

The Impacts of Recession on Civic Participation in the New York City Metro Area

by Oren M. Levin-Waldman

Recently in these pages I discussed the impact of income inequality on civic participation in the New York Metro area in 2008. It was clear from my statistical findings that those in households with incomes of less than \$30,000 a year were considerably less likely to be civically engaged than those in households with more, and that this was a nationwide problem. But this pattern has been even more pronounced in the New York City metro area where income inequality has been higher. In this paper, I seek to take the findings of the earlier study a step further. I show that between 2008 and 2010, when the country was plunged deep into recession, participation in civic affairs decreased. And yet civic participation was worse in the New York metro area, especially among those in low-income households than it was in both New York State and the U.S. as a whole. During the same period, income inequality increased more in the New York metro area. On one level, this might not be considered problematic in a large metropolitan region where the hustle and bustle of daily living leaves little spare time. But on another level, given New York's diversity, one would expect to see dynamic pluralism. None of this is to suggest it is not happening; only that it is not for the least advantaged.

Why Inequality Harms Democracy

Although income inequality is often considered to be the purview of the market place, it does impact the political universe, with clear implications for democracy. Unequal distribution in wealth and income might mean unequal political access. In situations of extreme inequality of resources, individuals might find that they really do not enjoy the same standing. Inequality is not only a matter of standing with implications for outcomes, rather it affects one's ability to participate. Democracy does not require that all participate, but it does require that there be no barriers to participation. According to Robert Putnam, democracy requires the development of social capital, which only comes about through the active participation in the myriad of activities and organizations that comprise civil society.¹ And yet, income inequality might just be a barrier to even this level of participation. It is perhaps a bedrock principle that all individuals as citizens enjoy the same consideration of their preferences and interests. All citizens have the same access to governing institutions, and at the most nominal level, this finds expressions in "one person one vote," equality before the law, and equal rights when it comes to speech, press, and assembly. Still, one must surely affect the other. Voter turnout, for instance, is much higher among the wealthy than among the poor. This fact alone has been the basis for the SES model of

participation — that those with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to be engaged, especially when it comes to voting — than those with lower socioeconomic status. The SES model does not only encompass levels of income, but education as well.²

Unequal distribution of wealth and income, however, is believed to affect access and may adversely affect individuals' ability to participate in the democratic process on the same footing. Those lacking wealth and income do not always enjoy the same access to political power as do wealthy, high-income households. In the United States, where politics and money are tightly intertwined, those with lower incomes tend to experience less responsiveness by representatives in Congress. Two extremes in the distribution of income, with great concentrations at both the top and the bottom, can effectively distort opportunity. The ability of those at the top to attain their policy and other ideological preferences is greater.³ Larry Bartels has observed that members of Congress tend to be more responsive to those who are affluent than those in the lower and middle classes, which is essentially the question of access. Analyzing voting patterns on the minimum wage increase that took effect in 2007, he found that senators attached no weight at all to the views of constituents in the bottom end of the income distribution. And the views of those in the middle class appeared to only have been slightly more influential. Senators, however, were more responsive to the opinions of affluent constituents than middle class constituents. Republican senators were about twice as responsive as Democrats to the views of higher income constituents, but both Democrats and Republicans were about equally responsive to the views of middle class constituents. There was no evidence of any responsiveness to the views of constituents in the bottom third of the distribution. While senators were consistently responsive to the views of affluent constituents, they were entirely unresponsive to the views of low-income constituents.

All of this would appear to suggest that a more equitable distribution might conceivably result in more responsiveness because members of Congress would no longer have incentives to favor the affluent over the less affluent.⁴ But it also begs another question: were the senators who were unresponsive to those at the bottom of the distribution less responsive because they had low incomes, or because they themselves were less likely to participate in the political process in whatever form? This is by no means a trivial question because, if the latter, it would imply that if lower inequality would lead to greater participation, especially among those at the lower rungs of the distribution, political figures might be more inclined to be responsive.

¹³ "Nassau Civil Service Employees Push To End Temporary Jobs" *Newsday*, March 26, 1956, p. 7.
¹⁴ Wyrick, Bob. "Price for Public Job in Nassau: One Per Cent Cut for the Party" *Newsday* April 16, 1972, p. 10.
¹⁵ Eysen, Alan & Pete Bowles. "Politics Rules Summer Jobs in Nassau" *Newsday* July 25, 1977, p. 19.
¹⁶ Donovan Brian & Lambert, Bruce. "Nepotism and Government Jobs-Nassau's GOP Isn't Bashful" *Newsday* Oct. 29, 1972, p. 3.
¹⁷ Bob Wyrick, "Price for Public Job in Nassau: One Per Cent Cut for the Party" *Newsday* April 16, 1972, p. 9.
¹⁸ Eysen, Alan, "Money, Men and Patronage Oil Nassau County's GOP Machine" *Newsday* March 11, 1973, p. 7.
¹⁹ Ibid., p.9
²⁰ Wyrick, Bob. "Price for Public Job in Nassau: One Per Cent Cut for the Party" *Newsday* April 16, 1972, p. 10.
²¹ William L. Riordon 1963 *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics, Delivered by Ex-senator George Washington Plunkitt, the Tammany Philosopher, from His Rostrum – the New York County Court House Bootblack Stand.* Ch. 9.
²² Eysen, Alan. "Money, Men and Patronage Oil Nassau's County's GOP Machine." *Newsday* Mar. 11, 1973, p.7
²³ Ibid.
²⁴ *Newsday* "CSEA Facing Test of Strength" Maureen O'Neill Aug. 13, 1970, p.10
²⁵ Silver, Roy R. "How Nassau Employees Got Organized". *NY Times*. May 8, 1977, p. 407
²⁶ O'Neill, Maureen. "CSEA Facing Test of Strength". *Newsday*, August 13, 1970, p. 10
²⁷ Ibid
²⁸ Goldstein, Marilyn. "'Only Republicans Need Apply' " *Long Island Newsday*. Sept. 21, 1974. p. 3.
²⁹ Wyrick, Bob. "Price for Public Job in Nassau: One Percent Cut for the Party: ONE DOLLAR". *Newsday*. April 16, 1972, p. 9.

