

Elements and Test of a Theory of Neighborhood Civic Participation

Michael R. Greenberg

Center for Neighborhood and Brownfields Redevelopment
Bloustein School
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1958
USA¹

Abstract

A theory of neighborhood civic activity is proposed, and a telephone sample of 2,517 residents of the Philadelphia metropolitan region gathered for the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press was used to test the theory. Two dimensions of neighborhood civic engagement were found, one with government and the political process, and the second with schools, hospitals, and other non-government organizations. Both forms of engagement were associated with a family history of public involvement, a strong sense of personal efficacy, relatively high socioeconomic status, and financial and long-term investments in the neighborhood. Beyond those similarities, those that engaged in government-related civic activities tended to be older, Black, cognizant of crime and blight problems in their area and not trust government and many people in their neighborhood. Non-governmental civic activism was most strongly correlated with younger women with strong religious ties who trust the people with whom they interact. Implications of these observations for building a broader theory of civic engagement and enhancing government policy are discussed.

Keywords: trust, neighborhoods, civic engagement, social capital, efficacy, environment

The objective of this paper is to contribute toward building theory about people who volunteer in schools and hospitals in their own neighborhoods, vote in local elections, call the police, argue with elected officials, and are involved in other civic activities in their neighborhoods without receiving remuneration. Neighborhood activism is important because of the continued deterioration of many neighborhoods and the lack of a strong federal and state financial commitment and policy direction, despite recent record levels of budgetary surplus (Moynihan 1996; Rusk 1999; Keating and Krumholz 1999). Not only are youth and hospital patients neglected when there is no civic participation, but also many neighborhoods literally depend on activism for survival. Without local

civic engagement, some neighborhoods are attacked by developers and turned into parking lots, sports complexes, divided by highways and gentrified for more affluent people. Others are neglected and deteriorate until they become ripe for redevelopment (Keating and Krumholz 1999; Metzger 2000).

A theory to explain neighborhood civic activities begins with a review of environmental activism, because factors that drive people to protect the physical and social environments of their neighborhood should be among the motivations for people demonstrating about global warming, writing letters in support of state programs to protect wetlands, and pressuring the mayor to set up a city-wide recycling program. Values are a cornerstone of these theories. For example, Spring and Spring (1974) have argued that some religions are much more supportive than others of protecting the physical environment (see also Eckberg and Blocker 1996; Dietz, Stern and Guagnano 1998). In other words, religious-based values would lead some people to focus on protecting their neighborhood. Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) classified cultural views and proposed that those who fit into the "egalitarian" group are most likely to support environmental protection (see also Dake 1991; Peters and Slovic 1995). Inglehart (1977, 1995) argued that affluent and secure people have "post-materialistic" values that emphasize quality of life and self-expression rather than materialism (see also Dunlap and Mertig 1997; Dietz, Stern and Guagnano 1998). These post-materialistic people are the likely candidates to be social and environmental activists.

Human Ecology Review published a paper by Stern et al. (1999) that explicitly incorporates environmental and individual characteristics, including psychological ones, into a theory of environmental activism. The moral norm-activation (MNA) theory focuses on social movements, such as civil rights, environmental justice, and conservation (Schwartz 1973; 1977; Stern et al. 1999). The authors assert that people who support environmental values, believe those values to be threatened and perceive that they can take actions that will make a difference are the people who act.

Despite the breadth of factors included in MNA, surveys and case studies by this author show that MNA does not fit easily with the reality of inner city neighborhoods. For example, in one small sample of 102 residents living in a former public housing project (now demolished) and in others done in economically stressed neighborhoods, I found that altruistic values do not necessarily lead to action (Greenberg 1997, 1998). Some people who held the strongest values in support of school lunch programs and protecting the streets against crime did not act, whereas others who did not express strong altruistic values did. The people who did act focused on protecting their life savings and their family and neighbors; they did not trust the school system or the police to protect their children, and expressed other concerns directly tied to self-interest. In conversations with some of these people, I often found altruism, but not at the surface and usually based on family history; self-interest clearly dominated. Also, compared to MNA, the theory presented here is heavily dependent on personal propensity to engage in many kinds of activities, civic or otherwise. In other words, efficacious and high-energy people are more likely to participate than are those with the most altruistic of values but low energy and little sense of efficacy. After describing the elements of a theory of civic participation, a large data set collected for metropolitan Philadelphia is used to test the theory.

A Theory of Neighborhood Civic Participation

I propose that family history, self-interest, and personal efficacy are foundations of neighborhood civic participation. I briefly sketch the theory, initially without referring to the literature. This is done in order to avoid numerous breaks in the presentation. After describing the theory, I review supporting literature for it.

