

5-2010

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Weare, Christopher and Musso, Juliet A., "Networks for Representation: Social Capital and the Efficacy of Local Participatory Institutions" (2010). 2010. Paper 39.

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Networks for Representation:
Social Capital and the Efficacy of Local Participatory Institutions

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Abstract. Efforts to understand the successes and limitations of civil society institutions have inspired a growing literature on social networks, social capital, and the role that social relationships play in developing group norms supporting collective action and in linking groups to network-based resources. The literature has tended to emphasize broad egocentric networks or informal networks of community organizations, largely ignoring the importance of social capital for supporting engagement of the formal participatory institutions that are arising as a way of improving stakeholder input in many cities. The extant research on community-representing organizations has tended to conceptualize social networks in largely metaphorical terms, and has not systematically investigated the manner in which political networks support their operations. This paper argues that differing forms of network resources will support distinct types of activities undertaken by participatory organizations. Our empirical analysis demonstrates that different network resources are employed in different contexts, while suggesting that civil society organizations must overcome basic organizational hurdles related to internal conflict in order to leverage latent network resources.

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Introduction

In the face of increased political polarization and declining trust in government, localized mechanisms for civic engagement in governance are held to cure an array of democratic ills. Despite widespread disenchantment with the community engagement provisions of the War on Poverty, neighborhood representing organizations have grown in number and importance during the latter twentieth century. In many cities these have been formalized into governance institutions that attach community-representing associations to urban policy making processes (Berry, Portney et al. 1993; Thomson 2001; Fung 2004). It is argued that these formalized institutions for community participation in governance increase the quality of citizen participation and represent localized interests, in turn increasing the responsiveness and accountability of policy within large urban entities. Others stress the potential of community-representing associations to provide forums for deliberation and advice, or to mobilize resources and advocate for neighborhood positions in a manner that may counter central-city elite policy influence (Ferman 1996; Fung 2004)

Many of the theorized benefits of community participatory institutions rest implicitly on assumptions that they create positive social network effects, effects that have received limited systematic empirical validation to date. This paper explicitly considers how the network structure of neighborhood-representing organizations in Los Angeles affects their political efficacy along several dimensions of civic associative activity. The paper is situated within a growing literature that considers how network relationships influence a broad range of political activities including civic engagement, political campaigns, policy development, and service delivery (Provan and Milward 1995; Provan and Sebastian 1998; Scholz, Berardo et al. 2008). The particular focus of the paper is on formal participatory institutions, generally ignored in the

social network literature. Its contribution is a textured consideration of the manner in which network structures support differing facets of collective civic action within such institutions.

Social capital is important to the function of participatory institutions, because these are typically hybrid organizations—municipal governance systems populated with volunteers—and hence confront the collective action dilemmas common to volunteer organizations. For example, group efficacy can be impeded by shirking behaviors that tend to be mediated by bonds of trust and norms of generalized reciprocity found in strong social networks (Coleman 1990; Putnam 2000). Effective engagement with policy also requires information resources that arguably can be leveraged through the development of outward-reaching ties among community-representing associations, stakeholders, and city entities (Burt 2000; Scholz, Berardo et al. 2008). Within cities that are increasingly diverse, networks potentially have an important role to play in overcoming group conflict and fostering coherence between elite and mass opinions (Mutz 2002; Mutz and Mondak 2006; Weare, Musso et al. 2010).

Our understanding of these critical roles of social networks to effective democratic participation are generally inferred from literatures that have examined related but distinct contexts for collective action including the role of ego-centric relationships on voluntarism (Lin 2001; Lin 2008), broad community-level studies relating overall community networks and outcomes (Sampson and Groves 1989; Hill and Matsubayashi 2005; Hipp and Perrin 2006), collaborative networks between social service organizations, and issue networks (Provan and Milward 1995; Esparza 2007; Scholz, Berardo et al. 2008). In contrast, there has been quite limited empirical work that links network effects to the political efficacy of participatory institutions in a systematic fashion. This constitutes a large gap in our understanding because the influence of social structures on organizational efficacy depends on the social context of the

organizations, including the goals they pursue and the opportunities and constraints presented by the environment within which they operate (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Galaskiewicz 2007).

This paper bridges this gap by focusing on how network-based resources influence the organizational performance of participatory institutions. We theorize that distinct forms of network-based resources – bridging and bonding social capital as well as varying forms of brokerage – are differentially accessed as participatory institutions engage in a diverse range of activities – promoting political participation, mobilization, and building a sense of community. We further argue that internal factors such as conflict mediate the ability of these organizations to leverage networks effectively.

The next section of the paper frames local participatory institutions within network terms, and develops hypotheses regarding the differential role that network resources play in supporting various dimensions of organizational performance. This is followed by a description of our empirical focus, which is a network survey of the elected board members of 85 advisory neighborhood councils in the City of Los Angeles. We then present our findings followed by a concluding discussion.

