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COMMUNICATION AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FORCES SHAPING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS IN A MULTIETHNIC CITY

Nien-Tsu Nancy Chen, Katherine Ognyanova, Nan Zhao,Wenlin Liu, Daniela Gerson, Sandra Ball-Rokeach, and Michael Parks

Research has revealed a continuous decline in civic engagement level across the United States over recent decades and persistently lower rates of engagement among ethnic minorities compared with Whites (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This is a cause for concern as the country becomes ever more diverse and as minorities become the majority in an increasing number of neighborhoods (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). In an effort to begin addressing this concern, the present study investigates the underlying mechanisms leading to ethnic disparities in civic engagement. Using data gathered from three ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese, Latinos, and Anglos) co-inhabiting an incorporated city in Los Angeles County, California, separate statistical analyses were conducted to investigate if the paths to engagement differed by ethnicity.[1]

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[1]In this chapter, "Whites" and "Anglos" are used interchangeably to refer to individuals who are Caucasian or non-Hispanic/Latino White; "Latinos" is used to

After all, as Leighley and Vedlitz (1999) suggested, ethnicity can structure how other individual-level variables influence civic engagement.

Consensus is lacking on what civic engagement entails. Some studies focus exclusively on participation in electoral activities, whereas others include a wider range of indicators, such as involvement in "political voice activities" (Lopez et al., 2006), participation in activities aimed at improving one's local community or helping others (Putnam, 2000; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005), the feeling of belonging to a residential area (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a), and a sense of political or collective efficacy (Jeffres, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2002). The present study follows Kim and Ball-Rokeach's (2006a, 2006b) definition of civic engagement, a definition developed and validated based on studies conducted in ethnically diverse neighborhoods (Kim, 2003; Matsaganis, 2008; Wilkin, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2009). By operationalizing civic engagement as a three-dimensional construct comprising civic participation, collective efficacy, and neighborhood belonging, this definition provides an inclusive framework for assessing the objective behavior of neighborliness and participation in civic activities, as well as the subjective feelings of collective efficacy and attachment to a residential area.

A long line of research has focused on the forces shaping civic engagement. Many individual-level analyses have identified age, income, and education as key sociodemographic predictors of civic engagement (Shah, 1998). Older Americans are typically more active in civic activities and organizations compared with younger generations (Norris, 1996; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006), and this finding has been explained variously as life-cycle, generational, or period effects (Putnam, 1996; Shah, 1998). The influence of income and education is often explicated in terms of resources. It is argued that individuals of higher socioeconomic status (SES) benefit more from civic participation because they have a higher "stake" in society (Downs, 1957), and they also incur lower costs in civic participation because they already possess many of the skills and financial resources necessary for participation (Riker & Ordeshook, 1986). However, Cho (1999) proposes that SES, especially

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refer to persons who are of Latin-American origin; "Asians" refers to individuals who are of East Asian, Southeast Asian, or South Asian descent; and "Blacks" refers to persons having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The present study's Asian participants were restricted to ethnic Chinese (i.e., individuals who self-identified their ethnicity as either "Chinese" or "Taiwanese") due to the linguistic capabilities of the research team, who conducted multilingual interviews with study participants in Spanish, English, and Mandarin.

when operationalized as educational attainment, is actually an indicator of the degree of socialization one has undergone to embrace the values of American democracy and civic participation. Given that these values and the skills necessary for participation in the United States might not receive as much emphasis in the education system in other countries, education could have less or even no impact on civic participation among immigrants primarily educated overseas. This argument has been supported by research showing a lack of association between SES and civic engagement among Asians (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Lien, 1994; Ramakrishnan & Baldassare, 2004). Other sociodemographic factors that can be linked to the process of socialization, such as age, might also have a weaker association with participation among immigrants insofar as being older does not translate into a longer period of time spent in the United States. Indeed, Ramakrishnan and Baldassare (2004) observed age to have a different relationship with civic participation among Latinos compared with other ethnic groups residing in California. Consequently, it is crucial to include immigration-related factors in analyzing ethnic minorities' participation patterns because these factors are indicative of minorities' degree of socialization into American civic norms.

Indeed, Cho (1999) found that controlling for foreign-born status and English proficiency eliminated disparities in civic participation across ethnic groups. However, Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet (1989) as well as Ramakrishnan and Baldassare (2004) found that, holding constant sociodemographic and immigration-related factors, Asians still had lower participation in political and civic activities compared with Whites, whereas the disparities among Whites, Blacks, and Latinos largely disappeared. They suggested that this phenomenon could be explained by Asians' historical experience of alienation from the political system both in the United States and abroad, as well as their relatively dispersed residential patterns.

Residential concentration or segregation of ethnic groups has been one of the most widely investigated contextual factors in civic engagement research. From the perspective of utility calculation, individuals living in places with few co-ethnics have little motivation to participate civically because they do not have sufficient in-group members to make a difference (Ramakrishnan & Baldassare, 2004; Uhlaner et al., 1989). Political mobilization efforts are also less likely to target minority groups that are small in size (Cho, Gimpel, & Dyck, 2006; Verba et al., 1995). Similarly, the social network literature on homophily (Monge & Contractor, 2003) and the relational goods hypothesis (Uhlaner et al., 1989) suggest that living in an area with a large number of co-ethnics is more conducive to civic engagement. Individuals are more likely to form social networks with

others of similar backgrounds, such as ethnicity, religion, and occupation (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), and these networks in turn provide effective channels of information exchange and orient individuals toward group-based preferences that facilitate engagement (Leighley, 2001; Uhlaner et al., 1989).