I postulate that neighborhood civic participation is kindled long before adulthood. A parent, uncle, grandparent, other family members, and very close family friends were volunteers and hence served as participant role models. These role models built civic activity as an important value. Family history also is at least partly responsible for teaching people how to perceive stress as an opportunity rather than as a dread to be avoided. In addition, most leaders are more educated and affluent than followers, feel that they can have an effect on their surroundings, and tend to engage in many different kinds of self-help activities. In other words, they are confident that they can have an impact and have the energy and time to engage. Family history is central to molding these socioeconomic status and personality characteristics.

Motivation for neighborhood civic engagement is based on self-interest. Those who are older, homeowners, and long-term residents of the neighborhood have a critical vested

interest in the neighborhood. In a distressed inner city environment, their motivation is fear that their investment in their neighborhood, perhaps their safety, is threatened by crime and physical decay. In a suburban setting, a proposed development (e.g., mall, factory, highway) will be the motivating threat. Threatened people, whatever their location, distrust government and many of the people in their neighborhood who they perceive as threatening their investment. As part of this self-interest expectation, I postulate that older and more educated African and Latino Americans will be disproportionately engaged with local government because disproportionately they are likely to be in neighborhoods stressed by crime and physical decay and have an investment in those neighborhoods. They are also likely to remember behaviors by the local government that they perceive as incompetent and/or hostile, and it is their lack of trust in government to protect their interests that motivates them to monitor and engage.

Volunteering to help in schools, hospitals, and other for profit and not-for-profit organizations is, I believe, a different form of neighborhood civic activism, although some highly active people doubtless engage in government and volunteer for other activities. In fact, I expect some overlap between engaging with local government and volunteering as a coach, part-time teacher, and for other neighborhood civic activities. Like their counterparts involved with government, I propose they will have a family history of activism, a high level of activity in general, possess a strong personal efficacy, and more likely be women than men. But if their investment in their neighborhood is not threatened (in other words, they do not need to engage with local government) then their stage in life and family background will likely govern their activism. Those with young children will be motivated toward schools, sports, and other youth-oriented activities; and those who belong to an active religious or non-religious institution will volunteer to feed the homeless, help out in the local health clinic, and engage in volunteers in ways that are consistent with organizations they belong to.

People who do not engage in civic activity, I propose, are markedly different from those who do. Those who are inactive will have no family history of engagement, nor have a sense that they can impact the neighborhood or be heavily involved in self-improvement activities. They will not be invested in the area. They are likely to be young, male, rent, and be less aware of any local problems. In other words, they have neither the family history, personality, nor current self-interest and motivation to be involved in the local civic activities.

The literature supporting this theory ranges from a limited number of case histories to quantitative surveys of sample populations. Beginning with family history, the author

reviews each of the elements of the theory. In a country that has a history of distrusting government, the U.S. prides itself on local activism (Wills 1999). Some exceptional people send letters to and call mayors, attend planning board meetings, tutor children, and serve dinners to the homeless. For example, Yvonne Carrington, a resident of a notorious public housing project in Chester, Pennsylvania, became a grassroots leader after her daughter was killed a few feet from her home by youths. Carrington coped with her grief by organizing the residents of her decaying housing project and winning a lawsuit against U.S. HUD. Carrington took over management of the housing project, raised funds to rebuild the housing project into what now looks like garden apartments, organized after-school activities, programs for the elderly, and obtained funds to train local residents to safely remove asbestos and engage in other building-related work. In addition, Carrington organized a food drive and with her neighbors delivered food to the residents of a Southern community who had been the victim of a flood (Greenberg 1999; see also Stack 1974).

Other grassroots leaders interviewed as part of the same research shared many of the same attributes, that is, they almost always were introduced to the idea of civic service by relatives who were heavily committed to community service. In addition, nearly all of them had suffered traumatic events in their early lives, such as death of a loved one, parental divorce, other forms of irreconcilable separations; some were told that they would never be qualified to be a doctor, lawyer or some other high status occupation. They were motivated and had developed strong coping skills. While not always highly educated measured by years in school, these civic participants were educated about the issues of importance to them. Carrington had altruistic values but they were dormant until a brutal tragedy occurred. She then seized upon neighborhood activism as a way of protecting the rest of her family and her neighbors, and respond to her anger.

With a few exceptions, most of the civic engagement literature about family history comes from studies of Presidents, governors, mayors, and military commanders (Barber 1992; Burns 1978; Gardner 1995; Holli 1999; Jones 1989; Halberstam 1969; Miller, Rein and Levitt 1990; Leavitt and Saegert 1988; Freudenberg and Steinsapir 1991). These reiterate the importance of family history in building motivation for service and a strong personality capable of coping with stress.

