more extreme cousins.⁷⁰ The audience that remains for the news, therefore, is more ideologically polarized than in the past.

The network news, like the daily newspaper, serves as a “general interest intermediary.” General interest intermediaries, according to Cass Sunstein, perform important integrative functions in large, modern, and increasingly heterogeneous democracies by providing a shared

⁶⁵ Jon Katz, quoted in Jane Mayer, “Bad News: What’s Behind the Recent Gaffes at ABC?” *The New Yorker* (August 14, 2000): 30-36.

⁶⁶ Matthew A Baum and Samuel Kernell, “Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television?” *American Political Science Review* 93 (2000): 99-114.

⁶⁷ Jim Rutenberg, “Network Anchors Hold Fast to Dwindling 15 Minutes,” *New York Times* (August 26, 2004). Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/26/politics/campaign/26anchors.html?ex=1091>.

⁶⁸ Stephen Hess, “Dwindling TV Coverage Fell to New Low,” (November 7, 2000). Available at <http://brookings.org/GS/Projects/HessReport/week9.htm#data> and <http://www.brookings.org/GS/Projects/HessReport/week10.htm>

⁶⁹ Larry M. Bartels and Wendy M. Rahn, “Political Attitudes in the Post-Network Era,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September, 2000. See also Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Lynn Vavreck, “The Reasoning Voter Meets the Strategic Candidate: Signals and Specificity in Campaign Advertising, 1998,” *American Politics Quarterly* 29 (2001):507-29.

⁷⁰ Markus Prior, “Avoiding Politics,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April, 2001.

focus of attention for millions of viewers and readers.⁷¹ The decline in newspaper reading was briefly discussed already; the magnitude of this decline is simply stunning. In 1960, the ratio of newspaper subscriptions to the number of American households was just over 1, indicating that the average American household received slightly more than one newspaper. By 2000, the ratio was down to .54.⁷² There is no sign that this long-term decline in newspaper reading is leveling off; indeed, it may even be accelerating. Data on newspaper readership collected by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, finds that in 1995 over half of those surveyed indicated that they had had “a chance to look at a newspaper yesterday.” The percentage declined steadily over the rest of the decade, falling more than ten points, to 39 percent, by 2002.

The impact of the tragic events of September 11th on the levels of political engagement provides a compelling example of how the mass media can unite Americans as Sunstein describes. The networks covered the tragedies for four days without breaks for commercials, and even entertainment-oriented cable TV networks, such as MTV, interrupted their usual programming to carry news feeds.⁷³ Tellingly, however, despite the extraordinary round-the-clock coverage of 9/11, it is not the largest attention-grabbing story in recent memory. Instead, that honor belongs to the Challenger disaster, where a record high 80 percent of the public reported following the story “very closely,” according to the Pew Research Center’s “News Interest Index” (74 percent of the American public followed the story of the terrorist attacks very closely). But 1986 was a different world, before cable and the Internet served to fragment the news audience.

With new communication technologies allowing individuals to create their own personalized versions of the news or avoid news all together, individualism, so dominant in American culture already, now has greater rein than ever to overwhelm a sense of common public culture. The “interested citizen” becomes just another market segment to be pursued, a niche left to specialty cable outlets or candidate web sites. We freely admit that there are no obvious policy solutions to these changes in the media environment beyond calls upon the media to enrich and expand their coverage of campaigns and political conventions. Nonetheless, any

⁷¹ Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); See also Elihu Katz, “And Deliver Us from Segmentation,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 546 (1996):22-33.

⁷² Media Trends Track, <http://www.tvb.org/MediaTrendsTrack/media/media.asp?c=3c>.

⁷³ Markus Prior, “Political Knowledge after September 11,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35 (2002):523-29.

efforts at re-engaging Americans with the electoral process must grapple with the challenges inherent in a fractured media market.

2. Political Campaigns

Ironically, perhaps, another reason that Americans express less and less interest in political campaigns is that campaigning has become pervasive. In the past, political contests were conducted in a limited period of time, in which voters' attention could be focused on the campaign. That is no longer the case, as campaigns have lengthened dramatically. Rather than a concentrated period of campaigning, which serves to heighten voters' interest, the long campaigns that characterize the American electoral environment produce what Thomas Patterson aptly calls the "politics of tedium."⁷⁴

Because of their two-year terms, members of the House of Representatives have always had to return to the campaign trail frequently. In recent years, however, they never really leave it, as they are essentially engaged in a permanent campaign.⁷⁵ At the presidential level, the process of winning a major party's nomination is truly a marathon, which in turn is just the precursor to the general election. Presidential candidates begin their public campaigns at least two years before the general election, in order to build support for the caucuses and primaries that they must navigate to win their party's nomination. Just as the media market's fragmentation has diminished the public's shared focus on political campaigns, so has the sheer length of the presidential campaign. Even news organizations genuinely committed to thoroughly covering political campaigns have a difficult time sustaining the public's interest over such a prolonged stretch of time.

In addition, the nominating process for the presidency cannot sustain voters' interest because the primary season has become heavily front-loaded: residents in early contested primary states turn out in much greater numbers, unsurprisingly, than in the states that hold primaries after the nomination is effectively decided. After "Super Tuesday" – which occurs in early March – the race may be over, but with the conventions still months away the voters experience what Patterson calls a "Silent Spring" in which interest declines and Americans

⁷⁴ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 99.

⁷⁵ Norman Ornstein and Thomas E. Mann, *The Permanent Campaign and Its Future* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2000); and Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign: Inside the World of Elite Political Operatives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980).

forget much of what they had learned about the candidates and their positions on issues.⁷⁶ Campaigns should be educational exercises – helping citizens to learn about candidates, their positions, and the relevant issues – but they are now structured so as to discourage citizen involvement and learning.

3. Political Competition

One of the least disputed facts about recent American politics is that both major political parties have used increasingly sophisticated information technology to protect incumbents during the decennial redistricting process. The result is a surge over the past two decades in the number of safe seats dominated by one party or the other. By 2002, the number of congressional races decided by four points or less had declined to only fifteen – less than four percent of total seats – and outright incumbent defeats had all but disappeared. California offers a perfect example of this process at work. After 2000, a major-party duopoly worked to eliminate marginal seats. In 2002, fifty incumbents (out of 53 congressional districts) ran for reelection. All fifty succeeded. Forty-eight received more than sixty percent of the vote in their districts; the lowest incumbent total was 58 percent. The same is true of state legislatures, where the percentage of uncontested seats has tended upward since the 1960s and 1970s, and the percentage of marginal seats has declined.⁷⁷

Studies of congressional races have found that the closeness of an electoral contest has far-reaching effects, altering the behavior of candidates, journalists and voters alike. Candidates not only mobilize voters more aggressively in competitive races, but are compelled to be more specific about their issue positions in campaign communications.⁷⁸ In addition, editors use pre-election polls to determine how many resources to devote to campaign coverage, and press reports are more likely to contain issue discussion in “intense” races.⁷⁹ Finally, voters in competitive congressional elections do a better job of recalling and recognizing candidates’

⁷⁶ Patterson, *Vanishing Voter*, 111-113.

⁷⁷ Ronald E. Weber, Harvey J. Tucker, and Paul Brace, “Vanishing Marginals in State Legislative Elections,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16 (1991): 29-47.

⁷⁸ Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, *The Spectacle of U.S. Senate Elections* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; Mark C. Westlye, *Senate Campaigns and Campaign Intensity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Doris A. Graber, *Media Power in Politics* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1990); Peter Clarke and Susan Evans, *Covering Campaigns: Journalism in Congressional Elections* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

names, and can articulate more likes and dislikes about the candidates, than their counterparts in safe districts and states.⁸⁰

The decline in contested marginal districts has another well-established effect which tends to depress turnout: namely, an increase in political partisanship and divisiveness. Safe seats empower the bases of the two major parties, increasing the chances that successful candidates will be either liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans. The result is bound to be an intensification of partisan conflict and a diminished capacity in legislatures to work effectively across party lines (the result of this process is especially evident in the U.S. House of Representatives).⁸¹ With the exception of intense partisans, most citizens react negatively to what they experience as incomprehensible and counterproductive bickering,⁸² and many respond by withdrawing from what they see as a system that does not represent their desire to “get things done.” Citizens who identify themselves as “moderates” and “independents” are less likely to participate than are strong ideological partisans, a trend that is especially evident among young adults.⁸³

We observe a similar process in presidential elections. While redistricting per se does not apply to presidential candidates, it is nonetheless the case that states deemed uncompetitive receive little to no attention from the presidential campaigns. For example, in the 2000 presidential election neither Al Gore nor George W. Bush purchased any advertising in seven states: Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Utah and Wyoming. At the same time, in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Washington, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Arkansas these candidates purchased enough advertising so that *every voter* would see an average of 350 ads!⁸⁴ The attention that a presidential candidate gives to a state has a profound effect on the information environment of its voters. For instance, in 2000, battleground state residents knew more about the candidates’ issue positions, were more likely to discuss their vote choice with

⁸⁰ Kahn and Kenney, *The Spectacle*; Paul Gronke, *The Electorate, the Campaign, and the Office: A Unified Approach to Senate and House Elections* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

⁸¹ David R. Jones, “Party Polarization and Legislative Gridlock,” *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (2001):125-141.

⁸² John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁸³ Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy*, chapter 5.

⁸⁴ Michael G. Hagen, Richard Johnston, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “Effects of the 2000 Presidential Campaign,” paper prepared for the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 25-28 (2002). More technically, the campaigns purchased 35,000 gross rating points. A gross rating point (GRP) is calculated by multiplying the percentage of a media market that is expected to see an ad by the number of times it is expected to see it. An advertiser who wants an entire media market to see an ad three times will purchase 300 GRP.

family, friends, and co-workers, and were less likely to believe that they have “no say” in who is elected president.⁸⁵

The difference between base and battleground information environments has not always been so extreme. Until the early 1990s, most presidential candidates purchased their ads on the national networks. Bill Clinton was the first one to bypass the networks and advertise locally in targeted areas.⁸⁶ This practice has now become the norm, exacerbating the information inequalities described above.

The absence of micro-level competition in so many political jurisdictions is paradoxical, given that at the macro-level the nation as a whole is evenly divided politically (witness the 2000 presidential election). Lack of a fighting chance in “safe” districts may discourage those in the minority and make the election seem a *fait accompli* for those in the majority. At the aggregate level, the sharpness of the political divide likely contributes to political brinksmanship among our elected officials, which intensifies partisanship among political elites. Such intense partisanship has multiple negative consequences, one of which is that it drives away voters who themselves are not strongly partisan.

4. Political Mobilization

Considerable evidence has accumulated demonstrating the great impact mobilization has on engaging people in the political process – whether turning out at the polls, or more intensive activities like attending political meetings or volunteering for a campaign.⁸⁷ As Sidney Verba and his colleagues put it, one reason people do not get involved in politics is simply that nobody asks them to. In light of what we know about the significance of political mobilization, a likely culprit for the low and declining levels of electoral engagement is the well-established deterioration of what might be called mobilizing institutions. Three instances are of particular importance. First, the kinds of multi-tiered national voluntary organizations that dominated American civic life until the 1960s (such as parent-teacher associations, fraternal groups, and

⁸⁵ Keena Lipsitz, “The Significance of Rich Information Environments: Voter Knowledge in Battleground States During the 2000 Presidential Campaign,” paper prepared for the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 15-18 2004.

⁸⁶ L. Patrick Devlin, “Contrasts in Presidential Campaign Commercials of 2000,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 44 (2001): 2338-2369.

⁸⁷ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*; Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy*; Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote! How to Increase Voter Turnout* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2004).

professional organizations) have lost members, status, and élan.⁸⁸ Second, membership in labor unions as a share of the workforce has declined from its peak in the 1950s by almost two-thirds.⁸⁹ Finally, the post-1968 transformation of political parties has empowered pollsters, consultants, and the media (as well as those who have the money to pay for them) at the expense of grassroots activities and face-to-face politics. Thus, while the volume of party mobilization efforts has not necessarily been declining (and by some accounts has actually increased in recent years), the nature of that contact has changed.⁹⁰ The parties generally engage in mobilization of the faithful rather than persuasion of the agnostic, which means they target their own supporters for get-out-the-vote drives. And among those supporters, they seek out those who are already the most likely to vote.

Among the groups in the population least likely to be contacted, therefore, are young people, since they are often politically unsettled and have had fewer opportunities to establish themselves as regular voters; poor people, who have historically voted at low rates and have few tools for interest-based mobilization; and immigrants, since they may not be eligible to vote because of citizenship status. This decline in mobilizing institutions is especially consequential for these groups of individuals, who are less well endowed with basic political skills and resources and may therefore encounter more obstacles (material and psychological) on the road to political participation. During the past three decades, for instance, younger voters and those with lower-socioeconomic status have been especially likely to drop out of official politics, or not to enter in the first place. Not entering is significant, in turn, because of mounting evidence that political participation is a “habitual” activity: early acts spill over into subsequent acts, forming enduring patterns of behavior.⁹¹ Hence, the quantity and equality of political participation is harmed over the long-term as young and poor potential voters are neither mobilized at particular points in time nor habituated to participate over the course of their lives.

5. Rising Levels of Inequality

⁸⁸ Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

⁸⁹ Stanley and Niemi, *Vital Statistics*.

⁹⁰ Kenneth M. Goldstein and Travis N. Ridout, “The Politics of Participation: Mobilization and Turnout over Time,” *Political Behavior* 24 (2002): 3-29.

⁹¹ Miller and Shanks, *New American Voter*; Donald P. Green and Roni Shachar, “Habit Formation and Political Behavior: Evidence of Consuetude in Voter Turnout,” *British Journal of Political Science* 30 (2000): 561-73; and Plutzer, “Becoming a Habitual Voter.”

One clear conclusion of political science research is that poor people participate less than the wealthy across the entire spectrum of political activities. For example, the APSA Task Force on Inequality reports that nearly ninety percent of people with family incomes above \$75,000 claim to have voted in presidential elections, compared to only half of individuals with family incomes under \$15,000.⁹² Statistics like these have led many political scientists over the past forty years to worry about the effects of widespread class-based participatory inequalities.

It is suggestive that the recent decades of declining political interest and participation have roughly coincided with a period of rising economic inequality. The links between inequality and participation are a nascent, but burgeoning, field of research, and much has yet to be learned. At this point, about all we can conclude is that the relationships between inequality and various forms of political participation are complex. Economist Richard Freeman, for example, concludes that rising income inequality is partially responsible for the decline in turnout over the previous generation.⁹³ On the other hand, Henry Brady demonstrates that rising income inequality over time does not appear to be responsible for the drop in other forms of political participation. In fact, his evidence suggests that, “participatory inequality *decreased* for at least some forms of political participation as income inequality *increased*” (emphasis in original).⁹⁴ Brady does find evidence, though, that income inequality across states is a factor explaining why some states have higher levels of participation than others.

Although there is no compelling evidence that political participation has become more unequal during the past three decades, or that rising economic inequality during this period has affected overall equality of participation,⁹⁵ it is difficult to be satisfied with a political system in which participation tracks inequalities of income and education as closely as ours does.⁹⁶ There is evidence that lower-income and less-educated citizens are especially likely to respond to more personal and face-to-face mobilization techniques.⁹⁷ All other things being equal, the recommendations we offer to rectify the current imbalance between media-centered politics and

⁹² Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, "Inequalities of Political Voice," American Political Science Association, 2004. Available at <http://www.apsanet.org/Inequality/voicememo.pdf>

⁹³ Freeman, "What, Me Vote?"

⁹⁴ Henry E. Brady, "An Analytical Perspective on Participatory Inequality and Income Inequality," paper for the Russell Sage Foundation Project on the Social Dimensions of Inequality, 2003: 2.

⁹⁵ Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, "Inequalities of Political Voice."

⁹⁶ Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality" American Political Science Association, 2004. Available at <http://www.apsanet.org/Inequality/taskforcereport.pdf>

⁹⁷ Gerber and Green, *Get Out the Vote*.

the politics of mobilization should enhance both the quantity and equality of political participation.

6. Institutional Structures and Obstacles to Enfranchisement

One explanation that cannot be invoked to explain the decline in electoral engagement over the last forty years is the difficulty in registering to vote. While registration in the United States remains more difficult than in most other democracies, it has become increasingly simplified. After the passage of the “Motor Voter” law, registering to vote can be done at the same time one renews a driver’s license or applies for state assistance in all but a few states. In the exceptions registration is arguably even easier, as it can be done on the same day as the election.⁹⁸ Numerous states have also simplified the process of voting absentee, while Oregon conducts its elections entirely by mail.

One group, however, that continues to face hurdles to voter registration are Americans who have been convicted of a felony. Some states permanently bar ex-felons from the polls, even once they have paid their debt to society.⁹⁹ Because they constitute a relatively small share of the overall population, the disenfranchisement of ex-felons cannot explain much of the aggregate decline in electoral engagement. Nonetheless, high incarceration rates among some subgroups in the population, most notably young African-American males, have created communities in the United States with heavy concentrations of disenfranchised voters.

E. CULTURAL FACTORS

1. Social Capital

Among the many factors known to have an influence on civic engagement is the nation’s level of social capital, an analog to both physical and human capital. In the words of Robert Putnam, “[S]ocial capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the

⁹⁸ States can avoid Motor Voter’s provisions by instead adopting election-day voter registration. States that have election-day registration include Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Maine, however, is not exempt from Motor Voter because some local officials require registration on election-day to be done at a location other than the polling place. Minnesota has a state level Motor Voter program but did not implement the federal version.

⁹⁹ Laws regarding the voting rights of ex-felons are in flux. As of June 2004, seven states have the most restrictive laws, which disenfranchise felons: Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, and Virginia. Seven more states have laws that disenfranchise some ex-felons: Arizona, Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, Tennessee, Washington, and Wyoming.

norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”¹⁰⁰ While the social capital literature is vast and inter-disciplinary, among political scientists research on social capital has focused on two key indicators: trust and participation in the voluntary sector. Over the past four decades, standard measures of both interpersonal and political trust have registered sharp declines, although the relationship between each and political participation is a matter of ongoing research. As noted above, the lack of a straightforward, linear correlation between trust in government and political participation is well established, but they do seem to be related to one another under some conditions. For example, a distrust of government in combination with political efficacy appears to boost voter turnout.¹⁰¹ Regarding the relationship between interpersonal trust and participation, the political science community has not yet reached a consensus. Some scholars have found evidence that various forms of social trust are related to participation, particularly local participation,¹⁰² but other researchers question the relationship between the two.¹⁰³ Interestingly, voter turnout appears to be driven less by an individual’s own level of trust, and more by whether one is surrounded by others who have a high degree of interpersonal trust.¹⁰⁴

Trends in associational life are no less contested, but we may conclude (tentatively) that overall levels have declined somewhat and (less tentatively) that the mix and characteristic structures of associational life have changed significantly. The work of both Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol¹⁰⁵ does suggest that the shift away from associational structures integrating grassroots activity with state and national agendas, and towards Washington-focused organizations manned by lobbyists and experts, may well diminish opportunities to acquire key political skills and to participate in public life. We discuss the professionalization of nonprofit associations, and their impact on civic engagement, in Chapter IV of our report.

Religious organizations in particular can play a considerable role in facilitating civic and political engagement. This is not to say, however, that most places of worship in America are

¹⁰⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Arthur H. Miller, Edie Goldenberg, Lutz Erbring, “Type-Set Politics: The Impact of Newspapers on Public Confidence,” *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 67-84.

¹⁰² Nancy Burns, Donald R. Kinder, and Wendy Rahn, “Social Trust and Democratic Politics,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 2003.

¹⁰³ Eric M. Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Eric M. Uslaner, “Civic Engagement in America: Why People Participate in Political and Social Life,” Civic Engagement Working Paper No. 2, The Democracy Collaborative/Knight Foundation Civic Engagement Project, 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone* and Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*.

heavily involved in political mobilization. While some clergy explicitly mobilize their parishioners into political action (constrained by legal limits on such activity by tax-exempt organizations), most do not engage in direct mobilization. Instead, faith-based institutions generally operate in other ways to enhance an individual's likelihood of engaging in political activity. For one, they are important venues for the acquisition of politically relevant skills. Also, people who attend religious services are usually embedded in a social network of like-minded parishioners; such social networks facilitate political mobilization by other parishioners.¹⁰⁶

Research on the civic life of young people adds a layer of complexity to the analysis. Many observers have noted that the recent rise in voluntarism among young people has been accompanied by a decline in their political activity, suggesting that voluntary sector activities serve not as a bridge but rather as an alternative to political engagement. It is true that even more than other age cohorts, young adults tend to regard public institutions as remote and unresponsive, and as unreliable mechanisms for transforming individual efforts into desired social effects. However, it turns out that people, including youth, who volunteer are also more likely to engage in political activity, and that volunteers are less, not more, likely to be alienated from public institutions.¹⁰⁷ Far from being alternatives to one another, voluntarism and political participation appear to be complements (we have more to say about this in Chapter IV).

2. Public Culture

Judged against other societies, the United States has long had an unusually individualistic public culture. Through most of our history, however, that individualism has been counterbalanced by forces such as strong neighborhood and local ties and by moral and religious doctrines that emphasized duties and obligations to others. During the past generation, though, these forces have weakened, and a form of individualism centered on unfettered choice has become a dominant cultural norm. Not surprisingly, therefore, young adults are more likely than their parents (and especially their grandparents) to see civic life as a matter of choice rather than responsibility. According to data collected by Scott Keeter and his colleagues, young people

¹⁰⁶ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

¹⁰⁷ Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins, 2004.; Krista Jenkins, Molly W. Andolina, Scott Keeter, and Cliff Zukin, "Is Civic Behavior Political? Exploring the Multidimensional Nature of Political Participation," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 3-6, 2003.

from fifteen to twenty-five years of age are the least likely to see citizenship as accompanied by obligations to the wider community.¹⁰⁸

Although largely neglected in political science research, a sense of civic obligation, or duty, is one of the primary reasons that people participate in politics. Indeed, the importance of civic duty as a factor enhancing political participation is underscored when we try to exclude it from any explanation of why people participate. The infinitesimal chance that any individual voter could cast a deciding vote means that a cost-benefit analysis of voter turnout should always result in greater costs than benefits – and thus no one should ever bother to vote. The same logic applies to other forms of political activity as well. Yet people do vote and participate in other ways. A primary reason for their doing so is simply that they feel it is their duty. In their massive study of why people become involved in civic life, Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady found that a sense of obligation is the most commonly cited reason that political participants give for their engagement.¹⁰⁹ All other things being equal, as the percentage of Americans who regard voting and other public acts as a civic obligation declines, so will participation.

F. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is possible, of course, to view the discussion so far as a collection of facts and conjectures lacking any particular normative or practical force. While we are obviously concerned with the current level and distribution of electoral engagement, some may argue that it doesn't much matter, within a broad range of variation, what overall percentage of the citizenry chooses to participate actively in a modern representative democracy. It is possible, however, to agree that engagement is too low without necessarily agreeing on how high it ought to be, or the costs that should be incurred to get there. We do not wish to short-circuit legitimate debate or settle complex issues by fiat. Nonetheless, as we have said, we believe that democratic politics in the United States would become healthier with increases in the *quantity*, *quality*, and *equality* of political participation.

¹⁰⁸ Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins, 2004.

¹⁰⁹ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, Chapter 4. See also Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Participation's Not a Paradox: The View from American Activists," *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (1995): 1-36.

In this report, we seek to provide an account of what political science suggests about linkages between institutional and policy changes and shifts in political behavior. From that standpoint, this report can be read as a set of hypothetical imperatives: *If* we want to increase and enhance political participation, the following proposals appear likely to promote that goal. To be sure, diagnoses outrun prescription, and so we do not feel that we can offer empirically-grounded proposals to address every factor that depresses civic engagement. Not surprisingly, the bulk of our recommendations consist of changes to the structural elements of the electoral process, as these are perhaps the easiest to reform.

A final caveat: it may well be that certain basic structures of politics in the United States tilt against high rates of political participation. For example, our complex federal system both multiplies the number of elections in which citizens are asked to participate and increases the diversity and complexity of voting rules among jurisdictions.¹¹⁰ A plausible case can be made that, all other things equal, these features of our system tend to depress turnout. Similarly, as discussed below, it is at least likely that two-party systems with first-past-the-post winners are less likely to mobilize marginalized citizens than are multi-party systems with some form of proportional representation.¹¹¹ Our recommendations do not fundamentally alter our constitutional structure, but *reforming* aspects of existing institutions to encourage participation is both possible and desirable.

Having made these disclaimers, let us outline the primary recommendations that gain support from recent work in political science. Our prescriptions follow the same pattern as our diagnoses, and are thus divided into personal, structural, and cultural factors affecting involvement in the electoral process.

1. Personal Factors

Information. The provision of information to prospective voters can significantly affect turnout.¹¹² For example, mailing polling place information to registered voters prior to election day increases overall turnout by roughly three percentage points, while mailing sample ballots

¹¹⁰ Richard G. Niemi and Paul Herrnsen, "Beyond the Butterfly: The Complexity of U.S. Ballots," *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (2003): 317-26; Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

¹¹¹ Mark N. Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹¹² Raymond E. Wolfinger, Benjamin Highton, and Megan Mullin, "How Post-Registration Laws affect the Turnout of the Registered," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, forthcoming.

yields an increase of two points. The impact is greatest for the least educated voters with the fewest alternative sources of information. Among registered voters with less than a high school education, advance polling place information yielded a seven point gain; the corresponding figure for sample ballots was about six points. Similar but not identical findings obtain for young registered voters ages eighteen to twenty-four. Mailing sample ballots to this group produces a very large gain in voting: almost fourteen percentage points.¹¹³

Although this report focuses on electoral rather than educational institutions, it is important to note recent research on high schools as sources of civic information.¹¹⁴ A study now in progress highlights the potential of school-based sources of information. A survey conducted in 1999 by the National Association of Secretaries of State found that many young people were staying away from the polls out of embarrassment: out of fear that they would not know what to do if they showed up.¹¹⁵ In response, a random assignment experiment has tested the effects of providing school-based instruction in the mechanics of voting to high school seniors. Preliminary results suggest noteworthy results, with gains of over twenty points in voting. Other research suggests that student governments can serve to trigger political engagement among young people. Students in schools where they report having a meaningful voice in at least some aspects of school governance also have higher levels of both political knowledge and engagement.¹¹⁶

2. Structural Factors

Costs of participation. Over the past two decades, states have put in place numerous reforms to lower the costs of voting with measurable, albeit modest, results. A simple reform that has been shown to boost turnout, if only a little, is extending the voting day earlier and later than normal working hours: total hours available for voting is directly linked to turnout. Importantly, younger voters in particular respond strongly to extended voting hours. An even more significant change would be to declare election-day a holiday, or move elections to the

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Richard G. Niemi and Jane Junn, *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹¹⁵ *American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government and Voting* (Lexington, KY: National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999): 36-37.

¹¹⁶ Judith Torney-Purta, Rainer Lehmann, Hans Oswald, and Wolfram Schulz, *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen* (Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2001).

weekend. In the words of Clyde Wilcox, “Estimates vary of the likely impact of holding elections on a holiday or weekend, but all agree that the impact would be great.”¹¹⁷ Anecdotally, Puerto Rico designates election day as a holiday and has very high rates of voter turnout.

Other institutional changes to decrease the costs of participation also have a significant impact on younger individuals. A recent analysis shows that election day registration boosts youth voting in presidential elections by an estimated fourteen percentage points, and by an estimated four percentage points in midterm congressional elections, while mail-in balloting also substantially increased youth turnout during presidential elections.¹¹⁸ (Other options – unrestricted absentee voting, in-person early voting, and motor vehicle registration, among others – have had either ambiguous effects or no positive effects whatever.)

Restoring the Right to Vote. Those who commit felonies are denied the right to vote in nearly every state, and there is considerable agreement that when in prison, felons should not be allowed to vote. Opinions vary on whether the right to vote should be restored when felons are on parole or probation, though a majority feels that they should be given back the franchise under both of these intermediate circumstances. Once these periods are over, the public strongly supports the restoration of voting rights, and most states in fact restore them.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, some states refuse to permit ex-felons to vote.¹²⁰ Restoration of this basic right once all of one’s time has been served would appear to be an important signal to the individual that he or she once

¹¹⁷ Clyde Wilcox, “Political Structures and Political Participation,” Civic Engagement Working Paper No. 6, The Democracy Collaborative/Knight Foundation Civic Engagement Project, 2003: 12.

¹¹⁸ Mary Fitzgerald, “Easier Voting Methods Boost Youth Turnout,” Center for Information and Learning on Civic Learning and Engagement Working Paper, 2003 [accessed 21 February 2004]. Available at <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WP01%20Fitzgerald%20no%20cover.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ Brian Pinaire and Milton Heumann, “Barred from the Vote: Public Attitudes toward the Disenfranchisement of Felons,” Paper presented at the National Symposium on Felon Disenfranchisement, September 30, 2002; Jeff Manza, Clem Brooks, and Christopher Uggen, “‘Civil Death’ or Civil Liberties: Public Attitudes towards Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States,” unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, Northwestern University, 2003.

¹²⁰ Justification of ex-felon disenfranchisement seems to rest on several arguments: (a) completing one’s sentence, by itself, is not sufficient. Those who have committed felonies should continue to be punished for their crimes unless they can further prove that they have rehabilitated; (b) permitting ex-felons to vote would endanger the public, perhaps allowing groups of them to vote against sheriffs and others involved in law enforcement; and (c) when raised as a matter for possible federal action, it is also argued that ex-felon enfranchisement is a matter of states’ rights. All of these arguments appeared in the Senate debate on the issue in February 2002 (*Congressional Record*, pp. S798-809). The argument about groups voting against law enforcement officials was actually made in reference to “jailhouse blocs” (S802), but it is implicit in arguments about ex-felons.

again will be allowed, and indeed, expected, to participate in the most important tasks that citizens perform.¹²¹

We readily admit that this change carries with it partisan implications. Given that nearly half of convicted felons are African-American and that most are not well off economically, one would suppose that they will tend toward the Democratic Party, and evidence supports this supposition.¹²² Obviously this is not a good reason to deny restoration of the right to vote. Other groups also have decidedly partisan tilts. Cuban Americans lean heavily Republican; African-Americans tend toward the Democrats; in recent years, women have been more supportive of Democrats, men of Republicans. It is perfectly acceptable for a political party to urge its own supporters to vote while not seeking to mobilize groups likely to oppose it. But this is very different from using institutional barriers to prevent participation by certain categories of adults. Presumably no one presently thinks it acceptable to deny the right to vote to Cuban Americans, to women, and so on, and it is unconstitutional to bar individuals from voting based on race or color or by imposing a financial requirement in the form of a poll tax. No state should find it acceptable to bar voting by felons who have served their complete sentence.

