



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Group Membership and Group Involvement Among Young People

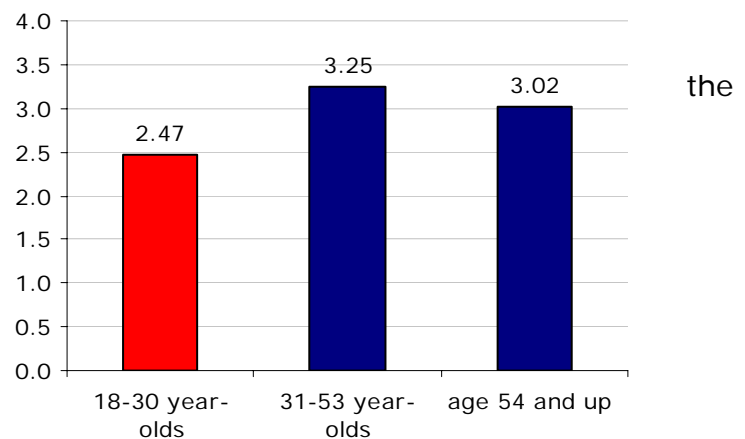
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Recently, social capital and civic engagement have been popular topics in assessing the health of America's communities.<sup>2</sup> Although there does not exist one single agreed-upon method of measuring social capital or civic engagement, there is consensus that group membership among a community's citizens is significant to both. Unfortunately, measuring the number of groups an individual joins is itself difficult, and this challenge has been documented.<sup>3</sup>

Two of the more recent sources of information on group membership, *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*<sup>4</sup> and the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*<sup>5</sup> report, are utilized in this fact sheet. This fact sheet presents an overview of group membership among different generations along with types of groups to which people belong.

On average, young people report belonging to fewer groups than older people. According to the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, 18-30 year-olds belong to 2.47 groups on average, while 31-53 year-olds boast 3.25 group memberships per person. People aged 54 and up belong to an average of 3.02 groups (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Mean Number of Total Group Memberships