Personality is a strong correlate of civic activity. Some people are dispositional optimists, others are pessimists; some have a sense of mastery and others feel helpless; some cope with stress by reaching out to many people, including their neighbors, others cope silently; and some want control of their environment, while others do not. The reasons for

these personality traits are many and complex, relating both to family history and to current place in life. Regarding the theory suggested here, the most important evidence shows that efficacious people tend to adopt personal protective health habits, and also engage in activities to protect their neighborhoods. They tend to rebound faster from surgery, from alcoholism, and at the neighborhood scale try to get local officials to help their neighborhoods more than do their counterparts who are pessimists, and do not consider themselves to have much control over their environments (Folkman and Lazarus 1988; Lazarus 1991; Pearlin et al. 1981; Scheier and Carver 1985; Greenberg 1997; Lin and Peterson 1990; Furnham and Steele 1993; Stone and Neale 1984).

Regarding environmental conditions that precipitate activism, people want good schools, nearby shopping, sound and attractive housing, and other amenities. Even more essential is that there be no crime and no physical decay (Greenberg and Schneider 1996; Greenberg 1999; Clay and Hollister 1983; Sanoff 1975; Gallagher 1993; Lewis, Lowenthal and Tuan 1973; Ross and Mirowsky 1999). People who are afraid to walk in the street and live in fear of having their homes burglarized, or live near a decaying polluted factory and at the same time feel efficacious are going to be motivated to engage with government to stabilize and improve the neighborhood.

The most uncertain evidence from the literature was about demographic characteristics and trust. The preponderance of people in leadership positions in the U.S. leaders are older, white males who are highly educated and affluent (Flynn, Slovic and Mertz 1994; Barber 1992; Burns 1978; Gardner 1995; Hollis 1999; Jones 1989; Halberstam 1969). But grassroots leadership and participation do not have the same monetary and power rewards as business and elected office (W. K. Kellogg 1999). Furthermore, African Americans and Latino Americans disproportionately live in stressed neighborhoods and will have the motivation to protect their investment. Accordingly, as noted above in the theory description, I expect neighborhood engagement with government to disproportionately be among older people, African and Latino Americans, and females, although survey data generally show low government-related participation rates among Latino Americans (Pew 1999a). In addition, education may be measured by length of residence in the neighborhood rather than in formal school-based education (Leavitt and Saegert 1988).

Regarding trust and civic engagement, mistrust of sources of authority has been receiving considerable attention in the United States. Many Americans mistrust and are cynical about elected officials, attorneys, business leaders, and even physicians, scientists, and educators who were once

viewed as more trustworthy (Pew 1998, 1999b). Unfortunately, during the last two decades, there has been no shortage of highly publicized scandals, other ethical violations, and environmental incidents, along with a perceived lack of responsiveness of government and business to public interests, to engender mistrust (Miller, Rein and Levitt 1990; Edelstein 1988; Flynn et al. 1992; Freudenberg and Steinsapir 1991; Piller 1991).

Putnam (1996; 1998) has argued that people are less engaged in civic activities than the previous generation and those that are most engaged are trusting. Others have challenged his findings (Ladd 1996). Using the same data employed in this study, Pew researchers (1999b) found an inconsistent relationship of civic engagement and trust. They concluded that a moderate degree of mistrust may engender civic activity; that is, some people may mistrust but they do not necessarily disengage, whereas others who mistrust lack personal efficacy and do not engage. In this paper, these Pew data are re-examined to test the proposed theory that family history, self-interest, and efficacy are key elements that explain neighborhood civic engagement.

Data and Methods

Study Area

Random digit dialing was used to obtain a data set from residents of the City of Philadelphia and adjacent Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties, Pennsylvania (Pew 1999b). The Philadelphia region is an excellent place for such a study because of its demographic characteristics, and economic diversity. More specifically, this theory of neighborhood civic participation should be tested in a place with many old neighborhoods, some of which are highly stressed and some of which are quite affluent and have been so for many years; in a place where the population characteristics vary a great deal, including many different racial, ethnic groups, and many opportunities for participation in religious and other organizations that date back for many decades and generations. The Philadelphia region certainly fits these criteria along with Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, and many of the large metropolitan areas of the Northeast and Midwest. As noted in the discussion, evaluations should also be done in the newer metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Atlanta, Miami, and Houston.

The population of the five Philadelphia metropolitan counties was estimated by the U.S. Bureau of the Census at 3.7 million in 1995. In 1994, the region as a whole was ranked 29th in per capita income among metropolitan areas in the U.S. in 1994. However, this overall affluence masks places of substantial impoverishment within the City of

Philadelphia, adjacent Chester City, and several other locations in the region. The Philadelphia region also had more than its share of political controversies. Recent ratings of the best and worst mayors of large U.S. cities by academics and other knowledgeable political people were done for the period 1820 to 1985 (Holli 1999). None of Philadelphia's recent mayors were near the top of the list. Frank Rizzo, mayor during the period 1972-1980, was rated the worst mayor. Wilson Goode, his successor, ranked 12th worst. Many of the respondents to this survey were residents of Philadelphia during the tenure of these controversial mayors. In short, it is reasonable to expect that respondents might disproportionately rate government in Philadelphia as less than trustworthy. In other words, this study area is a good place to look for the expected association between government engagement and mistrust by people who live in stressed neighborhoods.

