

**The Representative Role of Community Based Organizations:  
Characteristics Associated with Involvement in Participatory Processes**

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## **Abstract**

This article explains the characteristics associated with nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) serving as representatives of the poor. CBOs can become representatives in two ways: self-initiated representation, where the CBO authorizes itself as a representative, and invited participation, where the CBO is identified as a representative by elite community stakeholders. Using interview data from 105 CBO leaders located in low-income communities in Chicago, this study uses four factors to determine which organizational characteristics lead to self-initiated or invited participation: organizational type (service provider or religious congregation), budget, organizational age, and professionalization of the organizational leader. Findings reveal that organizations are equally likely to self-initiate into participatory processes, however, invited participation is not random, but is associated with larger organizational size and being a service provider. We conclude by considering what this means for the diversity of CBOs serving as community representatives for vulnerable populations.

One of the principal goals of deliberative democracy is to grant every individual equal opportunity to engage in decision-making processes that may influence policy creation and implementation (Arnstein, 1969; Young, 2000). Yet years of research has shown that the poor are systematically under-represented in the American political system, participating less in political processes than their more advantaged counterparts (McConnell, 1966; Patterson, 2002; Schattschneider, 1960; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). As economic inequality leads to political inequality, a vicious cycle ensues: a political system that excludes disenfranchised groups creates unjust policy outcomes (Verba & Orren, 1985; Walzer, 1983; Young, 2000). Thus, a variety of participatory processes intended to increase citizen participation in decision-making have been instituted in local governance (Fung, 2006; John, 2009; O'Doherty, Gauvin, Grogan, & Friedman, 2012). These processes include public meetings and forums, task forces, and citizen advisory boards.

Although these processes are intended to encourage broad-based participation in democratic governance, the individuals participating are often those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Verba, et al., 1995). Research on individual political participation has shown that less advantaged citizens are often unwilling or unable to participate in political processes, or have developed a heightened skepticism of government (Eisinger, 2000; Verba, et al., 1995). As a result, political participation and civic involvement is generally poor in low-income communities.

One possible solution to this problem has been to solicit the expertise of nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs), which are often assumed to have extensive knowledge of the community. CBOs are defined in this study as nonprofit organizations that operate in, and provide services to a specific community area. Research has shown that CBOs do often play a representative role, and when they do, they are generally expected to speak on behalf of the disadvantaged, representing individuals often excluded from political activities (Berry & Arons, 2003; Grogan & Gusmano, 2007; LeRoux, 2008; Mosley, 2011; Taub, Surgeon, Lindholm, Otti, &

Bridges, 1977). In this way CBOs serve as a link between citizens and the government and are often thought to be more responsive to community concerns than government agencies or private businesses (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; LeRoux, 2007; Mosley & Grogan, 2012; Warren, 2001).

This study conceptualizes CBOs as understudied but frequent members of participatory processes and sheds light on how participation varies among CBOs with differing characteristics. In doing so, we highlight a distinction not yet addressed by the literature: the distinction between CBOs that *self-initiate* into participatory processes versus CBOs that are *invited* to participate. This distinction highlights which organizations become involved due to an intrinsic motivation to represent their community and which become involved because they are assumed to be legitimate representatives by elite community stakeholders. Some organizations, of course, become involved through both routes. We present empirical support for a theoretical framework that explains which organizational characteristics are associated with CBOs becoming involved in these processes more than others and through which route (self-initiated or invited).

We address three research questions using data from 105 interviews with CBO leaders in three disadvantaged communities on Chicago's South Side. First, which organizational characteristics are associated with involvement in participatory processes? Second, is there a systematic bias in terms of which organizations self-initiate into participatory processes? Third, is there a systematic bias in terms of which organizations are invited to participate in such processes? Answering these questions is important in determining if communities that rely on CBOs for representation are being served by a diverse and representative group of organizations.

### **Community-Based Organizations and Participatory Processes**

Participatory democratic processes have been prevalent in the United States since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and academic attention to this idea has flourished since the 1960s (Arnstein, 1969; Barber, 1984; Mansbridge, 1980; Pateman, 1970). Proponents of citizen involvement in participatory

processes argue that representative democracy lacks a vehicle through which citizens can discuss community concerns, resulting in disengagement in civic and political activities (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992). Participatory processes are thought to promote individual political engagement, while also increasing policy effectiveness and promoting government accountability (Barber, 1984; Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005; Gastil, 2000).

