Reconsidering the Effects of Bonding Social Capital: A Closer Look at Black Civil Society Institutions in America

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Abstract Few studies consider how Putnam's bridging and bonding social capital arguments apply to voluntary associations within American minority group communities. Consequently, I examine African-American civic groups to explore Putnam's claims about the potential negative political effects of bonding social capital. In contrast to the bonding social capital thesis, I argue that black communal associations encourage African-Americans to be involved in a variety of mainstream civic and political activities that reach beyond their own group interests. Using the 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study I demonstrate that although black organizations are predominantly composed of African-Americans and work to advance their interests, these goals are not pursued at the expense of connecting blacks to others in the general polity.

Keywords Bonding social capital · Civil society · Black political behavior

In the last 10 years or so numerous scholars have written about the importance of social capital. Within the political science community, Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) is credited for popularizing the use of social capital models to explain trends in American civic and political life.[1] According to Putnam (2000, 19), "social capital refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." Recently, debates about the

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[1] Putnam (2000, 19–20) notes a number of scholars are credited for developing this concept. In particular, Coleman (1988, S98) maintains, "Social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors." His work examines interactions among individuals in various social settings to understand how individuals work together, exchange information and adhere to group norms.

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relevance of social capital and civil society for American democracy have been placed at the forefront of academic and popular discourse (see Foley and Edwards 1997; Hero 2003; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Indeed, the social interactions, patterns of exchange, and deliberation that occur within civil society institutions often teach citizens important civic skills and encourage them to connect their private concerns to larger issues that affect society.

Putnam's research, however, has been criticized for a variety of reasons. His earlier works, for example, often exalted the benefits of communal relations among individuals without carefully considering how these same networks could also produce unpleasant outcomes (see Putnam 1993, 1995). By Putnam's definition, for instance, groups such as the Ku Klux Klan represent a form of social capital. This exclusive organization, however, promotes divisive beliefs among its members. Since Putnam's initial work focuses on the positive effects of social relations, we are left to wonder about the potential negative effects of uniting citizens together to accomplish goals.[2]

Putnam elaborates on his argument in *Bowling Alone* (2000) by describing two forms of social capital: bridging and bonding.[3] On the one hand bridging social capital is thought to benefit society because it connects diverse groups across racial, class, or ideological lines. In contrast, bonding forms of social capital are often viewed with less favor because tight-knit civic communities tend to reinforce social differences among individuals.[4] But are these seemingly straightforward claims true? That is, does a strict dichotomy exist between bridging and bonding forms of social capital and would we expect all bonding associations to promote politically divisive and socially isolating behaviors among their participants?[5] This, of course, is an empirical question that must be examined by social scientists.

In particular, few studies consider how Putnam's bridging and bonding social capital arguments apply to associations within minority group communities.[6] Although it may be true that bridging social relations promote inclusive patterns of civic engagement and bonding attachments discourage individuals from participating in mainstream political life, little evidence has surfaced in the literature to evaluate these ideas. Moreover, it is likely that a simple bridging and bonding typology may not accurately describe the range of associations and networks that comprise the mosaic of American civil society.

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[2] Levi (1996, 52) notes, "There are innumerable instances when the capacity to engage in collective action is demonstrably a bad thing, for example, Bosnia or Rwanda."

[3] Granovetter (1973, 1371) makes a similar distinction in his discussion of strong and weak social ties. He notes, "Those whom we are weakly tied to are likely to move in circles different from our own and thus have access to information different from that which we receive."

[4] Putnam (2000, 23) notes, however, "Under many circumstances both bridging and bonding social capital can have positive social effects." This important point is not carefully explored in the book.

[5] Putnam (2000, 23) states, "bonding and bridging are not "either-or" categories into which social networks can be neatly divided." His goal is to use these categories for comparison purposes.

[6] My concerns about the utility of the bridging and bonding categories may apply more generally to a range of American civic groups. Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005, 239) note that a variety of bonding voluntary groups "develop citizenship virtues extolled by those who promote civic participation."

Consequently, I examine African-American voluntary associations to explore Putnam's claims about the potential negative effects of bonding social capital. In short, I contend that Putnam's bonding social capital argument may require some revisions in light of the realities of civic life for black Americans. More specifically, I argue that rather than inhibiting the social and political integration of African-Americans into mainstream society, black associations encourage individuals to be involved in a variety of conventional political activities.[7] These integrative functions of black civil society institutions stem from their experiences dealing with issues of inequality using various strategies that encourage blacks to work for the advancement of the group while remaining active in mainstream modes of civic and political engagement.

It is important to note that the argument I present in this paper is similar to Harris's (1999a, 40) oppositional civic culture model of black political participation. Like Harris, I believe that citizens' involvement in black religious institutions can influence their political behavior in multiple, "seemingly contradictory" ways. In this paper, however, I build upon Harris's model by applying it to a wide range of black voluntary associations (including a variety of black religious denominations and predominantly black social and political organizations) and using a more recent national survey of African-Americans. I also elaborate on some of the theoretical propositions of Harris's model by incorporating participatory theories of democratic politics and show how black organizations produce group-specific and sociotropic benefits for American democracy.