While a positive association between civic engagement and living with a large number of co-ethnics has been observed among Whites, Blacks, and Latinos (Matsubayashi, 2010; Rotolo, 2000), Cho et al. (2006) found an inverse relationship among Asians. These authors suggested that for new immigrants, especially the first generation who tended to have lower English proficiency, living with co-ethnics limited their opportunities to interact with participation-inclined out-group members, thereby reducing pressures to socialize into American civic norms. However, the dampening effect of residential concentration among Asians was found to be smaller in California compared with the rest of the nation. Cho et al. argued that this was mainly due to the state's exceptionally large Asian population and numerous Asian ethnic organizations that regularly engaged in mobilization for political or larger civic purposes. Consequently, these authors concluded that the contextual dynamics shaping civic engagement were multilayered and complex, an argument echoed by Ramakrishnan and Baldassare (2004), who suggested that in states with highly varied geographical regions, there were likely to be distinctions in the levels and types of civic engagement across regions, as well as within these regions with respect to different ethnic groups.

In addition to sociodemographic and structural factors, communication plays an integral role in facilitating civic engagement. Classic works by Tarde (in Katz, 2006), Habermas (1984), and Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) have demonstrated the importance of interpersonal conversation and, to a lesser extent, mass-mediated communication in enabling information-sharing and opinion formation about public affairs, which subsequently shape civic involvement. In contrast, Anderson's (1983) seminal book argues that communication in the form of mass-mediated collective storytelling allows individuals to imagine themselves as part of a larger community in lieu of interpersonal contact. While these classic texts frame their discussions primarily at the national level, research has revealed that civic engagement at the local level is similarly positively associated with the use of local media (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; Jeffres, Dobes, & Sweeney, 1987; Viswanath, Finnegan, Rooney, & Potter, 1990) and interpersonal conversations among neighbors (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999). However, the effects of these communication factors do not appear to be universal, as they are often found to be moderated by the structural and normative features of a residential area,

such as residential stability and ethnic heterogeneity (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

In an effort to take into account the interacting influence of communication and contextual factors over civic engagement, Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and colleagues (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b; Kim, Jung, & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) have developed the communication tnfrastructure theory (CIT). Based on research conducted in more than a dozen ethnically diverse neighborhoods across Los Angeles County, CIT studies establish that each neighborhood has a unique communication infrastructure comprising "a neighborhood storytelling network set in its communication action context" (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001, p. 396). The neighborhood storytelling network is made up of individual residents, geo-ethnic media, and community organizations, which are all key agents in sharing local information and telling collective stories. These communication and storytelling practices in turn facilitate community-building and neighborhood engagement.

CIT is explicitly formulated in network terms as it emphasizes the importance of connections among the people, news sources, and institutions interacting within a geographic area. The storytelling system described by the theory incorporates social relations based on local information exchanges. In contrast to other network frameworks with a narrower focus on interpersonal ties, CIT proposes a holistic approach to the study of complex multilevel structures embedded within a community. In addition, CIT is formulated with an eye toward increasing population diversity and the critical role of ethnic media in providing news and information to minorities that enable their participation in public life (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011). Consequently, CIT argues that it is important to expand the traditional focus on local media to examine the effects of "geo-ethnic media," defined as media outlets that "produce content covering a geographic area, potentially focusing on issues relevant to residents of a particular ethnicity" (Ognyanova et al., 2012).

Studies based on CIT typically explore individuals' connections with various local storytelling agents by asking them how frequently they talk with others about their neighborhood, how much they use geo-ethnic media to stay on top of what is happening in their neighborhood, and how many locally based community organizations to which they belong (Kim, 2003; Matsaganis, 2008). CIT argues that the extent of civic engagement in a neighborhood depends not only on the individual capacities of micro- and meso-level agents to tell local stories but also on how tightly connected these agents are to one another. Research has shown that a high level of connectedness among residents, community organizations, and geo-ethnic media—meaning that each storyteller is able to stimulate

the others to talk about their neighborhood—is most conducive to civic engagement (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b).

However, research reveals that in many diverse neighborhoods, a low level or even a lack of connectedness exists among local storytellers (Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006b). Furthermore, the positive effects of connections with community organizations and geo-ethnic media on civic engagement do not appear to be uniform. For example, Uhlaner et al. (1989) argue that engagement is facilitated by membership in specific types of organizations that are "politically meaningful," where members of the group are assumed to share some significant preferences and are able to compensate for insufficient personal resources with group resources. These organizations also tend to be more active in community organizing and in transferring the knowledge, skills, and beliefs necessary for civic engagement. For example, many churches in the United States have congregations that are ethnically homogenous, and these churches have played a critical role in facilitating political and civic participation, especially among Blacks and Latinos (Harris, 1994; Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001). Evidence also indicates that, among Asians, membership in religiously or ethnically based organizations has greater influence over political participation than other types of group-based resources (Wong, Lien, & Conway, 2005). Consequently, the positive effect of organizational membership on civic engagement is likely to be contingent on the types of organizations to which individuals of different ethnicities belong.

