

**Attachments, Grievances, Resources, and Efficacy: The Determinants of Tenant
Association Participation Among Public Housing Tenants***

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ABSTRACT: This study uses data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality to examine variation in tenant association participation among public housing tenants in Boston and Los Angeles. Using logistic regression models we estimate the net effects of four sets of factors on the likelihood that a tenant has attended tenant association meetings: neighborhood attachments, grievances, resources and constraints, and feelings of efficacy. Results show that net of other factors, participation is greater among attached tenants who have resided in public housing longer and who have social ties to other people. Grievances also increase participation, but they do so indirectly by increasing people's tendency to be more involved in their communities. With the exception of education's positive effect, resources and constraints are not important determinants of participation. Education and efficacy act like enablers increasing people's ability to be involved in their communities. The implications of the findings for research and community organizing are explored by examining how three mechanisms account for the findings.

There is a large and burgeoning body of literature on the causes and consequences of civic participation in America (Cunningham & Kotler, 1983; Fukuyama, 1995; Hipp, 2002; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Murphy & Cunningham, 2003; Olsen, Perlstadt, Fonseca, & Hogan, 1989; Putnam, 2000, 2002; Rankin & Quane, 2000; Small, 2002; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wuthnow, 1998). One focus in this literature has been on participation in neighborhood associations. This study attempts to extend our understanding of neighborhood association participation by looking at a type of participation within an important and often ignored subpopulation—public housing residents. Drawing from the literature on civic participation and collective action we identify four sets of factors that could account for variation among public housing tenants in their participation in tenant associations: neighborhood attachments, grievances, resources and constraints, and efficacy. We extend prior research by looking not only at which factors account for variation in tenant association participation but also how specific factors affect such participation. Using data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI) collected in the early 1990s, we test our theoretically informed expectations about the importance of these factors.

By focusing on participation of public housing tenants, we hope not only to extend our understanding of civic participation and the social organization of high-poverty urban neighborhoods but also to contribute to debates about policy initiatives that emphasize tenant participation as a key element of public housing management. Given that tenant participation is viewed from a policy perspective as important and beneficial in financial and social terms, and that from a practical standpoint is more difficult to do than often assumed (Conway, 2001, 2003; Hula & Hall, 1994; Koebel & Cavell, 1995; Knox, Kolton, & Dwarshuis, 1974; Peterman, 1996), it is important to increase our

understanding of its variation. Knowledge of the factors that predict participation in tenant associations is an initial first step in helping public housing staff and community agencies design and implement better policies that target socially isolated tenants, the so-called *hard core poor* who might not normally participate nor be recruited to participate in the first place (Feldman & Stall, 2004; Kingston, Mitchell, Florin, & Stevenson, 1999; Kramer, 1967, 1969; Reingold, 1997; Reingold, Van Ryzin, & Ronda, 2001; Venkatesh, 1997).

DETERMINANTS OF PARTICIPATION

There are many causes of tenant association participation among public housing tenants. Based upon our review of the literature on public housing and more general work on civic participation and collective action, we focus this study on four sets of factors that we think could cause variation in participation: neighborhood attachments, grievances, resources and constraints, and efficacy. Our interest, however, is not just in whether these factors are important determinants of tenant association participation, but also how they affect such participation. We believe that there are three important mechanisms through which a factor can affect tenant association participation. First, a factor may increase or decrease a person's ability to be involved in their community. For various reasons, some people are more involved in a variety of civic organizations and, as a result are more likely to be involved in their tenant association. We refer to this mechanism as the *global participation mechanism*. Second, a factor may not affect overall participation in civic organizations but only participation in specific types such as tenant associations. As discussed below, we expect these factors will pertain more to the specific domain of the tenant association. We will refer to this mechanism as the *local*

participation mechanism. Together these two mechanisms imply that there is often a two-step process leading to participation in particular civic organizations like tenant organizations. First, various factors increase the likelihood that an individual will get involved in some civic organization. Then possibly other factors affect the probability that an individual will get involved in a specific organization such as their tenant association. For example, those with more grievances may be more likely to get involved in their community in a variety of ways in order to address their grievances, while neighborhood attachment through social ties and longevity may increase the odds of getting involved in their tenant or neighborhood association.

The third mechanism highlights the importance of social ties. As discussed below, past research has found that social ties to other people are an important determinant of civic participation. Because of the centrality of social ties and networks for participation, we expect that other factors could impact tenant association participation through their association with social ties. We refer to this mechanism as the *social network mechanism.*

In what follows we discuss each of the four sets of determinants of tenant association participation and which mechanisms we think are responsible for the anticipated effects.

Neighborhood Attachment

A number of scholars have emphasized the importance of attachments to others through social ties as a determinant of participation (Ahlbrandt & Cunningham, 1979; Granovetter, 1985; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Oliver, 1984; Smith, 1994) though the actual reasons why social ties affect participation are debated. Different studies lead to different conclusions about the importance of ties in predicting civic participation. The

standard argument is that social ties increase participation because the more people someone knows, the more likely they are to know someone who participates in a civic organization and, therefore, the more likely they are to be asked by those people to participate (Ahlbrandt & Cunningham, 1979; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Smith, 1994; Wilson & Musick, 1997).

We also know from previous studies that the number of social ties an individual has is related to how long they have resided in a particular locale (Rankin & Quane, 2000). Because the development of social ties is a time-intensive activity, those who have been residents for a longer period of time should have more ties, and conversely, newer residents would be expected to have fewer social ties. In turn, people who are long-term residents are more likely to participate in a neighborhood organization because they have more of an investment in and attachment to their neighborhood, increasing the likelihood that they will be aware of opportunities for community participation (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Rankin & Quane, 2000; Rohe & Stegman, 1994; Sampson, 1988). On the other hand, in neighborhoods with high population turnover and weak levels of attachment, it is more difficult for tenants to become acquainted with others and to develop friendship networks through which information about community participation can flow (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Reingold (1995) found a positive association between civic participation and social networks in his study of community participation in Chicago public housing. He found that civic participation is influenced by how many people one knows in one's neighborhood and this depends in part on whether or not one has children. Olsen, Perlstadt, Fonseca, and Hogan's (1989) study in Lansing, Michigan, found that their measures of neighborhood attachment, including having ties to other people in one's

neighborhood and length of residency, were positively associated with neighborhood association participation.

Some research suggests that the location of one's ties is an important factor to consider. Orepesa (1992), for instance, found that people with friends both in and outside of one's neighborhood are more likely to participate in neighborhood improvement associations than residents with few local social ties. He also found that the effect of length of residency on participation in neighborhood improvement associations is not always linear—for residents that had lived up to six years in the neighborhood it had a positive effect but for residents who had lived six years or more in the neighborhood, they were less likely to participate than more recent tenants.

Finally, though Oliver (1984) does not look at the determinants of participation, her analysis of the factors that differentiate token from active participants in neighborhood organizations indicates that social ties are important. She found that active participants have more neighborhood-based social ties and more education. In addition, activists seem to participate more because they believe that other people are unlikely to do so.

Based on prior research we expect that both social ties and length of residence will be positively related to tenant association participation, though we also expect that the way in which social ties and longevity affect participation will vary. As past research has shown, it is important to distinguish between people who have more social ties in general and people who have social ties to those in their neighborhood. Both local ties to people in one's neighborhood and length of residence should affect tenant association participation through the local participation mechanism. Of all the factors that we look at, these two factors are most related to the domain in which tenant associations operate—

the local neighborhood and those who reside within it. Local ties increase a person's exposure to people who are likely to recruit them into the tenant association. Longevity increases attachment to a place, awareness of opportunities to participate, and interests in issues related to the local community.

On the other hand, the global participation mechanism should account for the effect of the overall number of social ties on tenant association participation. People with larger social networks are more likely to be involved citizens and because of their greater tendency to get involved, more likely to participate in their tenant association. Therefore, we expect:

H1: Persons with social ties to neighbors will be more likely to participate in their tenant association than those without ties to neighbors. This effect of neighborhood ties should persist even after controlling for variation among people in their overall tendency to participate in civic organizations.

