

Community Organizational Infrastructure and Volunteering/Civic Engagement

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Background

- Organizational context or “community-level institutional infrastructure” (Marquis et al. 2013) is not just derivative of community social characteristics but also produces community characteristics and *shapes the behavior of individuals within communities*
 - Integrates** individuals
 - Mobilizes** resources that build the capacity to act
 - Transmits** rules, values, and expectations of the local community in ways that focus individual attention and action
- Local places have different configurations of diverse organizational types, not all of which foster voluntary action
- Research Questions:**
 - What is the relationship between different dimensions of local organizational infrastructure and individual volunteering behavior?
 - How do these relationships vary across rural and urban places?

Research Methods and Data

- Current Population Survey’s (CPS) Volunteering Supplement 2002-2015
 - Permission to access the confidential-level data in a secure Census Bureau facility
- Matched individual respondents with information about their county’s civic infrastructure from additional sources (Decennial Census, American Community Survey, National Center for Charitable Statistics nonprofit data, Census of Business, etc.)
- Used split sample (rural/urban) logit regressions and an Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (used to explore differences between groups)

A community’s **organizational infrastructure**, which includes the social connectivity, other-orientation, scale, and density of organizations, **is key** for supporting individual volunteering, **particularly in rural places.**

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Primary Findings

- While **organizational density** and **nonprofit bridging organizations** increase volunteering in both rural and urban places, many dimensions of civic infrastructure affect volunteering differently in rural and urban places:

Effect of Organizational Infrastructure on Volunteering		
	Rural	Urban
Bonding nonprofits	+	-
Welfare nonprofits	-	None
Elite nonprofits	+	-
Congregation density	-	+
Small businesses	+	None
Public schools	-	None
Government employees	+	None

- Organizational infrastructure explains much of the gap in rural/urban volunteering rates because **organizational infrastructure has a different effect on volunteering in rural places relative to urban places**
 - This is largely due to the strong positive effect of small businesses in rural places

What are the potential opportunities to apply the study findings?

- Policy-makers and community leaders can enhance civic life by supporting and strengthening the organizational infrastructure in their communities
- Our results suggest that community organizational infrastructure may serve different civic roles in rural and urban places
 - The distinctions between “bridging” and “bonding” may be less relevant in rural places, but both types of organizations are important
 - A robust organizational infrastructure is key to sustaining and promoting volunteering in rural places
- Our next step is to explore how community civic/organizational infrastructure affects other forms of civic engagement (e.g. voting in local elections)