Similarly, earlier research that established a positive association between local media use and civic engagement was conducted with predominantly White samples (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; Jeffres et al., 1987; Viswanath et al., 1990). However, research using more diverse samples has shown that individuals of various ethnicities often turn to different media outlets to stay informed about their residential area (Matsaganis et al., 2011). Minorities may favor ethnic media over English-language media channels for news and information due to the former's cultural and linguistic accessibility (Spence, Lachlan, & Burke, 2011; Zhou & Cai, 2002). Ethnic media outlets in the United States, however, vary widely in size, ownership structure, and geographical orientation, with some being part of a transnational conglomerate and others being small operations serving a particular neighborhood (Viswanath & Lee, 2007). Consequently, not all ethnic media provide abundant local information. Indeed, Lin and Song (2006) found that ethnic media in Los Angeles engaged in little local storytelling, and evidence suggests that heavy or exclusive reliance on ethnic media negatively affects attention to local affairs (Suro, 2004), motivation to form cross-ethnic social ties (Zhou &

Cai, 2002), and interest in becoming involved in electoral politics (Cho et al., 2006). As a result, the positive effect of geo-ethnic media on locally oriented civic engagement may not be a given.

Building on emerging research on the geo-ethnic nature of civic engagement and the varying effects of local storytelling agents on it, the present study aims to provide a detailed analysis of the underlying mechanisms that shape different ethnic groups' civic engagement by focusing on a single city and holding neighborhood characteristics constant. The first step is to explore cross-ethnic similarities and differences in civic engagement levels and connections to local storytelling agents:

> RQ1: What are the average levels of neighborhood belonging, collective efficacy, civic participation, neighborhood conversations, participation in locally based community organizations, and connection with geo-ethnic media for local news among the city's Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents?

Next, hypotheses are tested to see whether previous research findings on the effects of sociodemographic, immigration-related, and communication variables on civic engagement can be reproduced in the multiethnic city studied. We propose that controlling for the other factors:

> H1: Age positively predicts civic engagement among the Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents.

> H2: Education positively predicts civic engagement among the Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents.

> H3: Income positively predicts civic engagement among the Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents.

> H4: A longer immigration history positively predicts civic engagement among the Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents.

> H5: English proficiency positively predicts civic engagement among the Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents.

Furthermore, validation is sought for the positive impact of interpersonal communication on civic engagement:

H6: Frequency of interpersonal conversations about one's neighborhood positively predicts civic engagement among Chinese, Latino, and Anglo residents.

The following research questions are also investigated:

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the number of locally based community organizations to which residents belong and their civic engagement levels?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the number of geo-ethnic media to which residents connect for local news and their civic engagement levels?

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The study area is a city of 83,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b) located in Los Angeles County, California. The two fastest growing population groups in the United States are well represented in the study area, as the majority of residents is Asian (53%), mostly ethnic Chinese, followed by Latinos (34%). Non-Hispanic Whites, who once constituted the majority of the city's population, have declined in numbers over recent decades, and at present they make up only 10% of the population.

Research has found a lower level of neighborhood belonging in the study site compared with many other residential areas in Los Angeles (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001), and anecdotal evidence points to a general lack of interest among the city's residents in becoming engaged in local politics. For example, the general municipal and school district elections scheduled to take place in this city in November 2010 were both canceled due to the lack of challengers to all five incumbent City Council and School Board members up for reelection. The decision to focus on this city was therefore based on a desire to identify the specific paths leading to or working against civic engagement in this community and to offer some insights that can be utilized by those interested in finding ways to promote engagement in diverse communities.

METHODS

A survey was conducted in the study area between November 7 and December 17, 2010. In addition to random-digit dialing, invitation postcards were mailed out to addresses without listed phone numbers to recruit participants so that the survey would have a chance to reach

residents who used cell phones only. The postcard carried messages in English, Chinese, and Spanish that encouraged the recipient to call a toll-free 800 number to participate in the survey.[2]

Among the 2,223 individuals contacted by or who contacted the survey interviewers, 512 did not meet the screening criteria of being at least 18 years of age, having lived in the study area for at least two years, and self-identifying as of Chinese/Taiwanese, Latino, or Caucasian/non-Hispanic White ethnicity. Among the 1,711 qualified respondents, the response rate was 24%, which was within the typical range for telephone surveys. The final sample consisted of 152 Chinese, 154 Latinos, and 99 Anglos. Among them, 50.6% were female, and 21.2% were recruited through postcard invitations. Although Anglos constituted only 10% of the area's population, they were oversampled to provide a sufficient sample size for statistical analyses.

Each telephone interview lasted around 25 minutes and was administered in the respondent's preferred language (English, Mandarin, or Spanish). A $20 supermarket gift card or a donation of an equivalent amount to a charity of the respondent's choice was offered as an incentive for completing the interview.

Measures

Endogenous Variables. Items used to measure communication and civic engagement variables were adopted from published CIT research (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). The mean and standard deviation of all variables are shown in Table 11.1.

Neighborhood Belonging. An eight-item belonging index was used to measure respondents' subjective attachment to their neighborhood and their objective neighborly behaviors. For the four subjective items, respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree") how much they agreed with statements such as "You enjoy meeting and talking with your neighbors." For the four objective items, participants were asked to provide a number to questions such as, "How many of your neighbors do you know well enough to ask them to keep watch on your house or apartment?" Numerical responses to the objective items were recoded so they also had values of 1–5

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[2]Chinese is used to refer to the common written language for individuals living in different provinces in Mainland China and Taiwan, whereas Mandarin is used to refer to the official spoken language of China and Taiwan, which is distinct from dialects like Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka.