H2: The more social ties a person has the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. However, after controlling for variation in the tendency to participate in civic organizations, the net effect of social ties should be substantially reduced. This is because we expect that social ties affect tenant association participation through their effect on global participation.

H3: The longer a person has lived at his or her current residence the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. This effect of longevity should persist even after controlling for variation among people in their overall tendency to participate in civic organizations.

Grievances

One important reason why people participate in tenant associations and more generally in collective actions is because they have grievances (Oropesa, 1992; Taube & Levin, 1971; Tilly, 1978; Venkatesh, 2000). A grievance exists when a person or group perceives their current situation or social conditions to be at odds with their expectations or with the values of their society. One way people can reduce the gap between

expectations and reality is by participating in civic organizations like neighborhood associations. Grievances are typically directed towards a delimited target such as a governmental agency and often stem from some incident or threat (Opp, 1988).

Prior research has found that grievances are not as important as one would think. Olsen et al. (1989) in their study of neighborhood associations looked at the relative importance of neighborhood cohesion, community satisfaction, perceived neighborhood problems, perceived effectiveness of neighborhood organizations, perceived community problems, participation in political organizations, and demographic characteristics in predicting neighborhood association participation. They found that variation in most grievances about neighborhood problems were not associated with neighborhood association participation and those that were, were only weakly associated with it (Olsen et al., 1989).

It is also possible that the effect of grievances on participation is the result of other factors. For example, Rohe and Stegman (1994) found that grievances about neighborhood problems are positively related to developing ties with one's neighbors. The more one knows one's neighbors the more likely one is to become aware of neighborhood problems and to participate in neighborhood organizations.

The limited importance of grievances in past research may be due to complex ways in which grievances are related to participation. We suspect that three mechanisms are at work. First, complaints about local problems such as neighborhood upkeep and safety should lead to participation in neighborhood or tenant associations (the local participation mechanism). Second, the accumulation of a wide range of grievances about such things as schools and bank lending should lead people to be more active in civic organizations within the larger community. In turn, that community activism should

increase the odds of them participating in their local tenant association (the global participation mechanism).

Finally, the network mechanism is likely to be important because of the association of networks (and longevity) with grievances. Those who have been around longer may be more aware of problems. Contacts with others may amplify grievances, and grievances may lead people to have more social ties as they come into contact with others who share their grievances. As such the effects of grievances on civic participation may be in part a social network effect. Either grievances affect participation by increasing social ties or the association of grievances with participation is the result of both grievances and participation increasing with more social ties (and length of residency).

As such we have three hypotheses concerning grievances:

H4: The more *local* grievances a person has, the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. This effect of local grievances should persist even after controlling for variation among people in their tendency to participate in civic organizations.

H5: The more grievances a person has, the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. However, after controlling for variation in the tendency to participate in civic organizations, the net effect of the accumulation of grievances should be substantially reduced. This is because we expect that grievances affect tenant association participation through their effect on global participation.

H6: The more grievances a person has, the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. However, after controlling for variation among people in their social ties and length of residence, the net effect of the accumulation of grievances should be substantially reduced. This is because we expect that (a) grievance levels are positively related to both social ties and length of residence, and (b) both social ties and length of residence should have a positive effect on tenant association participation (H2 and H3).

Resources and Constraints

Even if people have grievances, they still might not participate unless they have some resources that enable them to participate and they are not constrained by their job, family responsibilities, or physical mobility problems. Past research has shown that the “biographical availability” related to such things as a person’s employment status, marital status, and family responsibilities can affect participation (McAdam, 1986).

Turning first to resources, the key resources that can influence tenant association participation are education, time, and money. Education is an important resource because it purportedly supplies people with various skills and knowledge such as knowing the “rules of the game” and how to deal with public officials (Lawless & Fox, 2001; Oliver, 1984; Rice & Steele, 2001; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Without these skills and knowledge the costs of participation are higher for people with low levels of education (Oliver, 1984; Tjerandsen, 1980). Because civic participation is a time-intensive activity, the more time someone has the more likely they are to participate in civic organizations. The amount of discretionary time available to someone for civic engagement is a function of two opportunity costs: how much they work and how many children they have (Oliver, 1984; Putnam, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Finally, many organizations depend on the dues and contributions from their members. If tenants feel that they are obligated to contribute money in order to participate in a tenant association, those with less monetary resources should be less likely to participate.

Turning to constraints, we expect that physical mobility problems constrain civic participation. Children can be a constraint to the extent that they impose childcare responsibilities that make it more difficult for people to devote their time and energy to

community organizations. Those with fewer or no children or children of older ages are, conversely, more likely to participate (McAdam, 1996; Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991).

Olsen et al. (1989) found that the one of the most important predictors of neighborhood association participation is what they call *socioeconomic statuses* and what we term resources, such as home ownership, household income, occupational status, and education. Perkins, Brown, and Taylor (1996) also found that resources such as income are positively related to civic participation. Reingold's (1995) study found that households with children were more and not less likely to participate in civic organizations. This effect is explained in terms of the social ties parents develop with other parents through contact with local institutions such as schools and childcare providers.

Though most prior studies find that resources increase and constraints decrease participation, Lawless and Fox's (2001) study found that constraints might lead to participation among the poor. We suspect that their findings could be indicative of a grievance effect instead of a resource or constraint effect. Net of the grievances that those with less resources are likely to have, we expect that lack of resources will inhibit and not facilitate participation.

Overall, we expect that such resources as education, income, and time (resulting from not working full-time) will have a positive effect on tenant association participation. In contrast, constraints such as disabilities, old age, and caring for children should decrease participation. The central mechanism at work, we believe, is the global participation mechanism. Resources increase a person's overall potential to be involved in a variety of civic organizations, while constraints inhibit that capacity. Because those with resources are more participatory, they are more likely to participate in their tenant

association, while those with more constraints are less likely to be involved in their tenant association because they are constrained in their ability to participate in anything. As such we hypothesize that:

H7: The more resources a person has, the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. However, after controlling for variation among people in their tendency to participate in civic organizations, the net effects of resources should be substantially reduced. This is because we expect that resources affect tenant association participation primarily through their effects on global participation.

H8: The more constraints a person has, the less likely they are to participate in their tenant association. However, after controlling for variation in the tendency to participate in civic organizations, the net effects of constraints should be substantially reduced. This is because we expect that constraints affect tenant association participation primarily through their effects on global participation.

Resources and constraints may not just reflect availability and ability; they may also be related to social networks. This may explain the contradictory findings concerning the presence of children. On one hand, children, especially younger children, are a constraint because time must be devoted to their care. On the other hand, people with children are more likely to have social ties to others, especially parents of their children's friends (Reingold, 1995). Because such local social networks can serve as recruiting mechanisms, the presence of children could have a positive effect on tenant association participation. As such we expect:

H9: Controlling for the expected lower levels of global participation among those with children, those with children should be more likely to participate in their tenant association. This net positive effect of children on participation should, however, be substantially reduced when we control for social ties. This is because we expect that the presence of children also affects tenant association through the social network mechanism.

Efficacy

Efficacy is a state of mind or feeling that a person has about their ability to stand up for their rights and influence important outcomes in their life (Boardman & Robert, 2000; Nolan & Whelan, 2000; Ross, Mirowsky & Pribesh, 2001; Smith, 1994; Tjerandsen, 1980). Efficacy is higher when people believe that through their own actions they can influence things (internal efficacy) and/or that the system is amenable to change and outside influence (external efficacy) (Craig, 1979; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). People with low levels of efficacy are less likely to think that what they do is going to make a difference and, therefore, they are less likely to participate in associations (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993).

Very few studies have directly examined the effect of efficacy on participation. Perkins, Brown, and Taylor (1996) found that efficacy is positively related to participation in community organizations in the three metropolitan cities included in their study. However, most studies look at political activism and the extent to which poor people are more or less politically active, assuming that activism indicates that people feel that they can, through their actions, change things.

The standard view in much of the literature on poor people is that they are less political active and appear apathetic because they have more pressing problems given their lack of material resources, the social disorganization of poor neighborhoods, and their concern for their basic survival needs (O'Brien, 1974). O'Brien, however, takes issue with this line of argument by claiming, using a rational choice theoretical perspective, that the reason the poor are less politically active is not because they are apathetic but because poor neighborhoods tend to fall victim to a public goods dilemma.

