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# Civic Action<sup>1</sup>

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Commonly, researchers have looked for civic life in a distinct sector in which they assume that voluntary associations will cultivate special skills and virtues. Gathering together many challenges to this approach, and using ethnographic cases of housing advocacy and youth civic engagement projects, the authors reconceptualize “the civic” as civic action and show how patterned scene styles shape it. Doing so reveals patterns of action in complex organizations that may span institutional sectors. The authors show how researchers can locate scene styles, and with an extensive literature review, they portray several common styles and suggest that different civic styles often lead to different outcomes.

The concept of “civic” is an enduring but hazy one in social thought. It inspires crucial theories of democracy, solidarity, and participation (Cohen and Arato 1992; Hall 1995; Alexander 2006) and provokes broad diagnoses of American public life (Bellah et al. 1996; Boyte 2004). A great deal of research using the concept examines voluntary associations (Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000; Skocpol 1999*a*, 1999*b*; Mark R. Warren 2001; Andersen, Curtis, and Grabb 2006). Many studies have taken an approach that we broadly call neo-Tocquevillian. Those studies do not make up a conscious

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school of thought or paradigm, but researchers who share this approach have conceived civic activity as located in an institutional sector of voluntary, often face-to-face associations that are said to enhance participants' democratic virtues or skills. We call the approach "neo-Tocquevillian" because, whether accurately interpreting Tocqueville or not, research in this vein routinely invokes his work (Berman 1997; Mark E. Warren 2001). That approach has motivated valuable studies of U.S. secular voluntary groups (Wuthnow 1998), political participation (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995; Scholzman, Verba, and Brady 2013), religiously sponsored coalitions (Baggett 2000; Mark R. Warren 2001; Wood 2002; Stout 2010), youth civic participation (Flanagan 2004), and immigrant integration (Ecklund 2006; Wong 2006; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012).

Nonetheless, in the past decade, discord has grown around the neo-Tocquevillian approach. Studies of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs from here on) and "hybrid governance," or state-civic partnerships in the United States (Skocpol 1999b; Edwards 2009; Eliasoph 2009; Clemens and Guthrie 2011) and elsewhere (Alapuro 2005; Dekker 2009; Enjolras 2009), challenge its emphasis on a separate, special sector of civic associations. Other research shows that small, voluntary associations do not necessarily cultivate broad-minded skills and virtues but can be breeding grounds for racism, rigid parochialism, or ethnic conflict (Berman 1997; Blee 2003; Mann 2005). Worldwide, the number of NGOs is swelling dramatically (Edwards and Hulme 1996), making the image of the purely local, face-to-face, unfunded, free-standing voluntary association ever less helpful for examining civic life. In short, studies show the shortcomings of a neo-Tocquevillian operationalization of civic activity. Since many theorists and researchers who are distant from the neo-Tocquevillian approach insist or imply that civic activity is crucial to democracy (e.g., Schudson 1998; Skocpol 1999a, 1999b; McAdam and Brandt 2009), the next step is to clarify the concept of "civic" itself and find alternative ways of operationalizing it that help us ask empirical questions that strain the neo-Tocquevillian approach.

Gathering together numerous challenges to the neo-Tocquevillian approach, we specify what makes action civic. Relying on classic and current theories of civic life, we reconstruct a definition of *civic action* that preserves and clarifies the core of this long-standing theoretical tradition while

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logical adventures, for guiding inspirations and theoretical energy that helped to kick off this project. We are grateful as well for generous support from two National Science Foundation grants (SES-0719760 and SES-1024478). We presented an earlier version at the 2013 American Sociological Association meeting. The *AJS* reviewers were extremely helpful, reminding us of the virtues of our discipline's collaborative process. Direct correspondence to Paul Lichterman, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, HSH 314, Los Angeles, California 90089. E-mail: [lichterm@usc.edu](mailto:lichterm@usc.edu)

making it useful for an empirical focus on action. That definition helps us return to the empirical field with a lens for identifying the civic in widely varied sites. We hold that the neo-Tocquevillian approach has value for some research questions but makes it hard to investigate the locations and varieties of civic action (see table 1). To grasp the properties of civic action in everyday settings, we advance the concept of *scene style*. It draws attention to different, patterned ways in which actors coordinate civic action in a setting. The two ethnographic cases show how actors change scenes, through scene-switching practices, thus demonstrating the reality and possible consequences of different civic scene styles. In these cases, participants sometimes switch out of civic action altogether, even in organizations that outside observers might simply consider “civic.” The two cases are studies of a housing advocacy coalition and a youth organizations network. Learning from the recent challenges to a neo-Tocquevillian approach, we reveal civic action in places that the common approach might easily miss, and we

TABLE 1  
COMPARING NEO-TOCQUEVILLIAN AND CIVIC ACTION APPROACHES TO CIVIC RELATIONS

	Neo-Tocquevillian Approach	Civic Action Approach
Where to find civic relations	A distinct social sector, defined in relation to other sectors	A form of action in a scene, potentially located in different sectors
Distinctive characteristics of civic relations	Relations cultivate and depend on skills or virtues, such as reciprocity or “self-interest properly understood,” considered valuable for democracy	Relations come in different, patterned scene styles; action in these scenes fits conceptual definition of civic action Scene styles shape the definition and enactment of skills or virtues
Selected trade-offs	Facilitates collection of aggregate data on civic engagement and correlation with aggregate outcomes Offers broad societal overviews Definition of “civic” challenged in research literature Hard to grasp different patterns of civic relationship	Clarifies what counts as distinctly “civic” action Identifies widely varying, patterned styles of civic action, across institutional sectors Suggests mechanism driving some civic/political outcomes of different styles of civic action Still developing potential for aggregation Currently requires time-intensive study of interaction

reveal noncivic action in places that the approach would assume to be civic. Beyond providing an alternative to the neo-Tocquevillian approach, the concepts of civic action and scene style contribute to studies that have documented civic activity in hybrid governance organizations.

We will show that a focus on styles of civic action offers three benefits. First, by considering “civic” as a particular kind of action rather than a kind of sector-specific actor, a researcher can notice civic action in complex organizations that may include noncivic action as well. For example, some youth volunteers in the civic engagement projects initially came as clients in their “prevention programs” for “at-risk youths”; though clients, they once in a while acted civically, by our definition, and had to learn how to switch deftly between the two positions. Second, by focusing on civic scene styles, a researcher can systematically identify qualitatively different patterns of civic action, each of which honors and hones different, even incompatible, skills. Some studies have already begun to notice these distinctions. We systematize their work, contributing new insights to research—from both neo-Tocquevillian and other approaches—that distinguishes only between “more” or “less” civic action or that focuses on decontextualized skills separate from their everyday cultivation and use in practice. For example, housing coalition members enacted two civic scene styles, each of which promoted skills and virtues incompatible with the other, to appeal to different constituencies. Similarly, a few adult leaders of the youth projects distinguished between “random acts of kindness” and promoting socially transformative civic engagement—what we will call two scene styles. Third, the civic action approach suggests that style is a general mechanism that connects civic action with outcomes. The case of the housing coalition suggests, for example, that different scene styles evoke different abilities to access government-sponsored resources, even when all actors agree on a policy platform. The action-centered focus on scene style also suggests a new way to account for sometimes puzzling outcomes measured in quantitative studies.

The broad neo-Tocquevillian approach has helped researchers develop useful quantitative comparisons of civic life within or across societies (Putnam 2002) and to measure outcomes of civic engagement (e.g., McFarland and Thomas 2006). The civic action approach has different immediate aims as well as some shared concerns. It asks what kinds of action can be called civic to begin with, what varied, identifiable patterns of civic action may exist, and what varied outcomes may result from them. While close-up research on civic action is harder to aggregate than survey data are, existing studies already show clear patterns we use to designate indicators of different scene styles. Our review of those studies alongside our two cases suggests that in a given society, only a relatively few styles may

be common enough for participants to recognize with ease. We identify six common scene styles of civic action and several sets of civic outcomes of those styles as portrayed in existing literature. We do not suggest that there are only six styles of civic action in the United States. Rather, these findings suggest the value of searching for recurrent patterns of style, and they are a warrant for more research to aggregate knowledge of scene styles. We also suggest two other methods of aggregating data on civic scene styles; these use quantitative techniques. Each of these three ways of aggregating scene style data involves trade-offs that we consider briefly.

Classic and contemporary social theorists we discuss below have considered the ongoing coordination of action to be essential to the concept of "civic," and our definition of civic action follows suit. Somers (1993), among others, takes a relational approach to civic action, asking how people coordinate action, rather than focusing on individual behavior and internal values. Skocpol similarly implies that civic sites are ones in which people can learn "how to combine" (1999a, p. 462). This focus on civic action that people coordinate collectively is a departure from studies of individual beliefs or acts commonly thought of as civic (e.g., Verba and Almond 1963; Verba et al. 1995). Certainly, individual beliefs can move people to conduct civic action, as can civic education in school; voting or charitable acts for others can emerge from an individual sense of civic duty. Our approach does not aim to address all individual actions or personal sensibilities that may either grow out of or contribute to something "civic" or "prosocial." The two ethnographic cases show how to focus on civic action as a kind of coordination, and this prepares the way for connecting styles of action with outcomes. This precise focus on action in our operationalization should help guide researchers in making careful comparisons across situations, organizational types, cultural practices, or nations.

The following section summarizes the neo-Tocquevillian approach and the empirical challenges to it that emerge from within that approach and from studies that do not share its broad assumptions. The next sections construct a concept of civic action, and the concept of scene style, tracing their roots in previous theory and research. Then, the two empirical cases demonstrate how to use a civic action approach and show what it grasps empirically that neo-Tocquevillian approaches would not. Next, we demonstrate briefly how our approach may complement inquiries based on quantitative data. Then we use our two cases along with existing research to offer a preliminary, limited typology of civic scene styles and a discussion of strategies for quantifying investigations of scene style. This leads to a discussion of different potential outcomes of different scene styles and how our research contributes to causal claims. The conclusion shows how the civic action approach refreshes debates about neoliberal governance.

## THE NEO-TOCQUEVILLIAN APPROACH AND ITS LIMITS

## Neo-Tocquevillian Studies and Internal Strains

Borrowing selectively from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville [1835] 1969; see Berman 1997; Foley and Edwards 1997), contemporary neo-Tocquevillian works imagine civic activity residing in an institutional realm of voluntary, face-to-face associations.<sup>2</sup> Whether the researcher tries to characterize the whole sector or just examine a few organizations in it, such an approach implies and often states that this realm is a distinct sector of society outside the state, family, and economy (Berger and Neuhaus 1977; Habermas 1984–87; Wolfe 1989; for a thoughtful review, see Wuthnow [1991]). When scholars treat civic activity as belonging to a sector that is neither market, family, nor state, they often call it “the nonprofit sector,” “the third sector,” “the voluntary sector,” “civic society,” or the realm of NGOs. These all may be somewhat distinct from one another (Martens 2002), and, as studies argue (e.g., Hall 1999, pp. 212–13; Martens 2002; Clemens 2006, pp. 207–10; Steinberg and Powell 2006), each only partly overlaps with Tocqueville's realm of civic associations. Compare, for example, hospitals that have legal nonprofit status in the United States and social movement organizations or community service groups, which also are often legally registered as “nonprofits” and are more relevant to definitions of “civic” like the one we will propose. Our discussion in this section understands “sector” as a metaphor that guides the neo-Tocquevillian approach, which is not necessarily the same as the legally defined “nonprofit sector.”

Inside the civic sector as the neo-Tocquevillian approach sees it, participants in associations voluntarily address shared public concerns, as relative equals, cultivating capacities that a democratic society needs in its citizens. Neo-Tocquevillian studies cited at the start, along with Tocqueville himself (e.g., 1969, p. 515), say or imply that participating in civic-sector associations cultivates these virtues or skills. These connected notions of sector and virtue (or skill) are part of the warrant for neo-Tocquevillians' empirical focus on voluntary associations at the outset; they tightly intertwine the neo-Tocquevillian operationalization of civic with its definition.

With these connected notions, some researchers operationalize “civic” with large data sets on memberships in voluntary associations outside government. Thus, Putnam's (2000) study of American civic life counts civic associations in a distinct civic sector that he says cultivates the Tocquevillian

<sup>2</sup> Tocqueville himself argued that a healthy democracy in the United States depended on decentralized, local governance (1969, esp. pp. 87–98, 262–63) as well as civic and political associations (pp. 509–24). Whether citizens are acting inside or outside “the state,” what mattered most to Tocqueville was that citizens be active decision-making participants in governance, not passive subjects.

virtue of “self-interest properly understood” (pp. 48, 337–38; see also Putnam 1993, pp. 88–91). Comparative research makes a similar move (e.g., Andersen et al. 2006). With this logic, aggregate measures of civic groups or acts reveal a society’s or region’s civic health (Putnam 2000; Salamon, Sokolowski, and List 2003; McFarland and Thomas 2006).<sup>3</sup> These connected notions of sector and virtue or skill drive a new study that says that participation fosters “democratic orientations and skills. . . . When there is a vigorous sector of voluntary involvement and political engagement, it becomes easier . . . to engage in joint activity and to produce public goods” (Schlozman et al. 2013, pp. 99–100). The “skills” that the authors have already listed include being able to speak in public or run a meeting (Verba et al. 1995). Studies associate civic associational activity with individual civic outcomes such as increased likelihood of voting (Verba et al. 1995) or joining future civic associations (Hodgkinson, Gates, and Schervish 1995), as well as with noncivic outcomes such as increased health (Putnam 2000). Aggregate outcomes appear as well, as when neighborhoods with more civic life have less crime (Sampson 1996). When these studies entertain qualitative distinctions between exclusionary and inclusive civic associations (Putnam 2000, pp. 350–63), between “bonding” socially similar participants and “bridging” social differences, or tight group bonds and loose ties (Wuthnow 1998; Putnam 2002, pp. 10–12), for example, they say or imply that these distinctions are hard to grasp with concepts developed primarily to measure the size of a sector and quantify acts and skills in it.<sup>4</sup> Such surveys are valuable, and all operationalizations have trade-offs; neo-Tocquevillian approaches to a civic sector offer weak guidance for recognizing and documenting the qualitatively different patterns by which people coordinate action.

