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Non-Electoral Civic Engagement in California

Why Does the State Lag the Nation?

Abstract: We examine citizen engagement in political and social civic life in California. We begin by comparing the state to the nation at large, and find that California lags the nation in non-electoral civic engagement. The data also show that Whites were more engaged than Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, and native citizens born in the US are more engaged than citizens born elsewhere and non-citizens. To analyze whether demographic factors determine why civic engagement differs in California, we employ a regression analysis. The participation gaps between California and the rest of the nation (excluding New York and Texas) can be entirely explained by differences in demographics for three of the five measures of civic engagement. For the other two, the differing demographic profile of California explains 45% to 59% of the gaps. We also find that ethnicity, race, and citizenship are generally the most important determinants and explain much of the California engagement gaps. The fact that California has more Hispanics, Asians, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens than the rest of the US thus appears to go a long way toward explaining the lower level of civic engagement in the state.

Keywords: California; civic engagement; Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition.

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1 Introduction

Alexis de Tocqueville argued that a citizenry engaged in both political and civil associations is vital to liberal democracy (Tocqueville 2002). The assumption that a civically engaged citizenry results in a healthier republic underlies much current “neo-Tocquevillian” (Berman 1997) research in the area of civic and political engagement. Despite the importance of civic engagement, much research affirms that civic engagement (at least as traditionally measured) has declined in recent decades (Putnam 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Galston and Levine 1998; Levine

and Lopez 2002; Galston 2004; Macedo et al. 2005). Given California's role as a bellwether of social and political trends in the US, it is important to note that civic engagement is generally measured to be even lower in California than elsewhere. We confirm that California lags the nation in several measures of civic engagement, and show that for some of these measures Californians used to be more engaged than elsewhere. Thus, over the last half century California appears to be losing ground relative to other states. Our research looks at various measures of political and social civic engagement to compare California with the nation.

To analyze why civic engagement is different in California, we employ a regression analysis to look at how race, citizenship status, income, education, and other demographic factors affect civic engagement in California and the nation. We find that differences in demographics entirely explain the participation gaps between California and the nation for three of the five civic engagement measures we examine, and that demography explains significant portions of the engagement gaps for the other two measures. We also look at the impact of individual demographic factors, and find that ethnicity, race, and citizenship are generally the most important determinants and explain much of the California engagement gaps. The fact that California has more Hispanics, Asians, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens than the rest of the US thus appears to go a long way toward explaining the lower civic engagement we observe in the state.

Involvement in civic affairs comprises more than just voting. Political civic engagement also includes discussion of politics in the community and taking local political action. In addition, social civic engagement complements the political dimension with activities such as involvement in community groups and charitable volunteerism. Meeting one another "face to face" increases connectivity and interpersonal trust, which in turn encourages commitment to both the local community and to political interests at large (Putnam 1995a). For our empirical examination, we choose two measures of political civic engagement: discussing politics with family and friends, and involvement in non-electoral political activities. For social civic engagement, we look at three different measures: group participation, group leadership, and helping a neighbor with a favor. Putnam refers to civic involvement as "social capital" and argues that it can facilitate the proper functioning of social, civic, and governmental institutions¹ or otherwise increase overall social welfare.² Much research has identified the important and

¹ Fukuyama (2000: p. 6) states that "[t]he economic function of social capital is to reduce the transaction costs associated with formal coordination mechanisms like contracts, hierarchies, and bureaucratic rules."

² However, Fukuyama (2000: p. 8) cautions that it is "... possible to have too much of a good thing. One person's civic engagement is another's rent-seeking...."

beneficial roles that trust and social capital play in building strong public institutions (La Porta et al. 1997) and in stimulating overall economic growth (Easterly and Levine 1997; Knack and Keefer 1997; Zak and Knack 2001; Tabellini 2010).

Membership in fraternal organizations, parent-teacher groups, and labor unions – all traditional forms of civic engagement – is declining (Putnam 1995a, 2000). Researchers disagree on the implications of declining civic engagement for society. Putnam (1995a, 2000) focuses on the decline in membership in organizations like the PTA and Kiwanis as reducing the opportunity for individual trust-building interaction that can strengthen communitarian norms and increase social capital. Skocpol and Fiorina (1999) and Skocpol (2003) argue that the changing structure of organizations, from member driven to top down and “oligarchic,” is problematic for participatory democracy.

What about California? California is a diverse state, and Putnam’s (2007) research demonstrates that many forms of social capital and civic engagement are negatively correlated with the ethnic diversity of a community, at least in the short run. In Section 3, we explore data from the 2009 Current Population Survey (CPS) to see how civic engagement differs in California by looking at civic involvement among various subpopulations, including by breakdowns of race and citizenship status. We find that California indeed lags the nation in civic engagement. Whites are more engaged than Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Native citizens born in the US are more engaged than those born in Puerto Rico or other territories, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens. Previous literature has also found large gaps in political participation and volunteerism in the state across racial and ethnic groups and for immigrant status (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). The recent California Civic Health Index Report (NCOC 2010) shows that civic engagement in California as a whole lags the national average in some measures of civic connectivity, such as discussing politics with family and friends. On the other hand, eligible Californians vote at about the same rate as elsewhere in recent years (NCOC 2010), which is why we focus on non-electoral civic participation.³

In the next section, we briefly review some leading theories of the determinants of civic engagement: the rational actor model, the socio-economic status model, and the civic voluntarism model (Verba et al. 1995). In Section 3, we document California’s gaps in civic engagement, put them in historical context, and presage the econometric results by showing that race, ethnicity, and citizenship status are significantly associated with political and social involvement.

³ In Prieger and Faltis (2012), we find using 2008 CPS data that the voting rate was 63.3% in California, compared to the rate of 64.8% for the nation excluding California, New York, and Texas. The voting gap was not significant at the 5% level.

In Section 4, we use an econometric technique, multiple regression followed by Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition. Regression alone helps identify which socioeconomic and demographic factors are important in understanding who participates in civic life. The decompositions following the regressions extend the analysis by breaking down each gap by the contributing factors, to understand why California lags. Informally, a gap can be caused by two reasons: either we have demographically different people in California (in ways that matter for civic engagement) or people in California acts differently even when they are observably similar to others elsewhere (or both). Thus, part of each gap can be explained purely by demographic differences. For example, Asian-Americans are not as civically engaged as others, by the metrics we consider, and California has a higher percentage of Asian-Americans than elsewhere in the US. The part of each gap explained by demographics accounts for nearly all of the story, it turns out, for three of the five civic engagement measures. The rest of each gap, the unexplained residual, stems from either that Asians (for example) living in California have a different propensity to be involved than Asians do elsewhere, or because of a pure “group membership effect,” which captures the residual gap not able to be traced to any socioeconomic factor. The unexplained parts of the gaps are both generally smaller and statistically insignificant in our examination, and we therefore focus on the explained portions of the gaps. In Section 5, we conclude and discuss avenues for future work.

2 The Determinants of Civic Engagement

To understand why civic engagement differs in California, a theoretical groundwork for analyzing voluntary participation in community affairs is helpful. The two main competing models of participation in a civic action (such as meeting with a public official, for example) are the *rational actor* model and the *socio-economic status (SES)* model (Verba et al. 1995). In the rational actor model (Downs 1957), the individual is assumed to compare the benefit with the cost of the meeting. The decision-maker may consider both “hard” benefits (e.g., the probability that the individual’s action affects the public outcome times the benefit following from the preferred outcome) and “soft” benefits (e.g., additional utility gained from having a reputation for civic involvement). The cost of participation includes the opportunity cost of the individual’s time, the disutility of dealing with bureaucratic obstacles involved in participation, and the effort cost necessary to become familiar with the issues and to form opinions (Cho 1999).

In contrast to the rational actor model, which is rooted in the well-developed theory of utility maximizing behavior from neoclassical microeconomics, what Verba et al. (1995) term the SES model is a collection of empirical predictions holding that people of higher socio-economic status will be more civically engaged. For example, the SES model predicts that wealthier or more educated individuals will be more active in politics. The SES model is well verified in empirical literature (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004).

Verba et al. (1995) synthesize the rational actor and SES models with their *civic voluntarism model* (CVM). The CVM postulates that individuals' resources, psychological engagement with civic matters, and recruitment determine whether they participate in civic life. That is, according to the CVM a person engages civically if he or she *can* do so, *wants* to do so, and is *asked* to participate. The most important resources Verba et al. (1995) identify are free time, money, and civic skills, which include both organizational and communication skills. The components of the CVM have obvious connections to the rational actor model. The resources available to the individual affect both the benefits and costs of participation, as well as the constraints placed upon the individual's choices. Furthermore, the degree of mental engagement with civic affairs affects the utility of pursuing political or civic action.

The CVM also explains the empirical regularities found with the SES model. For example, Hispanics or other minorities may be less civically engaged because they lack the necessary time, money, and civic skills inculcated by education that are more readily available to Whites. Because these important resources are generally positively correlated with the schooling of the individual, education plays a central role in the CVM for explaining different levels of civic engagement among racial and other SES dimensions. Education can have a strong effect on civic engagement because it reduces participation costs by improving "the cognitive skills that facilitate learning about politics" and lowers the cost of overcoming bureaucratic obstacles (Cho 1999: p. 1143). In contrast to the primacy of education in the CVM, we find that education plays a relatively minor role in explaining why California lags in engagement.

