City Size and Civic Involvement in Metropolitan America

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Given the coincidence between America’s recent migration to smaller, suburban cities and declines in civic participation, Dahl’s speculations on the ideal-sized democratic polity have gained more pertinence. I explore the effects of city size on participation in four local civic activities using 1990 data. Controlling for both individual- and city-level characteristics, I find people in larger cities are much less likely to contact officials, attend community or organizational meetings, or vote in local elections. Lower civic participation is attributable partly to differences in social relations and psychological orientation between residents of larger and smaller places. People in big cities are less likely to be recruited for political activity by neighbors and are less interested in local affairs. These differences occur irrespective of the size of the surrounding metropolitan area and demonstrate the importance of municipal institutions for fostering civil society. The implications for studies of participation, suburbanization, and democratic political theory are discussed.

To end the alienation from government that is so prevalent in society today . . . the answer is not busting up a big city into a lot of small cities. You slice baloney, you get baloney.

Tom Hayden, Los Angeles mayoral candidate

Since the time of Aristotle, political theorists have puzzled over a difficult question: What is the optimal size for a democratic polity? In the 1967 presidential address to the American Political Science Association, Robert A. Dahl (1967, 960) offered an answer: Most democracies are too big to allow citizens actively to determine the “vital aspects of their lives in common.” Small polities, however, often lack the capacity to address meaningful political issues. The ideal-sized unit, Dahl reasoned, must be able to achieve collective goals but avoid the “consummatory” participation of the modern nation-state. Since we seem “destined to live in cities,” Dahl proposed dividing large metropolitan areas into federations of municipalities between 50,000 and 200,000 in size. These cities would be small enough to facilitate civic participation but large enough to generate meaningful political discourse.

Over the past fifty years, Dahl’s vision has become a reality. Most Americans now live in small to medium-sized cities or “places” within large, densely populated metropolitan areas. Since 1950, the proportion living in metropolitan areas has risen from 57% to 75%. Yet, proportionally fewer Americans reside in large cities: Less than 19% currently live in cities of more than 250,000, compared to 23% in 1950; 56% now live in metropolitan places smaller than 250,000, compared to 34% in 1950 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, 1993). America has changed from a country bifurcated between isolated rural towns and big central cities to one that consists largely of small and medium-sized suburbs.

The civic consequences of this shift are unclear and the empirical research on the civic effects of city size is inconclusive. On the one hand, the migration to smaller, suburban places has coincided with a well-documented decline in such activities as voting and organizational membership (Putnam 1995; Teixeira 1992; Wattenberg 1996). This suggests that participation is lower in smaller, suburban places, a finding supported by Fischer (1976). On the other hand, several studies report that residents of smaller places are more likely to participate (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969; Verba and Nie 1972). Yet, all these works fail to provide definitive evidence: Fischer’s estimates do not control for many important individual-level characteristics; Kasarda and Janowitz and Nie, Powell, and Prewitt compare only “urban” and “rural” places; and Verba and Nie’s results, from a sample of only 120 cases, are not statistically significant. Moreover, all these studies use data more than 30 years old, and city size has not been analyzed in the participation research since then, which means that the effects of city size are unmeasured relative to the recent trends in suburbanization.

America’s metropolitan expansion also calls into question many key assumptions about city size in classical democratic theory. For instance, does it have the same effect in a metropolitan setting of contiguous municipal boundaries, uninterrupted land development, and interdependent local economies? Does Dahl’s ideal democratic city of 50,000 foster as much

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2 An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1997 meetings of the International Society of Political Psychologists, July 12–15, Krakow, Poland. It greatly benefited from the comments of Henry Brady, Claude Fischer, Fred Greenstein, Tom Romer, Laura Stoker, Raymond Wolfinger, and the anonymous reviewers. I owe particular thanks to Henry Brady, Kay Schlozman, and Sidney Verba for making their data available and to Nancy Burns and Glen Beamer for their work in identifying the geographic residence of the CPS respondents.


2 By “place” or city, I refer to all incorporated municipalities, although generally city refers to larger municipalities and place refers to smaller ones. Rural is measured as residence in any county that is not part of a metropolitan area. Borrowing from the 1900 U.S. Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991), a metropolitan area is any county that contains a central city of at least 50,000 and the surrounding urbanized counties, that is, counties identified by the Census to have large portions of contiguous areas with high population density. Consequently, places of up to 50,000 population (the first two categories of city size used in this analysis) can be classified as rural or urban depending on their proximity to a metropolitan area.
civic engagement if it is in the middle of greater Los Angeles or isolated on the Kansas plains? Previous work has not examined these important questions. To complicate matters, most suburban places are not like large cities in miniature but are highly differentiated in social composition and land usage, characteristics that also shape civic participation. Oliver (1999) finds that people in affluent suburbs participate less than people in heterogeneous, middle-income places and that the effects of city affluence are greater than population size. Indeed, population size may no longer be the most important civic characteristic of a city.

The size issue also remains enigmatic partly because of the absence of any general theory on the relationship between social environments and political participation. Most social theorists either ignore civic participation (Simmel [1905] 1969; Tonnis 1988; Weber [1905] 1958; Wirth [1938] 1969) or do not link their speculations to models of why people participate in civic processes (Dahl 1967; Dahl and Tuft 1973; Montesquieu [1748] 1991; Rousseau [1772] 1994). Indeed, latter-day democratic theorists offer mostly vague and contradictory expectations about how polity size directly shapes civic involvement. Theorists of participation, meanwhile, mostly focus on individual-level factors and rarely take social context into account (Olson 1965; Rosenstone and Hansen 1994; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wilson 1972). Despite Lewin's (1935) near-axiom that human behavior is a function of both individual and environmental characteristics, most studies of civic participation concentrate on models of isolated, rational actors or on hypotheses validated by individual-level survey data. To establish causal linkages between city size and participation, a theoretical bridge between studies of context and participation is needed.