Many qualitative studies that do not inventory an entire sector of civic associations also imply that their objects of study belong to a sector that cultivates distinct skills or virtues. Like the surveys just described, they too strain a neo-Tocquevillian approach. For instance, one study locates second-generation Korean Americans’ church-based volunteering in a broader sector of civic participation “that can range from volunteering in a local soup kitchen to campaigning for politicians or causes” and affirms, with a nod to Tocqueville, that religious communities support democratic participation (Ecklund 2006, p. 6). Yet by emphasizing differences between church-centered volunteering that aims to be race blind and less church

<sup>3</sup> Quantitative research has become increasingly sensitive to the puzzles of defining a “voluntary association” in cross-nationally sensitive ways (see Dekker and Halman 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Putnam (2002, p. 12) calls social capital multidimensional and “subject to different understandings” and therefore counsels against framing questions “solely in terms of more social capital and less social capital . . . we must describe the changes in qualitative terms.”



centered, more ethnically identified civic participation, the study intends to highlight different ways Korean American Christians act civically rather than making the frequency of civic engagement the main question (p. 12). Invoking Tocqueville, another study locates Habitat for Humanity in a voluntary sector characterized as “relatively free of bureaucratic and pecuniary constraints” and able to promote skills and virtues such as “open discussion, shared responsibility . . . and even personal sacrifice” (Baggett 2000, pp. 5–6). However, the study fascinatingly reveals that some of these volunteers are employees of large corporations that partner with Habitat partly in hopes of boosting employees’ morale (p. 172). Habitat and the corporations operate symbiotically, as does a great deal of current volunteering (Walker 2014), thus crossing sectoral lines and confounding neo-Tocquevillian assumptions. Those assumptions make it hard to ask questions about institutionally diverse civic action.

### External Challenges to Neo-Tocquevillianism

Historical research on the United States (Clemens 1997), research on the nonprofit sector in Canada and Europe (Bode 2006; Laville, Levésque, and Mendell 2007), and studies of current hybrid governance in the United States (Minkoff 2002; Marwell 2004; Binder 2007; Eliasoph 2011*b*, 2012; McQuarrie 2011) all challenge the notion that a civic sector and distinct virtues or skills coincide. Civil society theory also challenges that common approach (Alexander 2006; Edwards 2009; Keane 2009). Others show that civic-commercial enterprises such as food or day care cooperatives, socially responsible businesses, and corporate volunteering also blur sectoral distinctions (Whyte and Whyte 1991; Gastil 1993; Micheletti 2003; Walker 2014). Here, we will focus on studies of civic-state hybrids rather than civic-market hybrids. We aim to do for neo-Tocquevillian notions of “civic” what scholars of the nonprofit sector (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990; Smith 1999; Van Til 2005) already have done for their subject of research: emphasize their connections to other sectors.

In much of Europe, civic associations are state-funded and have been for over 100 years. For them, “hybrid” would imply a once-pure, unadulterated civic sector that never existed. For example, from Finland’s founding, associations were funded by, and cooperated closely with, the state—even when they have opposed the government. Thus, Risto Alapuro points out (2005, p. 383) that “the distinction between state and society is so vague that in Finnish (as in Swedish and Norwegian) the term ‘society’ is often used as a synonym for the ‘state,’” implicitly challenging the notion that government and civic life are separate, conflicting spheres. At the same time, European and Latin American state entities often include “participatory democracy” (Laville and Nyssens 2001; Breviglieri, Pattaroni, and

Stavo-Debaugé 2003; Baiocchi 2005; Bode 2006; Dekker 2008; Evers 2009; Talpin 2011; Grootegoed, Bröer, and Duyvendak 2013; Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013). Throughout the global South and the former Soviet galaxy (for some examples among many, see Edwards and Hulme [1996], Sampson [1996], Bob [2005], Elyachar [2005], and Swidler and Watkins [2009]), NGOs and states conduct economic development projects that aim to be “participatory” to “empower” people and to “build civil society.”

Even within the United States, historical realities challenge the idea of a separate civic sector. The state has cultivated American civic life rather like a topiary garden, encouraging it to grow in specific ways and crimping growth in other ways (Skocpol 1999*b*; Hendrickson 2011). Civic actors have moved in and out of government positions, potentially acting civically wherever they went. For example, many early 20th-century social reformers became politicized as volunteers in settlement houses and then moved back and forth between government and voluntary positions over the course of their lives. They brought styles of organizing that they had learned in one sector into others (Skocpol 1995). Furthermore, federal funding of nonprofits goes back to the early 1930s at least (Clemens 2011; Grogan 2014). Recent work explores this complex interpenetration (Clemens and Guthrie 2011) and asks how it relates to social service provision and political activism (Brown 1997; Minkoff 2002; Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz 2004; Marwell 2004; Moseley 2012).

These studies show that it can be misleading to rely on sectoral distinctions when searching for examples of the solidarity-promoting skills or virtues that a neo-Tocquevillian approach would attribute to the civic sector. The same puzzle appears in research beyond the U.S. borders. Many NGOs could be considered “civic” according to definitions that focus on “the nonprofit sector,” yet many have very few volunteers and a large budget—characteristics that again stretch the neo-Tocquevillian understanding. Their dilemmas can be very different from those of classic voluntary associations (Bob 2005; Eliasoph 2009, 2011*a*; Swidler and Watkins 2009). Indeed, organizations with mixed state and private sponsors might inspire more traditionally “civic” skills than some unfunded, purely voluntary associations, if state sponsorship comes with a mandate for universalism and transparency (Dekker 2009).

The neo-Tocquevillian approach has raised expectations that researchers have gone on to investigate and discovered to be not entirely realistic. Researchers who start off with neo-Tocquevillian assumptions have gone to groups that they have labeled “civic,” expecting to find the cultivation of civic skills and virtues, but then finding that the groups actually stifle those skills and virtues. Interaction in American volunteer groups sometimes shrinks people’s circles of political or moral concern (Eliasoph 1998; Moon 2004) and stunts or disavows broad social ties (Kaufman 2002; Lichterman

2005; Baiocchi et al. 2014) instead of creating the “enlarged heart” of Tocqueville’s famous metaphor. Or voluntary associations may cultivate some civic skills at the expense of others: volunteer coordinators may try to recruit as many volunteers as possible to be inclusive, but since those “plug-in” volunteers may not stay on-site long enough to make informed decisions, coordinators might silence their potential voice by withholding decision-making power from them (Lichterman 2006; Eliasoph 2011*b*). Even groups that hope for “participatory democracy” (Polletta 2002) can define and enact “civic skills” like “running a meeting” in widely different ways (Epstein 1991; Lee 2007, 2014; Berger 2008).

It is therefore important to take an inventory of the kinds of civic organizations that are available for people to join rather than only tallying associations and their members (Schudson 1998; Skocpol 2003). The inventory of U.S. civic organizations has changed historically—for the worse, says Skocpol. She documents the growth of “associations without members,” that is, organizations run by paid professionals whose “members” only mail in checks rather than gathering together in person the way loyal members once did in the sociable, long-standing civic clubs such as the Rotary and the Elks (Skocpol 1999*a*; see also Putnam 2000). She says that the newly prevalent associations, whose members mainly write checks, have crowded out associations that relied on more active coparticipation by members (2003). Others disagree with this contention and say instead that we need to ask how the meaning and practice of membership itself have changed (Schudson 1998; Wuthnow 1998; Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner 2011, p. 1323). While, for example, the Elks and the Rotary have declined, single-issue organizations, such as domestic violence shelters, have grown (Wuthnow 1998). To understand what this transformation means for ordinary citizens’ civic engagement, we have to look inside the organizations themselves to see how, if at all, they cultivate participants’ capacities (Andrews et al. 2010).

Following from this debate, another challenge to a neo-Tocquevillian approach asks a different question about the professionalization of civic life (Smith and Lipsky 1993). Some scholars argue that when professionals, like those in a domestic violence shelter, recruit volunteers to help them conduct their social service work, the ordinary nonprofessional volunteers have little chance to find their own voices and arrive at their own grassroots solutions (Kretzman and McKnight 1993; Rudrappa 2004; Thunder Hawk 2007). Others argue that paid professionals can help make volunteers be and feel more thoughtful and powerful and might be effective at eliciting serious, reflective engagement from volunteers (Andrews et al. 2010; Terriquez 2011). In our own cases, paid professionals did sometimes conduct civic action. In some situations, professionals themselves might engage in reflective, civic discussion with each other. Our point

is that whether and how paid professionals and volunteers conduct civic action, either together or apart, is a question that requires we investigate their interaction.

Despite these challenges, studies employing the neo-Tocquevillian approach have made crucial contributions. Among other benefits, it has generated a massive amount of essential quantitative data. It is unquestionably important to measure participation trends over time, compare nations, test the effects of social inequality on political voice, and compare participants on different ends of the social spectrum. The benefits of a broad overview may make the neo-Tocquevillian operationalization of “civic” worth a trade-off, especially if alternative understandings of civic (see n. 3) become prohibitively difficult to operationalize. We simply want to highlight that there is a trade-off: the neo-Tocquevillian operationalization of one of social theory’s core inspirations may leave much civic action in the dark while sometimes idealizing or distorting what it highlights. To discover whether and how civic action contributes to democracy or produces other outcomes, it will help to reconceptualize “civic.”

## RECONSTRUCTING A DEFINITION OF CIVIC ACTION

### Theoretical Background

Social theorists have long pondered civic activity, hoping to understand how ordinary citizens can intentionally direct the course of social life together. The question motivates many modernist theories of a good society. Our reconstruction of the concept preserves this central piece of the modernist social vision. While theorists diverge in many ways,<sup>5</sup> they converge in seeing civic action as conscious “social self-organization,” as Habermas (1987) puts it. For Tocqueville, “civil” and also “political” associations were places where people learned, in different ways, to organize themselves and to solve problems together (Tocqueville 1969). The Durkheimian tradition similarly says that self-organizing citizens’ groups are crucial for democracy (Durkheim 1957; Etzioni 1968; Alexander 2006). American pragmatists (Addams [1902] 2002; Follett [1918] 1965; Dewey 1927; see Cefaï 2002) and early 20th-century “social control” theorists (Sampson 1996; see Janowitz 1975) asked how citizens of an increasingly diverse and complicated American society could “control” its development in a cooperative, mutually regarding, democratic way rather than let the state and market coordinate society. Similarly, in Cohen and Arato’s (1992, esp. p. 429) version of civil society, actors coordinate action by relying on mutual learning and social obligation rather than on using money or ad-

<sup>5</sup> For extensive reviews of relevant theory, see Cohen and Arato (1992), Hall (1995), or Alexander (2006).

ministrative power to coordinate action. This same concern with people reflectively cooperating informs studies, such as Putnam's (1993, 2000), that include neo-Tocquevillian understandings. Whether in Tocqueville's civil associations, Durkheim's occupational assemblies, Dewey's collectively inquiring publics, or Cohen and Arato's social movement groups, people *coordinate action together*. These theories focus on the coordination and the shared activity rather than on ideas or ideals that individuals might hold privately but never embody in collective action.

Further, this variegated theoretical tradition also highlights the "civic imagination" (Baicocchi et al. 2014): actors solve problems while imagining common membership in some broader "society," however they imagine it. This holds even for actors whose concern with "society" is mainly that society should recognize a specific oppressed group. For Tocqueville, "common membership" in society turned actors' self-interest into "self-interest properly understood" (1969, pp. 526–27). Or as Cohen and Arato put it, communication in the civic realm implies that "despite our differences, we have discovered, reaffirmed or created something in common that corresponds to a *general social identity* . . . that we are a *we*" (1992, p. 368; emphasis ours). This general "we" of society may be local; actors' sense of a "we" may grow (or shrink), as Tocqueville famously claimed; it may have boundaries—of gender or race, for example—that only later generations recognize as exclusionary (see Alexander 2006, pp. 199–202, 231–33, 417–18). Nevertheless, put simply, civic actors imagine themselves as members of some larger, shared society rather than purely as a collection of self-improving individuals, as in a self-help group, or an arts group dedicated to self-expression or developing talents, with no shared mission of improving a society beyond the confines of the group. Thus, while politically engaged theater groups in 1980s Poland (Goldfarb 1980) conducted "civic action," a theater whose members simply hope to develop a craft or land jobs on Broadway probably does not.

Our reconstructed definition reflects repeated calls to focus on action and relationships rather than beliefs, values, or a predefined social sector (Somers 1993; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Abbott 2007; see esp. Alexander 2006, pp. 31, 33). The researcher should watch how people carve out a space for civic action rather than assuming a priori, as Cohen and Arato (1992) do, that civic action will inhabit a distinct civic sphere. Thus the definition makes "social self-organization" empirically tractable and consonant with the theoretical tradition reviewed here.

### A Definition and Gloss

To put the definition in one sentence: in civic action, participants are coordinating action to improve some aspect of common life in society, as they imagine society. It may help to articulate the three features built into

this definition and then fill out each with illustrations: (1) Participants coordinate interaction around a mission of improving common life, however they define “improving” and “common.” (2) Participants coordinate their ongoing interaction together, expecting if not always attaining some flexibility in coordinating interaction rather than imagining their action as mainly being predetermined by preexisting rules and roles. (3) Participants implicitly act as members of a larger, imagined society—however they are imagining it—to whom their problem solving can appeal.