³⁰ Long, Irving; Kessler, Robert E. "Behind the kickbacks: Political, legal factors encourage GOP to settle 1% lawsuit". *Newsday*. Dec. 29, 1984. p. 7.
³¹ William L. Riordon 1963 *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics, Delivered by Ex-senator George Washington Plunkitt, the Tammany Philosopher, from His Rostrum – the New York County Court House Bootblack Stand.* Ch. 9
³² Lambert, Bruce. "CSEA Fights Caso Squeeze". *Newsday*. March 11, 1976, p. 3.
³³ Lambert, Bruce, "Strike Threat by CSEA Chief: CSEA Head Threatens a Strike. *Newsday*, Feb. 6, 1975, pp. 1,3.
³⁴ Bernstein, James. "Public-Sector Unions' New Aim". *Newsday*, Sept. 1, 1980 pp. 1,3.
³⁵ Lambert, Bruce. "Purcell's New Goals for His Second Term." *Newsday*. Nov. 9, 1981. p. 3
³⁶ Ibid
³⁷ Wilson, Kinsey & Robin Topping, "CAMPAIGN '93 Thomas Gulotta's Four Years His record: Executive gets mixed reviews, at best, for his handling of fiscal crisis. Series: Campaign '93. A Look at the Candidates" *Newsday*, Oct. 24, 1993 p. 7.
³⁸ Ibid.
³⁹ Rubin, Karen Fury. "Nassau County public unions signal willingness to vote out Republicans" *Long Island Populist Examiner*, Oct. 29, 2011. <http://www.examiner.com/article/fury-of-nassau-county-public-unions-signal-willingness-to-vote-out-republicans>.
⁴⁰ Figueroa, Laura. "Nassau Police Unions Switch Political Sides," *Newsday* April 3, 2012. <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/nassau-police-unions-switch-political-sides-1.3641360>
⁴¹ Searcey, Dionne. "Ghosts in the machine / Nassau's GOP haunted by loss of prominence on national and local scene" *Newsday*, Feb. 16, 2003: p. A8.

Table 1
Mean Household Income of Top & Bottom Quintiles, 2008-2010

	All U.S.			New York State			New York City Metro		
	Bottom	Top	Ratio	Bottom	Top	Ratio	Bottom	Top	Ratio
2008	\$15,930	\$189,200	11.9	\$13,466	\$200,968	14.9	\$12,354	\$218,443	17.7
2009	\$15,244	\$188,564	12.4	\$12,652	\$205,638	16.3	\$11,544	\$226,071	19.6
2010	\$14,894	\$186,782	12.5	\$13,010	\$207,291	15.9	\$12,153	\$220,983	18.1

Table 2
Mean Income in 10th, 50th & 90th Percentiles, 2008-2010

	Income Percentiles			Income Ratios		
	10th	50th	90th	50/10	90/50	90/10
U.S.						
2008	\$16,768	\$62,130	\$152,882	3.7	2.5	12.0
2009	\$16,028	\$60,300	\$152,002	3.8	2.5	9.5
2010	\$15,688	\$60,300	\$153,090	3.8	2.5	9.8
NY State						
2008	\$13,803	\$61,900	\$163,120	4.5	2.6	11.8
2009	\$13,332	\$60,000	\$162,313	4.5	2.7	12.2
2010	\$13,307	\$60,567	\$159,439	4.6	2.6	12.0
NYC Metro						
2008	\$12,390	\$60,000	\$176,063	4.8	2.9	14.2
2009	\$12,000	\$59,361	\$175,771	4.9	3.0	14.6
2010	\$12,762	\$60,450	\$168,370	4.8	2.8	13.3

Effects of Inequality on Civic Participation

Data for this study are drawn from both the Current Population Survey's Annual March Supplement for 2009-2011 (which measures for 2008-10) and Civic Participation Files for 2008-10 (which measures those years). Income inequality has been rising generally, but more so in the New York City metro area. The latter consists of New York City, Long Island, and White Plains in Westchester County.

Tables 1 and 2 show inequality by two different measures: Table 1 measures on the basis of quintiles, whereas Table 2 measures on the basis of the 10-50-90 percentile distribution. In neither case are we getting a full measure of the extent to which there is income inequality, especially in the New York City metro area because the Census Bureau topcodes the income variable at \$1,000,000 a year. Therefore, it is more than likely that income inequality is being underestimated.

Both Tables 1 and 2 show that income inequality has generally been higher in the New York metro area than in New York State and the U.S. On the basis of Table 1, income inequality rose by 3.3 percent in the U.S. between 2008-2009 and by 9.3 percent in New

York State. But it rose by 10.7 percent in the New York metro area. Again because Table 1 is only looking at the mean incomes in each quintile, the mean of the top quintile could be much higher, but we would not know that because of the top coding. The larger increase in New York metro is most likely accounted for by the 6.5 percent drop among the bottom quintile along with a 3.5 percent increase among the top. In the U.S. the drop among the bottom was only 4.3 percent, while the top quintile is little changed (-0.3 percent). And yet in Table 2, the ratio between the top 90th and bottom 10th percentiles drops by 20.8 percent in the U.S. between 2008 and 2009, while in New York metro it increased by 2.6 percent. It is also worth noting that the 90/10 ratio is 1.7 percent lower in New York State than in the U.S. in 2008 but 20.3 percent and 18.3 percent higher than in New York State and the U.S. respectively. As the country got

deeper into recession between 2008 and 2009 the 90/10 ratio in New York metro was 28.4 percent above New York State and 52.6 percent higher than the U.S. in 2009. Even though inequality declined between 2009 and 2010 by all measures, on the basis of the 90/10 ratio, inequality in New York metro in 2010 was 22.4 percent 35.7 percent higher than in New York State and the U.S. respectively. Inequality may have decreased from 2009 to 2010 in part because more people at the top of the distribution were affected, especially in the finance sector, than in other recessions; not because there were tremendous gains among those at the bottom. Even though the mean income of the bottom quintile rebounded in 2010, it was still 1.6 percent less in 2010 than in 2008. And yet, while the mean of the top fifth dropped 2.6 percent from 2009 to 2010, it was still 1.6 percent higher in 2010 than in 2008.

The question, however, is what is happening with regard to civic engagement. At the most basic level, voting is considered to be a nominal form of participation. The Civic Engagement files do not really offer voting as a variable that might even be used to measure civic engagement. Arguably, voting would require a degree of knowledge about politics, especially if voters are to be truly engaged. Discussing politics and the frequency with which one

discusses politics might speak to an interest in politics. It also speaks to the requisite knowledge level for the development of social capital that Putnam talks about. Discussing politics would certainly constitute what we might term a low level of civic engagement. Therefore, more active participation would require more than frequent discussions of politics. More active forms of participation would include visiting public officials, belonging to a school group, being active in religious organizations, and being involved in civic organizations. In this paper, I actually use different measures of civic engagement because I wanted a consistent set of variables running through the three survey years.