I examine the two most common forms of black group affiliation, African-American churches and political organizations. I ask the following questions that operationalize Putnam's arguments about the influence of bonding organizations. Are African-Americans who are affiliated with predominantly black churches and racial advancement organizations actively involved in the social and political concerns of the larger society? I am especially curious to see if participants in major black denominations (Baptist, Pentecostal, and Methodist) and members of venerable organizations (the NAACP and National Urban League) tend to limit their civic and political involvement within their own communities. Before I offer this evidence, however, I will position my arguments within the social capital, civil society, and African-American politics research literature.

Previous Studies of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

Putnam (2000, 22) argues that the most important variation among forms of social capital "is the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive)" social connections. Although this division is cited as crucial for understanding how social capital operates, Putnam does not elaborate on these

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[7] Putnam (2000, 23) acknowledges that black churches simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others by bringing together people of the same race and religion across class lines.

categories because he found "no reliable, comprehensive, nationwide measures of social capital that neatly distinguish "bridgingness" and "bondingness" (23–24).[8] Because of these constraints, Putnam utilizes his bridging and bonding framework as a conceptual tool in the remainder of the book but does not provide a thorough analysis of these categories he feels "are not interchangeable." Thus, Putnam introduces the reader to a potentially useful typology, but, fails to consider a number of crucial issues, such as how these categories might apply to associational life within minority group communities. Given the importance Putnam places on the bridging and bonding aspects of social capital, it is surprising that few scholars have carefully examined these distinctions in research on American social and political life.

Wuthnow (2002), for example, studied the effects of status-bridging social capital in American churches. His analysis shows that "membership in a religious congregation and holding a congregational leadership position was associated with a greater likelihood of having influential friends and acquaintances who are elected public officials, corporate executives, and scientists" (669). Thus, church members are more likely to be connected to influential people outside of their own social and economic circles. Wuthnow's work demonstrates that the bridging and bonding categories are useful for understanding some general aspects of communal life. However, his study primarily explores the general implications of distinctions between identity-bridging and status-bridging social capital in religious institutions. Consequently, Wuthnow does not consider how race and ethnicity might complicate our understanding of bridging and bonding social relations. Thus, additional research is needed to assess how Putnam's typology can be usefully applied in the literature.

Hill and Matsubayashi (2005) provide a deeper understanding of the theoretical dimensions and potential limitations of Putnam's social capital categories in their study of civic engagement and mass-elite policy agenda agreement in American communities. In contrast to Putnam's arguments about the beneficial effects of bridging social networks, Hill and Matsubayashi demonstrate that citizens' involvement in bridging civic associations is not related to democratic responsiveness of leaders to the mass public (215, 223). In addition, the authors find that bonding forms of civic engagement are negatively associated with democratic responsiveness. Moreover, their article highlights the detrimental effects of bonding civic ties on the democratic linkage process. Hence, this study illustrates that the political effects of bridging and bonding social capital may be more complex than scholars acknowledge.

It is also important to note that few scholars have focused on the civil society institutions of blacks (or other racial groups) as exemplars of bonding social capital. To be sure, Putnam (2000, 22–24) clearly has these voluntary associations in mind when he discusses categories of social relations. In fact, he specifically mentions ethnic fraternal organizations as examples of bonding social capital. Similarly, black

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[8] Putnam's (2000, 290–291) social capital index for American states does not include measures of church membership or attendance. He notes that his analysis of church attendance data indicates this form of involvement is "unrelated with the other indicators" (Endnote 9, p. 487).

churches and political organizations would also fit within this classification scheme. With this in mind, the next step is to consider the civic life of minority groups.

Social Capital and Minority Communities

Although Putnam's concerns about the negative effects of bonding social connections are not explicitly tested in *Bowling Alone*, other scholars have examined the political effects of minority civic associations.[9] Orr's (1999) study of urban politics and school reform in Baltimore, for instance, discusses black social capital and intergroup social capital. He notes that black social capital "refers to interpersonal and institutional forms of cooperation within African-American communities, while intergroup social capital describes cross-sector patterns of trust and networks that bridge the black white divide" (8). Orr's findings show how Baltimore's history of racial relations often separated black and white communities in urban areas and lead to distinct patterns of interactions among groups. As a result, African-Americans relied more on relationships within their own communities, rather than forming alliances with white associations. Orr argues that this political culture made in difficult to implement citywide school reform in Baltimore from 1986 to 1998.

From these findings Orr cautions that social capital generated within African-American communities does not necessarily translate into the kind of intergroup relationships required for social reforms. He maintains "if social capital is confined to individuals of the same ethnic or racial background, cooperation may be facilitated *within* particular groups, but not necessarily beyond them" (9). Consequently, black social capital may be effective for tackling problems within black communities, yet complex issues may require the cooperation of a diverse set of political actors and institutional arrangements (7–8). Thus, it is plausible that blacks' affiliation with indigenous associations may have the unfavorable consequence of isolating them from mainstream political life.