The first part of the definition signals that civic action is problem solving according to the participants’, not just the researchers’, sense of what a shared problem is. The problem may or may not be immediately political (Sampson et al. 2005) and may be local, national, or transnational. Actors might be doing civic action that others find deplorable—protesting against or for abortion rights, for or against racial segregation—but if they see their action as grounded in and speaking to “society” however they imagine it, their action is potentially civic. Sometimes “civility” prevents civic action, and sometimes civic action flies in the face of conventional civility—in, for example, confrontational sit-ins and pickets (Dekker 2009; Eliasoph 2011*b*).

The second part of the definition borrows John Dewey’s description of civic actors as “interacting flexibly” (1927, p. 147). We highlight participants’ expectations that they influence the ways in which their relations transpire. The “reality of moral expectations” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013) matters for everyday action. Expectations are not simply false ideology even though people’s expectations are often not met. While coordinated action almost always includes an implicit or explicit hierarchy, in civic action, participants do not expect to coordinate action only or mainly according to preestablished hierarchies or preestablished rules that they assume they can never alter. One contrast to civic action, for example, is an American jury: members have decision-making power but do not expect power to change the ground rules for their interactions with each other or the judge. “Some flexibility” certainly does not mean complete freedom for any participant to change the forms and goals of interaction, but an organization’s action is not “civic,” according to the theoretical tradition, if participants believe that little about participation is based on members’ coordinating action themselves—“self-organizing.” A neo-Tocquevillian approach assumes that civic actors are unpaid volunteers and that their voluntary participation is the source of their flexible relations. Rather than equating flexible and “voluntary” with “unpaid,” we highlight the possibility that paid employees may, themselves, conduct civic action, as long as they are imagining a wider society that they aim to improve with some mission they help devise and are relatively flexible in their manner of cooperating.

Just because authorities promise that an activity will be civic and open-ended does not necessarily make it so. For example, management firms may promise participation, but only within inflexible regimes of worker self-scrutiny, aimed toward a nonnegotiable goal—profit making—and management retains the right to exclude workers entirely, by firing them. Workers in such firms do not expect participation to be flexible and self-organizing (Kunda 1992; Kameo 2009; Charles 2012). In contrast, when workers collectively control some decision making, as in workers' collectives, they may well produce civic action. Whether and, if so, how a profit-making firm can make genuine civic action a core part of its operations is an empirical question (Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008).

The second part of the definition also highlights that civic actors expect that they will be part of something “ongoing,” not a purely one-time event or spontaneous happening. This follows from the continuous emphasis in the theoretical tradition, including the idea that self-organizing action helps “steer” society, even if in a small way. Civic relations may be face-to-face or virtual, in named associations with a stable membership or in unnamed shifting flows of members, in loose networks or tightly bound organizations. They may be short-lived, but an individual's isolated act, or a one-time event with no expectation of follow-up, would fall outside the view of our theoretical lens. Someone may “plug in” to volunteer, picking up trash in a beach-cleanup project, for example, but unless the person has some role in flexibly coordinating the project, the person's action falls outside our definition. The beach cleaner's acts may be good for the volunteer, the society, and the environment; we can investigate such questions empirically without needing to call the acts civic. Again, the point is to honor a consistent definition of “civic action” as ongoing doing together that resonates with the intent of the theoretical tradition, including the intent of neo-Tocquevillian writings (e.g., Putnam 2000, pp. 117, 184).

This is part of what makes “civic action” different from “the public sphere.” Though this concept is sometimes used nearly interchangeably with the “civic sphere,” the two are different (Calhoun 1993). The public sphere is defined as the set of conversational spaces in which private individuals assemble freely to deliberate about public matters (Habermas [1962] 1989, 1974; Emirbayer and Sheller 1999). “Civic action,” as we define it, is not just talk unless the talk is part of an ongoing, collective effort at problem solving. Civic action is not just “deliberation” and has to have a longer temporal scope. Chatting about politics at work, at the water cooler, would not be civic, but working together to coordinate a speakers' series about the same topic could be.<sup>6</sup> Forwarding a political post on Facebook

<sup>6</sup> This is important to note since people in workplaces are more likely than people in civic associations to talk about politics with people whose opinions differ from their own



would probably not be civic unless it was connected to a longer-term effort at coordinating action (embodied or virtual) in a flexible manner. When people coordinate action online, with ongoing conversation partners, aiming to improve a community, and imagining themselves as part of a larger society, it becomes civic action (Juris 2008; Wood 2012).

The third part of the definition holds that civic actors act on a shared basis as members of “society,” however they imagine membership in society. This part directs inquiry to people’s *practical methods for imagining other members of society and for sharing a basis for acting in relation to them*. Our approach investigates varied methods of constructing civil society in everyday interaction rather than taking civil society as an already existing container. Theorists often have filled the metaphorical container with the category of “citizen” as the only truly shared basis for a kind of action that promises universality and inclusion (Cohen and Arato 1992; Skocpol 2003; Evers 2009). They do this for two main reasons: citizenship works both as a material condition and as a vocabulary of motive. First, citizenship promises legal, formal, common membership. Some civic action does depend on the shared rights of citizenship, but not all; the civic action that might arise in revolutionary movements or transnational activist networks, for example, does not (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Second, the theorists say that civic action often depends on actors’ ability to make reference to its promises of universalism and solidarity (Habermas 1996). In everyday interaction, however, civic actors construct the “shared basis” in varied other ways too: They may, for example, construct the expressive, feeling self (Lichterhan 1996; Bernstein 1997) or comembership in an oppressed community (Beamish and Luebbbers 2009) as the shared basis for action.

We include the clause “however they are imagining it” because civic actors do not always expand opportunities for civic action (Habermas 1996, pp. 369–70). In fact, “in the context of civil societies . . . social movements emerge that can successfully block . . . and sometimes reverse” those opportunities (Alexander 2006, p. 418), as when white racist groups self-organize with a monoracial imagination of “society” and a correspondingly exclusive basis for action (Blee 2003; see also Putnam 2000, pp. 340, 400). Empirical research on civic action needs to include action based on actors’ exclusive or repugnant images of society and not assume that civic action always is “progressive.”

In sum, we make civic an adverb, as people can act together civically in a variety of institutions and at intersections between them, and not only

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(Mutz 2006). This is not to say that thoughtful deliberation is unimportant; it is, as many studies show (Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Walsh 2004; Khan and Schneiderhan 2008); it just might not be civic action.



in a specifically “civic” sector (Spillman 2012). Civic action can take place in many types of organizations. In this view, defining, ratifying, or redefining the collectivity—*discovering* the civic—is a central challenge, both for the people who form associations (Dewey 1927) and for the people who study them.

#### STYLES OF INTERACTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Our approach to the civic builds on recent studies that already emphasize patterns of coordinating action. These studies show that civic skills and virtues do not exist in the abstract, as a neo-Tocquevillian approach often assumes. Rather, what people count as a skill or virtue heavily depends on how they expect to coordinate action in a setting. In different settings, different skills or virtues can emerge, different kinds of talk or action can easily be valued, and different genres of speech can easily be appreciated. Using concepts from neo-institutionalism, network theory, emergence theory, French pragmatic sociology, and others, these studies locate durable patterns by which potentially civic actors coordinate action (for a variety of approaches, see Eliasoph [1998], Becker [1999], Armstrong [2002], Polletta [2002], Thévenot [2006], Hamidi [2010], Blee [2012], and Baiocchi et al. [2014]). Some show how different settings evoke different patterns of interaction even from the same people.

For instance, Mische (2008) traced the ways in which Brazilian youth activists’ styles of participation changed from one setting to another. In one group, an activist might be highly self-expressive and morally inquisitive, while in another, the same person might be craftily strategic and, in yet another, eager for practical dialogue aimed at fixing problems. The activists deftly avoided modes of argument in one group that they had cultivated in another. In a U.S. example, community organizers prize self-critical, moral searching in one setting of an organization while expecting a tightly united, collective voice in another part of the same organization (Wood 2002; see also Lichterman 1999, 2012).

We locate our approach in a flourishing literature on U.S. and non-U.S. cases that conceives these patterns of interaction as “styles.”<sup>7</sup> That means starting with one of sociology’s fundamental insights: when a person enters a setting, the first, unspoken questions that each participant must answer are “What is this situation a case of?” and “How do I act in relation to it?” (Dewey 1927; Mead 1934; Cicourel 1973, 1991, 1993; Goffman [1974] 1986). Earlier work defines style as recurrent patterns of interaction that arise from members’ shared assumptions about what constitutes

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Faucher-King (2005), Lichterman (2005, 2012), Talpin (2006), Doidy (2008), Mische (2008), Yon (2009), Citroni (2010), Eliasoph (2011*b*), Luhtakallio (2012), and Binder and Wood (2013).

good or adequate participation in the group setting (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, p. 737). To make style easier to analyze, this earlier work developed a heuristic composed of three elements (p. 739): One is a collectivity's implicitly shared *map* of reference points in the wider world—other groups, individuals, social categories—in relation to which participants draw their group's boundaries in the setting. Another is its *group bonds* or shared assumptions about obligations between members in the setting. The third is the *speech norms*, or shared assumptions about the appropriate speech genres for a setting and the appropriate emotional tones to display there.

Together, these heuristic elements referred to the “group style” of a setting. Many groups in a society, and sometimes across societies (Lichterman and Doidy, in press), may share a style, enacting roughly similar map, bonds, and speech norms.<sup>8</sup> Relevant empirical literature (see table 2 below) shows that map and group bonds—the elements of style most frequently documented—tend to appear together in typical, not random, combinations. This makes sense not for inherent, logical reasons but in light of insights from Goffman, cognitive studies, and elsewhere: participants in a setting generally figure out together quickly how to act in relation to each other (group bonds) and to some implicit “wider world” (map) as backdrop (Goffman 1986). Ordinary participants recognize a relatively limited number of schemata for styles rather than innumerable combinations of maps and bonds (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, p. 739; see also Becker 1999; Hallett and Ventresca 2006).

We emphasize that “map,” “group bonds,” and “speech norms” are heuristic devices that help the observer locate “styles” of coordinating action. They are not exclusive touchstones. They build on related concepts in the study of symbolic boundaries, neo-institutionalism, social identity, rhetoric, and sociolinguistics (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Our trio is not the only possible tool set for investigating how actors coordinate interaction. Another very useful framework influencing ours comes from rhetoric (Burke 1969). Using Burke's theater metaphors, we could, for example, examine “maps” by asking about the audiences, both present and invisible, that actors assume when crafting their performances (see Lo, Eliasoph, and Glaser

<sup>8</sup> For a different, also valuable, perspective that emphasizes local group identity and uniqueness more than widespread patterns of building groups, see Fine (2010). Style may be influenced by but not reducible to participants' demographic makeup (Lichterman 1995; Eliasoph 1998; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Mansbridge (1980), for instance, fruitfully compared volunteers by demographic categories and then asked who participated more, less, or in a different style. Sociolinguists show why individuals' styles sometimes differ depending on their demographic origins (e.g., Jupp, Roberts, and Cook-Gumperz 1982; see also Mansbridge 1980).

2014). Offering a similarly useful set of tools, Mische's heuristic is similar to ours but more subtle and complex (2014, p. 444). In the same heuristic spirit, we stress that a study that does use our style framework need not invoke each term of the trio in every instance (e.g., Lichterman 2008; Dasgupta 2013). Thus, the cases below present enough of the heuristics to distinguish their styles empirically. All these heuristics show that even if participants share ideas, beliefs, or social backgrounds, they still might misunderstand each other or not get along together if they do not share a style. Knowing distinct elements of interaction style such as map or group bonds helps us identify distinct styles in the existing research record and make careful comparisons. They tag general dimensions that we can identify in a collectivity and compare across collectivities.

Our two cases also have enabled us to improve the style framework: it is more analytically and empirically precise, in Goffman's vein, to focus on a scene rather than a "group" (Lichterman 2012, p. 21) and study "scene style." As Goffman (1986, pp. 8–10) defines it, a "scene" is constituted by actors' implicit assumptions about "what is going on here" in this "strip of action." Thus we will focus on "scene style," how actors coordinate action in one scene; in any organization, there may be multiple "scenes" with multiple "styles." "Style" describes the making of a scene (Blee 2012). Further, even inside one organization or group, the scene might switch.

*Scene-switching practices for complex organizations.*—When participants' shared assumptions about what is going on have changed, then the scene has changed, even if they are still physically in the same setting.<sup>9</sup> In Goffman's (1979) well-known example, even clumsy participants can make scenes shift. Without leaving the room, President Nixon signals the end of a press conference and instantly summons a different scene when he compliments the lone female reporter and invites her to twirl around to model her pantsuit. The scene no longer calls for the speech genre of "just the facts" or a bond between "reporter and president," but the emotional tone of an awkwardly flirtatious "female-male" bond instead.

The point is that, compared to the "group style" concept, the "scene style" idea makes it easier to describe *complex, multifaceted organizations, projects, and networks*. Recognizing that there may be multiple scenes in an organization or network makes it easier to see civic action that might transpire in state-civic partnerships, nonprofit service agencies, or donor-driven NGOs, for example. In these organizations and networks, partici-

<sup>9</sup>On setting, see Goodwin and Duranti (1992, p. 6). Goffman (1986, pp. 8–10) pointed out that participants within one setting may change the scene—their implicit idea about what is going on in one strip of action. Goffman proliferated terms wildly (Scheff 2006, pp. 5–6). To keep usage consistent while honoring Goffman's theater metaphors, we use "scene."

pants enact different scene styles for different parts of the organization. They have to know that what is out of place to say or do in one scene of the organization is perfectly acceptable or even necessary to do or say in another scene (Clemens and Cook 1999; Brunsson 2002). Thompson's (1967) work on complex organizations made this point a long time ago, but because studies of civic associations from the neo-Tocquevillian view have often taken civic associations to be unitary "groups" with single scenes, this core idea in organizational theory has rarely been used to examine civic action (but see Gusfield 1981; Binder 2007). We follow the insight in Mische's (2008) study, mentioned before, which found activists switching between different ways of relating to one another in different settings.