Survey Questions

Pew's survey instrument was developed after a conference of experts about social capital and trust and following up on focus groups for questionnaire development (Pew 1999b). The instrument consisted of over 100 closed- and open-ended items, and all the questions in this study are in the above report. Pew was exploring many dimensions of the relationship of citizen engagement and trust. The objectives of this study led to the selection of 52 of the items from the survey. Thirteen were used to measure civic activities. The remaining 39 were used to construct indicators that relate to the proposed theory: (1) 4 indicators of personal efficacy and empowerment, (2) 8 demographic measures, (3) 6 measures of neighborhood problems, (4) 8 activity indicators, (5) 10 indicators of trust, and (6) 3 family history measures.

Civic Engagement. The 13 indicators of engagement include a broad spectrum of activities such as contacting an elected official, voting in local elections, volunteering in schools and hospitals, joining a recreational league, and 8 others (Table 1). Some questions asked about activity during the last year and the others asked if the respondent had ever engaged in the activity. The key is that the range is broad enough to encompass what we would normally consider government-oriented and other forms of civic activity.

Efficacy. The four measures of efficacy asked if a respondent had tried to get local government and neighbors to work on a problem, and their perception of their effectiveness.

Demographic Characteristics. Given the expectation about the importance of neighborhood investment and standing in the community, it was important to have data on age, ethnicity/race, length of residence in the neighborhood, home ownership, gender, education and income.

Neighborhood Problems. Regarding neighborhood environmental conditions, the author chose six indicators. One

Table 1. Participation rates of respondents in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

Participation Rates (n = 2,517)	%
Ever joined or contributed money to an organization in support of a particular cause	66
Always or almost nearly always vote in elections for mayor or council	60
Ever attended a town meeting, public hearing or public affairs discussion group	47
Ever called or sent a letter to any elected official	44
During last year volunteered for any church or religious group activity	27
During last year volunteered for any organization to help the poor, elderly or homeless	22
Ever participated in organized recreational leagues, such as softball or bowling leagues	21
During last year volunteered for any child or youth development programs, such as day care centers, scouts or Little League	18
During last year volunteered for any school or tutoring program	16
During last year volunteered for any local government, neighborhood, civic or community group, such as block association or neighborhood watch	16
During last year volunteered for any hospital or health organization, including those that fight particular diseases	11
During last year volunteered for any political organizations or candidates	7
During last year volunteered for any environmental organization	5

asked respondents to rate the quality of their neighborhood on a five point scale (1 = excellent to 5 = poor). Respondents are also asked to indicate whether crime and blight problems exist in their neighborhood and if they feel safe.

Activities. The essence of the expectation is that those who are heavily engaged in many activities will also be engaged in civic ones. Hence, it was important to have religious attendance, participation in self-improvement through continuing education and exercise. The availability of measures of television watching, and Internet and e-mail use were valuable indicators of how people spend their time and interact with one another.

Trust. Testing the theory required information about trust in people and authority. Nine of the questions asked respondents to indicate whether they feel that they can trust others "a lot," "some," "only a little," or "not at all." A "don't know" option was also available. The tenth question asked if people who come into contact with the respondent trust them.

Family History. Questions about family history of civic engagement and family status at an early age allowed the evaluation of the proposal that those early experiences would influence civic engagement.

Results

Response

During the period November 13, 1996 to December 11, 1996, a total of over 10,000 phone numbers were obtained for the survey. Sixty percent of the 10,078 were found not to be eligible (30% were no longer in service or were business numbers, 8% were not eligible to be surveyed, and no response could be obtained from 22% after repeated contacts). Of the 4,003 who were successfully contacted, 2,517 (63%) yielded completed interviews. The surveyors are 95% confident that errors attributable to sampling is ± 2 percentage points.

Table 1 summarizes respondents' participation rates. Over 60 percent have joined or contributed money to an organization supporting a cause and almost always vote in local elections. About 45 percent have attended a town meeting, a public health or public affairs discussion, and have sent a letter to an elected official. During the last year, about one-fourth volunteered for a religious-related activity and volunteered for an organization that helps the needy. Less than 20 percent volunteered for activities that aid youth, the ill, the environment and political organizations or candidates.