Curiously, however, much of the research on black political activism demonstrates that black civil society institutions connect individuals to the political mainstream by facilitating their involvement in general modes of activism such as contacting elected officials, attending public meetings, participating in political campaigns, and voting for political candidates (Walton 1985; Brown and Wolford 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Harris 1999a; Mc Kenzie 2004). The impact of many of these activities, of course, reaches beyond black communities and often encompasses the interests of non-black political groups and constituents. So there is good reason to believe that black civic associations will connect their participants to others outside their own social circles.

Another report that explores the effects of bridging and bonding social capital is Chavez and Fraga's (2003) study of the civic participation of Latino attorneys in Washington. Their study demonstrates how group-specific associations exert bridging *and* bonding effects on society. In particular, Chavez and Fraga find that

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[9] Also see Uslaner and Conley (2003).

Latino lawyers use their positions to serve Latino communities and society at large. The authors note, "By the nature and types of their civic and professional involvements individuals use their professional location to bridge Latino and mainstream communities with the goals of fostering understanding and acceptance..." Thus, this study demonstrates that Latinos who are members of bonding organizations also participate in the general life of their local cities. These findings highlight the multiple influences that bonding groups have in America and provide a link to several recent studies of black political behavior.

Black Civil Society and American Political Life

Drawing upon the research literature, I define black civil society institutions as independently controlled, predominantly African-American voluntary associations that operate outside the forces of the state (government) and the business (economic markets) sectors (see Calhoun-Brown 2003; Foley and Edwards 1997). Examples include: churches of the major black religious denominations, black political and economic organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, black professional organizations, historically black private schools, and black sororities, fraternities, and Masonic organizations. Many of these organizations have national headquarters in large cities such as New York, Baltimore, and Nashville, along with hundreds of local chapters and congregations throughout the country. Black churches, in particular, can be found in virtual every city in America that has a notable black population. African-American churches and political organizations promote racial group interests in a variety of areas ranging from economic empowerment to spiritual development and social and political equality. These two forms of associational life are arguably the pillars of black civil society.

It is, perhaps, useful to provide some background for my discussion of the political impact of bonding organizations. To be sure, black associations may have played different roles in the recent past compared to their present functions in African-American communities. In particular, scholars note that black churches and groups such as the NAACP were invaluable in providing organizational resources for advancing black interests during the civil rights era (Mc Adam 1982; Morris 1984; Harris 1999a). Fortunately, the civil rights struggle resulted in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This federal legislation provided new opportunities for African-Americans. As mainstream participation in civic life by blacks increased, individuals utilized conventional electoral tactics such as voting, participating in political campaigns, and contacting public officials. In light of this shift one wonders about the contemporary role of black civic groups in the post-civil rights era.

A number of scholars have commented on the social and political influence of black organizations since the late sixties. Most of these individuals agree that African-American civic institutions continue to be important fixtures in black communities. Tate (1994, 107) notes, for example, that "although the civil rights struggle provided blacks with access to the political arena, it did not eliminate economic inequality and poverty." In addition, she argues that black civil society

institutions have recently been involved in a number of political efforts (such as helping with Jesse Jackson's political campaign in 1984) that aid African-American communities and the larger society. Billingsley (1999) similarly contends that black organizations (especially churches) continue to influence society by serving as "agents of social reform" on issues such as poverty, inadequate health care, educational disparities, and increasing voting participation.

African-American religious and civic groups are typically the first place scholars look when discussing black civil society. In particular, church involvement is often the most frequent form of communal activity that individuals participate in on a regular basis. Recent estimates of black church attendance indicate that between 40 and 56% of African-Americans report attending religious services in the past week (Gallup and Lindsay 1999; Mc Kenzie 2004; Roof and Mc Kinney 1987).[10] Furthermore, research indicates that beneficial social networks, communal bonding experiences, civic training and cooperative norms are fostered in black religious institutions and voluntary groups (Verba et al. 1995; Harris 1999a; Mc Kenzie 2004).

My examination of African-Americans' involvement in associations is well suited for testing Putnam's bonding social capital argument. Indeed, the seven historically black denominations and organizations such as the NAACP and National Urban League are prototypical bonding associations. These groups are primarily composed of African-American participants, even in the contemporary period (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; DeYoung et al. 2003).[11] Hence, there is much to be gained by studying these institutions.

As part of a larger study of black political behavior, for example, Tate (1994, 76) speculates that blacks who are involved in indigenous organizations should exhibit higher levels of electoral behavior than non-participants. She observes that various black organizations connect individuals to mainstream politics by providing information on political matters and motivations for activism (78). Tate's empirical findings demonstrate, however, that only membership in politically active churches promotes black voting and campaign activism (90–95). Given these results, the next step is to ask how major black denominations impact mainstream political activism.

Calhoun-Brown's (1999, 204–206) examination of religion and politics highlights the influence of black religious traditions on political behavior. Her findings show that black Baptists are more likely to engage in mainstream activism such as voting and participating in non-electoral activities than blacks who affiliate with white denominations. Moreover, in a separate study of the influence of otherworldly religious orientations on black political life, Calhoun-Brown (1998, 434) demonstrates that individuals who are affiliated with black Protestant denominations are *not* more likely to indicate support for institutional autonomy or black racial group solidarity compared to their counterparts in white congregations. Since most religious African-Americans are affiliated with Protestant traditions, these studies

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[10] These data are subject to over reporting (see Hadaway et al. 1993). The NBPS data does not allow for an examination of over reporting behavior.