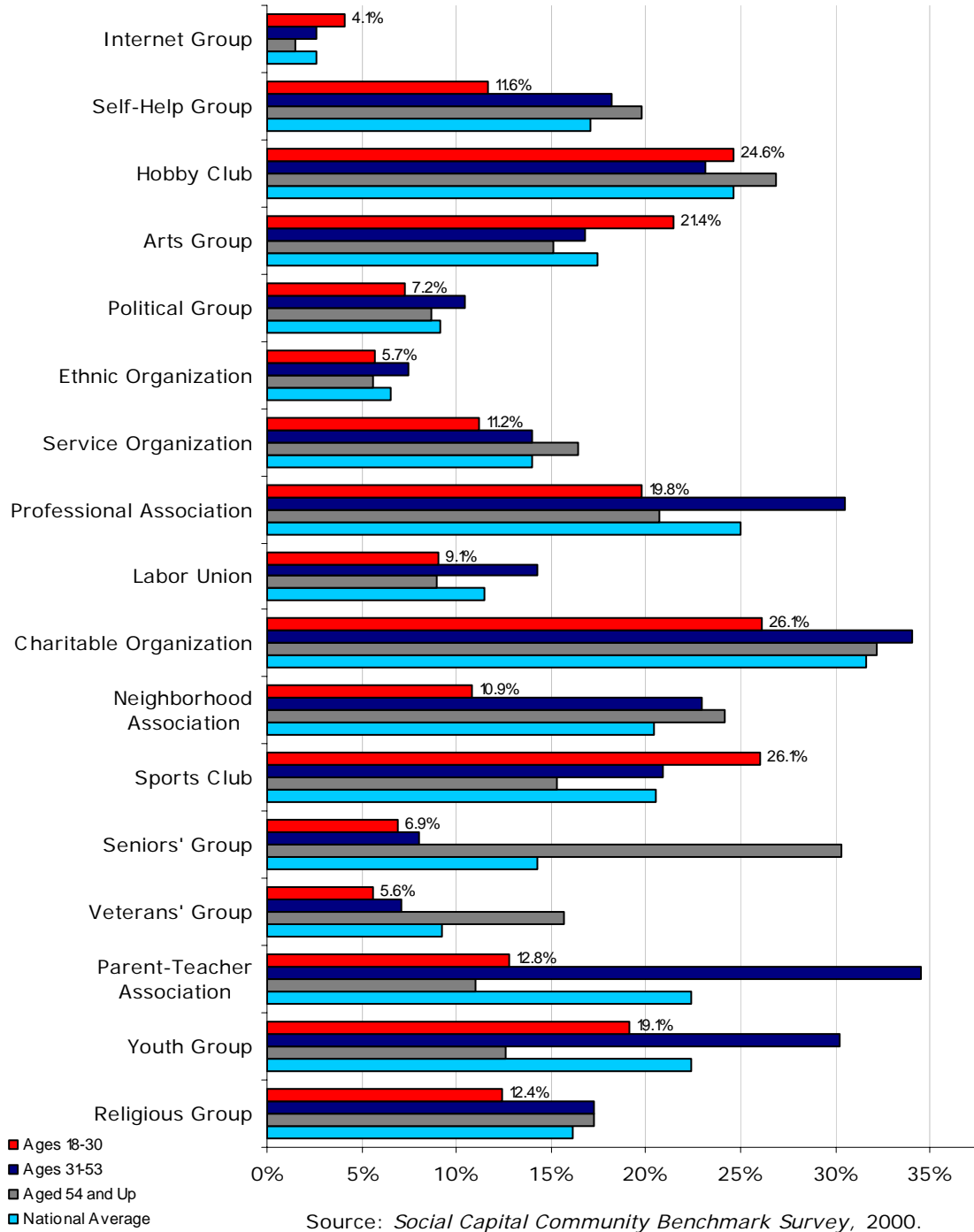


Source: *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, 2000

### ***Types of Groups***

On average, young people join fewer groups than adults. Young people are also more likely to join certain types of groups. According to the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, young people are more likely to be members of sports clubs, literary or arts organizations, and Internet groups than adults ages 31 and up. Adults ages 31 through 53 are more likely than younger or older people to be members of labor unions, charity or social welfare organizations, religiously-affiliated organizations, professional associations, parent-teacher associations, youth organizations, ethnic or nationality groups, and political groups. Adults ages 54 and up are more likely to be members of veterans' groups, seniors' groups, neighborhood associations, service or fraternal organizations, hobby, investment or garden clubs, and self-help groups (Graph 2).