Recently, scholars have recognized that to understand political engagement we need to expand our focus from the engagement of individuals to the engagement of local community-based organizations (Berry & Arons, 2003; Guo & Musso, 2007; Marwell, 2004, 2007; Mosley & Grogan, 2012; Owens, 2007). As it is difficult for politically unengaged citizens to be involved in participatory processes, public officials, business leaders, and health providers often recruit CBO leaders as a logistical short-cut for citizen involvement. By serving as civic intermediaries (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977), these organizations form a link between citizens and government (Berry & Arons, 2003; Salamon, 1995). Prior studies analyzing organizational involvement in participatory processes have looked at the efforts of specific types of CBOs, such as neighborhood councils (Hallman, 1977), neighborhood associations (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990), neighborhood representing organizations (Cnaan, 1991) and religious congregations (Olson, Reis, Murphy, & Gehm, 1988). In contrast, our study looks at the entire population of CBOs in three communities to determine which types of organizations self-authorize, and which are invited to serve as representatives. Because organizations are increasingly viewed as representatives of marginalized populations in participatory processes, it is important to understand which organizations actually participate.

Fung's (2006) "democracy cube" provides us with a useful lens through which we can view three different dimensions of various participatory processes: who participates, how participants communicate, and how discussions are linked to concrete policy making. Our paper focuses on his

first question: “who is eligible to participate and how do individuals become participants?” (Fung, 2006, p. 69). Ideally, an inclusive and diverse selection of CBO actors are involved across a variety of participatory processes allowing democracy to fully thrive (Fung, 2006). Unfortunately, we do not yet know which organizations are most likely to be involved in these processes, either through self authorization, or through invitation. We answer the question by considering which organizational characteristics are associated with participation and with different pathways to participation. This information is important in order to determine if there is systematic bias present in how organizations become involved in participatory processes and to determine whether their involvement facilitates democratic legitimacy.

### **Pathways to Involvement in Participatory Processes**

The most common method of organizational participation is through *voluntary self-selection*. This method can be valuable, as those who show up are typically motivated actors educated in the issues to be discussed. However, research on voluntary *individual* involvement shows a bias towards higher SES individuals, who typically have more resources and time at their disposal for participatory action (Fiorina, 1999; Verba, et al., 1995). We expect that the same tendencies may be found among organizations, where those with greater capacity will be more likely to self-initiate.

To avoid the biases of self-selected participation, organizers of participatory processes often select participants, either *randomly* or *purposively*. Random recruitment deals specifically with the bias problem in order to gather a wide range of views from the community (O'Doherty, et al., 2012). Purposive recruitment is typically used when it is preferable to gather opinions from those affected by a target policy and who may have an interest in the issue to be discussed. For example, individuals residing in crime-ridden areas may be recruited to participate in meetings concerning safety, while parents of school-age children may be recruited to participate in meetings regarding education.

CBOs are typically purposively invited to be representatives through either a *professional stakeholder approach* (Fung, 2006), where organizers of participatory processes select knowledgeable representatives of an interest group, or a *network approach* (Laumann, Marsden, & Galaskiewicz, 1977; Laumann & Pappi, 1973), where influential community representatives are asked to identify other leaders they believe can speak to specific concerns. Community leaders who are invited through these forms of purposive selection are typically perceived as educated actors familiar with the issue that will be discussed. Thus, purposive selection may be biased towards well-known leaders of higher status in the community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Building on the above, existing research on individual political involvement and prior studies on organizational involvement in formal politics may help shed light on which characteristics may be influencing CBO involvement in informal participatory processes. We propose a theoretical framework based on previous findings to explain how organizational involvement in participatory processes may be associated with particular CBO characteristics, distinguishing between the two pathways in which organizations become involved. Specifically, self-initiated participation, where an organization “authorizes” itself as a representative is expected to yield a different set of organizational actors than invited participation, where an organization is identified and legitimated as a possible representative. Figure 1 shows the factors we expect to be associated with each.

(Figure 1 about here).

### ***Factors Influencing Participation***

We propose that four organizational factors are likely to be associated with both organizations self-authorizing or being invited to serve as community representatives, albeit in different ways for each pathway: 1) organizational type, 2) budget and 3) organizational age and 4)

professionalization of the organizational leader.

*Factor 1: Organizational Type*

The first characteristic we examine is organizational type. In this study, we investigate participatory process involvement of two different types of CBOs: service-based CBOs and religious congregations. Service-based organizations are specifically created to serve the community or a subset of the community and include health and mental health clinics, community centers, and educational organizations. Although they primarily provide direct services, these organizations often speak on behalf of their clients or the community through advocacy activities, engaging in self-initiated representation in this manner (Berry & Arons, 2003; Mosley, 2010).

Religious congregations are also important actors in low-income communities, and frequently quite numerous. The ability of religious congregations to speak on behalf of low-income and minority populations is well-documented (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994; Harris, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Owens, 2007). However, recent studies have shown that some religious congregations may be more interested in representing their congregation rather than their community. McRoberts (2003) notes this in his study of black churches in a low-income Boston neighborhood, indicating that in areas with a high concentration of churches, the churches often do not function as neighborhood intermediaries. Instead, their tendency to champion the spiritual needs of their congregants typically eclipses their concern with broader community needs. If it is the case that congregations eschew these community processes to focus on spiritual concerns outside of politics, then we should expect congregations to participate less in self-initiated community participatory processes activities than their service-based counterparts.