Congressional districts. No aspect of our political system evokes more partisan energy than does defining electoral districts, and the idea of “taking politics out of redistricting” seems almost laughable. Nonetheless, we suggest that it is possible to shift the locus of redistricting power to reduce partisan outcomes. For example, after the 2000 Census, the state of Iowa gave a non-partisan commission principal responsibility for establishing new political boundaries. The result: Iowa (with only five congressional districts) now has more districts with competitive races than does California (which has 53 districts). Promoting competitive districts is likely to increase participation in two ways – by increasing the importance of small numbers of votes and by diminishing the kinds of extreme partisanship that many Americans find distasteful. What should *not* happen, from the point of view of increasing competition, is redistricting multiple times in a single decade in back-and-forth gerrymanders, as was attempted in Colorado (but ruled by the state supreme court to violate the state constitution) and was done in Texas (and was

¹²¹ A study of some 60 countries around the world found only two countries outside the United States (Belgium and the Philippines) with any restrictions on voting by ex-felons. Belgium is the only one that imposes a life-time ban, and that is restricted to felons who are imprisoned for five years or more. Louis Massicotte, André Blais, and Antoine Yoshinaka, *Establishing the Rules of the Game: Election Laws in Democracies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 32-33.

¹²² Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, “Democratic Contraction? The Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States,” *American Sociological Review* 67 (2002): 777-803.

upheld by a three-judge federal panel in which the U.S. Supreme Court refused to intervene).¹²³ It is not that we believe that ten years is necessarily the ideal period to wait before redistricting, but rather that redrawing district lines too frequently undoubtedly fosters cynicism among voters.

Greater competition might ensue if the U.S. Supreme Court made it easier to identify political gerrymandering. In *Davis v. Bandemer* (1986), the Court ruled that political gerrymandering was “justiciable,” that is, subject to a ruling by the court, but the standards enunciated in that case have made it virtually impossible for individuals or parties to successfully challenge a districting plan on the basis of partisan fairness.¹²⁴ The Court recently revisited political gerrymandering in *Veith v. Jubelirer*, but upheld the Pennsylvania redistricting plan in question because the five-justice majority concluded that “no judicially manageable standards for adjudicating political gerrymandering claims [had] emerged.” Five of the justices indicated that they believe such standards might exist,¹²⁵ but it is clear that the Court will not hear another case of this nature until they believe such standards have been found. Until then, the search for an adequate definition of excessive political gerrymandering must continue among academics and practitioners.

We applaud the widespread concern with the partisan and racial impact of gerrymandering. However, the public, and especially judges, should also recognize that deliberately crafting noncompetitive congressional districts may undermine voting and other vital participatory activities.

Mobilization. Starting in the early 1970s, political parties shifted away from grassroots activities towards a top-down politics dominated by pollsters and the media. Lately parties have taken some tentative steps to begin redressing the balance. Recent research suggests that a more systematic shift towards face-to-face contacts will increase participation, particularly for groups otherwise less likely to get involved. More specifically, Donald Green and Alan Gerber have spearheaded an ambitious research enterprise, involving scores of randomized experiments – the most precise method of determining causal relationships – in order to determine which

¹²³ Contrary to media coverage implying otherwise, the Texas legislature did not redistrict twice following the 2000 census. The legislature did not pass a plan following the Census, leaving the task to the federal district court; the court, arguably, left intact a previous Democratic gerrymander. Yet the fact remains that there were two redistricting plans implemented after the 2000 Census.

¹²⁴ *Davis v. Bandemer*. 478 U.S. 109 (1986).

¹²⁵ Indeed, four of the dissenting Justices offered their own definitions of excessive political gerrymandering.

mobilization methods have the greatest effect on voter turnout.¹²⁶ They have found that by far the most effective form of mobilization is old-fashioned shoe leather politicking, namely doorstep conversations. Close behind are personalized phone calls (NOT automated calls that simply play a recording). Distributing leaflets and direct mail also have measurable effects, but they pale in comparison to more personalized methods of communication. Importantly, e-mail appeals have no effect whatsoever.¹²⁷

Evidence also suggests that mobilization, competition, and cost-reduction can interact to increase turnout. Candidates and parties in states with same-day registration are more likely to reach out to younger voters, who are (as we have seen) especially influenced by this opportunity. And the competitiveness of individual races influences investments in mobilization by parties and candidates. For example, the 2002 Senate race in South Dakota, which was widely (and correctly) predicted to be a squeaker, stimulated a frenzy of outreach to individuals and groups, including long-neglected Native Americans living on reservations.¹²⁸

Electoral systems. Cross-national research suggests that multi-party systems employing some form of proportional representation tend to have higher rates of participation than do two-party, first-past-the-post systems.¹²⁹ We neither anticipate nor recommend shifting U.S. electoral rules in this direction. Nonetheless, it is worth inquiring whether it would be possible to incorporate some of the pro-participatory features of a proportional representation system into the basic structure of U.S. politics. For example, demographic groups that find themselves in permanent minority status in single-member districts may gain new electoral opportunities (and thus incentives to participate) in multimember districts. Indeed, evidence from multiple articles suggests strongly that incumbents are less advantaged in multimember state legislative districts.¹³⁰ This incentive would very likely be enhanced if voters were allowed to cast multiple ballots for a single candidate. Similarly, cumulative voting at the municipal level – which is

¹²⁶ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment,” *American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 653-63.

¹²⁷ Green and Gerber, *Get Out the Vote*.

¹²⁸ T.R. Reid, “New Indian Voters Turned Race in S.D.; Turnout Key to Democrat Johnson,” *Washington Post*, (November 8, 2002): 10.

¹²⁹ Franklin, *Voter Turnout*.

¹³⁰ William D. Berry, Michael B. Berkman, and Stuart Schneiderman, “Legislative Professionalism and Incumbent Reelection: The Development of Institutional Boundaries,” *American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 859-74; John M. Carey, Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell, “Incumbency and the Probability of Reelection in State Legislative Election,” *Journal of Politics* 62 (2000): 671-700; Gary W. Cox and Scott Morgenstern, “The Incumbency Advantage in Multimember Districts: Evidence from the States,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 20 (1995): 329-49.

essentially a form of partial proportional representation – appears to boost turnout by about five percentage points.¹³¹

One change that would encourage more geographically dispersed national campaigning for the presidency is for states to give two Electoral College votes to the statewide winner and one vote to the winner of each congressional district (as is presently the case in Maine and Nebraska). Under such a system, candidates would be less likely to refrain from campaigning in selected states on the grounds that the majority of the statewide popular vote is highly predictable from polling information and therefore the disposition of its entire bloc of votes in the Electoral College is known. Based on the history of the past fifty years, such a system would likely also result in closer votes in the Electoral College. By carrying the campaign to more places and increasing the overall level of competition, this reform would probably stimulate greater turnout across the country, although we admit that this conclusion is based more on inference than empirical analysis.¹³²

3. Cultural Factors

Civic duty. While decreasing the costs of voting has lifted turnout a little, the fact that previous reforms in this regard (like the “Motor Voter” law of 1993) have had a muted impact suggests that costs are not all that stand in the way of more people voting. Another likely reason is a diminished sense of civic duty, which, as noted earlier, has a major impact on political participation. Compared to the costs of voting, however, there has been far less research into what fosters civic duty. We do know that as an internalized moral norm, civic duty is hard to shape through specific institutional devices, at least in the short term. Nonetheless, it is worth thinking about ways that the norm of civic duty can be enhanced.

Civic duty can also be understood as a legal obligation, which presents one possibility: making voting mandatory. Making jury duty a legal requirement induces many citizens who would not volunteer for it to show up on the appointed day, and there is no evidence that jury “draftees” are on average less competent to perform their duties than are volunteers. It would be perfectly possible for individual states to experiment with mandatory voting systems. There is precedent for this in countries with political cultures reasonably close to our own. For example,

¹³¹ Wilcox, “Political Structures and Political Participation,” 13.

¹³² See Stephen J. Wayne, *Is This Any Way to Run a Democratic Election?*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 58.

Australian states that instituted compulsory voting in the 1990s saw an overall 23 percent increase in voting.¹³³

However, it remains to be seen whether these gains have been purchased at an acceptable cost, measured along other relevant civic dimensions. While it is true that mandatory voting would increase turnout,¹³⁴ the psychological literature on “insufficient justification” suggests that giving people an external reason for their behavior (i.e., I voted because I have to) decreases their intrinsic motivation for the task. Similarly, cross-national research suggests that higher rates of voter turnout are negatively correlated with other forms of civic activity,¹³⁵ and that in nations where the costs of civic membership are low (e.g., Scandinavia), people are actually less likely to spend time actively participating.¹³⁶ In sum, there is evidence that there are civic costs to making participation mandatory, or even easier. Any steps taken in this direction, therefore, should be accompanied by a careful consideration of the potential consequences coupled with rigorous research regarding its effects.

Short of making voting mandatory, there are other avenues by which a sense of civic duty can be thickened. Schools are one, the mass media another. One useful model would seem to be campaigns to discourage smoking and drinking, which have successfully fostered social norms discouraging such activities.¹³⁷ Perhaps similar efforts can be made to encourage political participation, especially among young people. One place to begin would be to encourage the recognition of a young person’s “first vote” as a significant rite of passage, much like getting a driver’s license. Schools can play a part in such an effort, as can parents. As mentioned, above, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that because voting is habitual, the earlier people start voting, the more likely they are to continue voting throughout their lives.

Families. While our proposals for reform are mostly targeted toward public institutions most amenable to changes in public policy, we are compelled to mention that the family is also an absolutely critical component in promoting civic and political participation among young people. Growing up in a home where other family members discuss politics has an impact on

¹³³ Simon Jackman, “Compulsory Voting,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 2001).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Mark N. Franklin, “Electoral Participation,” in Lawrence Le Duc, Richard G. Niemi, and Pippa Norris, eds., *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Comparative Perspective* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996).

¹³⁶ Evan Schofer and Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas, “The Structural Contexts of Civic Engagement: Voluntary Association Membership in Comparative Perspective,” *American Sociological Review* 66 (2001):806-28.

¹³⁷ H. Wesley Perkins, *The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

political participation long after one has left home.¹³⁸ Similarly, young people are more likely to vote and otherwise get involved in politics if they have seen their parents do so. Any public campaign designed to promote the political engagement of young people must not neglect the home as an institution in which youth learn to be engaged.

G. CONCLUSION

We began with three criteria to evaluate the mechanisms through which Americans select their political leaders: how well do they promote the quantity, quality, and the equality of engagement in our electoral system? We conclude by considering how the reforms we propose would affect each of these three criteria.

We acknowledge that, *prima facie*, most of our recommendations focus on the quantity of engagement. They are largely designed to increase the number of people who vote and otherwise participate in the electoral process. Reforms that make voter registration easier, for example, are intended to enhance overall participation at the polls. Likewise, efforts targeted at young people will swell the numbers of those involved in the electoral process. Furthermore, we have sought levers to enhance electoral competitiveness at the local level, because competitive elections beget engagement. The fact that our main focus has been on ways to increase the quantity of engagement, and voter turnout specifically, is largely a reflection of the current state of research. We simply know more about turnout than other types of engagement, and we know more about increasing the quantity of voters than enhancing quality and equality within the electorate.

None of this is to say that equality and quality would be unaffected by the reforms we propose. Ensuring that people who have committed a felony but paid their debt to society are enfranchised, for example, equalizes their opportunities for electoral engagement. In general, measures targeted at young people will address the inequality of engagement across younger and older voters. Promoting newspaper reading among high school students would serve to keep them informed of public affairs, boosting the quality of their engagement because informed voters are better able to connect their own preferences to candidates' policies. More systemically, efforts to restore competition to congressional elections would, we argue, enhance the overall quality of the electoral process. No longer would the parties' congressional

¹³⁸ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

delegations be dominated by representatives elected from districts in which their party is effectively an oligopoly, where, barring a scandal, their re-election is rarely in doubt.

As we acknowledged at the outset, our three desiderata may not be fully reconcilable. Political science can help us understand how these dimensions are traded-off, but it cannot tell us which one is to be most highly valued. Therefore, in closing, we argue that the nation would be well-served if the three criteria for engagement that we have laid out were regularly invoked when discussing the state of American politics so that these trade-offs might be explicitly weighed by would-be reformers and better understood by citizens.

We believe that our proposed reforms would have a salutary effect on electoral engagement. We also know that ours will not be the final word on this important subject.

H. RECAP OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Registration and voting

- Mailing polling place information to registered voters prior to election day.
- Mail sample ballots to voters.
- Declare election day a holiday, or move elections to the weekend.
- Employ election-day registration wherever possible.
- Restore the right to vote of felons who have served their complete sentence; consider restoring the right to vote to felons on parole or probation.
- Encourage face-to-face contacts urging voter turnout.
- Reauthorize the voting materials provision of the Voting Rights Act.

Districting

- States should *not* engage in redistricting multiple times in a single decade.
- Use non-partisan commissions for establishing new political boundaries for congressional and state legislative districts.
- Recognize that deliberately crafting noncompetitive election districts has a detrimental impact on voters' engagement.

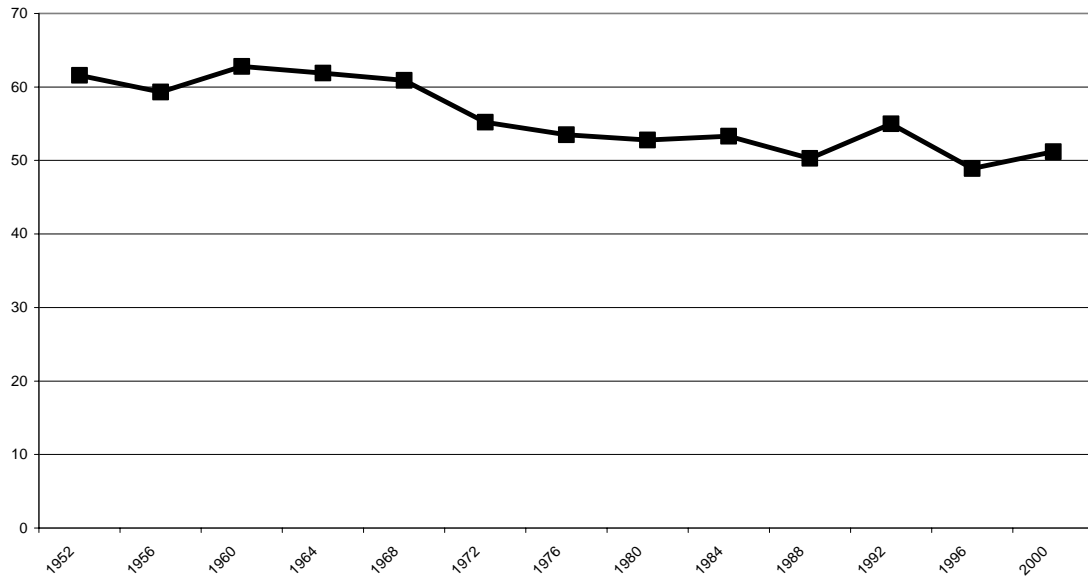
Electoral College

- Give two Electoral College votes to the statewide winner and one vote to the winner of each congressional district.

Schools

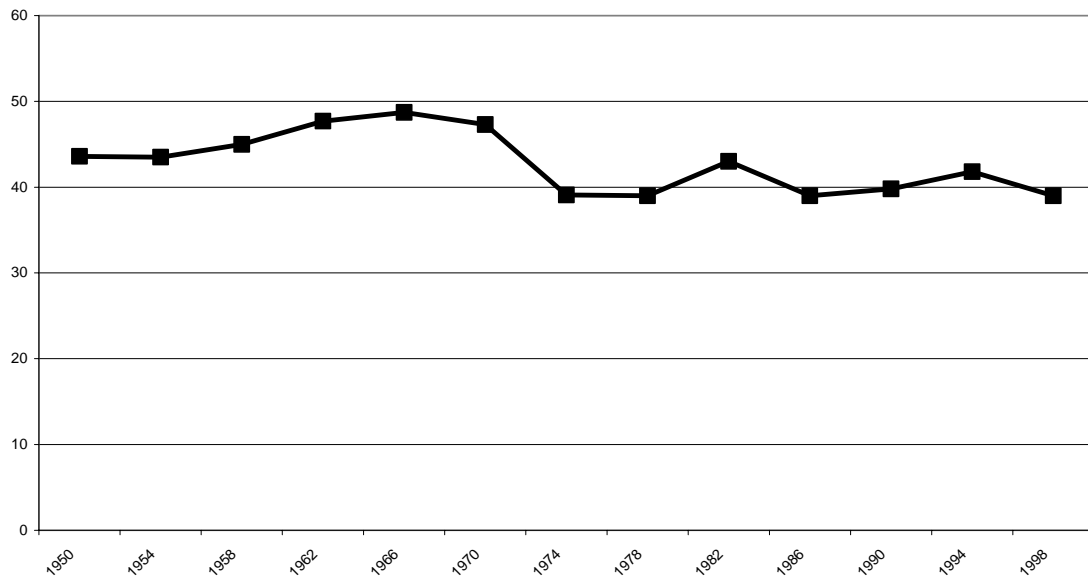
- Provide school-based instruction in the mechanics of voting to high school students.
- Encourage recognition of a young person's "first vote" as a significant rite of passage.
- Encourage greater use of newspaper reading and of other in-depth news sources among high school students.

Figure 1. Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections



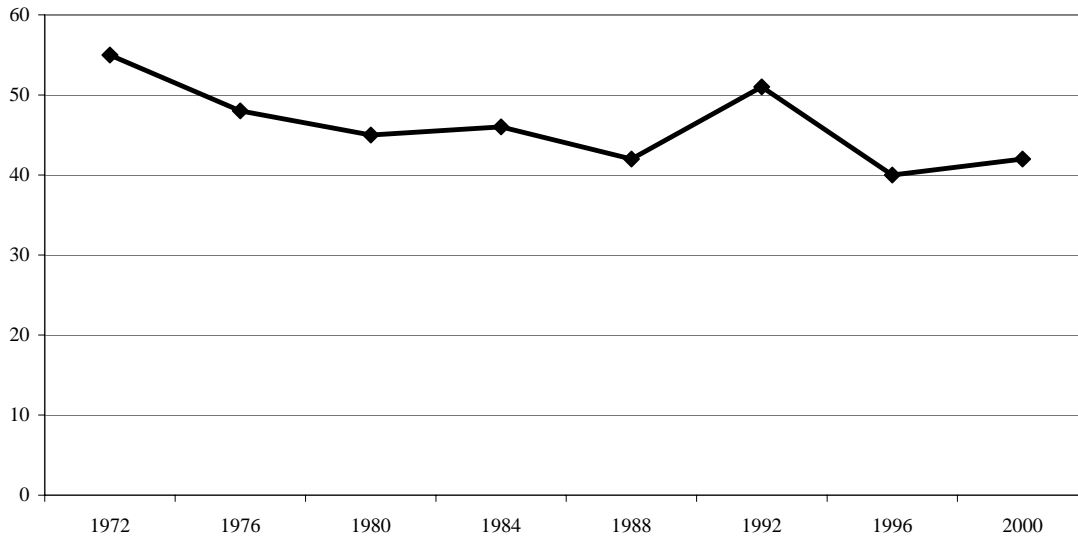
Source: Michael McDonald and Samuel Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter"

Figure 2. Voter Turnout in Midterm Congressional Elections



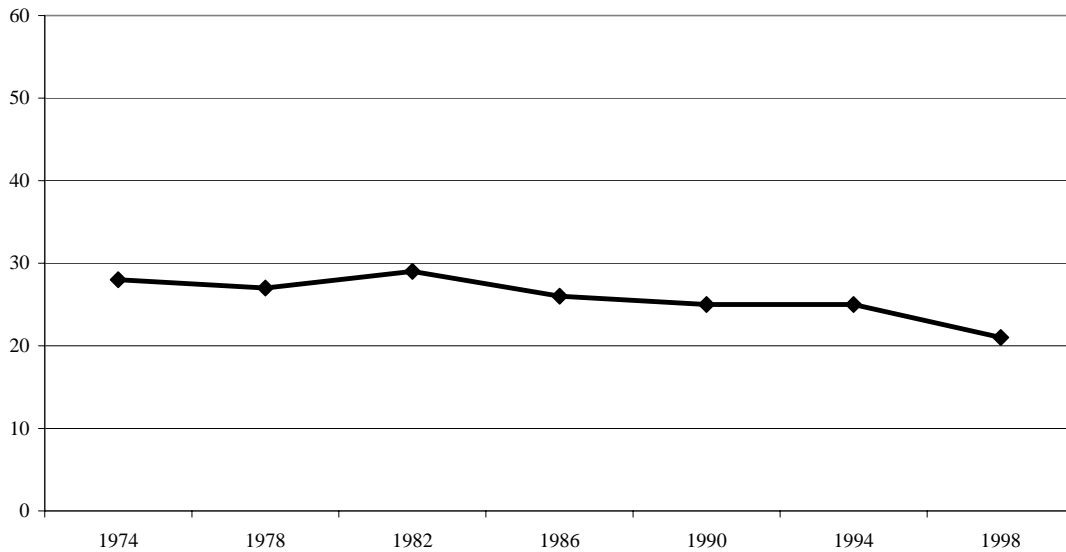
Source: Michael McDonald and Samuel Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter"

Figure 3. Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections, 18-24 Year Olds



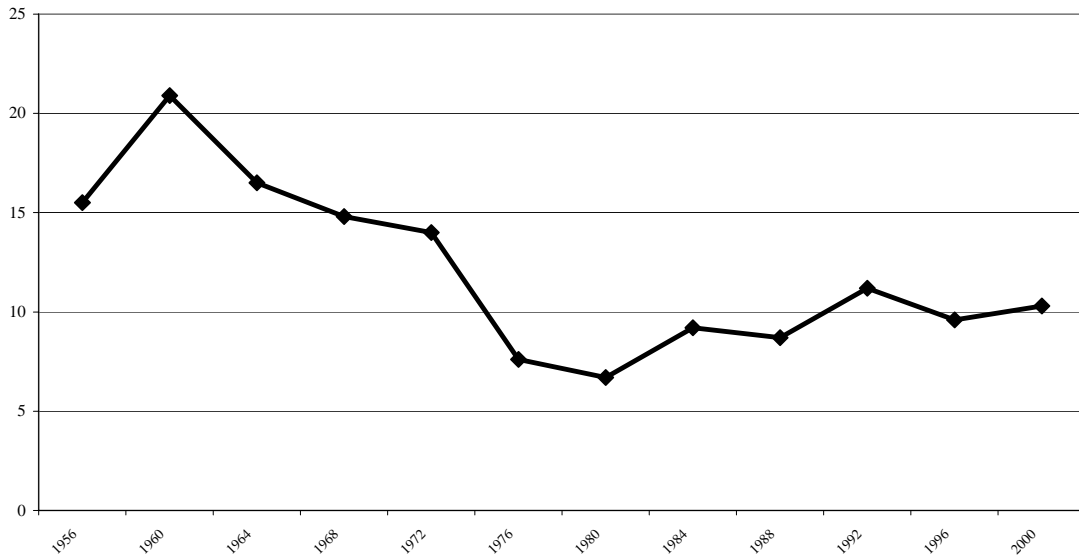
Source: Peter Levine and Mark Hugo Lopez. 2002. Youth Voting Has Declined, By Any Measure. CIRCLE Fact Sheet http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/fact_sheets_outside.htm

Figure 4. Voter Turnout in Mid-Term Congressional Elections, 18-24 Year Olds



Source: Peter Levine and Mark Hugo Lopez. 2002. Youth Voting Has Declined, By Any Measure. CIRCLE Fact Sheet http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/fact_sheets_outside.htm

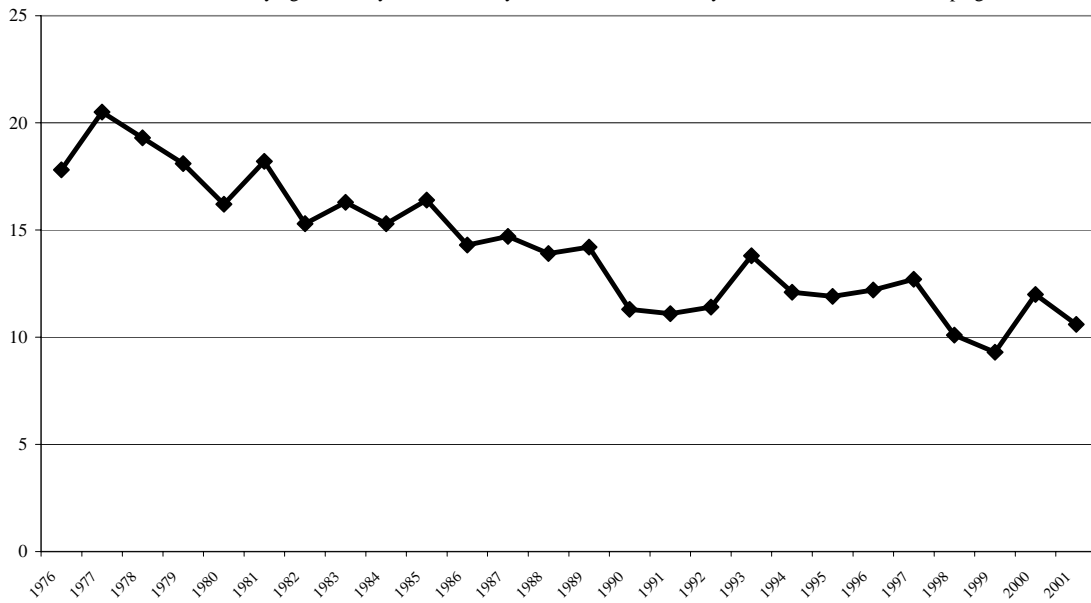
Figure 5. Displaying Campaign Buttons and Stickers



Source: National Election Studies

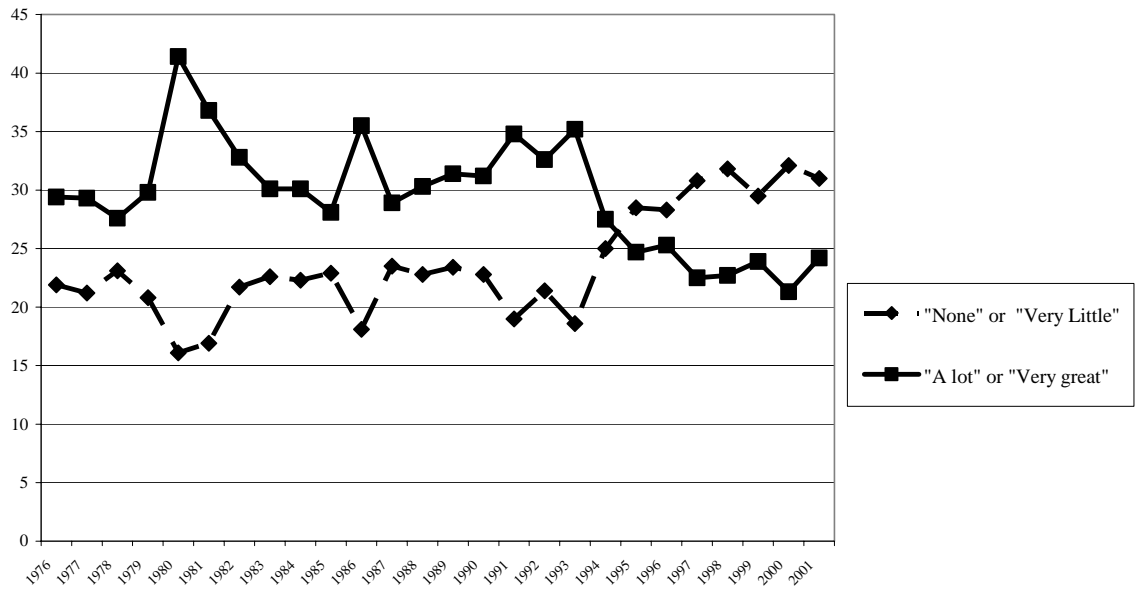
Figure 6. Political Engagement Among High School Seniors

% Saying That They "Will Probably Work" or "Have Already Worked" in a Political Campaign



Source: Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth

Figure 7. Interest in Current Events Among High School Seniors



Source: Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth

CHAPTER III

THE AMERICAN METROPOLIS

Consider: A vast portion of politics in America is local:

- Over 96 percent of all elected officials in the U.S. serve at the local level.¹
- Since 1970, the number of African-American elected officials has increased nearly five-fold, with close to half of the 9,101 holding office in 2001 serving at the municipal level, and another 21.3 percent elected to school boards.² Of all Latinos holding public office, 70 percent served in local office in 2002.³
- 24 percent of respondents said that they belonged to or worked with a community group or neighborhood association in a 2003 national survey sponsored by the Pew Internet and American Life Project.
- A majority of large American cities now have active systems of neighborhood councils, with most being officially recognized by city government.
- An estimated 50 million people belong to over ¼ million homeowners associations, with well over one million becoming actively engaged by serving on boards and committees.⁴

But trends in local participation are not encouraging:

- In 1967, 47 percent of U.S. adults said they always vote in local elections, but in 1987, only 35 percent reported doing so. In 1990 only 21 percent of eligible voters reported voting in all local elections⁵
- The number of candidates nationwide running for local offices dropped by 15 percent between 1974 and 1994.⁶ A recent survey of California city clerks found that 17

¹ 1992 Census of Governments. Volume 1. Government Organization, No. 2. Popularly Elected Officials. Need to update with 2002 Census of Governments, to be released soon.

² David A. Bosisis, *Black Elected Officials: A Statistical Summary, 2001* (Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2003).

³ National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, *2002 National Directory of Latino Elected Officials* (Los Angeles: NALEO, 1993).