Robert Putnam has suggested that involvement in associations (“associative life”) is the means by which society develops social capital, and that it is critical to a vibrant democracy. Visiting political officials and participating in different types of organizations can then serve as a proxy for interest in political affairs that extends beyond nominal voting. Therefore, to the extent that voting represents passive participation, visiting a public official then becomes a proxy for political activism, albeit what we might term mid-level participation. Participation in school groups and civic and religious organizations, then, would appear to speak to a level of voluntary civic engagement in communal affairs that also extends beyond nominal voting activity. Alexis de Tocqueville considered involvement in communal affairs to be the defining characteristic of American democracy. Many students of social capital maintain that participation in communal organizations provide the participatory skills necessary for getting involved in larger civic organizations or social and political movements.⁵ In this vein, involvement in school groups and religious organizations then serve as an important gauge of involvement in communal affairs.

Crosstabs for civic participation by different income groups can be seen in Table 3. They show that participation generally increases with income. Participation is not only lower among those in households with incomes under \$30,000 a year, but it is much lower for those in low-income households in the New York metro area. Measured by daily political discussion, in 2008 it was 19.6 percent and 8.5 percent lower among this income cohort in the New York metro area than in the U.S. and New York State respectively. Among those in households above \$100,000 a year, it was 70 percent and 27.4 percent higher in the New York metro area than in the U.S. and New York State respectively. Interestingly enough, there was a 16.2 percent increase among those in the low-income group who discuss politics every day in the New York metro area in 2009, and a further increase of 5.9 percent among this group in 2010.

We might speculate that discussions of politics increase among low-income households during a recession because the stakes are higher, particularly for this group. What the data cannot really tell us is just what the nature of those discussions are. In 2009 and 2010, there was much political discussion surrounding President Obama's economic stimulus package, which was intended to

reduce unemployment. Again, we do not really know whether increased discussions among this group might have been related because perhaps they would have had a greater stake in the outcome. And yet, oddly enough those in the top income group appeared to be discussing politics less in both New York State and the New York City. In the U.S. the percentage increase among those discussing politics every day among the top-income group increased by 1.8 percent in 2009 and by another 0.3 percent in 2010. In New York State, however, it dropped by 57.8 percent in 2009, but then increased by 119.4 percent in 2010. In the New York metro area, daily discussions of politics decreased by 71.8 percent in 2009, but increased by 197.1 percent in 2010.

On the question of visiting a public official, those in the low-income household group were considerably less likely in the New York metro area than in New York State and the U.S. and those in the high-income household group were considerably more likely to visit public officials in the New York metro area. In 2008, the difference between low-income households in New York metro and the U.S. and New York State on visiting public officials was 708.3 percent and 188.9 percent respectively. And the difference between high-income households in New York metro and the U.S. and New York State on visiting public officials was 86.9 percent and 65.3 percent respectively. Interestingly enough, the percentage of those in low-income households visiting public officials did not change in New York metro in 2009, although it does increase by 361.1 percent in 2010. In the U.S. the percentage of those visiting public officials decreases by 30.7 percent in 2009 but increased by 59.3 percent in 2010. In New York State, the percentage of those visiting public officials did decrease by 57.7 percent in 2009 but increased by 331.2 percent in 2010. The percentage of those in high-income households visiting public officials in New York metro decreases by 46.5 percent in 2009, but then increased again by 52.3 percent in 2010. In the U.S. the percentage of those in high-income households visiting public officials decreases by 4.9 percent in 2009, but only rebounds by 2.5 percent in 2010. And in New York State, the percentage of those in high-income households visiting public officials decreases by 14.9 percent in 2009, but increased by 29.1 percent in 2010. Again one wonders why the big increase in 2010 for visiting public officials among those in low-income households in the New York metro area. Is it because more people feel the need to seek assistance of some type during a recession?

The trends were similar for participating in a school group. Again participation among those in the low-income household group was lower in the New York metro area than in the U.S. and New York State. In 2008, participation among the low-income household group was 42 percent and 13.6 percent less in the U.S. and New York State respectively. Among the low-income household group participation fell by 14.8 percent in 2009 in the New York metro area, but rose by 49.3 percent in 2010. In the U.S. and New York State participation among the low-income group decreased 27.2 and 52 percent respectively in 2009, but increased by 48.3 percent and 196.8 percent respectively in 2010. Among the high-income

Table 3
Civic Participation by Income Groups in U S , NY State, and New York Metro Area 2008-2010

	Discuss Politics					Visited Public Official		Participate in School Group		Participate in Civic Group		Participate in Religious Group	
	Daily	Few times a Week	Few times a Month	Once/Month	Never	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
2008													
U. S.													
Less than \$30,000	14.8	16.5	17.1	20.6	30.6	11.7	20.8	12.5	21.2	11.1	20.3	14.1	20.9
\$30,000 to 59,999	27.5	28.7	29.6	31.5	35.0	25.1	31.0	23.4	31.8	25.0	30.7	26.9	31.1
\$60,000 to 99,999	29.4	28.8	29.7	28.2	22.3	31.1	27.3	31.4	26.9	32.2	27.3	31.3	26.8
\$100,000+	28.4	26.1	23.6	19.6	12.0	32.1	20.9	32.7	20.1	31.7	21.6	27.7	21.1
NY.State													
Less than \$30,000	13.0	16.9	13.4	18.2	32.6	10.4	19.3	10.0	19.8	14.8	18.5	11.0	19.8
\$30,000 to 59,999	24.2	32.6	25.3	28.4	25.3	24.4	27.7	16.2	29.5	23.5	27.6	22.5	28.2
\$60,000 to 99,999	24.9	23.5	34.5	29.7	24.9	28.9	26.7	31.0	26.4	30.9	26.8	31.6	26.2
\$100,000+	37.9	27.1	26.8	23.6	17.2	36.3	26.3	42.9	24.3	30.9	27.1	34.9	25.8
NYC.Metro													
Less than \$30,000	11.9	15.1	11.9	18.2	35.9	3.6	18.5	8.8	18.7	16.1	17.3	10.1	18.9
\$30,000 to 59,999	18.2	29.3	16.4	26.0	19.7	16.4	22.7	13.2	23.9	9.7	22.7	17.1	23.2
\$60,000 to 99,999	21.6	20.0	35.8	29.9	22.2	20.0	25.0	24.6	25.0	29.0	24.7	31.0	23.5
\$100,000+	48.3	35.6	35.8	26.0	22.2	60.0	33.8	53.5	32.5	45.2	35.3	41.9	34.4
2009													
U..S..													
Less than \$30,000	11.7	11.8	11.6	14.7	24.3	8.1	16.3	9.1	16.4	7.5	15.7	10.6	16.1
\$30,000 to 59,999	30.9	20.6	36.9	38.7	41.3	29.8	36.9	26.9	37.8	28.6	36.5	31.7	36.8
\$60,000 to 99,999	28.6	30.3	29.6	27.2	22.5	31.6	26.9	33.0	26.4	32.2	27.1	31.7	26.6
\$100,000+	28.9	27.5	21.9	19.4	11.8	30.5	20.0	31.0	19.5	31.8	20.7	26.0	20.5
NY.State													
Less than \$30,000	16.0	5.2	10.1	22.4	27.3	4.4	15.9	4.8	16.4	5.7	15.0	7.1	15.1
\$30,000 to 59,999	32.0	25.4	33.6	34.7	42.4	26.5	34.4	20.5	36.1	22.9	34.3	35.7	32.8
\$60,000 to 99,999	36.0	29.9	26.1	22.4	12.1	38.2	22.8	33.7	23.0	48.6	23.0	33.9	23.8
\$100,000+	16.0	39.6	30.3	20.4	18.2	30.9	26.8	41.0	24.5	22.9	27.7	23.2	28.3
NYC.Metro													
Less than \$30,000	13.6	4.9	10.6	21.7	28.6	3.6	15.8	7.5	16.3	12.5	14.6	3.1	15.8
\$30,000 to 59,999	27.3	24.4	25.8	30.4	28.9	28.6	29.1	18.9	31.6	6.2	30.5	34.4	28.1
\$60,000 to 99,999	45.5	34.1	30.3	17.4	12.7	35.7	26.1	30.2	26.3	50.0	25.6	34.4	26.3
\$100,000+	13.6	36.6	33.3	30.4	20.6	32.1	29.1	43.4	25.8	31.2	29.3	28.1	29.8

