

A large graphic on the left side of the page, partially cut off by the edge. It features a dark blue background with a white star in the upper left and red and white horizontal stripes below it. The graphic is composed of several curved segments, suggesting it's a partial view of a larger design.

A GUIDE TO THE INDEX OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

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Introduction

This document provides a detailed road map to a set of survey questions that comprise an index of civic and political engagement. We discuss the 19 different items used to measure active engagement, the dimensions that they capture, and the ways in which they can be used by interested groups. We also provide an in-depth description of various issues that should be taken into account when using the index.

Since the advent of survey research, scholars and practitioners have attempted to find the best measures of civic and political engagement. This was our goal as well. This index is designed to capture the myriad ways that individuals are involved in public life, drawing on the best lessons from previous work and incorporating additional measures that illustrate alternative ways in which some citizens—especially youth—are participating in the new millennium. We also wanted to ensure that we asked questions in ways that captured how lay people (rather than scholars or practitioners) view the political world. After much testing and retesting of a host of questions, we created an index of 19 items that are both representative of the breadth of activities that individuals undertake and are worded in ways that would resonate with a typical member of the public. We hope that others can benefit from our research by using all or part of the index for their own work.

We began our investigation by reviewing the academic literature on participation and studying the various ways in which engagement has been measured by scholars and practitioners. We then turned to experts in the field of youth involvement to hear their first hand accounts of working with today's younger generations. Next, we took the lessons from these expert panels and convened a series of age-specific focus groups all across the country in which participants talked about their civic and political attitudes and behavior. We then conducted several small surveys in which we subjected potential questions to a series of methodological tests. One of these surveys, a web-based poll, was restricted to those ages 15 to 25, and explored a number of school and youth oriented activities.¹ In Spring 2002, we tested the index in a national survey of 3246 individuals ages 15 and up, including significant oversamples of the two post Boomer generations. Finally, after the 2002 midterm elections, we fielded two more national surveys that allowed us to test the reliability of the index.

The index can be used for a variety of purposes and in a variety of forms. First, the percentages from our national telephone survey provide baseline numbers for these behaviors as measured by a national sample in the spring of 2002. The reported rates of participation represent national averages for all individuals aged 15 and older. Some subgroups (e.g., youth, the college educated, immigrants, or parents of young children) are more or less active in different arenas or across different measures. Organizations interested in how their communities measure up to the national averages could field a survey with the index and then compare their findings to the results of the nationwide sample to see if their communities are more or less active than the national average. In this way, the index could serve as a

¹ The Internet Survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks, which maintains a sample that allows them to randomly select participants who are representative of the larger public.

starting point for discussions about the level of engagement that currently exists and what, if any, programs might be used to encourage greater participation. Alternatively, if one is launching a program to boost engagement, the index can be used to measure behavior before and after the program as a means of testing the success of the venture.

Of course, the index can be used in part or as a whole, depending on a program's goals. For example, to measure youth participation in electoral politics, a survey could include only the five electoral indicators. Or, if a program's focus is community life, then the civic engagement indicators might suffice. If the goal is to capture the breadth of activity, then all 19 indicators (and the four attentiveness measures) would be appropriate. In short, we encourage use of the index in whatever form suits the purpose of the program.

The Index and Its Dimensions

The 19 items in this index represent a broad range of activities across three different dimensions, which are described in detail in our September 19, 2002 report, "The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait." The items may be used individually (if one is only concerned with a single behavior), in parts (if one is interested in a particular area of engagement), or as a whole (if the goal is to capture the greatest breadth of behavior). Alternatively, if one is interested in measuring all three dimensions, but is limited by time and space, each dimension can be represented by a few key questions, which we identify in more detail later in the report.

The percentage of respondents in our survey (ages 15 and up) who participated in each behavior in the past year (or "generally" for the campaign-specific items) are listed below in three blocks corresponding to the three dimensions—civic behaviors, electoral behaviors and expressions of political voice. For the exact question wording and the corresponding response categories, please see the questionnaire, which is at the end of this document.

These three dimensions represent different arenas in which individuals can contribute to public life. The first five measures, which capture "civic activities," include organized voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others. These activities are usually aimed at maintaining or developing one's local community, addressing local problems through organized activities, or providing critical resources to the nonprofit sector. The next five measures, the "electoral activities," include voting and work related to campaigns and elections to promote or support a party, candidate or cause. Electoral work is usually more sporadic than civic work because it is dependent on the cycle of campaigns and elections. The third dimension is entitled "political voice." The nine items included here comprise activities people engage in to give expression to their political and social viewpoints.

Individuals may also be *cognitively* engaged – i.e., involved through the attention they pay to current events and political and newsworthy happenings. Attentiveness represents a fourth dimension. (Tables on next page.)