This article explores the civic ramifications of city size, particularly in contemporary metropolitan and rural settings. I start by outlining a theory about the relationship between social environments and civic activity in the metropolis using a "civic voluntarism" model. Then, based on a data set constructed from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al. 1995) and the 1990 Census, I estimate four types of civic activity and find them all to be lower in larger places, a relationship that occurs irrespective of the metropolitan context. Large size depresses participation partly because residents are less likely to be mobilized and are less interested in local political life. These findings demonstrate the civic relevance of municipal boundaries in an era of metropolitan expansion: City boundaries define communities, and smaller places are civicly richer. Before celebrating the civic virtues of suburbanization, however, other city-level characteristics need consideration. Tom Hayden notwithstanding, smaller cities are not simply more baloney; rather, they are distinct cuts of meat, some more civically palatable than others.

**CIVIC VOLUNTEERISM AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS**

Previous theories on the civic effects of city size are inconclusive partly because they fail to explain which factors influence participation and how they may be shaped by the social environment. For example, Dahl and Tuft (1973) make a series of deductive inferences about civic participation in large and small democratic units. They reason that "smaller democracies provide more opportunity for citizens to participate . . . but, larger democracies provide citizens opportunities to participate in decisions . . . to control the most important aspects of their situation" (p. 13). In their framework, a city's population does not affect the nature of the civic act: Casting a ballot or contacting a government official is essentially the same in sprawling Houston as in tiny Starlightville. Rather, place size shapes participation indirectly by altering the opportunities for involvement. But Dahl and Tuft assume that smaller places provide more opportunities for participation and that availability stimulates involvement. These assumptions, however, are not based on any general theory or empirical tests. Dahl and Tuft do not demonstrate whether or how a polity's size changes the opportunities for participation, whether opportunities really do influence involvement, or what intervening characteristics may be operating. Such criticisms hold equally for other theoretical speculations (e.g., Montesquieu [1748] 1991; Rousseau [1772] 1994; Weber [1905] 1958; Wirth [1938] 1969). To overcome these deficiencies, the individual determinants of participation must be identified, and hypotheses then must be formulated on whether they differ between large and small places.

What are the determinants of political participation? A voluminous literature offers a wide range of theories (e.g., Olson 1965; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Teixeira 1992; Verba and Nie 1972; Wilson 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), but I use Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) "civic voluntarism" model. According to their framework, political participation is a function of individual resources, interest, and mobilization; people are more likely to participate if they have skills and knowledge, if they are more psychologically engaged, or if they are recruited by others. Although not explored in the original formulation of the model, each factor varies with a person's social environment. Psychological engagement in community life is clearly determined by context: When people feel they have more in common with neighbors or have a greater sense of efficacy, interest in local affairs is greater (Fischer 1976). Political mobilization varies with patterns of social interaction: When people are more familiar with one another, they are more likely to talk about politics and recruit others for action (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Context even shapes the influence of individual resources: When participation is more difficult, the relevance of individual knowledge and skills grows (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). By examining variations in political resources, interest, and mobilization between small and large municipalities, the causal connection between city size and participation can be specified.

Previous research in this area has arrived at strikingly contradictory conclusions. On one side are those who argue that both psychological engagement and
mobilization increase with a city's population. Dahl (1967) and Deutsch (1961) believe larger places have more compelling issues to attract citizen attention; Fischer (1995) and Sutlles (1972) find that larger places host more subcultures that mobilize citizens; Milbrath and Goel (1982) claim that greater media attention to big city politics stimulates citizen interest; and Dahl and Tuft (1973) speculate that larger polities have a higher level of political competition that mobilizes citizens and makes their participation more efficacious.

On the other side are those who suggest that a large population is a detriment. Early classics of urban sociology (Simmel [1905] 1969; Tonnis 1988; Weber [1905] 1958; Wirth [1938] 1969) argue that the size, density, and heterogeneity of larger places dissolves the social and psychological bonds that exist between neighbors in small towns. Surrounded by more strangers and greater social uncertainty, urbanites putatively seek psychic refuge in their primary social relations, shy away from formalized social contact, or feel content as "bystanders" to the political process (Finifter 1970; Latane and Darley 1970; Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969; Reisman 1953; Verba and Nie 1972). In addition, people in larger places are less likely to know their neighbors, have mutual friends, and see acquaintances in public settings (Fischer 1982; Lofland 1973), which in turn may inhibit political mobilization (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Finally, even though the act of participating may be the same in different cities, the costs of doing so may vary. Larger cities require a more complex bureaucracy, have greater spatial distance between city offices and citizens, and have elected officials who represent more people, all of which may increase the difficulty of participation and the importance of individual resources (Hansen, Palfrey, and Rosenthal 1987).

These issues are further complicated when one considers that most Americans do not live in isolated towns but within larger metropolitan areas. Most studies designate large cities as "urban" or "metropolitan" and small places as rural, but Dahl's speculations suggest that municipal boundaries are important in their own right for defining community and patterns of social interaction. Thus, when considering population size, the effects of living in a municipality must be distinguished from living in a large urbanized area.

On the one hand, if city boundaries are unimportant amid a surrounding urbanized population, then the effects of metropolitan areas should both replicate and overshadow the effects of city size; it should not matter whether people are partitioned by the invisible walls of a municipal border. The important contextual element, in this instance, is the number of people in a given geographic region, not simply the number within a particular municipal jurisdiction. The major contextual influence on civic involvement will be the size of the metropolitan area and not the particular city, and the largest differences in participation will occur between small rural places and large metropolitan regions.

On the other hand, if city boundaries are important for defining the character of local political engagement or patterns of social interaction, then the metropolitan environment should not alter the place-size effects. Differences in participation between people in large and small places should occur irrespective of the size of the surrounding metropolis because political engagement and mobilization arise primarily from the community as defined by the city boundaries. If this is true, then residents of small places in both rural and metropolitan settings should have equal levels of participation relative to their counterparts in large cities.