In such neighborhoods there are limited incentives that can induce poor people to participate and to overcome the free rider problem. According to O'Brien it is this public goods problem, which is poorly understood by those who would wish to increase poor people's participation, and not low levels of efficacy that explains the low level of neighborhood association participation among the poor.

Lawless and Fox (2001) found that among the poor, contact with government or street-level officials such as social service workers and police officers is as important as resources and constraints in explaining their political participation (whether they will vote or engage in protest activity) and levels of efficacy. Different encounters with different public officials have different political outcomes. For instance, negative experiences with some front-line public servants such as social service workers leads to lower levels of political participation while negative interactions with other public officials such as police officers can lead to higher levels of political participation. Lawless and Fox argue that this may be due to varying expectations among the poor about different types of government officials.

Part of the difficulty in disentangling the relationship between poverty, efficacy, and political participation may be due to contextual effects. Boardman and Robert (2000), using hierarchical linear modeling techniques, find that living in a neighborhood with high levels of unemployment and dependency on public assistance negatively affects people's sense of efficacy independently of their own socio-economic status. This negative neighborhood effect on efficacy may be the consequence of higher levels of social isolation found in poorer neighborhoods in which people are less likely to live with another adult who is employed or college-educated (Tigges, Browne, & Green, 1998).

Though neighborhood effects on efficacy probably exist, our focus is on people who all reside in public housing, that is, in neighborhoods that have high levels of unemployment and welfare dependency. Within this population we expect that, controlling for individual resource levels, those with a stronger sense of efficacy will be more likely to participate in their tenant association. We expect efficacy will increase participation because of the global participation mechanism. Like with resources, people with higher levels of efficacy are more likely to participate in a variety of civic organizations and not just in their neighborhood or tenant association. We, therefore, hypothesize:

H10: The higher a person's sense of efficacy, the more likely they are to participate in their tenant association. However, after controlling for variation among people in their tendency to participate in civic organizations, the net effect of efficacy should be substantially reduced. This is because we expect that efficacy affects tenant association participation primarily through its effect on global participation.

DATA AND METHODS

To assess which of these possible determinants of participation among public housing tenants are important and why, we use data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI), a multistage stratified, clustered-area probability sample of 8916 households conducted in four major metropolitan cities—Detroit, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Boston between 1992 to 1994. For the purposes of this analysis we only use data from Los Angeles and Boston because important questions were omitted in Detroit and Atlanta. Detroit respondents were not asked whether they lived in public housing at the time the study was carried out and Atlanta respondents were not asked about their participation in various community organizations. So the analysis is restricted to the 648 respondents who reported that they currently lived in public housing in Boston ($N = 453$)

and Los Angeles ($N = 195$). The between-city difference in the sample sizes is the result of the fact that the public housing stock in Boston (over 8,000 units) is twice that of Los Angeles.

Because the MCSUI employed a complex sampling design we weighted the data. For descriptive statistics we use individual expansion weights that yield estimates of the population totals for adults subject to corrections for non-response and deviations from the relative race/ethnicity distributions given in the 1990 Census. When estimating the standard errors of our models' parameters, we take into account design effects resulting from cluster sampling by estimating robust standard errors using the cluster option available in STATA.

Civic Participation

Respondents were asked the following: "Now we would like to know something about the groups and organizations to which you belong. I will read a list of different types of organizations, please tell me if you attended one or more of their meetings in the last twelve months." The list of organizations included neighborhood, tenant's group or block associations; PTA or school related groups; social clubs or sports teams; political organizations; church-related groups; and ethnic or cultural organizations.

Two variables were constructed from these indicators of participation. The first variable is our primary dependent variable, a measure of participation in tenant organizations. It is coded *1* if a respondent attended a neighborhood, tenant group, or block association meeting during the past 12 months. Therefore, for the purposes of this

¹ Los Angeles respondents were also asked about participation in business or professional organizations, but because Boston respondents were not asked about this form of participation we do not incorporate it into our participation measures.

study, tenant association participation is operationally defined as attendance at a meeting of a tenant organization in the last year. It would be useful to know more about levels of participation other than mere attendance such as whether or not tenants actively participate by taking on a committee or leadership role (Arnstein, 1969; Murphy & Cunningham, 2003). Unfortunately these data only contain information on meeting attendance. Nevertheless, we believe that this variable captures differences in this population between non-participants and participates. As noted in Table 1, 18% of public housing tenants reported attending at least one such meeting in the last year.

[Table 1 About Here]

The second measure of participation is constructed in order to control for variation within this population in the overall tendency to participate in community organizations. As noted earlier, one mechanism through which a factor could affect tenant association participation is by that factor affecting global participation. Our measure of global participation is constructed from the five additional participation items concerning respondents' attendance at meetings of social/sports clubs, political organizations, ethnic/cultural associations, church-related groups, and school-related organizations. This measure indicates the *proportion* of the five areas in which the respondent participated. In this sample, respondents participated in about 15% of the

² For the purposes of this paper the terms “tenant association,” “neighborhood association” and “block association” are used synonymously. A tenant association is an organization whose members are tenants who rent their dwellings and reside in a delimited geographical area. Typically the potential members of a tenant association all have the same landlord. Such associations seek to promote the social and physical well being of their living place through the holding of tenant meetings. Neighborhood and block associations are organizations whose members can include a mixture of homeowners and renters (tenants).

organizations that they reported information about, which equates to participation on average in about .75 associations.

Global participation and tenant association participation are linked. We view global participation as an indicator of participatory types of people. We expect that such participatory types will be more likely to participate in their tenant associations. This is why in our models global participation levels are hypothesized to be an important mediating factor.

Grievances

Whether or not people participate in tenant associations depends on how they perceive their neighborhood as a place to live. People vary in the extent to which they perceive that there are neighborhood problems. We assume that those who perceive more problems are more aggrieved about the situation in which they live. In our study information on grievances comes from two questions. In the first set, respondents were asked about their views on the quality of four city services: police protection, public schools, neighborhood shopping, and banks and lending institutions. In the second set, respondents were asked about the neighborhood problems having to do with three items: city services (street cleaning, refuse collection, etc.), housing and property upkeep, and crime and vandalism. We recorded all items so that higher scores indicate that a person was more upset about the service or situation. Then we took the average of the seven item scores (which range from 0 to 3) in order to create a continuous overall grievance

³ Initially we examined whether participation in specific types of community organizations affects participation in tenant organizations, but the effects for each of the five types of organizations were small and insignificant. However when we compute our summary measure of the overall extent of participation we find that it is significantly related to participation in tenant organizations, as we expected.

measure. We also created a local grievance measure, which is the average of the three residential grievances: housing upkeep, crime, and city services (such as garbage collection and road maintenance).

Resources and Constraints

Constraints/resources is a latent variable with four indicators: presence or absence of children in a household, work status, education, and per capita household income. Present work status has six categories: working full-time, working part-time, retired, disabled, out of labor force, and unemployed. In the regressions, working full-time is the reference category. Education has three categories: no high school or GED, high school or GED, and some college education. No high school or GED is the omitted category. Per capita household income is a continuous variable measured in dollars. By dividing actual household income by household size, per capita household income better captures

⁴ Technically we took the average of those items that did not have missing data. If a respondent had missing data on 4 or more the items they received a missing data value on our grievance measure.

⁵ We also had another “resource” variable in our model – whether a person received welfare benefits. However because receipt of welfare receipt is collinear with per capita household income, we omitted this variable from our models.

⁶ Household income was originally coded as a categorical variable in this data set. We recoded it into a continuous variable using the mid-point of each income range in order to make it more meaningful to interpret. For the 38 cases with missing income data we used mean substitution. We then divided household income by household size to compute per capita household income. In so doing we are controlling for household size and using an income measure that better.

the resources a household member has that can be used for non-family related items. A dummy variable is used to indicate the presence or absence of children in a household.

Thirty-eight percent of our sample does not have a high school degree or its equivalent, while 44% have completed high school, and only about 17% have gone on to obtain more education after high school. The mean per capita household income of respondents is approximately \$7,500. In terms of present work status, 19% of the tenants indicate they are working full-time, 7% are working part-time, 20% are unemployed, 24% are retired, 13% are disabled, and 16% are not in the labor force. Forty-one percent of tenants have children living at home with them.