Explaining Efficacy in Participatory Civic Networks

Despite Putnam's (1995, 2000) diagnosis that there has been a decline of social capital in the form of informal voluntary association, there is evidence that local civic associations have continued to grow during the 1980s and 1990s (Berry et al., 1993; Cooper & Musso, 1999; Cunningham & Kotler, 1983). Moreover, many cities in the United States have created participatory institutions intended to engage community-representing entities formally within processes of policy formulation and service delivery. It is argued that these participatory institutions can improve representation of localized preferences by mobilizing citizens to express

their concerns and interests, help establish a balance of power with broader economic forces, and promote citizen influence over local government activities (Cunningham & Kotler, 1983). Berry et al. (1993) found that neighborhood involvement in government improves the quality and efficacy of citizen participation; reduces alienation and strengthens trust in government; increases tolerance and reduces destructive conflict; cultivates a sense of community; and enhances government responsiveness to its citizens.

Local civic participation is particularly important given an increasing urbanization of the American population that is accompanied by a national trend toward decentralization of services that began in the late 1970s and has continued to the present (Musso, 1998). In this light, local participatory systems can be understood as a means of addressing the governance challenge facing most modern metropolitan regions: how to accommodate and respond to geographically compact community interests while also addressing the needs of the broader region (Box and Musso, 2004). At the same time community engagement faces severe challenges, as neighborhoods are hotly contested spaces in the American urban politics of growth and development (Mollenkopf 1983; Ferman 1996). As Peterson (1981) argues, economic competition within American federalism orients urban policy toward development and supports domination of alliances involving political officials, businesses and developers. At the neighborhood level, local participatory institutions inevitably experience conflict as the economic development prerogatives of the city encounter residential concerns about quality of life. Social capital may serve an important role in assisting the members of these groups to work together in democratizing urban political processes that are impenetrable to most community members (See also Evan and Boyte 1992).

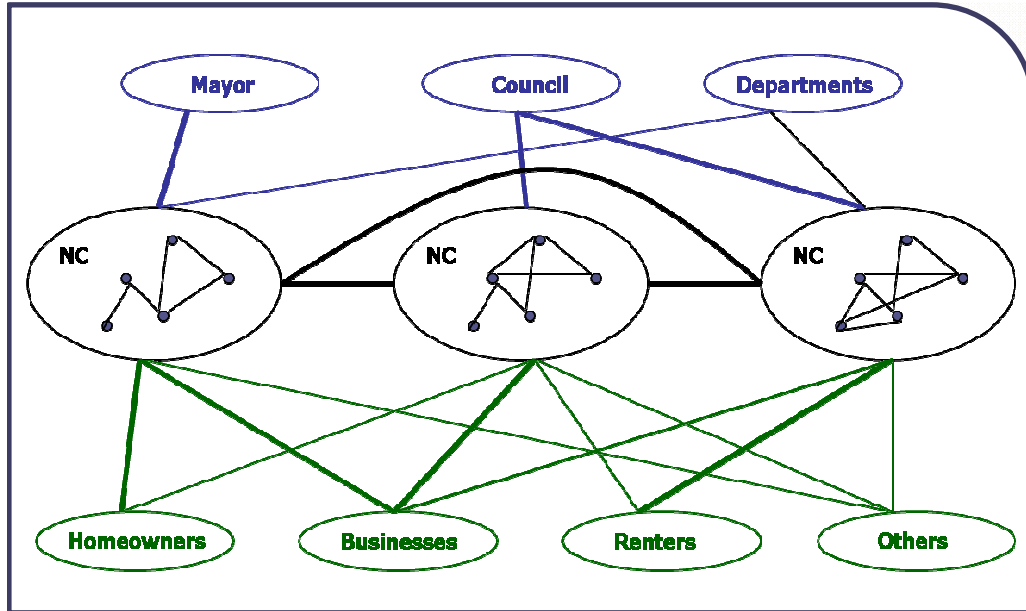
A Network Frame for Participatory Institutions

This paper understands participatory institutions to serve as mediating structures that connect in complex ways to stakeholders, city institutions, and to one another, shown in Figure 1, next page. Within the network system differing network structures support distinct types of civic activities and goals. For example, creating and reinforcing community identity likely require dense networks within councils, and between the association and community stakeholders, to facilitate cohesion and build a sense of group belonging. Creating and reinforcing community identity entails building a sense of group belonging and development of boundaries between the group and its environment (Coleman 1990; Hipp and Perrin 2006). As Diani and his co-authors (2004, 2007) suggest a combination of dense local network relationships with strong horizontal bridging connections is important for creating social movement identity. At the same time, these dense ties may be impeded to the extent that group heterogeneity divides communities along socioeconomic or ethnic lines (Katznelson 1982; Alesina and Ferrara 2000).