[11] The NAACP and the National Urban League were both founded by white and black citizens. For most of their history, these organizations have stressed the importance of interracial cooperation among groups to promote the advancement of African-American interests *and* a more just society for all (Moore 1981).

suggest that involvement in black churches may not preclude African-Americans from participating in mainstream politics.

Another study that is especially relevant for my examination of bonding social capital is Harris's (1999a) analysis of religion and African-American political life. In *Something Within*, Harris considers the importance of denominational affiliation on black voter participation and campaign activism (57–68). He also examines the influence of black civic and political organizations on these political behaviors. Harris shows that Baptist and Methodist respondents are more likely to engage in mainstream voting activities. He further demonstrates that being a member of a black masonic group or black organizations (such as the NAACP, Congress of Racial Equality, or the Urban League) has a positive effect on levels of campaign activism among blacks. Moreover, his results indicate that Baptists and Methodists are less supportive of separatist black-nationalist sentiments. Together, these findings illustrate that black civic associations encouraged individuals to participate in mainstream activism in the late 1960s.

Harris's study provides a foundation for understanding black civic life in the contemporary period. It is also necessary to consider that many transformations have occurred in black political life since the original 1966 survey data were collected. Consequently, the changing influence of black institutions in the present necessitates that a more recent analysis be conducted.[12] The 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study (NBPS), which I employ in this study, facilitates this task. In addition, the limitations of the 1966 Harris Newsweek data (few measures of black denominations) have been greatly improved upon in recent surveys. The NBPS permits me to extend the research of Harris and others by examining the political influence of a larger variety of black religious traditions.

Furthermore, Harris's oppositional civic culture model of black activism is also supported by normative arguments about civil society institutions and democratic governance. In short, the oppositional civic culture model posits that black religious institutions can have multiple political effects on African-Americans such that churches can provide, "oppositional capabilities as well as civic functions" (Harris 1999a, 40). Democratic political theorists similarly contend that one's involvement in various communal associations (which primarily serve group interests) can, nonetheless, link individual interests to broader processes of governance. Consequently, incorporating these arguments into the black politics literature allows me to understand a wide variety of civil society institutions in the contemporary period.

Carole Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970, 42), for example, provides a discussion of "participatory" theories of democracy. Building upon the work of Rousseau, Mill, and especially G.D.H. Cole, Pateman maintains that citizens' involvement in civil society often connects them to the larger political system.[13] In particular, the attitudes and democratic skills citizens learn through their communal affiliations link them to mainstream society and encourage them to

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[12] See Harris (1999b) for a discussion of recent changes in black civic life.

[13] Pateman (1970, 35–42) draws upon Cole's arguments about how citizens' involvement in industry, associational life and other spheres influence democratic governance.

think beyond their own narrow interests. Thus, blacks' participation in bonding organizations can also connect them to the larger polity.

Indeed, this alternative view of associational life suggests that, taking part in black associations has an "integrative function" and encourages African-Americans to feel as though they are vital parts of American society (see Pateman 1970, 27). Note, in particular, that participatory theories posit different (and more connective) political outcomes from citizens' involvement in group-specific organizations. From this perspective, African-American organizations might generate "broader identi-ties" among blacks. Hence, I argue that black associations encourage African-Americans to reach beyond their group interests and also become involved in mainstream political activities.

Data

I analyze data from the 1993–1994 NBPS. The NBPS is a nationally representative telephone interview survey of 1206 African-Americans designed to examine the political beliefs and behavior of the black population. The NBPS employed a multiple frame, random-digit probability sample. The first frame was composed of a national random-digit dial sample using an equal probability of selection methodology. The second frame was randomly selected from a list of households located in census blocks with 50% or more black households. The response rate was 65%. Calhoun-Brown (1999, 208) observes, "Comparisons to US census reports indicate the data are basically representative with regard to key demographic variables. NBPS respondents, however, are better educated and more female than current (1997) census reports." The NBPS data are well-suited for my examination of the effects of bonding social capital in black communities. These data include questions about respondents' affiliations with black religious denominations, their involvement in black communal and political organizations, and individuals' participation in mainstream modes of civic and political activities. The data are available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research archive.

Dependent Variables

From Putnam's perspective, we would expect that participation in mainstream political activities (rather than racial group specific modes) might be hindered by black organizational involvements. I employ a traditional measure of citizens' voting behavior to examine these claims. The survey item asks respondents if they voted in the 1992 presidential election. "Yes" responses are coded as ones. "No" responses are coded as zeros.[14] To consider other forms of mainstream participation, I created an additive index from responses to questions regarding political activities such as helping with voter registration, giving money to political candidates, giving people rides to the polls on election days, attending fundraisers, passing out

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[14] The NBPS data do not contain vote validation measures to assess over reporting.

campaign materials, and signing petitions (see Calhoun-Brown 1999).[15] "Yes" responses are coded as ones. "No" responses were coded as zeros. The index ranges from 0 to 6. Its scale reliability coefficient (alpha) was .71. It is important to emphasize that in the contemporary era these modes of activism often require African-Americans to work with predominantly or plurality white political institutions and actors. Although these items are frequently used by analysts of political participation, my theoretical arguments about citizens' connectedness to mainstream politics suggest that these measures can be profitably employed to assess how integrated blacks are in the polity.