Leaders of both organizational types may be presumed by government officials and other elite community stakeholders to have specific knowledge about their community that allows them to speak on the community's behalf (Berry & Arons, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; McRoberts,



2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Salamon, 1995). Whether or not an organization is invited to participate likely depends more on an organization's reputation and capacity within the community than its specific type. Yet, in minority and low-income neighborhoods, it is often assumed that church leaders serve as the "voice" of the community (McRoberts, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). Public officials have promoted the capacity of churches to serve as representatives, believing that they serve as a source of "moral structure" for impoverished urban neighborhoods (Cisneros, 1996). High levels of religiosity among black individuals (Chatters, Taylor, Bullard, & Jackson, 2009), and the fact that the black church is notable for being exclusively for and run by black people (Morris, 1996; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998), often leads elite community stakeholders to assume that congregations in black communities have a special capacity to mobilize and advocate on behalf of neighborhood interests. If this is true, and religious congregations are expected to play a representational role on behalf of marginalized communities, then we should see that religious congregations are more often invited to participatory processes than service-based CBOs.

### *Factor 2: Budget*

In this study, we use self-reported budget as our second factor driving selection into participatory processes. The organizational budget provides a source of discretionary resources that CBOs can use to further their mission as community representatives. Organizations with larger budgets can be expected to draw from their greater material and human resources in order to participate in activities outside of their primary programming. In contrast, smaller organizations with limited capacity may struggle to find the resources to be involved in many participatory activities. Previous research has shown that large organizational size is related to self-initiated participation in other political activities, such as contacting legislators and testifying at hearings (Berry & Arons, 2003; Mosley, 2010; Staggenborg, 1989). If it is true that capacity facilitates

involvement in representative activities then we should expect larger organizations to be more involved in self-initiated processes than smaller organizations.

In purposive invited selection processes, larger resource-rich organizations may be more likely to be invited to participate due to their perceived clout and increased capacity to conduct outreach within the community (Kadlec & Friedman, 2007). Furthermore, a cyclical process may exist where such outreach may facilitate a CBO's ability to sustain connections with community stakeholders who may then identify the CBO as a good representative. Larger organizations may also be more likely to maintain contact with government officials, the press, and other private stakeholders, sustaining a strong presence in the community. Thus, they may be more visible to organizers of participatory processes seeking potential community representatives. If this is the case, then it is likely that larger, resource-rich organizations will also be more likely to be invited to participatory processes than smaller organizations.

### *Factor 3: Age of Organization*

The third factor we look at in our study is organizational age. Younger organizations may lack the connections and networks that older organizations have (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Stinchcombe, 1965). This lack of access to networks of other organizations may preclude younger organizations' knowledge about open participatory processes occurring in the community, or may inhibit their confidence to serve as a representative as compared to older organizations. If older organizations are more integrated into the community and more knowledgeable about participatory processes, then we will expect them to self-initiate into processes more than younger organizations. In contrast, it may be possible that younger organizations are more inclined to introduce themselves to the community through self-initiated involvement in participatory processes. In this case we would observe higher numbers of younger organizations self-initiating into participatory processes.

Older organizations may also be seen as more legitimate in purposive selection processes as they have proved their loyalty to the community through providing services over time. This may lead to more established relationships between government officials and other agencies. Moreover, older organizations may be better able to foster relationships than younger organizations, who may need to use their limited resources to build up the capacity to survive as an organization (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Stinchcombe, 1965). For all of these reasons organizations that have been serving the community longer may be more likely to be invited to participatory processes than younger organizations. However, there is a possibility that if stakeholders are interested in newer voices, perhaps to reflect changing demographics or innovative practices, we may see younger organizational age associated with being invited to participatory processes.

*Factor 4: Professionalization of Organizational Leader*

The professionalization of the organizational leader, operationalized in this study as level of educational attainment, is another characteristic that may influence CBO involvement in participatory processes. In this study, we focus specifically on the educational attainment of the CBO leader, rather than the staff, as prior research has shown that most political activity is done by the executive director in nonprofit organizations (Mosley, 2010; Salamon, Geller, & Lorentz, 2008). Professionalization may confer a dual role when considering the presence of self-initiated community representation. On the one hand, nonprofits with professionalized leadership may be more likely to focus on efficiency and accountability concerns with their organization than they are on concerns about constituent representation, de-emphasizing civic and community engagement (Hwang & Powell, 2009; Suarez, 2011). This primary concern with internal organizational operations may reduce their involvement in self-initiated processes around the community. On the other hand, professionalization confers added training and skills to a leaders' political repertoire, which may facilitate their propensity to serve as a representative (Mosley, 2010). However, it

appears likely that the professionalization of leadership will lead to a de-emphasis on self-initiated processes.