The community capacity literature (Chaskin, Brown et al. 2001; Chaskin 2002; Chaskin 2003) also suggests that networks of civic associations can play an important constitutive role by creating or reinforcing a sense of community identify and commitment. Neighborhood institutions can partner with city entities to produce local public goods and services through processes of co-production. Moreover community networks are held to support local advocacy and exertion of power by representing community interests to policy makers.

Despite a growing body of theory pointing to the importance of network-based resources to support collective action by civic organizations, there is limited study of the extent to which differing types of social capital support their direct engagement in governance. Several

Figure 1: Network Conception of Community Representing Institutions



prominent works on civic associations and social capital focus on the important civic effect of the social relationships developed within these associations (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 1993; Putnam 2000). Following these works, however, there has been limited study of participatory institutions with the growing body of theoretical and empirical research focusing on the political effects of network structures. Studies with a network focus have tended to focus on arenas other than direct engagement in governance, such as individual level networks, community systems, and informal organizational networks. Much of the literature on community representing organizations have either treated networks metaphorically or ignored them altogether (Berry, Portney et al. 1993; Sirianni and Friedland 2001; Fung 2004). The question considered by the current paper is the manner in which social network structure supports performance of neighborhood-representing organizations within a formal participatory network, a neighborhood council in the City of Los Angeles.

The existing social network literature has generally connected individual and system level political performance with a range of social structural characteristics including network cohesion or bonding social capital, weak ties or bridging social capital, network diversity that increases access to resources (Lin 2001; Lin 2008), and brokerage that connects disparate regions within a network (Gould 1989). The research on individual egocentric networks generally supports the important role that networks play in fostering individual political participation, and the particular value of networks for encouraging voluntarism and fostering tolerance (Guest and Oropesa 1986; Mutz 2002; McClurg 2003; Son and Lin 2005; Son and Lin 2008). This literature suggests that engagement in diverse and wide-reaching individual networks supports a virtuous cycle of self-reinforcing participatory behaviors. These findings ignore, however, how the structure and deployment of network relationships lead to effective group level behavior.

A second set of system-level studies consider how community social structures influence civic attitudes and behaviors, or investigate informal organizational networks and the effects of organizational ties. Community level studies emphasize the importance of both weak ties (related to bridging social capital) and dense networks for system level outcomes. For example, bridging-type social capital is found to align mass and elite policy preferences (Hill and Matsubayashi 2005) and increase city-level cohesion (Hipp and Perrin 2006). Dense networks—related to bonding social capital—are important for developing neighborhood level cohesion. In addition (Sampson and Groves 1989) find that denser friendship networks and associational memberships are related to lower levels of crime and juvenile delinquency.

These findings resonate with Ostrom's (1990) work on collective action. Although she does not take a network perspective, her emphasis on the importance of monitoring and the maintenance of group norms follows closely with Coleman's (1990) emphasis on the importance

of dense, bonding networks. What the studies ignore is how the network positions of individual level organizations facilitate organizational level success. Moreover we are left without guidance as to how policy interventions might be designed to foster collective action as policy can be targeted toward organizations but system interventions are harder.

A third clustering of studies at the organizational level tend to focus on informal networks of social service providers or policy networks. These studies suggest that differing types of networks promote distinct elements of collective action. For example, Scholz (2008) in a study of estuary watershed policy networks distinguishes the effects of dense networks to build trust from the manner in which weak ties support search for potential collaborative partners. Agranoff (1998) found that in the case of economic development collaboration, networks differ in supporting different functions such as policy making, resource exchange, or collaboration on projects. Crenson (1978) found that in loosely knit communities (those with weak ties, in network terms), there was higher agreement between the goals of associations and those of individuals. Moreover network integration is found to improve system performance in a number of different domains, including estuary policy (Scholz, Berardo et al. 2008), homeless services (Esparza 2007), and mental health services (Provan and Milward 1995; Provan and Sebastian 1998). These effects are attributed to the effects of network ties in improving coordination, sharing of information, and collaboration.

This literature is mixed, however, as to the relative importance of weak and strong ties. Within community political networks Galaskiewicz (1979) shows that organizational centrality is more influential than resources for activation during the agenda setting phase of policy making, although centrality does not increase an organization's influence on the eventual decision. Laumann and Pappi (1976) find that community social structure has a major impact on mass-

elite relationships with common social bonds being an important predictor of network closeness of the mass and elites. In contrast, Safford (2009) finds that dense civic networks can impede collective action to address a systemic threat to a community whereas bridging networks between civic associations and business elites are critical to mobilization.

The lessons from these various network studies are somewhat difficult to connect, and may not be readily applicable to the question of how network positions and structures influence the efficacy of community-representing organizations as they engage in city governance. While the policy network and community power literatures are valuable, there are important differences between issue networks and networks of civic associations. First, social service and issue networks are more clearly goal directed in that connections are united by common foci (e.g. delivery of services to a particular population; a particular policy problem or goal), (Esparza 2007; Provan, Fish et al. 2007). In contrast while members of participatory institutions may have common goals that can support collaboration, they can and do pursue a more diffuse set of goals and at times their goals directly conflict, as when associations line up on different sides of particular issues.