In our analysis, per capital household income and education are viewed as resources. Three categories of work status (working part-time, unemployed, and out of the labor force--in contrast to working full-time) are viewed as resources because we suspect that people in these categories have more disposable time. Two of the work status categories, retired and disabled, are viewed as constraints. Disabilities constrain physical mobility and, therefore, the ability of people to go to meetings and other activities. Retirement, though it increases discretionary time, is viewed as a constraint because retired people are older and, therefore, on average less physically able to attend meetings. Finally, as discussed earlier, the presence of children is primarily a constraint. However, because of the social network mechanism, children could both increase and decrease participation.

⁷ Initially we used a continuous variable indicating the total number of children in the respondent's household but the results indicated that it is the presence and not the number of children that is important.

Neighborhood Attachment

Neighborhood attachment is a latent variable with two indicators: length of residency and social ties. The length of residency variable is measured as the length of time the respondent has lived at their current address in continuous months. Values on this variable range from one month to 35 years with a weighted mean of 74 months, a little over six years. The social ties variables are operationalized from a question that respondents were asked about the people with whom they discussed important matters and from a question which asked them whether each of the people they named lived in their neighborhood. From this information we constructed two social tie variables. The first counts the total number of social ties ranging from 0 to 3. Public housing tenants

⁸ This variable is constructed from a question that asked respondents about how long they lived at their current address. Respondents were asked to specify this in months and/or in years. Alternatively, respondents could reply “all my life.” In the case of the six respondents that did so, eighteen was subtracted from their age to compute the length of time they had lived in public housing and were eligible to participate in a tenant association.

⁹ Respondents were asked “who are the people, other than people living in your household, with who you discussed matter important to you?” If they names fewer than three people they were asked if there was anyone else. For the purposes of this paper the size of their social network is the number of people that they named in answer to this question.

¹⁰ Because 68 Boston respondents over the age of 65 were not asked about their social ties, we gave them the mean number of ties held by those aged 65 and over in the Los Angeles sample. The assumption is that the mean network size by age category does not vary between Boston and Los Angeles. With the exception of the 54-65 age category this is true, so we feel fairly confident in our solution to this missing data problem. We did, however, rerun analyses using other methods such as substituting the mean for the entire Los Angeles sample, the mean for the entire Boston sample, and the overall mean, but the significance of the social ties variable was essentially unchanged.

have on average about 1.35 social ties. The second measure distinguishes between: (1) those with ties, some of which are to those in their neighborhood (32%); (2) those with ties, none of which are to people in their neighborhood (22%), and; (3) those with no social ties (46%).

Efficacy

We would have preferred a measure of locus of control or some other social-psychological measure of efficacy, but these data do not contain such information. Instead we include a proxy for efficacy, whether or not a respondent is registered to vote. The assumption is that those who are registered are also high in efficacy because registering to vote indicates that they believe that their actions, in this case voting, can make a difference.

However, because 18% of our sample could not register to vote because they were not born in the US and have not become US citizens, we cannot just include in our models a measure of whether a person is registered to vote. Therefore, in the analysis we distinguish three groups: non-citizens who cannot register to vote (18%), citizens who are registered to vote (60%), and citizens who are not registered to vote (22%). We include two dummy variables in our models, one for non-citizens and one for citizens who have registered to vote, with the reference group being citizens who have not registered. This way we are able to ascertain whether citizens who are registered are more likely to participate than citizens who are not registered.

¹¹ For this variable, we assumed that respondents who were aged 65 or over in the Boston sample had no social ties because we don't know either whether they have ties or who the ties are to. We also experimented with another variable indicating respondents' total number of neighborhood ties, but results indicated that just distinguishing between those with and without neighborhood ties was sufficient.

Demographic and Background Variables

Table 1 also contains the descriptive statistics on the demographic and background variables that we control for in the analyses. The weighted mean age of the respondents is about 47 years. The sample is disproportionately female (57%), African American (37%), and Hispanic (26%). The never married category accounts for 24% of the sample.

The sample of public housing tenants in this study is broadly similar to the samples used by Taube and Levin (1971), Venkatesh (2000), Reingold (1995), Gotham and Brumley (2002), and Vale (1997). The public housing universe tends to be over-represented by females, minorities, and welfare recipients (Holzman, 1996).

To control for age and sex, measures of sex (a binary variable with females coded as 1 and males as 0) and age measured in continuous years are included in the model. We also include age squared in the models in order to test for curvilinear age effects. The race of respondents (three dummy variables with black as the reference category) is included in order control for the possibility of racial differences in tenant participation. Previous research suggests that church attendance and marital status also affect neighborhood association participation (Reingold, 1995). To control for these factors, we add to the model a marital status variable (four dummy variables with never married as the reference category), and a measure of church attendance. Our measure of church attendance is a continuous variable with values ranging from 0 (never goes to church) to 4 (attends church once a week or more). We also initially included a set of dummy variables for religious affiliation, but because these variables were not significant they are omitted.

Ideally we should also control for contextual factors such as the type of public housing and the characteristics of tenant associations. Civic participation is not just a function of individual-level traits such as grievances, resources and constraints, networks and attachment, and efficacy. People are also more likely to participate when they have the opportunity to participate. The existence of a tenant association, the extent of its presence, and its accessibility within a housing development may impact participation. Unfortunately, the MCSUI lacks information on these contextual factors. The only contextual factor that we do have information on is city. We control for city in order to control for variation between Boston and Los Angeles in the history of tenant associations within the public housing systems and the different opportunities those histories may have produced.

Because we lack measures of contextual opportunity factors (with the exception of city) we are assuming that public housing tenants have similar opportunities to participate in a tenant association. This assumption would be violated if, for example, there was significant nonrandom variation across public housing developments in the presence of tenant associations. While we have no data to justify our assumption of similar opportunities, we think this assumption is justified. We believe that one way public housing authorities mandate participation is by creating tenant associations at public housing sites. We expect, therefore, that most public housing developments have, at least formally, a tenant association that creates the opportunity for their tenants to

¹² Technically the assumption is that variation in the opportunities to participate are not associated with our measures of attachments, grievances, resources, constraints and efficacy. If opportunities vary at random or if opportunities are the same across all settings, then any measures of opportunity would not be associated with our independent variables.

participate. But because authorities do not require membership and participation as a condition of residence, there is, as we shall see, variation in the extent to which tenants do in fact participate. It is this variation that we are attempting to explain.

RESULTS

We proceed by estimating a series of models designed to assess the impact of the independent variables on tenant association participation and the mechanisms through which they have their impacts. We use the logistic regression routines in STATA to estimate our models. All models include these control variables: age, age², sex, marital status, race, church attendance, and city. Each of the first four models includes one set of predictors. Models 1a and 1b includes our measures of neighborhood attachment, Model 2 our measure of grievances, Model 3 the measures of resources and constraints, and Model 4 our measure of efficacy. Model 5 is the full model and includes all the independent variables. Finally, Model 6 includes our measure of overall (global) participation and allows us to ascertain whether the independent variables affect tenant association participation after controlling for their effects on tenant association participation via overall participation. The estimated parameters in all these models gauge the log-odds of attending a tenant association meeting that results from a one unit change in the independent variable. For dummy independent variables, the predicted change is relative to the omitted reference category.

Neighborhood Attachment

Table 2 contains the parameter estimates for each of the models. Models 1a and 1b test the neighborhood attachment hypotheses. In Model 1a we contrast people who have neighborhood ties and people who have ties but not to neighbors with those who have no ties. People with either type of ties are more likely to attend a tenant association

meeting. In addition, those that have resided longer in the public housing development are also more likely to participate. The difference between the two tie estimates in Model 1a is not significant. Therefore, we collapse the two categories together in Model 1b and just estimate the effect of having social ties irrespective of the character of those ties.

[Table 2 About Here]

We also experimented with a continuous measure of social ties but it did not improve the fit of the model. There are no differences in participation for those with one, two, or three social ties. We also constructed a measure of the proportion of total ties that are neighborhood-based ties, but it too is not significant. For attending tenant association meetings, it appears that it is just the presence of social ties and not the number of ties nor their type (neighborhood or not) that is important. Those with ties are about 140% more likely to attend a tenant association meeting than those with no ties.