In sum, if larger places stimulate citizen interest and nourish a variety of subcultural social networks, then participation should increase with population size; if greater size produces alienation and social disconnection or makes involvement more costly, then participation should decline with population gains. But the effects of metropolitan contexts may hinge on the importance of city boundaries for defining social behavior and political attitudes. If the boundaries are important, then the size of the surrounding area will not alter the effects of city size; if the boundaries are less important, then metropolitan effects will supplant the relationship between city size and participation, and larger differences should exist between rural and metropolitan areas.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Testing these assertions requires overcoming the classic difficulty of cross-level inference. Most data on citizen activity are either aggregate (e.g., statistics on precinct or county voting) or individual (e.g., surveys), which greatly restricts contextual induction (Achen and Shively 1995). An appropriate test of the effect of contemporary metropolitan social contexts requires information not only about individuals and their context but also a sample from a wide variety of places. To meet these criteria, I constructed a data set from the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (CPS) (Verba et al. 1995) and the 1990 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991). The CPS is a national, cross-sectional survey of the participatory activities of the American public; among the approximately 15,000 respondents in the screener set, 2,500 took part in in-depth follow-up interviews. For this analysis, I use data from the follow-up interview portion of the CPS. These respondents were drawn from more than 500 different places. In order to measure the effects of social context, the respondents' residence was identified, and data from the 1990 Census for the summary level of place (i.e., city) were matched for each case. With this individualized census information for such a large nationwide sample, the relationship between measures of social context (e.g., population size, median income) and individual behavior can be estimated while controlling for individual-level determinants, such as education, income, and age.

After constructing an appropriate cross-level data set, I then had to decide which civic behaviors to

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3 Thirteen percent of the interviewees (N = 2,500) were omitted because they did not live in identifiable municipalities or under municipal jurisdictions.
examine. These range from voting to joining voluntary organizations (Putnam 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and studying the relation of all to city size is impossible in a single article. Moreover, not all civic activities are equally susceptible to contextual influences. For example, social context should influence turnout in local elections more than in national elections. To estimate the consequences of city size, civic behaviors should be local in orientation, politically directed, and foster the type of social bonds that form the basis of civil society (Putnam 1993).

I chose four variables that best meet these criteria: Contacting Locally Elected Officials, Attending Community Board Meetings, Attending Meetings of Voluntary Organizations, and Voting in Local Elections. All these activities are not influenced by social context in exactly the same way, but all represent important aspects of locally oriented participation. Contacting officials and voting are the two most direct ways people communicate their preferences about local policies to local leaders. Attending the meetings of community boards and voluntary organizations, as Putnam (1995) argues, sustains the “norms and networks of reciprocity” upon which civil society is built. Furthermore, participation in each of these activities should be sensitive to the incentives and opportunities discussed above. If all these acts are influenced by interest and mobilization, as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) suggest, then the effects of city size should be consistent across all.

FINDINGS

I start by comparing average rates of participation in all four civic activities across five categories of city size (less than 5,000; 5,000 to 50,000; 50,000 to 250,000; 250,000 to one million; and more than one million); residents of metropolitan and rural areas are separated in the first two categories. The participation measures are based on self-reports. Contacting officials and attending meetings are scored dichotomously (1 if the respondent had engaged in the activity in the past year, 0 otherwise); voting in local elections is measured on a five-point scale (1 = never to 5 = always). A full description of the variables is given in the Appendix.

With the exception of voting in local elections, the average rate of participation in all types of civic activity tends to decline in larger places, although this effect is primarily limited to residents of metropolitan areas. As depicted in Figure 1, 40% of residents of metropolitan places of less than 5,000 report contacting local officials, compared to 30% in places between 5,000 and 50,000 and 25% in places of more than one million. Meeting attendance is 13 percentage points lower in the largest than in the smallest places for community boards, and 12 percentage points lower for voluntary organizations. The average local voting score declines by .2 points between metropolitan places of less than 5,000 and those between 50,000 and 250,000 but then levels off. Among residents of rural towns, contacting and voting rates decline between small and larger places, but attendance at community board or organizational meetings increases. On average, rates of participation in civic activities are lower in the smallest rural towns than in places of the same size within metropolitan areas. For example, the average rate of attending community board meetings is 9 percentage points lower in rural than metropolitan places of less than 5,000.

On the whole, these figures support the hypothesis that civic participation diminishes in larger places, at least in metropolitan areas. For three out of four indicators, steady decline occurs with an increase in place size. The highest participation rates are in the smallest metropolitan places. In rural areas, however, the relationship between population and civic participation differs in two respects. First, in towns of less than 5,000, participation rates are typically much lower in rural than metropolitan areas. Second, unlike the pattern in metropolitan areas, participation does not necessarily decline as rural size grows. Indeed, residents of rural places larger than 5,000 are more likely to attend board and organization meetings and are only slightly less likely to vote or contact officials than are rural dwellers in very small towns. What accounts for these rural anomalies?

Part of the answer may lie in demographic differences rather than social context (Finnifer and Abramson 1975), so demographic profiles are worth exploring in further detail. Table 1 lists average levels for Years of School Completed, Age, Percent Homeowners, and Median Household Income by place size for rural and metropolitan areas in the CPS/Census sample. Compared to all residents of metropolitan areas, rural dwellers on average have completed almost one year less of school and live in places with a median annual household income almost $10,000 lower. As both an individual’s education and city-level income are important determinants of civic participation (Oliver 1999; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), these lower resource levels may explain lower rural participation. Yet, rural residents are older and more likely to own a home, individual factors that correlate with higher participation rates. Furthermore, despite the steady decrease in civic participation within metropolitan areas, there are few demographic variations by size: Residents of small metropolitan places have, on average, levels of education, income, and age similar to those of people in large cities. The only demographic variance is that people in smaller places in metropolitan areas are more likely to be homeowners. Given at least some confounding demographic characteristics, multivariate equations are needed to isolate the specific effects of city size on participation.

4 Given Putnam’s (1995) speculations about the importance of face-to-face contact in voluntary organizations, I chose meeting attendance rather than membership as the measure to gauge local “social capital.”