Second, civic associations are also notoriously fragile organizations. They often collapse when the key members leave, and their capacity waxes and wanes as internal conflicts divert their attention and the voluntary contributions of members vary. Even in successful systems of community councils it is common to see a large number of councils being dysfunctional or inactive (Putnam and Feldstein 2003). These problems associated with the liability of newness suggest that emerging civic associations must first attain some level of internal coordination and external legitimacy before they can survive and achieve collective goals (Singh, Tucker et al. 1986). Early handicaps can impede organizations from effectively employing network-based

resources, leading to differences between latent network of relationships captured by socio-metric surveys and action networks in which relationships are leveraged for collective goals (Galaskiewicz 2007). Studies have shown that emergent and less stable service or policy networks are more likely to fail and less likely to provide informational benefits to well positioned actors (Laumann, Knoke et al. 1987; Human and Provan 2000).

Research Hypotheses

The literatures on community capacity and on participatory institutions have recognized the broad range of activities and goals of pursued by participatory institutions (Berry, Portney et al. 1993; Chaskin, Brown et al. 2001; Chaskin, Brown et al. 2001). They seek to promote political participation by providing deliberative venues and connections to organs of governance. They can produce needed local goods and services through coproduction or collective action. They support community advocacy by representing community interests to policy makers and service providers, and they can create or reinforce community identity and commitment.

The varied forms of network resources discussed in the literature – including bonding social capital, bridging social capital, brokerage, and access to network based resources – are to some degree fungible in that relationships developed in one context may be applied to other activities (Adler and Kwon 2002). We argue nevertheless that particular forms of social capital support distinct associational goals and activities. Whereas bonding social capital developed through dense in-group relationships supports collective action and helps organizations to overcome the liability of newness, we argue that it should be most important in constitutive activities: creating a sense of community and promoting political participation.

Beyond the need to develop some base level of group cohesion necessary for all activities particular types of relationships are more important. To *promote participation*, community

representing organizations need to act as brokers between community stakeholders and city officials, thereby providing a capacity for action that promotes participation. To do so they must recruit potential activists in the community, develop a capacity to deliberate on salient issues and maintain active relationships with city officials (Verba, Schlozman et al. 1995). To *produce community-based goods and services* civic associations primarily need to leverage community resources and city level resources. This would seem to require a broad and diverse network that connects community representing organization to a variety of resources (Lin 2008). *Community advocacy and exertion of power* requires representing community interests to policy makers and service providers. This entails gathering information about community concerns, keeping abreast of emerging city issues, and mobilizing resources. *Creating and reinforcing community identity* entails building a sense of group belonging and development of boundaries between the group and its environment. Stated as hypotheses:

- H₁:** Community representing organizations are better able to promote *political participation* when they have cohesive internal networks, dense ties to city officials and dense ties with neighborhood stakeholders.
- H₂:** Community representing organizations are better able to organize *collective action to address neighborhood problems* when they have cohesive internal networks and broad and diverse links to a variety of network-based resources.
- H₃:** Community representing organizations are better able to *represent community interests to policy makers* when they have cohesive internal networks and have low constraint and broad and external networks that effectively link them to diverse sources of information.
- H₄:** Community representing organizations are better able to *promote a sense of community* when they have cohesive internal networks and dense networks with community stakeholders.

Additionally, as community-representing associations become more established by developing a consensus on their goals and regularizing internal organizational processes, they are more likely

to benefit from the shared norms developed through network cohesion and are better positioned to leverage their networked resources. Stated as a hypothesis:

H₅: Community representing organizations that are more established in terms of age and established organizational processes are better able to leverage their network-based resources to achieve their goals.

Data and Methods

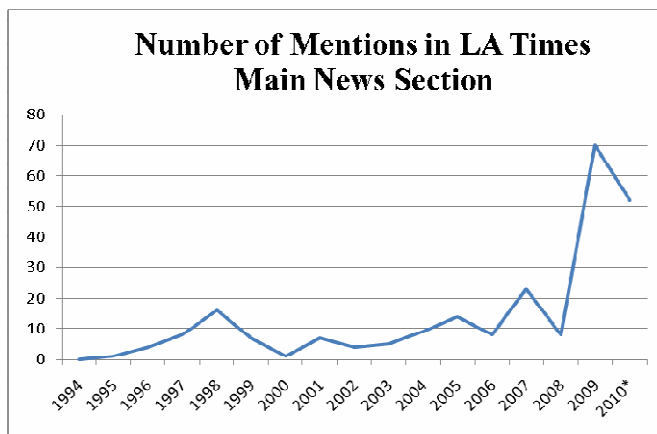
This study focuses on a 1999 neighborhood governance reform in Los Angeles that created a city-wide system of community-representing, voluntary associations. The charter reform established the councils as advisory, and the broad range of goals that they might pursue, directing the system to promote participation, represent the diverse interests within each community, and make government more responsive to local needs. The councils were self-organizing. Communities set their own boundaries, developed by-laws, and applied to the city for certification. The city provided some resources, most importantly a staff of community organizers that help with organizational issues and a \$50,000 yearly grant to each council for organizational operations and community projects. At present, the system consists of 88 self-organized councils. The average council has a 21-member, elected volunteer board and represents a community of about 38,000 residents.