⁴ Data on U.S. Community Associations [accessed 27 July 2004]. Alexandria, VA: Community Associations Institute. Available at <http://www.caionline.org/about/facts.cfm>.

⁵ Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 72. 1990 Citizen Participation Study, calculated on weighted data

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), XX.

- percent of mayoral candidates ran unopposed, and *The New York Times* reported that seven California cities cancelled elections in 2003 because of a lack of candidates.⁷
- Between 1973 and 1994, the percentage of people reporting that they attended a public meeting on town or school affairs declined from approximately 22 percent to 12 percent, and the proportion reporting that they had served on a committee for some local organization declined from ten percent to just over five percent.⁸
 - In 1990, 38 percent of people with family incomes over \$75,000 participated in some informal community activity, and six percent had been a local government board member. But of people with family incomes under \$15,000, just thirteen percent participated in community activity, and a mere 1 percent held a board membership.⁹

A. LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Place matters for civic engagement. Of course individuals' characteristics also matter – their level of education and income, for example – but the local circumstances in which citizens live and work have significant independent effects on whether they will get engaged, with whom (and against whom) they will engage, and how successful their activity will be.

Place contributes to what might be called an individual's sense of political self. A majority of Americans identify with their city or town and report that living where they do gives them a sense of community. These identities in turn influence political attitudes and behavior. Place shapes the issues individuals face as well as their responses to those issues. Place also influences the development of social networks, which help determine patterns of political mobilization (who, if anyone, will seek to enlist one's engagement). In addition, place has important institutional implications: the type of community largely determines the nature and capacity of its institutional structure, which, in turn, affects the nature of public participation. The characteristics associated with place shape the amount, the quality, and the distribution of civic engagement.

Metropolitan places are changing – growing, spreading, and fragmenting – and these changes affect civic engagement. As in Chapter II of this report, where we chronicled declines in participation at the national level, the facts cited above illustrate the erosion of many

⁷ *New York Times*, September 21, 2003, 30 (National Edition).

⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 43. But see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 72, who report slight increases in some forms of community engagement.

⁹ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 189-190.

traditional forms of local political participation. But when we look closely at patterns of local engagement, it is clear that the diversity of localities comprising metropolitan regions face different challenges and distinct opportunities. The goal of this chapter is to identify the place-related factors that work to enliven or dampen civic engagement at the local level. Because the nature of the places we live in are determined in large part by political choices, our overarching interest is this: *How can we reshape local institutions, policies, and practices to encourage residents of metropolitan areas to get more involved in working together, especially across geographic, racial, ethnic, class, and jurisdictional boundaries?*

Despite their problems, cities and other localities provide a vast array of opportunities for civic engagement. But, with some notable exceptions, political scientists have lately paid too little attention to local politics. What Robert Dahl said of the city nearly forty years ago is even truer now: “it confronts us with a task worthy of our best efforts because of its urgency, its importance, its challenge, the extent of our failure up to now, and its promise for the good life lived jointly with fellow citizens.”¹⁰

1. The Promise and Perils of Local Politics

As the country has grown, local institutions have helped spur civic engagement by keeping government close and accessible to ordinary people. The crazy quilt of political boundaries affords an almost endless array of occasions to get involved in local politics. In 2002, there were 87,525 units of local government in the United States, including 35,933 municipalities, towns, and townships, and 13,506 school districts.¹¹ Nearly half a million elected officials – 24 out of every 25 elected officials in this country – serve at the local level. In addition, many local governments – especially in larger cities – have created innovative mechanisms for citizen participation. Given the multiplicity of access points, it is relatively easy to get involved in local politics.

Many have argued that a healthy democratic life rests upon local institutions. “Local institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science;” as Tocqueville observed, “they put it within the people’s reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and

¹⁰ Robert A. Dahl, “The City in the Future of Democracy,” *American Political Science Review* 61 (1967): 953-970, 964.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Census of Governments, Volume 1, Number 1, Government Organization, December 2002, v.

accustom them to make use of it. Without local institutions a nation may give itself a free government, but it has not of the spirit of liberty.”¹² By “liberty” Tocqueville meant the capacity of free citizens to govern themselves in private and public life. It is through interaction with local institutions that citizens can directly connect their own interests and those of their political community.

The claim that democracy flourishes in small communities is as old as systematic reflection on politics. When Aristotle argued that a democracy should be small enough so that citizens can recognize one another he expressed what would be the common view for centuries. Robert Dahl summed up the thought two millennia later: “[T]he city-state must be small in area and in population. Its dimensions are to be human, not colossal, the dimensions not of an empire but of a town, so that when the youth becomes the man he knows his town, its inhabitants, its countryside.”¹³ Indeed, an “extended republic” of the sort championed by Madison and the other founders was a radical innovation, considered by many to be an impossibility – even though its federal structure would preserve vital space for the virtues of the small republic. The difficulty – or impossibility – of realizing democracy on the vast scale of a continental republic remains a subject of intense debate.¹⁴

The value of *local* government flows from its closeness to the people – closeness in the sense that city hall is nearer than Capitol Hill, city boundaries are narrower than those of an extended republic, and closer to home one’s fellow citizens are more likely to be one’s familiars. Local participation is important not just for its own sake but because it enables citizens and leaders to participate in the broader arenas of state and national politics. And the political stepping stones provided by local institutions seem especially important for those whose voices the nation has ignored. As we will see, many Black, Latino, and, increasingly, Asian public officials first gain office locally, often in places in which these groups have a numerical advantage, making local politics especially important for those traditionally under-represented groups that are geographically concentrated.

One would expect rates of participation to be higher at the local level because ease of access is coupled with direct potential benefits of involvement. The actions of local

¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J.P. Mayer ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 63.

¹³ Dahl, “The City in the Future of Democracy,” 954. Dahl here summarizes long-standing vision of local politics that includes both the ancient Greeks and Rousseau.

¹⁴ Cite Arendt, Wolin, Barber, Herbert Storing, others...

governments affect the value of residential property, the primary economic asset of the majority of Americans. In addition, local public services are “vital to the preservation of life (police, fire, sanitation, public health), liberty (police, courts, prosecutors), property (zoning, planning, taxing), and public enlightenment (schools, libraries).”¹⁵ Local governments spend close to a trillion dollars on service provision, and in doing so they directly address ordinary citizens’ tangible interests and everyday concerns.

Recent research supports the claim that smaller units of government invite political participation and civic engagement. In his study of citizen participation in eight hundred towns and cities in the United States, for example, Eric Oliver finds that rates for three kinds of engagement – contacting officials, attending board meetings, and attending organizational meetings – decline significantly as the population of one’s place of residence increases.¹⁶ In a decades-long study of participation in town meetings in Vermont, Frank Bryan reports that town size is by far the best predictor of participation rates at town meetings: far greater percentages of residents attend town meeting in small towns.¹⁷

Smaller places seem likely to help draw citizens toward participation for reasons in addition to those we have mentioned. Dahl, Bryan, and others observe that individuals participate more in smaller places because they are more likely to be able to influence outcomes.¹⁸ It may also be that alienation is lower and political interest greater in smaller places, and residents of smaller places seem more likely to be contacted by someone seeking to get them involved (or mobilized).

Robert Putnam, Wendy Rahn, and others muster a great deal of evidence showing that residents of smaller places are more likely to trust other people as a general matter, and those who exhibit greater trust are more likely to behave in a trustworthy manner.¹⁹ Residents of

¹⁵ Robert L. Lineberry, *Equality and Urban Policy: The Distribution of Municipal Public Services* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977), 10.

¹⁶ J. Eric Oliver, “City Size and Civic Involvement in Metropolitan America,” *American Political Science Review* 94 (June 2000): 361-73. J. Eric Oliver, *Democracy in Suburbia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 205-207, including references.

¹⁷ Frank Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also Christian Albrekt Larsen. “Municipal Size and Democracy: A Critical Analysis of the Argument of Proximity Based on the Case of Denmark” in *Scandinavian Political Studies* 25 (2002): 317-32.

¹⁸ This is an old claim, see, for example, Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns,” Speech Given at the Athenee Royal, in Benjamin Constant: Political Writings, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 314.

¹⁹ Wendy M. Rahn and Thomas J. Rudolph, “A Tale of Political Trust in American Cities,” *forthcoming*.

smaller places are far more likely to be involved in their communities: they are more likely to volunteer, work on community projects, and give to charity.²⁰

But we pay a political price for the civic advantages of localism. This is not surprising. If our only aim were to maximize the opportunities for civic engagement, Americans would have done well to side with the Anti-Federalists and reject the Constitution's "extended republic." We care not only about the quantity of political participation, but also its quality, and in addition the quality of governance. "Extend the sphere," as Madison argued in the Federalist #10, "and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and act in unison with each other." Madison did not argue that politics on an extended scale would inhibit all forms of political cooperation equally. To the contrary, in a larger polity "unjust or dishonorable purposes" are inhibited more than others because "communication is always checked by distrust in proportion to the number whose concurrence is necessary."²¹ It is hard to escape the suggestion that greater size and diversity of interests will inhibit political cooperation in general, even if these inhibitions apply most especially to dishonorable political purposes.

Also relevant to the quality of governance is the fact that different levels of government in our federal system have specific advantages when it comes to promoting particular political values and interests. Many of the Anti-Federalists preferred the sorts of aims associated with smaller and more homogeneous communities; an Anti-Federalist writing as "Agrippa" warned that state control over immigration was necessary to keep "separate from the foreign mixtures" and preserve "their religion and morals."²² Nearly two centuries later, Grant McConnell argued that larger and more diverse constituencies are more liable to promote encompassing public interests:

[I]t is not meaningless to speak of public values. They are public in the sense that they are shared by broad constituencies, usually, they must be achieved through mobilization of large constituencies. ... A political order composed exclusively of small constituencies, whether drawn on lines of geography, function, or other dimensions, would exclude a variety of genuine values of real concern to the members of society.

²⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 136-138, 119.

²¹ Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: The New American Library, 1961), 83.

²² *The Anti-Federalist: Writings by the Opponents of the Constitution*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1985), 245.

Many of the values Americans hold in highest esteem can only be realized through large constituencies, some indeed only by a genuinely national constituency.²³

Paul E. Peterson has given greater precision to McConnell's insight, emphasizing that local political institutions are less likely than the federal government to promote certain sorts of policies – including redistribution and policies with broad and unconfined benefits – because movement is easier across localities than across national boundaries. While national governments have some control over entry, naturalization, and eligibility for public benefits, local governments do not. When local communities raise taxes in order to aid the disadvantaged, they furnish incentives to the better off to exit and the worse off to enter.²⁴ Small communities are relatively incapable of pursuing broad-based political goals.

In thinking about civic engagement in the American metropolis, two central and related dilemmas have drawn our attention. First, there is the *dilemma of scale*: small size may increase opportunities and inducements for engagement in various ways, but smaller political units have their limitations, including the fact that they are less capable of promoting inclusive, broad-based, unconfined, and redistributive political goals.

In addition, there is evidence of a *dilemma of diversity or heterogeneity*. On the one hand, more diverse localities seem far more likely to realize democratic hopes of vitality, creativity, and innovation, and a large and diverse democracy needs settings in which citizens learn how to encounter, comprehend, and negotiate a myriad of differences: of opinion, race, class, religion, ethnicity, and lifestyle. Though cities have often contained neighborhood enclaves, the democratic promise of city life is that in their daily routines people encounter others who are different from themselves. As Iris Marion Young notes, "City dwellers frequently venture beyond ... familiar enclaves ... to the more open public of politics, commerce, and festival, where strangers meet and interact."²⁵ Douglas Rae similarly emphasizes that diverse and inclusive early 20th century cities, where all classes and races lived and worked in relatively close proximity to each other, helped realize core aspirations of democracy: "Central to

²³ Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966), 366.

²⁴ Paul E. Peterson, "Federalism, Economic Development, and Redistribution," in *Public Values and Private Power in American Politics*, ed. J. David Greenstone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 257. Because local institutions are far more permeable they are in a much weaker position than the national government when it comes to pursuing greater equality and other policies that generate "widespread repercussions," or broad and unconfined benefits, see McConnell, *Private Power*, ch. 10.

²⁵ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); this idea is echoed by Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 208-10.

the democratic experience is contact with difference – other races, other nationalities, other economic classes, other language groups.”²⁶

On the other hand, there is evidence that greater size and greater diversity – including racial and ethnic heterogeneity – decrease trust and undermine a shared sense of community. The greater diversity likely to be found in larger cities may engage citizens of different interests and backgrounds in a rich slate of meaningful political issues, but the greater levels of conflict that may accompany democratic politics among a diverse citizenry may prove off-putting and difficult to some – especially if local institutions do not encourage structured interaction in a supportive context.²⁷

In sum, the structure of local political institutions provides both opportunities and obstacles to civic engagement. The two dilemmas we have identified mean that certain valuable political goals and interactions may only be possible in larger, more diverse political communities, but there the quantity of engagement may be inhibited by size, remoteness of governmental units, greater social distrust, and the diversity of interests and groups. This does not mean that local institutions should be abandoned by those who favor civic engagement, even were this possible. Here more than elsewhere in this report we must grapple with both limited evidence and hard tradeoffs. But we are not completely in the dark, and institutional and policy choices offer the possibility of managing tradeoffs in better and worse ways in the specific contexts of American metropolitan areas.

2. Changing Patterns of Metropolitan Life

The whole pattern of local community life in America has changed enormously over the last fifty years, and these changes have had a profound impact on civic engagement in metropolitan America. These changes – the patterns of growth and decentralization, and increased inequality across places – are the result, in part, of particular political structures, laws,

²⁶ Douglas W. Rae, *City: Urbanism and its End* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 30-31, quoting Richard Sennett. See also Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* on the importance of context and structure in shaping inter-group contact.

²⁷ Social scientists find a negative relationship between community heterogeneity and the quantity of civic engagement. Wendy M. Rahn and Thomas J. Rudolph, “A Tale of Trust”; Alberto Alesina and Eliana La Ferrara, “Participation in Heterogeneous Communities,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115 (2000): 347-904; Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, “Civic Engagement and Community Heterogeneity: An Economist’s Perspective,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (2003): 103-11. See also John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans’ Beliefs About How Government Should Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

policies and institutions that are subject to our collective control. Similarly, the choices we now make about policies and institutions will shape future patterns of civic life.

Growth. American metropolitan areas are growing in population but they are spreading out even faster: the American metropolis has experienced a dramatic “decentering” over the last sixty years. They are adding urbanized or developed land at a much faster rate than they are adding population.²⁸ The vast majority of Americans now live in metropolitan areas (80.3 percent or 226 million people in 2000).²⁹ The U.S. has become a predominantly suburban nation in which places of residence and employment are far more separate than they were in the early decades of the 20th century.³⁰ As the U.S. has suburbanized, Americans have increasingly sorted themselves into a balkanized array of local governments, and many now reside in “ex-urban” areas that may lack strong general-purpose local governments.

Fragmentation. In some parts of the country, principally the South and the West, central cities have annexed territory and grown along with the suburbs. But in most metropolitan areas, incorporation laws facilitate the formation of new suburban municipalities, constraining the ability of central cities to grow through annexation. From 1952 to 2002 the number of municipal governments grew by 2,624 – from 16,807 to 19,431.³¹ More strikingly, the number of special district governments – usually serving only one function, such as fire protection or sewers – almost tripled in the half century after 1952, growing from 12,340 to 35,356. The average metropolitan area now has a complex and confusing array of over one hundred governments, including school districts and other “special districts” and regional authorities.³²

Among the distinctive features of contemporary American metropolitan life is the fact that government is broken up and localized: politics is fragmented. While the multiplicity of political institutions in metropolitan areas means smaller jurisdictions and more access points for civic engagement, jurisdictional fragmentation can undermine the quality of the engagement.

²⁸ William Fulton, Rolf Pendall, Mai Nguyen, and Alicia Harrison, “Who Sprawls the Most? How Growth Patterns Differ Across the U.S.” The Brookings Institution Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy, July 2001.

²⁹ Marc J. Perry et al., “Population Change and Distribution, 1990 to 2000,” U.S. Dept of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, April 2001, 5. Available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-2.pdf>, [accessed January 13, 2004].

³⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³¹ Figures on the number of governments are from the Census of Governments as reported in the U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2002), 260.

³² G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

Political boundaries may work to sever social relations, as well as political relations, cutting off the free flow of communication, mutual understanding, and a sense of shared fate.³³ In addition, many issues that fall across jurisdictional lines including transportation, housing, education, land use, employment, and law enforcement, appear on local agendas only in an attenuated form, if at all. Thus, many metropolitan areas are unable to confront a variety of important public issues.³⁴

For example, the St. Louis region, one of the most fragmented in the country, is comprised of 795 *local governments*, including 300 cities and townships.³⁵ In such a setting, issues that affect the metropolitan area as a whole fall through the cracks. And the sheer extent of this fragmentation makes voluntary inter-jurisdictional cooperation extraordinarily difficult. Instead, municipalities within the metropolitan region often pursue their particular interests at the expense of any regional good, and sometimes at great cost even to their own local self-interest. For example, heavy reliance on sales tax revenues encourages municipalities in the St. Louis area engage in a beggar-thy-neighbor competition for big-box retail stores, dumping the traffic and the need for affordable housing on neighboring municipalities.³⁶

Fragmentation of metropolitan regions is especially problematic to the extent that political borders coincide with patterns of racial and economic segregation. True enough, it no longer makes sense to think simply in terms of the “city-suburb doughnut;” the stereotype of suburbs as lily-white middle-class enclaves is increasingly false.³⁷ Metropolitan regions in the

³³ As Iris Marion Young states, “It is appropriate to ask whether the boundaries of a given polity correspond to the definition a polity ought to have in order properly to respond to moral requirements of justice.” Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 222. See also Michael N. Danielson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

³⁴ Many years ago, Dahl and Tufte argued that smaller units of government create greater opportunities for citizens to engage effectively in collective decision-making, but larger governments are more likely to have the capacity to address some public problems effectively. Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973).

³⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *2002 Census of Governments, Volume 1, Number 1, Government Organization* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2002).

³⁶ See *Growth in the Heartland: Challenges and Opportunities for Missouri*, Brookings Institution Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2002). See also David J. Barron, Gerald E. Frug, and Rick T. Su. *Dispelling the Myth of Home Rule: Local Power in Greater Boston* (Cambridge, MA: Rappaport Institute, 2004).

³⁷ The proportion of minorities in the suburbs of the nation’s 102 largest metropolitan areas grew from 19.3 percent in 1990 to 27.3 percent in 2000. William H. Frey, “Melting Pot Suburbs: A Study of Suburban Diversity,” in Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang, eds., *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 158. Across all metropolitan areas the rise in minority populations was even more substantial: the numbers of African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians residing in suburbs increased by 38, 72 and 84 percent, respectively, between 1990 and 2000. John R. Logan, “Ethnic Diversity Grows, Neighborhood Integration Lags” in Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang, eds., *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 248. Fifty-four percent of Latinos now reside in

United States have become markedly more diverse over the past fifteen years. But while it is true that suburbs taken as a whole are more diverse, suburban diversity is mostly *between* suburbs not within them. Across the patchwork of suburban jurisdictions, individual suburbs are likely to be characterized not by integration and diversity, but by residential segregation and homogeneity. While there is some evidence that black-white racial segregation fell in American metropolitan areas after 1970, it remains stubbornly high.³⁸ According to one measure of racial segregation, on average about half of all blacks would have to move across census tracts to achieve an equal distribution of the population.³⁹ If metro areas are not quite as segregated as they were by race, economic segregation has become worse over the past thirty years. In 1970, the neighborhood of the average poor person was 13.6 percent poor; by 2000 that figure had risen to 24.6 percent. Similarly, the average affluent household lived in a 30.8 percent affluent neighborhood in 1970, but that figure rose to 33.8 percent in 2000.⁴⁰ Between 1970 and 1990 there was a nearly one hundred percent increase in the number of people living in census tracts with poverty rates of forty percent or more.⁴¹ In the 1990s the number living in such areas fell 24 percent, though much of this decline was due to the unusually tight labor markets that prevailed when the census took its snapshot in 2000.⁴²

suburbs, as compared to 36 percent who reside in central cities. Roberto Suro and Audrey Singer, "Latino Growth in Metropolitan America: Changing Patterns, New Locations," Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy and the PEW Hispanic Center (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2002). Available online at http://www.pewhispanic.org/site/docs/pdf/final_phc-brookings_paper-appendix-tables.pdf. Nowadays, white flight is no longer the principal factor driving suburbanization. Increasing suburban diversity has been driven partly by the "new immigration": the dramatic movement of people from non-European countries to the United States since the repeal of racially discriminatory immigration laws in 1965. Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence J. Hanks, eds. *Black and Multiracial Politics in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). See also Ron Schmidt, Rodney Hero, Andy Aoki and Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, "Political Science, The New Immigration and Racial Politics in the United States: What do we know? What do we need to know?" Paper presented at the 2001 American Political Science Association Meeting.

³⁸ Edward L. Glaeser and Jacob L. Vigdor, "Racial Segregation: Promising News," in Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang, eds., *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 211-234; David M. Cutler, Edward L. Glaeser, and Jacob L. Vigdor, "The Rise and Decline of the American Ghetto," *Journal of Political Economy* 3 (1999): 455-506.

³⁹ Glaeser and Vigdor, "Racial Segregation."

⁴⁰ Douglas S. Massey and Mary J. Fischer, "The Geography of Inequality in the United States, 1950-2000," in *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs 2003*, edited by William G. Gale and Janet Rothenberg Pack (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 11.

⁴¹ Paul Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

⁴² Paul A. Jargowsky, *Stunning Progress, Hidden Problems: The Dramatic Decline of Concentrated Poverty in the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Center for Urban and Metropolitan Policy, May 2003).

Stratification. As a result of residential segregation, suburbs vary tremendously in fiscal capacity, socioeconomic conditions, and demographic composition.⁴³ One study of 50 metropolitan areas found that the percentage of suburban residents living in middle-class suburbs declined from 74.9 percent in 1980 to 60.8 percent in 2000.⁴⁴ In the twenty-five metropolitan areas studied by Myron Orfield the fiscal disparity among suburbs increased eight percent between 1993 and 1998.⁴⁵ Economic disparities across local communities are promoted by competition among local political communities for well-off residents and businesses, a competition spurred by local control over property tax revenues and the capacity of local communities to practice exclusionary zoning. Moreover, well-off communities frequently use exclusionary zoning to maintain their privilege and exclusivity.

Separation by race and especially class across suburban jurisdictions depresses the quality of civic engagement. As Rae explains:

[T]oo often, the end of urbanism has undermined [the democratic] experience by promoting social homogeneity within municipalities, leading to the evolution of regional hierarchies in which “purified communities”... bring likes together, safe from contact with persons different from themselves. ... [T]he bottom rung more often than not lies in the formerly working class neighborhoods of central cities, where opportunity is scarce, danger is commonplace, and democracy in any plausible sense seems out of reach.⁴⁶

Instead of being microcosms of the larger society, our local governments are too frequently characterized by persistent racial segregation and worsening economic stratification.

Some scholars have argued that homogeneity within suburbs depresses not just the quality but also the quantity of civic engagement by decreasing the likelihood of controversy that

⁴³ Myron Orfield has captured this variety of suburbs with a typology focused on the fiscal condition of each municipality. Orfield’s typology of suburbs includes at-risk segregated, at-risk older, at-risk low-density, bedroom-developing, affluent job centers, and very affluent job centers. Myron Orfield, *American Metropolitcs: The New Suburban Reality* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002). Nowadays, white flight is no longer the principal factor driving suburbanization. Increasing suburban diversity has been driven partly by the “new immigration”: the dramatic movement of people from non-European countries to the United States since the repeal of racially discriminatory immigration laws in 1965. Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence J. Hanks, eds. *Black and Multiracial Politics in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). See also Ron Schmidt, Rodney Hero, Andy Aoki and Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, “Political Science, The New Immigration and Racial Politics in the United States: What do we know? What do we need to know?” Paper presented at the 2001 American Political Science Association Meeting.

⁴⁴ Middle-class suburbs were defined as suburbs with per capita incomes between 75 and 125 percent of the regional per capita income. Todd Swanstrom, Colleen Casey, Robert Flack, and Peter Dreier, *Pulling Apart: Economic Segregation in the Top Fifty Metropolitan Areas, 1980-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, August 6, 2004), draft report.

⁴⁵ Orfield, *American Metropolitcs*, 60.

⁴⁶ Rae, *City*, 30-31, quoting Richard Sennett.

would mobilize people to become more involved.⁴⁷ While that claim is debated, it is clear that the homogeneity within many suburban jurisdictions deprives local leaders of the opportunity or necessity to engage the full spectrum of issues that face a metro region. "Boutique" suburbs – homogeneous upper income enclaves – trivialize and dampen public engagement because important issues involving race and class never make it onto the agenda. As McConnell observed of narrow constituencies in general: “[I]t often appears that the achievement and defense of particular status and privilege are the central goals of narrow and cohesive groups.”⁴⁸ Acting more like private interest groups than truly public institutions, havens of privilege keep their agendas narrow by practicing the politics of exclusion.

Stratification is especially harmful to those who live amidst concentrated disadvantage.⁴⁹ Although many poorer neighborhoods exhibit impressive levels of civic activity, people’s capacity to become involved in civic affairs is diminished greatly where inequalities are “cumulative rather than offsetting.”⁵⁰ Impediments to civic engagement in disadvantaged areas include greater health problems, transportation difficulties, and safety concerns. Surrounded by neighbors who may not have developed critical civic skills, residents of disadvantaged communities have comparatively fewer effective models of civic engagement. Even if they overcome these obstacles, they are likely to encounter local public institutions that lack the resources to respond to their needs.

In sum, American metropolitan areas have become among the most diverse urban areas in the world, taken in aggregate, but the fragmented jurisdictional fabric of many major metropolitan areas – including local control over property tax revenue and social services – has facilitated a sorting of populations by class and race that damages civic life by thwarting the effective pursuit of many inclusive political goals and short-circuiting the public encounters that bridge social and economic divisions among citizens. For both the privileged and the disadvantaged, the sorting of people into fragmented municipalities with radically different demographic profiles narrows civic identities, polarizes political interests, and dampens

⁴⁷ Oliver, *Democracy in Suburbia*.

⁴⁸ McConnell, *Private Power*, 365.

⁴⁹ Compounding the problem is the fact that local political institutions and groups in civil society are not doing all they could do to incorporate and facilitate the civic engagement of new immigrants.

⁵⁰ Rae, *City*, 421; Yvette Alex-Assensoh, *Neighborhoods, Family and Political Participation in Urban America* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); John Bolland and Debra Moehle McCallum, “Neighboring and Community Mobilization in High Poverty Inner-City Neighborhoods,” *Urban Affairs Review* 38 (2002): 42-69. [Add Berry’s chapter.](#)

important forms of civic engagement. Simply put, highly segregated localities defy pluralist democracy.

Sprawl. Segregation and stratification across metropolitan localities are not the only obstacles to a vibrant local civic culture. Civic activity is shaped by a variety of place-related factors besides demographic differences and jurisdictional boundaries. Sprawl itself may dampen civic engagement, as may other aspects of community design that emphasize the private over the public.⁵¹ Many scholars argue that the physical design of suburbs – their dearth of public gathering spaces, greater reliance on automobiles, absence of sidewalks and front porches – encourages people to withdraw from public life into a private world of family and work.⁵² An influential school of thought called “new urbanism” maintains that sprawled out suburban development creates an environment of “soullessness” and “placelessness” and thereby damages community involvements.⁵³

The idea that urban form can affect civic engagement has a long pedigree in the U.S. The great landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted argued that urban parks were necessary in a democracy so that people of different economic and social stations could rub elbows and establish trust.⁵⁴ Probably the best-known advocate for the salutary effect of traditional mixed-use urban design on civic engagement is Jane Jacobs. In her 1961 classic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs argued that city neighborhoods with relatively high population densities and mixed primary uses (residential, retail, and so on) would generate social capital that would carry over into the political sphere. As Jacobs famously observed, “Lowly, unpurposeful

⁵¹ For an introduction to the sprawl literature, see Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000). Many observers have linked sprawl with civic disengagement. Ethnographer M. P. Baumgartner describes a New Jersey suburb of the 1980’s as having a culture of atomized, isolated individualism, a “moral minimalism” according to which suburbanites keep to themselves, ask little of their neighbors, and seek nothing in return. See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 210.

⁵² For example, ethnographer M. P. Baumgartner describes a New Jersey suburb of the 1980’s as having a culture of atomized, isolated individualism, a “moral minimalism” according to which suburbanites keep to themselves, ask little of their neighbors, and seek nothing in return. M. P. Baumgartner, *The Moral Order of a Suburb* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁵³ For an introduction to new urbanist thinking, see Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000). In 1996 the Congress for the New Urbanism passed an official charter, which is reprinted in Appendix B. Peter Calthorpe, *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Communities, and the American Dream* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993). Peter Katz, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994).

⁵⁴ Witold Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Scribner, 1999).

and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow."⁵⁵

Evaluating the impact of urban form on civic engagement is difficult. Not only is sprawl hard to identify because of its many forms, but isolating its impact from other factors associated with it, such as home ownership and community size, is extremely difficult. Scholars have employed two research methods: case studies and more recent multiple regression studies using survey data.

The case studies tell conflicting stories about the impact of urban form on civic engagement. Herbert Gans' study of Levittown, New Jersey, a quintessential bedroom suburb, concluded that suburbanites are not the lonely individualists they are often portrayed as; they have rich social and political lives. But suburban form, Gans argued, has little effect on social and political life; the effects stem mostly from population mix, homeownership, and life stage.⁵⁶ However, in a detailed historical study of New Haven, Douglas Rae shows how neighborhoods in the early twentieth century typified Jacobs notion of diversity and supported a rich array of associations that nurtured civic engagement. In a nod to Jacobs, Rae calls this political system "a sidewalk republic." He argues that the suburbanization of jobs and middle-class residents undermined civic life in the late twentieth century. Rae's analysis is suggestive but his concept of "urbanism" includes much more than physical form – encompassing such trends as deindustrialization and the loss of neighborhood retail establishments.⁵⁷

More recently, scholars have begun to mine survey data to test the effect of different physical environments on civic engagement. Using national survey data, Eric Oliver concludes that land use, specifically living in single-use bedroom suburbs, has little independent effect on civic engagement.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Robert Putnam found that, after controlling for individual variables, "each additional ten minutes of daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by 10 percent."⁵⁹ Reinforcing this finding, studies have found that increasing

⁵⁵ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 71.