Other factors, such as trust, may influence an individual's psychological engagement in politics and help explain why groups such as Asians and Hispanics tend to be less civically engaged. Uslaner and Conley (2003) argue that perceived discrimination against an individual's affiliated ethnic group may strengthen group identity but lead him or her away from participating in civic life outside the group, due to the destruction of generalized trust in outsiders. Anxiety over immigration status and a general sense of "social distance" from mainstream civic groups can also contribute to a lack of civic trust (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006). Immigration, even when legal, can be an important factor

that affects people's psychological engagement in politics and helps explain differences in engagement among racial and ethnic groups. Cho (1999) argues that foreign-born US residents often differ sharply from the native-born in their past political experiences. Immigrants often come from countries with limited opportunity for citizen involvement and high levels of corruption in government, requiring many years of "political acculturation" or socialization in the US to build understanding, trust, and the desire to participate in civic life (Ong and Nakanishi 2003). Finally, the perceived benefits of action also influence cognitive and physical engagement in civic life. If the stakes for the individual are low because political action accomplishes little, the person is more likely to check out of the civic sphere. For example, Griffin and Newman (2008: Ch. 8) demonstrate empirically that the rewards from voting appear to be small for African American and Latino voters in the areas of defense and environmental spending, giving them little motivation to vote.

3 How Civic Engagement Differs in California

In this section, we look at various measures of civic engagement in California taken from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The data we examine are from the Civic Engagement Supplement to the CPS, collected in November 2009. The CPS has the advantages of a large sample size and careful weighting by the Census Bureau to allow state and nationally representative statistics to be computed. All subpopulations are limited to individuals aged 18 and up, leaving over 20,000 observations, about 1,800 of which are from California.⁴ For each indicator of civic engagement, we compare California to the rest of the US using data from 2009. We do not merely compare California and national averages, because with about 12% of the nation's population, California is large enough to significantly pull down the national civic engagement averages, attenuating the apparent degree to which the state lags the rest of the nation in some measures. For ease of reference we call the comparison group $US \setminus CA$ (where the notation is from set theory; i.e., the US less California). We defer a detailed numerical examination of the engagement gaps until Section 4; here we introduce our measures of engagement and provide a high-level characterization of civic participation. We also place the current California engagement gaps in historical perspective where similar measures from earlier years of other surveys are available.

⁴ See Prieger and Faltis (2012) for more information on the survey and sample.

In the first subsection, we consider political civic engagement along the dimensions of political discussion and non-electoral political activity. In the second subsection, we turn to social civic engagement, and examine leadership and participation in groups and exchanging favors with neighbors. For each measure, the averages are broken out by race, ethnicity, and citizenship. These bivariate tabulations help identify which groups lag in civic engagement, and serve to motivate the regression analysis in Section 4.

3.1 Political Civic Engagement

The first survey question regarding political civic engagement we consider asked, “How often were politics discussed when communicating with family and friends?” (during a typical month). The results comparing the prevalence of political civic engagement between California and elsewhere are in Table 9 in the Appendix; general results are described here. Fewer Californians discuss politics at least a few times per week or more than the national average, and many more Californians than elsewhere do not talk about politics at all. The differences in political discussion between California and *US/CA* are sizeable and statistically significant (which can also be assumed for the other measures we examine unless noted otherwise).

Californians did not always lag in political discussion. While the CPS survey we examine only began in 2008, we found similar measures in the American National Election Survey (ANES). From the 1980s to the mid-1990s, adults in California had much higher rates than elsewhere of discussing politics weekly (see Figure 1). By 2004, however, a gap had opened in the other direction.⁵

For the 2009 national averages from the CPS data differentiated by race, shown in Figure 2, Whites are most likely to discuss politics at all, followed by Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans. Whites are almost twice as likely to discuss politics weekly as are Asian Americans.⁶ Citizenship status also is associated with differences in the frequency of discussing politics (see Figure 3). Those who are native citizens born abroad lead in discussing politics weekly, followed

⁵ The wording of the possible answers to the ANES question “How often do you discuss politics with your family or friends?” changed slightly in 2000, and the series are plotted separately in Figure 1.

⁶ Following Census Bureau definitions, race and ethnicity are different dimensions, so that Hispanics can be of any race. Thus the White category includes many Hispanics. Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are also included in the Asian category. An “other” race category is included in the regressions but not shown in the figures.

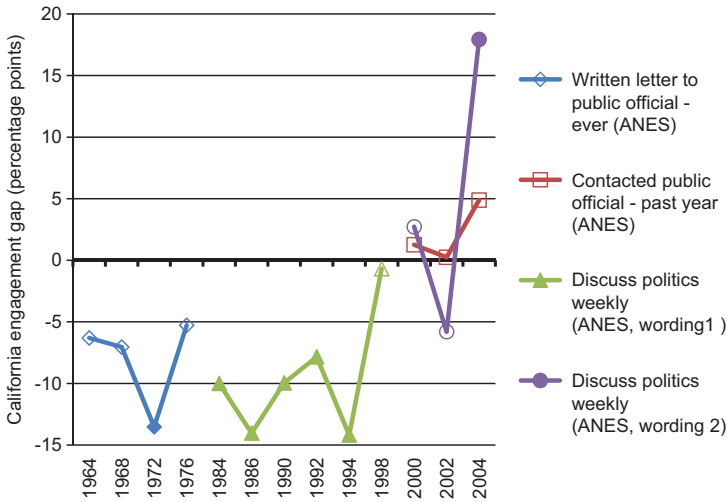


Figure 1: Trends in California Political Engagement Gaps.

Note: Solid markers indicate significance at the 5% level. Positive gaps imply that engagement is lower in California than elsewhere in the US.

Source: American National Election Survey (ANES), various years. All figures are weighted to represent population averages. Years are irregularly spaced on axis.

closely by those who are native born in the US.⁷ Those born in Puerto Rico, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens discuss politics at much lower rates.

We turn now to civic engagement in the form of non-electoral political activity. The survey includes two measures of political involvement: whether, in the last year, the individual has “contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion” and whether the respondent “bought or boycotted a certain product or service because of the social or political values of the company that provides it.” If the respondent answered yes to either one of these, we deem him or her to have engaged in at least one non-electoral political activity for purposes of analysis. Results are in Table 9. California is several percentage points behind the already low national average in engaging in these political activities. Contrast this finding with earlier ANES data from 2002 indicating that Californians were just as likely as others in the US to write to elected officials (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004: p. 12).⁸

⁷ While “native born in the US” appears to be redundant, the survey distinguishes between that category and “native, born in Puerto Rico” and “native, born abroad of American parents.”

⁸ Note from Figure 1, however, that 2002 is a local minimum in the time series for contacting public officials in California. There are higher gaps in 2000 and 2004.

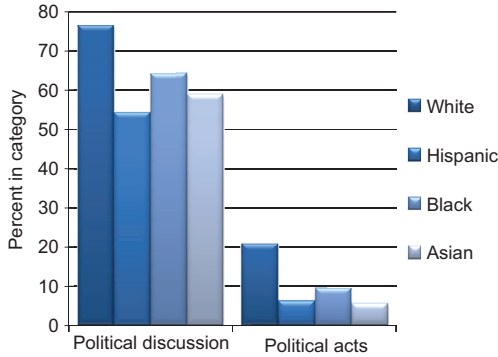


Figure 2: Political Civic Engagement in the US by Race and Ethnicity, 2009.
 Note: The figures for Political Discussion are the rates for “once a month or more,” as in Section 4.

The historical ANES data include responses on contacting public officials, which is a subset of the political activity measure. In the 1960s and 1970s, Californian adults were more likely than others to have ever written a public official (see Figure 1). In the 2000s (the next time a similar question was asked in the ANES), Californians were about as likely or less likely to have contacted a public official in the last year. As with political discussion, over the last half century California appears to have switched from a leader to a laggard in political civic engagement. That California was undergoing tremendous changes in demographic composition during the same period is suggestive of a cause, but this awaits formal investigation in Section 4.

In the US, engagement rates for non-electoral political activity differ by race and citizenship status. These demographic factors affect the propensity to engage

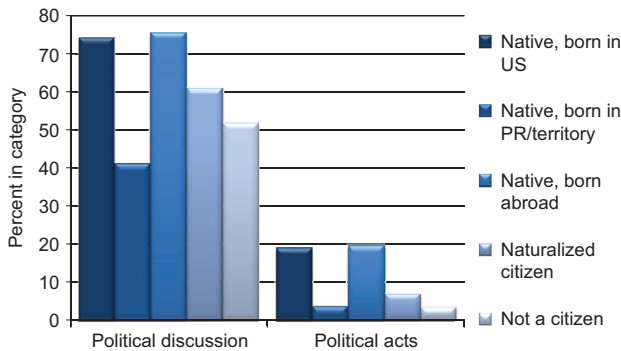


Figure 3: Political Civic Engagement in the US by Citizenship Status, 2009.
 Note: see note for Figure 2.

in political activities the same way they do for political discussion, although by this measure Asians have lower engagement rates than Blacks (see Figures 2 and 3). Ramakrishnan and Baldassare (2004: p. 48) also found that Blacks in California had much less citizen contact with elected officials than Whites, and that Latinos and Asian Americans are underrepresented in most types of political activities. Our findings are also in accord with those of Verba et al. (1995: p. 233), who found for the US in general the same ordering of rates of contacting public officials among Whites, Blacks, and Latinos that we do.

3.2 Social Civic Engagement

The first measure of social civic engagement we examine is participation in civic groups. The survey asks if the individual had been “an officer or served on a committee of any group or organization” in the past year. The numeric results for this and other measures of social civic engagement are in Table 10 in the Appendix. Fewer than one in ten US residents engage in this form of civic leadership, and even fewer Californians do.