Table 3 (continued)
Civic Participation by Income Groups in U S , NY State, and New York Metro Area 2008-2010

	Discuss Politics					Visited Public Official		Participate in School Group		Participate in Civic Group		Participate in Religious Group	
	Daily	Few times a Week	Few times a Month	Once/Month	Never	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
2010													
U. S.													
Less than \$30,000	17.6	16.7	18.5	20.1	30.9	13.9	23.6	13.8	24.0	13.5	23.1	16.1	23.8
\$30,000 to 59,999	28.0	27.1	28.3	29.7	32.2	24.3	30.5	22.8	31.0	25.5	30.0	26.9	30.3
\$60,000 to 99,999	25.4	28.3	27.8	27.7	22.8	29.0	25.5	29.1	25.4	29.5	25.7	28.8	25.4
\$100,000+	29.0	27.9	25.3	22.6	14.1	32.9	20.4	34.4	19.5	31.5	21.2	28.2	20.5
NY State													
Less than \$30,000	15.1	16.1	16.1	19.4	30.1	14.6	22.4	11.9	23.0	14.2	21.7	16.3	22.2
\$30,000 to 59,999	23.8	23.9	25.2	27.9	30.9	20.7	27.9	18.8	28.4	24.4	27.2	27.3	27.0
\$60,000 to 99,999	25.9	26.1	29.3	26.9	21.2	24.7	25.1	27.4	24.9	18.9	25.8	25.0	25.4
\$100,000+	35.1	33.9	29.5	25.9	17.8	39.9	24.5	41.9	23.7	42.5	25.2	31.3	25.5
NYC Metro													
Less than \$30,000	14.4	15.8	17.3	14.3	30.2	13.0	21.9	11.2	22.8	8.7	21.5	17.2	21.6
\$30,000 to 59,999	20.2	23.5	21.6	25.2	31.9	15.2	26.8	16.9	27.3	17.4	26.2	28.2	25.4
\$60,000 to 99,999	25.0	24.0	32.2	26.5	16.1	22.8	23.7	25.0	23.5	10.9	24.3	23.3	23.9
\$100,000+	40.4	36.7	29.0	34.0	21.8	48.9	27.5	46.9	26.4	63.0	28.0	31.3	29.0

household group participation in the New York metro area decreased by 18.9 percent in 2009, but increased by 8.1 percent in 2010. In both the U.S. and New York State participation among the high-income household group in a school group decreased by 5.2 percent and 4.4 percent respectively in 2009, but it increased by 11 percent and 2.2 percent respectively in 2010.

Participation in civic organizations declined among both low- and high-income household groups in the New York metro area. In 2008 participation among the low-income household group was actually higher than in the U.S. and New York State than in the New York metro area, by 45 percent and 8.8 percent respectively. The differences were even greater among those in the high-income household group. Participation in civic organizations among this group was 42.6 percent and 46.3 percent higher in the New York metro area than in the U.S. and New York State respectively. Still, among the low-income household group participation in civic organizations in the New York metro area decreased by 22.4 percent in 2009 and by another 30.4 percent in 2010. In both the U.S. and New York State participation among this group decreased by 32.4 percent and by 61.5 percent respectively in 2009. But in 2010 participation among this group increased by 80 percent and

149.1 percent in the U.S. and New York State, respectively. Among the high-income household group participation in civic organizations declined by 31 percent in the New York metro area in 2009 but increased by 101.9 percent in 2010. In the U.S. participation among the high-income household group increased by .3 percent, but it decreased by 25.9 percent in New York State in 2009. But in 2010 participation among this group decreased by .9 percent in the U.S. while increasing by 85.6 percent in New York State.

On the issue of participation in a religious organization, participation among the low-income household group was 40 percent and 8.2 percent less in the New York metro area in 2008 than in the U.S. and New York State respectively. In the New York metro area participation among the low-income household group decreased by 69.3 percent in 2009, but then increased by 454.8 percent in 2010. Participation among this group decreased by 24.8 percent and 35.5 percent in the U.S. and New York State respectively in 2009, but then increased by 48.1 percent and 48.2 percent in the U.S. and New York State respectively in 2010. Among high-income households in the New York metro area, participation in a religious organization decreased by 32.9 percent in 2009, but rebounded by 13.7 percent in 2010. In both the U.S. and New York State, participation in a