⁵⁶ Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a new Suburban Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). Gans does acknowledge that the political commitments of Levittowners are parochial and do not address metropolitan-wide issues.

⁵⁷ Douglas W. Rae, *City*. Rae defines his concept of "urbanism" on pages 18-19.

⁵⁸ J. Eric Oliver, *Deomcracy in Suburbia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), ch. 5.

⁵⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 213. Putnam estimates that sprawl accounts for approximately one-tenth of the decline in civic engagement that he documents in the book. Glaeser argues that commuting times in some cities – for example New York City – are longer than for the average commuter in an auto, but the experience of riding along to work is

the percentage of out-of-town commuters in a community reduces political participation, and, in addition, that increasing the number of residents driving to work alone decreases neighborhood ties.⁶⁰

The most extensive analysis of the political effects of sprawl using survey data has been done by Thad Williamson.⁶¹ He finds that living in a central city, in an older neighborhood, an area with fewer out-of-town commuters, and in an area with substantial pedestrian activity and use of public transit, are each independently associated with higher levels of some forms of political participation, such as being a member of a political group or attending a political meeting. Consistent with previous work by Oliver, Williamson also finds that in the American South, living in an older neighborhood is a predictor of increased participation. The cumulative negative impact of these sprawl-related variables is greater than the impact of those characteristics of suburban life that tend to *increase* political participation, such as smaller city size and higher rates of homeownership.

Overall, evidence concerning the ways in which urban form – specifically sprawl-related characteristics – influences political participation supports the sorts of trade-offs discussed in the introduction to this report. It suggests that people who live in low-density, single-use neighborhoods, where private automobile use dominates, are less likely to participate in politics, especially in more contentious political activities such as attending protests, demonstrations, and partisan political events. On the other hand, research consistently shows that suburban contexts are associated with higher levels of trust. Both findings make sense: living with other people like yourself in suburban environments where there are few opportunities to encounter strangers in public places should reinforce trusting relations; on the other hand, citizens would seem unlikely to be mobilized for issue-driven political participation in homogeneous places that fence

different from rubbing elbows with diverse residents. In addition, we believe that commuting times have lengthened somewhat in suburbs.

⁶⁰ Stan Humphries, “Who’s Afraid of the Big, Bad Firm: The Impact of Economic Scale on Political Participation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (July 2001): 678-99; Lance Freeman, “The Impact of Sprawl on Neighborhood Social Ties: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 67 (Winter 2001): 69-78.

⁶¹ See his “Sprawl, Politics, and Participation: A preliminary Analysis,” *National Civic Review* 9 (Fall 2002): 235-44 and “Does Sprawl Hinder Citizenship? The Impact of Local Socio-Spatial characteristics on Nonelectoral Political Participation,” paper prepared for the annual meeting of the Urban Affairs Association, Washington, D.C., April 1-3, 2004. See also his forthcoming doctoral dissertation, “Sprawl, Justice, and Citizenship” (Harvard University, 2004)

out much of our polity's diversity. Nevertheless, we should emphasize that this evidence is thin: more research is needed.

B. AVENUES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

With this background in mind, consider the central avenues through which residents of metropolitan areas engage with government and each other to influence policies, solve public problems, and enhance their community. The menu of opportunities for local civic engagement begins with government institutions: electoral politics, including voting, campaigning, and running for office. It also includes various forms of participation in deliberation and policy development between elections, from service on traditional city councils and school boards to an expanding array of other public committees, commissions, and councils that are receptive to citizen input. Many large cities are finding innovative ways of bringing government closer to the people by creating neighborhood councils, citizen advisory boards, and other means for citizens to participate in the provision of local services.

Local civic engagement is not restricted to formal institutions of government. A rich array of non-governmental institutions, committees, organizations, and other efforts exist for the purpose of influencing political choices, mobilizing citizens to act in local politics, and empowering politically disadvantaged segments of the population.⁶² Of course, here as elsewhere, observers worry that some forms of political activity may detract from the larger public good. Homeowners associations, for example, may in effect encourage members to disengage from the larger political community, or so some worry.

1. Engagement with Electoral Politics

The most common and arguably least demanding form of citizen participation at the local level is voting. Local politics offers a prodigious array of opportunities for casting a ballot. In 1992, there were 494,000 *locally* elected officials, including not only mayors, city councilors, and school board members, but also a wide variety of other town, city, and county officers, and a

⁶² In Chapter IV of the report, we turn to the many non-political civic groups, including chambers of commerce, fraternal organizations, churches, and other voluntary associations (like bowling leagues), which enhance personal connections and communications and facilitate ordinary people's capacity for civic engagement.

vast array of commissioners and board members. A remarkable 96.2 percent of the nation's elected officials serve at the local level.⁶³

Turnout in local elections is, however, notoriously low. In general, the lower the level of election, the lower the turnout. Although 62 percent of eligible voters claimed in 1990 to have voted in all or most presidential elections since they were old enough, only 54 percent claimed to have voted in all local elections.⁶⁴ The actual voting rates are certainly much lower, as turnout figures acquired through municipal records in cities over 25,000 in 1962 and 1975 put the average turnout in municipal elections at 31 percent. This compares with an average turnout rate in national elections of 59 percent during roughly the same period.⁶⁵ Most municipalities reformed elections in the late 1800s or early 1900s so that they would occur in "off years" and in the spring, rather than at the same time as higher-level, November elections.⁶⁶

As a consequence of the low turnout in local elections, a wide array of local elected officials – from mayors and council members to law enforcement and judicial officials – are simultaneously easily accessible, yet selected by a very small fraction of the constituents they represent.

Of course, local elections provide city residents with the opportunity to participate in campaigning and electioneering, and not only voting. Among the most important pre-election civic activities are citizens efforts to mobilize other citizens so that they will get involved and vote. As we emphasized in Chapter II, scholars have convincingly demonstrated that mobilization enhances political and civic engagement.⁶⁷ Getting someone to participate in public life is a bit like dating; it's a lot more likely to happen if someone asks, and asks in person. In a study of 30,000 registered voters in New Haven, Connecticut, for example, Donald Green and Alan Gerber find that personal, face-to-face contact substantially increases the probability that individuals will turn out to vote, while direct mail had only a slight effect on turnout and

⁶³ 1992 Census of Governments. Volume 1. Government Organization, No. 2. Popularly Elected Officials. Need to update with 2002 Census of Governments, to be released soon.

⁶⁴ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1990 Citizen Participation Study data, estimates calculated on weighted data.

⁶⁵ Robert L. Morlan, "Municipal vs. National Election Voter Turnout: Europe and the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 3(1984): 461.

⁶⁶ John P. Pelissero, "The Political Environment of Cities in the Twenty-first Century," in John P. Pelissero, ed., *Cities, Politics, and Policy: A Comparative Analysis* (Washington: CQ Press, 2003), 18.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993) and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

telephone solicitation had no effect at all.⁶⁸ In a later study of local elections in six cities, Gerber, Green, and David Nickelson found that face-to-face contact increased turnout by between 0.2 and 15 percentage points.⁶⁹

The goal of elections and campaigns is, of course, winning and holding elective office, which typically represents the most intense form of civic engagement available at the local level. An elected official has made the decision to run for office, solicited the support of others, succeeded in that effort, and subsequently participates in the exercise of public authority. Each of the nearly half-million local political offices represents considerable and recurrent collective political efforts, though obviously the scope of the activities varies widely. The sheer number of local elected offices, and the civic activity generated thereby, would seem inevitably to be a major spur to civic activity in America. Despite increasing numbers of local governments, however, the number of candidates running for local offices dropped by fifteen percent between 1974 and 1994.⁷⁰

Local elective offices are especially important to minority groups, because it is at the local level that both African-Americans and Latinos have had their greatest electoral success. By the most reliable estimate, the number of African-American elected officials has increased nearly five-fold since 1970: with 9,101 holding office in 2001. The number of Latino public officials has also risen steadily. Of these minority office holders, approximately 70 percent serve at the local level, in municipal political offices or on school boards.⁷¹

There are at least two major reasons for the increased minority office holding in cities and working class suburbs. One was the implementation of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 and its expansion to include language minorities in 1975. Thanks to Voting Rights Act enforcement, many cities and towns that had “diluted” the votes of African-Americans and Latinos through

⁶⁸ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment,” *American Political Science Review*. 94 (Sept. 2000): 653-63.

⁶⁹ Donald P. Green, Alan S. Gerber, and David W. Nickerson, “Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections: Results from Six Door-to-Door Canvassing Experiments,” *Journal of Politics* 65 (November 2003): 1083-1096. See also Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 134-9.

⁷⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, XX.

⁷¹ The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies first gathered data on the number of African-American elected officials in 1970. Of the 1,469 African-Americans holding elective office in 1970, 42.4 percent (623) served at the municipal level and another 24.6 percent (362) served in education, with most of these persons serving on local school boards. In 1980 72.7 percent (N=3570) of all African-American elected officials served at the local level. In 1990 it was 72.3 percent (N=5326). David A. Bositis, *Black Elected Officials: A Statistical Summary, 2001* (Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2003). National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, *2002 National Directory of Latino Elected Officials* (Los Angeles: NALEO, 1993).

gerrymandering and the use of at-large elections were forced to transform their electoral systems.⁷² Because of actions taken directly under the auspices of the Voting Rights Act, cities such as Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and many others have experienced considerable increases in the numbers of African-American and Latino local elected officials.

Another important factor in the rise of minority office holding was the out-migration of whites who, in decades after WWII, chose to leave many central cities and working class suburbs. As whites left, those who remained and moved in were often African-American and Latino. Simple demographics allowed minority candidates to win office in increasing numbers.

But these victories come with sobering challenges. When white residential out-migration has coincided with substantial retail and industrial out-migration, newly empowered racial and ethnic politicians often face almost insurmountable difficulties in finding sufficient financial resources to meet the needs of the constituencies that placed them in office.⁷³ In resource poor cities, public office is often a “hollow prize.”⁷⁴

Even in the face of these challenges, the substantial numbers of African-Americans and Latinos who hold local elective office is a clear sign of a minority leadership core willing to undertake demanding forms of civic engagement. In that local elective office serves as a training ground and spring board for leaders who go on to win higher elective office, local civic engagement in the metropolis may help promote more inclusive forms of civic activity in the polity as a whole.⁷⁵

a. The Impact of Institutional Design: Progressive Era Reforms

While local electoral politics furnishes a cornucopia of opportunities for civic engagement, these activities are structured, facilitated, and constrained by local political

⁷² See the discussion in Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman, *Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁷³ Paul Friesma, “Black Control of Central Cities: The Hollow Prize,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35 (1969): 75-79. Albert K. Karnig and Susan Welch, *Black Representatives and Urban Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). Adolph Reed, “The Black Urban Regime: Structural Origins and Constraints,” in Michael K. Smith, ed., *Power, Community, and the City*, vol. 1 of *Comparative Urban and Community Research* series (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988), 138-189. Neil Kraus and Todd Swanstrom, “Minority Mayors and the Hollow Prize Problem,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34 (March 2001), 99-105.

⁷⁴ Douglas Yates, *The Ungovernable City: The Politics of Urban Problems and Policy Making* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977). Paul E. Peterson, *City Limits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁷⁵ We do not mean to imply that the representation of African-American and Latino communities is in any sense proportional to their percentage of the population.

institutions. The political reform movements that swept across many cities in the 1890's and early decades of the 20th century transformed local institutions, including the method of filling many local government jobs (from patronage to civil service), election districts (from ward or district elections to more at-large elections), election ballots (from partisan to nonpartisan), and type of executive (from elected mayor to non-elected city manager). These reforms remain intact in many places today, and new localities often choose to adopt reform institutions.

With the goal of eliminating graft and corruption from local politics, reformers sought to replace political machines and partisan politics with greater professionalism and businesslike efficiency, though many scholars argue that another motive was to curb the political power of recent immigrants.⁷⁶ Whatever the mix of intentions, the changes were not without consequences for civic engagement. The reforms weakened the old political machines by curbing patronage and promoting council manager systems: chief administrators would be chosen on the basis of merit rather than 'sullied' partisan elections. While the machines themselves had often become entrenched power centers, they had also done a great deal to spur participation (at least for a time) and to incorporate immigrants into the political process. One of the leading scholars of cities argues that they were "a veritable school of politics for working-class and minority voters, compared with big-city reform."⁷⁷

The impact of reform institutions on civic engagement is not easy to sort out. Several studies suggest that some reform institutions – nonpartisan elections and council-manager forms of government – continue to decrease election turnout.⁷⁸ The dampening effects of these reform institutions seem to be particularly acute among African-Americans, Latinos in the South, Southwest and West, and people of lower socio-economic status, raising special concerns from the standpoint of democratic equality.⁷⁹ In addition, evidence from the 1970s showed that cities

⁷⁶ Russell D. Murphy, "Politics, Political Science, and Urban Governance: A Literature and a Legacy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (2002), 63-85.

⁷⁷ Amy Bridges, *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 216. See also Michael Jones-Correa, "Immigrants, Blacks and Cities," in Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence Hanks, eds, *Black and Multiracial Politics in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 137. Jones-Correa emphasizes that the point of reforms were not to mobilize citizens, but to perpetuate themselves. See also Steven Erie's analysis of "entrenched machines" in *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁷⁸ Robert R. Alford and Eugene C. Lee, "Voter Turnout in American Cities," *American Political Science Review* 62 (September 1968): 796-813; Karnig and Walter 1983; Harvey Schuckman, *Political Participation in American Cities: Deconstructing the Role of Local Political Institutions* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2000).

⁷⁹ Schuckman, *Political Participation in American Cities* for African Americans and people of low SES; Luis Ricardo Fraga, "Domination Through Democratic Means: Nonpartisan Slating Groups in City Electoral Politics,"

with a system for choosing a mayor other than through a popular election were less likely to have an African American mayor, holding other factors constant.⁸⁰ This is an important finding because the presence of a Black mayor is related to higher rates of African American local participation.⁸¹ However, other scholars are less certain about the relationship between reform institutions and minority participation.⁸²

Decisions concerning local political institutions are rife with difficult trade-offs among conflicting civic values. By shifting from neighborhood-based to city wide representation and by placing the powers of chief financial officer in the hands of a non-elected manager, reform institutions widen the distance between governing processes and ordinary citizens. By removing the cue of party labels and lessening neighborhood-based representation they reduce the information available to citizens about candidates' positions and about how to get involved in politics.⁸³ At the same time, council-manager forms of government and governments in which some of the seats are elected at-large, are associated with higher levels of trust in government.⁸⁴ Reforms aimed at curbing partisan politics may, thus, promote greater citizen trust in local government while also decreasing engagement.

Choices about institutional forms may also be important for immigrant incorporation. While evidence shows that individuals' resources, higher levels of education and income, and home ownership – increase immigrants' political activity (just as they increase the civic activity of persons generally) nevertheless, the political and institutional contexts of immigrants and their communities are also critical to understanding their political behavior.⁸⁵ In a recent study of

Urban Affairs Quarterly 23 (June 1988): 528-55, 551 for African Americans and Latinos (Fraga argues that, in the Southwestern cities he has studied, “[reform] governmental structures and their attendant party-type organizations...long serve[d] to minimize the effective representation of minority community interests in city government [by preventing] the election of their first-choice candidates.”); Rahn and Rudolph, “A Tale of Trust,” with respect to a negative relationship between political trust and at-large elections among African Americans.
⁸⁰ Albert K. Karnig and Susan Welch, *Black Representation and Urban Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980.)

⁸¹ Lawrence Bobo and Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., “Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment.” *American Political Science Review* 84 (1990): 377-393. There is also recent preliminary evidence that the presence of a black mayor is related to trust in local government among African Americans. (Melissa Marschall, 2004, “The Attitudinal Effects of Minority Incorporation: Examining the Racial Dimensions of Trust in Urban America,” Paper presented to the annual meetings of the International Society for Political Psychology, Lund, Sweden, July 15-18.

⁸² Luis Ricardo Fraga, “Domination Through Democratic Means,” 551.

⁸³ Schuckman, *Political Participation in American Cities*.

⁸⁴ Rahn and Rudolph, “A Tale of Trust.” However, low levels of trust may also spur participation, especially when combined with high levels of efficacy or political interest, Margaret Levi and Laura Stoker, 2000, “Political Trust and Trustworthiness,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 475-508, 486-488.

⁸⁵ Jones-Correa 1998; de la Garza 2004; DeSipio and de la Garza forthcoming; Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura 2001; Cho 1999; Lien et. al. 2004.

immigrants and Blacks in Los Angeles and New York, Jones-Correa found that responsiveness to immigrants' concerns was a function of institutional frameworks within the two cities.⁸⁶

Institutional form matters, but more research is needed before we can say definitively which forms foster more participation and more equal participation among residents of metropolitan areas. The published evidence suggesting that reform institutions depress turnout is dated. More recent research, by demonstrating a link between some types of reform institutions and greater trust in government, establishes at least that progressive era reforms are not all bad. Further research may even show that greater perceived professionalism or efficiency in government encourage some citizens to participate more.

b. Special Districts and Authorities

The reformist impulse also contributed to the formation of new governments insulated from partisan politics. Services previously supplied by municipal governments – such as water, sewers, and fire protection – are now frequently supplied by “special districts” and authorities. The number of special districts in the U.S. increased from 8,299 in 1942 to 35,356 in 2002.⁸⁷ These districts often overlap each other, as well as with municipal boundaries.

The tremendous growth of special districts represents, in part, an effort to take the politics out of municipal government. The formation of special districts and authorities may also be a strategy to overcome the tax and debt limitations of municipal governments, to provide services on a more regional basis, or to professionalize service delivery. In recent decades, however, corporations and real estate developers have been most successful at forming special districts, often via referenda that they succeed in placing on the ballot.⁸⁸ Once they are formed, Burns shows that developers use special districts to acquire access to powers of eminent domain and to

⁸⁶ Michael Jones-Correa, “Immigrants, Blacks and Cities”; Gary Gerstle and John Mollenkopf, “The Political Incorporation of Immigrants Then and Now” *E Pluribus Unum?: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Immigrant Political Incorporation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001). *Need to be more specific in summarizing the findings associated with the last 2 footnotes.*

⁸⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000), 299 and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2002), 261.

⁸⁸ For a review of the scholarship on special districts, see Kathryn Foster, *The Political Economy of Special-Purpose Government* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997), esp. ch. 2.

tax exempt revenue bonds to fund the infrastructure needed for private development, all with very little, if any, democratic oversight.⁸⁹

The formation of these districts is a profoundly political act that has significant implications for civic engagement. Beyond the fact that they can be a source of tremendous confusion for ordinary voters trying to understand and influence local decision-making, special districts enable the private values of selected groups to dominate via obscure political structures that are nearly invisible to voters. Kathryn Foster shows that special districts tend to drive up the cost of government and "bias" spending toward development and routine services to residents and businesses over social services.⁹⁰ Lest we assume that the specter of greater public indebtedness increases the salience of special districts to voters, turnout in special district elections (when they occur) is very low – usually less than five percent, compared to about thirty percent in municipal elections. Moreover, special districts are not required to follow the one-person, one vote requirement placed on municipal governments and they can have property qualifications for voting.

Special districts do not take the politics out of municipal government; they only make it less visible and accessible to the average citizen. As Burns argues, "these local institutions ... are created for reasons that often impair their ability to be democratic training grounds. ... [They] discourage participation because ... the information costs associated with learning even the names of the districts that govern a location are prohibitive."⁹¹

2. Engagement Between Elections

a. Participation vs. Expertise?

The design of local government institutions can either enhance or depress electoral turnout, as we saw in Chapter II, but citizens' participation in political and civic life should extend beyond voting, campaigns, and elections. Political choices also shape the opportunities for participation between elections.

⁸⁹ Nancy Burns, *The Formation of American Local Governments: Private Values in Public Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25.

⁹⁰ Kathryn Foster, *The Political Economy of Special Purpose Government*. Some argue that the overlapping jurisdictions created by the proliferation of special districts tends to result in higher taxes, not greater efficiency in service provision, see Christopher Berry, n.d., "Piling On: The Fiscal Effects of Jurisdictional Overlap," ms. Harvard University Department of Government.

⁹¹ Burns, *The Formation of American Local Governments*, 116.

After a law is passed, there is often a great deal of discretion to be exercised in interpreting and implementing that law. Much administrative discretion involves choices about values that cannot and should not be left entirely to technical experts or professional public administrators. We should increase the opportunities for direct participation by local residents in decisions that affect the quality of their cities, towns, and neighborhoods, including local development, environmental issues, operations of schools, and the character of local policing.

Often, direct citizen participation is viewed as making decision making slower and less efficient. Professional administrators worry that technical expertise will be cast aside by the emotional demands of uninformed citizens, who may take a parochial point of view that ignores citywide or region-wide interests. Although it is true that citizen participation often involves trade offs with other values, we do not believe, once again, that these trade offs are written in stone. In some contexts, citizen participation can result in decisions that are more effective and efficient, more representative of the interests of all, and more legitimate. Citizen participation can force experts, who often approach policies from the viewpoint of their narrow functional specializations, to confront the broader implications of their policies.⁹² *Decision making may be slower, but policy is often more legitimate, and implementation is often faster and more effective after all the major stakeholder groups have been consulted in the process.*⁹³

In what follows, therefore, we go well beyond citizenship as voting.

b. Traditional Avenues

Citizens may address their locally elected officials by writing a letter, making a phone call, or attending a public meeting. And millions of Americans do get involved in precisely these traditional ways. One 1987 survey found, for example, that almost 25 percent of Americans reported having contacted a local official about an issue in the previous year, and in 1989, 14 percent reported attending a meeting of a local board or commission.⁹⁴ In the 2000 National Election Survey, 27 percent responded that they had attended a meeting to address a community

⁹² A good example is when highway engineers are forced by citizens to consider the effects of their projects on the community or the environment. For a profound reflection on the problems of leaving highway building to experts and engineers, see Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

⁹³ See for example the suggestive evidence in Tom R. Tyler, et al, "Maintaining Allegiance toward Political Authorities: The Role of Prior Attitudes and the Use of Fair Procedures," *American Journal of Political Science* 33 (1989): 629-652.

⁹⁴ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 51, 72.

issue in the last twelve months. Beyond attending meetings, citizens may serve on local councils, commissions, and advisory boards.⁹⁵ In 1990, 3 percent of U.S. adults reported volunteering for an official local board or council in the previous two years.⁹⁶ But citizens appear to be utilizing these traditional avenues of politics in declining numbers. Between 1973 and 1994, for example, the percentage of people reporting that they attended a public meeting on town or school affairs fell from approximately 22 to 12 percent.⁹⁷ Service on local boards and councils also seems to be declining.⁹⁸

In addition to these most formal options for participation, American government provides an increasing variety of additional ways for people to make their voices heard. Among the legacies of the idea of “participatory democracy” that came to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s are “requirements for citizen participation ... at every level of government. Although they are seriously attenuated at the federal level, at the state and local level some good-faith efforts still provide citizens an opportunity to influence policymaking.”⁹⁹

c. Contemporary Neighborhood Councils

Many participatory structures are based at the neighborhood level, especially in large cities. After all, the neighborhood is where citizens may have the most to say about what government should do and how it should do it. Under the right conditions, government-mandated neighborhood-based structures for citizen input can stimulate engagement.

Since the upsurge of community organizing in the 1960s and 1970s, many city governments have gradually tried to incorporate neighborhoods into the institutions of city government. Boston Mayor Kevin White set up “Little City Halls,” New York created 59 community planning boards, and St. Paul empowered seventeen district councils – just to mention three examples with widely varied powers and citizen involvement. In a 1993 survey of

⁹⁵ For example, of all of the census-designated central cities between 50,000 and 250,000 in population in 18 states chosen randomly from across the United States, 90 percent had citizen seats on local boards and commissions. Katherine Cramer Walsh, n.d. “Local Governance and Intergroup Dialogue Programs” unpublished manuscript.

⁹⁶ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 51.

⁹⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 43. But see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 72 who report slight increases in some forms of community engagement, including contacting public officials.

⁹⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 43.

⁹⁹ Jeffrey M. Berry, Kent E. Portney, and Ken Thompson, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993), 45.

the 161 cities with populations over 100,000,¹⁰⁰ Carmine Scavo found that 60 percent have active systems of neighborhood councils: these cities reported an average of fifty-five neighborhood councils in their systems.¹⁰¹

Cities continue to innovate in the area of neighborhood governance. For example, the Minnesota state legislature and the city of Minneapolis initiated its Neighborhood Revitalization Project (NRP) in 1990. Through the NRP, neighborhood associations have implemented a host of housing rehabilitation, construction, economic development, education, and public service improvement projects.¹⁰² In 1999, Los Angeles revised its city charter to create what will become a system of more than one hundred neighborhood councils: a much needed layer of intermediate civic associations between residents and city government. Though the expansion has proceeded in fits and starts, more than half of the neighborhoods in the city created representative associations within the first three years.¹⁰³

Neighborhood councils address such issues as housing, the physical quality of the neighborhood, and public services. They vary widely in their powers, effectiveness, and methods for selecting representatives.¹⁰⁴ These bodies have received scant attention from researchers and so there is little evidence to report and few generalizations to be offered about

¹⁰⁰ Scavo's survey excluded New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. All three of these cities have systems of neighborhood councils. See also William M. Rohe and Lauren Gates, *Planning with Neighborhoods* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 8.

¹⁰¹ Carmine Scavo, "Use of Participative Mechanisms by Large US Cities," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 15 (1993): 93-109.

¹⁰² See, for example, Judith Martin and Paula Pentel. "What the Neighborhoods Want: The Neighborhood Revitalization Program's First Decade" in *American Planning Association Journal*. Vol. 68 No. 4 (2002): 435-49 and Fainstein, Susan. Center for Urban Policy Research. "An Evaluation of the Minneapolis NRP," CUPR Policy Report No. 13. January 9, 1995; Fainstein, Susan S. and Clifford Hirst. "Neighborhood Organizations and Community Planning: The Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program", in *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods*, edited by W. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and Philip Star, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996, 96-111; Goetz, Edward G. and Mara S. Sidney. "Revenge of the Property Owners: Community Development and the Politics of Property", *Journal of Urban Affairs* 16 (1994): 319-334.

¹⁰³ See Juliet Musso, Alicia Kitsuse, Evan Lincove, Michael Sithole, and Terry Cooper. "Planning Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles: Self-Determination on a Shoestring" Neighborhood Participation Project, School of Planning, Policy, and Development, University of Southern California (Report, April 30, 2002)

¹⁰⁴ See Rohe and Gates, *Planning with Neighborhoods*, 75-84. About a third of neighborhood councils elect representatives by committee, another third have elections in which neighborhood residents vote, and a quarter have volunteer memberships. Very few neighborhood councils have representatives that are appointed by the mayor or city council. Three-quarters of these councils are administered by cities' planning or development agencies. On the dimension of government support, almost all of the councils receive information and data from the city, 80 percent receive staff assistance, and 55 percent receive public money. In response to surveys, these councils claim to do far more than communicate preferences to city councilors or agencies: 80 percent say they develop neighborhood plans, and 67 percent monitor the activities and projects of agencies. Such organizational surveys, however, reveal little about the character of neighborhood politics and engagement. It appears that many neighborhood council systems are moribund or powerless.

the effects of different forms of neighborhood government on the quantity, quality, and equity of civic engagement in metro areas. The existence of neighborhood councils, associations, and similar bodies would seem to increase the quantity of civic engagement by multiplying the avenues through which citizens can engage with each other and with local government. They would seem, at a minimum, to offer a first step on the ladder of civic leadership, as neighborhood councils are more accessible than many city-wide institutions, such as the city council, school board, or zoning board offices.

We cannot say for sure, however, that neighborhood governance increases levels and improves the distribution of civic engagement. In the absence of neighborhood councils, issues might be brought directly to city councilors or agency officials. Neighborhood councils, furthermore, are subject to the same kinds of background inequalities that shape participation in other political venues. In particular, home-owners and wealthier and more educated residents participate far more actively than renters and low-income residents.¹⁰⁵ In addition, government may co-opt neighborhoods and seek to control their organizing and advocacy efforts.¹⁰⁶

Only one study has examined whether the presence of neighborhood governance increases civic engagement generally. Berry, Portney, and Thomson compared five cities with strong systems of neighborhood government to a group of cities without such institutions and found no significant differences in aggregate civic participation.¹⁰⁷ In terms of equity of engagement, this study also found that the expected socio-economic biases in participation (with greater activity exhibited by wealthier, more educated citizens) did not seem to diminish in cities with neighborhood governance structures. Berry, Portney, and Thomson are, however, more sanguine about the impact of neighborhood governance structures on the *quality* of civic engagement. They argue that neighborhood councils help make government more responsive to resident concerns, and that they make those who participate more knowledgeable about public affairs and more tolerant of differences, and give them an increased sense of political efficacy. Furthermore, residents of cities with robust neighborhood governance institutions are more likely to engage in a variety of more demanding forms of participatory democratic engagement.

¹⁰⁵ Susan S. Fainstein and Clifford Hirst. "Neighborhood Organizations and Community Planning: The Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program" in Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and Philip Star ed. *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ See Saul Alinsky, "The War on Poverty – Political Pornography," *Journal of Social Issues* 21 (January 1965), 42.

¹⁰⁷ Berry, Portney, and Thompson, *Rebirth of Urban Democracy*, 81.

d. Deliberative Opportunities

Since the general assemblies of New England town meetings, when settlements were much smaller than today's local communities, Americans have experimented with various forms of direct citizen deliberation.¹⁰⁸ As one way of overcoming parochialism, a growing movement promotes citizen interest in, and engagement with, public issues through face-to-face discussion. These efforts are consistent with a large and growing body of work within political theory about the importance of opportunities for citizens to come together and talk with one another about pressing public issues.¹⁰⁹ Deliberative theorists assert that such opportunities improve the quality and legitimacy of public policy, while also educating citizens.