We observed that actors shared fairly routine, patterned, interactional cues for switching scenes. We call these patterns *scene-switching practices*.<sup>10</sup> In learning scene-switching practices, actors learn not just what to say but who should say it, to what audience, for what purpose, and with what props, to paraphrase Burke's (1969) image for the study of rhetoric. We show below that different collectivities have different methods for switching from one scene to another. In some, people learn to stage different scenes in different physical spaces. In others, people switch scenes deftly in a more moment-by-moment way or they take cues from the speaker's apparent social identity—race, for instance. Sometimes people can even enact two scenes at once, each for a different audience. A researcher looking for scene-switching practices can observe reactions to "mistakes"; these reactions make people's implicit expectations clear. Below we discuss some scholarly and practical implications of this active scene-switching work.

In a study of civic action, deciding whether or not to study noncivic as well as civic scenes or deciding whether to investigate an entire organization or just part must depend on the research questions. In case 1 below, for instance, it sufficed to focus mainly on the central decision-making scene of a campaign, bracketing the financial and administrative scenes of the coalition sponsoring the campaign. In any case, civic action researchers can focus on one or more scenes of action, and not necessarily a "unitary group" taken as a freestanding whole.

It is important to note the methodological limitations in our proposed approach. It focuses on interaction in collectivities rather than mainly on self-conscious individual behavior. While individuals sometimes are conscious of scene styles, we also need to grasp patterns of everyday interac-

<sup>10</sup> This concept is informed especially by Goffman's treatment of "episodic conventions" that actors themselves employ to mark off scenes (1986, pp. 308–44). We emphasize the implicit knowledge that interactants share about sometimes subtle signals that announce or interrupt a scene.

tion built on actors' unspoken assumptions. Emphasizing meaning-making processes, the civic action approach works especially well with ethnography or other methods that directly or indirectly reveal actors' everyday, often implicit understandings and routines, such as conversation analysis, network analysis, or some kinds of interview research. Since actors usually take their knowledge of scene style for granted (Cicourel 1991, 1993), such tacit, practical knowledge is harder to examine by using actors' schematized, after-the-fact reports on their activities, as given in surveys. However, as we will discuss below, the civic action approach complements some existing survey research on civic action and informs new efforts to discern style with quantitative measures.

#### CASES AND METHOD

Two close-up empirical cases illustrate our approach. The first case is a housing advocacy coalition named Housing Justice, made up of several dozen local and regional groups that organized campaigns to institute municipal mandates for affordable housing in a western U.S. metropolitan area. The shifting assembly of 18 participants on the Housing Justice coordinating committee, the main focus of the case, included representatives from nonprofit, affordable housing developers, low-income tenants' rights organizations, community development corporations, labor organizations, and community-organizing outfits. Housing Justice aimed for a multiracial constituency that included working-class, moderate-income, and low-income people, tenants, and homeless people.

The second case, Network of Youth Organizations or NOYO, was a set of civic engagement projects in which youth volunteers mostly planned community service events, such as beach cleanups and food drives. Their biggest event was the annual Martin Luther King Day event, which youth volunteers planned with the aid of paid adult organizers from government and nonprofit agencies. These took place in a midsized midwestern city and included youths from diverse backgrounds. The most long-term of these projects held monthly meetings throughout the school year, planning one such event after another. The NOYO was a coalition of roughly 100 nonprofits, government agencies, and hybrid nonprofit, state, religious, and/or private organizations for youths, including government offices, arts schools, church youth groups, alternative sentencing organizations, and organizations such as 4H and Girl Scouts. Participants in NOYO's monthly lunchtime meetings and numerous subcommittees, many of which were aimed at promoting civic engagement in youths and adults, were paid adult organizers in NOYO-affiliated programs.

The two cases illustrate how to use the concepts of civic action and scene style. We aim to demonstrate the benefits of these concepts over a neo-

Tocquevillian approach to “civic” and their contributions to understanding subtle patterns, and emergent forms of inequality, inside what has been called hybrid governance. The cases do not intend to generalize about housing movements or youth civic engagement projects for their own sake. Intentionally, we chose cases of complex public organizations because as many studies in the hybrid governance literature show, varied modes of potentially civic action occur in such organizations (e.g., Chaves et al. 2004; Marwell 2004; Rudrappa 2004; Moseley 2012; Garrow and Hasenfeld 2014) and not only in small, voluntary groups. Coalitions or task forces of organizational representatives in the United States are increasingly the sites of civic action (Wuthnow 1998). Studies, cited above, already portray “styles” in face-to-face, unitary organizations. We will see that the concept of “scene style” widens the analysis for use in more complex organizations.

Beyond this goal, the two complex organizations serve as relatively distant comparison cases, selected on the basis of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This comparison strategy would strengthen our claim that the concepts of civic action and scene style can apply across a wide range of cases within the realm of complex, public organizations. At the outset we were concerned with the degree of interpenetration with the state, an issue central in studies from the neo-Tocquevillian approach (Berger and Neuhaus 1977), in the hybrid governance literature (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Skocpol 1999b), and in overviews of research on civic associations and nonprofit organizations (Clemens 2006; Minkoff and Powell 2006). Thus we chose a case (Housing Justice) relatively close to the neo-Tocquevillian scenario, an organization in which participants saw themselves as acting civically, pursuing citizen advocacy. We also aimed to see if our framework accommodated a case (NOYO) much more distant from the neo-Tocquevillian scenario, in which a mix of state- and non-state-sponsored actors organized volunteers, social service, and advocacy from the start. From there, comparisons unfolded inside each large case as well as between the two cases (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1991), and researchers also sought out negative cases (Katz 2001, 2002) to bolster claims about either civic or noncivic action happening where neo-Tocquevillians would not expect. The Housing Justice case is much closer to the “idealized cognitive model” (Lakoff 1987) of the American civic association than NOYO, just as an apple is closer to the idealized cognitive model of “fruit” than a fig is. The neo-Tocquevillian approach still would have difficulty analyzing Housing Justice’s participation in both civic and noncivic forums, as we see below. Ongoing comparisons helped us arrive at distinctions between different kinds of civic and noncivic scenes, beyond the initial comparison of a “relatively Tocquevillian” organization and a distinctly non-Tocquevillian organization. We noted earlier that civic-commercial as well as civic-state hybrids exist. Given space limitations, we

focus on the civic-state hybrid form that most concerns the theoretical literature we are addressing, but the conclusion briefly returns to the topic of civic-commercial hybrids.

One of the researchers attended multiple settings of the Housing Justice (HJ) coalition for 18 months, including 10 monthly coordinating committee meetings, five public HJ-sponsored rally events, five housing advocacy meetings run by other groups in which HJ staff participated, three municipal-sponsored “town hall” meetings, and five city council meetings, as well as spending the equivalent of one workweek as participant-observer among staff people in the coalition office.<sup>11</sup> To study the youth programs portrayed in the second case, the researcher attended meetings and events of NOYO, including, for an average of six hours a week for four and a half years, meetings and events of the youth civic engagement projects, at which dozens of youths participated, as well as workshops and lunchtime meetings for paid adult organizers. The researcher also conducted participant observation in the capacity of one of the many adult volunteers who came to the free after-school and summer programs from which some of the youth volunteers were recruited.

In all settings the researchers were participant observers. We took field jottings during meetings and events, later expanding them into complete field notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). As varied researchers note (Burawoy 1998; Timmermans and Tavory 2012), good ethnographic work often starts with preexisting theoretical ideas; we started by using neo-Tocquevillian understandings to identify potential cases of civic action in the kinds of complex organizations featured in hybrid governance literature. Initially hoping to improve neo-Tocquevillian understandings with puzzles from the field (Burawoy 1998), we found empirical challenges that led us to reconceptualize “civic” itself and to join a larger community of inquiry long concerned with civic activity. We developed empirical comparisons that solidified the notion of civic scene style and joined our findings to a growing literature that portrays outcomes of what we would call scene style. Rather than stick with one theory and improve it, ethnographic research may be informed by different theories and research literatures at distinct stages, from preliminary casing, to selecting comparison sites and recasing, to suggesting tentative causal claims (Lichterman and Reed, *in press*). After presenting both cases, we take up that last stage, in which researchers draw on preexisting literature to locate causal mechanisms, such as scene style, in their ethnographic findings. To identify scene styles, we started with the heuristic to discovering style in Eliasoph and Lich-

<sup>11</sup> Both cases are part of larger studies (Eliasoph 2011*b*; Lichterman 2012; Lichterman, Esparza, and Weare 2014; Weare, Lichterman, and Esparza 2014; Lichterman and Citroni 2009).



terman (2003, pp. 784–87). Maps, bonds, and speech norms, like other interactional patterns, are easier to identify when we see them violated or disputed (Goffman 1961; 1986, pp. 308–77). Participants' miscues, quick conversational shifts, and avoidances were useful signals. Cases below identify several scene styles using descriptive criteria that also appear, summarized, in table 2.

#### CASE 1: A HOUSING ADVOCACY COALITION

This case focuses on the main decision-making scene, at coordinating committee meetings of the Housing Justice (HJ) coalition, and compares it to several other scenes in which coalition participants acted. Beginning in 2007, the HJ coalition conducted a campaign to organize citizen constituencies and to pressure, negotiate, and collaborate with governmental agents in pursuit of new affordable housing policies in its region. An office staff of six people coordinated the coalition, and this office also called itself Housing Justice; two HJ office staff members usually attended coordinating committee meetings. The staff was housed and paid by the Western Housing Alliance (WHA), a nonprofit association that held educational workshops and lobbied on behalf of members, who included housing developers, community advocates, governmental agencies, some banks, and lending enterprises. Their focus was residential housing that sold or rented for below typical market rates ("affordable housing"). In short, WHA was the sponsor of the HJ coalition and its HJ office staff, and one or several persons identifying as "WHA staff" also attended coordinating committee meetings.

The fact that HJ coalition actors spread over what were, on paper, three separate entities—the HJ coalition as a whole, the small HJ staff organization, and the WHA—produces immediate puzzles. Briefly, we show how to resolve these by focusing on civic action rather than on distinct civic groups in an imagined sector. Then, more detailed empirical discussion shows how the concept of scene style helps identify patterns of civic action and shows how these patterns, in turn, condition relations between governmental and nongovernmental actors. In the HJ scenes observed, there was a dominant and a subordinate scene style, and actors learned they needed to "compartmentalize" the subordinate one inside the dominant.

#### Two Neo-Tocquevillian Puzzles Diminished

In the HJ coalition, collective problem solving straddled divisions between governmental and "civic" sectors. Governmental actors did not attend HJ coordinating committee meetings, but as illustrations show below, several government actors collaborated with the HJ coalition. Further, this



sometimes feisty coalition also contributed, as partners, to municipal leaders' policy drafting and promoting. While puzzling for a neo-Tocquevillian approach, these relations go well with the conceptual definition of civic action that emphasizes collective problem-solving action rather than actors' sectoral affiliations.

The neo-Tocquevillian focus on discrete groups generated another research puzzle. Given the three named entities associated with the coalition, as described before, should HJ staff be counted as members of a "group" called Housing Justice, or WHA, or both? Further, HJ staff identity was ambiguous: when talking to tenant advocate groups in the coalition, HJ staff named themselves Housing Justice. At coordinating committee meetings or at city hall, on the other hand, several staff members called themselves WHA. A study of civic organizations might just as reasonably count them as part of the single organization WHA or else take HJ as a separate "civic group." Which group(s) was/were the object of study?

From the civic action view, the question itself is the problem. Its solution is to make better sense of group identity by following the action. Resolving the puzzle of WHA's disappearing, then reappearing, group identity required recognizing that the HJ coalition depended on not one but two scene styles. It turned out that HJ staff members were not simply loose in their use of group names, but switched between them in specific ways to invoke different bonds with different kinds of partners, identify with bigger or smaller constituencies on their map, and signal whether or not expressing raw anger or deliberating coolly and strategically were more appropriate forms of speech. Examples below show that each scene style prized different skills and virtues, in other words, not "loyalty" or "participativeness" in the abstract but loyalty to one's people versus loyalty to a cause, and participation as giving voice to the marginalized versus participation as having a direct effect on government policy. We turn now to the scene styles. For brevity's sake we concentrate mainly on contrasting maps and bonds, with less attention to the speech norms of the two styles portrayed here.

### Scene Styles in a Coalition

*The dominant scene style: Community of interest.*—The community of interest style was dominant in the HJ coalition's decision-making and public outreach settings. It set the terms for appropriate staging of a different style in other scenes. On the community of interest map, a sharp boundary divided actors who supported campaigns for affordable housing from those perceived to oppose them. "Supporters" could include government employees as well as community advocate groups and nonprofit developers. When committee members wanted to clarify who stood outside the circle of supporters, they would satirize suburban neighborhood

associations' claims that affordable housing developments "change the character of the neighborhood" and would speak grimly of for-profit property developers and their spokespersons, calling one "the wicked witch" with theatrical irony. Emphasizing conflict between supporters and opponents of affordable housing, the map did less to distinguish the low-to-moderate-income constituency of some organizations in the coalition from the extremely low-income or homeless constituency of others—a point significant below. On this map, both constituencies should have a strong interest in more affordable housing as defined by HJ and should support a savvy strategy to change local policies in line with those definitions.