The historical analysis of the political civic engagement measures above showed steady decline in California’s position relative to the rest of the nation. The trends are not as easy to assess for social engagement. It proved difficult to find comparable data for California for earlier years. However, one year the General Social Survey (GSS) asked about doing “active work” for local civic or neighborhood groups such as leadership, organizational work, or giving time or money.⁹ While the state of residence is not identified in the public GSS data, we can examine how those living in the Pacific Census division (three-quarters of whom are Californians) differ from others.¹⁰ In 1987, adults living in the Pacific region engaged in these forms of group leadership more than others (see Figure 4), in contrast to the gap we find in 2009.¹¹ Another point of comparison comes

⁹ The question in the GSS asks: “Have you ever done any active work for (each group the respondent previously said he was a member of)? I mean been a leader, helped organize meetings, been an officer, or given time or money?” The latter two aspects of the question make it broader than group leadership as defined in the CPS. The GSS asks about more types of groups than the CPS, and so we include only those groups matching most closely with the set of neighborhood or civic groups in the CPS. The group categories we include from the GSS are: fraternal groups, service clubs, veterans’ groups, sports groups, school service groups, hobby or garden clubs, church-affiliated groups, and “any other groups.” The question was asked only in 1987.

¹⁰ In the 1990 US Census, 76% of adults living in the Pacific Census division were in California.

¹¹ Due to the smaller sample sizes in the GSS, the difference of 3 percentage points is not significant.

from the CPS Volunteering Supplement, since a respondent engaging in group leadership (particularly by the GSS definition) is likely to consider it volunteering. Californian adults volunteered less than others during the period 2002–2007 (refer again to Figure 4), by about the same magnitude that we find for group leadership in 2009. These results indicate, again, that California is losing ground relative to the nation in engagement.

In the 2009 CPS data, Whites were more likely to engage in group leadership than others, while Hispanics and Asians have the lowest measures (see Figure 5). The low leadership rate for Hispanics is in accord some other findings indicating that Latinos participate in groups less in general (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006), but in contrast to the specific finding of Verba et al. (1995) that Hispanics are the *most* likely group to serve on a local governmental board such as a school or zoning board. Breaking group leadership down by citizenship status leads to the same engagement ranking as for the political civic engagement measures (see Figure 6).

We turn now to civic engagement in the form of participation in various types of civic groups. The groups specifically mentioned in the survey were school

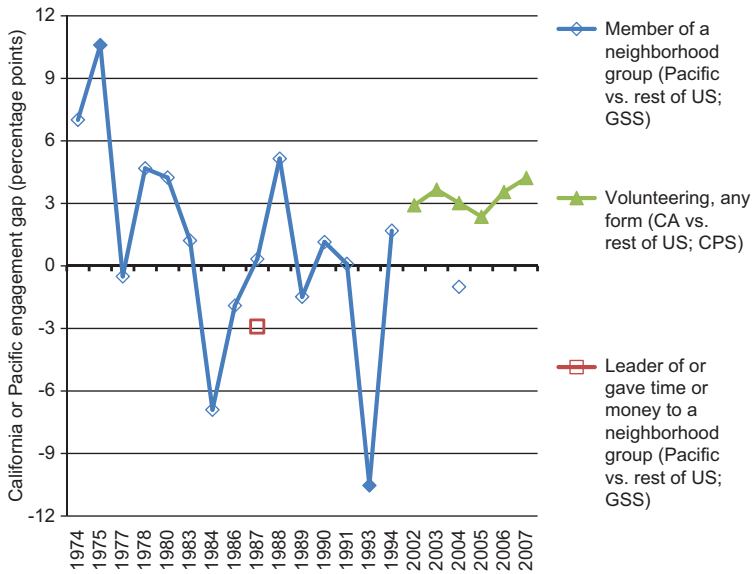


Figure 4: Trends in California and Pacific Region Social Engagement Gaps. Note: Solid markers indicate significance at the 5% level. Positive gaps imply that engagement is lower in California than elsewhere in the US. Sources: General Social Survey (GSS) and Current Population Survey (CPS), various years. All figures are weighted. Years are irregularly spaced on axis.

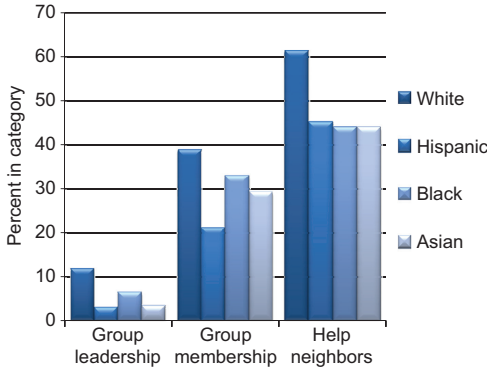


Figure 5: Social Civic Engagement in the US by Race and Ethnicity, 2009.

Note: The figures for Help Neighbors are the rates for “once a month or more,” as in Section 4.

groups, neighborhood or community associations (such as PTA or neighborhood watch groups), service or civic organizations (such as American Legion or Lions Club), sports or recreational clubs, and religious institutions (such as churches, synagogue, and mosques). For the latter category, participation had to be beyond normal attendance at religious services. Respondents indicated whether they had participated in any of these organizations in the past year. Respondents could also report participation in groups not listed, and these also are included in our statistics.

In 2009, Californians were only a bit less likely than others to claim participation in any type of group, and the differences between groups are not jointly

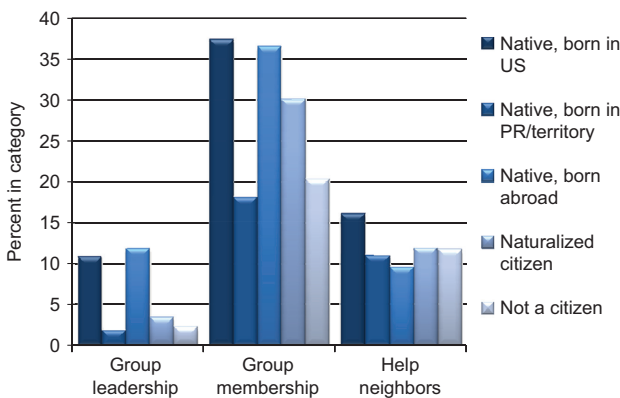


Figure 6: Social Civic Engagement in the US by Citizenship Status, 2009.

Note: see notes to Figure 5.

significant at the 5% level. However, the difference between California and *US/CA* in those answering “yes” is significant at the 10% level.¹² For the US as a whole, we find differences by race and citizenship in group participation, consistent with previous studies (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006) and in the same pattern as for group leadership (see Figure 5).¹³

Again turning to the GSS data for historical comparison (Figure 4), it appears that Californians and others living in the Pacific area formerly had large gaps in group membership. The trend from the mid 1970’s to at least 1993 shows a significant engagement gap turning into a significant membership advantage. The California lead may evaporate as soon as 1994 – the gaps are insignificant in that year and 2004, the only later year the question was asked. It thus appears that in the area of group membership, in contrast to the other measures of engagement we examine, California’s relative position has improved relative to at least some earlier years. However, with the differences in survey questions and the small sample sizes in the GSS, this conclusion remains tentative, and it will be interesting to re-examine the consistent series in the CPS Civic Engagement Supplement as more years of data become available in the future.

Reciprocal altruism is a basis of social trust, in that reciprocity norms are a critical part of social capital and alleviate free riding behavior in society. For our final measure of social civic engagement, we draw on a survey question regarding reciprocal behavior: “how often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other?” where helping a neighbor is defined as “watching each other’s children, helping with shopping, house sitting, lending garden or house tools, and other small acts of kindness.” California falls below the national average for helping a neighbor on a weekly or monthly basis. Only 13% of Californians help their neighbors at least weekly; however, 36% of Californians help their neighbors at least monthly (which is still below the national average of 41%). We did not find any similar questions in previous large-scale surveys to provide a historical comparison. Figure 5 shows that nationally, Whites help their neighbors the most on a monthly basis; Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians share a much lower rate. Native citizens, born in the US, lead among citizenship categories in helping a neighbor once per month or more (see Figure 6).

¹² However, further analysis shows that the nature of participation in California differs from that of the US at large. Californians are much less likely to participate in religious groups (14.7% vs. 19.8% for the whole US) and service and civic associations (6.0% vs. 8.0% for the US). The participation rates in California for the other types of groups are about the same as elsewhere.

¹³ Ramakrishnan and Viramontes (2006) found that Latinos and first generation immigrant Asians lag the average group participation rate in the US and California. They also found that Blacks lag the average participation rate in the nation, but not within California.

4 Why Civic Engagement Differs in California

The results in the previous section show, generally speaking, that non-Whites, Hispanics, non-citizens, and citizens not born in the US do not participate as much in civic life as Whites and native citizens born in the country. Since California's share of these less-engaged groups is disproportionate to that of the rest of the US, some of the civic participation gaps may be explained by these demographic factors. Before drawing any conclusions, however, the analysis must be extended in several regards. Other demographic factors are correlated with civic engagement, race, and citizenship. Ignoring other factors would give an incomplete picture of participation in civic life in California. In order to understand which factors are actually driving civic engagement, a multiple regression framework is necessary to examine each demographic variable holding other things equal. Also, we do not want to assume that the engagement patterns are the same in California as elsewhere. This requires an analytic framework that allows the propensity of each demographic group to help their neighbors (for example) to be different in California from elsewhere.