ALL		AGE:	15-18	19-22	23-25	15-25	26-37	38-56	57+
Civic Indicators									
31%	Active member in group or organization.		25%	18%	23%	22%	29%	39%	27%
31%	General fund raising for charity.		31%	22%	30%	28%	29%	37%	26%
24%	Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization.		27%	16%	22%	22%	25%	26%	19%
21%	Community problem solving.		25%	16%	21%	21%	22%	25%	15%
14%	Participating in fund-raising run/walk/ride.		16%	15%	17%	16%	16%	15%	8%
Electoral Indicators									
51%	Regular voting (for age 20 and older).	--		21%	27%	24%	34%	53%	72%
33%	Persuading others to vote for a particular candidate or party.		38%	33%	35%	36%	33%	32%	32%
26%	Displaying campaign buttons, signs, stickers.		24%	15%	19%	20%	18%	28%	34%
13%	Contributing to a campaign, party or group.		3%	3%	7%	4%	11%	17%	17%
6%	Volunteering for a candidate or political organization.		3%	3%	2%	3%	5%	8%	6%
Indicators of Political Voice									
38%	Boycotting.		33%	39%	45%	38%	43%	41%	28%
35%	Buycotting.		33%	34%	40%	35%	42%	37%	25%
23%	Signing written petitions.		15%	24%	23%	20%	23%	24%	21%
18%	Contacting officials.		9%	8%	14%	10%	16%	20%	21%
12%	“Signing” e-mail petitions.		12%	16%	16%	14%	15%	11%	9%
10%	Contacting the print media.		11%	9%	10%	10%	8%	12%	12%
8%	Contacting the broadcast media.		6%	9%	8%	7%	7%	10%	8%
4%	Protesting.		6%	8%	7%	7%	5%	3%	3%
2%	Canvassing.		2%	*	2%	2%	2%	3%	4%

ALL		15-18	19-22	23-25	15-25	26-37	38-56	57+
Attentiveness Indicators								
60%	Watch television news regularly.	35%	31%	50%	38%	47%	63%	85%
46%	Read a newspaper regularly.	28%	32%	32%	30%	32%	48%	60%
45%	Follow government and public affairs “most of the time.”	21%	23%	32%	25%	37%	50%	60%
33%	Talk “very often” about politics with family and friends.	19%	21%	27%	22%	28%	38%	35%

These dimensions are conceptually distinct in that the activities within each have more in common with each other than with the activities in other dimensions. But they are also empirically, or statistically, distinct as well. For example, in our surveys, people who do a particular activity within the civic dimension are more likely to do another activity in that same dimension than to do something in the electoral dimension, and vice versa.

The four dimensions separately provide insight into the distinct realms in which individuals, communities or groups concentrate their efforts or focus their attention. Collectively, they represent a broad and reasonably comprehensive measure of engagement in the life of the polity.

There is a natural tendency for groups interested in using the index to want to create additive scales that include all four dimensions of the index. An example of this would be to give an individual one point for having participated in each behavior and then comparing individuals by how highly they score on the scale. An overall index built from the four dimensions provides a very reliable measure of engagement, but it is insensitive to important differences in *types* of behavior. In an overall index, a person who concentrates all of their efforts in the electoral arena would get the same score as someone who does the same number of activities spread across the various domains. One person is a specialist, the other is more broadly involved. A general index does not allow one to make these distinctions and thus should be interpreted with caution.

In addition, much civic and political activity is episodic or sporadic in nature, which means that even within a dimension, all activities do not require the same amount of effort. Scales that sum up behavior count all activities equally when in fact the activities differ in how hard they are to do and how much time each might take to complete. Groups that choose to compute such indexes should be aware of these issues when drawing conclusions about their results.²

This does not mean, however, that there are no alternative ways of reducing the index or summarizing behavior within each dimension. Later in this document, we provide suggestions for selecting key questions to represent each dimension, if one is unable to ask the fully battery of 19 items. We also describe how to compute a typology that categorizes individuals based on their answers to the 10 measures of civic and electoral behavior.

Measuring Engagement Using Different Types of Questions

These indicators represent many different questions. Some are compilations of more than one question; others were asked as part of a series of questions. Sometimes it takes several questions to tap into a relevant behavior. Other times, a single question is enough. Often, when asking about a lot of similar activities, a series of questions allows the interviewee to respond to a list of similar questions in a relatively short amount of time.