5 All analyses for this article were conducted with SPSS for Windows, version 8.0.

6 The CPS measured individual income on an eight-point scale, so I used the measure for the median household income of the city from the 1990 Census as a measure of income differences by place size and metropolitan/rural context.
FIGURE 1. Average Rate of Participation in Four Local Civic Activities by City Size for Rural and Metropolitan Areas

Toward this end, I employed a logistic regression for the three dichotomous participation items and an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for the voting scale. Each measure was regressed on several explanatory measures: City Size (measured in ten increments along a 0–1 scale); dummy variables for residence in Rural areas and Small Metropolitan Areas (less than one million), with residence in a metropolitan area of more than five million counted as the excluded category; an interaction term between city size and rural residence (city size $\times$ rural); individual characteristics associated with civic participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 365)
TABLE 1.  Average Education, Age, Home Ownership, and Median Household Income by Place Size for Rural and Metropolitan Areas  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural place size</th>
<th>Years of School Completed</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage Homeowners</th>
<th>Med. Household Income</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5,000</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>$18,676</td>
<td>243</td>
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<tr>
<td>5,000 to 50,000</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>$19,990</td>
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<td>Rural average</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>$19,993</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Metropolitan place size</th>
<th>Years of School Completed</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage Homeowners</th>
<th>Med. Household Income</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5,000</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>$28,527</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 to 50,000</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>$35,565</td>
<td>477</td>
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<tr>
<td>50,000 to 250,000</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>$28,719</td>
<td>492</td>
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<tr>
<td>250,000 to 1 million</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>$24,831</td>
<td>298</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 1 million</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>$27,939</td>
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<td>13.7</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>$29,283</td>
<td>1,659</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The multi-level data in these analyses are combined from two separate sources. The variables measuring individual participation and demographic characteristics (i.e., education, age, etc.) come from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al. 1995). For each respondent in the CPS, the place of residence was identified and indicators of city population size, median household income, percentage black, metropolitan area size, and rural residence were appended from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991).

1995), such as Education, Age, Income, Length of Residence, Marital Status, Homeownership, race (Black), and sex (Female); and two other city-level social characteristics: affluence (Median Household Income) and racial composition (Percentage Black).7 To control for regional effects, I included South as a dummy variable. The coefficients from the equations are presented in Table 2, and a full description of the variables is given in the Appendix.

Controlling for other individual and city-level characteristics does not alter generally the negative relationship between civic participation and city size. Comparing the predicted rates of participation between the smallest and largest places, the likelihood of contacting local officials drops by 16 percentage points, attending organizational meetings by 8 percentage points, attending community board meetings by 18 percentage points, and voting in local elections by .14 points on a five-point frequency scale (from an average score of 2.5 to 2.36).8 The city size coefficients are statistically significant in all equations except the one predicting voting.

These findings have several points worth noting. First, the relative size of the coefficients demonstrates that city size is itself a powerful predictor of local civic activity. For example, the logistic coefficients in Table 2 for the three equations predicting nonelectoral participation are larger for city size than all other individual-level variables except for education, age, and income.9 In other words, the differences in contacting officials or attending meetings between very small towns and the largest cities are greater than those between renters and homeowners, men and women, or married and single people.

Second, the predicted participation rate steadily declines as population increases. Alternative tests for a curvilinear relationship between city size and participation are generally negative.10 The model predicts the value of the city size coefficient multiplied by the value of each increment along the city size scale.

7 A multitude of social characteristics distinguish American places (Berry 1972), but racial and economic segregation is routinely identified as the most important by-product of suburbanization (Massey and Denton 1993; Schneider 1987). Therefore, in distinguishing among suburban places, I use measures of median household income and percentage black.

8 The aggregate marginal effect of city size on the probability of participating was calculated by first using the logistic coefficients to compute a predicted probability of participation (p) for each person in the sample: p(x) = F(B_0 + B_1 + ... + B_n X_n). A second probability was calculated using the same equation except that for each respondent the lowest value of the city size scale (0) was substituted for the regular city size term. After recalculating both probabilities relative to the base of the natural logarithm, the difference between the two probabilities was then estimated for each respondent and the average scores were taken for each increment of the city size scale. For a full description of this procedure see Wollinger and Rosenthal (1980, 123). Using this procedure, the logistic coefficient for city size in the equation predicting contacting (-.712) translates into a predicted average difference of 16 percentage points between residents of places with population of less than 2,500 and those in places with population of more than one million. For the OLS equation, the predicted effect of city size was derived by setting all other independent variables to their means and adding these to the constant term. This new average rate was then added to

9 Of course, because of the nonlinear character of the logistic regressions, the comparative magnitudes of the independent variables cannot be estimated perfectly from the coefficients. To calculate the relative effect of one coefficient compared to another, a probabilistic function for each variable, as described in note 8, must first be estimated. For example, translating the coefficient for education (2.14) in the equation for contacting generates a predicted difference of 34 percentage points between those with only eight years of education versus those with an advanced degree. Nevertheless, comparing all the translated coefficients, the differences across city size are still larger than differences across any individual level variable except education, age, and income, just as the raw coefficients indicate. For example, the predicted differences in the rate of contacting officials across the city size scale (16 percentage points) is greater than that between renters and homeowners (6 percentage points) or men and women (5 percentage points).

10 For instance, when a squared term for city size is included in the equations, no large or statistically significant coefficients are generated. The relationship between city size and civic activity also can be found by breaking the size variable into nine dummies, with residence in a city of more than one million as the excluded category, and reestimating the equation. When this was done, the coefficients for the dummy variables progressively dwindled as city size increased in all three equations in which size had a significant effect on civic involvement.

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that, ceteris paribus, residents of a city such as Woodside, California (pop. 4,300), are 8% more likely to attend a local community board meeting than those in nearby Cupertino (pop. 41,000), who are 6% more likely to do so than people in neighboring San Jose (pop. 750,000). The effect of size is continuous: The larger a city becomes, the less likely are its citizens to participate in local affairs.

Finally, the effects of city size seem largely independent of the greater rural or metropolitan context. The coefficients for the interactive term in all four equations is small and not statistically significant. People in smaller rural places and in smaller suburban places are equally more likely to participate relative to people in large cities. In other words, the model predicts that compared to those in a city like Los Angeles, in a city the size of Santa Monica, California, residents are no less likely to participate in local civic activities than are people in rural and identically sized Sioux City, Iowa, even though Santa Monica is nestled within a metropolitan area that is 20 times as large.