Local experiments with deliberative forms of citizen engagement and decision-making are many. Minneapolis, Rochester, and Portland are among the municipalities that are developing innovative participatory opportunities for neighborhood planning.¹¹⁰ The states of Vermont and Kentucky encourage parents to serve on boards that help to govern individual schools. Citizen deliberations may be organized through city hall or particular city departments, as with the Chicago Local School Councils and Alternative Policing Strategy. Alternatively, they may be organized by non-governmental institutions and civic groups, such as the National Issues Forums, AmericaSpeaks, or Study Circles Resource Center.¹¹¹ Regardless of the sponsor, deliberative events can be a valuable addition to the formal institutions of local government, and public officials, seeking better ways to grapple with increasing heterogeneity and demands, are often willing to participate in them.¹¹² For example, the 2002 "Listening to the City" event,

¹⁰⁸ See Bryan, *Real Democracy* and Joseph F. Zimmerman, *The New England Town Meeting: Democracy in Action* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ See Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thomson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); James S. Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁰ See Archon Fung, "Street Level Democracy: Pragmatic Popular Sovereignty in Chicago Schools and Policing" (Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, September 2-5, 1999); Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹¹¹ See David M. Ryfe, "The Practice of Deliberative Democracy: A Study of 16 Deliberative Organizations," *Political Communication* 19(2002): 359-77; Mark Button and Kevin Mattson, "Deliberative Democracy in Practice," *Polity* 31 (1999): 609-37; Katherine Cramer Walsh, *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 191-194. For historical antecedents, see Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy during the Progressive Era* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997).

¹¹² Patricia Reichler and Polly B. Dredge, *Governing Diverse Communities: A Focus on Race and Ethnic Relations* (Washington, DC: National League of Cities, 1997).

which drew some 5,000 participants to the Jacob Javitz Center in Manhattan to deliberate about the plans to rebuild the area of lower Manhattan, was a remarkable opening of an urban design and planning process to public criticism.¹¹³

As with any measure to enhance civic engagement, these and other examples point to the need for efforts to insure that participatory opportunities are equitably distributed. As we discuss below, achieving equity in deliberation may require special mobilization efforts. Even when a representative cross-section of the community can be gathered and mobilized to participate, there is no guarantee that the proposals generated by deliberation will become public policy. Community involvement in the design of the World Trade Center site appeared to have a significant impact on evolving plans. It is often not altogether clear, however, how deliberative efforts ultimately fare in the wider, adversarial decision-making process, where elected officials, bureaucrats, or others, have the final say.

While many believe that deliberative participation improves the process, the participants, and the product, there are voices of caution, and much more systematic study is needed to understand fully the conditions under which public deliberation of the sort described here succeeds both as a participatory opportunity and as a means to improve outcomes.¹¹⁴

e. Co-production of Public Services

In some municipalities, citizen participation does not end with deliberation about policy development, but extends to policy implementation. Citizens become not just *consumers* of public services, but active participants in the *production* of those services as well. In his city survey, Scavo finds that the use of co-production strategies is widespread: 92 percent report block watches, 39 percent use adopt-a-park programs, and 27 percent report adopt-a-street programs.¹¹⁵ Public safety is perhaps the most obvious policy area in which the involvement of citizens themselves is crucial to the desired public goods. From providing “eyes on the street,”¹¹⁶ to forming block watches, citizen patrols, and anti-crime marches and crusades, residents frequently engage in activities – sometimes with police and sometimes by themselves –

¹¹³ Beyond the direct participants, the event catalyzed a much wider discussion in the pages of city newspapers and in New York generally. See Kennedy School of Government. “Listening to the City: Rebuilding at New York's World Trade Center Site” (Case 1687.0 and 1687.1, April 2003).

¹¹⁴ See Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy*.

¹¹⁵ Scavo, “Use of Participative Mechanisms,” 102.

¹¹⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

to promote their physical security.¹¹⁷ These forms of civic engagement are often essential to creating safer neighborhoods. In addition, fully forty percent of the U.S. population is protected by volunteer fire departments (most communities under 50,000 are served by volunteer departments).¹¹⁸

With respect to schooling, PTA's used to be a widespread and important part of our common commitment to education. But PTA's have experienced a huge decline in membership, "from a high in the early 1960s of almost 50 members per 100 families with children under eighteen to fewer than twenty members per 100 families with children under eighteen in the early 1980s."¹¹⁹ Some of this decline has likely been absorbed by PTOs which, unlike PTA's, are not organized nationally.¹²⁰ Even if parents continue to be involved in their school districts, the fact that they are no longer doing so (to nearly the same extent at least) through organizations that are linked across school district boundaries is troubling given the increasing homogeneity of school districts and the problem of metro-wide fragmentation.¹²¹

Efforts to involve citizens in local service provision may be sponsored by the federal government as well. Programs such as AmeriCorps or Teach for America engage citizens in helping to solve the problems of central cities and other disadvantaged places, and there are also new federal initiatives promoting faith-based service provision. We explore these topics in greater detail in Chapter IV of this report.

With a few notable exceptions,¹²² citizen participation in the production of public services has escaped the attention of political scientists who tend to focus on engagement in law- and policy- making rather than on implementation. However, many of the most salient encounters between citizens and government occur at the level of local program administration and service delivery. Here, individual engagement offers reasonable prospects for success. Citizens are crucial conduits of information, and crucial participants in the creation of public

¹¹⁷ Robert J. Sampson's Chicago Study is relevant here.

¹¹⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 130-1, and 465 (n. 38).

¹¹⁹ Susan Crawford and Peggy Levitt, "Social Change and Civic Engagement: The Case of the PTA, in Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds. *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, Washington: Brookings, 1999, 249-296.

¹²⁰ Crawford and Levitt report that membership statistics in PTO's are not recorded.

¹²¹ Crawford and Levitt, "Social Change and Civic Engagement," esp. 283-284,

¹²² Scholars working at Indiana University's Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis have produced fundamental work in this arena. See also Lawrence Susskind and Michael Elliott, *Paternalism, Conflict, and Coproduction: Learning from Citizen Action and Citizen Participation in Western Europe* (New York: Plenum Press, 1983).

goods. Citizen participation in services, then, offers many of the benefits claimed for participation generally: more informed and responsible citizens on one hand, and more accountable and responsive government on the other.¹²³

We believe that sustained participation requires giving citizens authentic decision-making power. When this occurs, reform efforts appear to overcome some obstacles that commonly hinder participation.¹²⁴ In any event, citizens want their engagement to make a difference and it is hard to see why their activity matters unless it does make a difference.

Skeptics will argue that democratic engagement cannot persist in resource-poor neighborhoods. While it is true that many participatory initiatives have failed to draw participation from low-income neighborhoods, other designs seem much more successful in this regard. Contrary to what socio-economic models of participation predict, for example, attendance at police beat meetings across the city was not a function of median income, education levels, or racial composition of the neighborhood. Instead, attendance was driven primarily by neighborhood crime rate.¹²⁵ With respect to public schools, the number of parents who ran for the Local School Council varied partly according to the socio-economic characteristics of the school, but turnout was higher in neighborhoods with higher proportions of Black and Hispanic students.

Direct mobilization can help involve citizens in these various venues. As part of its community policing initiative, for example, the City of Chicago provided \$3 million to a community-based group charged with deploying organizers throughout the city to recruit participants for neighborhood community policing meetings. They used door-to-door contacting, outreach to neighborhood forums, and other time-tested methods to generate very substantial participation rates across most Chicago neighborhoods.¹²⁶

¹²³ See Whitaker, Gordon P. "Coproduction: Citizen Participation in Service Delivery" in *Public Administration Review* 40 (May/June 1980): 240-46; Stephen L. Percy. "Citizen Participation in the Coproduction of Urban Services," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 19 (June 1984): 431-446; Wilson, R. K. "Citizen Coproduction as a Mode of Participation: Conjectures and Models" *Journal of Urban Affairs*. 3 (1981): 37-49.

¹²⁴ For example, while many neighborhood associations simply provide input or advice to city agencies, the Minneapolis Revitalization Project allocates \$400 million over twenty years to individual neighborhood associations to implement projects around housing, services, and amenities. The influence and power associated with various forms of participation is described in Sherry Arnstein's classic "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *American Institute of Planning Journal* (July 1969): 216-224.

¹²⁵ Fung, "Street Level Democracy," 33.

¹²⁶ Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation*.

These experiences suggest that both the equality of civic engagement – in particular the extent to which less well off citizens participate in the co-production and co-governance of public services – and also its quality and quantity depend upon the nature of the opportunities for participation. In particular, disadvantaged citizens seem to participate when doing so confers influence to improve outcomes about which they care, such as neighborhood safety and local school quality.

3. Engagement with Non-Governmental Institutions and Groups

Opportunities for civic engagement in local settings are not limited to the formal access points governments provide. Citizens who care about the issues facing their communities can find many other avenues of political action, including those provided by organizations that bridge the gap between citizens and the formal institutions of government. In some cases, these bridging efforts have become deeply enmeshed in government institutions, making it difficult to tell where one stops and the other begins. Often, these organizations work to mobilize different communities within the metropolitan region, including communities who share a common interest or a concern with a particular issue, communities of racial and ethnic similarity, and communities of geographic location, such as neighborhoods. In this chapter, we first highlight efforts to engage citizens by shared interest or issue and by demographic profile. We then turn to a discussion of citizen mobilization by neighborhood. Of course, to the extent that neighborhoods are fragmented and segregated, these distinctions are not clear cut.

a. Community Organizing and Community Organizations

One branch of extra-governmental local community engagement is “community organizing.” That phrase evokes for many the adversarial tradition of radical neighborhood organizing pioneered by Saul Alinsky in Chicago’s Back of the Yards.¹²⁷ Since the 1930s, organizers in that tradition have sought to mobilize residents of poor neighborhoods and local institutions such as churches and labor unions to demand concessions from city government and private corporations on issues such as employment, health, public services, and local amenities. This tradition remains significant in many cities today. Its hallmarks are the use of professional

¹²⁷ See Saul Alinsky. *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971), *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946); Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky—His Life and Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

organizers who attempt to build lasting “power” organizations and indigenous leaders in low-income, typically minority communities. These organizations deploy a variety of tactics, ranging from electoral mobilization to disruptive protest, to improve the quality of life in highly disadvantaged areas.

Community organizations may also be part of larger national organizing networks. The largest of these networks – and the ones that have been most studied – are the Industrial Areas Foundation,¹²⁸ Associated Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO),¹²⁹ the Gamaliel Foundation, and the Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART). There are no doubt thousands of less heralded organizations in cities and towns across the United States, dedicated to fair housing, community development, environmental justice, and school quality.¹³⁰

It is difficult to estimate the general effect of this brand of populist, adversarial community organizing upon the quantity or quality of civic engagement. There is no census of community organizing that reveals the extent of the number of persons involved.¹³¹ It is similarly difficult to assess the quality of participation in these organizations. Surely, they provide crucial avenues through which residents of disadvantaged areas can learn the skills and reap the benefits of collective action. There are also reasons to view these organizations critically: the quality of democracy within them varies. Even highly sympathetic writers notice tendencies toward top-down control and paternalism within their organizing techniques.¹³²

¹²⁸ Of the major community organizing enterprises, The Industrial Areas Foundation—and specifically the Texas IAF—has received by far the greatest attention from scholars and journalists. See, for example, Mark R. Warren. *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mary Beth Rogers. *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power in Politics* (University of North Texas Press, 1990); Paul Osterman. *Gathering Power: The Future of Progressive Politics in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Dennis Shirley. *Valley Interfaith and School Reform: Organizing for Power in South Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Michael Gecan. *Going Public: An Inside Story of Disrupting Politics as Usual* (Boston: Beacon Press 2002); Benjamin Marquez, *Constructing Identities in Mexican-American Political Organizations: Choosing Issues, Taking Sides* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2003).

¹²⁹ See Richard Wood. *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹³⁰ Harry Chatten Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizens' Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). We note that it is a weakness of the community organizing literature that it mostly focuses on left-groups.

¹³¹ ACORN claims 150,000 member families and 700 neighborhood chapters in 51 cities. Mark Warren and Richard Wood estimate that the faith-based community organizational field “includes about 4,000 member institutions, of which 87 percent are religious congregations, and 13 percent are non-congregational institutions (NCIs) like unions, public schools and a diverse array of other community organizations. The religious congregations involved represent between 1 and 1.5 percent of all congregations in the country.” Mark R. Warren and Richard Wood. *Faith Based Community Organizing: The State of the Field*.

¹³² Fisher, *Let the People Decide*, 60. But see Osterman, *Gathering Power*, 64.

The effect of these groups upon the equity of civic engagement seems clearer. These groups create paths of sociability and collective action in precisely those communities that often lack the resources and connections to engage civically. They reduce the bias in civic engagement that stems from inequalities in material conditions, social status, and political privilege. Community organizing can lead directly to improved economic access, school quality, public and private investment, and public services.

Issue- or interest-based adversarial community groups, and efforts to mobilize people along racial or ethnic or other demographic lines, are other forms of community organizing.¹³³ In cities, the settlement houses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries provide an early example of efforts at engaging immigrants and the poor. Established to address the economic, social, cultural, and intellectual needs of impoverished immigrant neighborhoods by mobilizing residents, these associations filled gaps in the larger civic and municipal political structure. The settlement houses drew public attention to the condition of impoverished areas¹³⁴ and produced many activists who would later engage in broader reform endeavors.¹³⁵

Community empowerment and mobilization initiatives can have an especially important impact on African-Americans, Latinos, newer immigrants, and other segments of working class urban communities.¹³⁶ Immigrants, in particular, face obstacles to mobilization and engagement in many aspects of community life because they often face statutory and bureaucratic obstruction, in addition to cultural and language barriers.¹³⁷ This is an increasingly urgent

¹³³ Fisher correctly observes that neighborhood organizing “is not inherently reactionary, conservative, liberal, or radical, nor is it inherently democratic and inclusive or authoritarian and parochial. It is above all a political method.” Fisher, *Let the People Decide*, 221.

¹³⁴ Rohe and Gates, *Planning with Neighborhoods*, 21.

¹³⁵ Richard L. McCormick, “Public Life in Industrial America, 1877-1917” in Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 93-117. Cited in Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

¹³⁶ Urban scholars have focused detailed attention on the role of accessible political institutions and coalition-building in facilitating empowerment and mobilization in minority communities. Rufus P. Browning, Dale Roger Marshall and David H. Tabb, *Protest Is Not Enough: The Struggle of Blacks and Hispanics for Equality in Urban Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall and David H. Tabb, *Racial Politics in American Cities*, 3rd Edition, (New York: Longman, 2003); Wilbur Rich, ed. *The Politics of Minority Coalitions: Race, Ethnicity and Shared Uncertainties* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996). In cities where African-Americans and Latinos have become politically empowered, it is because of accessible political institutions, which allowed members of previously disenfranchised groups to become a part of the governing coalition that determines public policy, coordinates institutional arrangements, and influences the distribution of scarce municipal resources. William Nelson. “Black Mayoral Leadership”, *National Political Science Review* 2 (1990):188-195; Michael Preston. “Symposium—Big-City Black Mayors: Have They Made A Difference?” *National Political Science Review* 2 (1990):129-195.

¹³⁷ Noah Pickus, *Immigration and Citizenship in the 21st Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998); Louis DeSipio, *Counting on the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Pei-te Lein, *The Making of Asian America through Political Participation*

problem because foreign migration to the United States is dramatically altering the demographic profile of the American population.¹³⁸

b. Immigrant Political Empowerment

A considerable range of new research is focusing on immigrant mobilization. Immigrants are likely to follow settlement patterns marked out by co-national predecessors – hence the striking array of new ethnic enclaves in which immigrants from particular “sending countries” live in close proximity. This residential concentration should make mobilization easier from a logistical standpoint, but efforts by political parties to activate political participation among immigrants are sporadic at best.¹³⁹ Lower naturalization rates, lower status occupations and correspondingly modest incomes, make these populations less likely targets of mobilization by established political forces that control local politics. The mobilizing work traditionally accomplished by political parties is now largely undertaken through civic organizations, labor unions, churches, and voluntary organizations in immigrant communities.¹⁴⁰

Immigrant mobilization is influenced by particular features of gateway cities and their surrounding metropolitan areas, and also by differences across the states in political culture, political parties, electoral competitiveness, and election laws.¹⁴¹ Among the local contextual factors that are especially important for immigrants are the density of co-ethnic populations, the competitiveness and receptiveness of local political party structures to immigrants, the possibilities for cooperation in cross-group coalitions, the presence of traditions of balancing

(Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); Michael Jones-Correa, *Between Two Nations: The Political Predicament of Latinos in New York City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ronald Schmidt, Sr., *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000). One study by Segura, Garcia, and Pachon found that those Latinos who were citizens (especially the native-born), more educated, and English-dominant were more likely to participate in traditional civic affairs. Gary M. Segura, F. Chris Garcia, and Harry Pachon, “Estimating and Understanding Social Capital and its Political Effects Among Latinos in the United States,” delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Long Beach, CA, March 22-24, 2002.

¹³⁸ More than 20 percent of Americans are immigrants or their children, and nearly a third of all Americans are of non-white and non-European descent. By a slim margin, African Americans are no longer the largest minority group in the United States, having been eclipsed in 2000 by a rapidly growing population of Latinos. In the last decade, Asians doubled the size of their population to more than 4 percent of Americans.

¹³⁹ Jones-Correa, *Between Two Nations*; Kristi Andersen 2004; Cara Wong 2004

¹⁴⁰ Kristi Andersen and Jessica Wintringham, “Political Parties, NGOs, and Immigrant Incorporation: A Case Study,” Workshop on Immigrant Incorporation, Syracuse University, March 21, 2003; Rodolfo O. de la Garza et. al. 2002

¹⁴¹ Karthick Ramakrishnan 2001.

slates with ethnic groups, and other features of local networks and organizations.¹⁴² For newer immigrant groups, one challenge is to find the most effective mechanism for becoming a part of the municipal governing coalition through collaboration, displacement, or the forging of new coalitions among immigrants that cross racial and ethnic boundaries.

Research on immigrant empowerment suggests that even in the midst of difficult circumstances, immigrants are very much involved in non-electoral political activities, including labor union organizing and participation, church-related activities, national-origin mutual aid societies, social movements, women's organizations, and other non-governmental organizations. In order to find such instances of engagement, political scientists must be willing to look beyond electoral participation.¹⁴³ We still have much to learn about existing patterns of civic engagement among immigrants and the ways in which they might be empowered to participate more. Latin American immigrants, for example, may simultaneously be engaged in churches whose activities focus on lived realities in the US, but also in "hometown associations" that maintain ongoing links between immigrants' communities in the US and their home country.¹⁴⁴

c. Neighborhood Organizations

Although neighbors may have similar demographic profiles and interests, neighborhoods themselves are fertile ground for civic engagement. Many Americans have strong neighborhood ties and cooperate with their neighbors to pursue collective aims on a regular basis. Efforts to mobilize along geographic lines have come from a variety of sources and have attempted to accomplish a variety of aims.

¹⁴² Roger Waldinger 1996.

¹⁴³ See Kim Geron, Enrique de la Cruz, Leland T. Saito and Jaideep Sing, "Asian Pacific Americans' Social Movements and Interests Groups," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34 (2001): 619-24; Carol Hardy-Fanta. *Latina Politics, Latino Politics: Gender, Culture and Political Participation in Boston* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Benjamin Marquez and James Jennings, "Representation by Other Means: Mexican Americans and Puerto Rican Social Movement Organizations," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (2000): 541-46.

¹⁴⁴ Hometown associations within Latino immigrant communities have become major centers of civic activity. The primary identity of these groups is to villages and towns in home countries. Hometown associations have been directly responsible for raising funds and in-kind contributions to promote a variety of urban development projects including the building of churches, schools, roads, and water wells, all in countries of origin. Although there is no systematic survey of their presence in U.S. communities, such information would provide a very clear indicator of the full scope of civic engagement of some immigrant communities. Our traditional categories of civic engagement may need to be expanded to comprehend this growing segment of urban populations. [See NYT article.](#)

Neighborhood-based social service providers can be especially important in disadvantaged areas.¹⁴⁵ Consider, for example, the Grand Boulevard neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, which was studied by a research team at Northwestern University. This is a high poverty neighborhood of 36,000 residents in which fully 82 percent of the children grow up in families living below the poverty line. Yet even in this very poor neighborhood, a block-by-block inventory revealed 319 "face-to-face organizations" where volunteers do the bulk of the work. About one hundred of these nonprofits were churches or religious groups.¹⁴⁶ Such organizations can empower citizens and provide an important link between residents and city hall.

An important wave of neighborhood organizing came from Washington, with President Johnson's 1964 War on Poverty and its Community Action Programs (CAPS) and Model Cities.¹⁴⁷ Community Action Agencies were created and charged with developing and administering poverty-reduction programs "with the maximum feasible participation of the members of the groups and residents of the area served."¹⁴⁸ Many urban neighborhoods participated, eventually establishing over one thousand Community Action Agencies across the country, making the Citizen Action Program a "vast incubator" of civic engagement.¹⁴⁹ The participation mandated by the Community Action Program laid the groundwork for other forms of citizen participation in policymaking, and changed expectations about what local policy ought to look like.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ See Steven Rathgeb Smith, "The New Politics of Contracting: Citizenship and the Nonprofit Role," in Helen Ingram and Steven Rathgeb Smith, eds., *Public Policy for Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993), 198-221.

¹⁴⁶ John P. Kretzmann, John L. McKnight, and Nicole Turner, *Voluntary Associations in Low-Income Neighborhoods: An Unexplored Community Resource* (Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1996).

¹⁴⁷ David J. Greenstone and Paul E. Peterson, *Race and Authority in Urban Politics: Community Participation and the War on Poverty* (New York: Sage, 1973), 2-6.

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Congress, *An Act to Mobilize the Human and Financial Resources of the Nation to Combat Poverty in the United States*, Public Law 88-452, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1964, 9, quoted in Greenstone and Peterson, *Race and Authority*, 4-5.

¹⁴⁹ Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland, *Civic Innovation in America: Community Empowerment, Public Policy and the Movement for Civic Renewal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 35-43; Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom, *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1998), 394; see also Richard Cole, *Citizen Participation and the Urban Policy Process* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974).

¹⁵⁰ Allard 1999. The effects were, some argue, especially pronounced among low-income residents and across racial boundaries. Thomas 1986, 38, 41. Since many model cities grants went to African-American residents, the legislation helped to break down racial barriers in local politics. Allard 1999, 180. The program served as a political training ground for residents, as the experience helped launch various attempts to gain elected office at the local and

Today, community development corporations, or CDCs, could be an important avenue for citizen engagement at the neighborhood level.¹⁵¹ CDCs are nonprofits with a primary focus on housing and are governed by their own independent boards of directors. Though the vital role they play in conceiving, planning and financing various neighborhood projects and their role in establishing public-private partnerships to pursue economic development gives them considerable status in their communities, some scholars have argued that most CDCs exert little effort at community organizing and advocating for their neighborhoods.¹⁵² Although CDCs have been highly successful in building links between city hall and neighborhoods, as currently configured they are less than ideal vehicles for citizen participation. Whereas citizen participation was at the very foundation of CAPS, it has never been at the heart of the CDC mission.

Beyond efforts to mobilize poor or disadvantaged areas, residents of middle- and upper-class neighborhoods are especially likely to organize their neighborhoods, seeking to preserve the value of their homes or promote the quality of local public goods (and thereby to enhance the value of their homes). Most sizable towns and cities in America contain dozens if not hundreds, of neighborhood improvement associations, block clubs, neighborhood corporations, and residential community associations.

In the national 2000 Social Capital Benchmark survey led by Robert Putnam, twenty percent of respondents claimed to participate in a neighborhood association.¹⁵³ Those with college educations were almost three times as likely (32 percent responded affirmatively) as those with a high school education or less (12 percent responded affirmatively) to participate in such an association.

Older studies have found different relationships between neighborhood participation and socio-economic status (SES). Nearly a quarter century ago Richard C. Rich identified 167 neighborhood associations in the consolidated county of Indianapolis/Marion, Indiana.¹⁵⁴ Rich

state levels. Peter Eisinger, "The Community Action Program and the Development of Black Political Leadership," in Dale R. Marshall, ed. *Urban Policy Making* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979), 127-144; Allard 1999.

¹⁵¹ In 1980 there were only 200 CDCs in the United States but a 1999 survey puts their number at around 3600. Over half of these are in urban areas. Mildred Warner, "Innovative Economic Development Strategies," June 2001, at <http://www.cce.cornell.edu/restructuring/doc/reports/econdev/ieds.htm>. Accessed 27 February 2004.

¹⁵² See Randy Stoecker, "The CDC Model of Urban Redevelopment: A Critique and an Alternative," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 19 (1997): 1-22.

¹⁵³ See Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. <http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/>.

¹⁵⁴ Richard C. Rich. "A Political Economy Approach to the Study of Neighborhood Organizations" in *American Journal of Political Science* 24 (Nov. 1980): 559-92.

found *no* associations in the wealthiest quarter of neighborhoods, ten percent of the associations in the poorest quartile, and ninety percent in the middle half. More recently, Matthew Crenson has argued that participation tends to be highest in middle-income neighborhoods and considerably lower in both poor and wealthy neighborhoods (or, as political scientists would say, there is a *curvilinear* relationship between SES and neighborhood participation). Eric Oliver finds a similar relationship between different communities' median household income and a host of other local participatory acts.¹⁵⁵ If this is correct, then neighborhood participation operates in ways quite unlike other forms of political engagement, such as voting, working in political campaigns, and contributing money to campaigns, all of which tend to be lowest among the poor and less educated, higher among the middle class, but higher still for the better off and better educated.¹⁵⁶

Rich and Oliver differ, however, about the explanation for this pattern. Rich hypothesizes that formation of, and participation in, neighborhood associations corresponds to the ratio of resources in the neighborhood to the demand for public goods. Poor neighborhoods have many needs, but few resources to address those needs, whereas wealthy neighborhoods have few needs but many resources. These different mismatches between needs and resources result in low participation and collective action. In middle-income neighborhoods, Rich argues, local participation can mobilize moderate resources to address manageable needs. In contrast, Oliver argues that communities in the middle-income range are also more likely to be economically diverse and that diversity begets conflict, which, in turn, generates participation.¹⁵⁷ Here is another important topic on which we must report conflicting evidence, competing theories, and considerable uncertainty.

d. Homeowners Associations

One type of neighborhood organization that is particularly common among middle- and upper-income Americans raises concerns about civic engagement. Established by covenants attached to the deeds of residential property, homeowner associations (HOAs) are “private governments” that manage property held in common by homeowners, provide services such as

¹⁵⁵ Oliver, *Democracy in Suburbia*, 79.

¹⁵⁶ See Matthew Crenson, *Neighborhood Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁵⁷ Oliver, *Democracy in Suburbia*, 86-93. Oliver argues that both poor and wealthy communities are more homogenous and less conflictual, with individuals in such communities less likely to be drawn into the political process.

trash collection and snow plowing, and enforce the covenants, rules and regulations that restrict the behavior of residents, such as pet ownership, home improvement, and parking. Since homeowners associations are self-governing, and since they lobby of local government, HOAs seem generally to stimulate civic participation. However, both the quality and equality of that participation is problematic.

The moniker “private government” is applied because HOAs tend to take on many of the roles traditionally assumed by local government. HOAs collect mandatory fees, similar to local taxes, to finance their operations, which include provision of the sorts of services often provided by local government. A 1989 report by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) asserted that homeowner associations “account for the most significant privatization of local government responsibilities in recent times.”¹⁵⁸ In addition, HOAs usually have a public meeting once or twice a year and elect a governing board that supervises business between meetings.

This form of association has grown dramatically over the past forty years. In 1964, there were fewer than five hundred HOAs. By 2003, eight thousand new HOAs were forming each year and an estimated fifty million Americans – almost one out of every five – lived in association-governed communities.¹⁵⁹ Despite their growing numbers, few, if any, HOAs cater to low-income or subsidized housing.¹⁶⁰ As exclusively middle and upper-middle class homeowner enclaves, HOAs reinforce income segregation and may thereby reinforce racial segregation.¹⁶¹

According to the 2001 Annual Housing Survey, seven million Americans live in gated communities: these almost always involve a community association and further accentuate their

¹⁵⁸ ACIR, *Residential Community Associations: Private Governments in the Intergovernmental System?* (Washington, D.C.: ACIR, 1989), 18.

¹⁵⁹ Figures are from the Community Associations Institute, which is the trade association for HOAs as cited in Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 11 and on the Community Associations Institute website: <http://www.caionline.org/about/facts/cfm>.

¹⁶⁰ Robert H. Nelson argues that the benefits of homeowner associations should be spread to existing poor and inner city neighborhoods. At least two obstacles present themselves immediately to this scheme: 1) most inner city poor are renters, not homeowners; 2) almost all HOAs were founded by real estate developers when they built the subdivision; it is difficult to imagine who would serve this function for existing neighborhoods. See Nelson, “Privatizing the neighborhood: A Proposal to Replace Zoning with Private Collective Property Rights to Existing Neighborhoods,” in David T. Beito, Peter Gordon, and Alexander Tabarrok, eds., *The Voluntary City* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 307-370.

¹⁶¹ McKenzie, *Privatopia*, 22.

exclusionary character by controlling public access.¹⁶² The withdrawal of prosperous homeowners from the local public fisc leaves fewer resources to meet the needs of those left behind; the possibilities for redistribution and the promotion of other inclusive public goods within the public sector are attenuated. HOAs can thus exacerbate place-based inequalities.

HOAs might be viewed as “small republics”: the epitome of grassroots democracy where residents closely identify their own personal interests with the interests of their community. The weakness of HOAs is that they nurture a sense of shared fate among residents at the expense of connections to the larger political community. In addition, the governance structures of HOAs do not encourage norms of healthy political engagement, despite the semblance of direct and representative democracy. For example, renters do not have a vote, meetings are not subject to sunshine laws, free speech and other constitutional guarantees are not protected, and many decisions are delegated to hired professionals and contractors, leading to a system that, in the words of one author, “attempts to replace politics with management.”¹⁶³ The underlying rationale is that the residents have chosen to self-segregate into communities where they consensually agree on what services should be provided and what rules of behavior should be enforced.¹⁶⁴ With everyone agreeing on the goal of protecting property values, there should, in theory, be few interest or value conflicts. Management thus replaces politics because values are agreed upon, and those who do not agree are free to move.