The measure of community problem solving is a single item (see CB1 in the Questionnaire), but regular volunteering for both non-electoral and electoral organizations is a compilation of several different questions (see the box on the next page). To create the volunteering measure, respondents were first asked a general question about volunteering in the past year. If they responded affirmatively, they were asked a series of questions about volunteering for particular groups, and then asked about the regularity of their group volunteer work. Five groups (including the catch all “other”) comprise the

² A note for methodologists: the indexes have relatively low inter-item correlations and coefficient *alpha* is modest. Still, the indexes display good construct validity, correlating appropriately with variables such as education, political interest, and the like.

measure of non electoral work. Work for a candidate or political organization is one of the six types of groups mentioned in the series, and constitutes the electoral volunteering, which is not measured as “regular” since it is dependent on the electoral calendar. (The volunteer series are questions CB2, CB3 and CB4 in the Questionnaire.)³

The other activities associated with elections—always voting, persuading others to vote, displaying a button, bumper sticker or sign, and contributing money to a candidate, party or organization—each represent a separate question. (See EB2, EB3, EB4, and EB6 in the Questionnaire.) Only individuals who first responded positively to a question about their voter registration (EB1), were asked about the regularity of their voting. The other questions associated with civic engagement— participation in a fund-raising walk/run/bikeride and other fund-raising for charity—are asked along with a series of political voice questions. (See PVI and PVJ.)

Active group membership is measured by two questions: one that asks about membership in general and a follow up question that asks respondents if they are “active” members of any of the groups. (See CB5 and CB7 in the Questionnaire.) The political voice items are part of a long battery of questions. In order to make sure that no item was always first or always last, we used a computer program that allowed us to randomly rotate the order in which these questions appeared in the survey. (See PVA-H and PVK in the Questionnaire.) However, within this series, several items were linked together as pairs and thus rotated as a set: the boycott question was always followed immediately by the buycott question; the walk, run or ride for charity always preceded the question about raising money for charity, and the e-mail petition question always came before the written petition. (We will explore issues of question order in more depth later.) For the attentiveness indicators, following political news and talking with friends and family were separate questions. The measures of “regular” news habits represent respondents who said they read a newspaper or watch television news at least five times a week. (See Questions AT1, AT2, and AT3 in the Questionnaire.)

Measurements Created from Multiple Questions

Regular Volunteering for Non-electoral Organization: Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven't you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay. IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months? I'm going to read a list of different groups that people sometimes volunteer for. As I read each one, can you tell me if you have volunteered for this type of group or organization within the last 12 months? An environmental organization; A civic or community organization involved in health or social services. This could be an organization involved with youth, children, or education; Any other type of group. Thinking about the work for (type of group) over the last 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?

Simplified Version: Use gatekeeper question and last 12 month follow up as above. Then ask: “Thinking about your volunteer work over the past 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?”

Active Group Membership: Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally? IF YES, Are you an active member of this group/any of these groups, a member but not active, or have you given money only?

³ Because this series of followup questions is time consuming, we tested an alternative that simply asks about the regularity of volunteering among those who indicate having volunteered in the past 12 months. If specific information about the type of volunteer activity is not needed, this simplified approach is an acceptable alternative.

Using the Index

It may be difficult for most groups interested in using all or part of the index in a survey to replicate the exact conditions under which our survey was conducted. This is both expected and understandable. When comparing a survey that contains all or part of the index with our baseline survey, however, one needs to be aware of issues that could affect the results. For example, the national index was designed to be administered with a telephone survey, in which the interviewers used computer programs that rotated items within sections—such as the “political voice” items, among which indicator always came first or last. To replicate this, one would need to hire a professional survey field house with computer assisted telephone interviewing, the costs for which may exceed the resources available to many organizations. Other ways of administration are certainly acceptable (including paper-and-pencil telephone surveys or mail surveys), but they may introduce slight differences between the results obtained via our survey and alternative methods. If difference modes of implementation are used, then, one should be aware that differences could be the result of different methods, and not because the two populations are significantly different. Our survey with Knowledge Networks, using a web-based mode of administration, yielded several different results that we attribute to the self-administered form of the survey.

Issues Confronting Surveys Measuring Civic Engagement

No survey is ever perfect. One is often limited by time, money, or space. Some populations are hard to reach. Some respondents may have difficulty reading. Surveys of immigrant communities often need to be translated into other languages. Paper surveys of older populations need to be in large print. Because survey findings can be influenced by a wide range of issues, we suggest that before organizations use all or part of the index in their own work, they give careful consideration to the following issues. In addition, we recommend that questions be tested on small groups before being fully administered.

Memory

A respondent’s ability to accurately recall whether or not they engaged in a particular activity depends at least in part on how significant the behavior is to that person. If a person is actively and regularly involved in an activity or if the activity is associated with a memorable event, it may be fairly easy to recall the behavior. However, with a few exceptions, many of the questions used in this index ask about activities that are sporadic and not tied to any notable or regular event. It may be more difficult for most people to accurately recall behavior that is not done on a daily (or regular) basis, occurs only when an election is taking place, or when someone asks them to do it, such as the case with signing petitions.