In Models 1a and 1b the estimated for the effect of length of residency is significant and positive. An additional year of residency increases the odds of participating by about 5%. As such those who have resided in the public housing development for 10 years are about 62% more likely to attend a tenant meeting than those who have just arrived.

¹³ Because logistic regression models are multiplicative, the anti-log of the parameter estimates presented in Table 2 indicate how much the odds of participating are increased or decreased for a unit change in the independent variable. For continuous variables you can also compute the change in the odds for a greater than 1 unit change in the independent variable. In the case of longevity which is measure in months, a 1 year increase yields a 1.049 ($= e^{(12 \cdot .004)}$) increase in the odds, while a 10 year difference yields a 1.62 ($= e^{(120 \cdot .004)}$) increase in the odds.

In order to ascertain how and why social ties and longevity affect participation we turn to Models 5 and 6. In Model 5 we control for the other expected determinants of participation, while in Model 6 we also control for global participation (i.e., the number of other civic organizations besides a tenant association in which a person participates). As expected (H3) the effect of longevity is basically unchanged, indicating that longevity's effect is direct (the local participation mechanism).

The effect of social ties is a bit more complex. In Model 5 the social ties effect is basically unchanged compared to Model 1b (.817 versus .867) indicating that the effect of ties is independent of the other factors in the model. However, in Model 6 the social ties effect is reduced, though it is still positive and statistically significant at the .05 level. This indicates that some of the effect of social ties is indirect via social ties' effect on global participation. The effect of social ties on global participation is shown in Table 3 where the parameter estimates from an OLS regression of global participation are presented. Social ties has a positive net effect on global participation, and because global participation strongly affects tenant association participation (see Model 6, Table 2), social ties has an indirect effect on such participation. While we expected this indirect effect through global participation (H2), we did not expect a residual direct effect for social ties in general. Instead we expected only neighborhood ties to directly effect tenant association participation (H1). However, as we have seen, there is no difference in the effects of neighborhood and non-neighborhood ties. Ties, no matter who they are to, affect neighborhood participation both through the global participation and the local participation mechanisms.

[Table 3 About Here]

The strong effects of neighborhood attachment could indicate that there are two subpopulations among public housing tenants: *settlers* who view their current public housing dwelling as a near permanent place of residence and *sojourners* who see public housing as a temporary way station on their way to other housing. Settlers put down roots in public housing developments and develop ties with others. Because of their commitment to where they live, they have more of a stake in the place and are less likely to leave, resulting in longer residencies. Because public housing is seen as a permanent home and because they have more social ties, they are more likely to be drawn into participating in their tenant association. In contrast, because sojourners expect to leave, they are less likely to develop social ties, to have a stake in the neighborhood, and, therefore, to participate in tenant associations.

Grievances

Model 2 in Table 2 contains the estimate for the effect of grievances. As expected those with more grievances are more likely to attend a tenant association meeting. Initially we thought that some grievances would be more important predictors so we estimated models with dummy variable indicators for each of the seven grievances. Results not shown here indicated that none of the specific grievances relating to city services and neighborhood problems are significant by themselves. We also computed a grievance measure using the three grievances that are most related to the local neighborhood—housing upkeep, crime, and city services. Results not reported here indicate that that measure is also not significant. The implication is that it is the accumulation of various types of grievances rather a specific grievance or specific set of grievances that leads to participation.

Models 5 and 6 allow us to ascertain whether the effect of grievances persists when we control for other factors. As shown in Model 5, the effect of grievances is reduced when we control for the other determinants of participation and is no longer significant. According to H6, the decreased significance of grievances should be the result of the association of grievances and neighborhood attachment. Those with network ties are more likely to have grievances, and there is a positive correlation between length of residency and grievances ($r = .167$). Therefore, we estimated a combined model that includes the grievance measure and the two measures of neighborhood attachment, ties and longevity. The results reported in Table 4 in the column labeled Models 1 and 2 show that the grievance effect (.283) is not significant. This finding supports H6. The grievance effect is reduced when we control for variation in ties and longevity.

[Table 4 About Here]

Whether social ties and longer residencies lead to more grievances, or whether grievances lead to forming ties and staying longer is something we cannot ascertain with these data. What is clear is that the effect of grievances on participation is really an attachment effect and not per se a grievance effect.

Further evidence that there is no net direct grievance effect is evident in Model 6 of Table 2 that includes the global participation measure. Controlling for global participation (whose effect is highly significant as one would expect) further reduces the net grievance effect from .373 in Model 5 to .067 in Model 6. Even if there is some net effect of grievances after controlling for attachment, that effect disappears when we control for global participation.

The explanation for this substantial decrease in the grievance effect is found in Table 3 that reports the effects of our variables on global participation. As one can see,

grievances have a significant and positive effect on global participation, even with controls for social ties and length of residency. The implication is that grievances also affect tenant association participation through their effect on global participation, a finding that is consistent with H5.

In sum, we find that contrary to H4, local grievances do not increase tenant association participation. Only overall grievances affect tenant association participation but not directly. Rather it is because grievances are positively associated with social ties and longevity and because grievances positively affect global participation that grievances are related to tenant association participation.

The lack of a direct net effect of grievances led us to suspect that there could be interactions between grievances and other factors, especially resources. As resource mobilization theories have noted (Tilly, 1978), grievances may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for collective action. Only when aggrieved people are able to participate, will they in fact participate. Therefore we examined whether grievances had an effect on participation among those who had more resources. Interactions with our resource variables (education, per capita household income, and work status) were however not significant.

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Though grievances do not have a direct net effect on tenant association participation, this does not mean that they are unimportant. On the contrary, grievances are important. People residing in public housing who have more grievances are more active and involved in their community. Because of their greater overall participation levels and their social ties they are also more likely to participate in specific civic organizations such as tenant associations. As such grievances have a more general and diffuse effect on participation. The accumulation of grievances does not dispose people to participate in specific organizations. Rather grievances lead people to be more involved in general.

Resources and Constraints

To recap, the important resources are education, money, and time, while the constraints are disabilities, retirement, and having children. Contrary to prior expectations only one of the resource factors, having a high school degree and having some college education (in contrast to those without a high school degree), is significant and only one of the constraint variables, presence of children, is statistically significant (see Model 3, Table 2). Both those who have graduated from high school and those with a college degree are over 80% more likely to participate than those who have not graduated from high school. The coefficients for the two education dummy variables are very similar in value, indicating that it is the completing high school versus dropping out contrast that is crucial.

According to H7, resource effects should be the result of the global participation mechanism. Results from Models 5 and 6 appear to confirm that expectation. Controlling for other factors, the educational contrasts are still positive, though only the high school versus dropout contrast is statistically significant. However, after controlling

for global participation in Model 6, neither educational contrast is significantly different from zero. Education increases tenant association participation, but it does so by increasing a person's overall participation activity.

The other resource measures, per capita household income, and the three work status contrasts that are indicative of having more disposable time are never significant. In this population, variation in these resources is not an important determinant of participation in tenant organizations. A plausible explanation for the absence of resource effects is that public housing tenants are a relatively homogenous, resource-poor population with few full-time employed persons and low incomes. The one resource variable that does differentiate people within this population (education) is also the only resource variable that affects participation in this population.

Turning to the constraint variables, contrary to H8, neither the disability nor the retirement contrasts are statistically significant. The only constraint variable that is significant is the presence of children in the household and contrary to expectations its sign is positive. People with children are over twice as likely to be involved in their tenant association than people with no children living at home.

In order to explore the effect of children, we examined the relationship between children being present and both social ties and longevity. Having children is negatively related to longevity and positively related to social ties. Those with children have resided about two and half years less in their public housing development. Approximately 63% of those with children have social ties, while 45% of those without children have ties. The implication is that the presence of children affects tenant association participation in two opposing ways. The presence of children increases social ties, which increases participation, while having children decreases the length of residency that leads to a

decrease in participation. This is why when we control for these counterbalancing forces, the children coefficient's value does not change very much (compare Models 3 and 5).