Leaders' education may also influence whether or not organizations are purposively invited to participatory processes. Leaders with higher education may be more likely to be part of established professional networks that result in invitations to specific participatory processes (Oliver, 1983). Professionalized leaders may be more likely to make use of institutionalized tactics which can facilitate positive relationships between government officials and elite private community stakeholders (Staggenborg, 1988). These positive relationships likely translate into these leaders being recognized as community representatives, which is often the case even if professionalized organizations often de-emphasize civic activity. Additionally, well-educated leaders are likely expected to be knowledgeable and legitimate representatives of the community, and thus may be more likely to be identified as representatives by elite community stakeholders.

### **Data and Methods**

The data for this analysis comes from 105 semi-structured qualitative interviews of CBO leaders in three South Side neighborhoods in Chicago: Woodlawn, Washington Park, and Grand Boulevard.<sup>1</sup> These neighborhoods were chosen as typical of urban, low-income, predominately black neighborhoods where political equality is known to be low (Mosley & Grogan, 2012). As of 2010, 29% of individuals in Grand Boulevard, 41% of individuals in Washington Park and 30% of individuals in Woodlawn lived below the federal poverty line. During the same year, these neighborhoods had median per-capita incomes of \$23,638, \$12,868, and \$19,471, respectively (City of Chicago, 2011).

The population of organizations in these neighborhoods was obtained using a novel census database developed during an asset-mapping project conducted in 2010 by the South Side Health

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<sup>1</sup> 85 of these interviews were conducted in person, and 20 were conducted by telephone.

and Vitality Studies (SSHVS) at the University of Chicago.<sup>2</sup> For this study, we defined a CBO as a nonprofit organization that operates in, and provides services or resources to a specific community area: neither government organizations nor for-profit businesses were included in the study. This resulted in a population of 188 CBOs, with 135 religious congregations and 53 service-based CBOs. Out of the service-based CBO category, 65% were human service organizations, 15% were advocacy organizations, 10% were education organizations, 5% were community health centers, and 5% were other organizations, including community gardens and animal shelters.<sup>3</sup>

Using the population as our sampling frame, we attempted to contact the executive directors of all 188 organizations to determine whether they were involved in any participatory processes in the community.<sup>4</sup> First, postal letters were sent to all organizations inviting their participation in the study and providing the researchers' contact information. We then called each organization in order to conduct an initial screen to determine whether or not they were involved in participatory processes. If they were not involved in any participatory processes, we completed a 15-minute interview over the phone collecting demographic information. If they were involved in participatory processes, we set up a time for a longer (30 to 80 minutes) interview at their organization.

All organizations were called at least 10 times on different days of the week, and emailed at least three times if an email was available. If a representative of the organization could not be reached by either email or telephone, a site visit to the organization was made to ensure it was still

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<sup>2</sup> The SSHVS project took a unique approach to cataloging community resources: a group of individuals went out into the community and recorded every non-residential organization in the community in order to form a digital map of all the resources in South Side Chicago neighborhoods.

<sup>3</sup> We refer to all of these organizations as "service-based" due to their primary mission of serving the community.

Although advocacy organizations are not typically referred to as "service-based" we found in our analysis that these organizations have similar characteristics and shared similar views with the traditional human service organizations.

<sup>4</sup> We allowed CBO leaders to determine what constituted a participatory process during the initial screen but used the following as examples: "public forums, advisory boards and task forces, alliances or collaboratives."

in operation.<sup>5</sup> If the organization was closed, it was eliminated from the population count. If open, we continued attempting contact.

Ultimately, 105 CBO leaders were contacted and interviewed for a response rate of 56%. This response rate is not unusual for hard-to-reach populations but we did collect additional information about the 82 non-responders to assess representativeness. Our extensive contact attempts reveal that 50 of those non-responders (27% of the original population) refused to participate; that is, they had regular business hours and valid contact information, but explicitly refused to participate in the study, or neglected to respond to our contact attempts after multiple contacts with a person at the organization. We were unable to reach the remaining 32 non-responders (17% of the original population) because they did not have any publically available contact information, or because no one answered our contact attempts (even after the extensive protocol described above). We conducted further site visits with those organizations and all were closed with no available way to determine when they might open. Many were housed in buildings in an extreme state of disrepair. We concluded that these 32 organizations could reasonably be defined as “very low-capacity.” Thus, our sample is biased towards larger organizations, but not only are these very low-capacity organizations unlikely to be involved in participatory processes, it would also be difficult for neighborhood residents to contact these organizations for needed assistance. We concluded our sample to be representative of organizations with the capacity to be involved in participatory processes.

Interviews were conducted between September 2011 and May 2012. In-person interviews were digitally tape recorded and professionally transcribed for analysis. Field memos were written for each organization directly following in-person interviews in order to capture the physical environment and other relevant details.

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<sup>5</sup> Religious congregations were visited on Wednesday evenings, Saturday afternoons or Sunday mornings. Service-based organizations were usually visited on weekdays between 9 am and 5 pm.