On the whole, there are almost no differences in civic behavior according to either the size of the metropolitan area or whether the setting is rural. By itself, city size has no effect: None of the equations predict significant differences in participation between residents of small and large metropolitan areas. Moreover, controlling for size generally has little influence on the magnitude of the city size effect, as the predicted variations in participation by city population are roughly the same in the multivariate equations as they are in the cross-tabulations illustrated in Figure 1. The only civic activity that does vary between metropolitan and rural areas is attendance at community board meetings. Like the findings in Figure 1, people in rural places are less likely to attend community board meetings than people in metropolitan areas. But beyond this, rural dwellers living in similarly sized places are no less likely than people in metropolitan settings to undertake any other civic activity, such as contacting officials or voting in local elections. Most of the differences in participation rates between metropolitan and rural settings are the consequence of individual demographic characteristics.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{table}
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\small
\begin{tabular}{lcccc}
\hline
\textbf{City-level variables} & \textbf{Contact Officials} & \textbf{Attend Board Meeting} & \textbf{Attend Organization Meeting} & \textbf{Vote Local Elections}\tabularnewline
\hline
City size & $-0.712^{**} (0.256)$ & $-1.48^{**} (0.036)$ & $-0.424^{*} (0.208)$ & $-0.133 (0.134)$

Med. household income & $-0.589^{*} (0.275)$ & $-0.932^{*} (0.009)$ & $-1.04^{**} (0.358)$ & $-0.724^{**} (0.004)$

Percentage black & $0.587 (0.349)$ & $1.37^{*} (0.414)$ & $-0.530 (0.331)$ & $0.309^{*} (0.156)$

Metropolitan area size\textsuperscript{b} & 

Small metro area & $0.179 (0.145)$ & $-0.245 (0.178)$ & $-0.053 (0.142)$ & $0.055 (0.179)$

Rural & $0.361 (0.263)$ & $-0.761^{*} (0.328)$ & $-0.207 (0.260)$ & $0.042 (0.141)$

City size \times rural & $-0.440 (0.679)$ & $1.59 (0.866)$ & $-0.261 (0.683)$ & $-0.528 (0.366)$

Other variables & 

Education & $2.14^{**} (0.232)$ & $1.97^{**} (0.291)$ & $2.19^{**} (0.226)$ & $1.55^{**} (0.117)$

Income & $0.816^{**} (0.052)$ & $1.08^{**} (0.261)$ & $1.12^{**} (0.201)$ & $0.429^{**} (0.109)$

Age & $0.652^{**} (0.260)$ & $0.528 (0.327)$ & $0.538^{*} (0.254)$ & $2.23^{**} (0.135)$

Homeowner & $0.357^{**} (0.132)$ & $0.526^{*} (0.174)$ & $0.404^{*} (0.126)$ & $0.358^{*} (0.067)$

Married & $0.052 (0.115)$ & $0.015 (0.146)$ & $0.062 (0.111)$ & $0.115 (0.059)$

Black & $-0.247 (0.157)$ & $-0.456 (0.207)$ & $0.269 (0.147)$ & $0.055 (0.078)$

Female & $0.239^{*} (0.104)$ & $-0.198 (0.124)$ & $0.090 (0.101)$ & $0.038 (0.055)$

Length of residence & $0.182 (0.191)$ & $0.343 (0.252)$ & $0.241 (0.185)$ & $0.217 (0.096)$

South & $-0.201 (0.126)$ & $-0.308^{*} (0.158)$ & $-0.127 (0.121)$ & $-0.172 (0.065)$

Cox & Snell $R^2$ & 0.12 & 0.10 & 0.13 & ($r^2$ .28)

\hline
\textbf{N} & $2,032$ & $1,914$ & $2,038$ & $2,022$

\hline
\end{tabular}
\textsuperscript{a}Source: See source note for Table 1.
\textsuperscript{b}Other multivariate analyses demonstrate that, controlling for just city size, rural residents are less likely to attend organizational meetings and vote. When the variables measuring everything but education and income are included, people in rural areas continue to have a lower participation rate, although the differences are no longer statistically significant. Adding the education and income measures greatly attenuates the rural coefficients. This suggests that the lower levels of rural participation are due largely to socioeconomic differences. Interestingly, no matter what controls are added, rural dwellers are always more likely to contact local officials, although this difference is not statistically significant, and always less likely to attend community board meetings, a difference that is statistically significant.

\end{table}
### TABLE 3. The Effects of City Size by Education on Local Civic Participation, with Controls for Individual and Contextual Population Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City-level variables</th>
<th>Contact Officials</th>
<th>Attend Board Meeting</th>
<th>Attend Organization Meeting</th>
<th>Vote Local Elections*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City size</td>
<td>-.871** (.334)</td>
<td>-.12** (.399)</td>
<td>-.658* (.333)</td>
<td>-.110 (.191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med. household income</td>
<td>-.572* (.267)</td>
<td>-.810* (.444)</td>
<td>-.102** (.358)</td>
<td>-.702** (.198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage black</td>
<td>.706 (.332)</td>
<td>1.34** (.405)</td>
<td>-.444 (.324)</td>
<td>.418* (.192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>-.12** (.234)</td>
<td>-.882** (.296)</td>
<td>-.138** (.234)</td>
<td>-.713** (.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>-.329 (.235)</td>
<td>.019 (.302)</td>
<td>-.464 (.256)</td>
<td>-.037 (.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City size × high school</td>
<td>.109 (.415)</td>
<td>-.371 (.541)</td>
<td>.648 (.394)</td>
<td>-.097 (.217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City size × some college</td>
<td>.234 (.437)</td>
<td>-.167 (.521)</td>
<td>-.033 (.432)</td>
<td>-.223 (.249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan area sizea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small metro area</td>
<td>.189 (.144)</td>
<td>-.185 (.177)</td>
<td>-.045 (.140)</td>
<td>.065 (.077)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>.263 (.196)</td>
<td>-.380 (.244)</td>
<td>-.253 (.193)</td>
<td>-.073 (.106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.949** (.204)</td>
<td>1.20** (.258)</td>
<td>1.26** (.199)</td>
<td>.533** (.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.617* (.260)</td>
<td>.573 (.328)</td>
<td>.404 (.253)</td>
<td>2.17** (.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>.405** (.131)</td>
<td>.607** (.174)</td>
<td>.450** (.125)</td>
<td>.358** (.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>.053 (.115)</td>
<td>-.031 (.146)</td>
<td>.048 (.110)</td>
<td>.114 (.060)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-.274 (.157)</td>
<td>-.468 (.207)</td>
<td>.248 (.147)</td>
<td>.046 (.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.254* (.103)</td>
<td>-.201 (.128)</td>
<td>-.108 (.100)</td>
<td>.022 (.055)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of residence</td>
<td>.113 (.189)</td>
<td>.260 (.251)</td>
<td>.187 (.183)</td>
<td>.169 (.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.245* (.123)</td>
<td>-.299* (.155)</td>
<td>-.161 (.119)</td>
<td>-.216 (.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell R²</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>(R² .28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,032</td>
<td>1,914</td>
<td>2,038</td>
<td>2,022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See source note for Table 1.