Table 4
Percentage Differences Between Income Groups

	Discuss Politics			Visited Public Official	Participate in School Group	Participate in Civic Org.	Participate in Religious Org.
	Daily	Once	Never				
2008							
U. S.							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+91.9	-4.9	-60.8	+174.4	+161.6	+185.6	+96.5
<\$30,000/59,999	+85.8	+52.9	+14.4	+ 63.2	+ 87.2	+125.2	+85.9
NY.State							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+191.5	+29.7	-47.2	+249.0	+329.0	+108.8	+217.3
<\$30,000/59,999	+86.2	+34.1	-22.4	+134.6	+ 62.0	+ 58.8	+104.5
NYC.Metro							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+305.9	+42.9	-38.2	+1566.7	+508.0	+180.7	+314.9
<\$30,000/59,999	+ 52.9	+42.9	-45.1	+ 355.6	+ 51.1	-39.8	+69.3
2009							
U.S.							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+147.0	+32.0	-51.4	+276.4	+240.7	+324.0	+239.6
<\$30,000/59,999	+164.1	+163.3	+70.0	+267.9	+195.6	+281.3	+199.1
NY State							
<\$30,000/100,000+	0	-8.9	-18.7	+602.3	+754.2	+301.8	+226.8
<\$30,000/59,999	+87.5	+54.9	+55.3	+502.3	+327.1	+301.8	+402.8
NYC Metro							
<\$30,000/100,000+	0	+40.1	-28.0	+791.7	+478.7	+149.6	+806.5
<\$30,000/59,999	+100.7	+40.1	+ 1.0	+694.4	+152.0	-50.4	+978.1
2010							
U.S.							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+64.8	+7.5	-54.4	+136.7	+142.0	+133.3	+75.2
<\$30,000/59,999	+59.1	+43.8	+4.2	+74.8	+65.2	+88.9	+67.
NY State							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+132.5	+33.5	-40.9	+173.2	+252.1	+199.3	+92.0
<\$30,000/59,999	+57.6	+43.8	+2.7	+28.1	+58.0	+57.7	+67.5
NYC Metro							
<\$30,000/100,000+	+180.1	+137.8	-27.8	+276.2	+318.8	+624.1	+82.0
<\$30,000/59,999	+40.3	+69.2	+5.3	+16.9	+50.0	+100.0	+64.0

religious organization among high-income households dropped by 6.1 percent and 47.9 percent respectively in 2009, but rebounded by 8.5 percent and 34.5 percent respectively in 2010.

Although there were some changes from one year to the next, with the most pronounced declines in participation among those in lower income households during the height of the recession in 2009, the remaining constant appears to be that those in lower income

households are participating considerably less in communal affairs than those in higher-income households. These percentage differences between the lowest- and the highest-income households can be seen in Table 4.

The differences revealed there between the two extreme income groups are quite substantial. On daily discussions of politics, in 2008 the differences between the two groups is considerably larger

in the New York metro area than in the U.S. and New York State. Interestingly enough the percentage difference in the New York metro area decreases in 2009, but rebounds a bit in 2010, but not quite to the 2008 level. The difference between the two actually increased nationally in 2009, before it drops substantially in 2010. This trend appears to be the same for the U.S., although not to the same degree. It is only in New York State that there appears to be a steady decline in the difference between the low- and high-income households. On visiting public officials there appears to be a much greater percentage difference between the two extreme income households in the New York metro area than anywhere else, and although that difference does drop between 2008 and 2010, it is clear that those in high-income households are much more likely to visit public officials than those in low-income households, and this more so in the New York metro area than anywhere else. The same patterns also appear to hold true for the other variables, although the difference between low- and high income households in the New York metro area is not larger than elsewhere by 2010.

Perhaps the main question is whether the recession had any real impact on participation rates among the various income groups. Tables 5 and 6 show changes among the lowest and middle household income groups respectively.

In Table 5 it becomes clear that participation among those in the lowest household income group tended to decline between 2008 and 2009 in the New York metro area, although it actually increased for daily discussions of politics and did not change at all for visiting public officials. The declines on the more active forms of civic engagement were actually larger in the U.S. and New York State than in the New York metro area between 2008 and 2009, for the exception of participating in religious organizations. Between 2009 and 2010, as the recession appeared to be easing, those in low-income households appeared to be participating more, with a slight increase in daily discussions of politics, and substantial increases in visiting public officials and participating in religious organizations. It was only on participation in civic organizations that participation declined even further from 2009 to 2010 in the New York metro area. For the exception of daily discussions of politics and participation in civic organizations, similar trends appeared to be occurring in both the U.S. and New York State. On daily discussions of politics there were fewer in New York State from 2009 to 2010. And on participation in civic organizations, participation among those in low-income households increased from 2009 to 2010, although the increase was much larger in New York State than in the U.S.

As Table 6 suggests, among most middle income groups, civic engagement appeared to increase in the New York metro area between 2008 and 2009. For visiting public officials, the increase from 2008 to 2009 was greater than in the U.S. and New York State, although the declines on this variable also appeared to be greater in the New York metro area than elsewhere. On participating in school groups, increases again were greater in the New York metro area than elsewhere, and again from 2009 to 2010 the

declines were greater in the New York metro area, for the exception of those in the \$60,000 to \$99,999 group where the decline was slightly larger in New York State than in the New York metro area. On participation in civic organizations, there was no real consistent pattern. In the New York metro area, participation among the \$30,000 to \$59,999 household income group decreased from 2008 to 2009, but increased substantially from 2009 to 2010. And yet, in the U.S. participation among this group did increase from 2008 to 2009 and then dropped again from 2009 to 2010 while it declined from 2008 to 2009 and rose again from 2009 to 2010 in New York State. Among those in the \$60,000 to \$99,999 household income group, participation increased more in the New York metro area than elsewhere from 2008 to 2009, but it also declined more from 2009 to 2010. And on participation in a religious organization there was again a much greater increase among those in the \$30,000 to \$59,999 group in the New York metro area than elsewhere, but the decline among this group from 2009 to 2010 was actually greatest in New York State. And among those in the \$60,000 to \$99,999 household income group, there were again increases in participation from 2008 to 2009, which were greater in the New York metro area than elsewhere. And again the declines among this group were greater in the New York metro area from 2009 to 2010.

Regression Analysis

Higher household income does appear correlated with more civic participation. But the key question is: what variables have a higher probability for being engaged in these issues? All we know so far is that those in the lowest household income group are participating the least and those in the highest household income group are participating the most. Even those in the next household income group up from the lowest are participating more. If we assume that the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) is correct – that those with the resources, which includes organizing skills are more likely to be engaged⁶ – this in and of itself does not prove it. At issue are what factors are more likely to predispose individuals and/or groups to participate more. In my previous piece in these pages, I used logit regression analysis to look at the effects of educational attainment, gender, household income, sub- minimum-wage earnings, age, and marital status. This model specification was first estimated on three dependent variables: low-level participation, medium level participation, and high level participation. And in the second logit regression equation, I looked at how low household income, high household income, low-income industry, high-income occupation, union coverage, and earning less than the minimum wage influence the same three dependent variables. Low-level participation spoke to daily discussions of politics and reading of newspapers. Medium-level participation involved attending meetings, rallies, and showing support for candidates. And high-level participation involved active participation in civic organizations.