Table 11.1. Mean and Standard Deviation of All Exogenous and Endogenous Variables Among Anglo, Chinese, and Latino Respondents

Variable	Anglos (N = 99)		Chinese (N = 152)		Latinos (N = 154)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	64.15	18.35	55.88	16.84	52.04	15.78
Income	58,352.27	39,023.51	42,591.6	32,668.11	47,415.58	35,579.72
Education	4.95	1.53	4.15	1.81	3.68	1.60
Immigration generation	3.16	0.91	1.32	0.59	2.36	0.95
Language(s) spoken at home	2.69	0.63	1.52	0.65	2.25	0.64
Residential tenure	27.97	18.59	15.11	8.96	21.05	13.68
Interpersonal neighborhood storytelling	5.25[a]	2.78	3.65[ab]	2.35	5.12[b]	2.68
Connection to community organizations	0.95[c]	1.00	0.47[cd]	0.73	1.16[d]	1.17
Connection to geo-ethnic media	0.66[e]	0.54	1.12[ef]	0.81	0.71[f]	0.64
Neighborhood belonging	3.14[g]	0.75	2.77[gh]	0.78	3.15[h]	0.78
Collective efficacy	3.37	0.86	3.19[i]	0.83	3.56[i]	0.83
Civic participation	3.66[j]	2.06	2.00[j]	1.87	2.93[j]	2.27

Note. Means with the same superscript differ at *p* < .05.

(1 = "no neighbor," 2 = "one neighbor," 3 = "two neighbors," 4 = "three neighbors," 5 = "four or more neighbors"). An acceptable Cronbach's alpha of .80 was obtained for the neighborhood belonging index, and a composite variable was subsequently computed for each respondent by averaging his or her scores on the eight items.

Collective Efficacy. A seven-item collective efficacy index was used to measure respondents' perceptions about their neighbors' willingness to engage in collective problem solving. Taking into consideration that collective efficacy should be a task- and context-specific construct (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls 1997), the present index included five items developed by Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006b) to assess efficacy regarding some of the most common neighborhood problems, as well as two items to measure efficacy with regard to two problems identified as top community concerns by residents of the study area during prior focus group discussions. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (1 = "none" and 5 = "all") how many neighbors they feel they could count on to "do something" if there were dangerous potholes on the street where they live, if the fee for an overnight parking permit in the city was doubled to $120 per year, and so on. An acceptable Cronbach's alpha of .83 was obtained for the collective efficacy index, and a composite variable was subsequently computed for each respondent by averaging his or her scores on the seven items.

Civic Participation. A ten-item civic participation index was used to assess respondents' involvement in a range of political, civic, and voluntary activities. Going beyond items pertaining to local political participation, the present scale also included questions to assess participation in more general civic activities, such as "volunteering for a social cause or neighborhood initiative." In each question, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had engaged in the specified political, civic, or voluntary activity during the past two years (0 = "no" and 1 = "yes"). To assess whether the political and nonpolitical items represented the same underlying construct, factor analysis was conducted to rotate factors with an eigen value of at least 1.00 to an orthogonal solution using the Viramax method. A single factor was obtained (*eigen value* = 2.92), and scale reliability was subsequently computed for the ten civic participation items. After obtaining an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of .72 for the civic participation index, a composite variable was computed for each respondent by adding his or her scores on the ten items.

Interpersonal Neighborhood Storytelling. Respondents' intensity of interpersonal neighborhood storytelling was assessed through their response to the question, "How often do you have discussions with other people about things happening in your neighborhood?" The response was given on a ten-point scale (1 = "never" and 10 = "all the time").

Connection to Community Organizations. Respondents were asked to name up to two organizations in eight different categories (e.g., sport or recreational, cultural or ethnic, religious or church-based, etc.) to which they or someone in their household belonged. Furthermore, they were asked whether the organizations reported were located in the study area. Having a membership in each type of organization that was locally based was coded as "1," and affirmative responses to the eight organization categories were summed up to create a composite score for each respondent.

Connection to Geo-ethnic Media. Participants' scope of connection to geo-ethnic media was assessed in a two-step process. First, respondents were asked about their top two ways for staying on top of their community. If they identified television, radio, newspapers, or the Internet as one of the top two ways, they were asked whether the media outlets to which they connected were mainstream and commercial, publicly funded, or produced for their ethnic group or their residential area (i.e., "geo-ethnic"). Respondents whose top two ways for staying on top of their community did not include geo-ethnic media were coded as 0, those with one of the top two ways being geo-ethnic media were coded as 1, and respondents with both of the two ways being geo-ethnic media were coded as 2.

Exogenous Variables

Age. Respondents were asked to indicate the year in which they were born, and their age at the time of survey was calculated by subtracting their year of birth from 2010.

Income. Respondents were asked to choose from eight categories, ranging from "less than $15,000" to "$100,000 or more," their household income from the previous year. Income was then transformed into a ratio-level variable through mid-point assignment followed by a division by 1,000, with respondents earning $100,000 or more recoded as having an annual income of $125,000.

Education. Participants were asked to indicate the highest level of education they had received based on seven categories (1 = "middle school or less," 2 = "some high school," 3 = "high school graduate," 4 = "some college or technical school," 5 = "college graduate," 6 = "some graduate study," 7 = "graduate degree").

Residential Tenure. Respondents were asked to indicate how many years they had lived in the study area.

Immigration Generation. Immigration generation was assessed by asking respondents who in their family first came to the United States.

Individuals reporting themselves or their spouse, sibling, child, niece, or nephew were coded as 1 (i.e., first generation); those reporting their parents, aunt, or uncle were coded as 2 (i.e., second generation); respondents reporting their grandparents were coded as 3 (i.e., third generation); and those reporting their great grandparents or earlier were coded as 4 (i.e., fourth generation or more).