The neighborhood governance system in Los Angeles has experienced a mixed success. An evaluation of their performance after 7 years of operation found many councils still struggling with operational challenges and internal strife (Musso et. al, 2007). The elected boards under-represent Latino residents relative to population, and have experienced some difficulty establishing their legitimacy with city officials (Ibid.). Also, early broad support for councils by residents weakened after they were in operation for a number of years. Nonetheless

the system has resulted in political networks that connect councils to city policy bodies and to each other.

One measure of their political prominence is the number of references they receive in the press. For example, Figure 2 shows that although the Los Angeles Times covered neighborhood councils in 1998 when the provisions of the new charter were being debated, coverage was almost non-existent between 2000 and 2004 as the neighborhood councils were forming. Since 2004, neighborhood councils are much more likely to be cited in major news stories.

Figure 2: Neighborhood Council Mentions in LA Times News Section



The network data analyzed in this study come from a 2006 survey of neighborhood council board members. The survey included items concerning board members' political attitudes, political activities, and demographic information. Because of the range of activities that can be undertaken by these boards, the survey included both roster-based items designed to collect whole network data and items akin to position generators that captured the range of contacts that neighborhood councils maintained with outside organizations. At the time of the survey, there were 85 certified boards, though two were not active and were dropped from the survey. Project members attended board meetings to describe the survey and its purposes. The web-based survey was initially emailed to all members and two follow-up emails were also sent.

After this initial wave, non-responders were contacted by phone to take the survey on-line or could complete the survey on the phone. To accommodate the large number of new immigrants in Los Angeles, respondents were able to take the survey in Spanish and Korean. There were a total 1499 board members at the time and 702 took the survey, for a response rate of 47%.

Measures

Four batteries of questions collected the main components of the network data. The first two collected whole network data on internal board communications and inter-board contacts. The first presented respondents with a list of all other members of their council board. They were then asked: “Thinking about the two weeks just before your most recent neighborhood council meeting, which board members were you in touch with during that time to discuss matters concerning politics, government, or neighborhood issues?” The second battery presented respondents with a list of all of the other neighborhood councils, and they were asked to nominate up to six with which they had been in contact during that two week period. The third and fourth items collected information on the range of city and neighborhood groups with which the member was in contact. The third included lists of city offices (e.g. mayor, city council, city departments) and the fourth listed stakeholder groups (e.g. homeowners, social service agencies, businesses), and respondents were asked which of these groups they had been in contact.

The dependent variables measuring the success of neighborhood council collective action are taken from a self-evaluation included in the survey. Respondents were asked to rate the performance of their council on four dimensions: 1) promoting citizen participation in government, 2) working to solve problems in the neighborhood, 3) advising the City on citywide policies, and 4) creating a sense of community. The ratings were on a 4-point scale ranging between poor (1) and excellent (4). The scores for each neighborhood council are the average of

all respondents from each council. While objective measures of council performance would be preferable, these council members are the best informed individuals concerning their activities. In any case we have some verification of the validity of these measures based on similar performance ratings by the community organizers that worked with the councils. Although we were only able to collect information on a subset of councils, three of the four measures are positively correlated with the council self reports with correlations ranging between .27 and .50. Only in the case of evaluations on promoting citizen participation do these ratings disagree.²

Based on these data, we calculated a range of network measures. To capture the degree of bonding social capital within each board, we calculated the *mean out-degree* for board members. We employ *mean out-degree* instead of the more common density measure because it is robust against differences in the size of boards and the differing response rates of boards. To capture the degree of brokerage between community stakeholders and city offices we calculate *mean city contacts* and *mean stakeholder contacts* for each board. We also calculate a *total groups* variable that sums the total number of different city offices and stakeholder groups contacted by a board as a measure of the range of network resources available to a board.

To measure the position of a board within the broader neighborhood council network, we constructed an interboard network that aggregated the individual-level responses concerning contacts with other boards. We then employed UCINET VI to calculate *interboard constraint* based on Burt's (2000) measure of the degree to which a board is connected to redundant alters. Lower scores for this measure indicate that a neighborhood council bridges more structural holes

² This disagreement may relate to differing perspectives on the task of promoting participation, as the city organizers generally assessed councils in terms of their ability to reach out to diverse and underrepresented groups, an evaluative norm not necessarily shared by council board members.

thereby gaining access to novel information.