In practice, the governance of HOAs is characterized by a combination of widespread indifference along with recurrent nasty conflicts of interest and values. Many HOAs have trouble mustering a quorum for their meetings or persuading someone to run for the board. More than half of the respondents to a 1988 survey of HOA board members characterized their members as “apathetic.”¹⁶⁵ Much of this nonparticipation is probably due to the fact that members are basically satisfied with the services of their homeowner association, perhaps because the dissatisfied have moved on. But when conflicts do arise, usually over enforcement of association rules, the private decision making process, or managerial model, of HOAs is not

¹⁶² Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

¹⁶³ McKenzie, *Privatopia*, 18.

¹⁶⁴ The CC&Rs prohibit behaviors that are perceived as harming property values. These rules cover an incredibly broad range of activities, from paint colors, to banning clothes lines or basketball hoops, to rules about pets, cars, and guests. Everyone who purchases property in the development becomes a member of the HOA and is subject to the rules.

¹⁶⁵ Cited in Robert Jay Dilger, *Neighborhood Politics: Residential Community Associations in American Governance* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 140.

well suited to resolving these conflicts. Members are forced to go outside the association to the courts, using expensive and time-consuming lawsuits to address their grievances. Homeowner association litigation is a thriving legal specialty and increasingly association boards resort to eviction or foreclosure to enforce rules or collect fees.¹⁶⁶

HOAs can stimulate citizen participation in the larger community, and in fact, homeowner associations have increasingly become effective lobbying organizations. However, they usually become politically active when residents perceive that a proposed action, such as a commercial development or a landfill, threatens their property values. According to research based largely on case studies, HOAs “are in the vanguard of the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) movement across America.”¹⁶⁷ In contrast to renters and low-income homeowners, HOAs have the resources, networks, and, often, the paid legal assistance to effectively direct patterns of land use around their neighborhoods. HOAs have every right to organize and lobby the government, but the “mobilization of bias,” to use Schattschneider’s term, tilts the playing field of metropolitan development in the direction of these well-financed and well-organized interests.

In conclusion, HOAs can provide an avenue for civic engagement by their members, but it is a narrow form of civic engagement, aimed at advancing the particular interests of a well-defined association. Internally homogeneous and democratically frail, HOAs seem to exemplify the weaknesses of small and insular communities committed to advancing a narrow agenda. They do not serve as effective schools for civic engagement in a large and diverse society.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

We have emphasized throughout this discussion that metropolitan regions have experienced dramatic change – most notably growth and decentralization, coupled with increasing economic stratification and persistent segregation. We believe these changes have had profound and complex effects on the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement in cities and their suburbs. We have also emphasized two central tradeoffs, even dilemmas, of civic engagement in the metropolis. One is the dilemma of size: small scale serves in many ways to spur civic activity by keeping government accessible to citizens. But small communities are

¹⁶⁶ Analysis of court records in the Houston metropolitan area identified more than 15,500 filings between 1985 and 2001 that could have resulted in foreclosure against owners in homeowner associations. Source: www.HOAdata.org as reported in Motoko Rich, “Homeowner Boards Blur Line of Just Who Rules the Roost,” *New York Times* (July 27, 2003).

¹⁶⁷ Dilger, *Neighborhood Politics*, 7.

liable to be narrow and exclusive in their outlook. In addition, many important public issues, such as concentrated poverty, environmental pollution, and traffic congestion, cannot be addressed effectively at the local level. Second is the dilemma of diversity or heterogeneity: the personal encounter with diversity seems essential to democratic citizenship in a vast heterogeneous republic such as ours. But some evidence suggests that more heterogeneous places, irrespective of size, are less trusting and also, quite possibly, less apt to nurture engagement.

The presence of steep tradeoffs could easily make one pessimistic about the prospects for metropolitan reforms to improve civic engagement. If improvements on one dimension automatically lead to offsetting harms on another dimension, then nothing we can do will really make us better off. Two points need to be made, however, about the tradeoffs we have identified. First, the existence of these tradeoffs highlights the need to make moral choices about the kinds of cities and civic engagements we want to realize. In general, this committee believes that metropolitan development and governance in the United States has tilted too far in the direction of localism and segregation, with negative effects both for the quality and equality of citizen participation. To address this we recommend, among other things, creating broader, more diverse decision making arenas in metropolitan areas – *even if this has some negative effects for trust and local community participation.*

But the more important point to make about the tradeoffs we have identified is that they are not fixed; they can be managed in better and worse ways. In certain circumstances, we can transcend the tradeoffs and pursue both values at once, or at least alter the nature of the tradeoffs to some degree. It is possible, for example, to have small and quite homogeneous communities that foster high levels of interpersonal trust, while at the same time requiring them to recognize the diverse claims of other communities in wider public settings. In many ways, this is the genius of American federalism.

There is no simple formula for managing difficult tradeoffs or for improving their terms. But such opportunities exist, we believe, and it is precisely the function of research to identify where and when they exist. These recommendations – which seek to enhance the quantity, quality, and equity of civic engagement – address state and federal, as well as local, policy-makers; because cities are limited, fostering metropolitan civic engagement requires deliberate and concerted action at all three levels. We recommend four different kinds of actions:

- *Encourage citizens to participate directly in decisions that affect their lives* including the provision of such local services and amenities as neighborhood planning, local school governance, public safety, and local economic development. The challenge here is to create new institutions – or reinvigorate old ones – that invite public engagement and deliberation outside the formal electoral process.
- *Explore new metropolitan governance institutions* that enable citizens and their political representatives to address problems that cannot be adequately or effectively addressed within the ambit of current local institutions. The challenge here is to devise structures that overcome the fragmented nature of many metropolitan areas without suppressing opportunities for popular political engagement.
- *Reduce concentrations of rich and poor within metropolitan areas, as well as the segregation of races and ethnicities.* Geographic separation that reinforces political, economic, and social divisions undermine the quality of our civic life.
- Increase the scope for organized politics, popular engagement, political conflict, and public collaboration in local and metropolitan government by reconsidering the Progressive era reforms that attempted to insulate the operations of local government from political conflict.

We must enter one final caveat. As we have said before, political scientists have not recently paid sufficient attention to many aspects of metropolitan life and local political institutions. We wish we knew more about how political institutions and human interactions might best be structured to promote government that is wise and capable because all its citizens are actively engaged. We hope that our efforts may stimulate others to redressing this situation. In the meantime, however, and in contrast with the discussion in Chapter II, we venture to speak here without nearly as much evidence as we would like, and without the confidence that we hope future research will supply.

1. Empower People to Participate Between Elections

As we have emphasized throughout the report, improving the overall amount, distribution, and quality of civic engagement holds out the promise of more legitimate public policy which has the support of a broader array of stakeholders, a more capable and active citizenry, improved public policy as a consequence of broader discussion, and greater fairness insofar as the range of relevant voices that are heard is widened.

Political scientists should seek a more systematic understanding of the conditions under which direct citizen participation creates inclusive deliberative encounters and improved public

policy. Conversely, we must also understand the conditions under which deliberation falls short of these aims by excluding particular groups or perspectives or by hobbling the policy process. Although we do not fully understand the conditions under which citizens are likely to participate, we believe that the most successful of participatory and deliberative reforms exhibit several features. First, citizens are more likely to participate when they are asked to do so: personal contact that seeks to mobilize citizens to act in politics is vital. Second, we believe that participation is more likely when it makes a difference: citizens must see that their efforts influence decisions and shape policies. Third, we recommend that residents should not merely be allowed to express their opinions, which officials may then consider or dismiss, but that they have the opportunity to work directly with elected officials and agency staff.

Institutions can be designed so as to discourage or invite greater participation: we recommend inviting more direct, broader, and more consequential input from citizens. These recommendations are not directed exclusively at governments. Indeed, many problems can be addressed by citizens acting on their own through voluntary associations or nonprofit organizations. Many public policies are now implemented in partnership with nonprofit and voluntary organizations. Just as government should be opened up to citizen participation, so civic and community organizations can be structured in ways that invite greater direct involvement by those who are affected by the actions of associations and organizations. This theme is at the center of Chapter IV, but we touch on it here as well. Our recommendations in the area of direct political participation and citizen empowerment are several:

- *Local governments* should enhance opportunities for citizens to become involved in issues they care about. All government agencies should explore methods to involve citizens in shaping and administering policy through advisory boards, public meetings, and greater citizen involvement in what we have called the “co-production of public goods and services.” Large cities should make extra efforts to ensure that local government is brought close to the people through such means as neighborhood governance and administrative decentralization. As much as possible, citizens should be involved “up front” before the agenda has been set, rather than late in the process when most important decisions have already been made.
- *Community organizations* should be structured in ways that foster greater citizen engagement. They should envision their missions not simply as providing services but as engaging residents in efforts to improve their communities. The governing and advisory boards of CDCs should involve more residents, for example, and these organizations should invite residents to participate in a wider range of activities.

- Government programs that provide funds to neighborhood organizations should require that a majority of the governing board be residents of the neighborhood.
- *Cities should invest in and engage in direct mobilization.* These efforts should supplement the important mobilizing activities of political parties and other community organizations. Providing participatory opportunities may not be enough: people are more likely to get involved when asked, face-to-face, to do so. At the same time, we recognize that getting government involved in community organizing has the danger of furnishing public officials with a new instrument of partisan politics. We are mindful of this concern, and seek ways of addressing it.
 - *Political scientists should seek a more systematic understanding* of the relationship between engagement and good governance. In particular, what kinds of engagement make governance more deliberative, accountable, effective, and legitimate? Conversely, what sorts of engagement polarize, facilitate, capture, or, as our colleagues from an older generation worried, overload government with the demands of special interests?

2. Governing the Metropolis with Engagement in Mind

We began by noting the complex relationship between civic engagement and the size of the political community: participation is greater in smaller jurisdictions where government is close and accessible to the people. On the other hand, the political fragmentation that creates smaller political communities in many of America's metropolitan areas facilitates the social stratification and segregation that undermine our capacity to pursue broad and inclusive public aims together. Additionally, smaller, more homogeneous, municipalities may promote social trust and ease of social intercourse, but they organize key issues out of politics and prevent the kind of bridging social capital necessary for a diverse democracy.

The conflicting values we face in addressing tradeoffs between more and less centralized decision making are indeed vexing.¹⁶⁸ Other things being equal, taking decision making authority out of the hands of local governments and putting it in regional bodies is not good for civic engagement. But "other things" are not always equal.¹⁶⁹ Increasing the authority of regional institutions can, in some contexts, enhance the power of local governments. The ability of a local government to make effective decisions depends not simply on being left alone by higher level governments, but also on its relationship to other local governments and to the

¹⁶⁸ Many reforms, such as, state court litigation aimed at curbing local exclusionary powers, state legislative impositions of consolidated regional governments, or special-purpose regional authorities, may well depress political and civic participation.

¹⁶⁹ David J. Barron refers to this as the "baseline problem" in "A Localist Critique of the New Federalism," *Duke Law Journal* 51 (2001): 377-433.

private market. Greater local autonomy does not always mean greater local control. Isolated and weak institutions are at the mercy of more powerful forces. If a local government is resource poor or locked in competition with its neighbors, it will not be able effectively to exercise its formal authority. Regional reforms that may impose limitations on local governments in order to require them to address problems of sprawl and segregation that cannot otherwise be addressed. Civic engagement may be enhanced – certainly the quality of governance may be enhanced – if important problems that are now effectively off the public agenda can be brought onto it, albeit at the regional level.

Ideally, metropolitan political institutions should foster participation and engagement at the local level, but do so in ways that encourage citizens of localities to transcend their parochial interests and identities in favor of more encompassing and inclusive political perspectives that span boundaries of race, class, and locality. Although there is no consensus among social scientists or policy-makers regarding the institutional arrangements that best combine public engagement with the capacity to confront pressing metropolitan challenges, some approaches are worthy of further study.

Local government scholars David Barron and Gerald Frug, argue for legal and institutional reforms that would allow citizens and representatives of localities to address common concerns and conflicts in authoritative political arenas.¹⁷⁰ These reforms have two prongs. First, state laws that define the powers of local governments should compel them to take seriously the effects of their actions on other localities and create incentives for cooperation on regional problems.¹⁷¹ Second, state legislatures should create representative regional institutions that allow municipalities to address common issues by forging enforceable agreements with one another.¹⁷² Such regional institutions would have super-majority requirements, perhaps modeled on the European Union, to forestall problems of the tyranny of the majority. We cannot with

¹⁷⁰ See Barron, “Reclaiming Home Rule,” *Harvard Law Review* 116 (2003): 2255 and Frug, chap 7. See also Richard Briffault, “Localism and Regionalism,” *Buffalo Law Review* 48 (2000). Barron’s “Reclaiming Home Rule” includes a discussion of regional government and two-tiered approaches, including the distinction between two-tiered approaches and consolidation.

¹⁷¹ Barron argues, for example, that certain common local powers should be reduced: powers to engage in exclusionary zoning, maintain municipal boundaries, and refuse to share property tax revenues, while localities should exercise greater powers in other domains such as the enactment of inclusionary zoning and anti-discrimination ordinances. Such changes, he contends, would create incentives for citizens and officials in current localities to address, rather than exacerbate, sprawl and spatial stratification. David Barron, “Reclaiming Home Rule.”

¹⁷² Gerald Frug, “Beyond Regional Government,” *Harvard Law Review* 115 (2002): 1763-1836.

confidence endorse this or any other particular proposal, but the approach is promising and merits more research and experimentation.

At present, there are few if any metro-wide institutions that are elected by the population they serve, and fewer still that purport to represent the individual municipalities that make them up.¹⁷³ Still, a few metropolitan areas – most notably, Portland, Oregon – have succeeded in establishing successful regional institutions or patterns of effective cooperation without weakening local civic participation.¹⁷⁴ These examples of metropolitan governance are worthy of greater study from the perspective of their effect on civic engagement, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

We believe that regional reforms that address metropolitan-wide issues can, under the right circumstances, enhance civic engagement. The challenge for future research is to determine what these circumstances are. Given the urgency of the problem of metropolitan governance, but the absence of consensus upon any solution, it is appropriate to embark upon a course of institutional innovation and experimentation in which metropolitan regions become laboratories of democracy and civic engagement:

- *State and local policy makers should experiment with a range of institutions that alter municipal powers and create arenas that encourage citizens from different localities and their political representatives to engage with one another around issues of metropolitan concern.* New regional forms should include civic engagement as a critical goal. They should recognize that whatever institutions are created will affect civic engagement, for better or worse. When possible, they should not to over-ride local decision-making, but rather create incentives that align local and regional aims.
- *Special purpose governments should be more open and transparent.* Corporations and real estate developers have used special districts to confer benefits on a few and impose burdens on the many – in ways that are almost invisible to the public at large. Special purpose governments should allow meaningful input from citizens and prevent private interests from pursuing their goals invisibly. They should be required to coordinate and balance their functions with other special districts and general-purpose governments.
- Social scientists should develop a comparative politics that illuminates the variety of institutional arrangements under which metropolitan regions can be governed. Which of these are better and worse for civic engagement, and other aims of regional governance? Such a social science would inform policy experimentation.

¹⁷³ See Frug, “Beyond Regional Government” and note article on Puget sound regional assembly.

¹⁷⁴ Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein, and Don Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003)

- Social scientists should seek to understand the conditions under which individuals seek highly parochial aims without regard to the consequences for other neighborhoods, towns, and the region as a whole. When, conversely, do residents embrace more encompassing identities or wider concerns for equity, welfare, or environment?

3. Creating More Diverse Communities

Local political communities in America too often reflect and reinforce the most significant divisions among citizens, including divisions of class and race. We recognize that diversity can be a source of conflict, and that creating trustful and cooperative relations among people who are different is a challenge. Nevertheless, vital aspects of the democratic experience are short-circuited when local communities erect barriers that constitute exclusive enclaves of privilege: the political agenda is artificially constrained, and those who are excluded are deprived of equal opportunities.

The fragmentation of American local governments into relatively homogenous enclaves undercuts the ability of local communities to serve as effective training grounds in the skills of politics. Immigrants face high hurdles to political incorporation. Many immigrant groups are rarely mobilized, and they face additional obstacles to full participation, such as language barriers and naturalization requirements.¹⁷⁵ The social and political marginalization of racial and ethnic groups creates unequal opportunities for meaningful civic and political engagement. These engines of systematic material and political inequality, which some critics have called an “American apartheid,” enervate metropolitan civic engagement.¹⁷⁶

More generally, many regard the massive foreign migration to the United States as worrisome from a civic standpoint. But these changes also have a democratic potential. Political scientists must do more to understand the dynamics of civic and political engagement among new immigrant communities. We recognize that there is a danger in attempting to “retro-fit” new populations into existing institutional arrangements and democratic practices. Advocates of democracy should consider providing resources and space for these new Americans to imagine

¹⁷⁵ There have been some recent efforts to increase the turnout rates among registered voters in areas of high Latino population density but low Latino turnout. Preliminary research shows that live phone contacting can increase turnout in areas with a low propensity to vote. Ricardo Ramírez, Alan Gerber, and Donald Green, “Report on NALEO *La Voz del Pueblo*, 2002,” forthcoming 2004. Personal contacting may be an especially effective strategy for increasing voter turnout in a number of urban communities.

¹⁷⁶ Douglass S. Massey and Nancy L. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

and construct new models of democratic politics consistent with basic principles of liberty and equality. Scholars studying civic and political engagement should use this moment of racial pluralism to reconsider their assumptions about where political and civic engagement can be found, the utility of reigning models of political behavior, and even to reconsider the extent to which political power resides in the institutional structures of American democracy

We recommend several policies to enhance the political capacity and engagement of racial minority and immigrant groups and to foster engagement that bridges racial and economic divides.

- *Municipalities should be encouraged to provide a mix of housing that meets the needs of the people who work in the area.* Madison, Wisconsin, for example, recently passed an inclusionary zoning law that requires all new development to include affordable housing. Zoning laws that exclude apartments or require all houses to be built on large lots are not in the public interest. Federal and state governments should consider a variety of more ambitious housing policies for economic integration, such as tying grants to having a “fair share” affordable housing plan, encouraging inclusionary over exclusionary zoning, and fully funding housing voucher policies that facilitate geographic mobility.
- *Lower formal barriers to the political participation of immigrants.* At the federal level, we should investigate the consequences of easing paths to naturalization. Some cities and towns have expanded the local political franchise. Takoma Park, Maryland, for example, permits non-citizens to vote in school board elections, and San Francisco is currently considering a similar policy.¹⁷⁷
- *Since schools are often the first place immigrants interact with local government, public school officials should reach out to the parents of immigrant children – in their native language – to try and lessen the barriers that fan alienation and low achievement.*¹⁷⁸
- *Enforce Fair Housing Laws.* Vigilant enforcement of fair housing laws already on the books would help insure that all Americans have the same opportunity to live in desirable neighborhoods. Increasing racial and social integration would, in turn, inject diversity and pluralism into experiences of local engagement.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Additional normative concerns, in particular whether and when members of immigrant groups have fulfilled the responsibilities concomitant with the privileges of the franchise, should regulate these proposed extensions. Allowing non-citizens to vote could also result in a noticeable backlash from native citizens. Any community considering extending voting to non-citizens must take the risks of such a backlash into account.

¹⁷⁸ See the work of Alejandro Portes.

¹⁷⁹ We well know that because privileged suburban enclaves derive direct public and private benefits from their the exclusivity and fiscal autonomy – better public services, including schools, and in the higher home values associated with the superiority of schools and public services – important constituencies will be opposed to residential integration. But fair housing laws are supported in principle by the majority of Americans. Abravanel, Martin D.

4. Revitalizing Politics in Local Government

In the first part of the twentieth century, urban reformers instituted political reforms to combat corruption and enhance the professionalism of public agencies. These reforms – including at-large systems of representation, and city-manager forms of government, professionalized agencies that insulated themselves from political “interference” – had the effect of de-politicizing many activities of city government and dampening civic engagement. On the other hand, as we reported above, some studies show that council-manager forms of city government and electing at least some city council seats at large, are associated with higher levels of trust in government, which may tend to encourage the civic engagement of some.

The evidence here does not permit us to advance definitive proposals with confidence. We tend to believe that partisan political activity can and should be revitalized at the local level. Conflict can be healthy, especially when it brings new voices and perspectives into the arenas of public discussion and decision. While conflict associated with racial and economic diversity may turn some citizens off to politics and cause them to feel less connected to their localities, it may also foster new patterns of political mobilization and help local politics take up important but neglected issues. Furthermore, enlarging the scope of politics invites not just conflict, but also the give-and-take between political and civic interests and organizations that can result in innovative collaborations that thicken the relationships between government and civic groups, and among civic groups themselves. We also recognize that while increasing conflict in local government will mobilize some, it will prove distasteful and difficult for others. We suspect that widespread aversion to conflict and compromise highlights the need for more and better education of citizens about the centrality of disagreement and debate to democratic political life.

Given the apparent presence of tradeoffs between civic engagement and trust in government, and the limits of what we know, our primary recommendation here must be directed at our fellow researchers.

Therefore,

- *Social scientists should work to understand* which municipal institutions promote more and better civic engagement. Older studies that uncovered the negative effects of Progressive-era reform institutions should be updated to consider the effects of municipal size, partisanship, administrative structure, regional form and location, and

“Public Knowledge of Fair Housing Law: Does it Protect Against Housing Discrimination?” *Housing Policy Debate* 3 (2002): 469-504. We understand the importance of stable communities and are revising this recommendation.

relationship between local state and civil society upon the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement.

- *Cities should reconsider the Progressive-era reforms*, including council/manager governance, at-large city council districts, and non-partisan elections. These institutional forms seem to depress participation, especially minority participation. By contrast, mayoral campaigns can spur civic engagement, particularly when the elections help empower previously excluded groups.

D. CONCLUSION

The features of the metropolitan landscape that shape civic engagement are the result of many factors. New technologies, especially the automobile, played a major role in shaping the places where people live and work – the spreading out of the American metropolis, the separation of home from work and other functions, and the sorting of population along economic lines.¹⁸⁰ But technology did not work this transformation without the significant and ongoing intermediation of political choices at all levels of government.

Local communities often cannot undertake the necessary actions. Cities remain, as Douglas Rae and Paul Peterson have argued, weak players in the mix of actors that shape the future of the nations' metropolitan areas. Federal policies – governing programs from interstate highways to FHA loan guarantees to the deduction of home mortgage interest and property taxes – have contributed to certain patterns of residential organization by encouraging suburbanization and segregation.¹⁸¹ Although it was inevitable that cities would spread out, it was not inevitable that this new development would be governed by hundreds of local governments. States are the source of city authority: determining cities' revenue streams, often limiting their ability to annex their suburbs, and frequently preventing regional governance and cooperation.¹⁸² Finally, cities and other local governments are often relatively weak players, they do have policy options at their disposal, from zoning codes, to economic development incentives, to the way they deliver local services.

¹⁸⁰ It took the availability of cheap cars, advances in housing construction, the development and extension of the AC electric grid, and other factors to unleash the great decentering of the metropolis. Economists Edward L. Glaeser and Mathew E. Kahn are unequivocal about the causes: sprawl is ubiquitous, expanding, and irresistible, and it has a single root cause: the technological superiority of the automobile. "Sprawl and Urban Growth," May 5, 2003; forthcoming in Volume IV of the *Handbook of Urban and Regional Economics*, manuscript 2. And see Rae, *City*.

¹⁸¹ For syntheses of the scholarly literature on the role of public policies in suburbanization, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* and Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metro Politics for the 21st Century* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), esp. chapter 4.

¹⁸² David J. Barron, "A Localist Critique of the New Federalism."

The institutional arrangements that organize our metropolises are not incorrigible facts of nature. We often choose to live with the consequences they produce: dramatically unequal opportunities for civic engagement, local government that is too often insulated from popular influence rather than a channel for self-government, and Balkanized enclaves that deprive us of opportunities for encounters with those who have different life experiences and perspectives. But we can and should reject these consequences in favor of other institutions and politics that are more worthy of our democratic ideals.

Serious reform requires hard work from public leaders, citizens, and social scientists. Here in particular, the challenge demands not just action but greater knowledge. As we have repeatedly said, many problems and potential solutions have yet to be understood adequately.

CHAPTER IV

THE NONPROFIT, VOLUNTARY, AND PHILANTHROPIC SECTORS

Consider:

- There are more than 900,000 nonprofits registered with the federal government.
- There are 50,000 foundations in the United States, with collective assets of \$450 billion.
- There are 350,000 churches in the United States.
- One hundred ten million Americans volunteer in a single year.
- Private charitable giving is estimated at \$200 billion a year.

A. ASSOCIATIONS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

At the heart of civic engagement is associational life. Associations are the foundation of communities, linking neighbors to one another and integrating neighborhoods in cities and towns. Associations with active memberships are classrooms for citizenship and building blocks for broader political movements of all kinds.¹ This chapter of our report focuses on the role of associations in nurturing civic education and civic engagement, and also on the ways in which public policy enhances or inhibits the opportunities for associations and their members to participate in civic and political affairs.

Voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations can contribute in a host of direct and indirect ways to the quantity, quality, and equality of civic and political engagement in a democratic society. Some associations may act directly in politics to advance the shared political interests of members, and still others facilitate public-private partnerships. Many other voluntary associations are, however, oriented toward particular goals and activities that have little directly to do with civic and political and affairs. Even such apparently “a-political” associations bring individuals together in cooperative relations and thereby often enhance members’ willingness to engage in political activity. Associations in which members play an active role seem to enhance

¹ Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

the civic capacities of participants, increasing the likelihood of their involvement in politics. In various ways, groups and associations are “mediating structures” in large complex societies and, by linking individuals to others in cooperative relations, can encourage wider forms of civic involvement. In a variety of ways, therefore, groups and associations are training grounds and laboratories of citizenship.

Of course, associational activity is not always an unambiguous good. Particular groups can be insular, exclusive, and self-protective in ways that harm the larger community and even their own members. It is the task of public policy – and our aim in this report – to craft policies and institutional structures that encourage the good and deter the bad of associational life.

We believe that overall, and under reasonably favorable conditions and within well-structured institutions, associations generally strengthen democracy. What are these favorable conditions? Here, as in earlier chapters, we seek to advance an argument: government’s pervasive power to regulate and establish the context within which organizations and groups work can – when ill-used – inhibit individuals’ and associations’ involvement in public life. By adjusting institutional and regulatory frameworks, policymakers can enhance the role played by civic associations in American life, and in the process enliven the civic and political capacities of individuals.

The extent to which law and policy shape civic engagement in civil society is often overlooked. For example, when those interested in civic engagement look back to Alexis de Tocqueville’s canonical account of the importance of groups and associations to democracy, pride of place is often given to individual freedom and scant attention is paid to the ways in which Tocqueville emphasized that a healthy civic life depends upon sound policy choices and well-designed institutions. True enough, Tocqueville argued that freedom helps give rise to association: “In no country of the world has the principle of association been more successfully used, or applied to a greater multitude of objects, than in America.”² In his rhapsodic descriptions of American life, citizens organize at the slightest pretext: “If a stoppage occurs in a thoroughfare, and the circulation of vehicles is hindered, the neighbors immediately form themselves into a deliberative body.”³

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Richard D. Heffner, ed. (New York: Mentor, 1956), 95.

³ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 95.

This great observer and theorist of democratic life also emphasized the crucial role of institutional design and policy choice in establishing the conditions for an active citizenry: a federal political structure, administrative decentralization, a strong public commitment to education for all, and the expectation of jury service, are among the ways in which political design helps call forth the civic energies of free individuals.⁴ Not only did Tocqueville usefully emphasize the importance of laws and institutions to the behavior and attitudes of free individuals, he also argued that individual freedom – understood as the right to lead one’s own life and make one’s own decisions – is complemented and sustained, not threatened, by involvements in associations, groups, and practices of self-governance.⁵ Indeed, our attempt to renew the political science of citizenship is, in important measure, an effort to elaborate, refine, and bolster this Tocquevillian insight.

To move beyond platitudes about the virtues of associations it is important to identify the specific means by which associations enhance democracy. In the pages that follow we discuss the relationship between individual political behavior and associational membership; examine current trends in volunteering; analyze the health and well-being of various types of civic associations, paying special attention to 501(c)(3) nonprofits, churches, and philanthropies; and consider various ways in which policies and institutions can either help or hinder associations’ contributions to democratic life.

As we have emphasized before, wealthier and better educated citizens have clear participatory advantages, and they do indeed participate more on the whole than the less well off. Against this background – a civic playing field tilted toward the relatively wealthy – it is especially significant that membership and involvement in groups appear to furnish additional and distinct resources for civic engagement. To use the language of modern social science, associations have an independent impact on other forms of civic and political involvement after controlling for other underlying sources of political behavior.

The recent interest in the value of associational membership was spurred in part by Robert Putnam’s emphasis on the civic byproducts of social interaction among participants in groups and social activities of all sorts. That general byproduct, social capital, “calls attention,” argues Putnam, “to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network

⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (JP Mayer edition; Harper), 62-84; 270-276; 286-7, 301-308; also, the laws of property and inheritance, 51-54.

⁵ Need some cites...

of reciprocal social relations.”⁶ Associational activity tends to stimulate civic activism: “Volunteering fosters more volunteering in both formal and informal settings. Organizational involvement seems to inculcate civic skills and a life-long disposition toward altruism.”⁷

The notion that there is a positive connection between associational membership and civic engagement is amply supported by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, whose influential book, *Voice and Equality*, highlights the political impact of what they call the “non-political institutions of adult life – the workplace, voluntary associations, and churches.”⁸ These institutions provide opportunities to learn about the political world and to develop politically relevant skills – from learning to give a talk to learning how to negotiate – that can be transferred to participating in a community group, volunteering in a political campaign, or even organizing a new nonprofit.