Viewed on HJ's dominant map, many groups potentially might identify with housing problems, not only low-income people. A major goal was to expand that identification, expanding the community of interest; hence HJ leaders even visited dreaded neighborhood associations in hopes of building bridges. No matter to whom they spoke, they pushed a simple "housing platform" of concrete policy recommendations, mandating new affordable housing construction and protecting existing low-cost housing. The platform was intentionally issue specific and did not elaborate any other visions about housing or the nature of property relations. At one meeting, HJ leaders firmly rejected an appeal to identify HJ with broad critiques of housing inequality even though some leaders also identified openly with left-progressive politics. The platform was supposed to be a minimal statement of interests and goals around which diverse actors might bond, not a cry for fundamental social change. Perhaps for that reason, HJ had over 100 "paper" endorsers, including several banks and the YMCA.

The bonds of a community of interest obliged participants to be loyal supporters of the housing issue, as defined by the HJ coalition staff, as long as participants' particular interests in the issue were met adequately; hence a "community of interest." The community of interest demanded loyalty to the housing platform, and as we see below, participants felt betrayed when their fellow participants criticized the focus on the platform. They expected that their unity needed to endure during the period of the campaign for the platform, but not indefinitely.

Bonds and map worked together in the coalition's community of interest scene. This became especially clear during a heated argument between several low-income tenants' advocates and other coalition members. One advocate wanted the HJ coalition to oppose publicly a local redevelopment plan that could displace many low-income tenants. HJ staff person Carol responded that city officials promised to relocate any displaced tenants and then instructed, "As endorsers, you signed on to the [platform]. If we raised hands, you all would probably be against the [Iraq] war, and for another presidential candidate, but we're not going there. We have JUST enough

energy for the affordable housing platform.” To the advocate’s chagrin, HJ was not trying to bond members around commitment to a socially oppressed category of people. Carol assumed that an instrumental coalition needed to bond loyally and narrowly on HJ’s issue and bypass controversies that could threaten bonds between coalition members who might weigh the benefits of redevelopment against the risk of tenant displacement in varying ways. Another participant articulated the coalition’s bonds similarly: “I always thought in this coalition if you don’t like where we are going, you can get off here.” He said that if the HJ coalition ended up promoting too little low-income housing for his own constituency, then “WE will pull out. That’s always been our prerogative . . . [but] we’ve committed to this platform, that’s what we bought into.” For this man and Carol, a few low-income tenant advocates were threatening the bonds that held HJ together as a community of interest that was pursuing an issue with which they thought many people might potentially identify.

The community of interest style shaped the coalition’s way of including state agents. On the community of interest map, HJ staff included inside their circle of close partners Joyce Jackson, a housing agency director in one of the cities in HJ’s purview. At one community forum on housing policy, Jackson narrated a slide show that used exactly the same statistical comparison HJ leaders used, pointing out that during a recent year, developers had built less than 1% of the homes needed for residents in the (lower-moderate) \$48,000–\$78,000 income range. Jackson said, “We tried before [in an earlier campaign], and got so close to a city council vote.” Strikingly, Jackson mapped herself into an earlier HJ campaign, saying “we.” Bonds were shared in a strategic interdependence that included several governmental officials to varying degree: Jackson’s boss, a high municipal official, told HJ staff that he was depending on them to keep the issue visible and push ambivalent council people. Again, bonds focused on a strategic interest: HJ coalition members suggested that, while present at an HJ rally, this leader could make it into “his press conference.” One said, “Make [the rally’s tone] be ‘let us help you help us.’”

Observations over months of meetings showed that other actors might come from the same institutional “sector”—local government—yet occupy different places on HJ’s dominant map. HJ never took for granted that it was “working with” even relatively supportive city council members the way it “worked with” Jackson. It maintained, rather, the petitioning relationship traditionally considered a “civic” approach to the state, not the collaborative relationship that the coalition sustained with governmental agent Jackson.

Members’ own surprises and contrasts between one scene style and another help the researcher identify different styles, showing again that sectoral affiliation by itself does not determine scene style. Two HJ staffers,

for instance, distinguished between the scene of a housing policy workshop put on by a city planning department—from the same municipal government as Joyce Jackson—and other scenes that they considered “activist” and that we would categorize as civic. They saw placards at the workshop using some of the same language that their own flyers used to talk about the income needed just to rent in the area. The workshop surprised and bothered the HJ staffers who thought the placards claimed to be only the voice of “the city” and not affordable housing proponents. They thought this was the wrong map. As one staffer put it, the placards suggested that housing conflicts were battles “between the city and opponents of affordable housing development: in those terms, we [housing activists] don’t exist.” On her map, in contrast, a few city officials shared the bonds of HJ’s community of interest but others did not, and “the city” as a whole was not simply a unitary, constant ally. The workshop consisted of informational booths, at which planning department workers could answer visitors’ questions. Planners explained the benefits of high housing density and invited the participant-observer multiple times to ask or e-mail questions and get “answers.” The workshop was organized to answer questions authoritatively (Berger 2008), not invite potentially policy-changing discussion and action. In terms of the definition of civic action, a participant in this scene would not expect to have a role in coordinating the action in this scene or changing the roles.

*Scene-Switching Practices and a Subordinate Scene.*—Coalition actors learned that adequate members should switch between scenes in ways that kept any other scene style subordinate to the community of interest. HJ-sponsored protests and public education events could enact other scene styles as long as those remained compartmentalized within a longer “episode” (Goffman 1986, p. 251) driven by the community of interest style that was dominant at coordinating committee meetings. An event might call up two scenes, but one subordinate to the other—a scene within a dominant, narrating scene. The frequent neo-Tocquevillian focus on unitary “groups” would miss these scene-switching practices, but they were important civic skills to master in a complex organization. These practices allowed inclusion—on subordinate terms—of a scene style favored by some advocates of socially marginalized groups.

These scene-switching practices helped explain certain coalition members’ puzzling sometime-habit, mentioned before, of claiming different group identities and obscuring the WHA’s overall sponsorship of the HJ coalition. Observation revealed that low-income tenant associations in the HJ coalition, representing largely people of color, were wary of housing developers, even WHA’s nonprofit, affordable housing developers, because to these tenant activists, developers represented property and business, not

people like themselves. The mere mention of financial sponsor WHA might sour these coalition participants. So at training workshops for tenant advocates, HJ leaders allowed, even invited, participants to treat the HJ coalition as a voice of “the community,” not a voice of affordable housing developers. These workshop settings summoned the map, bonds, and speech norms of a “community of identity,” a scene style preferred by the tenant advocates in their own organizations’ settings (Lichterman, Esparza, and Weare 2014; Weare, Lichterman, and Esparza 2014). Below we suggest that it, like the first style, resembles a scene style that researchers have observed in other settings and that we observed in case 2.

At the center of the community of identity map was what advocates referred to unceasingly as “the community”—constructed as low-income, oppressed tenants—rather than the housing issue per se. The main boundary posed a central conflict between the community on one side and property owners who exploited the community and government agents who legally enabled the property owners on the other. On this map, activists wanted mainly the members of the community to identify strongly with their claims. Others ideally would recognize those claims, or in the case of powers that be, redress their grievances, from afar, but activists did not seek close identification with their problems from a wide, diverse public. They certainly did not visit suburban neighborhood associations looking for support and never mentioned “paper” endorsers. Like the community of interest, the community of identity did not try to make abstract ideologies of social change guide their efforts; they insisted on protecting the community from abuses, not transforming the perceived source of abuse.

The bonds of community of identity stressed long-term commitment rather than campaign-specific loyalty, as when one advocate insisted that the coalition should work for low-income tenants and homeless people far beyond one strategic campaign. Bonds were built on a group focus, not attention to individualized expression; these advocates spoke always for the community. When actors were in this scene, they imagined that since government protected property over human needs, it was often better to fight city hall than collaborate with it. In the coalition, appropriate scene-switching practices compartmentalized this scene temporally as well as geographically from the coordinating committee meetings.

Compartmentalizing scenes was a way to keep the HJ coalition together as a complex organization without alienating advocacy groups that went along only warily with the “community of interest,” hoping like other groups to get some interests met. The coalition’s scene switching was patterned, not random. We discovered that participants routinely used the type of event, or evident group identity of other actors, as cues to switching between scenes. At HJ’s kickoff rally, tenants’ rights advocates criticized landlords

for victimizing low-income people in a ritualized call and response format that elicited “that’s not fair!” from the crowd. When they spoke, suddenly the speech norms as well as map and bonds changed: the speaker was angry and the tenant group members bussed in for the rally matched the tone with righteous indignation. Then the scene changed with an obvious change in the group identity of the next speaker; an affordable housing developer in a suit promoted the housing platform, affirming that people of different backgrounds should live together and that affordable housing never lost any money. The map, bonds, and speech norms of the community of identity had changed back to those of a community of interest. Appropriate scene-switching practices were all the more clear in the breach (Goffman 1961; McCall and Simmons 1978): when HJ leaders smudged boundaries between scenes inadvertently, low-income tenant groups complained. An HJ leader reported spending precious phone time finessing tenant groups’ annoyance that journalists at the kickoff rally had photographed dozens of tenant advocates, fists aloft, standing behind the dress-suited affordable housing developers. To them, the photo in effect was mapping the tenants as adjuncts to developer interests, not feisty members of a community fighting exploiters. To them, tenants and developers projected different social identities that needed their own scenes.

On the one hand, the dominant community of interest scenes could include socially diverse actors. Recall that civic action, in our definition, constructs some “common basis” for improving society. Community of interest scenes coordinated action that respected actors’ differing opportunities to contribute as long as they could be strategically helpful. HJ members expected that a governmental official would bring special skill at pressuring legislators and discussed whether or not Jackson was an effective collaborator for them. They did not expect the same of the coalition’s small Latino tenants’ organization, whose own representative openly characterized it as lacking organizing expertise; one HJ staffer said that he valued this group for bringing more racial diversity to HJ—realizing a different kind of strategic interest.

On the other hand, keeping the community of interest dominant and the community of identity subordinate looked to some actors as though it was diminishing marginalized people’s voices. Some coalition members chafed at the community of interest, all the while familiar with what it required. One homeless advocate argued fiercely for more extremely low-income housing mandates than other HJ members thought was strategic. She spoke in solidarity with a category of extremely low-income people rather than in strategic support of HJ’s issue platform. She said she recognized HJ’s “insider strategy” of collaborating with governmental agents—part of the community of interest—but said that it needed an “outsider strategy”

to “act like a social movement” and spoke repeatedly about the particular needs of poor and homeless people. She understood how to play along with the community of interest style but explicitly challenged it from the community of identity map and bonds that did not distinguish strong governmental supporters like Jackson from less supportive council members. Rather than try to make poor people even more strategically interesting to HJ, she cast doubt on the whole notion of organizing alongside government agents on a convergent interest. Another coalition member argued back that his lower-moderate-income constituents went to rallies supporting housing for the homeless, so she should participate in the give-and-take too. She presented her own people’s needs as nonnegotiable. He responded from the community of interest—“We need your passion!”—and added that HJ benefited from people willing to push stronger demands at city hall, as long as they did not challenge HJ’s unity (bonds). “Passionate” advocates could be “another voice” as long as they could be folded back into a coalition bonded on a community of interest’s terms. The homeless advocate, in contrast, saw the compartmentalizing of the community of identity as diminishing marginalized people’s voices *per se*. Her ally implied the same thing, criticizing HJ for caring too much about middle-class constituents “who hear ‘low income’ and think it’s a bad thing; you are talking racial!”

Socially marginalized people participate less in many formal and informal political acts and civic groups and are more likely to link participation with basic needs such as housing (Wuthnow 2002; Schlozman et al. 2013, esp. pp. 126–38). The civic action approach shows that when they and their spokespersons do participate, socially marginalized people have more than one style for placing those needs on a wider map and bonding around them; each opens to marginalized voices differently. Each defines “trust,” a neo-Tocquevillian virtue (Putnam 2000), quite differently. For instance, one HJ representative and supporter of the platform said that the homeless advocate and her allies had been “disrespectful” of the coalition and other members’ compromises; she had violated “trust” as a community of interest defines it. She said they were wrong to accuse other HJ members of disregarding “working-class and homeless” because “that’s who [my own] constituency *is*!” Others said the homeless advocate “betrayed” them. For the homeless advocate, in turn, compromises, and dalliances with governmental allies, betrayed a community of identity’s notion of trust—trust in the community to know what is best. HJ leader Carol told the advocate that she (the advocate) was “still learning”; Carol wanted her to “learn” to put the community of interest style in the dominant position and save her angry advocacy for a smaller compartment, one that could open on cue at well-orchestrated events. Carol revealed that she understood the speech norms of the advocate and her allies: “We know what



you are doing. You use drama! We know—we do that when we go to city hearings.” HJ leaders such as Carol included extremely low-income tenants as one important constituency among others on their own map, but, metaphorically speaking, Carol thought the advocate had staged the wrong show for the scene.

*Backdoor hybrid governance.*—Following scene style and its switches helps observers understand how participants in civic action collaborate across sectoral identities. While the case of HJ is closer to the traditionally understood “civic” end of the civic/state spectrum than the case that follows, it did participate quietly in governance, in yet another scene; neo-Tocquevillian assumptions would obscure this fact. HJ maintained a backstage scene that would not count as civic action by our definition, separate from others that did count. As an “insider,” HJ contributed to emerging housing policy proposals wielded by city leaders rather than only contesting proposals or pressuring for new ones, as traditionally understood civic actors would do. A pressing “technical” issue was to decide how much housing a proposed new law should mandate to be built for people who made 30% or less of the average income in the region. Jackson’s office tried out different figures with HJ leaders in ongoing, backstage conversations about a draft policy document. Carol reported Jackson saying she “wasn’t open to making changes to the document; she was willing to ‘correct’ it.” “Change” would imply ceding her administrative authority to a civic will, while “correction” is simple, technical help one accepts from a colleague. In effect, HJ leaders participated in a noncivic scene by our definition, one in which mutual coordination needed to follow governmental routines, and it was compartmentalized into separate meetings with municipal agents. Speaking from the community of interest, Carol could honor that scene by compartmentalizing it: “Behind the scenes we can be technical, but in public this [campaign] needs to be going forward.”