Key Independent Variables[16]

The NBPS asks respondents about their affiliation with the seven major black religious denominations. These traditions include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated, the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Church of God in Christ. No other recent national survey of black political life contains similar religious denomination questions.[17] Because these items gauge individual's affiliations with almost exclusively black congregations, they are ideal measures of bonding social capital. Moreover, scholars note that between 80 and 85% of black religious adherents report being affiliated with these seven denominations (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Roof and McKinney 1987, 140–141). Using Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) denomination classification scheme, I categorize respondents as participants in black Baptist, black Methodist, black Pentecostal, or affiliates of non-black religious denominations.[18] Affiliates are coded as ones. Non-identifiers are coded with zeros and this group was used as the comparison category for the religious tradition items.[19]

I also include a measure of individuals' involvement in black social and political organizations. Participation in these groups is measured by the question, "Are you a member of any organization working to improve the status of black Americans?" "Yes" responses are coded as ones. "No" responses are coded as zeros. This item captures the influence of groups such as the Urban League, NAACP, and to some extent, black sororities and fraternal groups that may be engaged in efforts to improve black communities.

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[15] The percentage of African-Americans who engage in each activity follows: helping with voter registration 23%, giving money to political candidates 24%, giving people rides to the polls on election days 25%, attending fundraisers 27%, passing out campaign materials 23%, and signing petitions 42%.

[16] I also include various political, demographic, and socioeconomic status variables in my regression models. These measures are listed in Tables 3 and 4.

[17] The 1996 National Black Election Study does not include these measures.

[18] The Church of God in Christ denomination was originally called the "Church of God"(Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, 80). Thus, the black Pentecostals identifier includes both categories.

[19] Islamic identifiers are not coded as members of black religious denominations. The "Islamic" category ($N = 24$) includes members of general Sunni, Shiite, or Black Muslims sects.

Table 1 Affiliation with black denominations 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study

	Black denomination
Yes	780 (65%)
No	426 (35%)
Totals	1,206 (100%)

Table 2 Affiliation with black advancement organizations 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study

	Black organization member
Yes	358 (30%)
No	848 (70%)
Totals	1,206 (100%)

Analysis

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate how active African-Americans are in voluntary associations. Overall, the responses to the denomination question compare favorably with national estimates of black religious affiliations (Roof and Mc Kinney 1987; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Sherkat 2002). These data show, for example, that among respondents who provided information about their religious attachments, a majority (52%) indicate they are affiliated with black Baptist churches. In addition, the next two largest categories among religious identifiers show that sizable groups of blacks associate with African-American Methodist (8%) and black Pentecostal (5%) traditions.[20] Together, Table 1 reveals that the majority of African-Americans (65%) indicate they are connected with black denominations. Moreover, these findings provide evidence that affiliation with black churches is probably the most common form of associational involvement for African-Americans. Few civic groups attract this level of regular commitment in black communities. It is also important to note, however, that 35% of respondents indicate they are participants in non-black religious traditions, non-denominational groups, not connected with organized religion, or did not provide information about their religious preference.[21] Although some individuals look beyond black churches or do not participate in religious life, these data, nonetheless, demonstrate the vitality of African-American denominations.[22]

Turning to other black organizations, Table 2 shows that 30% of respondents indicate they are members of groups that serve African-American communities.[23]

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[20] These data do not show the gains among Pentecostals that other scholars observe (Sherkat 2002). This may be due to the fact that the sample is slightly better educated than the general black population, which might account for greater numbers of Methodist identifiers.

[21] My results compare favorably with other studies (Roof and McKinney 1987; Sherkat 2002).

[22] Individuals who are labeled with zeros may vary. They could be affiliated with white churches, participate in "non-traditional" independent black congregations, or not connected with organized religion.

[23] A tabulation of the original variable C6 confirms these figures.

Thus, even in an era of declining civic engagement, about a third of all blacks believe it is important to work with racial advancement organizations. These figures underscore the perceived significance of black civic associations for promoting African-American interests at the local and national levels. The next step is to ask how these groups influence black political behavior outside African-American communities. I address this question in the next section using a series of regression models that explain citizens' involvement in mainstream (and often interracial) modes of political activism.

Table 3 shows that individuals who are members of black advancement organizations are more likely to engage in mainstream activities (such as voting in presidential elections) than non-members. For interpretation purposes, I use the probit coefficient estimates to generate predicted probability values for typical NBPS respondents.[24] These more intuitive results indicate that a typical 26-year-old respondent who is a member of a black advancement organization has a higher voting probability of .71, compared to .63 for individuals who are not involved in organizations. In addition, a typical 43-year-old member has a voting probability of .82, compared to a lower propensity of .76 for non-members. Thus, we see that members of African-American bonding groups are also active in modes of electoral participation that benefit society in general. Indeed, mass-based democratic theories of politics often argue that citizens' participation in governmental affairs is essential for the overall health of society.