### ***Dependent Variables***

During the interviews, each respondent was asked about the types of participatory processes they were involved in. We then asked the respondent whether or not the organization was invited to or self-initiated their participation into these processes. Based on this information, we constructed a database containing demographic information for each of our cases, as well as the participatory processes they were involved in. Based on the respondents' answers, we categorized the following as participatory processes: public meetings, task forces, citizen advisory boards, and membership in alliances. The majority of organizations (78%) indicated during the initial telephone screen that they were involved in one of these types of processes.<sup>6</sup>

We begin by looking at involvement in participatory processes generally: 1) whether or not an organization is involved in any participatory processes and 2) how many participatory processes an organization is involved in. This is followed by the four primary analyses: 1) whether or not an organization self-initiates into any participatory processes, 2) the number of self-initiated participatory processes an organization is involved in, 3) whether or not an organization has become involved in a participatory process through invitation, and 4) the number of participatory processes an organization is involved in through invitation. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics on the dependent variables (N=105).

### ***Measurement of Independent Variables***

Descriptive statistics on each independent variable, grouped together according to the independent variables of interest: organizational type, budget, age, and educational level, are also presented in Table 1.

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<sup>6</sup> In order to reach a wide range of possible respondents, we initially interviewed everyone that indicated they were involved in a "representative activity," which we initially defined more broadly to include conversations with the alderman, and memberships on organizational boards. Eighty-seven percent of respondents were involved in participatory process if these activities were included. However, because these activities are not specifically "participatory processes", we did not count all these activities in our final analysis.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Organizational type is a binary variable which indicates whether an organization is a religious congregation, or a service-based CBO. Budget is determined through respondent self-report for the current fiscal year. The budget variable is transformed by a natural log to account for a positive skew. Age is the self-reported number of years the organization has been serving the community.<sup>7</sup> Finally, professionalization is measured by a binary variable representing whether or not the executive director has a bachelors degree or higher. Correlation tables between the independent variables are shown in Table 2.

### ***Analytical approach***

This study looks at the characteristics that lead to an organization becoming involved in participatory processes, and then looks through the pathway through which they enter these processes. Thus, there is a two-stage process in which some low-capacity organizations have selected out of the sampling frame by not choosing, or being unable to serve as representatives. To control for this sample selection bias, we use the two-stage Heckman (1979) specification to estimate the probability of involvement in participatory processes. Using the Heckman specification reduces the bias by taking the information of organizations that select out of the sample, to produce unbiased estimates for the organizations that remain. More specifically, the model uses the information about organizations that choose not to represent in order to more closely gather the pathways of entry into participatory processes of those that do. In this instance, the Heckman estimates a parameter for the correlation between the two equations which can be used to test the presence of selection bias in our sample. In order to measure the Heckman, we used two variables in the first stage to account for selection bias: organizational type and the number of attempts conducted prior to reaching a person at the organization. We report results for the second

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<sup>7</sup> We examined the age variable for possible outliers, and none were found.



stage of the model. In this stage, for all of our binary dependent variables (general participation, self-initiated participation, and invited participation) we use binary logistic regression to evaluate the organizational factors that determine involvement and pathways into involvement. Additionally, we add in the Heckman coefficient which corrects the problem of selection bias. For each of our dependent count variables (number of processes, number of self-initiated processes and number of invited processes) the mean of the variables exceeds the variance, and thus we use negative binomial regression to adjust for overdispersion.

## **Results**

### ***Overall Participation in Participatory Processes***

First, we use logistic regression to predict whether or not an organization is involved in any participatory processes. Taken together, the results from the Heckman provide evidence that there is a bias between organizations that select into our sample. After controlling for all relevant independent variables and controls, the only significant predictor of whether or not an organization is involved in participatory processes is the organizational budget. This variable is logged, which makes interpretation difficult, but essentially with each unit increase in budget, the odds of being involved in participatory processes grow by 62 percent (see Table 3, Column 1).

Next, we use the negative binomial regression model using the number of total participatory processes an organization is involved in as the dependent variable. Budget is also the only statistically significant predictor of the number of participatory processes an organization is involved in. For each unit increase in an organization's budget, the expected count of participatory processes would be expected to increase by 0.195 units, holding all other variables constant (see Table 3, Column 2).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

One basic finding that is not apparent from the regression analysis is that there is a subset of organizations (22%) that are not involved in any participatory processes. Although regression analyses hint that this may be due partly to small organizational size, our qualitative data allows us to explore other, non-structural issues as well. For example, when asked why they were not actively involved in representative activities, many of these non-involved respondents, most of whom were religious congregations, mentioned their adherence to their religious mission: one leader said that they “are a small religious congregation and just do not have the time to be involved,” which was a common theme among several of the religious organizations. Others said that they were “just interested in spreading the word of Jesus Christ,” “primarily interested in teaching people about the Bible” or “only interested in our spiritual activities.” This finding echoes those in McRoberts (2003), where concerns about spiritual activities trumped civic engagement and community representation.