Question 1: Dimensions of Participation

Government engagement was more prevalent than non-government. Regarding government engagement, 9 percent of respondents participated in none of the six activities and 19 percent in only one. Forty-three percent engaged in two or three, and 29 percent in four or more. In comparison, 37 percent of respondents had not engaged in any of the seven non-government activities and 27 percent had participated in one. Twenty-nine percent had engaged in two or three and only 7 percent in four or more of the seven. The combination of heavy government and non-government activity was rare. Only 111 people (4.5%) were active in four or more government and four or more non-government related civic activities. In contrast, 16 percent engaged in zero or only a single activity.

The author had anticipated at least two different types of civic participation. Depending on the method of analysis, two to four dimensions were found. Factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha statistics were used to assess these dimensions. Table 2 shows the results of a varimax rotated factor analysis of the 13 civic engagement dimensions. The first factor (government and politics) shows that respondents who participate in any one of the six government-engagement activities often engage in many of them, such as contacting an elected official ($r = .689$), attending town and other public meetings ($r = .658$), voting in local elections ($r = .609$), joining a group in favor of a cause ($r = .488$), volunteering for a

Table 2. Factor analysis of respondent participation groupings.*

Type of Participation	F1: Govt. & politics	F2: Youth oriented	F3: Church- related outreach	F4: Help people
Have ever called or sent a letter to any elected official	.689			
Have ever attended a town meeting, public hearing or public affairs discussion group	.658			
Always or nearly always vote in elections for mayor or council members	.609			
Joined or contributed money to an organization in support of a particular cause	.488			
During last year volunteered for any political organizations or candidates	.437			
During last year volunteered for any local government, neighborhood, civic or community group, such as block association or neighborhood watch	.407			
During last year volunteered for any child or youth development programs, such as day care centers, scouts or Little League		.726		
Have ever participated in organized recreational leagues, such as softball or bowling leagues		.699		
During last year volunteered for any school or tutoring program		.525		
During last year volunteered for any church or religious group activity			.767	
During last year volunteered for any organization to help the poor, elderly or homeless			.563	.495
During last year volunteered for any hospital or health organization, including those that fight particular diseases				.729
During last year volunteered for any environmental organization				.553

*The numbers in the table are correlation coefficients. The four factors accounted for 58% of the covariance.

political organization ($r = .437$), and volunteering for a local government, neighborhood, or civic group activity ($r = .407$). In other words, there is a clear government engagement dimension. Cronbach's Alpha was used to further estimate the reliability of the six government engagement variables as a single government encasement dimension. They demonstrated good reliability as a single scale. Cronbach's Alpha for the six was .65, where $\geq .4$ to $< .6$ is considered fair reliability, $\geq .6$ to $< .8$ is considered good reliability and $\geq .8$ is considered excellent.

The second, third and fourth factors focused on three non-government civic engagement activities. The second of four was youth-oriented, including volunteering for child or youth development ($r = .726$), school or tutoring programs ($r = .525$), and participating in organized recreational leagues ($r = .699$). The third paired volunteering for a religious activity ($r = .767$) with helping the needy ($r = .563$). The fourth grouped individuals who volunteered to support public health ($r = .729$), environmental protection ($r = .553$), and any organization to help the needy ($r = .495$).

Further investigation with oblique factor analysis and the Cronbach's Alpha statistic showed that the seven non-government activities could be collapsed into a single dimension. That is, the three non-government dimensions had slightly correlated factors in the oblique rotation, and the seven non-government civic engagements had a Cronbach's Alpha of .58, which is fair reliability. The cause of that lower reliability among the non-government indicators was the low corre-

lations between those who during the last year participated in activities that are youth oriented (organized recreational leagues; tutoring; youth development) and those whose volunteering tended to be oriented to needy populations (poor, elderly, homeless, ill), and the environment. The average correlation coefficient between the youth-related activities and others was only $r = 0.092$ (all were statistically significant at $p < .01$ primarily because of the large number of respondents).

Question 2: Correlates of Neighborhood Civic Engagement

Thirty-nine indicators about demography, activity, family history, neighborhood problems, feelings of efficacy, and trust produced 78 simple bivariate correlations with the two civic engagement measures. The results showed many statistically significant relationships. By chance, only four should have been statistically significant ($.05 \times 39 \times 2 = 3.9$). Regarding government engagement, 19 of the 39 were statistically significant, and 19 of the 39 correlations with non-government engagement were also statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Four methods were used to assess the results at the multivariate level. Each method has advantages and disadvantages, which will be briefly reviewed in the context of the data set. The simplest method is to test the entire model at once, that is, put in all 39 variables. The advantage is that every correlation can be studied. The disadvantage is that many of the 39 variables in this data set are co-linear, which

Table 3. Correlates of two types of public engagement: All variables entered.*

Characteristic (number of variables)	Government Engagement	Other Civic Engagement
Feelings of efficacy (8 variables)	.469	.287
Demographic characteristics (8 variables)	.439	.233
Neighborhood problems (6 variables)	.249	.130
Activity level of person (8 variables)	.283	.411
Trust level of person (10 variables)	.052	.222
Family history (3 variables)	.290	.210
All variable (39 variables)	.636	.542

*Multiple r values shown.

means that a single equation with 39 variables is tedious, if not infeasible, to assess and explain in a single paper. An alternative used here was to enter together all of the variables

that are part of the same element group (e.g., efficacy, demographic, neighborhood problems, activity level of person, trust level of person, and family history), and interpret the results by group of characteristics.