On the other hand, my findings indicate that African-Americans who are affiliated with black denominations are no more likely to be involved in electoral activism than their counterparts in non-black religious groups. This surprising result may be explained in a number of ways. First, it is likely that affiliation with a black church alone is not sufficient to stimulate increased voting among African-Americans. Second, it is important to recognize that the primary mission of churches is to address the religious needs of their congregants. Thus, although many black churches connect the spheres of religion and public life, it is also true that elections are only periodic events and may not receive regular attention on Sundays compared to pressing spiritual matters. It is equally plausible that black denominations did not have a large impact on mobilizing African-American voters in 1992, compared to their influence in previous campaigns such as the 1984 and 1988 Jackson presidential bids. In fact, analyses of the 1992 elections scarcely mention churches as a primary source of mobilization for African-Americans (see Tate 1994, 181–209). Together, each of these forces may explain why affiliates of black churches are not more active voters compared to individuals who attend white churches.

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[24] I employ the SPost post-estimation analysis of regression models software. Representative characteristics are determined by using the mean categories or values for continuous variables and the modal categories for dummy variables. These ideal types also had to exist in the data. The characteristics are: age-26 or 43 years old, distruster of the legal system, has a media attentiveness score of 2, has completed 13 years of schooling, is working, non-rural, non-southerner, has a family income of $25K–$30K, homeowner, female, partisanship strength score of 2, is a citizen, not married, has a group identification score of 1, a polar power score of 1, a system blame score of 1, and the typical multiplicative value of the group consciousness interaction term for the sample is 0.

Table 3 Probit model of voting participation

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Black denomination	.029	.099
Black organization member	.230**	.114
Partisanship strength	.400***	.044
Media attentiveness	.150***	.050
Legal system trust	.073	.134
Group identification	−.227	.141
Polar power	−.248*	.146
System blame	−.045	.141
Interaction-group consciousness	.458**	.179
Education	.033**	.015
Rural	−.060	.163
Working	.134	.104
South	−.229**	.100
Family income	.048**	.023
Gender (Female)	−.029	.099
Age	.021***	.004
Citizen	1.141***	.219
Married	.264**	.103
Homeowner	.024	.104
Constant	−2.771***	.411

$N = 1,206$

Log likelihood = −475.78

Wald χ^2 (19) = 213.85

Prob $> \chi^2$ = .00

Pseudo R^2 = .21

Percent of cases correctly predicted = 82%

Proportional reduction in error = 10%

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$

Source: 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study

My analysis also demonstrates that the partisanship strength and media attentiveness variables both perform as expected, with stronger partisans and more attentive individuals voting at higher levels than less committed and inattentive individuals. One's trust in the legal system had no effect on their voting participation. It is likely that this result reflects the fact that a single measure of distrust may not capture all aspects of blacks' perceptions of the fairness of governmental institutions and political processes. The regression model also indicates that only one separate component of group consciousness (polar power) exerts a marginally significant negative effect on black voting turnout. More importantly, however, the combined positive impact of the group consciousness interaction variable conforms to previous studies of black political participation

(Miller et al. 1981). Similarly, one's education and income level exert positive effects on mainstream voting activism, demonstrating that individuals who possess these resources tend to be engaged in political life (Verba et al. 1995; Tate 1994).

Among the demographic variables, older individuals, those who are married, and respondents who are US citizens all tend to vote in national elections. Black southerners, on the other hand, are less likely to vote than non-southerners. This result is consistent with previous studies of black voting behavior (Harris 1999a, 61). My model also demonstrates that gender, employment, rural residence, or homeownership status has no significant effect on one's voting behavior. Tate (1994, 85) obtains similar results for women and homeowners in her analysis of black voting behavior in 1984. Moreover, I suspect that the effects of employment status and rural residence may be indirectly captured by other significant variables, such as education and southern residence.

Next, I consider other forms of participation that often benefit non-black communities and the larger society. Table 4 displays the results from a regression model that examines individuals' involvement in various non-voting activities. The most notable finding indicates that controlling for other variables, members of black advancement organizations participate in almost one additional mainstream political act, compared to individuals who are not involved in these groups. Thus, these associations play a crucial role in connecting African-American interests with those of the larger community.

In contrast, individuals who are affiliated with black denominations are not more likely to participate in non-voting modes of activism than individuals who attend white churches. Harris (1999a, 60–61) obtains similar findings in his analysis of campaign participation among black Baptists and Methodists. Together, these results suggest that the influence of black religious settings alone may not be enough to encourage individuals to engage in more demanding non-voting activities. Indeed, helping with voter registration, giving money to political candidates, providing rides to the polls on election days, attending fundraisers, and passing out campaign materials all require substantial time and political resource commitments from individuals. Hence, one's affiliation with black churches may not overcome the burden that non-voting activism places on participants. As I mentioned earlier, it is also possible that black denominations did not have a great impact on political activities in this period. Hence, these findings may be an artifact of the electoral and political context of the early 1990s.