## CASE 2: YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

Our second case concerns a set of civic engagement projects organized by the Network of Youth Organizations in a midsize city in the Midwest. As noted earlier, the network comprised programs ranging from Girl Scouts to programs for youth offenders; most of these programs included a youth civic engagement component, and we focus on those projects here. Each project held monthly evening meetings to organize a sequence of one-day volunteer events, such as litter cleanups, or the annual Martin Luther King Day event, in which about 400 youth and adult organizers attended workshops and speeches in the morning and then conducted community service in the afternoon. Planning for this January event began in late



summer each year. In addition to the monthly planning meetings for each project, there were interim get-togethers for activities like painting posters for the events.

This case serves as a relatively distant comparison to case 1 since here no scene style was dominant, and the organization blended civic and non-civic action instead of compartmentalizing them. A competent participant in NOYO projects, adult or youth, had to recognize that behind the appearance of one big organization, there often were clearly defined subgroups, with different maps and bonds—different scene styles—not all of which hosted civic action. As in case 1, sometimes members' anger or puzzlement revealed, after the fact, that someone had misread what others thought was the appropriate style for the scene at hand. The fact that actors considered themselves or others to be making "mistakes" and that they criticized statements deemed infuriatingly out of place signals that expectations about scenes were important, even if usually unspoken.

We note first that there were two socially distinct subsets of youth volunteers. Some came in their organization's minivan or program organizer's car, as members of their free after-school programs. Governmental and nongovernmental funding made their participation possible by transporting them and paying for a long-term adult organizer who coaxed them to join and drove them to meetings. These youths' "prevention programs" needed to show to multiple, distant funders that they were preventing drug use, crime, and pregnancy among "at-risk youths." The second set of youth volunteers were not disadvantaged. They came to meetings individually, usually from middle-class neighborhoods, in their own or their parents' cars. No one had to justify to an external public that this second type of youth volunteering was saving taxpayers' money in the long run by reducing prison costs, as one often heard in public discussions about the first group. The two groups were supposed to act as civic equals when they volunteered together; while they sometimes shared scene styles, they often did not.

### Multiple Styles

Here we identify four of the scene styles in NOYO. Three of these scene styles meet the definition of "civic" and can be found in other studies, as table 2 shows. Given space limitations, we focus mostly on maps, identify bonds only briefly, and bracket speech norms here.

First, some youth participants, disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged, acted some of the time as "club-style" (Wuthnow 1998) volunteers—local folks banding together for work they considered nonconflictive. These youths expected to bond over a relatively long term, not simply pitch in once or twice. Like other club-style volunteers, they knew too that they

were supposed to bond in unity and not just aim to appreciate each individual's unique contribution, as their annoyed comments toward slackers show below. The implicit map on which they placed their action, when they were enacting this club-style volunteering, was clean of conflict and focused on single issues—sick children, litter—about which they assumed any humane person would care. To participants, the problems seemed self-evident and eternal; they did not try to fit their actions into a larger vision of social change. As one put it, in a conversation with the researcher and another youth volunteer, “We do what there is to do—like nursing homes. There’s always gonna be a need for people to go to nursing homes.” Most paid adult organizers shared this style with the youths, hoping to encourage youth participants to conjure up ideas for addressing local problems with can-do enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, some of the disadvantaged youths often acted in a second style. This style's map highlighted nonprofit and state-run social service organizations that were not mainly aimed at flexibly discovering and addressing problems, but serving needy individuals as clients, adjusting their individual lives, not transforming a common life. The bonds that this style invoked were those of “at-risk” individuals to service providers who had a prespecified task to perform rather than bonds between civic actors who have some leeway to coordinate themselves and collectively discover or address problems. Action coordinated this way is not “civic” by our definition.

There was, however, sometimes a way of reconciling these two goals, of the sort that Minkoff (2002) describes. This reconciliation occurred when participants imagined that raising individuals up was really a way of raising up a whole subgroup. When enacting this style, they engaged each other as a “community of identity,” as introduced in case 1. This was a third, though rare, scene for disadvantaged youths, then, when they bonded as proud members of their “community,” committed to it and each other over the long haul. They placed themselves on a map with local, low-income, minority people, who recognized conflict on their maps. As in case 1, drawing the community of identity's map did not require working to fit actions into a broader vision for systemic social transformation, but just working to help members of the community protect themselves against oppressors and resist the odds stacked against them.

Away from the youth, a small handful of adult organizers of the youths once in a great while put a fourth scene style in play, the “social critic” style. This style coordinated interaction around broad political principles beyond single issues and illuminated conflicts that generally do not appear on the “club volunteering” map. In such a scene, organizers wanted youth volunteers to fit their actions to a broader vision of social transformation.

One adult, for example, said at a meeting among other adult NOYO participants, "If you work at a food pantry for your service project, the key to it all is to ask why there is hunger and what can our society do about it." Another said, "We should get kids thinking about civic responsibility and their role in society, by picking up the trash, sure, but go on from there, to *tie it to something broader*." In one organizer's imagined example, kids could read *The Grapes of Wrath* while working on the issue of migrant labor. Inside these scenes, some adults expected to bond as fellow consciousness-raisers who could expect each other to act like social critics instead of only keeping up enthusiasm for nonconflictual projects. No adult actually ever asked the bigger questions when they were working directly with youth volunteers. In scenes with the youths, organizers often started a meeting by asking the youth volunteers to "think of a problem in your community" and would emphatically insist to youth volunteers that the planning of one of those daylong events was "open and undefined, up to you to decide 'whatever,'" as one adult phrased the frequent suggestion. These usually jelled as club-style volunteer scenes. Youths would mention working in food pantries, for example, with no discussion of connecting this action to a broader social vision, of the sort that adults imagined when enacting a "social critic" scene elsewhere.

When youth volunteers were coordinating action by using the club-style scene but were treated as recipients of social service aid rather than volunteers, they and their adult organizers would become angry; the scene had been violated. For example, when disadvantaged youth volunteers won an award—money toward a minivan for their community center's after-school and summer program to use—for doing volunteer work, they and their adult organizer were delighted and proud. However, when the group got to the awards ceremony, members saw on the list of awardees "van to transport needy youth," and later, the organizer said both she and the youth volunteers were furious. In the scene at the awards ceremony, they had expected to be treated as civic, club-style volunteers. As volunteers, they were supposed to bond as initiative-taking, problem-solving contributors, not "needy" youths who were objects of beneficent others' action and were dependent on them.

The noncivic scene that put youths on the map as "needy youths" receiving aid, rather than active volunteers in collaboration, was sometimes appropriate, but participants could become confused about when the "social service recipient" (noncivic) scene was in play and when the "volunteer" (civic) scene was in play. Interviewing some youth volunteers who were helping out at a public event, a reporter asked a standard journalist's question that usually is intended to let the respondent display a generous community spirit (Eliasoph 1988). The question could have let the youth

identify himself on a map of club volunteering, where hardy individuals work cheerfully for a locale's good. But he did not orient himself on a civic map:

Reporter: Why are you here today?

Wispy African-American boy, maybe 14 years old: I'm involved instead of being out on the streets or instead of taking drugs or doing something illegal.

The journalist gestured surprise at the wispy boy's response, but the response was not just a mistake. Knowing as they did that they were recipients of state and nonprofit aid for the needy, as well as civic volunteers, disadvantaged youth participants had at least two roles in the youth programs, each calling for its own scene style. In contrast to case 1, one scene was not necessarily subordinate to another one. To demonstrate that the aid was well spent, the civic engagement projects all had to show that some substantial proportion of their participants were, indeed, needy. To demonstrate that the youths were good civic actors, the organizations had to show that the participants were effective, self-propelled, hard-working, creative civic volunteers, helping others. But this often did not correspond to the first scene because volunteers who were very needy or troubled were not, at least initially, self-propelled, hard-working, creative, or helpful to others. The local news reporter's standard, upbeat question invites the wispy boy to place himself implicitly on a civic map of can-do volunteer. But the boy represented himself primarily as a troubled recipient of aid—not a civic equal—on the map of social service. He was imagining himself as a potential statistic, an at-risk individual, a problem.

Organizers often hoped to make these disadvantaged kids into club-style volunteers. Some disadvantaged participants attended a year of civic engagement meetings but never volunteered for the projects, never spoke in meetings, but fiddled with empty Doritos bags, made abstract designs with Skittles on the table, and doodled on erasers. Organizers would say privately to each other, as one put it, that they should "face it" that many kids were not in the civic projects to volunteer, but rather to avoid going home to empty or abusive households; the organization offered social service as well as civic engagement. Organizers would say to each other that just giving these unenthusiastic or dependent youths a taste of volunteering might whet their appetites, and that in any case, it couldn't hurt; they might slowly become "real volunteers." One adult, for example, sounded triumphant and proud when a disadvantaged teen volunteer finally spoke to her, after several months of silence at meetings.

Three of the disadvantaged youths who had initially interacted mainly as at-risk clients eventually did become exceptionally energetic, self-initiating, civic actors. When they did, it was not as club volunteers, though; rather, it was as a community of identity, similar to that described in case 1. One newly

civic actor—a Latina from a housing project who participated in an after-school program for disadvantaged youths—put it this way: “We’re here to show that our community isn’t as bad as everyone thinks.” When momentarily in this scene, these youth volunteers imagined themselves on a map in which they—as low-income minority teens from a housing project—were triumphantly beating the odds and bonding with each other to defend their community. Within this style, it was a collective triumph if a disadvantaged youth volunteer got a scholarship for college. Rather than simply accessing assistance for a needy client, the victorious youth volunteer could speak about equality of opportunity for people from his or her “community.” This meets the definition of civic action: participants were self-organizing to do something that they considered to be addressing a shared problem of improving their collectivity, and not only an individual need.

#### Scene-Switching Practices: When Displaying Civic Respect Implicitly Demands Ignoring Social Inequality

Unlike actors in the housing coalition, participants in the youth civic engagement projects could rarely take cues from the physical setting to know which scene style to play. Distinguishing between different kinds of youths and a multitude of fleeting projects often required more complicated or subtle signals. Those signals existed: a youth volunteer’s visible racial characteristics made for a very quick, frequently utilized—though sometimes inaccurate—cue, legible to adults and youths alike. Participants assumed that if a youth participant appeared to be black or Latino, he or she was a member of a prevention program for at-risk youths. But even when this visual image assessment was accurate, it still was hard to blend scenes and take cues from two scenes running concurrently in the same room, especially when the same actors aimed to speak to two different audiences at once. Our definition above pointed out that civic actors act on some shared basis as “members of society,” however they imagine society; NOYO settings often had several different shared bases in play simultaneously. A close look at scene-switching practices in NOYO shows that for members to maintain a shared basis of mutual respect, in a diverse organization with multiple maps, they often actively had to suppress their knowledge of inequality.

For instance, participants often had to figure out that club-style volunteering and social service clienthood were both potentially in play and know which style was appropriate for which actors. When being “civic,” youth participants had to treat each other as equals, but another map close at hand signaled that they were not equals. Working as fellow volunteers with disadvantaged youths in the “youth civic engagement projects,” the nondisadvantaged youths wanted to see themselves as doing club-style work, though many worried aloud that some fellow, nondisadvantaged

youths were there only to plump up their resumes (working toward this goal presented yet another scene that space constraints exclude from discussion).<sup>12</sup> They also had to know that the disadvantaged youth volunteers who were participating alongside them were sometimes implicitly operating as clients of social service. At the same time, they had to keep their knowledge of this difference to themselves because acknowledging it aloud would have been disrespectful in the club style of volunteering, in which all actors are supposed to bond as can-do, civic equals, not as needy clients to nonclients. It was clear that the two sets of youths could not switch places; nobody was saying that the college-bound youths were at risk and nobody had to justify public or nonprofit funding for things that the nondisadvantaged kids' parents could easily afford. Nondisadvantaged youths learned to switch out of a scene styled for the disadvantaged youths instead of treating the latter's clienthood as an opportunity to learn about social inequality.

The following example illustrates this puzzle of scene switching. At one Martin Luther King Day event, about 400 youth volunteers and their adult organizers listened to a speech from the local Urban League president who exhorted the young people to "Achieve!" The African-American speaker pitched a message aimed straight at fellow African-Americans. To make sense, the message, aimed at that set of youths, had to transform when it entered the nondisadvantaged youths' ears. "Achievement matters," he said. "One out of two African-Americans will drop out of high school in Snowy Prairie." He gave more statistics about the high dropout rates among blacks and added some about Latinos. And at another Martin Luther King Day event, the same speaker said, after offering similar statistics, "If we don't start taking achievement seriously, we'll continue to get what we've got, and that's unacceptable. They're the next group of people that's gonna take care of us in the twilight of our years." He declared further that he would not want someone who got D's taking care of him in his old age; he would want someone who got B's. In this context, the "we" on the receiving end of unacceptable grades and high dropout rates by the group taking care of "us" in old age makes sense if "we" are an African-American family or community. So here, he was inviting the African-American participants, and perhaps other people of color, onto the map of a "community of identity" that should share disadvantaged groups' griev-

<sup>12</sup> We call them "nondisadvantaged" instead of naming them by class or race because their category was considered unremarkable. No one named it as a category on grant applications. Not all were solidly middle class—some were children of downwardly mobile divorced mothers—nor were all white. During the time of study, one of the nondisadvantaged youth volunteers was Asian. Notice that projections regarding the future form an important element of the "map." For more on this, see Eliasoph (2014, in press) and Mische (2014).

ances. This was the shared basis of togetherness at the moment. During the first speech, about “achievement,” the speaker interrupted himself to scold a cluster of African-American boys who were fidgeting and giggling in the back of the auditorium. He pointed to them and said to them—and to everyone else in the auditorium—“There’s the problem right there,” thus underscoring the implicit point that he was not talking to the nonblack kids in the room at that moment.