One of the greatest civic virtues of associational involvement is that it can contribute to one’s sense of political efficacy: the conviction that one is capable of influencing policymakers, or that one’s voice counts. In their study of neighborhood associations in cities, Berry, Portney, and Thomson conclude that “community participation makes people feel better about their own political effectiveness and about the ability of the local government to respond to them. It contributes to the amount of political knowledge that people possess.”⁹

If the direction of the impact of associational membership is clear, the dimensions of these benefits are subject to the usual scholarly differences and methodological debates. There is no shortage of research – *Bowling Alone* itself has generated a small cottage industry of scholars elaborating upon the book’s findings. The process of learning and acquiring civic skills is complex and measurement is inherently difficult. And some believe that political scientists and other scholars have exaggerated the impact of associational life. After a review of a wide range of literature, Miriam Galston writes that it “no longer seems reasonable or useful for civic renewal advocates to continue to portray associational life as critical for cultivating public spiritedness in individuals or promoting attitudes and practices necessary for reflective self-

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 19.

⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 121.

⁸ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Scholzman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 309.

⁹ Jeffrey M. Berry, Kent E. Portney, and Ken Thomson, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1993), 279.

governance.”¹⁰ We regard Galston’s interpretation of the evidence as overly pessimistic but her deflationary assessment is a useful reminder that uncertainties remain about whether and when associations generate the positive behavior and attitudes that may be derived from community life.¹¹

Other scholars, such as Samuel Huntington, have warned about the dangers of too much participation by citizen groups, though the consensus in our profession is certainly in favor of more participation by citizen organizations rather than less.¹² Huntington’s worries about the capacity of government to contain a surge in popular advocacy have been supplanted by concerns about diminishing civic engagement.

We believe that the evidence supports the claim that associations tend to enhance democratic government. Putnam has chronicled declines in a host of organizations, groups, and even in such mundane forms of socializing as visiting one’s neighbors. He argues that these dramatic declines have important implications for citizens’ capacity and willingness to act in political and civic life. For Theda Skocpol, the problem is the replacement of mass membership organizations with more narrowly focused nonprofits and professionally run organizations that place little emphasis on active involvement by members.¹³

We join Putnam, Skocpol, and many other students of associational life in being troubled by the decline of many groups and associations. Yet we also see crosscurrents and even some encouraging signs with respect to citizens’ group involvements. Rather than attempt to survey the entire field of community life – a hopelessly big task in any event – we focus here on volunteering and the nonprofit sector because they provide important means by which Americans in vast numbers escape the pull of “bowling alone.”

By any measure, the nonprofit and voluntary sector in this country is enormous. Fully seven percent of all Americans are employed by the independent sector and its share of the national income is about six percent. The number of nonprofit organizations continues to grow rapidly. The roles of nonprofits are varied and, increasingly, nonprofits are responsible for

¹⁰ Miriam Galston, “Civic Renewal and the Regulation of Nonprofits.” Typescript, n.d., 151.

¹¹ M. Galston’s criticisms need to be specified; also we might want to add something here about the importance, using putnam’s lingo, of ‘bridging’ rather than ‘bonding’ associations.

¹² Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

¹³ Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Chapter 4.

administering the welfare state. Nonprofits are vital links between citizens and government and they are a major source of civic education and engagement in American life.

Nonprofits provide opportunities to individuals to move beyond solitary, familial, and self-interested pursuits. Lester Salamon captures this dynamic:

Like the arteries of a living organism, [nonprofits] carry a life force that has long been a centerpiece of American culture – a faith in the capacity of individual action to improve the quality of human life. They thus embody two seemingly contradictory impulses that form the heart of American character: a deep-seated commitment to freedom and individual initiative and an equally fundamental realization that people live in communities and consequently have responsibilities that extend beyond themselves. Uniquely among American institutions, those in the nonprofit sector blend these competing impulses, creating a special class of entities dedicated to mobilizing private initiative for the common good.¹⁴

Nonprofits and churches are among the principal means through which Americans try, in conjunction with other citizens, to do good in this world. Most importantly, they are channels for collective action. While these organizations generate many benefits for their members – and no doubt sometimes some social costs – we are centrally interested in the ways in which they both develop and expend social capital and thereby foster citizen mobilization.

B. TWO POSITIVE TRENDS

Much of the current interest in civic education and civic engagement was catalyzed by research documenting the decline of associations, especially those that provide for ongoing personal interaction between members. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* links the decline of associational life to the decline of social capital, the glue of "reciprocity and trustworthiness" that binds communities together.¹⁵ The mountains of data documenting the decline of associations make it easy to overlook two important contrary trends. In contrast to the general downward drift of associational life, the continuing growth of volunteerism and the increasing number of nonprofit associations offer at least some hope for expanding individual participation and enhanced organizational capacity. These developments may not fully compensate for the deterioration of other aspects of civic life, but they represent important, vital, and widespread channels of civic education and engagement.

¹⁴ Lester M. Salamon, "The Resilient Sector," in Lester M. Salamon, ed., *The State of Nonprofit America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 3-4.

¹⁵ Robert L. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

1. Volunteering

In terms of sheer numbers, volunteering is the most popular form of civic engagement. More adults volunteer than vote. Surveys conducted by Independent Sector estimate that around 110 million Americans 18 and older volunteer in any given year.¹⁶ Since significant numbers of high school students volunteer, the nominal figure is even higher. The same survey indicates that the average time volunteered is 3.5 hours per week.¹⁷ It would not be overly cynical to wonder if there is some exaggeration in these hourly figures. They are self-reported and since volunteering is universally considered to be virtuous, it is surely the case that there is some over-reporting – just as people over-report their participation in elections. Still, even after discounting for some reasonable deflator, the figures would remain impressive.¹⁸

The most popular sectors for volunteers are religion, education, youth activities, and social services. The economic value of volunteering is impressive as well. For formal volunteering – where someone has a regular position and is expected to show up at prescribed times – the dollar value of volunteering for 1998 was \$226 billion. The average number of organizations in which each volunteer participates in is 1.67. This number has risen as well.¹⁹ A good deal of volunteering does not involve a regular position but is episodic, such as the many charity walk-a-thons that have become increasingly popular.

Putnam recognizes this trend, acknowledging that volunteering is “sailing. . . boldly against the tide of civic disengagement.”²⁰ Yet he cautions against generalizing from recent patterns. His careful statistical analysis uncovers a disproportionate amount of volunteering from older Americans – the “greatest generation” whose experiences with or memories of the Depression and World War II seem to have given them a distinctive inclination toward many forms of political activity and civic engagement. However, Putnam’s cohort analysis also reveals impressive levels of volunteering by young people, as we will shortly discuss, and there is certainly reason to hope that this trend might endure.

¹⁶ Murray S. Weitzman, Nadine T. Jaladoni, Linda M. Lampkin, and Thomas H. Pollak, *The New Nonprofit Almanac and Desk Reference* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 69.

¹⁷ Weitzman et al, *The New Nonprofit Almanac*, 69.

¹⁸ Recent Census estimates are summarized in Ian Wilhelm, “Stepping Up to Serve Charity,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, January 8, 2004. Available at <http://philanthropy.com/premium/articles/v16/i06/06004301.htm>.

¹⁹ Weitzman et al, *The New Nonprofit Almanac*, 71-73.

²⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 129.

The quality of volunteer experiences appears to vary a great deal. Political scientist Jeffrey Brudney notes that many organizations devote scant resources to the appropriate staffing, training, and supervision of volunteers. According to a survey commissioned by United Parcel Service that asked 1,000 respondents about their volunteer experiences, roughly forty percent of volunteers indicated that they had stopped going to a position because they were dissatisfied with the way their program was managed. Their most frequent complaints were poor use of their time, poor use of their skills, and poor definition of their tasks.²¹

Some worry that volunteerism and nonprofit association activity tend to bring into politics and public life values that are private, or sectarian, or conflictual, such as religious convictions or particular ideological visions. Some worry that for these reasons volunteerism (or some forms of it at least) will weaken norms of consensus building, inclusiveness, and tolerance. Others laud volunteer efforts through churches and other nonprofits precisely because these may present an ideal blend of private values and initiative with public action in ways unavailable to public institutions alone. E.J. Dionne characterizes nonprofits as an engine of contemporary progressive politics, bridging important conservative aspects of our public culture (including religion) and liberal aspects of our public culture (including traditions of popular political action and the empowerment of all citizens).²² In Dionne's view, nonprofits tend to help bridge important social divisions and are, in effect, consensus builders.

Volunteerism appears to have qualitative properties that distinguish it from other modes of civic engagement, such as political activity. Volunteer service activity for example tends to be local, particular, direct, and ameliorative – serving a hungry person a meal, caring for the injured, or re-building local playgrounds, for example. Civic engagement involving partisan or mobilizing work, such as a campaigning for food subsidies, raising money for particular causes, or organizing a low income community food bank, tend to be more systemic and aimed at transforming law or policy. This reveals different aspects of the multifaceted role of citizen: straightforwardly political activity calls for participants to shape the laws and policies that govern all, it holds out the possibility of broad-gauged public solutions to social problems. In volunteer activities, we typically join with others directly to address a common and particular problem: to help the poor or make a neighborhood safer or cleaner. We do not disparage either

²¹ Jeffrey L. Brudney, "The Perils of Practice," *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 9 (1999):385-846.

²² E.J. Dionne, *The Vitality of Society Rests on the Independent Sector, Conversations with Leaders Series*. (Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 2000).

sort of activity – to the contrary, we think both are necessary and applaud each – but they are different sorts of activity and it is worth asking how they tend to be related.

What, in particular, do we make of the fact that volunteering has been growing while the more political forms of civic engagement, such as voting and party involvement, have been stagnating or declining? This has led some to argue that volunteering and more specifically political forms of engagement are in fact inversely related: that volunteering of some sorts or many sorts tends to be a substitute for political action, and that the promotion of volunteer activities is linked to a disparagement of politics.²³ These inverse trends are especially striking among the young. UCLA's long standing study of college age freshmen, for example, shows steadily declining levels of interest and activity in political party involvement, but steadily increasing levels of interest and activity in volunteerism. Fully 81% of all incoming freshman reported participation in volunteer activity in 2000, up from 66% in 1989.²⁴ This has suggested to many that volunteering has become a de facto substitute for – not a bridge but an alternative to – those forms of engagement most closely associated with politics and citizenship.

Moreover, it is unclear exactly how much of the increase in volunteering among the young is a reflection of their increased interest in such activity. Many high schools now require volunteering in order to graduate. Service learning – the integration of community service activity with academic learning in the classroom – has also blossomed over the past generation. Finally, even in the absence of required volunteer hours or service learning courses, students with higher educational aspirations understand that universities and colleges expect to see evidence of community service in the successful students' applications. So what should we make of the evidence of increased volunteering among the young?

In fact, as we mentioned briefly in Chapter II, we should be optimistic not pessimistic about the connection between volunteering and political engagement. The evidence to date shows that people who volunteer, including youth, are more, not less, likely to engage in political activity, and that volunteers are less likely to feel alienated from public institutions. For example, the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress Report Card indicated that

²³ NEED CITES.

²⁴ William A. Galston, *Civic Education and Political Participation*. Working Papers: The Democracy Collaborative. Available at http://www.democracycollaborative.org/publications/galston_cepp.pdf; and Higher Education Research Institute. 2002. Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). Available at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/freshman.html>. See also *The Civic Mission of Schools*, CIRCLE and Carnegie Commission, 2003, 19.

students who engaged in any kind of community service – through school or on their own – had higher scores in civic knowledge than those who did not volunteer. Diana Owen concludes, after a review of the scholarly literature, that service learning programs can be effective in fostering political participation²⁵

Whether service programs do foster political engagement depends in large part on the design of the programs. The hallmarks of successful service learning are by now well-known: they consciously engage teachers and students in civic outcomes and not merely academic performance; they allow students to work on public policy issues; they give students a choice about their community service; they allow them to see results within a reasonable amount of time; they provide regular opportunities for reflection on their service work; and they allow students to pursue explicitly political projects and outcomes. In short, thoughtful service learning programs appear to be very promising vehicles for forging positive link between volunteering and increased political engagement.²⁶

Whatever the challenges they represent and the controversies they generate, volunteer programs have become critical components of many organizations' operations. Although a sizable percentage eventually become dissatisfied, larger numbers of volunteers know that they provide critical services. More than 350,000 volunteers deliver meals to seniors at their homes or at senior centers. The Department of Interior has more volunteers than it has employees, and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs has 160 job classifications for its 87,000 volunteers.²⁷

2. Growth of the Nonprofit Sector

The vast majority of volunteers (about 75 percent) serve in nonprofits. Most of the remaining quarter work for government though this figure, as we shall see, does not adequately convey government's massive and growing dependence on volunteer labor.²⁸ Nonprofits have

²⁵ Diana Owen, "Service Learning and Political Socialization," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (September 2000): 638-40.

²⁶ *Civic Mission of Schools*, 27.

²⁷ Jeffrey L. Brudney, "The Effective Use of Volunteers: Best Practices for the Public Sector," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 62 (2000): 219-255.

²⁸ Weitzman et al, *The New Nonprofit Almanac*, 73.

become the foot soldiers of social service provision, and this raises important issues for civic life.²⁹

People looking to volunteer have a wide variety of options because many parts of the nonprofit sector have experienced dramatic growth over the past generation. The sector as a whole has come to include a vast array of organizations.³⁰ Peter Frumkin notes that “the nonprofit and voluntary sector is home to such a wide range of organizations that grouping them together into one entity is highly problematic.”³¹ This domain includes churches, charities, foundations, hospitals, universities, museums, think tanks, youth groups, social service organizations, neighborhood associations, PTAs, civic associations, arts councils, Community Development Corporations, unions, trade associations, or any number of other types of organizations that fall outside of the for-profit business or government spheres. For purposes of this part of the report, we pay special attention to nonprofits that provide social services, because they can offer their poor and disadvantaged clients an avenue to become more engaged in civic life.

Public policy has played a large role in spurring the growth of nonprofit social service delivery in America. Given the growing pressure on government over the last quarter century to appear “lean and mean,” it should come as no surprise that many ostensible government functions have been subcontracted to nonprofits.³² As welfare policy has turned more and more away from income maintenance and toward social services, nonprofits have become increasingly important. Nonprofits have become the foot soldiers of social welfare, and this raises important issues for civic life.³³

The passage of welfare reform in 1996, designed to “end welfare as we know it,” shifted even more responsibility to nonprofits. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) set strict time limits on eligibility for welfare and forced many recipients into job training programs.

²⁹ See generally, Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Lester M. Salamon, *Partners in Public Service* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

³⁰ The nonprofit sector includes a great variety of organizations and groups, but the term “nonprofit” is a misnomer. Ironically, nonprofits are not prohibited from making a profit. Should they make one, nonprofits are forbidden from distributing it to owners or shareholders. One thing that distinguishes this sector is their treatment under the tax code: their income is not taxed.

³¹ Peter Frumkin, *On Being Nonprofit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 2.

³² Paul C. Light, *The True Size of Government* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

³³ See generally, Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire* and Lester M. Salamon, *Partners in Public Service*.

This, in turn, led to more government support for nonprofits providing services to the disadvantaged. One of the byproducts of this shift in domestic policy is that it broadened the opportunity for nonprofits to offer civic education to clients who may be poorly tied to their communities. For example, when Chicago's Bottomless Closet offers a program of skill development, training for job interviews, and clothes to wear at work, it initiates a process that not only educates its clients, but also begins to connect them to the outside world. With the increase in government funds available for training and social services that private sector organizations are increasingly competing with nonprofits for government contracts in some selected areas such as childcare and home health care.³⁴

There can be no doubt that the United States now possesses one of the most robust nonprofit sectors in the world. In comparison to other developed countries and measured by percentage of all employment, the United States has an atypically large share of its labor force working in the nonprofit sector. When volunteers are added to paid employees, the United States stands out even more. At the same time, the share of nonprofit revenue provided by the government is considerably less in this country than it is in other industrialized nations.³⁵

America's growing reliance on the nonprofit sector affects how individuals relate to government. Nonprofits have the potential to play an increasingly significant role in engaging and mobilizing citizens, but their capacity to play a role in bolstering civic and political engagement depends upon the rules under which they operate.

C. REGULATION

There are at least four reasons why government regulates associations. Some regulations promote transparency, integrity, and accountability, like campaign finance or lobbying disclosure rules. Others referee participation, such as labor union organizing rules or standing requirements for litigants. A third type of regulation shapes incorporation: laws and programs designed to draw certain types of groups into the policymaking process. Laws like the Federal Advisory Committee Act and the Negotiated Rulemaking Act have been important means of bringing citizen groups into bargaining forums where administrative regulations are written and revised. Finally, the government sometimes acts to promote and even subsidize associations. A well-

³⁴ Steven Rathgeb Smith, "Social Services," in Salamon, *The State of Nonprofit America*, 165.

³⁵ S. Wojciech Sokolowski and Lester M. Salamon, "The United States," in Lester M. Salamon et al., eds. *Global Civil Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, 1999), 276.

known example is the Department of Agriculture's nurturing of farm groups in the early part of the 20th century. As we saw in Chapter III, the focus on urban problems in the 1960's brought about Community Action Programs, and, today, Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are able to take advantage of unique financing opportunities designed to promote them as middlemen in neighborhood development.

Of particular importance is the subsidy government provides 501(c)(3)'s, which comes with an array of requirements by the government.³⁶ Since 1917 federal law has offered tax deductibility to certain classes of organizations that, presumably, do work so beneficial to the public good that they deserve this subsidy. Tax-deductible charitable donations are a subsidy because they encourage taxpayers to donate money to 501(c)(3)'s. Of course, this results in a loss of revenue to the government or what may be thought of as a tax expenditure – the use of the tax code to funnel funds to specific activities. Organizations that qualify for this status must be “operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, or educational purposes.”³⁷ The moniker 501(c)(3) comes from the section of the tax code governing organizations with tax deductibility.³⁸

There are more than 900,000 c3's registered with the Internal Revenue Service.³⁹ These are primarily small organizations – the threshold for registering is just \$5,000 in annual income. Nonprofits that fall under the tax return threshold of \$25,000 are obviously too small to have a paid staff and are run instead by volunteers. The advantage of 501(c)(3)'s comes not only from the government subsidy through the tax deductibility of contributions. These organizations are the face of charity in the United States: The 501(c)(3) nonprofit has become the organizational

³⁶ In the pages that follow we will focus largely on four different components of the 501(c)(3) world: foundations, churches, other c3's large enough to file a tax return, and those that fall under the tax filing threshold. In this report we will pay little attention to two of the wealthiest segments of the 501(c)(3) world: universities and hospitals. The regulatory issues affecting these organizations are rather different from the other nonprofits and their role in galvanizing civic engagement is different as well. The remaining set of 501(c)(3)'s, outside of churches and foundations, fall largely in the area of social services.

³⁷ U.S. Code, Title 26, section 501.

³⁸ Confusion often arises because c3's are only one type of nonprofit. Under federal law there are 26 other types of nonprofits. 501(c)(5)'s are labor unions, 501(c)(6)'s are business associations, and 521's are farmer cooperatives. Lester M. Salamon, *America's Nonprofit Sector*, 2nd ed. (New York: Foundation Center, 1999), 8. Although all 27 categories of nonprofits are exempt from income tax, only the 501(c)(3)'s can offer tax deductibility to donors. On the surface not having to pay income taxes may also seem to be an important tax advantage for nonprofits. In reality, it's a rather modest advantage since conventional accounting practices can easily inoculate a modest profit by turning it into something else. In contrast, tax deductibility is an enormous advantage as it is a strong incentive for a donor to give more than he or she would otherwise commit to.

³⁹ Stephanie Strom, “New Equation for Charities: More Money, Less Oversight,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2003, E1.

template of choice in community life, and their tax deductible status confers enormous legitimacy upon them. Entrepreneurs wanting to build a group to address neighborhood problems have every reason to establish their new organization as a public charity.

States also regulate the nonprofit sector. The state laws that are analogous to the federal laws mentioned above are too numerous to catalogue here, but once organizations begin to interact regularly with state and local government, they become aware of certain structured opportunities to participate (hearings, meetings, comment periods, advisory panels, reporting requirements, etc.). As they learn, they also become aware of restrictions.

All such regulations can affect the overall amount as well as the distribution and quality of participation. Particularly striking evidence of the relationship between law and nonprofit activity comes from the comparison between growth rates of 501(c)(3) nonprofits and those of other types of organizations. Between 1987 and 1997, 501(c)(3) nonprofits grew by 64.2 percent.⁴⁰ By comparison, the 501(c)(4) nonprofits, which include avowed citizen advocacy groups and are not entitled to tax deductible contributions, grew by just 2 percent during the same period. Hence, the lion's share of the growth in this area is concentrated among nonprofits that are limited in their capacity to mobilize civic activity among their constituents and clients and influence policy.

In other ways as well, public rules influence organizations' health and their capacity for political voice, and thereby the distribution of participation across the population. Unions have often been important schools of instruction to working class men and women. It is worth noting that many scholars are concerned about the declining proportion of the workforce that holds membership in a union, though too few study the complex web of rules and limitations that govern union activities. Those who study this area generally agree that business associations, on the other hand, despite some regulations particularly in the area of campaign finance, have plentiful opportunities to participate in public policymaking and to involve their rank-and-file.

Although government has cut back on formal opportunities for citizen participation, it has shown increasing skill in learning how to work with citizen groups critical of its programs.⁴¹ In their recent study of "mega-projects" Altshuler and Luberoff found that recognizing the legitimate interests of citizen groups and demonstrating a commitment to seriously negotiating

⁴⁰ Jeffrey M. Berry with David F. Arons, *A Voice for Nonprofits* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 9.

⁴¹ Jeffrey M. Berry, "Maximum Feasible Dismantlement," *Citizen Participation* 3 (1981), 3-5.

with them, is critical to siting very large and disruptive public works projects.⁴² In her comparative study of growth politics in Pittsburgh and Chicago, Barbara Ferman documents the advantages in Pittsburgh of a process that emphasized cooperating with citizen groups rather than confronting them.⁴³ Clarence Stone and his co-authors have advanced similar arguments: local government's capacity to govern depends upon civic capacity, or the ability of local stakeholders including business groups and community leaders to mobilize and coalesce on behalf of reforms.⁴⁴

The broader point is simple: if citizen organizations matter in promoting civic engagement and education, so too does government policy toward citizen organizations. Government policy, including rules that hinder or encourage political communication and advocacy, influence both the overall amount and the distribution (and likely the quality) of political and civic activity.

D. RESHAPING THE CIVIC CONTEXT FOR ASSOCIATIONS

A wide range of public policy measures affect the ability of associations to become involved in public affairs and, in turn, to involve and educate their members. We seek to discern ways of reshaping public policy and redesigning institutions in order to better mobilize individuals, facilitate volunteering, link citizens to government, expand philanthropy, promote community involvement in neighborhood problem solving and government policymaking, and thereby, in sum, to build better citizenship. In discussing five important areas of public policy involving associations and civic engagement, we focus on the rules affecting participation.

We begin with an examination of the incentives relating to philanthropy, then move on to laws regulating public charities and voluntary associations that may involve lobbying, followed by analyses of issues pertaining to accountability and governance of associations, the division between church and state, and national service. Each of these topics involves current debates about the role of associations in American government.

1. Incentives and Philanthropy

⁴² Alan Altshuler and David Luberoff, *Mega-Projects* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

⁴³ Barbara Ferman, *Challenging the Growth Machine* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

⁴⁴ Clarence N. Stone, Jeffrey R. Henig, Bryan D. Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi, *Building Civic Capacity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

Large numbers of Americans donate money, time, goods, and services to charitable causes. This philanthropy improves the polity and is an important avenue of civic engagement. Public policy encourages this activity through the tax code; donations to charities are generally tax-deductible. Many extol the virtues of the charitable tax incentive because it funds private, innovative approaches to social problems as an alternative or supplement to governmental programs.⁴⁵

Still, there is recognition that incentives to give may need adjusting. Only those who itemize receive the deduction for charitable donations, and most low-income taxpayers take the standard deduction. Congress has debated (but has not yet passed) a tax deduction of up to \$250 for non-itemizers. A proposal along these lines in the 108th Congress also proposed increasing the tax deduction cap for corporations' charitable contributions. The expansion of the charitable tax deduction to those who take the standard deduction might enlarge the pool of donors and could be a step toward greater civic engagement for those lower on the income scale. Another simple regulatory change that many believe would increase giving would be to allow tax filers to itemize and deduct in the prior tax year any charitable gifts made up through the April 15 filing deadline; a similar approach is used for contributions to IRAs.

2. Public Charities

There are many ways in which public charities enhance our civic life and provide opportunities for citizen engagement. They are, however, limited in their ability to act in politics. For those who are concerned about the ability of nonprofits to pursue political ends, the most pernicious regulation governing nonprofits is the limitation on legislative lobbying and grassroots mobilization by 501(c)(3) nonprofits.

One problem is a simple lack of clarity. The law on public charities says that nonprofits may not lobby to any "substantial" degree: but what constitutes "substantial" lobbying in this context? The Internal Revenue Service resolutely refuses to define what constitutes substantial lobbying.

⁴⁵ It is important to note that lowering tax rates reduces the financial incentives to donate to charitable causes. People donate for other reasons than the tax deductibility of their contributions, but the tax benefit is no small matter and economists believe that the tax rate affects contribution patterns. Evelyn Brody and Joseph J. Cordes, "Tax Treatment of Nonprofit Organizations: A Two-Edged Sword?", in Elizabeth T. Boris and C. Eugene Steuerle, eds., *Nonprofits and Government* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1998), 141-175. Likewise, the recent repeal of the estate tax appears to work against private charity, though the impact of the change has yet to be measured.

Compounding this lack of clarity is ignorance on the part of nonprofit leaders about what the law actually says. A high percentage of nonprofit executive directors believe the law is far more restrictive than it is. Their organizations' advocacy is much more limited than it need be because of this misunderstanding of what kind of advocacy is allowable within the bounds of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.⁴⁶

Here we must get a bit technical. Unbeknownst to the vast majority of 501(c)(3)'s, there is a perfectly legal alternative to the ambiguous "substantial" standard for allowable direct lobbying and grassroots mobilization. The so-called "H election" permits nonprofits to substitute a very liberal expensing standard that allows up to 20 percent of a 501(c)(3)'s budget to be devoted to legislative advocacy.⁴⁷ And unlike the substantial standard, the H election regulations offer clear and explicit definitions of what counts toward the advocacy limits. Much of what effectively amounts to advocacy does not need to be expensed and few nonprofits would bump up against the limits even with significant advocacy efforts. Most importantly, H electors do not lose the most precious asset of 501(c)(3) status: the right to offer tax deductions to contributors.

In spite all of these advantages, only about 2 percent of 501(c)(3)'s take the H election, largely because they remain ignorant of it or misunderstand it. The IRS deserves blame for not publicizing this option and nonprofit infrastructure organizations – those that do training of other nonprofits – should also do more to bring the H election to light. Regardless of where the fault lies, it is clear that a high percentage of nonprofit executive directors believe the law is far more restrictive than it is.

Research by Berry and Arons demonstrates that the law on public charities strongly deters involvement in public policymaking. The law has a profound chilling effect on participation of nonprofits, reducing advocacy across a range of activities.⁴⁸ Companion interviews with the executive directors of a variety of nonprofits revealed a pattern of excessive caution in dealing with government: they worry that any transgression in this area will lead to an IRS revocation of their tax-deductible status.

⁴⁶ Berry with Arons, *A Voice for Nonprofits*, 57-65.

⁴⁷ The amount of money that an H elector can spend on lobbying is tied to a sliding scale based on the budget of the nonprofit. The 20 percent figure is for the smallest nonprofits (up to an annual budget of \$500,000). An additional one-quarter of the direct lobbying limit can be spent on grassroots efforts. Advocacy before administrative agencies is not limited in any way. See Bob Smucker, *The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1999), 55.

⁴⁸ Berry with Arons, *A Voice for Nonprofits*, 60-74. Using a random sample of IRS 990 filers and a comparison sample of H electing organizations that are otherwise similar, they measured the impact of 501(c)(3) on advocacy.

Although the most significant civic benefits of nonprofits involve the mobilization of clients and constituents, it is also significant that the professionals employed by nonprofits often work to represent the interests of clients through their own advocacy efforts. We would be remiss to ignore the work of nonprofits in representing their constituents in ways that don't directly involve them. This is especially significant because many nonprofits work with the most disadvantaged sectors of American society: frail elderly, immigrants, mentally retarded children, battered women, the disabled, those without medical insurance, and the mentally ill. It's important to acknowledge that for some Americans their connections to government and community affairs are going to be indirect at best. For these Americans it's crucial that the organizations that have an interest in representing them are not significantly restricted by the regulatory environment. Nonprofit political activity holds out the possibility of redress for some of the class-based participatory inequalities discussed earlier. And yet, the unfortunate fact is that under current regulations, as Jeffrey Berry puts it, "Enron and the Teamsters Union have more rights in our political system than the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation or the Children's Defense Fund."⁴⁹

Nonprofits working on behalf of disadvantaged constituencies may also offer a first step toward civic engagement by the disadvantaged themselves. Our conception of engagement must be elastic enough to cover incipient steps toward participation by those who face real obstacles to personal involvement.

Nonprofits in health and human services provide clients with a link to government in a number of ways. For the poor and many other disadvantaged constituencies, nonprofits are the source of government-sponsored services and, thus, nonprofits are a face of government to many of their clients.⁵⁰ Fully half of all nonprofits large enough to file a tax return (at least \$25,000 in annual income) work in the area of health care or human services (see Figure 3-1). Nonprofits can do a lot just by having service providers make it clear to clients where funding for services comes from. Aside from facilitating people's access to services, nonprofits like the Codman Square Health Center in Boston register voters, provide skill building courses in their facilities, and even encourage clients to contact their legislators (along with information as to how to do it).

⁴⁹ Jeffrey M. Berry, "Nonprofit Groups Shouldn't Be Afraid to Lobby," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, November 27, 2003. Available at <http://philanthropy.com/premium/articles/v16/i04/04003301.htm>.

⁵⁰ Steven Rathgeb Smith, "The New Politics of Contracting: Citizenship and the Nonprofit Role," in Helen Ingram and Steven Rathgeb Smith, eds. *Public Policy for Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993), 213-218.