We also include a number of control variables. To assess the ability of younger boards to leverage their network assets productively, we include a dummy variable, *newer board*, that is equal to 1 for boards that were certified less than 3 years prior to our survey. Additionally, *internal conflict* measures the degree to which the effective operation of a board is hampered by conflict amongst its members. This measure was an index of the proportion of board members reporting internal conflict in an open-ended question on the major challenges facing the respondent's council. To control for differing capacities of neighborhood councils and pre-existing social capital, we include the *average education* of board members and an *index of associational membership*. This membership index is calculated for each individual is based on the number of civic associations the person is a member and the level of involvement with each, ranging from a past member to a current member with a leadership position. This index is then averaged over all board members.

Finally, we include a measure of the degree of community heterogeneity. Heterogeneity has been theorized to affect civic participation, but the direction of the effect is debated (Oliver 1999; Alesina and Ferrara 2000). It may constrain civic participation due to the difficulties that individuals often face in engaging in collective action across racial or class differences, but it may increase participation if increased competition over public resources spurs civic interest. Our measure of heterogeneity is based on indices of dispersion calculated for race, income group, and educational attainment in each community. The three indices are then combined into a single measure employing principal components factor analysis.

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for these variables. On all measures there is there is a significant amount of variation over the 83 councils in our sample. On the average

council members had about 6 six contacts with other board members, but this ranged between only 1.29 to as many as 12.75 contacts. Similar variation is found with the average number of contacts with the city and with community stakeholders. The average board was in contact with 14.2 different city and stakeholder groups (out of a possible 19 groups listed in the position generator items), while the least connected councils only was in contact with six different groups and the most connected council was in contact with all possible groups. The measure of interboard constraint ranges between .12 and 1. A third of boards have been certified for less than 3 years. Because these councils tend to attract more educated and engaged individuals, the average education and index of associational memberships are both quite high on average. The average board member has a college education and multiple associational memberships with leadership positions in those associations. Nevertheless, there a wide amount of variation between council in terms of education levels and associational memberships.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for 83 Neighborhood Councils

	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
Promoting more citizen participation	2.42	1.13	4.00	0.49
Working to solve neighborhood problems	2.80	1.25	3.67	0.53
Advising the City on citywide policies	2.45	1.00	3.75	0.47
Creating a sense of community	2.57	1.25	4.00	0.57
Mean Out-degree	5.91	1.29	12.75	2.29
Mean City Contacts	2.47	1.00	7.25	1.02
Mean Stakeholder Contacts	2.07	0.25	4.33	0.84
Total Groups	14.20	6.00	19.00	3.24
Interboard Constraint	0.35	0.12	1.00	0.15
Newer Board	0.33	0.00	1.00	0.47
Average Education	15.89	12.00	17.43	1.15
Index of Associational Memberships	13.97	5.50	24.25	3.35
Neighborhood Heterogeneity	0.02	-2.72	1.26	1.00

Analysis

To examine how council network structures influence various dimensions of organizational performance, we regress the four ratings of council performance on the network measures and control variables employing ordinary least squares. The four models are presented in Table 2. Considering the entrenched difficulties of measuring the organizational performance of civic associations given their complex and often conflicting goals, the first three models performed well, explaining between 22% and 28% of the variance. In contrast, the fourth model performs less well, perhaps indicating the difficulties that councils face in creating a sense of community in a large, diverse city such as Los Angeles. In terms of the control variables, most of them -- *Newer Board*, *Average Education*, and *Index of Associational Memberships* – do not influence perceived performance in any of the four models. *Neighborhood Heterogeneity* is related to better performance in terms of working to solve neighborhood problems and advising the city, suggesting that it fosters civic participation as argued by Oliver (1999).

While the results are mixed, the findings concerning the effects of associational networks do provide broad support for the expectations outlined in our hypotheses. For promoting citizen participation internal cohesion and a denser set of ties with community stakeholders are found to affect council performance positively. Contrary to expectations, though, councils that have denser ties to city offices actually perform worse in terms of promoting participation. While we hypothesized that ties with government agencies would promote participation by increasing its likely benefits, it is possible that this finding indicates that councils that are more city-focused spend less effort in reaching out and organizing the stakeholders that they represent.

Table 2: OLS Regression Results for Types of Associational Activities

	Model I Promoting more citizen participation in government		Model II Working to solve neighborhood problems		Model III Advising the City on citywide policies		Model IV Creating a sense of community	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Constant	1.704*	0.942	1.157	1.020	2.845*	0.878	2.184*	1.185
Internal Cohesion	0.066**	0.027	0.056*	0.029	0.072***	0.025	0.057*	0.033
Mean Stakeholder Contacts	0.222**	0.093	-0.007	0.101	0.072	0.087	0.155	0.117
Mean City Contacts	-0.146**	0.072	-0.032	0.078	-0.032	0.067	-0.059	0.091
Total Groups	-0.005	0.026	0.019	0.029	-0.012	0.025	-0.029	0.033
Interboard Constraint	0.163	0.370	-0.162	0.401	-1.050***	0.345	-0.015	0.466
Newer Board	0.015	0.121	0.068	0.131	-0.042	0.113	0.102	0.152
Average Education	-0.009	0.052	0.061	0.057	-0.035	0.049	-0.008	0.066
Index of Associational Memberships	0.026	0.017	0.015	0.018	0.015	0.016	0.026	0.021
Neighborhood Heterogeneity	0.018	0.057	0.131**	0.062	0.108**	0.053	0.036	0.072
R ²	.229		.218		.276		.099	