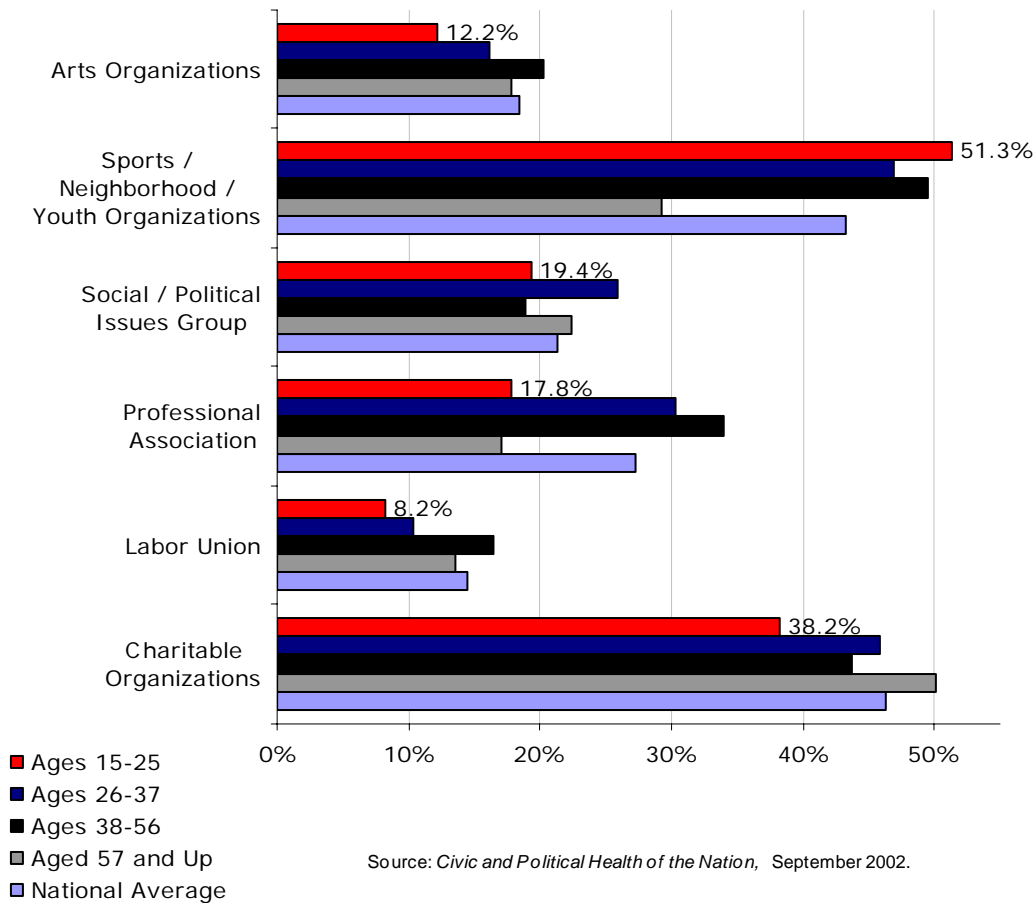
**Graph 2: Group Membership by Group Type and Age**



A more recent survey, the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* provides another source of group membership data comparable to the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*. The *Civic and Political Health of the Nation* categorized respondents into generational groups: the DotNets, aged 15-25 years old (in 2002 at the time of the survey), Generation X, aged 26-37, Baby Boomers, aged 38-56, and Matures, aged 57 and up.

According to the survey, the DotNets are more likely than their older counterparts to have been involved in sports, neighborhood or youth organizations in the last year. Generation Xers are more likely to have been involved in associations concerned with social or political issues in the last year, and Baby Boomers are more likely to have been involved in labor unions, professional associations and arts organizations in the last year. Matures are more likely to have been involved in charitable organizations in the last year (Graph 3).

**Graph 3: Participation in Organizations by Group Type and Age**



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I thank Mark Hugo Lopez, Research Director for comments and assistance. I also thank Carrie Donovan for helpful comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam, New York: Simon Schuster, 2000 and *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, Washington: Brookings, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See Jan Van Deth, "Measuring Social Capital: Orthodoxies and Continuing Controversies", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 6(1) pp. 79-92 and Allen Ciglar and Mark Joslyn, "The Extensiveness of Group Membership and Social Capital: The Impact on Political Tolerance Attitudes", *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(1), pp. 7-25.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, 2000*, by the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, a project of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. This nationwide telephone survey of 3,003 individuals was conducted from July to November 2000. The survey data is available through The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at [Hwww.ropercenter.uconn.edu/dataacq/scc\\_bench.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/dataacq/scc_bench.html). More information about the Saguaro Seminar is available at [Hhttp://sparky.harvard.edu/saguaro/index.htm](http://sparky.harvard.edu/saguaro/index.htm). All calculations performed for this fact sheet with this survey data utilized the "final weight" (FWEIGHT) as provided in the survey data.

<sup>5</sup> See the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, by Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, September, 2002. This nationwide telephone survey of 3,300 individuals was conducted from April 4 through May 20, 2002. The report was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and is available through the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning (CIRCLE) at [Hwww.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).