However, about half of these leaders indicated that they were interested in being involved in representative activities, but had “not yet been asked.” These leaders seemed eager about opportunities present to serve their community, yet remained unaware of processes through which they could do so. Many leaders in this category believed that they could serve as a representative of the community specifically because they “understand the community” or because they have “a great deal of congregants from the community.” This was particularly true for organizations with leadership that tended to mirror the organizational demographic of the community. These leaders perceived themselves as being more aware of community concerns, and thought that in certain instances, they could be better representatives than those from more advantaged organizations. This finding suggests that there is a group of organizations, albeit small, that are interested in representing their community and feel that they have the ability to be good representatives, yet find themselves so disconnected from organizational and community networks that they do not know of

activities they can self-initiate into, nor are they identified by stakeholders as potential representatives.

### ***Self-Initiated Representation***

Sixty-six percent of our respondents indicated that they self-initiate into some type of participatory process, whether it is a public meeting, a membership in an alliance, or some other open participatory process format. Notably, there are no significant predictors of whether or not an organization is involved in any self-initiated processes, indicating that involvement appears to be randomly dispersed (see Table 4, Column 1). Additionally, there are no statistically significant predictors for number of self-initiated activities (see Table 4, Column 2).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

### ***Invited Representation***

Next, we use logistic regression analyses to examine whether there is a systematic difference between organizations invited to be involved in participatory processes and those not invited. Only 37 percent of organizations mentioned that they were invited to one or more participatory processes, indicating that organizations invited to participate constitute a more exclusive subset of organizations than those that only participate in self-initiated processes. Our model indicates that organizational type and budget are both statistically significant predictors of whether or not an organization is invited to participate. The probability that a service-based organization will be invited to a participatory process is about 85 percent higher than that of a religious congregation. Additionally, a one-unit increase in size corresponds to a 72 percent increase in the odds of being invited to participatory processes (see Table 5, Column 1).

Finally, we used a negative binomial regression in order to analyze which organizational characteristics are associated with the number of invited processes an organization is involved in. Our results show that organizational type and size are again the only significant predictors of the

number of invited activities. Being a service-based organization corresponds to a 0.74 increase in the expected count of the number of invited activities. For each unit increase in budget, the difference in expected count of the number of invited activities is expected to increase by 0.33 units (see Table 5, Column 2).

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

### **Discussion**

Recent research has explored the degree to which CBOs serve as political actors or otherwise act as representatives of marginalized populations (Berry & Arons, 2003; Guo & Musso, 2007; Marwell, 2004). However, little is known about what characteristics are associated with organizations becoming involved in particular participatory processes. In this paper we contribute to this literature by investigating what characteristics of community-based organizations are associated with self-authorizing as a representative and which are associated with being invited to be a representative. Several important findings emerge from this research.

First, we found that there is a subset of organizations that are not involved in any participatory processes on behalf of the community. These organizations are typically very small, and more likely to be religious congregations. Most organizations in this category mentioned that they had no direct interest in community representation, and were focused on their service or spiritual role. However, it is important to note that some low-capacity organizations in this category were interested in community representation, yet were not aware of activities in which they could represent. Although we do not know enough in this study to make a recommendation about incorporating these organizations into participatory processes, there are several questions that this finding presents. It could be the case that these organizations actually represent the disenfranchised population that are traditionally left out of politics, hence including them in participatory processes

is extremely important. In contrast, these organizations may have little or no contact with their constituents, and thus it is not problematic that they are not involved.

Second, we find that self-initiated participation does not hinge on particular organizational characteristics. Contrary to what we expected based on the individual political participation literature, organizations of all types are equally likely to participate in self-initiated processes. One possible explanation for this finding is that self-initiated processes are not difficult to attend, even for smaller or less integrated organizations. Attending public meetings or being involved in an issue alliance constitute the majority of activities that the respondents in our sample are involved in. For many of these processes there are few barriers to involvement and they are widely advertised throughout the community. While we examine the number of self-initiated processes involved in and find no differences across organizational characteristics, our study does not assess the depth of participation (i.e., intensity or quality) in any one participatory process, so it could be that organizations with greater capacity simply participate in more comprehensive ways. For example, larger or more professionalized organizations may take on leadership roles in these types of processes that smaller or less professionalized organizations may lack the capacity to adopt.

Third, we found that fewer organizations are invited to participatory processes than self-initiate participation, thus constituting a more exclusive set of organizations. We find that service-based CBOs are more likely to be invited and are more likely to be involved in a greater number of invited participatory processes than are religious congregations. There are three likely explanations for this finding. One may be that service-based CBOs are thought by leaders of these processes to interact with a more diverse set of community members than religious congregations. A second reason is that service-based organizations may be perceived as having more substantive policy expertise than religious congregations. Third, religious congregations are subject to the critique that they only seek to represent their congregation, and are not always trusted by the community

(McRoberts, 2003). Public officials may recognize this and hesitate to invite them to participatory processes.