*p < .01, *p < .05; standard errors are in parentheses.

*Coefficients from OLS regression.

aExcluded category is metropolitan areas of more than one million.

Community with which its residents identify, even though the physical demarcation may be nothing more than a signpost. The absence of any interaction effect based on rural area validates this interpretation. City boundaries are important for defining social behavior and perceptions, even when that city is nestled within a huge metropolis.

### CAUSES OF THE CITY SIZE EFFECT

According to my usage of the civic voluntarism model, the lower participation rates in larger places must result from differences in resources, political interest, and/or patterns of political mobilization. The source of the effect can be identified, therefore, by estimating how each determinant of participation changes with a city's size and then gauging how much the city size effect attenuates once these determinants are controlled.

Previous research focuses considerable attention on individual resources relative to the costs of participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1994; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wilson 1972). For instance, Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) argue that the elderly and educated are more likely to vote because they have more resources to deal with the "costs" of electoral registration, particularly in states with difficult procedures. These individual differences in resources may be similarly relevant to city size if, as some researchers suggest, participation is more difficult in larger places (Dahl and Tufte 1973; Hansen, Palfrey, and Rosenthal 1987; Verba and Nie 1972). Faced with larger and more complex bureaucracies, greater distances to public offices, and political organizations of larger scale, people in big cities may find voting, contacting officials, or attending meetings difficult.

If participation is more "costly" in larger places, then the effects of city size should vary according to individual resource levels. Just as the young or uneducated are less likely to vote when registration is more difficult (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), so should these "resource poor" groups be more adversely affected by city size. In other words, if contacting an elected official is more difficult in Chicago than in Peoria, Illinois, then differences in contacting rates between high school dropouts and college graduates should be greater in Chicago. To test this hypothesis, I reestimated the civic participation equations with new interaction terms between two levels of individual education (High School [diploma] or Less and Some College) and city size (city size × high schl., city size × some col.). Those with a college degree or postgraduate education were the excluded category. The results are listed in Table 3.

In none of the four equations did the interaction terms between individual education and city size yield any large or statistically significant coefficients. The equations predict that the effects of city size are no different among differentially educated groups. Similarly negative results were also found when other measures of individual resources (e.g., age and income)
were substituted for the education measure.\textsuperscript{12} These results provide no evidence that civic participation is lower in larger places because it is more "costly."\textsuperscript{13}

Since the city size effects do not arise from variations in the cost of participation or individual resources, they must come from differences in political interest or mobilization. Previous empirical work offers inconclusive evidence that people in larger places are less engaged in community life or less likely to be mobilized. Fischer (1976, 1982) reports little evidence of any distinct psychological patterns in large places, but he does find city dwellers more "estranged from the wider community" than rural dwellers: The former are less trusting of strangers, less familiar with neighbors, and feel less efficacious with respect to community affairs. Similarly, Finifter (1970) reports that people in larger urban centers are more politically estranged. Yet, it is unclear whether these findings can explain the decline in civic participation, because none of the studies link urban alienation to lower participation. It is generally assumed, however, that political interest increases with city size because the stakes of political contests, the number of participants, and the visibility of local politicians are all higher (Verba and Nie 1972). In large places, residents have an easier time following local politics and, therefore, are thought to be more interested in local affairs. It is not less plausible that people in larger places may feel more removed from their community, so political interest may be low. Despite the greater stakes and visibility of local politics, residents may "tune out" as part of their psychological disengagement from their surroundings.

Previous research also suggests that patterns of political mobilization may vary as a function of city size (Fischer 1982). In small towns, social networks are portrayed as closely knit, in that people are more likely to know one another. In large places, social networks are typically characterized as loosely knit; there is less proximity and redundancy among acquaintances (Bott 1971; Kasarda and Janowitz 1972). Patterns of recruitment should differ, therefore, between these environments: Information about and recruitment for local activities between neighbors should be greater in small towns than in large places.

To test whether differences in psychological engagement or mobilization are the source of the city size effect, I return to the CPS/Census data set. Although the CPS does not contain any explicit indicators of political or social alienation, it does have items that measure interest in local and national politics. These may capture some level of psychological disengagement. Respondents were also queried about whether they had been asked by someone to take part in a number of community oriented activities, including serving on a community board or contacting a local public official. From these questions, a dichotomous measure of mobilization was created (1 = asked in the past year to contact a local official or serve on a community board, 0 otherwise). An OLS regression was employed for the political interest items, and a logistic regression was done for the mobilization measure, with the same predictors used above. The coefficients for the equation are listed in Table 4.

In larger places there is significantly less interest in local politics than in smaller places. Compared to people in places smaller than 2,500, people in cities of more than one million score nearly .40 lower, on average, on the five-point local political interest scale. But this negative relationship does not appear to reflect any generalized aversion to politics among urban residents. When national political interest is regressed on the same set of predictors, the coefficient for city size is small and not statistically significant.

People in larger places are also less likely to be politically mobilized. Translating the coefficients into probabilities, residents of the largest cities are 17\% less likely to be asked to serve on a community board or contact a government official than are residents of small towns.\textsuperscript{14} Further analysis indicates that the character of mobilization changes with place size as well. Residents of large cities are much less likely to be mobilized by friends or neighbors than are people in small places.\textsuperscript{15} Aside from individual education, age, and income, city size is the greatest predictor of whether a person is mobilized. As with the earlier findings, these results occur irrespective of the rural or metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{16}

Are these lower levels of local political interest and mobilization in larger places responsible for the decline in civic participation? The answer can be found by reexamining the relationship between place size and civic activity while controlling for local political interest

\textsuperscript{12} To test the interaction between income and city size, three income categories were created: less than $25,000, between $25,000 and $50,000, and above $50,000. Interaction terms for the first two categories and city size were included in the equation. In no case were the coefficients for the interaction terms large or statistically significant. Similarly negative results were found when interactions between senior citizens (over 65 years) and city size were created.

\textsuperscript{13} Another test of participation cost was based on the assumption that participation in larger places is more time consuming. The CPS had several items measuring free time, although these are subject to numerous criticisms (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Although people in larger places did report less free time, controlling for free time had no influence on the relationship between city size and any of the civic activities.