Table 3 summarizes these results. Efficacy (multiple $r = 0.469$) and demographic characteristics (multiple $r = 0.439$) are the strongest correlates of government engagement, whereas activity level of person (multiple $r = 0.411$) and efficacy of person (multiple $r = 0.287$) are the strongest correlates of other forms of civic engagement.

A limitation of assessment by groups of variables rather than by individual variable is that one obviously wants to know the key variables from within each group. An efficient way of identifying the most important indicators is through stepwise regression. The advantage of stepwise regression is that the strongest correlates are entered into the equation. The

Table 4. Multiple Stepwise Regression of Engagement and Correlates.

Characteristic	Government Engagement Standardized Beta Coefficients (rank)	Other Civic Engagement Standardized Beta Coefficients (rank)
(Efficacy) Have tried to get local government to pay attention to something that concerned you	.218*** (1)	.092*** (6)
(Demographic) Respondent age, in years	.254*** (2)	-.079** (16)
(Demographic) Education completed	.128*** (3)	.090*** (10)
(Efficacy) People like you can have an impact on your community	.109*** (4)	.084*** (5)
(Family history) As a child someone in your family worked as a volunteer for a local organization or hospital	.132*** (5)	.108*** (3)
(Efficacy) Would take up problem directly with local government officials	.120*** (6)	
(Efficacy) Tried to get neighbors to work together to fix or improve neighborhood	.100*** (7)	.093*** (9)
(Demographic) Family income, in dollars	.079*** (8)	.047* (21)
(Activities) Attended a church or religious service during last year	.070*** (9)	.112*** (2)
(Activities) During last year took continuing or adult education classes	.067*** (10)	.103*** (4)
(Demographic) Length of residence in Philadelphia region	.066*** (11)	
(Activities) During last year exercised or worked out	.069*** (12)	.070*** (11)
(Family history) As a child, parents were divorced	.056*** (13)	.058** (14)
(Trust) Trust the federal government in Washington	-.053** (14)	
(Demographic) Respondent identifies as Black	.055** (15)	
(Trust) Trust people in the neighborhood	-.046** (16)	
(Activities) Use computer for e-mail and Internet	.047** (17)	
(Activities) Wishes could volunteer more	.045** (18)	-.064** (15)
(Demographic) Home owner	.047* (19)	.056** (17)
(Neighborhood Problems) Illegal drug use or drug dealing a neighborhood problem	.044* (20)	
(Neighborhood Problems) Neighborhood quality is high	.071* (21)	
(Neighborhood Problems) During last 12 months someone from the family has been a victim of a crime	.036* (22)	
(Neighborhood Problems) Run down or abandoned buildings and empty lots are neighborhood problem	.042** (23)	.062*** (19)
(Activities) Participated in a reading group, religious study group or other study group during the last year		.229*** (1)
(Activities) During last year played cards or board games with a usual group of friends		.085*** (8)
(Trust) Trust people in the same clubs or activities as you		.083*** (7)
(Trust) Trust people in your church or place of worship		.085*** (13)
(Trust) Trust people in immediate family		.060** (18)
(Trust) Trust fire department in your area		.041* (20)
(Demographic) Respondent is female		.083*** (12)

***Statistically significant at $p < .001$

**Statistically significant at $p < .01$

*Statistically significant at $p < .05$

disadvantage is that sometimes the strongest correlates are highly correlated with other variables (e.g., trust people in family and trust people in clubs). With this caveat noted, the stepwise results are summarized in Table 4.

The standardized beta coefficients for the statistically significant ($p < .05$) indicators are presented along with the order in which the correlate was brought into the statistical model for the governmental engagement model. Standardized beta coefficients are the result of multiplying the regression coefficients by the ratio of the standard deviation of the independent variable to the standard deviation of the dependent variable. This results in coefficients that indicate the relative importance of variables. Alternatives would have been to provide the zero-order correlation coefficients, unstandardized regression coefficients, and the partial correlation coefficients. The author prefers the standardized coefficients because they allow direct comparison among all the indicators.

The specific variables contributing to the overall results presented in Table 3 are clear in Table 4. Four of the first eight strongest correlates of government engagement measure efficacy and three of the remaining four are demographic. The overall pattern is that those who engage with government tend to have a strong personal sense of efficacy, they are older and more educated and have higher incomes than their counterparts who do not engage. Lastly, but quite notable, is that they have a family history of volunteering in local organizations.