Prior to the national survey, we conducted several surveys in which we asked individuals about a wide range of activities, and then interviewed them again about a month later, asking about the same activities. This provided us an opportunity to test the reliability of their recollections. An analysis of these experiments indicated that despite the challenges posed by memory and recall, most respondents were consistent in their answers to questions about their regularity of voting, their contacting of government officials, or their participation in protests. They were somewhat less consistent in their responses to questions about volunteer activity and media attentiveness. This suggests that not all behaviors are recalled with similar ease; acts that occurred more recently will be easier to remember than those that took place many months before the survey. For example, remembering whether or not one had worn a campaign button is easier to do just after an election, rather than months later.

Grouping similar activities together in the survey can help respondents recall their behavior. We recommend maintaining the questions within each component, rather than mixing up their order and interspersing, for example, civic with political voice or electoral questions. We believe this is important in order to ensure a respondent is not asked to jump across domains when recounting his or her behavior.

Keeping the questions together within areas of behavior makes it easier for people to remember accurately what they have and have not done. For guidance about what questions relate to each dimension, refer to the table on page 3.

Question Order

As mentioned earlier, the national survey randomized the order of the political voice questions so that no single item was always first or last. If this is possible to replicate, we encourage programs to do so. When respondents are asked about a long list of activities, they may become fatigued, and, as the list continues, they may be more likely to fall into a pattern of responses or to respond negatively. Alternatively, hearing the list could jog their memory so that by the end, they are more likely to recall a particular activity, and respond positively. Randomly changing the order of questions prevents these problems from disproportionately affecting particular measures. If random ordering is impossible, sponsors should be aware of these potential issues.

A few of the questions should be kept together as pairs. The question about raising money for charity by participating in a fund-raising run/walk/ride should be asked before the more generic question about charitable fund-raising, since the run/walk/ride item is a subset of the broader question about fundraising. (If the broader question is asked first, some respondents will answer in terms of the more limited activity, and will fail to be counted as active in this arena.) Similarly, given the sporadic nature of petition signing – and the more limited nature of e-mail petitions – respondents are more likely to remember doing so if they are asked about email and written petitions sequentially. And since boycotting and buycotting both deal with consumer behavior, asking these questions together should help respondents stay in the mindset of what motivates their purchasing behavior. We ask boycotting first since it may be a more recognizable activity.

Paired Questions
Now, I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not. (For each YES, probe: And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?)
<i>Fund-raising:</i> Personally walked, ran or bicycled for a charitable cause—this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event? And have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause?
<i>Petition signing:</i> Signed an e-mail petition? And have you ever signed a written petition about a political or social issue?
<i>Consumer Activism:</i> NOT bought something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces it? Bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it?

Context Effects

When the index is used as part of a larger survey, organizations should be sensitive to the ways in which the indicators can be affected by other items. Ideally, these measures would be asked before other questions in a survey. For example, a series of questions that asks about political scandals, if asked before the items on political engagement, may reduce the likelihood that respondents will acknowledge their own activities on behalf of political candidates. More generally, we advise users of this index to be aware of how earlier questions may influence responses to later questions.

This issue is especially important when one is conducting surveys before and after an intervention to measure the impact of a particular program. In these situations, organizations should be especially

careful about including the same questions in the same order and in the same context on both the pre and post surveys to assure the comparability of results.

Social Desirability

A great deal of research has demonstrated that people sometimes report having engaged in socially desirable behaviors such as volunteering, voting, or contributing to charities when they have not actually done so (or have done so less often than they report). For example, reported voter turnout in surveys is typically 10-15 percentage points higher than is documented by actual voting records. Sometimes, when respondents have already answered “no” to a number of questions, they may feel the need to say yes to a subsequent question, even if they have never done what is being asked. We use two different approaches to minimize the impact of this bias.

Many of our indicators first ask respondents if they had ever participated in a particular activity before asking if they had done so in the past year. By allowing individuals to “get credit” for seemingly good work through the “ever” option, we hoped to reduce the likelihood of over-reporting such activity within the past 12 months. Experimental evidence indicates that this tactic reduces the reported level of many behaviors, and thus probably conforms more closely with reality.

We understand this type of question format increases the length of the survey, which may pose a problem for some programs. However, the “ever” and “12-months” format goes quickly, especially in the context of the political voice questions. And given this format’s usefulness in screening out untruthful “yes” responses (known as “false positives”), we believe the benefits far outweigh the costs. Moreover, for many purposes, the measure of lifetime incidence of the behavior is also valuable analytically.