English Proficiency. Respondents were asked what language(s) are usually spoken in their home, and this information was used as a proxy measure for English proficiency. Respondents reporting speaking a language other than English only were coded as 1, those reporting speaking both English and another language were coded as 2, and individuals speaking English only were coded as 3.

Analysis

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to investigate the average level of connection to local storytelling mechanisms and civic engagement among different ethnic groups, with the significance level set at $p < .05$. In modeling civic engagement, the hypothesized relationships among the variables of interest are summarized in Figure 11.1. Based on Kim and Ball-Rokeach's (2006a) conceptualization, residential tenure, sociodemographic characteristics, and immigration-related variables are exogenous in the model, potentially shaping both connections to local communication mechanisms and the three dimensions of civic engagement.

Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006a) hypothesize neighborhood belonging to have an indirect effect on civic participation through collective efficacy as well as a direct effect. They suggest that belonging not only motivates neighborhood-oriented action (Ball-Rokeach, 2001), but "when residents have a high level of belonging . . . belonging will activate participation even more intensively when it leads to increasing collective efficacy" (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, p. 189). In contrast, based on established theory that links efficacy with behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), collective efficacy is hypothesized to have a direct effect on civic participation. Although under ideal circumstances, an integrated local storytelling network is represented by bidirectional paths between the communication variables, this scenario is rarely the case in reality (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a). Consequently, bidirectional paths among the communication variables are not included in the hypothesized model.

Data were first screened using PRELIS 2, and no variable was found to have a substantially skewed distribution. Consequently, LISREL 8.80
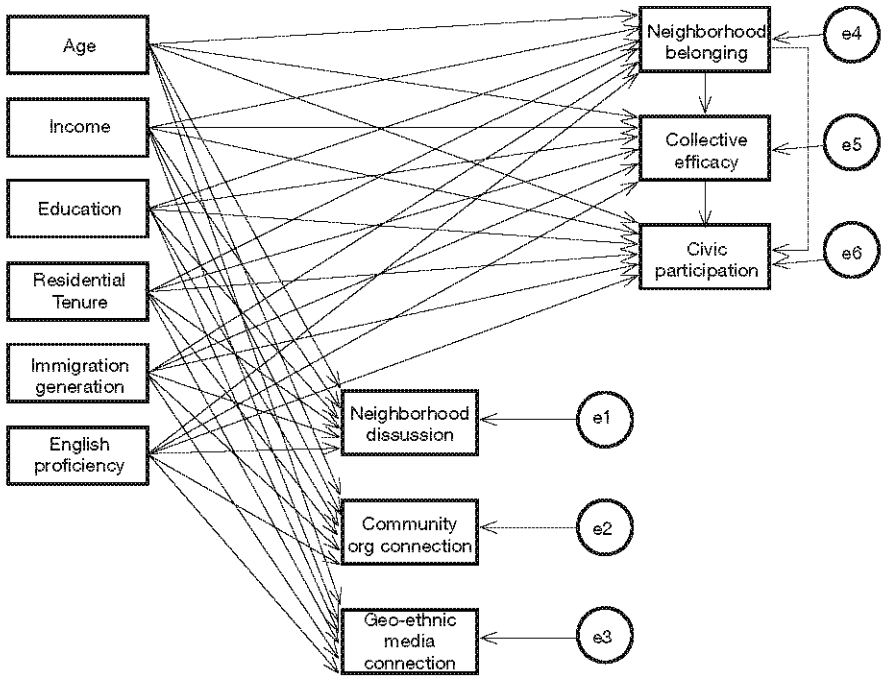
Figure 11.1. Hypothesized model.

was used to obtain separate estimates for each of the three subsamples. The goodness-of-fit of the hypothesized model to the observed data was assessed in three ways. First, the chi-square ($\chi2$) statistic was examined, and a χ^2 to degrees-of-freedom (df) ratio of 5 or smaller was considered a satisfactory model fit. Second, the comparative fit index (CFI), which compares the hypothesized model with a null model specifying no association between any of the variables, was examined. A CFI $\geq$ .90 suggests an acceptable fit. Last, the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), which reflects the average discrepancy between the observed and hypothesized correlations among the variables, was inspected. An SRMR $\leq$ .08 suggests a satisfactory fit.

In cases where any of these measures indicated a less than acceptable fit, the theoretical model was revised based on the modification indices. A modification was made when it was theoretically plausible, would result in a large reduction in chi-square, and was linked to a path coefficient

of considerable magnitude. The significance of individual parameters was assessed using t tests with the significance level set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

ANOVAs

RQ1 inquires whether residents of different ethnicities diverge in their levels of civic engagement and connection to local storytelling mechanisms. Results from one-way ANOVAs indicated that all global differences were significant. Consequently, the Games-Howell method, which assumes neither equal sample sizes nor equal variances across groups, was used to identify which ethnic groups differed from each other. These tests showed that Chinese scored significantly lower on all communication and civic engagement variables compared with the other ethnic groups. In contrast, no significant difference was found between Anglos and Latinos except in civic participation, where Latinos scored significantly lower (see Table 11.1).

Path Analyses

Modeling Civic Engagement among Chinese Residents. When the hypothesized model was fitted to the data, the CFI was high at .97, and the SRMR was low at .032. However, the χ^2/df was slightly higher than 5 (15.59/3), indicating a less-than-satisfactory fit. An examination of the modification indices suggested the need to add one path from geo-ethnic media connection to community organization connection, with the path coefficient being negative. This modification was in line with the argument that intense connection to ethnic media among new immigrants could have a negative impact on interest in local affairs and in socializing with diverse others. Although adding a path in the opposite direction or allowing the error term of these two variables to correlate would result in a reduction in χ^2 of the same magnitude, the chosen modification was more theoretically justifiable, and its resulting standardized path coefficient was larger in absolute value compared with path coefficients resulting from the other two potential modifications.