In this section, we take a closer look at the gaps in the various measures of civic engagement between California and the rest of the nation. The reference group in the discussion below is the entire US except for California (*US/CA*). The aim of the analysis here is to break down each gap by contributing economic and demographic factors, to understand why California lags. It is important to note that the method does not (and with the available data, cannot) peer into the black box of race, ethnicity, and citizenship status to determine which of the theoretical considerations discussed in Section 2 cause the association between demography and engagement. In that sense, the regressions are purely descriptive, and can serve to motivate future theoretical exploration. We first discuss the regression methodology we use for the decompositions of the gaps. In part 4.2, we present how the demographics in California differ from those elsewhere. In parts 4.3 and 4.4, we apply the results of the first two parts to comprehend the driving forces behind the gaps in civic engagement in California.

4.1 Methodology

For each measure of civic engagement considered, we begin by calculating binary measures for each respondent for participation in each of the five forms of civic involvement. Unlike in the previous section, here survey responses coded as N/A, "refused," and "don't know" are dropped from the sample, so that only respondents who gave definite answers are included in the engagement rates estimated.

The difference between the means for California and *US/CA* is the engagement gap (where a positive figure for a gap means that the civic engagement rate is lower in California). We then split the engagement gap into two components: the part explained by differences in demographics and the unexplained residual. Each component, in turn, is decomposed into the underlying contributions from each demographic variable. For example, we show below that 3.8 percentage points of the 8.5 point gap between California and *US/CA* in discussing politics is explained by demographic differences – mainly from there being more Hispanics, Asians, and non-citizens in California, all of whom are less likely to discuss politics. The rest of the gap not explained by differences in demographics, the “unexplained” portion, arises because (for example) Hispanics living in California may have a different propensity to discuss politics than Hispanics do elsewhere. Finally, even after controlling for all differences in the demographic composition of the state and the propensities of various demographic groups to discuss politics, the attitudes held by California residents of any demographic type toward discussing politics may be fundamentally different than those held by residents elsewhere, and this contributes further to the unexplained portion of the gap.

More formally, the technique we use to break down the gaps is called the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (Blinder 1973; Oaxaca 1973). Let \bar{X}_j^g be the average of the j th demographic variable for the g th group. For illustration, consider the two groups $g=CA$ for California and $g=US/CA$ for the US excluding the three largest states. Let b_j^g be the estimate of the regression coefficient for the j th demographic variable in a linear probability model regression of civic engagement variable Y^g on the K demographic variables and a constant,¹⁴ using data only from group g . Then the gap in mean outcomes between the groups, $\Delta = \bar{Y}^{US/CA} - \bar{Y}^{CA}$, can be decomposed into explained and unexplained components. The first part of the gap, denoted Q for the *quantity effect*, is

$$Q = \sum_{j=1}^K b_j^{US/CA} (\bar{X}_j^{US/CA} - \bar{X}_j^{CA}) \quad (1)$$

which is the portion explained by differences in the averages of the demographic variables.¹⁵ The quantity effect computes how outcome Y is expected to differ between groups if each individual had the group’s average characteristics and the demographics were related to Y as they are in the reference group (*US/CA*). Each term in the sum isolates a particular variable’s contribution to the quantity effect

¹⁴ The constant is $X_0=1$.

¹⁵ Since all statistics and regressions are computed using survey weights, the averages are to be understood as weighted averages that estimate the mean values in the subpopulation.

Q . For example, let Y be a voting variable and the first X be a Hispanic indicator variable. Then the first term in (1) shows how much of the gap between California and the rest of the nation is due to differing proportions of Hispanics in the two subpopulations, holding other demographic characteristics equal, and assuming Hispanics everywhere had the same propensity to vote that they do in US/CA .

The remainder of the gap, denoted U for “unexplained,” stems from differences in the coefficients:

$$U = \sum_{j=0}^K \bar{X}_j^{CA} (b_j^{US/CA} - b_j^{CA}) \quad (2)$$

The unexplained part of the gap is due to differences in the regression coefficients between groups. In the expression, the differences in how the demographics relate to the outcome (as reflected by the regression coefficients) are weighted by the demographic variables held fixed at their California average levels. Again, each term in the sum is the contribution of a single variable to U . Continuing with the example above, the term for $j=1$ in (2) shows how much of the gap between California and the rest of the nation is due to Hispanics having a different propensity to vote in California than elsewhere. The term for $j=0$ in U is the difference in the estimated intercepts from the regressions, and is the residual unexplained part of the gap after accounting for all differences in group average demographics and regression coefficients. This third type of impact is sometimes called the pure “group membership” effect. Together, Q and U exactly match the total size of the gap, so that $\Delta = Q + U$.¹⁶

In summary, while Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition may be less familiar than standard multiple regression, it is merely a way of organizing the information provided from regressions. One regression is performed for California and another for the rest of the nation, and thus no restrictions are placed on how the demographics affect participation between the two groups. Then the regressors and estimated coefficients are compared to determine which demographic factors contribute most to the engagement gaps.

4.2 The Demographic Difference in California

To understand the decompositions of the gap for a particular measure of civic engagement, we must first look at how the demographics differ between Califor-

¹⁶ Jann (2008) provides a good overview of the Oaxaca-Blinder methodology we use to decompose the engagement gaps between California and the rest of the US, as well as information on the Stata program we used to compute the estimates (oaxaca version 4.0.5).

nia and the rest of the nation, and second at how demographics relate to civic engagement. While the latter task involves looking at regressions of the particular measure of civic engagement on demographic variables, the former can be examined here before delving into specific types of civic engagement. Table 1 contains the comparison along each measured demographic dimension of California to *US/CA*, using CPS data for 2009.

Comparing California to *US/CA* in Table 1, we see that California has proportionally many more Hispanics, Asians, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens than elsewhere. Conversely, the state has fewer Whites, Blacks and native citizens born in the US. Education is a mixed picture in California. More California residents lack a high school degree but fewer have only a high school degree. However, the proportion that attains education above a high school degree is about equal to the rest of the state. California is also nominally wealthier (incomes are not adjusted for differences in costs of living) and far more of its residents live in metropolitan areas. The state's residents are more likely to be young, male, and unmarried than elsewhere.

4.3 Political Civic Engagement

In this section, California's gaps in the political measures of civic engagement are dissected. The subsequent section discusses the decompositions of the gaps in social civic engagement.

4.3.1 Political Discussion

We first examine civic engagement through discussing politics with others. The binary variable *Discuss Politics* equals 1 if the individual typically discussed politics once a month or more when communicating with family and friends, and equals zero otherwise. There is a gap of nine percentage points between California and elsewhere in discussing politics with others. We begin by looking at the regression of the political discussion variable on demographic explanatory variables for the reference group *US/CA*. The coefficients from the regression, shown in Table 2, are the $b_j^{US/CA}$ parameters in equation (1).¹⁷ Column one of Table 2, for the dependent variable *Discuss Politics*, shows that Hispanics, Blacks,

¹⁷ The regressions are linear probability models, and so the magnitude of the coefficients are readily interpretable. For example, the coefficient of -0.048 for Hispanics in the first column of Table 2 implies that Hispanics are 4.8 percentage points less likely to discuss politics than non-Hispanics, other things (including race and citizenship) equal.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics for the 2009 Subpopulations.

	California (%)	Rest of the US (<i>US/CA</i>) (%)
Hispanic	35.6	10.9
Race		
White	76.5	81.7
Black	5.9	12.6
Native American	1.0	0.8
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.7	3.7
Multiracial	1.9	1.2
Citizenship		
Native, born in US	61.9	86.4
Native, born in PR etc.	0.1	0.8
Native, born abroad	1.7	0.7
Naturalized citizen	18.1	5.6
Not a citizen	18.2	6.6
Education		
Less than high school	17.9	11.9
High school only	23.8	31.6
Some college, no degree	21.9	19.1
2-year college degree	8.6	9.1
4-year college degree	20.3	18.7
Advanced degree	7.6	9.7
Income		
(missing)	12.5	14.6
<\$35K	26.6	30.0
\$35K to \$50K	10.8	12.9
\$50K to \$75K	18.8	17.5
More than \$75K	31.3	25.0
In a metro area	98.4	81.9
Age		
18–25	15.7	13.9
26–35	20.3	17.6
36–45	17.9	18.2
46–55	19.3	19.4
56–65	13.7	14.8
66–75	7.5	9.1
76+	5.6	7.1
Gender		
Male	49.1	48.2
Female	50.9	51.8
Married	52.7	54.2

Notes: Population is restricted to individuals aged 18 years or higher. The survey weights are employed in the estimates.

and Asians are less likely to discuss politics than are Whites (the excluded categorical variable in the regression). Native citizens born abroad are more likely to discuss politics, while foreign-born naturalized citizens show the opposite tendency. The propensity to discuss politics rises with the level of education and income, although the latter is significant only for the highest income category.¹⁸ Other research also finds that wealthier and more educated individuals are more likely to pay attention to politics, to hold political knowledge, and to engage in its discussion (Eveland et al. 2005). Living in a metropolitan area is associated with more discussion of politics, as is being male or married. Gender differences in political knowledge and discussion are widely reported and explored in the literature (e.g., Dow 2009). The likelihood that the individual discusses politics is greatest for the 56 to 65 age group. Much previous work examining data from the US and California confirms that the younger the individual (except perhaps for the eldest Americans), the lower the level of political participation of various forms (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Ramakrishnan and Bal-dassare 2004).

With an understanding of the demographic differences in California and the reference regression results, we can now unpack the determinants of the gap in political discussion between the state and the rest of the nation. Results from the decomposition of the gap are presented in Table 3. The table shows a summary of results, whereas the complete Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition can be found in Table 11 in the Appendix.