*** p < .01 ** p < .05 * p < .10

Model III that examines advising the City also shows strong network effects. Greater cohesion and lower levels of constraint strengthens councils' ability to provide advice. These results support our expectations that the advisement role requires both bonding social capital that facilitates collective action and bridging social capital that enables the council to collect necessary information to actively participate in the policy making process. Counter to expectations, though, greater density of contacts with the city does not appear to improve the ability of councils to provide advice to the City.

Models II and IV that seek to explain the success of boards in solving neighborhood problems and creating a sense of community perform less well. In each case, internal cohesion is positive and weakly statistically significant, indicating that bonding social capital is also important for these types of activities. Nevertheless, the other sets of relationships theorized to play an important role in board performance are not found to have positive effects. For solving neighborhood problems, we theorized that access to a broader set of resources in a boards network would be helpful, but neither the total number of groups with which a board has contact nor the range of associational memberships displays a statistically significant association with performance. In terms of creating a sense of community, the density of contacts with stakeholders is not significant, though we do not find that community heterogeneity impedes the development of a sense of community.

To investigate whether internal board operations may impede or facilitate their ability to leverage network assets effectively, we ran another set of analyses on the same dependent variable and included the measure of internal board conflict. See Table 3. For each model, we included the *internal conflict* variable as well as that variable interacted with the network measures that were statistically significant in our original models. Unfortunately, these

Table 3: OLS Regression Results for Types of Associational Activities, Models Including Controls For Internal Conflict

	Model I Promoting more citizen participation in government		Model II Working to solve neighborhood problems		Model III Advising the City on citywide policies		Model IV Creating a sense of community	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
	Constant	2.246**	0.915	1.667*	0.943	3.547***	0.872	2.586*
Interaction – cohesion x conflict	-0.043†††.††	0.084	0.141*†††.††	0.084	0.021†††.†††	0.077	0.133†††.†	0.104
Interaction – stakeholder contacts x conflict	-0.249†††.††	0.286						
Interaction – city contacts x conflict	0.295†††.††	0.230						
Interaction – constraint x conflict					-2.030**†††.†††	0.923		
Internal Conflict	-0.573*†††	0.658	-1.519***†††	0.534	0.229†††	0.542	-1.327*†††	0.655
Internal Cohesion	0.070*††	0.036	0.002††	0.038	0.054†††	0.034	0.007†	0.046
Mean Stakeholder Contacts	0.290**††	0.135	0.001	0.092	0.060	0.084	0.161	0.113
Mean City Contacts	-0.223**††	0.092	-0.023	0.071	-0.036	0.064	-0.051	0.088
Total Groups	0.005	0.026	0.016	0.026	-0.013	0.024	-0.031	0.032
Interboard Constraint	0.368	0.373	0.212	0.380	0.012†††	0.546	0.299	0.466
Newer Board	0.081	0.117	0.108	0.120	-0.089	0.113	0.134	0.148
Average Education	-0.043	0.051	0.048	0.053	-0.081	0.050	-0.016	0.065
Index of Associational Memberships	0.027	0.017	0.024	0.018	0.013	0.016	0.035	0.022
Neighborhood Heterogeneity	0.053	0.055	0.159***	0.058	0.137**	0.052	0.057	0.071
R ²	.354		.365		.364		.183	

Test of individual significance *** p < .01 ** p < .05 * p < .10

Test of joint significance conflict term and interaction terms †††p < .01 ††p < .05 †p < .10

Test of joint significance network term and interaction with conflict ††† p < .01 ††p < .05 †p < .10

interaction terms introduce a great deal of multicollinearity into the models, complicating inference for individual coefficients. Consequently, we also present the joint significance for two groups of variables: 1) the *internal conflict* variable and all of the interaction terms including that variable, and 2) the interaction variable including *internal conflict* and a network measure and that network measure.

The inclusion of *internal conflict* and associated interaction terms is significant at the .01 level in all four models. In three of the models the coefficient for internal conflict is negative, indicating that the internal conflict on boards does hamper goal achievement. The general results concerning the impact of networks on council success in the four activities remain stable. The interactions between *internal conflict* and the network measures, however, are complex and often counter to expectations. We hypothesized that boards with less well developed internal operations would be less able to leverage their network assets productively. The expected negative coefficients for the interaction terms, however, only arise in Model I. There as internal conflict increases it dampens the benefits for internal cohesion and dense stakeholder contacts in terms of promoting political participation. Even in this model, boards with higher levels of conflict benefit more from their city contacts.