<p style="text-align: center;">Reducing Social Desirability</p> <p><i>If ever format:</i> Have you ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live? IF YES, Was this in the last 12 months or not?</p> <p><i>Normalizing non participation:</i> We know that most people don’t vote in all elections. Usually between one-quarter to one half of those eligible actually come out to vote. Can you tell me how often you vote in local and national elections? Always, sometimes, rarely or never?</p>

We also address the problem of social desirability in some items by normalizing non-participation. For example, when we ask about a respondent’s voting habits, we begin by saying, “We know that most people don’t vote in every election. Usually between one-quarter to one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote.” Again, while this increases the length of the question, our work suggests that the additional language is worthwhile in reducing overreporting.

Clarity, Precision, and Comprehensiveness

A major task facing anyone conducting a survey is the need to make sure that respondents actually understand the question being asked. Sometimes the danger is that respondents will think too narrowly and thus omit reporting behavior that is relevant. Other times, the problem is that respondents will think too broadly and thus report behavior that is substantively not at issue. Several aspects of the index attempt to address these concerns.

The measurement of group membership poses many challenges to survey researchers. It is well documented that providing respondents a long list of groups, rather than a single generic question about “groups,” spurs recollection and thus results in respondents acknowledging membership or activity in a higher number of groups. Going through a long list of groups, however, is cumbersome and time

consuming. Since one of the objectives of this project was to create a set of measures that could be administered in a relatively compact survey, we sought an efficient solution to this dilemma. Prior to the spring national telephone survey, we tested various options and determined that a simple question that included examples of various groups in the text provided a valid measure of group membership. The references to different groups helps respondents remember their activity, and the single question format is significantly more manageable than the longer battery. Asking about many different kinds of groups may be warranted if particular kinds of groups are important to the research, but if “joining” behavior is the activity of interest, a single question should suffice. We follow up the initial question with probes about the level of activity in and the political nature of the groups.

Developing the wording for our items on consumer activism was challenging. This type of behavior had not been probed in national surveys, and we encountered some confusion about what actually constitutes consumer activism in our focus groups. Since “boycotting” and “buycotting” are not common terms, we opted to describe the behavior in question, rather than asking respondents if they had ever “boycotted” or “buycotted” a product. In our test surveys, we followed up these measures with open-ended questions that asked respondents to tell us what they had done. Most respondents were able to provide examples of behaviors that fit the definition of consumer activism, which suggests that these measures do a fairly good job isolating such behavior.⁴

Activities that are Difficult to Measure

Group Membership: Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally? IF YES, Are you an active member of this group, a member but not active, or have you given money only? Does this group/Do any of these groups take stands on or discuss public issues, or try to influence governmental actions?

Consumer Activism: Have you... NOT bought something from a certain company because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces it? Have you... Bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it?

Measuring Community Service and Volunteer Activity

Volunteering is a very problematic concept to measure. There are many different survey research approaches to capturing it. To some extent, the problem is similar to the measurement of group activity: people may engage in many different kinds of volunteer activity and may have trouble remembering all of it. But social desirability is also a factor, since volunteer work is thought to be a praiseworthy activity. And it is also a somewhat vague concept, potentially covering “random acts of kindness” and regular, lengthy, intensive work for organizations or groups.

As with group activity, we opted for a single opening question (called a “gatekeeper” question) rather than a lengthy list of different kinds of volunteer work. This strategy minimizes the survey cost (both in time and money) but probably results in some degree of underestimation of activity. We reached this decision after testing a variety of approaches in our earlier surveys.

⁴ Based on further research we have modified our boycott question to refer more specifically to the social and political values of the product’s producer. The revised wording appears in the box above and in the questionnaire at the end of this document. We do not yet have national norms for the new question but expect the incidence to be a few percentage points lower than the number reported in the table on page 3.

Our gatekeeper question includes a definition (“by volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay”). Respondents who pass this hurdle (saying they have volunteered during the past 12 months) are then asked a series of questions about volunteering with different groups. For each of the types of group for which they have volunteered, they are asked if they are regular volunteers. Overall, 33 percent of those 18 and older said they had volunteered in the past year. About one quarter (24%) say that they volunteer regularly for a non-electoral group.

These generic volunteer numbers are somewhat lower than those reported in other surveys. For example, a 1998 Independent Sector survey conducted by Gallup reported an adult volunteer rate of 56 percent. The 2000 National Election Study found 43 percent of adults saying they had volunteered within the past year. In a Kaiser Family Foundation/*Washington Post* poll, 51 percent of adults said they had volunteered in the past month. While our numbers fall below each of these, there is hardly a consensus among them.

In our earlier work, described above, which asked individuals to recall their behavior in two different surveys, respondent reports of their volunteer work were less consistent across surveys than were some other activities. These early tests, along with the variability in estimates from survey to survey, suggest that volunteering is a particularly difficult activity to measure. Since volunteering is such an essential element in civic life, we decided to conduct several additional tests to determine if we had accurately and reliably measured this behavior.