Those who are poor are not by definition apathetic and our knowledge that the poor participate less than others should not become an assumption that they won't participate at all.⁵¹

<Figure 3-1 About Here>

No one would suggest that nonprofits should be able to do whatever they want with charitable donations and, thus, there is a strong justification for government regulation of 501(c)(3)'s. Foundations, government agencies, and government donors expect community groups to be public charities rather than overtly partisan political organizations. We would not argue that nonprofits should make advocacy their central mission. Many 501(c)(3)'s believe that they do not have sufficient resources to become involved in public policymaking or regard it as a low priority. Nevertheless, nonprofits should understand their rights under the law. The unnecessary uncertainties of the IRS rule barring "substantial" nonprofit advocacy, including grassroots mobilization, inhibits the capacity of nonprofits to involve and educate members, clients, and constituents. As it currently stands, section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code is an enormous barrier to expanding civic engagement in America by the most disadvantaged and under-represented Americans.

3. Accountability and Governance

Discussions of nonprofit accountability – the integrity and transparency of their operations – have become pervasive; so too have discussions of nonprofit management, administration, and governance. These issues may seem disconnected from political and civic engagement. Yet these matters affect people's decisions whether to donate or volunteer, and how much to do so, and they can affect the perceived legitimacy of nonprofits as providers of critical social services. Of course, we recognize that overly intrusive regulation may have a chilling effect on philanthropic activities.

There are two types of accountability that concern us here. By financial accountability we refer to whether nonprofits spend their dollars wisely. The increased popularity of models of businesslike efficiency – expressed in the language of metrics of outcome measures, deliverables, and benchmarks – make this kind of accountability the most familiar and the most prominent within the independent sector. Democratic accountability refers to the means

⁵¹ Joe Soss, "Lessons of Welfare: Policy Design, Political Learning, and Political Action," *American Political Science Review* 93 (1999): 363-380.

available to funders, clients, government officials, and the public at large to examine nonprofit operations. In short, to what degree is a nonprofit's operations transparent to the public? Unlike government officials who are subject to a number of important mechanisms of democratic accountability, nonprofits are largely exempt from such requirements. They are not even required to hold public board meetings.

In recent years foundations in particular have been subject to increased scrutiny of their operations, especially the transparency of their finances.⁵² With close to 50,000 foundations in the United States and the number continuing to grow, the federal government has rightly instituted some guidelines governing accountability and the yearly payout. Many foundations remain tightly controlled by the families and corporations that created them, sometimes raising suspicions about their financial operations. Support has emerged in Congress for a revision of the payout rule, effectively raising the share of assets (currently set at a minimum of 5 percent) that must be expended each year. Such legislation manifests widely held concerns that foundations are too autonomous, spend too much on administrative overhead (costs that currently may be included in the 5 percent minimum annual payout), and may have less noble agendas beyond philanthropy.

A small number of well-publicized scandals have put the nonprofit world on the defensive. The post-September 11th revelations that the Red Cross was intending to use for general administrative expenses some of the money it raised for helping the victims' families resulted in furious denunciations of the organization. Financial improprieties by the president of the United Way more than a decade ago also raised real and embarrassing questions about accountability to donors.⁵³ There has been no shortage of exposes of small family foundations where boards of directors have enriched themselves at foundation expense, made unconscionably small payouts after expenses, and otherwise abandoned their fiduciary responsibilities.⁵⁴

It is unclear the effect these scandals have had on the likelihood of people getting involved. The uproar over such malfeasance by foundations has led to a range of proposals for enhancing both financial and democratic accountability. A number of state legislatures are

⁵² Leslie Lenkowsky, "Foundations and Corporate Philanthropy," in Salamon, *The State of Nonprofit America*, 355-386.

⁵³ Paul C. Light, *Pathways to Nonprofit Excellence* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2002), 5-12.

⁵⁴ At the Berger Foundation, for example, seven directors awarded themselves bonuses totaling \$4.2 million as a reward for successful investments. Beth Healy, "Foundations Veer into Business," *Boston Globe*, December 3, 2003, A1.

considering placing limits on compensation for executives and requiring the officials of foundations and other charities to certify that their financial statements are accurate.⁵⁵ Leaders in the nonprofit community have been equally vocal and have called for measures such as sharply limiting compensation to directors, prohibiting family members of a family foundation from receiving compensation of any type, requiring an annual report be made available the public, and forbidding any significant business with companies tied to foundation executives or board members.⁵⁶

In addition to strengthening policies to assure the integrity and transparency of nonprofit operations, we should take general steps to improve nonprofit leadership and management. Leadership development in the nonprofit sector is often deficient, as has frequently been recognized.⁵⁷ During the 1980's, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education sponsored innovative educational practices for volunteer training through leadership organizations such as the Red Cross, the Girl Scouts of America, the Junior League, the YWCA, the National Council of Negro Women, and the Lutheran Social Mission Society.⁵⁸ There is continuing public need to support such efforts because, as we have argued throughout, volunteerism and nonprofit performance can strengthen democratic fundamentals.

Millions of Americans serve on nonprofit boards and this is a vital form of civic engagement in every American community. Boards are, of course, instrumental in raising money but they are used for many specialized tasks beyond this. Approximately 40 percent of nonprofits have at least one advisory group beyond their board of directors.⁵⁹ Given their duties it's not surprising that nonprofit board members tend to be community elites. Laws requiring citizen participation in various government-sponsored nonprofit programs sometimes mandate that a significant portion of boards come from the community. This is understood to mean that the board must include those with low incomes and reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the

⁵⁵ Stephanie Strom, "Questions about Some Charities' Activities Lead to a Push for Tighter Regulation," *New York Times*, March 21, 2004, 17.

⁵⁶ Pablo Eisenberg, "What Congress Can Do to Fight Charity and Foundation Abuses," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, March 18, 2004, 62.

⁵⁷ Michael Brintnall, "Developing Management and Leadership Capacity: Strategic Goals for the Independent Sector." Paper prepared for delivery at the Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, New Orleans, November, 2000.

⁵⁸ Carol F. Stoel, "Improving Postsecondary Education Through the Nonprofit Sector," in Elinor Miller Greenberg, ed., *New Partnerships: Higher Education and the Nonprofit Sector* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982).

⁵⁹ Judith R. Sidel, "Expanding the Governance Construct: Functions and Contributions of Nonprofit Advisory Groups," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 27 (1998), 421-436.

neighborhood or city. Federal regulations require that the boards of community health centers be composed of at least 50 percent patients. There is no nonprofit analogue to the Sarbanes-Oxley law, passed in the wake of the Enron scandal, and its new requirements for governance in the private sector. Some nonprofit boards, however, have been prompted to systematically review governance procedures and to consider which members of the community should serve on the board and other advisory bodies.

Like most other organizations nonprofits select their own boards. It's not uncommon for small foundations to be dominated by family members of the donor or family agents chosen for their loyalty. In neither case do citizens have any formal point of access for participation, even though the operation of nonprofits and foundations so frequently touch their lives in direct ways. For example, a trio of foundations in Pittsburgh decided in 2002 to suspend grant-making to the Pittsburgh public school district and to withhold \$3 million of a \$12 million prior commitment. Their stated aim was to prod the district into making important structural reforms.⁶⁰ This private decision had serious repercussions for all public school children in Pittsburgh: the foundations' money was directed at reading and literacy programs, teacher-training, and technology support, and some of the district's governmental grants were contingent on receiving foundation money. Yet in spite of the broad public impact, citizens had no role in this decision.⁶¹

Another interesting development is the growth of charitable giving via "pass through instruments" operated by investment houses, such as the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund.⁶² Donors may increase their personal control of where their money goes without the trouble of starting their own foundation. Although there now is generally little community involvement in foundations, there will be even less when philanthropy moves to investment firms.

Important questions about accountability and governance of 501(c)(3) nonprofits in general also merit attention. Their favorable tax status and significant levels of direct government grant support might argue for the appropriateness of significant public oversight. One helpful mechanism for such oversight is the fact that 501(c)(3)'s must make their tax return public and form 990 returns are now available online at an organization's own web site and at

⁶⁰ Some additional questions may need to be considered here: if we believe in the robustness of the 3rd sector, then we will have to acknowledge and respect its significant (if not unconditional) independence. If we impose greater political controls on foundations, and thereby further qualify their independence, will we thereby undermine the incentive to establish and support foundations? Did the school district here need structural reforms?

⁶¹ Debra Blum, "3 Pittsburgh Foundations Halt Grants to Schools," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, July 3, 2002. Available at <http://philanthropy.com/premium/articles/v14/i19/19001802.htm>.

⁶² Lenkowsky, "Foundations and Corporate Philanthropy," 364-365.

www.guidestar.org. Generally, however, the accountability of nonprofits to the public is highly attenuated and indirect. Aside from regulations on finances and political activities, there are few public requirements to which nonprofits and foundations are held. The boards of nonprofits are supposed to be the public's accountability mechanism but, as discussed, nonprofit boards do not always function effectively and many are used primarily for fundraising. If nonprofits are not accountable to the public, neither are they accountable to clients. The clients of social service organizations in particular – the disproportionately marginalized and dispossessed – are rarely in a position to demand better performance.

Another bar to effective collaboration between nonprofits and public agencies is weakness in the national capacity to monitor and evaluate public policies co-produced by these organizations. As program implementation increasingly devolves to nonprofit organizations, we risk the loss of centralized record keeping and data gathering which is necessary for measuring performance. There is a conspicuous need for a national survey focusing on nonprofits and volunteers analogous, say, to the National Election Studies Series.⁶³ If better information is needed, so too is better leadership education. Gradually the graduate programs in public administration and in nonprofit management are recognizing the degree to which public goals are now met through co-production – operating partnerships of nonprofit organizations and the public sector – and are introducing attention to training on both sides of this relationship into their curriculums.⁶⁴ We endorse this trend.

The issues of nonprofit accountability and governance are important and complex. It is central to the dynamism of the sector that individuals and small groups be able to form nonprofits or establish foundations that are dedicated to the inventive and even eccentric ideas of their founders. It is a great virtue of the nonprofit sector that it operates in the public interest but without the larger bureaucracy of governmental agencies. However, as nonprofits and foundations have assumed a larger role in society and increasingly influence the lives of Americans, there is greater reason to hold them accountable, to insist on transparency of operations, and to encourage forms of democratic governance. We cannot here answer the

⁶³ This is way too technical: can it be stated simply? We need better small area data indicators to facilitate locally focused evaluation in ways that allow national comparisons. Audit standards for nonprofit organizations might be adjusted to assure greater integrity and accessibility of data systems.

⁶⁴ *Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Nonprofit Organizations, Management and Leadership*. (Washington, DC: National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 1998). Available at <http://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/seeking/reference/guidelines.asp#graduate>.

question of where the balance should be struck but the guiding principle can be expressed in simple terms: Although nonprofits of all sorts, and especially foundations, want to protect their ability to promote the aims they favor, there should always be a role for broad, sustained, and meaningful community participation in the oversight and assessment of their operations.

4. Church and State

Central to the civic life of America, churches are as diverse as the country itself in terms of demography, theology, and ideology.⁶⁵ It is important to recognize that some embrace political involvement, others skirt the edges of it, while still others avoid it studiously. Some go so far as to actively encourage their members to withdraw from the public square all together. On balance, however, churches do more to pull their members into civic life than pull them out of it. As Americans' most common form of associational involvement, churches have an impact on the civic landscape in at least two ways. First, as noted earlier, they provide individual churchgoers with the skills and opportunities for participation in political activity. Second, churches themselves often play an important role as providers of necessary social services.

Although there is considerable variation by individual congregation and denomination, churches provide opportunities to learn the skills necessary for effective political engagement like running meetings, giving speeches, and writing letters.⁶⁶ For many low-income Americans whose educational background and jobs have not provided training in such skills, churches play a valuable role in equipping them to make their voices heard in the public square. Churches do more than just teach skills, however. They also foster social networks, and thus are also important venues for political mobilization.⁶⁷

Among African-Americans, black churches have long served as a primary conduit for the rise of a cadre of black leaders and also for the mobilization of voters, which, in turn, facilitated their election to public office. There is a reason so many candidates for office – black and white – regularly visit black churches during the campaign season. Politicians recognize the role of churches as political mobilizers within the African-American community.⁶⁸ Beyond their

⁶⁵ Throughout this section, the term “church” is meant to include all places of worship, including synagogues, mosques, and temples.

⁶⁶ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

⁶⁷ David E. Campbell, “Acts of Faith: Churches and Political Engagement,” in *Political Behavior* (forthcoming).

⁶⁸ Fredrick Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

mobilization efforts, in the post-civil rights era, black urban churches are performing yet another civic function: taking the sanctuary to the streets to engage in collective efforts of community development aimed at revitalizing the economic, social, and political conditions of inner-city neighborhoods.⁶⁹ Similarly, churches are often the central civic association within Latino communities, and thus provide an important channel for Latinos' full participation in the nation's civic and political life.⁷⁰ Furthermore, churches often successfully partner with other organizations to accomplish civic ends. Organizations like the Industrial Areas Foundation are able to leverage the institutional resources of churches and other faith-based institutions in promoting the activism of racial minorities and the disadvantaged.⁷¹

In addition to equipping individuals to express themselves in the political process, many churches, particularly in urban areas, also contribute to their community by providing social services to the disadvantaged. For example, in a recent national survey of congregations Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos found that 58 percent of churches provide some type of social service. Although this is a lower percentage than suggested by some other sources, it still represents a huge investment in assistance to people in need.⁷²

At the same time, the level of commitment to social services by individual congregations is far more modest than the 58 percent suggests. Chaves and Tsitsos also note that “[o]nly 6% of congregations have a staff person devoting at least 25% time to social service projects.”⁷³ Some confusion arises because a considerable amount of denomination and congregation-based service provision comes from not from churches but from separate nonprofits created for that purpose. Organizations like Catholic Charities and Jewish Family Services obtain government funding for various programs they administer and there isn't controversy over such support. Little government support goes directly to the nation's religious congregations – only 3 percent of which receive any government funding.⁷⁴ In this vein it should be noted that a significant number

⁶⁹ Omar McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Arthur E. Paris, *Black Pentecostalism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); Frances Kostaleros, *Feeling the Spirit: Faith and Hope in an Evangelical Black Storefront Church* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); and Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, “Taking The Sanctuary To The Streets”, *The Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* 594 (July 2004), 79-91.

⁷⁰ Michael Jones-Correa, “Political Participation: Does Religion Matter?” in *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (2001), 751-770.

⁷¹ Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷² Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos, “Congregations and Social Services: What They Do, How They Do It, and With Whom,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30 (December 2001), 669.

⁷³ Chaves and Tsitsos, “Congregations and Social Services,” 671.

⁷⁴ Mark Chaves, “Religious Congregations,” in Salamon, *The State of Nonprofit America*, 275-298.

of churches disavow government funding for social service delivery or any other purpose because they believe accepting such funds will lead to government influence over them.

The movement toward expanding the role of churches and religion-related 501(c)(3)'s in the delivery of social services received a major boost with the passage of welfare reform in 1996 and the "charitable choice" provision included in it. Charitable choice was designed to lift obstacles making it difficult for churches to receive government funds for social service programs. Upon taking office, President George W. Bush expanded the effort to direct federal money to social service providers with a religious character by establishing the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and related offices in five federal agencies.⁷⁵ The initiative has now been extended to ten federal agencies. These offices are designed to promote the role of faith-based organizations in social service delivery, help them understand grant procedures, and aid them in navigating the bureaucracy.

The expansion of the offices to help promote faith-based social services reflects, in part, the Bush administration's inability to gain passage of its program of legislation designed to support such work by churches. The faith-based initiative stimulated an active and acrimonious debate about the separation of church and state.⁷⁶ Liberals angrily criticized the proposal because it would have allowed discrimination based on religious beliefs in hiring for provision of social services funded by the government. Supporters believe that it is appropriate for a religious organization to restrict hiring to believers in its faith. The Bush administration calls it a "fundamental civil right" for religious organizations "to take their faith into account when they make employment decisions."⁷⁷ Some argue that religious organizations are the ones who are subjected to discrimination, believing federal funds are disproportionately channeled toward

⁷⁵ For helpful discussions of charitable choice and the faith-based initiative, see E.J. Dionne and Ming Hsu Chen, eds. *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes: Should Government Help Faith-Based Charity?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001); Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers, and Paul Weber, *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); and Charles L. Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁷⁶ *Uneven Playing Field: Barriers to Participation by Faith-Based and Community Organizations in Federal Social Service Programs* (Washington, D.C.: White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 2001); Stephen Macedo, "The Trouble with Bonding," *Responsive Community* 12 (2002): 16-27; and E.J. Dionne, Jr. and Ming Hsu Chen, eds., *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes*.

⁷⁷ *Protecting the Civil Rights and Religious Liberties of Faith-Based Organizations* (Washington, D.C.: White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 2003), 3.

secular organizations.⁷⁸ These disagreements could not be bridged in Congress and led to the strategy of using executive orders to instruct agencies to assist religious groups in their attempts to win government grants.

Are religious organizations discriminated against when it comes to gaining access to public funds for the delivery of social services? After a careful examination of available evidence, one leading church-state expert, Mark Chaves, concludes that “there is no substantial discrimination against religious organizations in public financing.”⁷⁹ He argues that the primary reason churches don’t receive government support is that they are not set up to compete for grants. They typically lack the infrastructure and skilled staff to submit a credible proposal to a funding agency. Ironically, the churches that have done best in competing for government funding are inner city African-American congregations.⁸⁰

It should also be emphasized that a substantial number of scholars – some of a conservative persuasion and some not – argue that faith-based nonprofits provide some social services more effectively than public agencies. Evidence comparing the effectiveness of different types of social service agencies (public, non-sectarian nonprofit, and faith-based nonprofit) is sparse. Some studies claim that faith-based agencies and programs – substance-abuse programs such as Teen Challenge, and prison ministries – are uniquely effective because they can “forge encompassing whole-person, personally transforming relationships with clients,” as Robert Wuthnow puts it.⁸¹ Even if faith-based programs have an advantage, it is not clear whether that advantage stems from the expression of religious teachings or the fact that the programs involve clients in significant new social relations. Wuthnow speculates that both are important and mutually reinforcing, but he also points out that only about one quarter of faith-based agencies employ the sort of “congregational” model that engages faith and build social relations. Most religiously-affiliated nonprofits operate much like non-sectarian agencies on account of the pervasive influence of professional norms and standards of success.⁸² Faith-based

⁷⁸ Ian Wilhelm, “President Bush Makes Changes in Operations of National-Service Agency,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, March 18, 2004, 49.

⁷⁹ Mark Chaves, “Debunking Charitable Choice,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 1 (2003): 28-36.

⁸⁰ Arthur E. Farnsley II, “Can Faith-Based Organizations Compete?,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30 (2001): 99-111; and Mark Chaves, “Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform: Who Will Take Advantage of Charitable Choice?,” *American Sociological Review* 64 (1999): 836-846.

⁸¹ Robert Wuthnow, *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 159.

⁸² Wuthnow, *Saving America*, 173-4.

nonprofits may, furthermore, assist a distinctive clientele, but they represent a small fraction of the overall mix of social service agencies.

The members of this committee do not agree on the most effective and appropriate way of delivering social services, and neither do political scientists. Settling the many questions surrounding President Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives is not part of our brief. We believe policymakers can fashion appropriate policies that allow for broader participation of faith-based nonprofits in social service delivery. What we are not in favor of is affirmative action for faith-based organizations. Agency efforts to aggressively pursue religious groups to aid them in that organization's grant process are ill-conceived as they tilt what should be a level playing field. Religious organizations are a fundamental and enduring source of civic engagement and ways can be found to further utilize their energies while still respecting the important division between church and state.

5. National Service

Although volunteerism remains widespread in America, we hear frequent calls to increase or enhance it, especially among young people. Among the more ambitious are proposals to provide opportunities, or even to require, a sustained period of service, which many believe can be a life-changing experience.

The federal government has promoted various forms of service. Most significantly, military service is often regarded as a powerful instrument of civic education; at least as implemented during World War II, it is credited with creating bonds among citizens of widely different social classes, regions, religions, and ethnicities. Similarly, the Civilian Conservation Corps, instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression, gave "500,000 jobless young men the opportunity to live and serve in the nation's parks and forests."⁸³ John Kennedy proposed a Peace Corps, which was created in the wake of his assassination. Lyndon Johnson also created a domestic service program, VISTA, as part of the War on Poverty. Although the number of Peace Corps volunteers never reached much above 15,000, idealists in this era argued that some significant period of citizen service should be the common expectation for all Americans.

⁸³ Harris Wofford, "The Politics of Service," 46.

Early in his first term in office, President Clinton proposed a national program of voluntary service in exchange for modest stipends and college aid. “AmeriCorps,” as the program was dubbed, would be a domestic Peace Corps, mainly but not exclusively for the young. Among the goals identified by advocates were “getting socially important work done, instilling an ethic of sacrifice, helping troubled youths turn their lives around, reducing the barriers between different races and classes, and reinvigorating an assortment of civic virtues.”⁸⁴ Clinton hoped for a program that would enroll half a million volunteers for a cost of \$8 billion a year, what he got when the bill finally passed Congress was \$300 million for the first year, which was enough to fund 20,000 volunteers.⁸⁵

In return for a year of full-time service, AmeriCorps contributes \$6,500 toward an enrollee's living allowance (which can be supplemented from other sources). A year of service also entitles an enrollee to an education award of \$4,725. Some AmeriCorps volunteers have worked in federal environmental agencies, but most work with local voluntary groups, community youth and after school programs, and nonprofits such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the YMCA.

Critics often fasten on the ideas of paid service and of government aid to charities and nonprofits. Government support for charitable work will make charities dependent on government assistance, critics charge, and vulnerable to political and bureaucratic whims. AmeriCorps, in particular, could give the federal government a “management position” in the service sector. Service is a vital force in America because it is decentralized and privately organized. With government aid will come government regulation of various sorts, and charitable institutions could lose their moral and religious anchors, and eventually their ability to attract the energetic engagement of volunteers. Indeed, paid national service will transform the notion of freely given service arising from personal duty into work that is paid for by the government.⁸⁶ Martin Anderson indicts paid volunteerism as an oxymoron.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Harris Wofford and Steven Waldman, “AmeriCorps the Beautiful?” *Policy Review*, (September/October 1996), 28-33.

⁸⁵ Stephen Bates, *National Service: Getting Things Done?*, A Cantigny Conference Series Special Report, (Chicago: Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 1996), 33.

⁸⁶ Doug Bandow, “National Service—or Government Service?” *Policy Review* (September/October 1996); and see Bates, *National Service*, 44-46.

⁸⁷ Martin Anderson, remarks at Cantigny Conference on National and Community Service, July 15-16, 1997, sponsored by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation.

So why, then, “paid volunteerism?” Why not leave community service to pure volunteer efforts and the professional staffs of not-for-profit organizations? In many ways, this is the nub of the issue. AmeriCorps volunteers appear to fill an important “in-between” need for many organizations. The typical charitable organization must depend upon two types of personnel: volunteers who give a limited amount of time, along with a small number of full-time paid professionals. AmeriCorps volunteers are neither paid professionals nor pure volunteers. Training is provided by the service agency in which they are employed, and there is an expectation of at least one year’s full-time service. The idea is that AmeriCorps members will have some of the staying power and expertise of professionals, along with the energy and commitment that characterizes volunteers.

Worries about government attempts to promote voluntary activity are worth taking seriously, but there is little evidence that government involvement has seriously compromised the integrity and independence of nonprofit organizations. There are many nonprofits that receive significant funding from the government. Although they are certainly cautious in taking actions or stands that might offend their funding agency, there is little data to support the idea that long-standing government aid has sapped the spirit of public charities.

While funds and broad guidelines come from Washington, a serious effort has been made to preserve the spirit of local initiative. AmeriCorps is largely administered by state commissions that allocate funds on the basis of proposals submitted by local agencies and organizations, including religious organizations (funds may not be used for religious purposes). Thus, the program tries to insure that initiatives come from the local level.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush called for a renewal of citizenship in the form of service. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, “Bush called for 4,000 hours—or two years—of service by every American and asked for a doubling of the Peace Corps and a 50 percent increase in AmeriCorps in one year, from 50,000 to 75,000 members.”⁸⁸ He reorganized AmeriCorps into “FreedomCorps,” and created a new umbrella organization to coordinate the range of federal service programs, including Senior Corps and the Peace Corps. Bush asserted that FreedomCorps “provided the answer to the post-September 11 question: ‘What can I do to help?’”⁸⁹ However, in the face of the yawning budget

⁸⁸ Wofford, “The Politics of Service,” 51.

⁸⁹ Charles Moskos quoting Bush in “Patriotism Lite Meets the Citizen Soldier,” in E. J. Dionne, et al, *United We Serve: National Service and the Future of Citizenship* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 40.

deficits that followed his tax cuts and the economic downturn of 2002, the Bush administration changed course and proposed not an increase but a substantial cut in the national service budget.

We applaud well-designed national service programs such as the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps. A year's service could be linked to a federal program of college scholarships. Federal efforts to make some form of service an expectation for all Americans are to be encouraged, as many in both major parties have long recognized.

E. CONCLUSION

The task of renewing civic engagement will require attention to many domains of public life, most of which lie beyond the scope of this brief report. Attention to the regulation of nonprofits should be part of any concerted effort to broaden civic and political engagement. There may be some forms of participation that people do alone but civic engagement generally involves working with others. Unless working with others is done on a wholly informal basis, the organizational template for community effort is likely to be the nonprofit.

No one doubts the importance of nonprofits in American life – they have been celebrated in every conceivable way. Our argument is that nonprofits stimulate civic involvement and that public policy shapes nonprofits' capacity to do so. Government regulation of foundations, charities, churches, nonprofit social service providers, and other nonprofits, often make political participation easier or more difficult. These choices affect the health of American democracy.

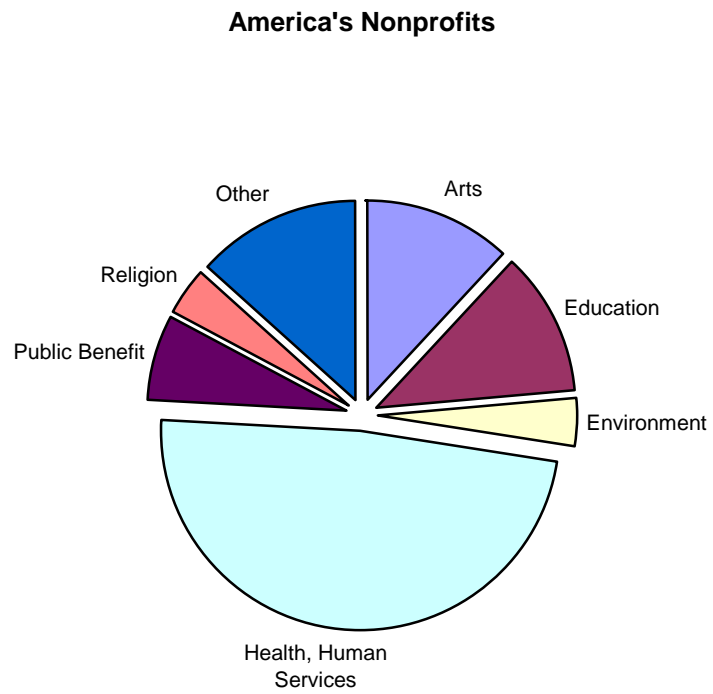
Nonprofits are a critical interface between government and its most vulnerable and least civically engaged citizens. Those who need income support, health care, jobs, training, counseling, and other services, turn to nonprofits for help. The less well-off, the sick, the very young or old, and other clients of social service agencies, must overcome hurdles that are often considerably higher than those faced by the rest of us before they can act in civic life and make their voices heard. Yet many do overcome these obstacles to participate. They would be still more active citizens, and the overall equity of civic engagement in America could be enhanced considerably, if greater care were taken to craft the legal and policy frameworks of nonprofits so as to enhance their opportunities for political participation.

F. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Internal Revenue Service should clarify vague rules that unnecessarily discourage political activity by nonprofits afraid of losing their tax deductibility

- status. It should, in particular, offer an explicit definition of the “substantial” criterion for legislative and grassroots advocacy. We have no specific recommendation for that definition but the alternative standards in the H election are certainly satisfactory. In the absence of any such action by the IRS, we encourage those nonprofits that are interested in advocacy to take the H election.
- We encourage nonprofits of all types to maximize the transparency of their finances and governance. In particular, we encourage all nonprofits, and especially foundations, to ensure that their boards of directors are broadly representative of their communities. Selection to boards should not be insular, and to maximize public accountability, the actions of boards should be as open as is practical.
 - We applaud the involvement of churches in civic engagement and believe that religious organizations have an important role to play in the delivery of social services. We should find ways to encourage the important work of faith-based nonprofits, while still respecting the separation between church and state. Faith-based and non-sectarian nonprofits that seek and obtain public funding should play by the same rules; we do not favor affirmative action by administrative agencies designed to increase church success in obtaining grants.
 - Governments at all levels can provide opportunities for citizen and voluntary service. Most importantly, we call upon the federal government to fully fund a national service program. There are various options worth exploring. For some, service could be a rite of passage between high school and college, as it is for many better-off youngsters in the United Kingdom. Another option is a year or two of service after college, as is typically the case with AmeriCorps volunteers. We favor a variety of options for service, ranging from full-fledged military service, to shorter, fifteen- or eighteen-month enlistments – a “citizen soldier” option – involving such non-combat assignments as peacekeeping or humanitarian missions, or homeland security.
 - Service could be tied to student aid and other public benefits, though we acknowledge that this makes service more appealing to (or obligatory for) poorer Americans. We acknowledge that making service mandatory is one way of promoting fairness and reciprocity for all: if everyone benefits from public institutions, everyone should play a role in sustaining them. Nevertheless, most of us believe that, absent a national crisis, conscription is unjustified and possibly counterproductive.
 - Public policies designed to promote volunteerism – such as service learning programs in schools – should be designed so as to enhance rather than detract from the connections between service and citizenship.
 - With the increasing role of nonprofits in administering government programs, we lose coordinated and centralized record keeping and data gathering. The federal government should initiate efforts to better evaluate public policies co-produced by nonprofits. Within public agencies, and schools of public administration, more attention and training should be devoted to preparing administrators to manage relationships among public and nonprofit agencies.

Figure 3-1



Source: Jeffrey M. Berry with David F. Arons, *A Voice for Nonprofits* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p. 5. This distribution represents only those nonprofits large enough to file a tax return (\$25,000 or more in annual income).