After adding the path from geo-ethnic media connection to community organization connection, all global fit indices became satisfactory (CFI = .99, SRMR = .021, χ^2/df = 4.57/2). An examination of the modification

indices suggested that no other modification would significantly improve the model fit. Thus, this revised model was estimated. Given that removing nonsignificant paths did not result in a considerably worse model fit or change the magnitude of the parameter estimates much, only significant paths, their standardized coefficients, and standard errors are presented in Figure 11.2.

H1, H2, and H5 were rejected because age, income, and English proficiency were not found to predict any of the civic engagement variables. H3 and H4 were partially supported, as education and immigration generation were both positively related to civic participation but not to belonging or collective efficacy. H6 was also partially supported because neighborhood discussion positively predicted neighborhood belonging and civic participation. RQ2 and RQ3 inquired whether civic engagement was predicted by community organization connection and geo-ethnic media connection. Community organization connection was found to be unrelated to any
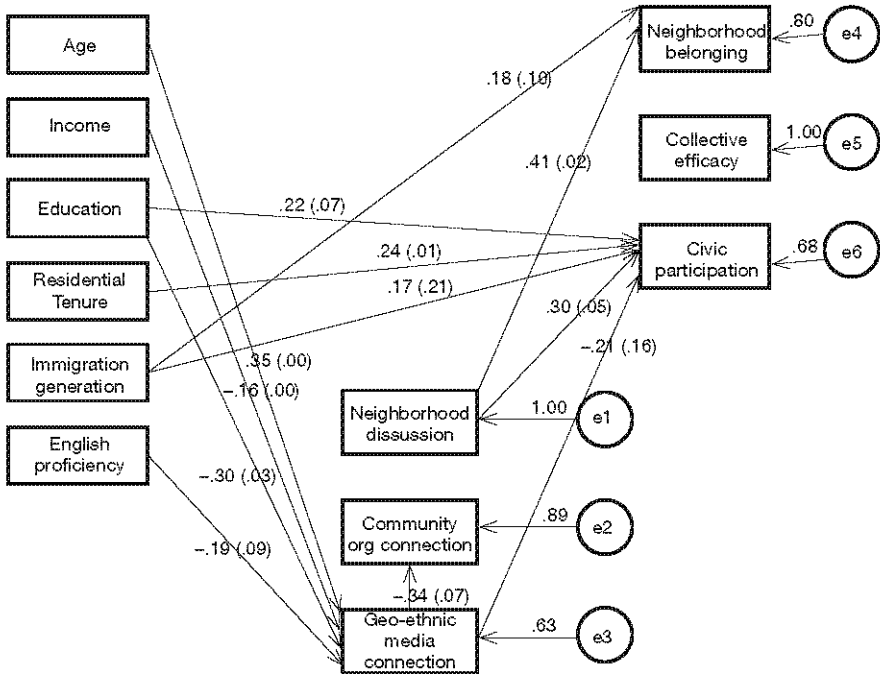

Figure 11.2. Paths to civic engagement among Chinese.

of the civic engagement dimensions, whereas geo-ethnic media connection negatively predicted neighborhood belonging and civic participation.

Modeling Civic Engagement among Latinos. When the hypothesized model was fitted to the data, the CFI was acceptable at .95, and the SRMR was low at .047. However, the χ^2/df was higher than 5 (20.74/3), indicating a less-than-satisfactory fit. An examination of the modification indices suggested the need to allow the error term of neighborhood discussion and community organization connection to correlate, with the correlation being positive. Although adding a directional path from neighborhood discussion to community organization connection or a path in the opposite direction would result in a reduction in χ^2 of the same magnitude, it was unclear which directional influence was more theoretically plausible and should be added first. More frequent neighborhood discussions might help individuals learn more about locally based community organizations and become involved in some of them. However, participation in community organizations might help individuals learn about local issues and motivate them to discuss those issues with others. There was also the possibility that neighborhood discussion and community organization connection were influenced by the same underlying constructs not accounted for by the hypothesized model, such as extrovert personality traits. Given those considerations, allowing the errors to correlate was the preferred modification over inserting a directional path into the model.

After allowing the error term of neighborhood discussion and community organization connection to correlate, all global fit indices became satisfactory (CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .010, χ^2/df = 1.09/2). An examination of the modification indices suggested that no other modification would significantly improve the model fit. Thus, this revised model was estimated. Given that removing nonsignificant paths did not result in a considerably worse model fit or change the magnitude of the parameter estimates much, only significant paths, their standardized coefficients, and standard errors are presented in Figure 11.3.