\textsuperscript{14} Using the procedure described in note 8, I translated the logistic coefficient in the equation predicting mobilization depicted in Table 4. The logistic coefficient (−.496) translates into a difference of 17 percentage points between residents of the smallest and largest places.

\textsuperscript{15} Respondents in the CPS were also asked who had mobilized them. Selecting those who had been mobilized, I created two dichotomous measures: whether a person had been mobilized either by a friend or by a neighbor. These two items were then regressed on the standard set of predictors. In both cases, the city size coefficient was large and statistically significant. Translating the logistic regression coefficients into probabilities, mobilized respondents in small towns are 16\% more likely to be mobilized by an acquaintance and 13\% more likely to be mobilized by a neighbor than are people in larger places, which further demonstrates that the latter are less likely to have social contact with their neighbors.

\textsuperscript{16} Running the same equations with interaction terms between metropolitan area and city size yielded no statistically significant additional effects of city size in larger as opposed to smaller metropolitan areas.
and mobilization. If civic activity diminishes in larger places because residents are less likely to be recruited by their neighbors or are more alienated, then the relationships between place size and participation should attenuate once the interest and mobilization items are included in the equations. To test this assertion, I reestimated the regression equations for each civic activity with the four-point local political interest scale and a dummy variable for mobilization. The results are given in Table 5.

When political engagement and mobilization are taken into account, the negative relationships between place size and three of the civic activities attenuate. For example, comparing the findings in tables 2 and 5, the difference in the rate of contacting local officials between the smallest and largest places diminishes from 16 to 12 percentage points. The gap in attendance at organizational meetings also shrinks—compared to people in the largest places, residents of places smaller than 5,000 are only 3% more likely to attend organizational meetings once political interest and mobilization are considered, a difference that is no longer statistically significant. On the voting scale, the city size coefficient drops by more than half. The predicted rate of board meeting attendance is only slightly diminished by the additional controls. Nevertheless, across three measures of civic participation, the effects of place size are clearly related to differences in levels of political interest and mobilization.

Yet, even when differences in interest and mobilization are considered, the negative effects of city size on participation remain, particularly for contacting officials and attending board meetings. Does this mean that city size has other effects not considered here? This is a difficult question to answer. The measures of citizen interest and mobilization are crude indicators for the concepts outlined in the civic voluntarism model. A better test would be measures of trust, levels of contact with neighbors, and more detailed items on mobilization for each particular civic act. One may also wonder about other contextual factors that are correlated with city size. For instance, participation may be lower in larger places because of fewer intermediary institutions to facilitate involvement, such as neighborhood groups or civic clubs (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993). Unfortunately, no data are available to determine whether the number of such groups varies as a function of city size. It is quite plausible that other factors underlie the city size effect, but uncovering them awaits further research with better data.

**CONCLUSION**

Residents of larger places are much less likely to participate in a variety of local civic activities than are people in small communities. Between the smallest and largest places, the predicted rate of contacting officials falls by 16 percentage points, attendance at community and organizational meetings declines by more than 8 percentage points, and the reported frequency of voting in local elections drops substantially. Subsequent analyses demonstrate at least two sources for the place size effect. First, people in larger communities are less likely to be mobilized for political activity, particularly by neighbors or acquaintances. The absence of mobilization stems partly from the character of social relations in larger places: As city size increases, people are less likely to know their neighbors and less likely to
have social contacts that are geographically proximate (Fischer 1982). In this environment, local organizations and political movements find it hard to recruit members and disseminate information, which limits many opportunities for participation. Second, despite the greater visibility and stakes of local politics, people in larger places are less interested in local affairs. This may arise from a psychological response to the complex urban environment, namely, withdrawal into a more private-regarding orientation. None of these explanations is mutually exclusive, and all illustrate the general principle that as city size grows, people are less socially connected with their neighbors, less interested in local politics, and less active in local civic affairs.

These results have several implications for research on participation and urban political theory. First, social context has a large and independent effect on civic participation. Most studies of American political participation use random samples to validate models of individual behavior, but people do not live in randomized relation to one another but in specific social and political settings. These settings influence participation in systematic and predictable ways. Indeed, the variations in political participation between the smallest and largest places are often greater than differences between high school and college graduates, homeowners and renters, or single and married people. By using multilevel data that contain information on both the individual and aggregate level, a broader range of factors can be estimated. Given the magnitude of these findings, future research should pay closer attention to differences in social and political contexts when analyzing determinants of civic participation.

Second, city boundaries are very important for creating community in an era of metropolitan expansion. One might not expect a rural town such as Muleshoe, Texas, to have the same civic culture as a similarly sized suburb of New York, such as Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey. After all, Ho-Ho-Kus residents have a larger surrounding social universe from which to draw. Yet, I find no interaction between metropolitan or rural area and city size in shaping participation, once other demographic characteristics are taken into account. The model predicts that residents of Ho-Ho-Kus and Muleshoe are equally more likely to participate in civic life than are New Yorkers. In the American metropolis, municipal boundaries are as important for defining the social interaction and psychological orientation of residents as they are for demarcating size. Despite the fact that boundaries in many metropolitan areas are invisible amid a continuous urban sprawl, they nevertheless influence the behavior of the residents within them.

These results suggest that Dahl’s speculations about the ideal-sized democratic city are correct: People in smaller places are more civically involved. But if this is the case, then why has America’s migration to smaller places coincided with a putative decline in civic involvement? Although I do not have data to estimate the effect of suburbanization over time, the results of the cross-sectional analysis and my other research with these data can provide a partial answer. On the one hand, breaking up large urban areas into collections of