Our model also shows that organizations with larger budgets are more likely than smaller organizations to be invited to serve as representatives. This finding is unsurprising, considering that these organizations are more likely to have the resources necessary to network with other stakeholders in the community (Staggenborg, 1988). Organizations with larger financial and human resources are more able to draw on multiple sources of expertise, more resources and more time in order to achieve their political goals (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). It is likely that these organizations maintain a central position in participatory processes, due to their greater resources, and larger population they can claim to represent. As a result, these organizations may be more likely to be perceived as legitimate representatives.

Overall, this research shows that organizational involvement in self-initiated participatory processes is random, while invited participation is more exclusive and hinges on organizational type and budget. We suspect that the low barriers to entry adopted by many self-initiated processes may allow more organizations to become involved. Future research should address the range of ways those processes differ from processes that rely upon invited participation of “legitimate” representatives. Are different issues and concerns brought to the table at each type of process, and if so, does it matter that one type of participation is more exclusive than the other?

As invited participation does appear to be biased towards larger, service-based CBOs, future research should address what this means for inclusivity of community voices. On one hand, if these larger organizations primarily represent more elite members of the community, then it is possible that a disadvantaged subset of an already disadvantaged community is not getting their voice heard. On the other hand, it is possible that larger organizations may dedicate more resources to serving and representing disadvantaged populations. If this is the case, then this bias towards inclusion of

larger, service-based CBOs may not matter, and may even be preferable to a more random assortment of CBOs in the community.

There are several limitations to this research. First, because our data comes from organizations located in a specific neighborhood the generalizability is unknown. More research needs to be done with CBOs located in neighborhoods with different demographics and sociopolitical environments. Second, our study does not differentiate between degree of involvement or specific types of participatory processes. Some organizations indicate that they are involved in multiple processes, yet their actual time commitment may be minimal. Third, we have little information as to whether organizational involvement in participatory processes is actually effective at incorporating the viewpoints of different community members. Further research is needed to determine how these organizations solicit the opinions from the community, and incorporate the perspectives of the community members in their representative work.

This study provides insight into which organizational characteristics are associated with being invited or self-selecting into participatory processes instituted to showcase the viewpoints of community members. We have shown that many CBOs are concerned with issues in their respective communities, and that this concern often translates into concrete action through participation in participatory process. For self-initiated representation, this is true regardless of organizational characteristics. However, when it comes to deciding which organizations are legitimate representatives, the roadmap of selection changes, favoring large organizations and organizations that are not religious congregations. In order to select representatives that are the most inclusive of residents' perspectives, further attention should be paid to the processes by which CBOs are identified as representatives. Organizers of participatory processes should focus attention on vetting all potential community representatives. This could result in improved representation efforts among all organizations that have the potential to represent the concerns of the poor.

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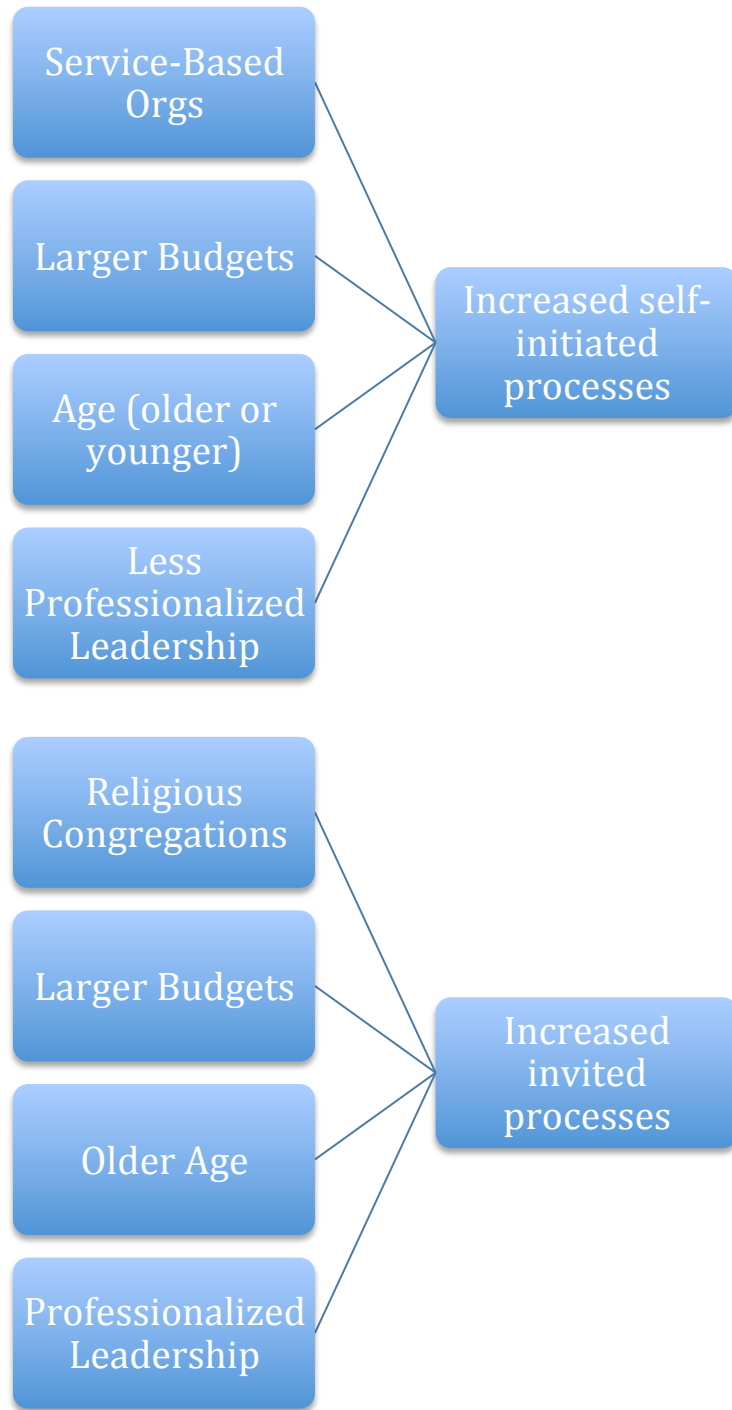
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**Figure 1**