Four of the eight strongest correlates of non-government civic engagement point to active people. They participate in a reading group, religious study group or other study group, attend a church or religious service, take continuing adult or continuing education classes, and play cards or board games with a usual group of friends. In other words, these people are engaged in activities outside the home. Two of the remaining four strongest variables measure efficacy. The respondents feel like they can have an impact on their community, and have tried to get local government to pay attention to something that concerned them. Those engaged in non-government civic engagement also trust people who are part of their clubs and activities and they have a family history of volunteering.

Overall, there are four indicators that are predictive of both forms of civic engagement: feeling that they can have an impact on their community, having the experience of trying to get local government to pay attention to something that concerned them, trying to get neighbors to work together, and having a family history of volunteering.

Drawing from both Tables 3 and 4, neighborhood problems are more associated with government activism (multiple $r = .249$) than non-governmental (multiple $r = .130$). Both regressions identified run down or abandoned buildings and

empty lots as significant correlates of activity. But those who engage in government-related civic activity are more distressed by illegal drug use and are more likely than the norm to have had a family member been a crime victim in the recent past. Notably, they also rate their neighborhoods as high quality despite these problems, an observation consistent with an optimistic personality. These results had been anticipated with one exception. The author had not expected engagement in non-government activities to be associated with concern about neighborhood blight.

Activities are stronger correlates of the non-governmental activity (multiple $r = .411$) than the governmental (multiple $r = .283$). The two strongest correlates of the propensity to engage in non-governmental civic activities are having participated in a reading group, religious or other study group and having attended a church or religious service during the last year. Activism was also associated with physical exercise, and in the case of government engagement with using the computer for e-mail and Internet. Notably, those engaged in government-related civic activity wished they could volunteer more, their counterparts who engage in non-governmental civic activities do not wish to engage more. The direction of the results had been expected, but the fact that the set of activity variables were the strongest predictors of non-government-related activities was surprising. I had anticipated efficacy and family history would be even stronger correlates.

As expected, trust indicators show a marked contrast between the two types of engagement. Those who engage in non-governmental activity trust people in the same clubs or activities ($B = .083$), people in their church or place of worship ($B = .085$), people in their immediate family ($B = .060$) and the local fire department ($B = .041$). Those who engage in governmental-related activities are notable by their lack of trust in people in their neighborhoods ($B = -.046$) and the federal government in Washington, D.C. ($B = -.053$).

The last group of potential correlates was family history. In both cases, those who engaged came from a family where the parents disproportionately were divorced as children and where the family had a history of civic engagement. In long face-to-face interviews, the author had previously found that a history of family distress seemed to be associated with later civic engagement. The finding of an association of family divorce with civic engagement in a sample of 2,500 people elevates this to an association clearly deserving follow-up.

The limitations of the general linear and stepwise models led the author to try an approach that avoids co-linearity problems. The 39 correlates were converted into uncorrelated dimensions with principal components analysis and the component scores were used as variables in the analysis. In addition, an advantage of this approach is that it can produce components that are different from the analyst's construct.

There are disadvantages. First, the new variables produced are linear combinations of the original variables, which means that each component can contain a great detail of statistical noise caused by the reality that every indicator plays a role in the component score. In this case, this analysis reduced the 39 variables to eight components that tended to replicate the activities, family history, neighborhood problems, feelings of efficacy and trust dimensions, rather than intertwine them. The only obvious exceptions were the demographic characteristics. Length of residence and home ownership were part of the feelings of efficacy component that was found, and Black respondents were part of the distressed neighborhood component. In addition to not contributing as much as had been expected, the components obscured the role of some variables, most notably gender, and so are not presented here.

The fourth statistical method was discriminant analysis. The regression linear regression analyses showed that there were some underlying variables that strongly contributed to both forms of civic participation. Furthermore, the bivariate correlation between government and non-government forms of engagement was $r = 0.319$. Consequently, a test was made to determine if there are strong patterns among both forms of participation. Using cutoffs in participation, respondents were grouped into four categories: (1) strong government and strong non-government engagement, (2) little engagement in either, (3) strong government and weak non-government engagement, and (4) weak government and strong non-government engagement. The 39 correlates were used to determine which were the strongest discriminators among the four engagement categories. Unfortunately, sensitivity analysis of the results showed that the results were unstable. That is, the definition of what constituted "strong" and "weak" engagement substantially impacted the four categories and the overall results. Since the analysis did not produce stable results, it is not presented.

Discussion

The three major findings of the empirical tests can be summarized as follows:

1. There are at least two forms of neighborhood activism, one is with *government and the political process* and the second form of volunteering is with *schools, hospitals, and other non-government-related activities*.