| TABLE 5. The Effects of City Size on Local Civic Participation, with Controls for Political Interest and Mobilization and Individual and Contextual Characteristics |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| City-level variables                        | Contact Officials | Attend Board Meeting | Attend Organization Meeting | Vote Local Elections |
| City size                                   | -.534* (.282)  | -.134** (.338)       | -.239 (.257)              | -.026 (.125) |
| Med. household income                       | -.435 (.403)  | -.716 (.475)         | -.942* (.375)             | -.567** (.183) |
| Percentage black                           | .443 (.370)   | 1.46** (.447)        | -.731 (.345)              | .173 (.164)  |
| Local political interest                   | .676** (.075) | .782** (.097)        | .437** (.065)             | .446** (.030) |
| Mobilized                                  | 1.47** (.122) | 1.54** (.154)        | .808** (.112)             | .383** (.058) |
| Metropolitan area size                      |                   |                     |                           |                |
| Small metro area                           | .204 (.159)   | -.325 (.191)         | -.059 (.147)              | .036 (.072)  |
| Rural                                      | .614 (.392)   | -.819* (.356)        | -.142 (.271)              | .065 (.132)  |
| City size × rural                          | -.716 (.754)  | 2.06* (.962)         | -.303 (.712)              | -.536 (.340) |
| Other variables                             |                   |                     |                           |                |
| Education                                  | 1.17** (.258)  | 1.10** (.318)        | 1.54** (.238)             | .923** (.115) |
| Income                                     | .309 (.228)   | .614* (.280)         | .835* (.210)              | .170 (.102)  |
| Age                                        | -.167 (.297)  | -.240 (.366)         | -.027 (.273)              | 1.78** (.128) |
| Homeowner                                  | .157 (.145)   | .435** (.189)        | .292* (.131)              | .258** (.062) |
| Married                                    | .038 (.129)   | -.017 (.158)         | .047 (.111)               | .107 (.055)  |
| Black                                      | -.227 (.172)  | -.487* (.220)        | -.309* (.154)             | .029 (.073)  |
| Female                                     | -.256* (.113) | -.202 (.138)         | -.080 (.105)              | .052 (.051)  |
| Length of residence                        | -.121 (.206)  | -.281 (.265)         | -.189 (.184)              | .162 (.089)  |
| South                                      | -.155 (.137)  | -.295 (.170)         | -.085 (.124)              | -.143** (.061) |
| Cox & Snell R²                             | .25           | .19                  | .19                       | (r² .38)     |
| N                                         | 2,025         | 1,907                | 2,031                     | 2,014        |

Source: See source note for Table 1.
*p < .01, *p < .05; standard errors are in parentheses.
*Excluded category is metropolitan areas of more than one million.
small and medium-sized municipalities should create communities with more socially, psychologically, and civically involved citizens. On the other hand, smaller places in a metropolitan context are rarely uniform in social composition. In fact, they have strong incentives to differentiate themselves in the types of services they provide and the residents they seek to attract (Peterson 1981; Tiebout 1956). Such incentives are a primary cause for the drastic social and economic segregation within many metropolitan areas (Weicher 1991). In other work, I find that the civic consequences of this racial and economic segregation generally are not positive (Oliver 1999). For example, residents of economically homogeneous municipalities are less civically engaged than people in more heterogeneous places. These tendencies occur with racial segregation as well; as was illustrated in Table 2, people in predominantly white cities are less likely to attend board meetings or vote in local elections.

In the contemporary American metropolis, subdividing populations into smaller political units alone will not be sufficient to stimulate civic involvement because the racial and economic segregation that accompanies such fragmentation will counteract the civic virtues of smaller city size. Democratic theorists who speculate about city size in the contemporary metropolis must take into account the civic consequences of social and economic segregation. The ideal democratic city may not just be of a particular size, but of a sufficient social and economic diversity as well.

APPENDIX: CODING OF THE VARIABLES

The data in this article come from two separate sources. The variables measuring participation, political interest, mobilization, and individual demographic variables come from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al., 1995). The contextual variables come from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991). The coding is described below.

Dependent Variables

These variables were coded with dichotomous, yes/no responses.

Contacting Local Officials. In the past 12 months...have you initiated any contacts with an elected official?

Attending Community Board Meetings. Have you attended a meeting of (any official local governmental board or council that deals with community problems and issues, such as a town council, a school board, a zoning board, a planning board, or the like) in the past 12 months?

Attending Voluntary Organization Meetings. (Respondents identified a voluntary organization to which they belonged.)

Here is a list of things that people sometimes have to do as part of the involvement with organizations. After I read each one, please tell me whether or not you have engaged in that activity as part of your involvement with this organization. Have you (gone to a meeting)?

Mobilization. (A positive response to either of the following questions was scored as positive.) In the past 12 months, have you received any request directed to you personally asking you to contact a government official—asking you to write to or talk to a government official? and serve on community board or council?

The following variables were scored as indicated.

Voting. A five-point voting-in-local-elections scale was based on responses to the following questions: In the past five years, how often have you voted in elections for local or city officials? (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always).

Political Interest. (The political interest variables were drawn from two questions.) Thinking about your local community, how interested are you in local community politics and local community affairs? How interested in national politics and national affairs are you? (1 = not at all interested, 2 = slightly interested, 3 = somewhat interested, 4 = very interested).

Independent Variables

Education. The six categories were: less than 8 years of schooling, 8–12 years, high school diploma, some college, college degree, and advanced degree. The coding was from 0 (less than 8 years) to 1 (advanced degree).

Income. The eight categories were: less than $7,500 annually; $7,500 to $15,000; $15,000 to $25,000; $25,000 to $35,000; $35,000 to $50,000; $50,000 to $75,000; $75,000 to $125,000; more than $125,000. The coding was from 0 (less than $7,500) to 1 (more than $125,000).

Age. Recording from the original score of 18–92 years yielded a range from 0 (18 years old) to 1 (92 years old).

Length of Residence. 0 = less than 2 years, 1 = 2 or more years.

South. 0 = live outside South; 1 = live in Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, or Virginia.

Contextual Variables

City Size. The ten categories were: less than 2,500; 2,500 to 5,000; 5,000 to 10,000; 10,000 to 25,000; 25,000 to 50,000; 50,000 to 100,000; 100,000 to 250,000; 250,000 to 500,000; 500,000 to one million; more than one million. Size was recorded on a 0–1 scale.

Median Household Income. Rounded and originally coded on a 50-point scale (0 = <$10,000; 1 = $11,000; ... 49 = more than $59,000), the recoding ranged from 0 (less than $10,000) to 1 (more than $59,000).

Percentage Black. Recoding from 0 to 97 yielded 0 (0% black) to 1 (97% black).

Rural. Residence in rural area = 1, in metropolitan area = 0.

Small Metropolitan Area. Metropolitan area with population of less than one million = 1, more than one million = 0.

REFERENCES