The results in Table 3 show that California's gap in political discussion is 8.5 percentage points. Stated another way, California's engagement rate of 27.4% is 24% lower than the political discussion rate elsewhere – a large gap. Differences in demographics account for 44.5%, or 3.8 points, of the gap. The single largest contributor to the explained gap is the difference in the ethnic composition of the state. The greater proportion of Hispanics, who are less likely to discuss politics than non-Hispanics, accounts for 41.3% of the explainable gap, Q . The second largest factor is race, which explains 37.3% of Q . The greatest impact regarding race comes from the fact that California has many more Asians, who are less likely to engage in political discussions than any other racial group.¹⁹ Differences in the citizenship profile explain another one-third of Q . Despite a minor amount

¹⁸ All standard errors for the decompositions (as well as for all other statistics in the paper) are computed with the Taylor Series linearization method, account for survey design effects from clustering and stratification, and are robust to heteroskedasticity and clustering within PSUs. See Prieger and Faltis (2012) for further details, including an account of how pseudo-strata were constructed.

¹⁹ This can be seen from the detailed breakdown of the racial factors in Table 11.

Table 2: Reference Group (*US/CA*) Regressions for the Political Civic Engagement Variables.

	Y=Discuss Politics		Y=Political Acts	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Hispanic	-0.048**	0.024	-0.029**	0.015
Black	-0.040**	0.017	-0.066***	0.011
Native American	-0.016	0.050	0.012	0.035
Asian	-0.182***	0.028	-0.119***	0.016
Multiracial	-0.011	0.040	0.079**	0.036
Born in PR/other	-0.067	0.058	-0.071***	0.024
Native, born abroad	0.118**	0.053	0.016	0.041
Naturalized citizen	-0.055**	0.025	-0.096***	0.015
Non-citizen	-0.009	0.027	-0.079***	0.014
High school	0.039**	0.015	0.038***	0.008
Some college	0.088***	0.017	0.112***	0.010
2-year college	0.132***	0.020	0.118***	0.013
4-year college	0.167***	0.018	0.195***	0.012
Advanced degree	0.186***	0.021	0.250***	0.016
Income: <\$35K	-0.019	0.017	0.018	0.011
Income: \$35–50K	0.015	0.021	0.050***	0.014
Income: \$50–75K	0.014	0.020	0.048***	0.013
Income: >\$75K	0.076***	0.019	0.061***	0.013
In a metro area	0.024*	0.013	-0.010	0.009
Age: 26–35	-0.017	0.018	0.024*	0.013
Age: 36–45	-0.016	0.018	0.036***	0.012
Age: 46–55	0.038**	0.017	0.077***	0.012
Age: 56–65	0.073***	0.019	0.109***	0.014
Age: 66–75	0.028	0.021	0.110***	0.015
Age: >75	0.012	0.021	0.036**	0.014
Female	-0.038***	0.007	-0.012**	0.006
Married	0.035***	0.011	0.002	0.008
Subpopulation obs.		16,969		17,361
Strata		294		294
F statistic (d.o.f.)		20.3 (27,62931)		44.3 (27,62931)
F stat. p-value		0.000		0.000
R ²		0.051		0.085

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.

Notes: Each column presents the results from separate linear probability model regressions, where the dependent variable is as noted in the column heading. Regressions are weighted and the linearized standard errors account for the complex survey design and are robust to heteroskedasticity.

of offsetting by having more native citizens who were born abroad (who are more likely to discuss politics), the greater proportion of non-citizens implies that there will be less political discussion in California. Education is the only other factor

Table 3: Decomposition of California's Gap in Political Discussion.

California average	27.43
Gap between California and the rest of the US (percentage points)	8.52
95% confidence interval for the gap	(5.6, 11.4)
Percentage of gap explained by differences in demographics ($100*Q/\Delta$)	44.5
Percentage of the quantity effect (Q) explained by...	
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	41.3***
Race	37.3***
Citizenship	34.0***
Education	7.1***
Income	-13.8*
Metro/non-metro	-10.7**
Age profile	4.9
Gender	-1.3
Marital Status	1.3

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.

Notes: The mean of the response variable for California and *US/CA* differs from the statistics reported in Section 2 because survey responses coded as N/A, "refused," and "don't know" are dropped from the sample here. Percentages given for a category of variables is calculated as the sum of the contributions to the explained gap from each demographic variable in the category, multiplied by 100 and divided by Δ . Significance stars are for the joint hypothesis that all the estimates of the explained portion of the gap for the group of demographic variables indicated are zero. The confidence interval accounts for survey design effects.

that adds significantly to the gap, although it contributes much less than the ethnicity, race, and citizenship factors. The facts that California has more residents without a high school degree and fewer with an advanced university degree both widen the gap in political discussion. The educational attainment variables altogether account for 7% of the explained gap. The impacts of age, gender, and marital status are small and statistically insignificant.

Ethnicity, race, citizenship status, and education together thus account for more than the entire explained gap – 113% of it, to be exact. What does this mean, since the contributions of all categories of demographic variables must sum to 100%? The answer lies in the fact that two other factors, income and metropolitan location, contribute *negatively* to Q . California is relatively wealthier and more urban than elsewhere, and since both of these *increase* the propensity to discuss politics, they make up about -24% of Q . This implies that without the mitigating effect of income and urban location, the gap would be even higher (Q would be 24% higher, for a total gap (Δ) of 9.5 percentage points, in fact). The same logic applies to any negative percentages encountered below: such demographic factors by themselves would cause California to have *more* civic engagement

than elsewhere. Thus, to summarize the discussion, while the greater wealth and population density of California stimulate political discussion in the state, the negative impacts of having more Hispanics, Asians, non-citizens, and high-school dropouts and fewer holders of advanced degrees predominate in the final analysis. The differences in demographics, altogether, compose almost half of the total gap.

The remainder of the gap, U , does not warrant discussion because the estimates of its components are statistically insignificant.

4.3.2 Non-Electoral Political Activity

The binary variable *Political Acts* takes value 1 if, in the past year, the individual contacted or visited a public official or participated in a boycott motivated by the social or political values of the targeted company. *Political Acts* takes value zero if neither action was performed in the past year. There is a gap of 3.3 percentage points between California and elsewhere in such non-electoral political acts (see Table 3). In proportional terms, California's political action rate is about one-fifth lower than elsewhere – roughly the same proportional gap as found for political discussion.

As in the previous section, we begin by looking at the regression of the binary variable *Political Acts* on demographic explanatory variables for the reference group (see column two of Table 2). Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians are less likely to engage in political acts than are Whites. Ramakrishnan and Baldassare (2004) also found in their study of California residents that controlling for other demographics does not eliminate racial disparities in most types of political activity. Multiracial residents are more likely to contact politicians or boycott products. Native citizens born in Puerto Rico or other territories, foreign-born naturalized citizens, and non-citizens are less likely than native citizens born in the US to perform political acts. The propensity toward political action generally rises with the level of education, income, and age, although activity tails off for those above 75 years old. These relationships between political activity and education, income, and age have also been found for the US (Verba et al. 1995) and California residents in earlier data (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004: pp. 34, 37) as well as for 2008 (PPIC 2008). Women are slightly less likely to engage in non-electoral political action. Metro areas are associated with less political activity, but insignificantly so, despite the findings of other research that the weaker social relations and greater “psychological disengagement” of residents of larger cities results in them being much less likely to contact officials (Oliver 2000).

Summary results for the determinants of the gap in non-electoral political action between California and the reference group are presented in Table 4. As before, the complete estimation results can be found in Table 11. Table 4 shows that differences in demographics account for 121% of the total gap, implying that demographics alone would cause the gap to be even larger than it is. As for political discussion, the three largest contributors to the explained gap in *Political Acts* are the three closely related elements of ethnicity, race, and citizenship. These three factors account for nine-tenths of the explained gap. Differences in the citizenship profile (mostly the lower proportion of native citizens born in the US) alone explain over half of Q . Race and ethnicity differences each contribute almost one-fifth of the explained gap. As before, the greatest impacts from these variables come from the greater number of Asians and Hispanics. Education is the fourth factor that adds significantly to the gap, although as before its impact is much smaller than that of citizenship, ethnicity, and race. Again, the twin facts that California has more residents lacking a high school degree and fewer with an advanced university degree both widen the gap in *Political Acts*. The higher incomes in California mitigate the engagement gap a small amount. None of the impacts of the other demographic variables are significant at the 5% level.

The other component of the total gap, U , acts to decrease the size of Δ , although almost all of the individual components of U are insignificant. The two components that are significant: the lowest education group and the middle income group. Those lacking a high school degree are more likely in California

Table 4: Decomposition of California's Gap in Non-Electoral Political Action.

California average	14.33
Gap between California and the rest of the US (percentage points)	3.29
95% confidence interval for the gap	(1.1, 5.4)
Percentage of gap explained by differences in demographics ($100*Q/\Delta$)	120.7
Percentage of the quantity effect (Q) explained by...	
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	18.9**
Race	18.2***
Citizenship	52.8***
Education	6.4***
Income	-8.1**
Metro/non-metro	5.2
Age profile	6.9
Gender	-0.3
Marital Status	0.1

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.

See notes to Table 3.

than elsewhere to engage in political acts; this lowers the engagement gap by about a half a percentage point. On the other hand, those with middle class incomes are less likely to engage in California, and this raises the gap by about a half a percentage point.

4.4 Social Civic Engagement

We now look at California's gaps in the social dimension of civic engagement. The variables considered here are leadership of and participation in groups and helping neighbors with reciprocal favors.