2. With regard to *government-related actions*, those who engage tend to have a strong personal sense of efficacy, they are older and more educated and have higher incomes than their counterparts. Lastly, but quite notable, is that they have a family history of volunteering in local organizations. They are active people and do not trust people who live in the

neighborhood or officials who represent it, and they perceive drug and blight problems in their neighborhoods. In other words, they have the self-interest, the efficacy, the mistrust, and the family background to deal with the considerable stresses that go along with dealing with (often figuratively and literally, battling) elected officials and civil service.

3. People who *volunteer in hospitals, schools, and for other forms of non-government civic activism* are disproportionately active in and outside their neighborhood. They participate in a reading group, religious study group or other study groups, attend religious services, take continuing adult or continuing education classes, and play cards or board games with a usual group of friends. Two of the remaining four strongest variables measure efficacy. The respondents feel like they can have an impact on their community, and have tried to get local government to pay attention to something that concerned them. Unlike their government-engaged counterparts, those active in non-government civic activities trust people who are part of their clubs and activities and they have a family history of volunteering.

Before placing these findings in the context of the social capital literature, it is essential that the limitations of the study be reviewed. While this survey has the largest number of subjects of any study known to the author focusing on the correlates of civic engagement at the time it was made, the data were collected just before the December 1996 winter holidays. Snow et al. (1986) point out that people move between passive support and activism. Would the results be the same if the survey were done in 2001? Only a repeat survey can provide the answer. Second, the Philadelphia region is large and populous, but Northeastern. Would these same findings be made in a Southern, Midwestern, and Western metropolitan region of the same or even greater size? Would they be made in smaller cities, old industrial suburbs, and new growing metropolises? I wonder for example, how family history might be changed in a relatively new metropolis, such as Las Vegas, where family identity with the region for the overwhelming majority is short-lived. Philadelphia does not have a large Latino or Asian American population, so not much could be learned about these rapidly growing populations in this study. More studies across the spectrum of geographies represented in metropolitan regions are essential to test and refine the theory presented here.

The author was offered these data because of his interest in testing this theory. However, the survey data were not ideal for a full test. In particular, the family history questions were too few, and although they were significant predictors, I view these family history results as teasers of the intricate relationships of family history and current civic engagement. Frankly, I doubt that a fully labeled, quantitative survey can accurately disentangle the nuances of personality, family his-

tory and activism. The findings of this research call for ethnographic work to clarify these relationships. The efficacy results were strong. Yet I would have been more satisfied had some standard optimism and locus of control questions been included. The results could then have been compared with the considerable literature about personality in the public health literature. Use of at least a few standard indicators of health status is the best way of directly tying the massive personal health outcome literature to the much smaller neighborhood health one. This author firmly believes that personal health protective activities are related to civic neighborhood protecting activities, but that hypothesis awaits testing. The survey would have benefited from more questions about personal values that would have permitted a better assessment of the association of environmental and social values. Finally, I think self-interest and altruistic motivations lie along a continuum, and I suspect the geographical scale of the issue (ranging from global to block) is key in determining whether self-interest or altruism dominate. An experiment to test this expectation would be useful. Summarizing, despite the large size of this survey, this data set has generalizability and limitations because it was not designed to help test a pre-conceived theory of neighborhood activism.

There is no mystery why a theory of local civic activity is worth building. Civic activists build social capital. Social capital is the stock of behaviors, interrelationships, and trust that neighborhoods use to solve problems and improve neighborhood quality by working with not-for-profit and for-profit partners, and government (Putnam 1998; Galster, Metzger and Waite 1999; Temkin and Rohe 1998; Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997; Nyden, Maly and Lukehart 1997; Keyes et al. 1996; Clay and Hollister 1983; Powell 1990; Shlay 1999).

Putnam (1998) presented four challenges for social capital theorists: (1) demonstrating the utility of the concept to housing, environment, and other public policy areas; (2) determining how social capital leads to improvement in neighborhoods; (3) determining the different forms of social capital (in this regard, he asserts that we have only a crude comprehension of it); and (4) how social capital is built and lost. This study contributes to the third and fourth of these challenges. It shows at least two different and only slightly correlated forms of civic engagement in the neighborhoods of one of the largest regions in the U.S. and provides a theory and empirical evidence to support major parts of the theory. In addition, the theory suggested here links different research disciplines, most notably anthropology, geography, public health, social psychology, sociology, and urban planning. The theory proposed here and the MNA theory offer an opportunity for researchers to find the intersections of a continuum from self-interest to altruism, and from global to

block-scale concerns. Directing our collective critical eye and analytical skills to explaining and boosting civic engagement is not only a fascinating intellectual challenge but also means a lot to all Americans who believe in stabilizing and improving neighborhood quality.

Endnote

1. E-mail: mrg@rci.rutgers.edu

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