For these messages to make sense, the youth volunteers—nondisadvantaged and disadvantaged alike—had to take a cue from the speaker’s race, combined with the subject of his speech: they had to know he was not addressing the already-ambitious, college-bound, nondisadvantaged youths in the room. Adult organizers often criticized those teens, telling them to lighten up and stop being so ambitious all the time. Most of them were already getting A’s, many in advanced placement (AP) classes,<sup>13</sup> so being exhorted to be even more ambitious and to get B’s would not make sense to them unless they understood implicitly that there were two scenes in the same room. While the speaker had called the community of identity scene into play, these teens could not share a common basis as part of the community of identity. So, respect meant silence. These messages, spoken in one scene but overheard in a different scene, further divided the already racially segregated audience. Youth volunteers could not mention knowledge of their inequalities here, but they had to make use of this knowledge, just to decipher speech, to know what to say and what not to say.

Switching into or out of a scene similarly was necessary when an adult organizer asked a disadvantaged youth and nondisadvantaged youth at a civic engagement project meeting to name a “problem in your community.” The nondisadvantaged participants named this problem: the local high schools did not grant more than 4.0 grade points for AP courses, while other high schools in the nation give 5.0 points for an A in an AP course. The nondisadvantaged youths here were making a mistake, in one paid adult organizer’s eyes: he quietly nixed this project, saying behind the scenes to the other organizers that the civic engagement project was supposed to benefit “all youths,” implying that this one did not. Usually, however, the teens who were getting A’s and wanted even higher credit knew to comply with the scene invoked by the Urban League president. Usually, they knew to pretend to be equals while subtly using knowledge of inequality. One needed to act one’s own scene appropriately while keeping silent about, and pretending not to notice, the action happening in a different scene in the same room at the same time.

<sup>13</sup> AP courses offer high school students college-level material; if the students pass a test, they can get college credit for the course.



These examples illustrate that distributing scenes in a “four-stage theater” required fine-tuning silences and differentiating bonds according to race. Youth volunteers often used the participant’s race as a way of guessing whether he or she was disadvantaged or not. To be respectful, non-disadvantaged youths knew not to have the same club-style volunteering expectations for disadvantaged youth volunteers that they had for one another. When they observed a lack of volunteer spirit in these projects, they reserved their wrath for those fellow nondisadvantaged youth volunteers who came to meetings (to put it on their resumes) without actually doing any work. In contrast, they did not mention that some disadvantaged youth volunteers, such as those whom they observed fiddling with Doritos and Skittles, also did not do any volunteer work. The nondisadvantaged teens implicitly understood that even though those other teens were in the same room, the two sets of youths were in a different scene.

#### Beyond the Neo-Tocquevillian Story

A neo-Tocquevillian focus on sectoral differences would be misleading here. First, many projects in NOYO got money both from the state and from nonstate, nonprofit organizations, and each kind of support usually came with a mandate both to serve the needy and to promote civic engagement. Whether it was a government or nongovernmental organization was irrelevant for this process. *Financial sponsorship did not change from moment to moment*, but as we have seen, *the scene could change quickly*. Second, we saw that disadvantaged youth participants could “grow into” a civic style—without any change in sponsorship. Given these observations, it is clearly an empirical question whether, how, for whom, and how much sectoral sponsorship shapes civic action.

This case also challenges the neo-Tocquevillian assumption (for instance, Putnam [2000] and also Tocqueville himself [1969, p. 515]) that civic engagement makes people more sensitive to a wider, diverse world beyond their familiar experience. On the one hand, participants worked with diverse others; hearing the statistics in the Urban League president’s speech could have made them think about unjust inequality, since the speaker did not just celebrate it all with a bland term like “diversity.” On the other hand, acting appropriately as club-style volunteers meant saying nothing about those inequalities; to remark on them would have been disrespectful for the club-style volunteer’s (civic) bonds, in which all participants are supposed to be equal, can-do citizens. To make any sense of interaction at all, youth volunteers had to perceive inequality, but to act appropriately in the mixed group, they had to ignore it. When disadvantaged youths were alone together, they made fun of their nondisadvantaged peers; the nondisadvantaged youths, on the other hand, simply



remained baffled by disadvantaged kids' lives—confused when one moved several times in a year or having no idea where these kids' housing project was.

There is a second way in which the case challenges the idea that civic participation teaches people how to connect their self-interest with the broader collectivity: in the rare moments that youth volunteers were exposed to political decision making, they learned to disconnect their interest from that of others. County officials, once a year, encouraged one youth group to attend the county board meeting to advocate for more funding for youth programs; youths discovered that they were competing against senior citizens, disabled people, and babies. After one, teens said to each other that it was “sad.” Adults did not encourage them to ask why this wealthy society does not have enough funds to help both old people and young people. When the researcher asked the volunteers, they said that it was just how the game is played, with some winning and some losing. The youth projects presented the opportunity to place their activity on a broader social map but swiped it away: this is a sharp twist on the neo-Tocquevillian notion that civic engagement opens onto broader, shared horizons.

This case suggests that organizations that say they are about “civic engagement” do not necessarily do civic action and may well systematically dampen the virtues that scholars often assume arise in civic groups. Some youth volunteers did act as civic actors, but the prevalence or existence of such scenes in any organization that aims to promote “civic engagement” is something to study, not presume. Conversely, social workers who are paid by the state or nonprofits may well act more civically than some volunteers, as when NOYO staff acted in a social critic style, critically ruminating about adult volunteers who worked with youth volunteers in a way that the social workers considered to be not adequately participatory. The following section suggests ways of connecting different scene styles to different outcomes and also suggests a way to aggregate research on civic scene styles.

## OUTCOMES OF CIVIC ACTION: AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

### How the Civic Action Approach Contributes to Studies of Aggregate Outcomes

Research that uses a neo-Tocquevillian approach often measures a nation's civic sector by counting groups, group memberships, or time spent in groups. It uses these aggregate measures to investigate participation's salubrious civic effects on future volunteering or political engagement, for example, as well as noncivic effects such as reducing the risk of “colds, cancer, heart attacks, stroke, depression and premature deaths of all sorts”

(Putnam 2000, p. 326). We favor a pluralist appreciation of what different approaches do well. Aggregate data are crucial for characterizing a society's civic action systematically and for comparing across societies, or historical periods, or for measuring outcomes. However, when these studies define "civic" in terms of a distinct sector or when they obscure differences between the kinds of civic action that can take place in different scenes, they may miss patterns that the civic action approach can further illuminate.<sup>14</sup> We offer three very brief illustrations.

First, broad-brushstroke studies have shown that youth civic engagement tends to lead to adult civic engagement (Hodgkinson et al. 1995), which, in turn, is supposed to lead to political engagement. But they do not show which kinds of youth engagement make a difference for which kinds of adult engagement. McFarland and Thomas's (2006, p. 414) finer-grained study offers hints by finding two puzzles that our approach helps solve. First, membership in many sports teams does nothing for future political engagement, and cheerleading even has a negative effect, though neo-Tocquevillian studies would put both in the same civic "sector." The civic action approach helps us interpret the differing outcomes of different forms of action that other approaches would lump together as "civic": sports teams or cheerleading squads may not give members much practice with improving common life or imagining shared membership in society. Perhaps only membership in a group whose activities are closer to our definition of civic action tend to socialize young people for future civic or political activity.

Second, our definition may clarify McFarland and Thomas's (2006, p. 415) puzzling finding that participation in an environmental project—which looks like civic, political action—did not predict teens' future political activity. The authors speculated that the disconnection arises because these campaigns tend to be too short-lived and sporadic to make a difference for the individual. That hypothesis complements our definition of civic as ongoing action that people must coordinate together. A nuanced concept of the civic can help explain why some measures of participation do not yield correlations that a neo-Tocquevillian approach would expect.

A final example shows how our approach can help interpret correlations identified in quantitative studies, turning their findings into launchpads for further inquiry. For example, studies show that voluntary asso-

<sup>14</sup> There do exist studies that use aggregate quantitative data without basing data collection on the neo-Tocquevillian understanding of a civic sector. One involves counting organizations that fit a clear definition of "the nonprofit sector" that differs from the neo-Tocquevillian (<http://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector/cnp-publications>). Another conducts surveys that ask people about specific actions that they might consider as "volunteering" rather than counting organizations (Dekker and Halman 2003).

ciation participants vote at higher rates than nonparticipants (Verba et al. 1995). Beginning with this finding, the civic action approach would suppose that even narrow-minded civic associations such as “Not in My Backyard” groups may contribute to citizens’ desire to vote—on at least one political issue. This approach would then go on to ask whether different styles of civic action may cultivate voters who bring different kinds of civic imaginations to the voting booth. By developing an attachment to politics through one civic style or another, people may imagine and carry out qualitatively different kinds of orientation toward the act of voting itself; historical research already points to the reality of changing orientations toward voting in the United States (Schudson 1998).

In sum, while neo-Tocquevillian studies show correlations between civic engagement and various outcomes (Putnam 2000; but see Sobieraj and White 2004), the civic action approach asks about the how (Katz 2001), including asking how different styles might lead to different outcomes. Further, our theoretical distinction between civic and noncivic action matters empirically. While quantification is not this article’s main topic, both quantitative and qualitative approaches to civic action can benefit from a reconstructed definition of “civic,” and both could find ways of explicitly recognizing the finite types of civic scenes that actors themselves implicitly recognize.

### Three Warrants for Aggregating Scene Style Research

Civic styles are part of a larger, shared cultural repertoire (Lamont and Thévenot 2000). They can be thought of as implicit organizational forms in the neo-institutionalist sense (Becker 1999; Eliasoph and Lo 2012). They are not infinitely varied, idiosyncratic group cultures, though those do, of course, also exist. So far, researchers have inductively identified several civic styles. Through an extensive literature review, we found that the scene styles we described above also can be found in many other studies that show enough detail on everyday routines to depict scene style implicitly, if not explicitly. The enactment of a single scene style in different settings can be roughly similar; we should not expect them to be identical since scene styles are fuzzily perceived patterns of coordinating action, like other elements of culture, and not rigid sets of rules (Cicourel 1993; Lichterman 2012). Below we illustrate the potential for aggregating style research in three different ways.

First, we use simple indicators gleaned from our extensive literature review to show that each scene style portrayed above bears a family resemblance to a scene style portrayed in a previous study. Previous research has paid more attention to maps and group bonds than to speech norms, so we use indicators that tap dimensions of maps and bonds only, though

we underscore that it is vital to study speech norms too and the kinds of emotions they invite members to display. Repeatedly, these studies show the utility of using our three heuristic dimensions to discern the actors' map of the wider world: Actors may be (1) highlighting or else downplaying their relation to conflict (as shorthand, we name this the "conflict" dimension); (2) working to coordinate everyday action in relation to a vision of social transformation, or else not working to coordinate action toward such a vision ("vision," for short); and (3) aspiring to make a socially diverse public identify with the problem, or else trying to construct a distinct community or limited social category that identifies strongly with the problem, and casting any others' allegiance as secondary or distant ("universalism," for short).<sup>15</sup> Repeatedly, these studies show two dimensions that indicate how actors implicitly define group bonds: In everyday shared action, actors (1) are expected to cohere as one body, as if singing in unison, or else are expected to highlight each unique individual's contributions, as if singing in complex harmony (the "unison" dimension); and (2) cultivate the expectation that bonds will be relatively long enduring, or else short-term and easily disconnected (the "time horizon" dimension).

We stress that participants' implicit assumptions about maps and bonds are expectations for appropriate behavior, since by definition, style is about shared expectations. Not all collectivities that expect unison or long-time commitments actually get them. Many collectivities that aspire to universalistic appeal often appeal to only a specific segment of the population. And scene styles often produce paradoxical outcomes, viewed below.

Table 2 lays out the simple indicators that distinguish scene style along dimensions of maps and bonds and shows how to use them. In this way it schematizes the four scene styles found in our cases, along with two other prevalent styles in the literature. The table cites other examples of each style.

Using these indicators of scene style is one way of aggregating data from many studies. This qualitative form of aggregation involves a trade-off. It distinguishes different patterns of civic action with nuance, rather than measuring "more" or "less" civic action, but it is a cumbersome means of aggregation.

Offering a different set of trade-offs, a second method facilitates aggregation of data on scene style but greatly simplifies the contours of style and reduces the number of styles we can grasp. This method relies on a

<sup>15</sup> A diverse public may identify vicariously with the problem even if they do not claim to have it themselves: for instance, some civic actors coordinate activism for homelessness on the assumption that many can identify sympathetically with it. In contrast, the community of identity within the HJ coalition opposed efforts to frame housing as a problem a diverse public could identify with because that would obscure the specificity of a specific aggrieved community.

theory of culture developed by Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) to grasp how collectives' relations are structured in terms of their relatively high or low ascription of roles to members (the "grid" axis) and relatively tight or loose cohesion of members to the collectivity (the "group" axis). Each of the four group/grid combinations is a "culture" of collective life (see Swedlow [2011] for a review). Elsewhere, we show how this two-by-two typology can be used—again, as one possible heuristic, not a closely interpretive theory of culture—roughly to categorize some prevalent scene styles (Weare, Lichterman, and Esparza 2014). Two of the four potential cultural types fit our definition of civic action, corresponding very roughly to community of interest and community of identity. Research routinely uses surveys of individuals to infer these cultural types (e.g., Gastil et al. 2011; Ripberger, Jenkins-Smith, and Herron 2011). Surveys of members of civic organizations could allow researchers to aggregate scene style data, especially if the survey questions can tap respondents' perceptions of different scenes. The simple group/grid framework risks making differences between some styles imperceptible, so it currently limits this method only to certain predefined subsets of civic sites. Further research might determine, however, that subtler distinctions than high/low on "group" and "grid" could tap other styles identified by way of our indicators.