4.4.1 Group Leadership

The binary variable *Group Leadership* takes value 1 if the individual had been an officer or served on a committee of any group or organization in the past year. There is a gap of 2.6 percentage points between California and elsewhere in reported group leadership. The California leadership rate of 7.6% is one-quarter lower than elsewhere. The regression of *Group Leadership* on the demographic explanatory variables using data from the reference group is reported in column one of Table 5. The estimated regression coefficients show that Asians are less likely to serve as group officers or committee members than are Whites. In contrast to the political measures of engagement, the lower tendency of Hispanics to take on leadership roles is not statistically significant. Foreign-born naturalized citizens, men, and unmarried residents are less likely to take leadership positions in groups. Those living in metropolitan areas are 3.2 percentage points less likely to lead groups, after controlling for other factors, which echoes findings in the literature (Oliver 2000). The propensity toward group leadership generally rises with the level of education and age (again excepting the oldest age group). Group leaders have disproportionately higher income, other things equal, although the coefficient is significant only for the highest income group.

Table 6 contains the summary of the decomposition of the gap in group leadership for California. The full Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition is in Table 12 for reference. The results in Table 6 show that differences in demographics account for more than the entire total gap. Citizenship and race are the two largest contributors to the explained gap, together accounting for more than three-fifths of Q . The lower proportion of native citizens and the higher proportion of naturalized citizens cause most of the impact from the citizenship variables. The greatest impact regarding race, as found for the political civic engagement variables

Table 5: Reference Group (US/CA) Regressions for the Social Civic Engagement Variables.

	Y=Group Leadership		Y=Group Participation		Y=Help Neighbor	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Hispanic	-0.013	0.010	-0.044*	0.023	-0.047*	0.026
Black	-0.011	0.008	0.037**	0.017	-0.095***	0.019
Native American	-0.024	0.022	-0.039	0.047	-0.051	0.058
Asian	-0.070***	0.014	-0.067**	0.031	-0.089***	0.034
Multiracial	0.008	0.025	0.041	0.041	0.032	0.042
Born in PR/other	-0.021	0.020	-0.068	0.045	0.073	0.074
Native born abroad	0.005	0.033	0.029	0.052	-0.125**	0.050
Naturalized citizen	-0.065***	0.012	-0.063**	0.026	-0.061**	0.029
Non-citizen	-0.028**	0.011	-0.068***	0.024	-0.083***	0.029
High school	0.019***	0.005	0.078***	0.014	0.005	0.017
Some college	0.067***	0.008	0.185***	0.016	0.030	0.019
2-year college	0.075***	0.010	0.185***	0.019	0.005	0.021
4-year college	0.117***	0.009	0.293***	0.017	0.047**	0.020
Advanced degree	0.196***	0.013	0.371***	0.020	0.050**	0.022
Income: <\$35K	-0.013	0.008	0.008	0.015	0.007	0.019
Income: \$35–50K	0.006	0.011	0.048**	0.019	0.077***	0.022
Income: \$50–75K	0.012	0.011	0.060***	0.018	0.043**	0.021
Income: >\$75K	0.050***	0.011	0.107***	0.018	0.073***	0.020
In a metro area	-0.032***	0.008	-0.012	0.012	-0.039***	0.013
Age: 26–35	-0.007	0.008	-0.006	0.017	0.084***	0.019
Age: 36–45	0.018**	0.009	0.059***	0.017	0.148***	0.019
Age: 46–55	0.048***	0.009	0.025	0.016	0.160***	0.018
Age: 56–65	0.062***	0.010	0.030*	0.018	0.158***	0.020
Age: 66–75	0.098***	0.012	0.114***	0.020	0.192***	0.022
Age: >75	0.049***	0.011	0.061***	0.020	0.101***	0.023
Female	0.014***	0.005	0.034***	0.007	0.003	0.007
Married	0.023***	0.006	0.097***	0.010	0.109***	0.012
Subpopulation obs.		17,268		17,346		16,950
Strata		294		294		294
F statistic (d.o.f.)		31.7 (27,62931)		50.1 (27,62931)		21.4 (27,62931)
F stat. p-value		0.000		0.000		0.000
R ²		0.075		0.108		0.062

*Significant at the 10% level. **Significant at the 5% level. ***Significant at the 1% level.

Table notes: see notes to Table 2.

examined above, comes from the Asian group, who are less likely to serve as officers or on committees than any other racial group. Ethnicity contributes no statistically or numerically significant amount to the gap, which contrasts starkly with the importance of Hispanics in explaining the gaps in the political civic engagement measures. The next largest contribution to the gap is from metropolitan

residence. The relatively urban nature of the state accounts for over one-sixth of Q . The income and age profiles largely offset each other, with the higher income in California offsetting the younger age profile. The greater fraction of residents in the lowest educational category also contributes a small amount toward the explained gap. The unexplained component of the gap accounts for only a small (and statistically insignificant) part of the total gap.

4.4.2 Group Participation

The binary variable *Group Participation* takes value 1 if, in the past year, the individual participated in any of the various sorts of organizations described in Section 3.2. If no participation in any sort of civic or community group, including unlisted types of groups volunteered by the respondent, *Group Participation* is equal to zero for the individual.

There is a gap of 2.8 percentage points between California and *US/CA* in group participation. Unlike the other measures examined here, the confidence interval for the gap is wide enough to admit the possibility that there is no difference in group participation between California and elsewhere. The point estimate of the gap represents an 8% lower participation rate in the state, making it the smallest gap in both absolute and proportional terms. We first discuss the regression results for *Group Participation* for the reference group (see column two of Table 5).

Table 6: Decomposition of California's Gap in Group Leadership.

California average	7.64
Gap between California and the rest of the US (percentage points)	2.56
95% confidence interval for the gap	(1.1, 4.0)
Percentage of gap explained by differences in demographics ($100 \cdot Q/\Delta$)	109.4
Percentage of the quantity effect (Q) explained by...	
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	7.8
Race	22.6***
Citizenship	42.8***
Education	6.9***
Income	-10.2*
Metro/non-metro	17.6***
Age profile	10.6*
Gender	0.6
Marital Status	1.2

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.

See notes to Table 3.

Table 7: Decomposition of California's Gap in Group Participation.

California average	33.57
Gap between California and the rest of the US (percentage points)	2.78
95% confidence interval for the gap	(-0.3, 5.8)
Percentage of gap explained by differences in demographics ($100*Q/\Delta$)	146.0
Percentage of the quantity effect (Q) explained by...	
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	21.1*
Race	23.3*
Citizenship	44.6***
Education	10.3***
Income	-14.4**
Metro/non-metro	2.4
Age profile	8.7
Gender	1.0
Marital Status	2.9

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.

See notes to Table 3.

The results are qualitatively similar to the regression for *Group Leadership*, with one exception. While Blacks are neither more nor less likely to take leadership roles in civic groups than Whites, they are almost four percentage points more likely to participate in groups as Whites (mainly religious groups and school or community organizations). After controlling for the other demographics, women have a greater propensity for participation than men, an interesting result standing in contrast to earlier literature finding that women have fewer group memberships on average than men, before and sometimes even after controlling for other individual characteristics (e.g., Curtis et al. 2001; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001; Lam 2006).²⁰

Summary results for the determinants of the group participation gap are presented in Table 7; complete estimation results are in Table 12. Table 7 shows that differences in demographics account for 146% of the gap, implying that demographics alone would cause the gap to be 4.1 percentage points. As with group leadership, the largest contributor to the explained gap in *Group Participation* is citizenship, which accounts for almost half of Q . The impact of race on the explained gap is about the same size as for group leadership, 23% of the whole, but it is statistically significant only at the 10% level. The Hispanic impact is of

²⁰ Survey results regarding group participation may be sensitive to the specific types of groups mentioned in the survey questions, and this may account for the variation in findings across the literature.

similar magnitude and significance. Differences in the profiles of educational attainment and income offset each other, as for group leadership. None of the impacts of the other demographic variables are significant at the 5% level.

The other component of the total gap, U , acts to decrease the size of Δ by 46 percentage points. One of the two factors with the greatest impacts is native Citizens born in the US, who in California are more likely to participate in groups than elsewhere. The other important factor in U , and by far the largest in magnitude, is residing in a metropolitan area. Such residents are much less likely to participate in groups in California than elsewhere, and this contributes 13 percentage points toward the gap.

4.4.3 Helping Neighbors

Californians are much less likely (by 8.4 percentage points) to report helping neighbors than are residents elsewhere. Proportionally, helping neighbors in California is 15% less prevalent than elsewhere. The binary variable *Help Neighbor* takes value 1 if the individual reported that favors were exchanged with neighbors at least once a month on average during the past year. The regression of *Help Neighbor* for the reference group is reported in column three of Table 5. Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians are less likely to exchange favors with neighbors than are Whites, even after controlling for income and urban location. Native citizens born abroad, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens are all less likely to help their neighbors than citizens born in the US. The inclination to exchange favors mostly increases with educational attainment, although the coefficients are significant only for 4-year college and advanced university degrees. The income group most likely to help neighbors is the \$35,000–50,000 group, an unusual finding when compared to the regressions for the other civic engagement variables, although the propensity to help is nearly as large for those with annual incomes over \$75,000. The propensity to help neighbors generally rises with age until age 75. Metropolitan dwellers are 4 percentage points less likely to help their neighbors, and married individuals are 11 percentage points more likely to exchange neighborly favors than their unmarried counterparts.

The determinants of the gap in helping neighbors between California and US/CA are shown in Table 8 (more extensive results are in Table 12). Table 8 shows that differences in demographics account for almost three-fifths of the total gap. The determinants of the gap do not follow the patterns for either of the other social civic engagement variables, except in that the largest contributor to gap in helping neighbors is the set of citizenship indicators. The citizenship profile of the state accounts for 42% of the explained gap in helping neighbors. The next

Table 8: Decomposition of California's Gap in Helping Neighbors.