Although this paper is to some degree a sequel to my last one, adding two additional years to the analysis effectively required looking at different variables. The only civic engagement variables available in 2009 and 2010 that were available in 2008 were

Table 5
Percentage Differences Between Income Groups

	Discuss Politics			Visited Public Official	Participate in School Group	Participate in School Group	Participate in Religious Org.
	Daily	Once	Never				
U.S.							
2008/09	-20.9	-28.6	-20.6	-30.8	-27.2	-32.4	-24.8
2009/2010	+50.4	+36.7	+13.2	+71.6	+51.6	+80.0	+51.9
NY.State							
2008/09	+23.1	+23.1	-16.3	-57.7	-52.0	-61.5	-35.5
2009/2010	-5.7	-13.4	+13.9	+231.8	+160.4	+149.1	+129.6
NYC Metro							
2008/09	+14.3	+19.2	-20.3	0	-14.8	-22.4	-69.3
2009/2010	+5.9	-34.1	+5.6	+261.1	+49.3	-30.4	+454.8

Table 6
Participation Changes Among Middle-Income Group

	Discuss Politics			Visited Public Official	Participate in School Group	Participate in Civic Org.	Participate in Religious Org.
	Daily	Once	Never				
U.S.							
\$30,000-\$59,999							
2008/09	+12.4	+22.9	+18.0	+18.7	+15.0	+14.4	+17.8
2009/2010	-9.4	-23.3	-22.0	-18.5	-15.2	-10.8	-15.1
\$60,000-\$99,999							
2008/09	-2.7	-3.5	+9	+1.6	+5.1	0	+1.3
2009/2010	-11.2	+2.2	+1.3	-5.1	-11.8	-8.4	-9.1
New York State							
\$30,000-\$59,999							
2008/09	+32.2	+23.9	+67.6	+8.6	+26.5	-2.6	+58.7
2009/2010	-25.6	-19.6	-26.9	-20.3	-8.3	+6.6	-23.5
\$60,000-\$99,999							
2008/09	+36.5	-17.8	-51.4	+32.2	+6.8	+57.3	+7.3
2009/2010	-28.1	+20.1	+75.2	-19.6	-18.7	-61.1	-26.3
NYC Metro							
\$30,000-\$59,999							
2008/09	+50.0	+16.9	+46.7	+74.4	+43.2	-36.0	+101.2
2009/2010	+14.3	-28.9	+10.4	-46.9	-10.6	+180.6	-18.0
\$60,000-\$99,999							
2008/09	+110.6	-41.8	-42.2	+78.5	+22.8	+72.4	+11.0
2009/2010	-45.1	+52.3	+26.8	-36.1	-17.2	-78.2	-32.3

discussions of politics and participation in civic organizations. Therefore, I added three different variables to this paper in order to have a consistent set of variables throughout the three years. These variables do not lend themselves to the same easy categorization as the others. Participation in a civic organization still would represent a high level of participation, but visiting a public official could also represent a high level of participation depending on what the purpose of the visit. To simply visit might be considered medium level, as one had to actively make the effort to see somebody. But if upon visiting a public official one is actively engaged in lobbying activity, the participation level may have increased to high. Of course, one might think of participation in a school group as a high level of participation, but it could conceivably be medium, given that parents of children in schools are more likely to participate because of their interest in their children's education. And then participation in a religious organization might actually have little to do with interest in the affairs of the larger community, rather it may speak to people's commitment to religion and religious practice. And yet, all of these variables beyond daily discussions of politics share something in common, which is they enable those who are involved to develop social capital. In this vein, participation in a religious organization is important because much of the literature on civic engagement stresses the importance of religious affiliation and the participation in church groups to the development of social capital.⁷

Given the difficulty of categorizing the dependent variables, it makes sense to use all five of the dependent variables with the same independent variables. Tables 7 and 8 show regression coefficient estimates for general demographic and labor market variables respectively in the New York metro area. As much as the coefficients themselves are worth note, the change in the size of the coefficients from year to year is also of interest. What certainly stands out in all three years is that having a low educational attainment has a strong negative probability for visiting public officials, although it is not statistically significant in 2009. Having a high educational attainment has a strong probability for visiting public officials in 2008, but in 2009 and 2010, the coefficient is not only much smaller, but it is not statistically significant. The same appears to be true of daily discussions of politics. In 2008, when it comes to visiting public officials the strongest variable appears to be high educational attainment, followed by high household income and then being older than 65. In 2009, earning less than the minimum wage has a very strong negative probability for visiting a public official and the other variables are not statistically significant. In 2010, the only variables that are statistically significant are low educational attainment (which is strongly negative), being older than 65 and being married.

On participating in a school group, the key variables in all three years that are statistically significant are high educational attainment, high household income, and being married. Low educational attainment has negative probabilities for participating in school groups in all three years, but it is only statistically significant in 2010. In both 2008 and 2009, high educational

attainment had a stronger effect than high household income, although that variable did have strong probabilities too. It is in 2010, however, that the size of the high educational attainment coefficient shrinks and becomes not statistically significant. Females in all years appear to have a high probability, with the effect being largest in 2009, for participating in school groups. And those who are married are also likely to be involved in school groups. On this variable, the coefficient decreases from 2008 to 2009, but it is the largest of all the variables in 2010.

On participating in civic organizations, it would appear that those in high-income households and married people are most likely to participate. In 2008, being married had the largest effect, followed by high household income for participating in a civic organization. In 2009, it was being married that had the strongest effect and high household income was not statistically significant. In 2010, however, the variable with the strongest effect is being older than 65, followed by high household income, and then being married. It is on participating in religious organizations that we see some interesting anomalies. In 2008, having a low educational attainment had a strong negative effect for participating in a religious organization. The strongest effects for participating in religious organizations were being married, followed by being older than 65, followed by high household income. In 2009, high household income is not statistically significant. Being older than 65 has the largest effect, and the variable with the second largest effect is being in a low-income industry, followed by being married. Although high educational attainment is statistically significant, relative to the other variables, it has the smallest effect. Perhaps what is most interest, however, is the strong negative effect that earning the minimum wage has for participating in a religious organization. In 2010, the size of the coefficient for high educational attainment, although still statistically significant, is much smaller than in 2009. In fact, all the coefficient estimates are smaller. The largest is still that of ages over 65, followed again by employment in a low-income industry, and then being married. This might suggest that older people tend to get involved because they have more time to devote to communal affairs, and participation allows them to remain active. And that married people are more likely to be involved may say something about the family unit. Married people may feel that communal affairs have a bearing on their families.