But what about the positive net effect of children? This effect appears to be the result of the positive effect that having children has on global participation. Those with children are more active in their communities. So when we control for global participation (Model 6 in Table 2) when analyzing the odds of participating in a tenant association, the children effect is substantially reduced and is no longer significant. The presence of children increases tenant association participation, but it does so by increasing a parent's overall participation activity.

In sum, population resources and constraints are less important determinants of tenant association participation. Only one resource, education, affects tenant association participation and it does so indirectly by increasing more educated people's overall tendency to be involved. None of the constraint variables are important except the presence of children, and that variable does not act like a constraint. While the effect is positive, the three ways in which the presence of children impact tenant association participation appear to have little to do with constraints. Instead the presence of children promotes both global participation and local participation through social ties to others. The negative effect children have on tenant participation is indirect; the result of those with children having shorter stays in public housing. People with children probably view their stay in public housing as temporary and are, therefore, less likely to get involved in their local tenant association, though social ties formed while there can mitigate this tendency. Even if social ties do not compensate for the negative effect on participation that results from short durations, this does not mean that parents with children are less involved in their communities. They may not be as involved as others in tenant

associations (because they do not plan to stay long), but as the results from Table 3 show, they are more likely to be involved in other types of civic organizations.

Efficacy

Model 4 tests the efficacy expectation by looking at the effect of being registered to vote. Citizens who are registered to vote are over two and half times more likely to attend tenant association meetings than citizens who are not registered. Non-citizens (who cannot vote) and citizens who are not registered to vote (the reference group) do not differ in their participation rates. Both these groups are less likely to participate in their tenant association than the purportedly more efficacious feeling citizens who are registered to vote. The efficacy effect does not appear to be a social network effect. While those who are registered to vote are somewhat more likely to have social ties than those who are not, the effect of being registered to vote is still statistically significant even with controls for social ties and other factors in Model 5. However, the efficacy effect is the result of the global participation mechanism (H10). More efficacious people, as measured by those who are registered to vote, are more involved in civic organizations (see regression results in Table 3) and are more likely to participate in their tenant association. Therefore, as seen in Model 6 of Table 2, there is no net efficacy effect when we control for global participation.

¹⁵ The registered to vote effect does decrease from Model 4 to 5 but this appears to not be due to attachment and networks. In Table 4 we report results from a model that includes the attachment variables and the efficacy measures. While the registered to vote coefficient is a bit smaller compared to Model 4 in Table 2, it is still quite large and statistically significant.

Control Variables

The effects of the control variables on participation for Models 5 and 6 are reported in Table 5. Five control variables are significant: female, age, Los Angeles, church attendance, and divorce/separated. The positive female effect on tenant association participation appears to be the result of women being more involved in general in their communities. We are unsure why women are more involved than men, but given the previously discussed effects of children we suspect that it has something to do with sex differences in time spent at social reproductive work such as child rearing and housework (Feldman & Stall, 2004). Other studies such as Lawson and Barton's (1990) study of the tenant movement in New York City found that initially women were more likely to be followers than leaders of tenant unions because of institutional discrimination against women. However, over time women are likely to move into leadership positions once they learn the skills of grassroots organizing and develop social ties with important power nodes. While we find this sex difference to be intriguing and worthy of further study, unpacking it is beyond the scope of this paper.

[Table 5 About Here]

Turning to the effect of age, results indicate that participation increases with age. While in Models 5 and 6 the age-squared effect is not significant, it is significant in a model that contains only the control variables (results not reported here). However, when we control for work status and, in particular, retirement, the age-squared effect is no longer significant. The implication is that participation increases with age up to a point and then begins to decline. This curvilinear age effect is probably due to effects that

¹⁶ We only report the parameter estimates for Models 5 and 6. The estimates do not change much in Models 1-4.

make people less active and mobile as they age. Given these results, the highest level of participation is found among middle-aged people who because of their life course stage have more at stake and, therefore, are more likely to participate.

Both the church attendance and the separated/divorced effects are significant and negative in Model 6, but not statistically significant in Model 5 (see Table 5), suggesting that a suppressor effect is at work. Results not shown here indicate that both these factors increase global participation, but as shown in Model 6 of Table 5, after controlling for global participation, both factors decrease tenant association participation. This direct negative effect could indicate the presence of tradeoffs resulting from time commitments. For some subpopulations of public housing tenants, participation in other civic organizations (which usually increases participation in tenant associations) could decrease their participation rates in their tenant association. Therefore, for churchgoers and divorcees the direct negative effect on tenant association participation resulting from a time tradeoff is suppressed by the indirect positive effect of divorce and church attendance via global participation.

Finally, the negative Los Angeles effect could be the result of a number of factors. The public housing population could be different in Los Angeles, though we have controlled for a range of demographic variables such as race/ethnicity and immigrant status. The way in which public housing is organized in Los Angeles as compared to Boston could also make tenant participation more difficult. Alternatively, Los Angeles may have fewer active tenant associations so the opportunity to participate is more limited compared to Boston. Finally, the housing stock is likely to be different in these two communities because Boston is older and has more extensive public housing. Poorer housing and critical masses of tenants could increase participation in Boston. The fact

that participation rates vary geographically implies that differences in opportunities across places could be an important determinant of participation.

DISCUSSION

These findings indicate that attachments, grievances, a sense of efficacy, and to a lesser extent, resources and grievances are determinants of public housing tenants' odds of participating in their tenant association. However, how these factors affect participation varies. The *global participation mechanism* is important in understanding how grievances, efficacy, and one resource—education—impact participation. Grievances, efficacy, and education increase a person's overall participation level and, therefore, their participation in their tenant association. Grievances also affect participation through the *social network mechanism*, as does the presence of children. Because those with children and those with more grievances are more likely to have social ties to others, they are more likely to be involved in their tenant association. Finally, the *local participation mechanism* is important in understanding the effects of social ties and length of residency. The positive direct net effects of both these factors indicate that they increase the odds of tenant association participation directly and not just through other factors. These findings not only shed some new light on the determinants of tenant association participation, but they also raise some important research questions.

First, researchers interested in understanding civic participation and collective action need to revisit their views on the role grievances play. It appears that it is the accumulation of grievances and not any specific grievance or even grievances directly related to specific issues (in this case public housing issues) that is important in explaining participation. Furthermore, this accumulation of grievances increases tenant

association participation by increasing people's overall tendency to be involved in their communities. Grievances set the stage for public housing tenants getting involved in their associations by making them more prone to participate in civic life.

Second, neighborhood attachment matters. People who have lived longer at their current residence and who have more social ties are more likely to participate. The importance of attachments built by social ties cannot be understated. Ties affect tenant association participation in two ways. First, ties increase people's overall level of civic participation and, as a result, their tendency to be involved in their local association. Second, ties directly increase participation in tenant associations, most likely through people's contacts informing them about and recruiting them into the association. Future research on civic participation needs to explore the central role networks play in civic participation. Because of both the direct and indirect effects of social ties on specific forms of participation, networks can and often are an important mechanism through which other factors lead to participation in specific civic organizations.

We suspect that part of the reason attachment based on longevity increases participation is that tenants who reside longer in public housing are more likely to accumulate social ties to people already involved in the tenant association. However, even after controlling for social ties, longevity has a positive net effect on tenant association participation. There are many reasons why people who have resided longer in a place are likely to be more involved, net of the networks they have formed. Longevity increases the stakes one has in one's residential area, awareness of opportunities to

participate, interests related to community issues, and the frames through which they view their community (Small, 2002).

Third, within this relatively poor population, variation in resources such as available time and money is not as important as we expected. Among these relatively poor public housing tenants, people do in fact participate, even though they lack the resources that purportedly facilitates participation. This non-finding implies that resources may not be as important as some theories of collective action and civic participation would lead us to believe. Of course attending tenant association meetings is a relatively low cost form of civic participation. Types of participation that require more sacrifices may be more a function of resources.