Among the other explanatory variables, increased levels of media attentiveness and partisanship strength boost individuals' involvement in non-voting modes of participation. Respondents' perceptions of the legal system or their levels of group consciousness, however, are not significant forces for explaining blacks' involvement in more demanding political activities. The insignificance of the legal system trust variable in both regression models may be attributed to the survey item itself. An improved measure of political trust, for example, might ask respondents about their levels of trust in American governmental institutions, political actors, and their perceptions of the fairness of the political system. The insignificance of the group consciousness measure in this model may also stem from the fact that I am

Table 4 Regression model of mainstream political participation

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Black denomination	−.017	.094
Black organization Member	.965***	.109
Partisanship strength	.137***	.044
Media attentiveness	.427***	.045
Legal system trust	.099	.124
Group identification	.219	.133
Polar power	−.015	.138
System blame	−.115	.133
Interaction-group consciousness	−.005	.169
Education	.026*	.014
Rural	.288	.189
Working	.138	.099
South	−.096	.090
Family income	.038*	.022
Gender (Female)	−.276***	.096
Age	.014***	.003
Citizen	.387*	.206
Married	−.068	.093
Homeowner	−.032	.097
Constant	−1.174***	.338

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficient estimates followed by robust standard errors

$N = 1,206$

Prob $> F = 0.00$

R-Squared value $= .24$

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$

Source: 1993–1994 National Black Politics Study

examining individuals' involvement in non-voting political activism. Indeed, group consciousness may stimulate black voting turnout (which requires less effort), yet, exert no impact on more resource and time intensive political behaviors.

As expected, African-Americans who possess more education and income are slightly more politically active than their counterparts. In terms of gender, women are less likely (by almost one third of an act) to register voters, give money to political candidates, serve as fundraisers, or provide rides to the polls than men. Moreover, characteristics such as rural residence, employment status, and homeownership had no influence on one's likelihood of participating in nonvoting activities. As expected, active participants tended to be older, US citizens. Finally, marital status and southern residence do not significantly influence blacks' non-voting behavior, a finding that favorably compares with previous studies (Harris 1999a, 61, 114).

Together, both models demonstrate that members of black political organizations, rather than individuals who are affiliated with historically black denominations, are more likely than non-members to engage in mainstream political activities. Rather than exclusively focusing on political activism within African-American communities, black voluntary associations serve as bridging groups that also connect individuals to the larger public sphere of social and governmental affairs.

Discussion and Conclusions

The dearth of research on social capital within minority communities has led scholars to speculate about the negative effects of bonding groups on American society.[25] One wonders, for example, if black associations produce the same exclusive attitudes and behaviors as racial supremacist and "not in my backyard" groups. Fortunately, my results indicate the short answer is no. Although both groups facilitate bonding attachments, black organizations differ from more restrictive associations because they also exert a bridging influence on their participants. Thus, it is likely that other indigenous institutions might also connect citizens to mainstream society. This alternative account of interactions within African-American communities more accurately portrays black civic life. Consequently, scholars should carefully consider the usefulness of simple distinctions between categories of social capital.

It is unclear, however, if the voluntary associations of other racial groups simultaneously exert bridging and bonding effects on their members. Because the political histories of America's three largest groups (Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans) differ, I am uncertain if the civic institutions of each group will operate in the manner we observe for blacks. Some recent evidence demonstrates that Latino associations serve this dual function in their communities (Chavez and Fraga 2003). Yet, exceptions to this pattern exist. Uslaner and Conley's (2003) recent study of Chinese communities in southern California, for example, found that individuals with strong ethnic identifications and who associate primarily with their own people either withdraw from civic participation or only belong to organizations made up of their own nationality. Thus, Asian-American organizations for recent immigrants exhibit different tendencies in connecting individuals to political life. These distinctions should be explored in future research on race, ethnicity, and politics.

In summary, it is crucial to recognize that although black civic groups are composed of African-American members and primarily work to advance black interests these goals are not pursued at the expense of connecting individuals to the general polity. The recent efforts of political organizations and churches on wide-reaching issues such as educational reform, community development, and labor

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[25] Putnam (2000, 23) notes, "We might expect negative external effects to be more common with bonding forms of social capital." Huntington (2004, 221–256) also worries about the negative effects of "insular" Latino communities on American political life.

force improvement attests to the broad agendas of today's black voluntary associations.[26]

Appendix 1

1993–1994 NBPS Questions and Response Categories

Strength of Partisanship: I created a partisanship strength scale from responses to the party identification questions in the NBPS. The scale ranges from 0 (nonpartisans) to 3 (strong partisans).[27]

Legal System Trust: I employ a measure of trust in the legal system. The NBPS asks respondents to choose which statement is most true, "Generally speaking, the American legal system treats all groups fairly OR the American legal system is unfair to blacks?" Fair responses are coded as ones, unfair responses are coded with zeros.

Media Attentiveness: I created a media attentiveness variable by constructing an index from responses to three questions regarding respondents' consumption of news media. The questions ask, "Have you in the past week read a metropolitan newspaper? Have you in the past week read a black newspaper? Have you in the past week listened to a black news program on the radio?" "Yes" responses are coded as ones. "No" responses are coded with zeros. The additive index of these three items ranges from 0 to 3.