**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Dependent and Independent Variables (N=105)**

<u><i>Dependent Variables</i></u>					
<i>Dependent Binary Variables</i>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>		
	<b>Involved in a Participatory Process</b>	78%	22%		
	<b>Self-Initiates into a Participatory Process</b>	66%	34%		
	<b>Invited to a Participatory Process</b>	37%	63%		
<i>Dependent Count Variables</i>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
	<b>Number of Processes</b>	1.85	1.60	0	6
	<b>Number of Self-Initiated Processes</b>	1.10	1.06	0	4
	<b>Number of Invited Processes</b>	0.74	1.18	0	5
<u><i>Independent Variables</i></u>					
	<b>Organizational Type</b>	<b>Religious Congregation</b>	<b>Service Based CBO</b>		
		64%	36%		
	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
		\$1,884,537.74	6,462,550.00	0	50,000,000
	<b>Age</b>	51	40	1	150
	<b>Professionalization</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>No College</b>		
		80%	20%		

**Table 2: Correlations between Independent Variables**

	<b>Organizational Type</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Professionalization</b>
<b>Organizational Type</b> (Service-Based=1)	1.000			
<b>Budget</b>	0.197	1.000		
<b>Age</b>	-0.159	0.394	1.000	
<b>Professionalization</b>	0.070	0.398	0.259	1.000

**Table 3: Logistic and Negative Binomial Regressions Assessing Organizational Characteristics Associated with Involvement**

	<b>Logistic Regression Odds Ratio (S.E.)</b>	<b>Negative Binomial Regression Coefficient (S.E.)</b>
<b>Organizational Type</b>	1.629 (1.265)	.058 (.201)
<b>Budget</b>	1.622* (.317)	.195*** (.055)
<b>Age</b>	1.005 (.009)	-.003 (.002)
<b>Professionalization</b>	1.807 (1.096)	.192 (.244)
<b>Heckman</b>	.125* (.196)	-.969 (.596)
<b>Constant</b>	.043 (.111)	-1.363* (.638)
<b>Log-Likelihood</b>	-46.365	-163.979
<b>Pseudo-R2</b>	0.225	0.123

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

N=188

Uncensored in Stage 2=105

**Table 4: Logistic Regression Analysis Assessing Organizational Characteristics Associated with Self-Initiation**

	<b>Logistic Regression Odds Ratio (S.E.)</b>	<b>Negative Binomial Regression Coefficient (S.E.)</b>
<b>Organizational Type</b>	.410 (.242)	-.395 (.250)
<b>Budget</b>	1.247 (.160)	.096 (.056)
<b>Age</b>	.997 (.006)	-.004 (.003)
<b>Professionalization</b>	1.281 (.732)	.237 (.289)
<b>Heckman</b>	.115 (.159)	-1.479 (.756)
<b>Constant</b>	.648 (.111)	-.159 (.803)
<b>Log-Likelihood</b>	-62.123	-137.499
<b>Pseudo-R2</b>	0.070	0.041

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

N=188

Uncensored in Stage 2=105

**Table 5: Logistic and Negative Binomial Regression Analysis Assessing Organizational Characteristics Associated with Invitation**

	<b>Logistic Regression Odds Ratio (S.E.)</b>	<b>Negative Binomial Regression Coefficient (S.E.)</b>
<b>Organizational Type</b>	5.859* (4.362)	.744* (.379)
<b>Budget</b>	2.591*** (.680)	.330*** (.084)
<b>Age</b>	.996 (.008)	-.002 (.003)
<b>Professionalization</b>	.765 (.605)	.188 (.475)
<b>Heckman</b>	.882 (1.720)	-.099 (1.030)
<b>Constant</b>	.000*** (.000)	-4.948 (1.163)
<b>Log-Likelihood</b>	-43.175	-101.089
<b>Pseudo-R2</b>	0.377	0.185

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

N=188

Uncensored in Stage 2=105