The one resource that does matter, education, increases tenant association participation indirectly. Education appears to operate as an enabler providing people with the skills and self-assurance needed to take part in public affairs. However, the education effect could also be the result of exclusionary practices of civic associations that look down upon and stigmatize those with limited amounts of education (Wuthnow,

¹⁷ Those with longer stays in a place are also more likely to have developed a “neighborhood narrative” (Small, 2002) that tells them that staying rather than leaving represents the best means of optimizing one’s life chances. Consider, for instance, Small’s (2002) study of local participation in a Latino housing project. Small argues that people’s “neighborhood frames” or orientations to their living place vary according to their history in it. People that have been long time residents of a neighborhood tend to have a better knowledge of its history and collective memory. Newly arrived residents, on the other hand, tend to lack this knowledge of a neighborhood’s collective memory and so invest less meaning or significance in it. For newcomers, the desire for upward mobility (which in all likelihood entails leaving public housing) trumps their desire to contribute to their public housing community.

2002). Such educational elitism could create disincentives for those with less education to participate.

Fourth, there is no evidence in this population that constraints inhibit participation. In fact, one of our purported constraint variables, the presence of children in the household, increases instead of decreases tenant association participation because having children leads to social ties and increases global participation. The only negative effect of children that we detected is not the result of child caring constraints. Instead people with children tend to move on sooner, leading, all things considered, to less participation in their local association. Therefore, future research needs to examine the multiple ways in which variation in household composition affects not just people's overall involvement in their communities but also the specific types of civic organizations in which they are likely to be involved.

Fifth, like with grievances and education, efficacy disposes people to be more involved in their community and, therefore, also in their tenant associations. The fact that we found an efficacy effect, even with our crude measure, indicates that even in this relatively poor population residing in a relatively poor locale, there is variation in efficacy and those with more efficacy (as indicated by their registering to vote) are more likely to be involved in civic life. We expect that with better social-psychological measures of such things as locus of control, the efficacy effect would be even stronger.

Finally, this research has focused on the individual-level determinants of participation. While our results show that individual differences among tenants in grievances, attachments, education, and efficacy are important, we realize that contextual factors may also play an important role. In particular we suspect that the characteristics of tenant associations themselves could affect participation rates. Tenant associations

differ from one another along a range of dimensions such as how long they have been active, their relationship to other organizations and the wider community (Kingston, Mitchell, Florin, & Stevenson, 1999; Mesch & Schwirian, 1996; Monti, 1989; Tjerandsen, 1980), the extent of local housing authority support for them (Monti, 1989), racial and ethnic representativeness (Fahey, 1999), and the quality of tenant leadership (Monti, 1989; Tjerandsen, 1980).

Future research needs to examine these contextual factors for three reasons. First, the opportunity to participate may vary across places. Some places may have thriving tenant associations, while in other places they may not even exist. Second, participation may be influenced by the perceived inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the tenant organization, which in turn may be related to how similar or different association members are to a prospective member. In particular, the racial composition of tenant organizations in a racially diverse public housing development could influence tenants' comfort level and, therefore, their decision to attend association meetings. Third, the traits of public housing developments such as population density (high versus low), building type (high-rise versus other), ownership (public versus subsidized/private), quality of housing unit, and type of unit (family versus senior citizen, clustered versus scattered-site housing) could make it easier or harder to organize a tenant association and attract participants (Amick & Kviz, 1975; Bickford & Massey, 1991; Garshick Kleit, 2001; Greenberg & Rohe, 1984).

¹⁸ Furthermore, if people are more likely to have grievances when a tenant association exist, grievance effects could really be opportunity effects.

CONCLUSION

The notion that participation in groups and organizations is a good thing for the individual and the community and that it operates as an antidote to anomie is as old as sociology itself (Portes, 1998). This study looks at one special type of associational involvement in a sample of public housing tenants. Our purpose is to identify the factors that account for variation in neighborhood association participation among public housing residents and increase our understanding of how those factors affect participation. The findings suggest that the factors that predict tenant participation are not that different from the factors that predict civic participation generally. Therefore, there does not appear to be something unique or distinctive about tenant participation as we might have expected. Tenants who are more participatory are more likely to have grievances, to have a sense of their own power, to have lived for a long time in their current neighborhood, and to have social ties to others. To be sure, public housing residents have other characteristics that distinguish them from other populations such as low levels of education and limited economic resources. But the evidence indicates that being resource-poor does not constrain one's willingness or ability to participate in tenant associations. Rather the picture is one of a resource-poor population in which grievances, efficacy, and attachments stimulate participation and involvement in civic life generally.

Additionally, we argue that scholars and policy makers should be attentive to the fact that public housing developments are not as socially disorganized as they are often assumed to be (Vale, 2000). Policy documents and the media often portray the urban poor as social isolate, contrasting them with the home owning, stable middle class. But in some respects the social distance between public housing tenants and homeowners may not be as great as pundits and politicians portray. Almost 20% of tenants in the

present study attended a tenant organization meeting in the last 12 months. That one in five tenants participate is remarkable and suggests that public housing is not an aberration but is a fertile ground for even more participation. Indeed, public housing tenants may in fact be more participatory than residents in private housing (see Olsen et al., 1989 who report a 9% participation rate among people residing in private housing; see also Reingold, 1995).

Though participation levels are not low in this population, they could be even higher. The responsibility for increasing participation often falls to local housing authorities and at the street-level community organizers. Authorities and organizers need to consider not only which strategies for increasing participation will be more effective, but also how they want to go about increasing participation. Based on the three mechanisms that we identified (the global participation, local participation, and social network mechanism) we highlight three strategies.

First, using the global participation mechanism, organizers could increase participation in a specific civic organization like a tenant association by increasing people's overall tendency to be more involved in their community. Three factors in our analysis work this way: grievances, efficacy and education. Local organizers can heighten grievances indirectly by increasing people's awareness of the issues and problems that affect their lives through public meetings that provide tenants with information about and contacts with organizations in the local community. Increasing grievances by increasing awareness is also likely to increase people's social ties to other people, further enhancing participation. This is probably why awareness efforts can have such a huge payoff. They not only activate overall involvement, but they also facilitate

the formation of social networks, which create connections to people in specific civic associations.

Local authorities and organizers could also increase tenant's global participation rates by empowering tenants. Our research highlights the importance of two enablers: a sense of efficacy and education. Efficacy could be increased by small successes through which tenants see that their efforts make a difference. To the extent that education is an enabler, increasing educational attainment through adult education programs could increase participation by giving people the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to express themselves in public. On the other hand, to the extent that education's effect is the result of educational elitism within tenant associations, local authorities need to counter the exclusion that results from this elitism by, for example, recruiting people with low levels of education as tenant leaders and reorganizing meetings so that those with more education do not dominate discussions.

Alternatively, using the local participation mechanism, authorities and organizers could focus their efforts upon increasing participation in the local tenant association. Our results indicate that an effective way to do this is by increasing the probability that a tenant will stay longer in a public housing development. Longevity could be increased in several ways: (1) by upgrading the quality of public housing; (2) by offering ownership rights to dwellings; and, (3) by decreasing the negatives sometimes found in public housing such as poor services, ineffective management, and anti-social behavior problems. By pursuing these objectives, authorities could increase people's stake in their residences and in turn their participation in the local community.

However, attempts to convert potential sojourners into settlers by making public housing more attractive raises questions about whether public housing is designed to be a

permanent home for those who can not afford private sector housing or a form of transition housing for the poor. Can public housing authorities make public housing attractive and thereby increase commitment among tenants to their place of residence while at the same time they are promoting public housing as a transitory form of accommodation? At some point the goals of increasing attachment and participation could come into conflict with public housing being a temporary source of housing for those in need.

Finally, because of the importance of social networks for both local and global participation, local authorities and organizers could increase participation by helping tenants develop social ties. Of course authorities and organizers cannot directly create ties for tenants. People create ties to others based on their interests, needs, and many other factors. But authorities and organizers can do things that are conducive to the formation of ties by creating spaces, situations, and activities that allow tenants to interact with one another. Such facilitation may be most important for tenants without children given that the presence of children already is conducive to the formation of social networks.