Overall, the general demographic coefficients would appear to suggest that different demographics are bound to have different effects for different types of participation. That those in high income households and with high educational attainment are likely to be involved in school groups perhaps bears out the importance of SES, at least when it comes to education. That having a high educational attainment appears not to have much effect for participation in religious organizations might speak to the increasing secularization of society generally, and in the New York City metro area more specifically. It might even reinforce a stereotype that as one is more educated, one tends not to be as interested in religion. That those who are older than 65 are more

Table 7.
Regression Coefficient Estimates (NYC Metro Area)

	Discuss Politics Daily		Visit Public Official		Participate in School Group		Participate in Civic Org.		Participate in Religious Org.	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
2008										
Low Education	-.110	.436	-1.996	.050	-.669	.063	-.847	.168	-.740	.007
High Education	.712	.000	1.313	.000	.806	.000	.256	.384	.398	.008
Female	.039	.660	-.045	.839	.780	.000	-.426	.120	.256	.062
High Household Income										
Low Income	.635	.000	.833	.000	.852	.000	.862	.003	.664	.000
Industry	.330	.013	.445	.173	-.548	.067	-.018	.968	.147	.494
Earn Below Min. Wage										
Min. Wage	-17.980	---	-14.828	---	-15.989	---	-15.723	---	-16.550	---
Age 18-24	.141	.395	-.476	.374	.156	.630	.525	.354	.110	.711
Older than 65	.528	.000	.729	.012	-.388	.149	.539	.130	.792	.000
Married	.513	.000	.183	.437	.873	.000	1.260	.000	.922	.000
Constant	2.226	.000	4.710	.000	4.314	.000	5.090	.000	3.672	.000
2009										
Low Education	-1.660	.023	-1.916	.060	-.976	.063	-1.450	.160	-.306	.408
High Education	-.215	.578	.273	.466	.435	.120	.488	.250	.264	.375
Female	.275	.353	-.222	.475	1.054	.000	-.796	.043	.628	.013
High Household Income										
Low Income	-.564	.204	.573	.095	.775	.002	.450	.270	-.399	.254
Industry	.155	.779	-.090	.884	.091	.865	-.311	.678	.824	.034
Earn Below Min. Wage										
Min. Wage	-2.184	.000	-1.720	.001	-.843	.115	15.773	---	-1.737	.000
Age 18-24	.198	.701	-.844	.266	-.605	.265	.656	.288	-.785	.202
Older than 65	.019	.975	-.110	.881	-.317	.596	.375	.617	1.251	.000
Married	.663	.027	.382	.229	.506	.037	.890	.031	.788	.001
Constant	2.453	.000	2.814	.000	4.053	.000	20.774	.000	3.013	.000
2010										
Low Education	-.196	.447	-1.240	.008	-.773	.018	-.638	.237	.058	.769
High Education	.291	.120	.204	.350	.271	.119	.286	.354	.241	.136
Female	.148	.335	-.049	.788	.592	.000	-.418	.100	.294	.027
High Household Income										
Low Income	.351	.041	.583	.002	.819	.000	1.278	.000	.163	.287
Industry	-.500	.244	.146	.704	.295	.305	-.266	.664	.666	.006
Earn Below Min. Wage										
Min. Wage	.417	.422	.808	.266	.441	.315	-.462	.454	.120	.751
Age 18-24	-.510	.286	-20.274	---	-.711	.240	-20.053	---	-.964	.065
Older than 65	.375	.060	.691	.002	-.594	.018	1.294	.000	.723	.000
Married	.386	.014	.599	.001	1.280	.000	.607	.019	.638	.000
Constant	3.689	.000	4.487	.000	4.305	.000	4.275	.000	3.313	.000

Table 8.
Labor Market Coefficient Estimates (NYC Metro Area)

	Discuss Politics Daily		Visit Public Official		Participate in School Group		Participate in Civic Org.		Participate in Religious Org.	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
2008										
Low Household Income	.001	.996	-.638	.153	.057	.820	.452	.273	-.097	.644
High Household Income	.838	.000	1.121	.000	1.249	.000	1.263	.000	.844	.000
Low Income Industry	.301	.019	.315	.322	-.469	.111	-.013	.977	.069	.742
High Income Occupation	-.097	.818	.750	.311	.473	.443	1.315	.079	.129	.832
Covered by Union	2.328	.008	2.432	.033	1.482	.187	-15.753	.999	-16.926	.998
Earn Below Min. Wage	-18.136	---	-15.774	---	-16.472	---	-15.425	---	-16.848	---
Constant	1.756	.000	4.130	.000	3.390	.000	4.736	.000	2.922	.000
2009										
Low Household Income	-.179	.674	-1.205	.103	.230	.513	-.492	.435	-1.354	.000
High Household Income	.648	.152	.381	.276	.630	.017	.470	.264	-.666	.058
Low Income Industry	.236	.659	.103	.865	-.187	.720	.084	.910	.686	.061
High Income Occupation	.999	.001	.895	.005	1.283	.000	.477	.251	.748	.003
Covered by Union	-.18.493	---	1.385	.199	-18.076	---	14.743	.998	.759	.482
Earn Below Min. Wage	-2.147	.000	-1.481	.003	-.730	.171	14.911	---	-1.555	.000
Constant	.155	.779	-.090	.884	.091	.865	-.311	.678	.824	.034
2010										
Low Household Income	.066	.726	-.313	.201	-.249	.223	-.039	.916	.126	.414
High Household Income	.153	.407	.325	.112	.631	.000	.977	.001	.023	.889
Low Income Industry	-.552	.195	.118	.755	.317	.261	-.250	.678	.622	.008
High Income Occupation	1.018	.000	1.011	.000	1.311	.000	1.126	.000	.778	.000
Covered by Union	-18.600	--	.621	.572	-.216	.844	.985	.373	.172	.874
Earn Below Min. Wage	.351	.499	.764	.291	.167	.702	-.412	.498	.051	.891
Constant	3.544	.000	4.311	.000	3.411	.000	4.235	.000	2.842	.000

likely to be involved in religious organizations may also speak to generational differences when it comes to religion. Still, the most interesting effect is the significance of being in a low-income industry. In 2008, the coefficient estimate was statistically significant, with a small positive effect relative to the other variables for daily discussions of politics. Otherwise, it is not a significant variable. But in 2009 and 2010, it does have a strong positive and statistically significant effect for participating in religious organizations. Again, this might feed into another stereotype that it is poorer people who more likely to seek comfort in religion, perhaps because it is all that they have. For those in low-income industries, religion and participation in religious organizations may be what gives them comfort, especially as the recession deepens. And yet, simply being in a high-income household is not in and of itself the critical determinant. There are other variables that are as important. And yet, as Table 3 suggests, those in high-income households are on average more civically engaged than those in low-income households.