H1, H4, and H5 were rejected because age, immigration generation, and English proficiency were not found to predict any of the civic engagement variables. H2 and H3 were partially supported, as education and income were both positively related to civic participation. H6 was also partially supported because neighborhood discussion positively predicted neighborhood belonging and civic participation. RQ2 and RQ3 inquired whether civic engagement was predicted by community organization connection and geo-ethnic media connection. Community organization connection positively predicted neighborhood belonging and civic participation, whereas geo-ethnic media connection was not related to any of the civic engagement variables.
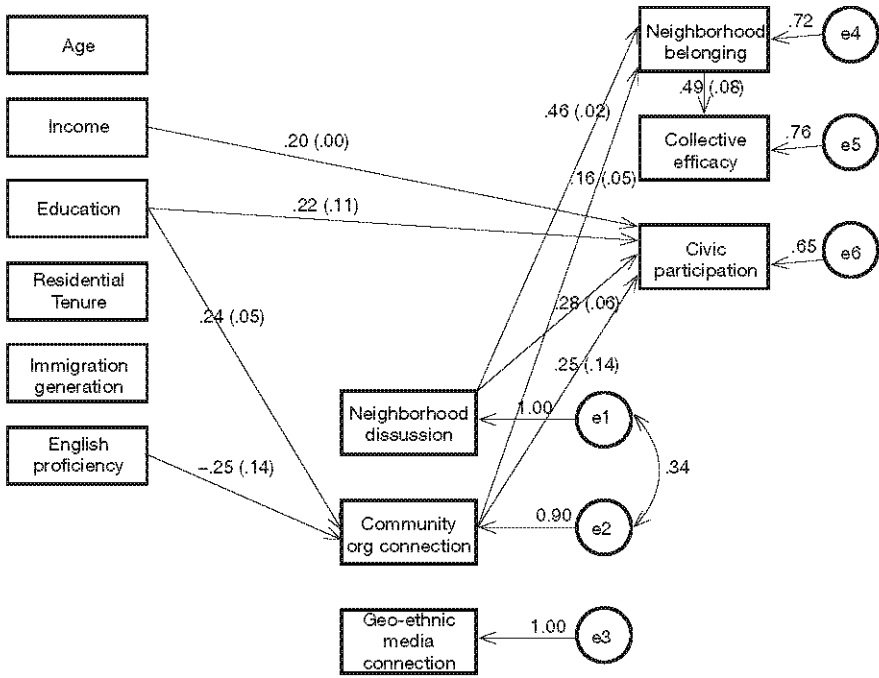
Figure 11.3. Paths to civic engagement among Latinos.

Modeling Civic Engagement among Anglos. When the hypothesized model was fitted to the data, all global fit indices were satisfactory (CFI = .97, SRMR = .034, χ^2/df = 8.90/3), and an examination of the modification indices suggested that no modification would significantly improve the model fit. Therefore, the hypothesized model was estimated. Figure 11.4 shows only significant paths, their standardized coefficients, and standard errors in the model. Even though removing the nonsignificant paths did not change the magnitude of the parameter estimates much, it did result in a considerably worse global fit (CFI = .89, SRMR = .090, χ^2/df = 61.53/41), possibly due to the relatively small sample size (N = 99). Consequently, the parameters estimates for the Anglo sample need to be interpreted with more caution.

H1, H3, H4, and H5 were rejected because age, income, immigration generation, and English proficiency were not found to predict any of the civic engagement variables. H2 was partially supported, as education was positively related to civic participation. H6 was also partially
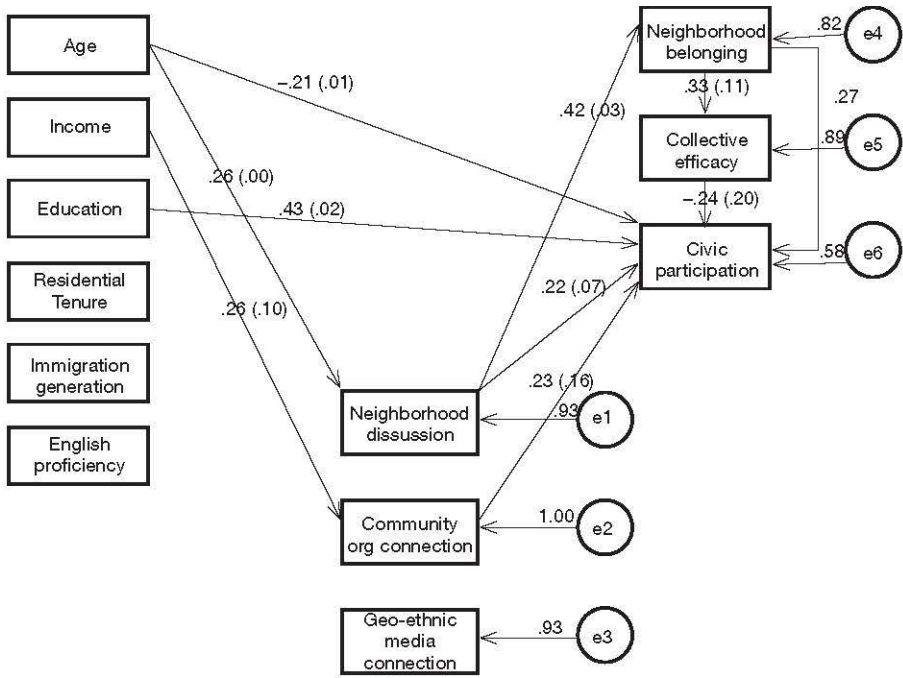
Figure 11.4. Paths to civic engagement among Anglos.

supported because neighborhood discussion positively predicted neighborhood belonging and civic participation. RQ2 and RQ3 inquired whether civic engagement was predicted by community organization connection and geo-ethnic media connection. Community organization connection positively predicted civic participation, whereas geo-ethnic media connection was not related to any of the civic engagement variables.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter investigated civic engagement patterns among individuals of different ethnicities co-inhabiting the same incorporated city and the forces shaping these patterns. Contrary to previous research findings on minorities' lower levels of civic engagement, Anglo and Latino residents in the researched neighborhood did not differ on neighborhood belonging and collective efficacy levels, even though Anglos remained more active

participants in civic activities. In contrast, the Chinese residents scored significantly lower on all three dimensions of civic engagement compared with Anglos and Latinos.