Though our findings suggest some strategies that could increase tenant association participation, if we really want to help those involved in public housing increase participation, we need to directly study the mechanisms and processes through which participation is affected. We have highlighted in this article three mechanisms: (1) the global participation mechanism linked to grievances and enablers such as education and a sense of efficacy, (2) the local participation mechanism linked to longevity which increases people's stake in the places that they live, and (3) the social network mechanism through which social ties to others lead to information about and recruitment

into civic organizations. But it is difficult to really know how grievances, attachment, social networks, efficacy, and education affect participation without direct observation of what goes on in public housing developments. Ethnographic research could, for example, illuminate and help us understand differences within this population that our quantitative research has detected as important, e.g., the differences between sojourners and settlers and those with and without a high school degree. We see our research as providing new insights that can help social scientists and practitioners better understand the social lives of those who are less fortunate. Ultimately, we hope this research both debunks misconceptions about and stimulates more research on the civil society that poor people create through their civic participation.

TABLE 1
Weighted Descriptive Statistics (N = 648)

| Variable | Proportion/Mean | Standard Error |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Demographic/Background Variables: | | |
| Age | 46.928 | 1.831 |
| Sex (1 = female) | .57 | |
| Marital status: | | |
| Married | .27 | |
| Separated/Divorced | .25 | |
| Never Married | .24 | |
| Widowed | .15 | |
| Cohabiting | .05 | |
| Race: | | |
| White | .30 | |
| Black | .37 | |
| Hispanic | .26 | |
| Other | .06 | |
| Church attendance | 2.203 | .145 |
| Religious affiliation: | | |
| Catholic | .36 | |
| Protestant | .54 | |
| Other religion | .04 | |
| No religion | .04 | |
| Participation: | | |
| Overall (global) participation | .15 | |
| Tenant association participation | .18 | |
| Grievances: | | |
| Level of grievances | 2.114 | .066 |
| Local grievances | 3.126 | .086 |
| Resources/Constraints: | | |
| Education: | | |
| No high school | .38 | |
| High school | .44 | |
| Some college | .17 | |
| Work status: | | |
| Full-time work | .19 | |
| Part-time work | .07 | |
| Retired | .24 | |
| Unemployed | .20 | |
| Disabled | .13 | |
| Not in the labor force | .16 | |
| Per capita household income | 7539.818 | 1113.523 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Presence of children | .41 | |
| Neighborhood Attachment: | | |
| Length of residency (in months) | 74.187 | 12.207 |
| Number of ties | 1.353 | .156 |
| Type of ties: | | |
| Neighborhood ties | .32 | |
| Non-Neighborhood ties | .22 | |
| No ties | .46 | |
| Efficacy: | | |
| Citizen registered to vote | .60 | |
| Citizen not registered to vote | .22 | |
| Non-citizen | .18 | |

TABLE 2
Effects for Models of Attendance at Public Housing Tenant Association Meetings
Without global participation (Models 1 through 5) and with global participation
(Model 6).

| | Model | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------|---------|----------|
| | 1a | 1b | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Grievances: | | | | | | | |
| Level of grievances | | | .445* | | | .373 | .067 |
| | | | (.205) | | | (.249) | (.283) |
| Constraint/Resources: | | | | | | | |
| Working part-time | | | .715 | | | .621 | .704 |
| | | | (.497) | | | (.495) | (.633) |
| Disabled | | | .220 | | | .249 | .592 |
| | | | (.410) | | | (.425) | (.569) |
| Retired | | | -.888 | | | -.865 | -.913 |
| | | | (.631) | | | (.619) | (.752) |
| Out of labor force | | | .393 | | | .439 | .812 |
| | | | (.422) | | | (.437) | (.545) |
| Unemployed | | | .611 | | | .631 | .890 |
| | | | (.386) | | | (.415) | (.553) |
| Per capita household income | | | .000 | | | .000 | .000 |
| | | | (.000) | | | (.000) | (.000) |
| Presence of children | | | .732** | | | .733*** | .347 |
| | | | (.305) | | | (.317) | (.353) |
| High school | | | .604*** | | | .540* | .377 |
| | | | (.219) | | | (.233) | (.274) |
| Some college | | | .620** | | | .388 | -.606 |
| | | | (.274) | | | (.317) | (.514) |
| Neighborhood Attachment: | | | | | | | |
| Presence of ties | | .867*** | | | | .817*** | .573* |
| | | (.206) | | | | (.227) | (.283) |
| Neighborhood ties | .902*** | | | | | | |
| | (.228) | | | | | | |
| Non-neighborhood ties | .817** | | | | | | |
| | (.261) | | | | | | |
| Length of residency | .004** | .004** | | | | .004* | .005** |
| | (.002) | (.002) | | | | (.002) | (.002) |
| Efficacy: | | | | | | | |
| Non-citizen | | | | | .348 | .680 | .134 |
| | | | | | (.342) | (.368) | (.472) |
| Citizen registered to vote | | | | | .960*** | .709** | .565 |
| | | | | | (.261) | (.275) | (.332) |
| Global participation | | | | | | | 9.674*** |
| | | | | | | | (1.021) |
| Pseudo R ² | .1124 | .1122 | .0843 | .1111 | .0965 | .1573 | .4263 |

Note. *p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.

Robust standard errors in parenthesis, $n = 648$. All models include the following control variables: age, age², sex, marital status, race, church attendance, and Los Angeles.

TABLE 3
Determinants of Global Participation, Full Model

| Variable | Full Model |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Grievances: | |
| Level of Grievances | .036* (.018) |
| Constraint/Resources: | |
| Working part-time | .055 (.039) |
| Disabled | -.007 (.026) |
| Retired | -.028 (.037) |
| Out of labor force | .002 (.024) |
| Unemployed | .030 (.025) |
| Per capita household income | .000 (.000) |
| Presence of children | .052* (.022) |
| High school | .036* (.016) |
| Some college | .085** (.027) |
| Neighborhood Attachment: | |
| Presence of ties | .041** (.015) |
| Length of residency | .000 (.000) |
| Efficacy: | |
| Non-citizen | .073** (.021) |
| Citizen registered to vote | .043* (.018) |
| R^2 | .21 |

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Robust standard errors in parenthesis, $n = 648$. The full model of global participation includes the following control variables: age, age², sex, marital status, race, church attendance, and Los Angeles.

TABLE 4
Effects of Select Combined Models on Attendance at Public Housing Tenant Association Meetings (without Global Participation)

| | Model | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | 1 and 2 | 1 and 3 | 1 and 4 |
| Grievances: | | | |
| Level of Grievances | .283 (.216) | | |
| Constraint/Resources: | | | |
| Working part-time | | .691 (.480) | |
| Disabled | | .243 (.423) | |
| Retired | | -.792 (.627) | |
| Out of labor force | | .420 (.435) | |
| Unemployed | | .658 (.398) | |
| Per capita household income | | .000 (.000) | |
| Children | | .748* (.316) | |
| High school | | .557* (.224) | |
| Some college | | .472 (.323) | |
| Neighborhood Attachment: | | | |
| Presence of ties | .844*** (.206) | .850*** (.217) | .839*** (.218) |
| Length of residency | .004** (.001) | .004** (.001) | .004** (.001) |
| Efficacy: | | | |
| Non-citizen | | | .593 (.357) |
| Citizen registered to vote | | | .821** (.268) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .1152 | .1437 | .1247 |

Note. *p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.

Robust standard errors in parenthesis, $n = 648$. All models include the following control variables: age, age², sex, marital status, race, church attendance, and Los Angeles.

TABLE 5
Effects of Control Variables on Attendance at Public Housing Tenant Association Meetings, Select Models

| Control Variable | Model 5 | Model 6 |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Age | .113* (.046) | .131* (.057) |
| Age ² | -.001 (.001) | -.001 (.001) |
| Female | .605* (.272) | .598 (.412) |
| Married | .025 (.452) | .054 (.526) |
| Separated/Divorced | -.351 (.283) | -.923* (.381) |
| Cohabiting | .179 (.626) | .159 (.674) |
| White | .226 (.412) | -.314 (.537) |
| Hispanic | -.059 (.420) | -.424 (.544) |
| Other | .279 (.800) | -.380 (.878) |
| Church attendance | .005 (.077) | -.367*** (.104) |
| Los Angeles | -1.198** (.393) | -.578 (.448) |

Note. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Omitted categories are: Never married, for marital status; Black, for race; No Religion, for religion; No High School, for education; Working full-time, for work status.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

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