In Models II-IV, internal cohesion is found to have an even more positive impact on goal achievement when there are higher levels of internal conflict. In Model III, the inclusion of the interaction term between *internal conflict* and *interboard constraint* reduces the direct effect of *interboard constraint* significantly, and the negative and statistically significant coefficient for the interaction term indicates that the benefits lower constraint, and therefore access to a richer set of information from contacts with other boards, actually increases for boards that are affected by higher levels of internal conflict.

Discussion and Conclusions

These results provide overall support for the theoretical arguments of the important roles that interpersonal and interorganizational relationships play in fostering collective action within participatory institutions. The strength of the network results is highlighted when compared to the *average education* of board members. While socio-economic status is frequently found to be one of the most important predictors of civic involvement (Verba 1967; Verba, Schlozman et al. 1995; Valelly 1996), in these models the network assets of the civic organizations are found to be much more important for facilitating collective action. In particular, the consistently positive impact of internal cohesion on organizational performance demonstrates the importance of bonding social capital or strong ties to enabling informal, voluntary organizations to work together productively.

These results also demonstrate the importance of differentiating different dimensions of networks and different types of organizational activities. Previous studies have shown the need to differentiate between the content of relational ties, be it information exchange, resource exchange, advice, friendship, or authority (Galaskiewicz 1979; Krackhardt, (ed) et al. 1992). Our analysis complements this insight by also demonstrating the importance of distinguishing between internal versus external associational networks and differentiating between different parts of qualities of the external network. For example, bridging structural holes (e.g. having low constraint) in the interboard network provided councils with informational advantages that enable councils to provide advice to the city which is an instrumental and information intense task. In contrast, these external networks were less important to the goals of promoting participation and creating a sense of community, which are more constitutive than instrumental tasks and appear less related to information provided by other boards.

The results are nuanced and suggest that organizational capacity mediates the usefulness of network-based resources. Internal conflict certainly impedes associational performance in particular domains, although it does not necessarily impede the use of network resources. In three of the models (II through IV) internal conflict actually made network relationship more valuable. For the *internal cohesion* interaction terms it appears that denser internal consultation is particularly important for overcoming disagreements. So, that amongst boards experiencing conflict, it is those that have higher levels of *internal cohesion* are the ones that can achieve important goals despite the conflict. In contrast, in the case of promoting citizen participation internal conflict does weaken the efficacy of network linkages most likely because boards experiencing conflict are viewed negatively by stakeholders, making them a less viable avenue for participation. The reason why internal conflict makes councils with less constrained interboard networks more effective is less clear. This result possibly may indicate some level endogeneity in that boards seeking to be involved in city-level advice giving are more likely to encounter conflict as they work toward a position on the issue and also seek out information and advice from other boards.

In other ways the results do indicate how particular contextual factors can challenge the ability of participatory institutions to leverage network-based assets. For example, counter to expectations it is not the case that goal achievement is furthered by the number of different groups with which a council maintains relationships. In Los Angeles the councils under study represent quite large communities of an average of 40,000 people, and this size has impeded their ability connect with other civil society or social service organizations (Musso, Weare et al. 2007). This general detachment from other associations may account for why we do not observe a positive relationship between the range of relationships and the ability of councils to solve

local problems. Also, neighborhood councils in Los Angeles have experienced contested relations with the city, with council members feeling that they are not afforded the attention they deserve and the city questioning the legitimacy of councils to represent their neighborhoods. These tensions may color the vertical ties between councils and the city, explaining why denser connections to the city actually decrease the ability of councils to promote participation, again counter to expectation. This suggests that network relationships can have both positive and negative valence, a nuance not generally addressed in the literature.

This study is constrained by a number of limitations of the data. Most importantly, the use of cross-sectional data does not permit us to establish causation. It is possible that the pursuit of particular goals entails the creation of a particular set of relations, nevertheless the correlation between networks and specific activities does demonstrate that importance of relationships for civic action. We also rely on self reported perspectives on group efficacy which may lead to spurious correlations at the respondent level. (“I talked to a lot of people in the city so we must be doing a good job on advising the city”). To check on this possibility, we analyzed council performance on the subset of councils for which we had performance ratings by the city organizers who work with the councils. These analyses were qualitatively similar to the ones presented here, though most of the results did not attain statistical significance because of the much lower number of degrees of freedom. Future research should focus on attempting to link network effects to less subjective external measures of network performance, and focus on more longitudinal studies of network formation and outcomes.

From a policy standpoint the results suggest that the long-run effects of democratic reforms will hinge on the types of network relationships that develop from institutional reforms. Internal cohesion appears a very strong indicator of system success, while external ties related to

bridging social capital appear more important to the advisory functions of the boards than to goals related to community capacity. The results in particular highlight the dangers associated with the liability of newness, suggesting that strong system support is necessary to assist such organizations to overcome group conflict in working toward common goals.

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