California average	48.82
Gap between California and the rest of the US (percentage points)	8.43
95% confidence interval for the gap	(5.1, 11.8)
Percentage of gap explained by differences in demographics ($100*Q/\Delta$)	58.9
Percentage of the quantity effect (Q) explained by...	
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	33.3***
Race	1.2***
Citizenship	42.2***
Education	1.7**
Income	-4.9
Metro/non-metro	14.7***
Age profile	8.6*
Gender	0.2
Marital Status	3.0

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.
See notes to Table 3.

largest factor is Hispanic ethnicity, at 33% of Q . The racial profile is highly significant but accounts for only 1.2% of the explained gap. In this case only, Asians do not contribute significantly to the engagement gap. Metropolitan status, at 15% of the explained gap, appears to be a more important determinant than is race. None of the other factors are significant at the 5% level.

Since the unexplained component, U , accounts for over two-fifths of the total gap, it is interesting to look at its largest contributors (see the final column of Table 12). As with political discussion, in California, native citizens born in the US are more likely to help their neighbors, which acts to decrease the gap by 3 percentage points. By far the largest component of U comes from the difference in the constants in the regressions. Since the constants capture the impact of pure “group membership” – e.g., living in California versus living elsewhere – this implies that much of U and Δ remain unexplained by demographics or the differing likelihoods that various demographic groups are willing to help their neighbors. Thus, for helping neighbors (but for none of the other civic engagement variables), there appears to be a “California distinctiveness.”

5 Conclusion

The work in this section shows that for three of five civic engagement measures, differences in the demographics explain most of why California lags the rest of

the country. For non-electoral political action, group participation, and group leadership, differences in demographics alone explain more than 100% of each engagement gap. For these measures, at least, seekers of why California lags in civic engagement need look no further than the demographic and economic make-up of the state. In fact, for these measures California's demographics would cause even larger gaps than actually observed, but for mitigating unexplained differences in the propensity of the state's residents to engage. The two exceptions to this observed result are political discussion and helping neighbors, for which differences in demographics explain 45% and 59% of the California gap, respectively. The importance of the unexplained factors is relatively larger here, and indeed it is only for the first of these two measures that the unexplained parts of the gaps are statistically significant as a whole.

Despite the varying importance of demographic differences among the various measures of civic engagement, there is some regularity among the individual determinants of why California lags the rest of the nation. The most important regularity is that ethnicity, race, and citizenship explain much of the California gaps. First, consider the political measures of civic engagement. Hispanics are less politically engaged, by the measures examined, and the greater presence of Hispanics in California accounts for 19 to 41% of the explained part of the gaps in political civic engagement, depending on the measure examined. Asian Americans are far less likely to engage politically than others, and their larger numbers in the state contribute 27 to 36% of the explained gaps. Asians are the primary reason why racial factors altogether account for a large part of the explained gaps. Individuals with citizenship gained by means other than being born in the US are generally less politically engaged, and their greater prevalence explains between 34 and 53% of Q . The only other factor that was a consistently significant determinant of the political engagement gaps was education. California's greater proportion of residents without a high school degree widened the gaps for the political measures, although by smaller amounts than the "big three" factors of ethnicity, race, and citizenship.

The picture is more mixed when looking at the measures of social civic engagement, although ethnicity, race, and citizenship typically still are large, albeit sometimes statistically insignificant, determinants. The regressions show that Hispanics and Asians are less socially engaged, after controlling for other demographics, although the estimates are sometimes insignificant. The impacts of citizenship on the gaps in social engagement generally stem from naturalized citizens and non-citizens, both of whom are less likely to engage. The larger numbers of residents who are not native citizens in California leads to total contributions of the citizenship factors of about 45% of Q in each case. Unlike race and ethnicity, the impacts of citizenship as a whole are significant for all three social measures.

Thus, to sum up, the empirical examination of the determinants of civic engagement in California shows that participation in the state differs from engagement elsewhere in the US in degree but not in kind. That is, for the most part people with similar socioeconomic profiles are as likely to be civically engaged in California as elsewhere. In particular, Hispanics, non-Whites, and residents with citizenship status other than native born in the US are not significantly less civically engaged than elsewhere.²¹ Perhaps the good news for those seeking to improve civic engagement in the state is that the uniqueness of California's challenge stems more from who lives here than from deficient opportunities to apply individuals' resources toward participation or from generally underdeveloped recruitment networks.

It may be scant comfort to know that California faces the same task as elsewhere in equipping, motivating, and recruiting minorities and those with non-traditional citizenship status. Nonetheless, one implication is that lessons learned in other parts of the country about increasing civic engagement may be more or less directly applicable to California. We conclude by mentioning three potential avenues to improve social capital and civic engagement: municipal leadership, civic education, and e-engagement.

New or rejuvenated forms of democratic governance, often at the community and municipal level, have received much attention in recent years. Leighninger (2009) characterizes democratic governance as providing a "new relationship between citizens and government...by governing communities in participatory, deliberative, collaborative ways." Such governance structure can be temporary, as in day-long exercises in deliberative democracy focused on a specific community issue, or permanent, such as standing neighborhood councils. Delli Carpini et al. (2004) review empirical studies on various experiments in deliberative democracy, which general find positive outcomes on civic engagement and political outcomes. However, much more empirical work and better designed experiments are needed to assess outcomes in this area.

A certain amount of civic knowledge is necessary for some forms of political civic engagement. Without understanding of the powers and limitations of various elected offices in the US, how the government works, or even how to register to vote, the motivation to vote or to contact public officials may be low. Recent research indicates that civic knowledge indeed promotes political participation (Galston 2007). Whether civic knowledge can be taught is another matter, and much of the older empirical work in the field came to the consensus that civic education has no effect on civic knowledge. However, some studies of

²¹ That is, the relevant components of *U* for these factors are generally not statistically significant in Table 11 and Table 12.

particular pedagogical interventions find that they significantly improve participants' understanding of politics (Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Galston 2007) and social capital (Michael et al. 2007). More work is needed in this area to be able to generalize the results beyond the specific programs studied.

The internet potentially a low cost way to engage with the community and political life, and thus may be a democratizing and equalizing force. Some researchers see the Internet and cyberspace as fostering resources embedded in social networks to such a degree that they claim that social capital has actually been increasing during the same period Putnam claims it diminished (Lin 2001). Some existing research has found a positive association between internet use and some forms of civic engagement, such as voting, contributing to political campaigns, and contacting government officials.²² Other research finds that the internet has not reduced the income gap in terms of active political participation, such as signing a petition (Smith et al. 2009). The explosion of social networking media such as Twitter, Facebook, along with blogs and other venues for social commentary, necessitates research on how these media impact elections, political discussion, and community networks.

It remains to be seen whether virtual forms of engagement and contact with others in the anonymity culture of cyberspace will foster the same sort of trust that contributes to social capital as with face to face meetings. Review of particular pilot project in Boston using a virtual world to engage citizens in urban planning found that it allowed “previously disempowered individuals ... to form politically powerful groups” in cyberspace (Gordon and Koo 2008: p. 204). However, some commentators question whether online communities will “cyberbalkanize” society by encouraging communication only with like-minded people (Putnam 2000; Sunstein 2001). Research on whether the internet is a democratizing or polarizing force will be vitally needed as ever more of Americans' lives take place online.

²² See the many sources cited in Mossberger et al. (2008: p. 49).

Appendix: Additional Tables

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics and Comparisons for Political Civic Engagement, 2009.

	Proportion	95% Conf. Interval	<i>p</i> -Value
Political discussion: how often were politics discussed when communicating with family and friends?			
US without CA			
Few times per week or more	34.6	(33.6, 35.6)	
At least once per month but less than weekly	35.0	(34.0, 35.9)	
Not at all	26.6	(25.7, 27.6)	
No response/Refused/Do not know	3.8	(3.5, 4.2)	
California			
Few times per week or more	26.4	(23.8, 29.1)	0.000*
At least once per month but less than weekly	34.3	(31.5, 37.2)	0.665**
Not at all	35.5	(32.6, 38.6)	0.000**
No response/Refused/Do not know			
Political acts: have you contacted a public official or boycotted a product?			
US without CA			
Yes	17.4	(16.6, 18.1)	
No	81.1	(80.4, 81.9)	
No response/Refused/Do not know	1.5	(1.3, 1.8)	
California			
Yes	14.2	(12.3, 16.3)	0.015*
No	84.6	(82.4, 86.6)	0.433**
No response/Refused/Do not know	1.3	(1.2, 1.6)	0.002**

**p*-Value for the Pearson design based χ^2 -test of the independence of the rows and columns of the region-response contingency table (a joint test for responses differing between CA and US/CA).

***p*-Value for the simple hypothesis test of equal proportions between the state and US/CA, only for the row category.

Table notes: Each subpopulation excludes individuals under 18 years of age.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics and Comparisons for Social Civic Engagement, 2009.