Our main focus in these tests was the effect of question order on our results.. In one survey, in which we changed the order from our original survey, 55 percent of respondents said they had volunteered in the past 12 months, suggesting that question order mattered significantly. However, in another test, switching the question order made no difference. Two versions of the survey with different orderings yielded almost identical results (43% and 44%, respectively), both of which fell substantially below our first test, but above our original measurement. Finally, in a third experiment, we simultaneously fielded two identical polls (both testing the question order) with two different survey houses. In one, the order mattered (45% vs. 34%, depending on placement) and in another one it didn’t (35% vs. 40%).

These tests suggest that measuring the percent of the public who volunteers is inherently difficult and often unreliable. Groups interested in measuring this phenomenon should be aware of these challenges. However, our work also suggests that while overall levels of volunteering may be difficult to

Measuring Volunteer Activity

Regular Volunteering for Non-electoral Organization: Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven’t you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay.

IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months?

IF YES, I’m going to read a list of different groups that people sometimes volunteer for. As I read each one, can you tell me if you have volunteered for this type of group or organization within the last 12 months? An environmental organization; A civic or community organization involved in health or social services. This could be an organization involved with youth, children, or education; Any other type of group.

FOR EACH TYPE OF GROUP R HAS WORKED FOR, ASK: Thinking about the work for (type of group) over the last 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?

Simplified Version: Use gatekeeper question and last 12 month follow up as above. Then ask: “Thinking about your volunteer work over the past 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?”

accurately measure, we can reliably capture *regular* volunteers, individuals of particular interest to us in gauging civic engagement.

When it comes to the percentage of individuals who *regularly* volunteer, there is greater continuity among these different surveys, including our own. Our spring survey yielded an estimate of 24%, while the omnibus survey found 26%. Our fall experiments identified 27% as regular volunteers for non-electoral organizations. These estimates are consistent and not significantly different from each other. We believe that this suggests that regular volunteers, those people who are giving time and energy to service work on a consistent basis, are more reliably identified than episodic volunteers, or people who drop in and out of volunteer work or give time on a project-by-project basis. The gatekeeper question captures nearly all of those who volunteer regularly, because they understand what the question is asking about and know that they qualify. Sporadic volunteers and non-volunteers may not understand the question in the same way; some may think the question refers to “random acts of kindness.” Others may not remember exactly when it was they last volunteered - it could have been within the past 12 months, but it also could have been 18 months ago. Thus, asking respondents who pass the gatekeeper hurdle about the regularity of their work (either with or without the series about particular groups) should isolate those individuals who are most committed and active in their community.

Using a Reduced Form of the Index

The 19 items in the index each capture a distinct element of citizen engagement. Some activities—such as voting—are relatively common; others—such as canvassing—are largely the province of a relative minority. Asking about all 19 items, and the attentiveness indicators, provides a very comprehensive measurement of citizen participation, but it is also costly both in terms of time and money. Many groups interested in measuring engagement may not have the resources to ask the full battery of questions. If this is an issue, one can select key variables from each domain to represent the broader arena.

If one has the space to include two or three questions from each dimension, we recommend the following items: In the civic arena, the two most important variables (or combination of variables) are regular non-electoral

A Five-Item Index

Regular Volunteering (simplified version):

Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven't you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay.

IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months?

IF YES, Thinking about your volunteer work over the past 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?"

Regularity of Voting

We know that most people don't vote in all elections.

Usually between one-quarter to one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote. Can you tell me how often you vote in local and national elections? Always, sometimes, rarely, or never?

Attention to Public Affairs

Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs, whether there's an election or not. Others aren't that interested. Do you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, rarely or never?

Contacting Officials

Have you ever contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to express your opinion? And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?

Boycotting

Have you ever NOT bought something from a certain company because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces it? And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?

volunteering (CB2, CB3A, CB3C, CB3D, CB3E, CB3F and CB4) and community problem solving (CB1). If there is space for three, active group membership (CB5 and CB7) is a close third. In the electoral arena, regularity of voting (EB2) and raising money or working for a candidate are central items (EB7). Again, if there is space for more, trying to persuade others how to vote (EB3) is another important element of electoral activity. To measure the political voice dimension, we would recommend asking about boycotting (PVG), contacting public officials (PVA), and, if space allows, signing petitions (PFE and PVF)⁵ and contacting the news media (either PVB or PVC). Finally, for attentiveness, the measure of regular attention to news about government and public affairs is a good surrogate for the other questions (AT1). Groups interested in the habits of older respondents could include measures of their newspaper use (AT3A); those interested in the news consumption of young adults might add Internet news usage (AT3E).