Group Consciousness: I employ an interaction variable to capture the multiple dimensions of politicized group consciousness that Miller et al. (1981) discuss in their study of political participation. Miller et al. (1981, 496–497) note there are four specific components of group consciousness: group identification, polar affect, polar power, and system blame. Of these four dimensions, the authors find that an interactive model that combines three key components (group identification, polar power, and system blame) produce the strongest results for explaining the political involvement of subordinate group members (500). The authors note that this *alliance* of beliefs motivates subordinate groups to use the electoral process to improve their condition. Thus, I operationalize the effects of group consciousness as the *interaction* between group identification, polar power,

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[26] See Billingsley (1999) for a discussion of initiatives by black churches and the agendas of the NAACP (http://www.naacp.org), National Urban League (http://www.nul.org), and the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (http://www.bigvote.org).

[27] Due to question wording, the zero category includes a small number of true independents. The analyses were conducted using variations of the partisanship strength variable. The findings are the same.

and system blame. The group identification component measures agreement with the following question: "Do you think what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?" Those who agree with the statement are coded as ones and others are coded with zeros. Polar power was gauged using the following question: "Do you think blacks have achieved racial equality, will soon achieve equality, will not achieve equality in your lifetime, or will never achieve racial equality?" Respondents who felt that blacks will never achieve racial equality or that equality was not a realistic expectation in their lifetime are coded as ones and others are coded with zeros. The third component, system blame, is measured by agreement with the question: "American society just hasn't dealt fairly with black people." Individuals who agree with this statement are coded as ones and others are coded with zeros.

Control Variables: Age is coded in years, ranging from 18 to 99.[28] Education is coded as the highest grade of school or year of college completed and ranges from 0 to 26.[29] Women are coded as ones and men are coded with zeros. Total family income is measured in ordinal categories from 1 to 9. Values of one represent individuals with an income from 0 to $10,000, while respondents with incomes of $75,000 and greater are coded as nines.[30] Homeowners are coded with ones. Non-homeowners are coded with zeros. Respondents who live in rural locations are coded as ones. Non-rural respondents are coded with zeros. Southern respondents are coded as ones. Non-southerners are coded with zeros. Respondents who are employed part or full-time are coded as ones and others are coded as zeros.

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[28] A few respondents (67 cases or 5.6% of the sample) reported "don't know" and "refusal" responses for the age question. These cases were recoded to the mean value of age (43) among available respondents. My analyses are conducted both with item-missing responses and mean estimates for comparison. The major results are identical. Multiple imputation techniques have been suggested to treat item non-response in survey analyses. I employ the present approach due to the relatively small amount of missing data for this variable.

[29] Item non-responses are recoded to the mean value of education (13 years of schooling).

[30] The household income measure includes some item non-responses (93 cases or about 8% of the sample). These cases are recoded to the mean income category among available respondents, $25,000–$30,000. My analyses were conducted both with item-missing responses and mean estimates for comparison. The results are identical.

Appendix 2

	allblkdn	blkpolog	stparty	mediattn	lgltrust	groupid	polarpwr	sysblame	groupcs	educ	rural	working	south	fmincome	gender	age	citizen	married	homeown
allblkdn	1.00																		
blkpolog	-.01	1.00																	
stparty	.20	.05	1.00																
mediattn	-.00	.22	.03	1.00															
lgltrust	.06	-.05	.05	-.09	1.00														
groupid	-.03	.14	-.00	.17	-.10	1.00													
polarpwr	-.04	.07	-.01	.05	-.13	.07	1.00												
sysblame	-.06	.06	-.04	.09	-.17	.09	.15	1.00											
groupcs	-.04	.12	.00	.10	-.17	.51	.69	.37	1.00										
educ	-.04	.22	.01	.14	-.06	.12	.08	.06	.14	1.00									
rural	.07	-.04	.01	-.07	-.01	-.06	-.02	-.00	-.04	-.04	1.00								
working	-.03	.11	-.02	.07	-.06	.07	.02	.05	.10	.19	.05	1.00							
south	.13	-.05	.10	-.08	.05	-.05	-.05	-.04	-.06	.00	.21	.02	1.00						
fmincome	-.02	.24	-.02	.20	-.07	.10	.10	.07	.12	.30	-.05	.33	-.08	1.00					
gender	.06	-.05	.09	-.10	-.03	-.14	-.01	.04	-.05	.02	.04	-.04	.10	-.13	1.00				
age	.08	.04	.15	.00	.05	-.14	.02	-.08	-.09	-.12	-.05	-.28	.03	-.06	.05	1.00			
citizen	.13	.03	.06	.01	.03	.01	-.02	-.02	.01	-.03	.04	-.02	.16	.02	.03	.01	1.00		
married	.04	.04	.01	.06	.03	-.04	.06	-.02	.01	.06	.09	.07	.05	.29	-.06	.10	-.01	1.00	
homeown	.10	.10	.09	.09	.02	-.06	.02	-.00	-.01	.08	.10	.06	.15	.30	.01	.27	.08	.22	1.00

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