	Proportion	95% Conf. Interval	<i>p</i> -Value
Group leadership: have you been an officer or served on a committee of any group or organization?			
US without CA			
Yes	10.0	(9.5, 10.6)	
No	88.0	(87.4, 88.6)	
No response/Refused/Do not know	2.0	(1.8, 2.3)	
California			
Yes			0.010*
No	7.5	(6.3, 9.0)	0.002**
No response/Refused/Do not know	90.6	(89.0, 92.0)	0.854**
Group membership: have you participated in any group or organization?			
US without CA			
Yes	35.8	(34.8, 36.8)	
No	62.7	(61.7, 63.7)	
No response/Refused/Do not know	1.6	(1.3, 1.8)	
California			
Yes			0.181*
No	33.0	(30.2, 36.0)	0.080**
No response/Refused/Do not know	65.4	(62.4, 68.2)	0.996**
	1.6	(30.2, 36.0)	0.080**
Helping neighbors: how often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other?			
US without CA			
Few times per week or more	15.2	(14.5, 15.9)	
At least once per month but less than weekly	39.9	(38.9, 40.9)	
Not at all	41.1	(40.1, 42.2)	
No response/Refused/Do not know	3.9	(3.5, 4.3)	
California			
Few times per week or more			0.000*
At least once per month but less than weekly	12.4	(10.6, 14.5)	0.009**
Not at all	34.4	(31.6, 37.3)	0.000**
No response/Refused/Do not know	49.1	(46.0, 52.2)	0.000**
	4.1	(3.1, 5.4)	0.723**

**p*-Value for the Pearson design based χ^2 -test of the independence of the rows and columns of the region-response contingency table (a joint test for responses differing between CA and US/CA).

***p*-Value for the simple hypothesis test of equal proportions between the state and US/CA, only for the row category.

Table notes: Each subpopulation excludes individuals under 18 years of age.

Table 11: Decomposition of California’s Gaps in Political Civic Engagement – Detailed Results.

Summary of Gap	Y=Discuss Politics		Y=Political Acts	
	Estimate (×100)	95% CI	Estimate (×100)	95% CI
Ave. Y for US/CA ($\bar{Y}^{US/CA}$)	35.95***	(34.9, 37.0)	17.62***	(16.9, 18.4)
Ave. Y for CA (\bar{Y}^{CA})	27.43***	(24.7, 30.1)	14.33***	(12.3, 16.3)
Total Gap (Δ)	8.52***	(5.6, 11.4)	3.29***	(1.1, 5.4)
Explained Gap (Q)	3.79***	(2.4, 5.2)	3.97***	(2.9, 5.0)
Unexplained Gap (U)	4.73***	(1.8, 7.7)	-0.68	(-2.7, 1.4)
<i>Detailed decomposition</i>	$Q_i \times 100$	$U_i \times 100$	$Q_i \times 100$	$U_i \times 100$
Hispanic	0.781***	0.932	0.374**	0.753*
Non-Hispanic	0.781***	-1.646	0.374**	-1.346*
White	0.152	-1.690	0.060	-2.381
Black	-0.081	0.139	-0.344***	-0.493*
Native American	-0.022	-0.005	-0.009	0.027
Asian	1.370***	0.318	1.065***	-0.134
Multiracial	-0.008	-0.032	-0.051	0.174
Born in USA	0.645	-2.812	1.197***	-0.756
Born in PR/other	-0.048*	0.006	-0.016	0.013
Native born abroad	-0.091*	0.162	-0.054	-0.140
Naturalized citizen	0.711***	-1.295*	0.564***	-0.492
Non-citizen	0.070	-0.958	0.404***	-0.578
No HS degree	0.641***	-0.803	0.694***	-0.648**
High school	-0.532***	-0.660	-0.626***	-0.028
Some college	0.040	-0.632	0.027	-0.087
2-year college	0.011	0.004	-0.003	0.124
4-year college	-0.117	1.116*	-0.128	0.395
Advanced degree	0.226***	0.345	0.290***	0.054
Income: missing	-0.040	-0.553	-0.073	-0.119
Income: <\$35K	-0.118*	0.954	-0.080*	-0.233
Income: \$35–50K	-0.017	0.295	0.033	0.492**
Income: \$50–75K	-0.006	0.697	-0.016	0.040
Income: >\$75K	-0.343***	-1.601*	-0.186**	-0.893
In a metro area	-0.203**	8.703	0.102	3.773
Not in metro area	-0.203**	-0.133	0.102	-0.060
Age: 18–25	0.023	0.544	0.094	0.200
Age: 26–35	0.100*	-0.882	0.080**	-0.230
Age: 36–45	-0.004	-0.400	-0.003	-0.032
Age: 46–55	0.000	0.957*	0.001	-0.299
Age: 56–65	0.064	-0.066	0.052	-0.223
Age: 66–75	0.017	-0.229	0.077*	0.108
Age: >75	-0.016	0.087	-0.026	0.096
Female	-0.024	-0.408	-0.006	-0.482
Male	-0.024	0.402	-0.006	0.467
Married	0.024	0.817	0.002	0.235

(Table 11: Continued)

Summary of Gap	Y=Discuss Politics		Y=Political Acts	
	Estimate (×100)	95% CI	Estimate (×100)	95% CI
Not married	0.024	-0.716	0.002	-0.208
Constant		3.774		2.229

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.

Table notes: Each pair of columns presents the results from separate regression decompositions of the gap between CA and US/CA in the dependent variable in the column heading. Refer to Section 4. A for notation and methodology of the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition. Deviation contrasts are used for categorical regressors.

Table 12: Decomposition of California’s Gaps in Social Civic Engagement – Detailed Results.

Summary of Gap	Y=Group Leadership		Y=Group Participation		Y=Help Neighbor	
	Estimate (×100)	95% CI	Estimate (×100)	95% CI	Estimate (×100)	95% CI
Ave. Y for US/CA ($\bar{Y}^{US/CA}$)	10.20***	(9.6, 10.8)	36.35***	(35.4, 37.3)	57.25***	(56.2, 58.3)
Ave. Y for CA (\bar{Y}^{CA})	7.64***	(6.3, 9.0)	33.57***	(30.7, 36.4)	48.82***	(45.7, 52.0)
Total Gap (Δ)	2.56***	(1.1, 4.0)	2.78*	(-0.3, 5.8)	8.43***	(5.1, 11.8)
Explained Gap (Q)	2.79***	(2.0, 3.5)	4.06***	(2.5, 5.6)	4.96***	(3.4, 6.5)
Unexplained Gap (U)	-0.24	(-1.7, 1.2)	-1.28	(-4.4, 1.8)	3.47*	(-0.1, 7.0)
<i>Detailed decomposition</i>	$Q_j \times 100$	$U_j \times 100$	$Q_j \times 100$	$U_j \times 100$	$Q_j \times 100$	$U_j \times 100$
Hispanic	0.109	0.225	0.429*	1.209*	0.826***	0.487
Non-Hispanic	0.109	-0.401	0.429*	-2.159*	0.826***	-0.871
White	0.057	0.940	-0.011	0.972	0.288**	-4.938
Black	0.011	0.007	0.169	-0.004	-0.410***	-0.283
Native American	-0.006	-0.093	-0.007	-0.118	0.003	-0.050
Asian	0.577***	-0.108	0.803**	0.687	0.201	1.028
Multiracial	-0.006	0.151*	-0.007	0.101	-0.023	0.162
Born in USA	0.535**	-2.321**	0.899**	-7.851***	1.592***	-3.040
Born in PR/other	-0.010	0.007	-0.018	0.029	0.028	0.031
Native born abroad	-0.048	0.008	-0.069	0.042	0.072	-0.158
Naturalized citizen	0.610***	-0.689**	0.433	-2.544***	0.236	-1.288
Non-citizen	0.109	-0.103	0.566**	-1.795***	0.166	-2.709***
No HS degree	0.455***	-0.583***	1.076***	-1.775***	0.251***	0.324
High school	-0.468***	-0.328	-0.875***	0.002	-0.140**	-0.221
Some college	0.036*	-0.182	0.012	-0.138	-0.033	0.512
2-year college	-0.003	-0.044	0.002	0.022	-0.016	-0.446
4-year college	-0.071	0.177	-0.192	0.485	-0.060	0.749
Advanced degree	0.245***	0.380*	0.395***	0.588*	0.083**	-0.123
Income: missing	-0.020	0.332*	-0.080	0.081	-0.080	-0.306
Income: <\$35K	-0.062*	-0.538*	-0.117*	-1.289*	-0.088	-2.024**
Income: \$35–50K	-0.011	0.046	-0.007	0.568	0.069	1.281**
Income: \$50–75K	-0.004	-0.050	-0.024	-0.414	-0.017	-0.142
Income: >\$75K	-0.186***	-0.291	-0.355***	0.350	-0.129*	-0.246
In a metro area	0.246***	7.673*	0.048	13.061**	0.364***	5.557
Not in metro area	0.246***	-0.122*	0.048	-0.208**	0.364***	-0.091
Age: 18–25	0.062	0.142	0.080	-0.731	0.188	-0.392
Age: 26–35	0.117**	-0.117	0.130**	0.485	0.122**	-0.737
Age: 36–45	-0.004	-0.277	0.007	0.066	0.009	0.162
Age: 46–55	0.000	0.060	0.001	-0.805	0.003	0.033
Age: 56–65	0.023	0.168	-0.017	-0.110	0.041	0.225
Age: 66–75	0.086*	0.118	0.126**	-0.093	0.105*	0.149
Age: >75	0.014	-0.103	0.027	0.443**	-0.041	0.075
Female	0.008	0.215	0.020	1.228**	0.004	1.183**
Male	0.008	-0.209	0.020	-1.194**	0.004	-1.165**
Married	0.017	0.283	0.058	0.255	0.076	0.593

(Table 12: Continued)

Summary of Gap	Y=Group Leadership		Y=Group Participation		Y=Help Neighbor	
	Estimate (×100)	95% CI	Estimate (×100)	95% CI	Estimate (×100)	95% CI
Not married	0.017	-0.251	0.058	-0.226	0.076	-0.527
Constant		-4.358		-0.500		10.674

***Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level. *Significant at the 10% level.
Table notes: see notes to previous table.

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