Some groups may want to create a very concise index, limited to five items. Although there is no perfect set of questions that will suit everyone's needs, there are some measures that serve as particularly good representatives of the larger domains of civic, electoral, voice and cognitive arenas. First, for the electoral arena, we recommend using regularity of voting (EB2); for civic engagement, either regular non-electoral volunteering (CB2, CB3A, CB3C, CB3D, CB3E, CB3F and CB4) or community problem solving (CB1) would serve as a good surrogate. In the voice arena, we would recommend including both contacting public officials (PVA) and boycotting (PVG). Finally, for cognitive engagement or attentiveness, regularity of attention to news about public affairs (AT1) is the most important element of attentiveness.

The Typology of Engagement

Our September 19 report describes a typology of engagement, which sorts the public into four categories based on their activities in the civic and electoral domains. The typology, which is easy to construct, serves as a short hand way of identifying individuals who are specialists (either active solely in the electoral arena or solely in the civic arena), dual activists (involved in both arenas), or disengaged (not involved in either). This is a unique mechanism for evaluating some particular aspects of a community, such as whether residents concentrate their efforts in a particular arena, or if they are involved across domains. It also provides a concise means of interpreting answers to a large number of survey questions.

To create the typology, assign respondents one point for having performed each of the following activities:

Electoral Dimension

- Regular voting (EB2)
- Trying to persuade others to vote for a particular candidate (EB3)
- Wearing campaign button, displaying sticker or sign (EB4)
- Donating money to a candidate or political party (EB7)
- Volunteering for a candidate or political party (CB2 and CB3B)

Civic Dimension

- Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization. (CB2, CB3A, CB3C, CB3D, CB3E, CB3F and CB4, or the simplified version if necessary)
- Active group membership (CB5 and CB7)

⁵ The e-mail and written petitions questions can be combined into one question by asking "Have you ever signed an email or written petition about a social or political issue?"

- Working with others to solve a community problem (CB1)
- Participating in a walk/bike/run for charity OR doing other fund raising for charity (one point for doing either or both) (PVI and PVJ)

Then, sort respondents according to the following pattern:

- *Disengaged*: score 1 or 0 on BOTH dimensions.
- *Civic Specialist*: score 2 or higher on the civic dimension and 0 or 1 on the electoral dimension.
- *Electoral Specialist*: score 2 or higher on the electoral dimension and 0 or 1 on the civic dimension.
- *Dual Activist*: score 2 or higher on BOTH dimensions.

The typology is a simple but powerful way to categorize citizens in the realm of civic and political engagement. Our fall 2002 survey showed that the typology was very reliable – we were able to recreate the groups we found in the spring survey very closely. And a pair of focus groups conducted with Civic Specialists and Dual Activists in the summer of 2002 provided strong evidence for the validity of the concept. The groups were both very engaged and active, but strikingly different in orientations toward the political system and in attitudes about the value of voting and electoral activity.

The Typology of Engagement			
		Electoral Activities	
		0 or 1	2 or more
Civic Activities	0 or 1	<i>Disengaged</i> (48%)	<i>Electoral Specialist</i> (20%)
	2 or more	<i>Civic Specialist</i> (16%)	<i>Dual Activist</i> (16%)

**National Civic Engagement Indicators Project
Questionnaire**

- CB** CIVIC BEHAVIOR QUESTIONS
- EB** ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR QUESTIONS
- PV** POLITICAL VOICE QUESTIONS
- AT** ATTENTIVENESS QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION To begin with, for how many years have you lived in the community or town where you now reside, or have you lived here all your life?

/_____/_____/ Code actual number: 1-97; 98 = all my life; 99 = don't know/refused; Less than 1 year = 0

CB1 Have you ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live? IF YES, Was this in the last 12 months or not?

- 1 Yes, within the last 12 months
- 2 Yes, but not within the last 12 months
- 3 No, haven't done it
- 9 (VOL) Don't Know/Refused

CB2 Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven't you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay. IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?

- 1 Yes, have done it in last 12 months – GO TO CB3
- 2 Yes, but have not done it in last 12 months – GO TO EB1
- 3 No, have not done it – GO TO EB1
- 8 Don't know if have done it – GO TO EB1
- 9 Refused – GO TO EB1

CB3 I'm going to read a list of different groups that people sometimes volunteer for. As I read each one, can you tell me if you have volunteered for this type of group or organization within the last 12 months? [Randomize, with OTHER (ITEM F) always last]

- A A religious group
- B A political organization or candidates running for office
- C An environmental organization
- D A civic or community organization involved in health or social services. This could be an organization to help the poor, elderly, homeless, or a hospital.
- E An organization involved with youth, children, or education
- F Is there any other type of group I haven't mentioned that you have volunteered for in the last 12 months
[If yes] What group would that be? _____

- 1 Yes, has volunteered within the last 12 months
- 2 No, has not volunteered within the last 12 months

- 8 Don't know if volunteered within the last 12 months
- 9 Refused

NOTE: Response category B in above question (a political organization or candidates running for office) is an ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR measure

[Ask the following question for each group (mentioned in CB3) that the respondent identifies as having volunteered for in the past 12 months, up to a maximum of 3 groups. If more than 3 groups selected choose randomly, but always include 'a political organization or candidates for office' if selected by respondent.]