The labor market coefficients reveal that some interesting things are going on. In 2008, being covered by a union has the strongest linkage to daily discussions of politics and visiting a public official. Being in a high-income household also has strong positive effects for daily discussions of politics, visiting a public official, participating in a school group, participating in a civic organization, and participating in a religious organization. In 2009, however, there appeared to be some change. High income was only statistically significant for participating in a school group. Rather the most important variable that was statistically significant was being in a high-income occupation. This variable had strong positive effects for daily discussions of politics, visiting a public official, participating in a school group and participating in a religious organization. The estimated impact is not statistically significant for participating in a civic organization. Also in 2009, earning less than the minimum wage had strong negative effects for daily discussions of politics, visiting public officials, and

Table 9.
Estimated Effects of Union Variable Nationally

	Discuss Politics Daily		Visit Public Official		Participate in School Group		Participate in Civic Org.		Participate in Religious Org.	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
2008	.380	.016	.638	.004	.610	.002	.366	.205	.254	.230
2009	1.050	.000	.740	.004	1.605	.000	.487	.185	1.321	.000
2010	.267	.342	.326	.171	.529	.008	.902	.000	7.542E-5	1.000

participating in religious organizations. This would suggest that those who are earning at the very bottom of the distribution are highly unlikely to be civically engaged, in part because they may feel that it will not have any real impact on their lives. In 2010, being in a high-income household has strong positive effects which are statistically significant for participating in a school group and participating in a civic organization. And yet, it is being in a high income occupation that has the strongest positive effects that are statistically significant for all measures of civic engagement. Again we find that in 2010, employment in a low-income industry has a strong positive effect for participating in a religious organization.

What, then, does all this mean? Being in a high-income household appears to be less of a factor as the recession gets deeper, but being in a high-income occupation becomes more of a factor. In other words, those in occupations where they are paid well are more likely to be civically engaged. Being in a high-income household does not really tell us whether the survey respondent has a high income; only that the household as a whole does. During a recession, we might expect high household income to be less of a factor as overall household income may decline depending on how many in the household have lost their jobs. That those in high-income occupations are more likely to be civically engaged would also appear to consistent with those earning the minimum wage to be the least likely to be civically engaged.

Although the union variable is for the most part not statistically significant in the New York metro area, it is often quite significant at the national level, owing primarily to a larger sample size. The effects of union coverage at the national level can be seen in Table 9. The importance of being covered by a union as a factor in being civically engaged cannot be overstated. In 2008, the effect of being a union member for visiting a public official was the strongest and the second strongest for participating in a school group. In 2009, being covered by a union had the strongest effect for daily discussions of politics, participating in a school group, and participating in a religious group. For visiting a public official, its effect was also strong, but being in a high income occupation was stronger. Although the estimated impact of this variable in 2010 was only statistically significant on participating in a school group and participating in a civic organization, on the latter it was the strongest effect. We can only speculate that if the sample size for the New York metro area was substantially larger, the union

variable's impact might be significant there too. To the extent that the union impact is no trivial matter, it is consistent with the role that unions historically played in developing social capital among their members.⁸ At a minimum, unions have been able to deliver their members to the polls.⁹

Conclusion

Although those in low-income households are less civically engaged than those in high-income households, income in and of itself is not necessarily the main determinant of civic engagement. It is certainly the case that those in low-income households in the New York City metro area, where income inequality is greater, are participating less than in both the U.S. and New York State, and while civic engagement appears to have declined, particularly for those in low-income households, at all levels, it is also clear that different demographic characteristics played different roles, depending on the activity. Older and married people are more likely to be involved in school groups, civic organizations, and religious organizations. Those in high-income occupations are more likely to visit public officials and at times be involved in civic organizations. In 2008 at the beginning of the recession, those in high-income households were more likely to be civically engaged on all measures, but as the recession deepened in 2009, that was not nearly the case. In 2009 and into 2010, it was specifically those in high-income occupations who are likely to be engaged in civic engagement on all measures, for the exception of participating in civic organizations in 2009, and on all measures in 2010.

Again, this would suggest that if incomes of those at the bottom of the distribution were to rise, perhaps through a wage policy, not only would income inequality decrease, but civic engagement would increase. Similar trends were observed in both the U.S. and New York State, but income inequality is higher in the New York metro area than elsewhere, which perhaps makes the need for a wage policy of some type all that more imperative in the New York metro area.

There are perhaps two issues here: one is the wide gaps between the top and the bottom, and the other is civic participation. Democracy is threatened by huge gaps between the top and the bottom because it speaks to the absence of a middle class, which most theorists hold to be essential to the maintenance of democracy.¹⁰ But democracy requires all citizens to participate on

some level, and if those at the bottom of the distribution are going to disengage themselves, it only becomes a foregone conclusion that policy will be skewed towards those at the higher end of the distribution. That those most likely to be civically engaged are specifically those at the high end of the income distribution in an area where income inequality is even higher certainly poses a greater threat to democracy. What we do not know is whether people at the bottom of the distribution are less civically engaged because they are at the bottom per se or because they feel that the system is simply unresponsive and to get involved would be pointless. Some of the literature does suggest that even those at the bottom are more likely to be engaged when they see that involvement does serve their interests.¹¹ Some of the data from the Civic Participation Files did tend to bear that out, especially for those in low-income occupations being likely to participate in religious organizations. Still, the place to begin for increasing civic participation would be with a wage policy that will bolster the incomes of those at the bottom and will ripple through the middle class through wage contour effects.¹² More people might then see themselves as having a stake in the outcome.

Oren Levin-Waldman is professor of public policy in the Graduate School for Public Affairs and Administration at Metropolitan College of New York and is the author of *Wage Policy, Income Distribution, and Democratic Theory* (London and New York, Routledge, 2011).

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NOTES:

- 1 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000)
- 2 See Sidney Verba and Norman H.Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972).
- 3 Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick, *Power and Empowerment: A Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1992, pp.4-5); and Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 4 Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*.
- 5 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
- 6 Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1995).
- 7 See Robert Wuthnow, "Mobilizing Civic Engagement: The Changing Impact of Religious Involvement" in Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, ed. *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).
- 8 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; also see Bruce Nissen, "Political

Activism as Part of a Broader Civic Engagement: The Case of SEIU Florida Healthcare Union" *Labor Studies Journal* 35, 1 (March 2010): 51-72.

- 9 See Oren M. Levin-Waldman, *The Case of the Minimum Wage: Competing Policy Models* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2001), especially Chapter 5.
- 10 Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53 (March 1959):69-105; and Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press).
- 11 Andrea Louise Campbell, "Self-Interest, Social Security, and the Distinctive Participation Patterns of Senior Citizens," *American Political Science Review* 96, 3 (September 2002): 565-574; and Suzanne Mettler, "Bringing the State Back into Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the GI Bill for World War II Veterans," *American Political Science Review* 96, 2 (June 2002):351-365.
- 12 Oren M. Levin-Waldman, *Wage Policy, Income Distribution, and Democratic Theory* (London and New York, Routledge, 2011).