When examining the paths to civic engagement in each ethnic group, the only consistent associations observed across groups were the positive influence of neighborhood discussion and education over civic participation, as well as the positive effect of neighborhood discussion on belonging.

Among Chinese, individuals reporting higher levels of neighborhood belonging on average had a longer immigration history. Those with higher civic participation levels tended to have a longer immigration history and residential tenure, but they reported a weaker connection to geo-ethnic media for local news and information. The positive effect of immigration generation on belonging and civic participation supports the argument that for newer immigrants, the process of socialization into American civic norms and the development of local attachment might take some years to achieve. Although these same positive effects were not observed among Latinos, this finding could be explained by the fact that Latino residents in the study area on average have a longer immigration history compared with Chinese. Consequently, Latino residents might have already undergone substantial civic socialization and developed considerable local attachment.

In contrast, the negative effect of connection to geo-ethnic media on civic participation among Chinese could be accounted for by the fact that Chinese residents mostly connected to ethnically oriented rather than geographically oriented media for local news and information. In fact, research participants who identified geo-ethnic newspapers as one of their top two ways for staying informed about their community were asked to name up to two newspapers to which they connected for local news. Among the Chinese respondents, more than two thirds named one of the two large-scale Chinese-language newspapers owned by overseas parent companies. On the other hand, the most frequently mentioned newspaper by the Latino and Anglo respondents were the same English-language newspaper published monthly by the Chamber of Commerce in the study area. Given previous research findings on the tendency of Los Angeles-based ethnic Chinese media to shift the audiences' gaze away from local affairs to state, national, international, or home country news (Lin & Song, 2006), it is not surprising that Chinese respondents' largely "ethnic" rather than "geo-" media connection negatively affected civic participation. It is also not surprising that Latinos' and Anglos' connection to the Chamber newspaper did not have any impact on civic engagement, as the content of this publication tends to be promotional of local businesses and

personalities and does not include critical coverage of local issues (Chen et al., 2012). In other words, it appears that the "geo-ethnic" media to which the respondents connected do not engage in much local storytelling that facilitates civic engagement. This finding is unfortunate given geo-ethnic media's potential to raise awareness about local issues, motivate neighborhood discussion about these issues, and connect individuals to organizational resources in their area that can be utilized in community problem solving (Matsaganis et al., 2011). The challenge, then, is for policymakers or local institutions to find ways to encourage existing local and ethnic media outlets to engage in more local storytelling and critical coverage. Residents or community organizations can also capitalize on the lower barriers to entry of new media and create their own local news platforms to facilitate engagement.

Among Latinos, individuals participating in more locally based community organizations on average had higher levels of neighborhood belonging. Those reporting higher levels of civic participation also tended to participate in more locally based community organizations, be wealthier, and have a stronger sense of neighborhood belonging. The positive effect of connection to community organizations on belonging and civic participation supports the argument that participation in community organizations provides individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, motivations, and beliefs to engage civically. It is worth noting that Latinos with lower English proficiency were connected to more community organizations in the study area. This finding could be partially explained by the large number of connections to churches and religious organizations reported by Latinos. The ready availability of Spanish-language services makes churches a nonintimidating environment for those not fluent in English to socialize with others and participate in various activities. Consequently, efforts to promote civic engagement among Latinos, especially those confronting linguistic barriers, would do well by reaching out to and collaborating with churches and other community organizations.

Among Anglos, individuals reporting higher levels of civic participation tended to be younger and participate in more locally based community organizations. They also reported a stronger sense of neighborhood belonging but a lower sense of collective efficacy. The negative effect of age on civic participation is not surprising given that Anglo respondents were considerably older than Chinese and Latinos, with the average age for Anglo respondents being 64.15 years. Research has suggested that the positive relationship between age and civic participation in adulthood tends to reverse among the very elderly due to their reduced mobility (Uhlaner et al., 1989), and this finding could well be the case with many Anglo residents in the study area. Another curious observation pertains

to the negative impact of collective efficacy on civic participation. One possible explanation is that Anglo residents feel efficacious but are nonetheless resistant toward participating with "newcomers" who are displacing them. Of course, interviews with Anglos in the study area need to be conducted in the future to identify the actual reasons behind this negative relationship, and it also needs to be further tested out in other communities where the old timers are being replaced by newcomers.

Overall, it seemed that local storytelling mechanisms in the study area functioned separately rather than in an integrated fashion. The only exception was the positive association between the frequency of neighborhood discussion and the intensity of participation in locally based community organizations among Latinos. Taken together with the findings on the different types of geo-ethnic media to which residents of different ethnicities connected, the local storytelling telling networks in the study area appeared to be both ethnically bounded and fragmented within each ethnic group. These patterns could well be observed in other multiethnic communities, and such patterns are detrimental to the end of civic engagement according to research. However, unlike sociodemographic factors that are not malleable to change, the present study and other research (Chen et al., 2012) have outlined a number of strategies to connect various local storytelling agents and bridge the ethnically bound storytelling networks.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated the utility and necessity of scaling down from national or state-level analyses to community-level studies in order to obtain a contextualized understanding of how ethnicity shapes civic engagement and its driving forces in a particular geographical community. This type of understanding is more relevant and useful for developing policy recommendations or interventions that would work with the existing communication infrastructure and contextual factors in a particular area to facilitate civic engagement. The declining trend in civic engagement might just start to turn if more scholars, policymakers, and other stakeholders engage in this type of geographically and ethnically sensitive investigation into the civic health of local communities.

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