- CB4 Thinking about the work for (type of group) over the last 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?
- 1 On a regular basis
 - 2 Once in a while
 - 8 Don't know
 - 9 Refused

- EB1 In talking to people, we find that many are not registered to vote because they are too busy or move around often. Would official state records show that you are now registered to vote in your election district, or not?
- 1 Registered
 - 2 Not registered Go to EB3
 - 8 Don't know Go to EB3
 - 9 Refused Go to EB3

- EB2 We know that most people don't vote in all elections. Usually between one-quarter to one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote. Can you tell me how often you vote in local and national elections? Always, sometimes, rarely, or never?
- 1 Always
 - 2 Sometimes
 - 3 Rarely
 - 4 Never
 - 5 Other (eligibility problems) (VOL)
 - 8 Don't know
 - 9 Refused

- EB3 When there is an election taking place do you generally talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, or not?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No
 - 8 Don't know
 - 9 Refused

- EB4 Do you wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house, or aren't these things you do?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No

- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

EB5 During the past 12 months, have you been contacted by someone PERSONALLY to vote for or against any candidate for political office? This does not include contact through a mass mailing or recorded telephone call.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

EB6 During the past 12 months, have you been contacted by someone PERSONALLY to work for or contribute money to a candidate, political party, or any other organization that supports candidates? This does not include contact through a mass mailing or recorded telephone call.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

EB7 In the past 12 months, did you work for or contribute money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

{ROTATE, BUT KEEP THE FOLLOWING BLOCKS TOGETHER: E and F; G and H; I and J}

PV I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not. (FOR EACH YES, PROBE: And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?)

- A Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to express your opinion?
- B Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?
- C Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air?
- D Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?
- E Signed an e-mail petition about a social or political issue?
- F And have you ever signed a written petition about a political or social issue?
- G NOT bought something from a certain company because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces it?
- H Bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it
- I *Personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause -this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event?*

J *BESIDES DONATING MONEY, have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause?*

K Have you worked as a canvasser - having gone door to door for a political or social group or candidate.

Response Options PVA-K

- 1 No. Have not done it.
- 2 Yes, Have done it, but not in last 12 months
- 3 Yes, Have done it, and within last 12 months
- 8 Have done it, DK whether in last 12 months or not
- 9 Don't know if have done it.

NOTE: PVI and PVK measure CIVIC BEHAVIOR.

AT1 Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs, whether there's an election or not. Others aren't that interested. Do you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, rarely or never?

- 1 Most of the time
- 2 Some of the time
- 3 Rarely
- 4 Never
- 8 Don't know/Depends.
- 9 Refused

AT2 How often do you talk about politics or government with your family and friends -- Very often, sometimes, rarely or never?

- 1 Very often
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 Rarely
- 4 Never
- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

AT3 I'm going to read you some ways that people get news and information. Over the past seven days, please tell me on how many days you have done each of the following...

(ROTATE)

- A Read a newspaper
- B Read magazines like Newsweek, Time, or U.S. News and World Report?
- C Watch the national news on television
- D Listen to the news on radio.
- E Read news on the Internet
- 0 No, did not do use
- /___/ Code number 1 through 7; couple=2; few=3; everyday=7
- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

CB5 Now we would like to know about the groups and organizations you might belong to. I'm interested in knowing about groups you're a member of, or donate money to. I'm talking about charities, labor unions, professional associations, political or social groups, sports and youth groups, and so forth. Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 (VOL) Don't know /Refused

CB6 About how many groups would you say you belong to or donate money to? Take your time and think about it.
(PROBE: "Just your best guess" BEFORE ACCEPTING DON'T KNOW OR REFUSED)

__ enter number (RANGE: 1-97, 98 = Don't Know, 99 = Refused)

CB7 Are you an active member (IF CB6 = 1 "OF THIS GROUP", IF CB6 > 1 "ANY OF THESE GROUPS"), a member but not active, or have you given money only?

- 1 Active member of at least one of them
- 2 Member but not active in at least one of them
- 3 Given money only
- 4 (VOL) Given Money and Active Member
- 5 (VOL) Given Money and Inactive Member
- 8 (VOL) Don't know
- 9 (VOL) Refused

CB8. (IF CB6 = 1 "DOES THIS GROUP", IF CB6 > 1 "DO ANY OF THESE GROUPS") take stands on or discuss public issues, or try to influence governmental actions?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 (VOL) Don't know/Refused