A third path toward aggregating data on style appears in the growing affinity between cultural analysis and computational linguistics. In their study of National Security Strategy documents, for example, Mohr et al. (2013) teach a computer to identify words representing actors (the president, the United Nations, e.g.), actions ("impose," "fight," e.g.), and backdrops for action ("the international finance system," e.g.) and count frequencies of actors paired with actions, against various backdrops. By quantifying these elements, the analysis not only will reveal dictionary definitions of the words and phrases but also will be able to show how people use the words and how the words come to mean different things, in different performances, with different matches of actors, actions, and settings (see Mische [2014] and Tavory [2014] for similar creative approaches). The potential utility of these studies for examining "style" is clear: Mohr and colleagues invoke Burke's theater metaphors—one heuristic for grasping scene style, as we mentioned before. Researchers can easily translate our heuristic to Burke's (Lo et al. 2014); for example, the backdrops and actions that Mohr et al. analyze can be seen as "maps" that emphasize or disregard conflict. These studies examine formal public documents. To adapt such methods to study civic styles, the next step would be to analyze more mundane online scenes—such as those implied in an organization's online mission statements, descriptions of its projects and upcoming events, blogs, and Facebook postings—to see how patterns in these texts related to the face-to-face interactions that ethnographers had

TABLE 2  
SCENE STYLE DESCRIPTORS AND EXAMPLES

SCENE STYLE	MAP			BONDS		CASE EXAMPLES
	Conflict	Vision	Universalism	Unison	Temporal Horizon	
Club-style volunteering	No	No	Yes	Yes	Long	NOYO youth volunteering, some scenes (this study); Boston neighborhood service clubs (Eckstein 2001); men's lodges and women's service clubs of midcentury (Wuthnow 1998); a school parents' volunteer group (Eliasoph 1998); women's service clubs (Kaplan-Daniels 1988)
Social critics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Long	NOYO adult staff meetings, some scenes; some Tea Party local settings (Skocpol and Williamson 2012); Brazilian left-party activist settings (Mische 2008); a local church-based social justice network (Lichterman 2005); a Central America solidarity setting (Munkres 2003); U.S. Christian right women's activist settings (Klatch 1988); French activists HJ housing advocacy coalition, some scenes (Luhtakallio 2010)
Community of identity	Yes	No	No	Yes	Long	NOYO youth projects, some settings an environmental justice coalition, some settings (Beamish and Luebbers 2009); Oakland, Calif., race-based community organizing (Wood 2002); an antitoxics organization, some settings (Lichterman 1996); Chicago-area steel mill associational life, some settings (Kornblum 1972)
Community of interest	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Short	HJ housing advocacy coalition, dominant scene; ACORN community organizing, Mo. and Calif. (Swarts 2008); IAF community organizing in Texas (M. R. Warren 2001); a gay and lesbian coalition, some settings (Lichterman 1999); ACORN community organizing, some settings (Delgado 1986); Chicago union and municipal politics, some settings (Kornblum 1972)

Personalized politics	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Long	Some World Social Forum settings, internationally (Juris 2008); Brazilian church-based democracy activist settings (Mische 2008); U.S. Green movement settings (Lichterman 1996); anti-nuclear activism, varied group settings (Epstein 1991); student new left, some settings (Gitlin 1987); radical pacifists of 1950s (Isserman 1987); Occupy Wall Street settings (Miller 2012); some scenes in activist squatters collectives in Spain (D'Alisa, Demaria, Cattaneo 2013)
Nowtopianism	No	Yes	Yes	No	Long	A left-leaning Catholic charity mission (Allahyari 2000); community gardens, bike repair collectives, etc. (Carlsson and Manning 2010); a bike repair cooperative (Charles 2012); some (other than the personalized) scenes in activist squatters collectives in Spain (D'Alisa, Demaria, Cattaneo 2013)

NOTE.—To make this chart easier to read, we gave each dimension a quick moniker: (1) “Conflict – yes” means participants are highlighting conflict on their maps of the wider world. “Conflict – no” means they are downplaying their conflicts with other organizations and other entities on their implicit maps. (2) “Vision – yes” means “working to coordinate their everyday action to a vision of social transformation.” “Vision – no” means not doing so. (3) “Universalism – yes” means aspiring to make a socially diverse public identify with the problem. “Universalism – no” means trying to construct a distinct community or limited social category that identifies strongly with the problem and casting any others’ allegiances as secondary or distant. (4) “Unison – yes” means participants are expected to cohere as one body, as if singing in unison. “Unison – no” means members are expected to highlight each unique individual’s contributions, as if singing in complex harmony. (5) “Temporal horizon – long” means participants cultivate the expectation that bonds will be relatively long enduring. “Temporal horizon – short” means they expect short-term and easily disconnected bonds. Examples are identified by locale or state, or real organizational name, when the study permits; cases are from the United States unless otherwise specified. For descriptors, yes or no designates where this kind of scene tends to stand on a simple balance, but ethnographically speaking, each dimension is on a spectrum; such terms always trade off ethnographic nuance for empirical generalizability. Further work can determine relative weights of these dimensions. For example, with club-style volunteers, a long temporal horizon is crucial, but the “universalism” dimension is less important; it is less important to know whether or not club members imagine that diverse other people could rally to a volunteer cause like theirs. For now, the distinctions in this table help researchers distinguish several common scene styles from each other.



observed in the same organizations. If this two-step research found ways of mapping congruencies between the online texts' scenes that the computation revealed, and the embodied scenes that ethnography revealed, researchers could make a leap to using big data methods to make inferences about thousands of organizations' styles (Crigler et al. 2014). In short, new developments in computational linguistics and analysis of "big data" offer a third warrant for the notion that scene style data can be aggregated.

Nonetheless, each of these methods of aggregation most likely involves trade-offs between humans' nearly infinite, sometimes fickle, possibly self-reflective ways of recognizing patterns and survey research's or computers' ways of recognizing patterns (though Mohr et al. [2013, p. 677] are confident that the trade-offs with computational approaches will be quite minimal now, given the recent increase in automated text analysis). In any case, we offer each as a warrant for further research on what we would call scene style; all have the same interest of identifying patterns by which people coordinate civic action. We proceed now to show how our indicators of scene style help us see how our own two cases' styles could be found in previous studies. We emphasize, again, that this is not meant to be a list of all possible styles.

#### Scene Styles in the Cases

*Community of interest.*—In case 1, the dominant map in the HJ coordinating committee highlighted conflict about affordable housing. When using this map, participants did not tightly connect campaigns to a socially transformative vision, as when Carol implied that while most participants probably shared antimilitarist ("against the Iraq war") and other agendas, the coalition had "just enough energy" for its housing issue. On this map, a socially diverse public was supposed to identify with the housing issue, not a limited one. Members did not necessarily expect bonds to be long-term but to last until a campaign ended; if benefits diminished, "you can get off here," as one member said. Until such time, though, the coalition expected tight unity, not individualized expression. A study of Industrial Area Foundations (IAF) community organizing in Texas portrayed a similar style, which aimed to build tight unity in each of a series of campaigns for inner-city schools. Participants did not connect their actions to broad social transformation. They hoped to appeal to a broad, interracial public, though the schools initially at issue were predominantly black (Mark R. Warren 2001, pp. 103–10). These orientations suggest a "community of interest" style.

*Community of identity.*—Some members of the HJ coalition shared a map that pictured them with a distinctive social identity—low-income

tenants of color—in conflict with their exploiters. For these activists, affirming and protecting this local community was in tension with engaging a broader public and was also more important than acting in relation to broad visions of social transformation. Good participants were supposed to work in unison for “the community” rather than being wide open to individual expression. Good participants were supposed to bond over the long haul, as when one advocate challenged the notion that she should bracket the community’s objection to redevelopment for the sake of a short-term strategic alliance. In a similar vein, Richard Wood describes some community organizing in Oakland, California, as based on members’ perceptions of themselves as “third-world” people, in conflict with exploitative police. Participants worked to make a distinct social category of people identify with their cause. They acted in hopes of disrupting or resisting white domination but not working toward a broad vision of transformation. They expected good members to commit themselves to long-term action in tight unison (Wood 2002, pp. 113–15, 119–22).

*Social critics.*—Case 2 showed that a few adult NOYO members tried to get youth participants to place their projects on a map that included political conflict and to connect their actions to broader social transformation rather than feeling satisfied with “random acts of kindness,” as one adult put it. When enacting this “social critic” scene, staff wanted youths to appeal to a broad public. In this scene, staff supposed that truly devoted youths would engage themselves in collective-minded, civic action for the long term, not just as individuals doing good deeds, and not just in a single event. Similarly, and showing that the “social critic” style can go with ideologies on all ends of the political spectrum, we find some grassroots Tea Party groups mapping themselves in conflict with big government and other institutions. They work toward social transformation, restoring neglected constitutional principles, as they see it (thus illustrating an important point: just as instituting something new can involve a transformative vision, “restoring” can, too, involve a transformative vision). And they aspire to appeal to a diverse, possibly universal public. Local Tea Party participants hope to bond in unison rather than in a complex harmony of diversity. And they hope for long-term bonds, beyond any single issue (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, pp. 3–18, 83–120).

*Club-style volunteer.*—Case 2 showed that some youth volunteer settings had a club style, of the sort Wuthnow (1998, pp. 31–57) found in interviews and historical accounts: they imagined themselves operating on a nonconflictual map in an effort to do indisputable good; they did not work to connect action with broad social visions; and they imagined engaging a broad, general public. In a club-style scene, participants focused on working in unison, as a group, chiding members who slacked off

on volunteer projects. And they hoped their bonds would endure beyond any current project. In a similar vein, charitable clubs in an Italian neighborhood of Boston focused on projects that they perceived as nonconflictual, suppressing potential conflict rather than exploring antagonisms that some individuals expressed privately. Participants did not try to connect current action to a grander vision of social transformation. They hoped to appeal to a general, if local, public with projects such as collecting Christmas presents for needy children. Their bonds stressed strong group obligation over individual desires or voice, as when a leader said "You will give and not complain!" Expecting long-term bonds, the leader checked up on members to encourage enduring commitment (Eckstein 2001).

#### Other Scene Styles in Recent Literature

Table 2 notes another civic style, called personalized politics, that appears repeatedly in studies of young, urban countercultural groups; some environmental and peace activism; some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activism; some church-based advocacy; and alternative globalization activism: participants work to align their action with broad principles of social transformation. They imagine their efforts on a map that includes conflicts, such as industrialism versus "green values," corporate militarism versus peace, or global capitalism versus decentralized democratic planning. They hope a broad public will identify with their work. Strikingly, they emphasize members' personalized voice and individual efficacy within collective efforts rather than tight group unity. They hope for long-term bonds between "social change agents," who should not plug in and out according to individual convenience.

A second style appears frequently in the literature. Following Chris Carlsson and Francesca Manning (2010), we can call it "nowtopianism." This is often the style for some community gardens, soup kitchens, bike activism, and other kinds of projects that rely on building solidarity through hands-on, sensual action. These are "emergent convivial communities, which are largely grounded in unpaid, practical work" (Carlsson and Manning 2010, p. 933; Charles 2012). By planting the garden and working together, they feel that they are changing relationships already, "being the change they want to see," in a kind of "pre-figurative community" (Epstein 1991). When participants are planning the hands-on activities together, conflict does not loom large on their maps (though in other scenes in these same collectivities, participants may become "social critics" who do highlight conflict); but even when planning hands-on activities, participants work explicitly to connect their action to a long-term vision of social change.

This style can become noncivic when participants plug in on a one-time basis. But when participants engage in it long enough or repeatedly enough to gain some “flexibility” in their own relationships with each other, it becomes civic.

#### Outcomes of Civic Scene Styles: Tentative Evidence

By gathering many qualitative cases,<sup>16</sup> we can see that different civic scene styles contribute to different outcomes. Others have argued (Lichterman 2005; Gross 2009; Reed 2011) that “style” is one mechanism that potentially matters for outcomes of collective action. Some quantitative research substantiates this claim (Terriquez 2011). We see this causal mechanism at work in our two cases also, producing outcomes similar to those found in other studies. In this way, our ethnographic cases contribute to generalizable knowledge about scene style (Lichterman and Reed, in press). Given space constraints, we describe just a few outcomes that researchers, as well as the people they have studied, have considered important. We draw on studies in which we infer that two or more styles were in play, so we can show that a particular style went with a particular outcome, and we give examples suggesting that style works even despite (and sometimes in tension with) actors’ stated goals, and often despite actors’ preferences in other scenes. We offer these tentative summary statements as hypotheses still acquiring evidence, but their logic is sound: writings elsewhere treat the question of how to avoid circular reasoning by not using the same ethnographic evidence both to establish the existence of a style and also to portray its outcomes (Lichterman 2005, pp. 274–79; 2012, p. 22). Future empirical work can specify more precisely how scene style influences outcomes.

*Accessing state resources.*—Research is showing that the “community of identity” style, with its emphasis on the highly distinct grievances of “the community,” makes it difficult for actors to access government money, expertise, or facilities. This can happen even when government agents try to share resources or expertise. In the HJ coalition, this scene style made some housing activists wary of working with supportive municipal leaders, and this significantly weakened the campaign (Lichterman, Esparza, and Weare 2014). Similarly, race-based community organizing works to construct

<sup>16</sup>Some material here comes from existing studies of group styles. We treat them as reasonable indicators of scene style outcomes because the authors often investigated fairly simple if not unitary groups or focused heavily on one decision-making or other prominent scene. They rarely, if ever, distinguished the scene under study from the group’s book-keeping or money-raising scenes, for instance (though see Binder 2007).

a distinct minority “community” that identifies with its concerns. Members’ shared map pits them against powerful others who might otherwise become sometime partners, as they did when HJ operated as a community of interest. Compared with campaigns organized as communities of interest, a campaign that relies primarily on a community of identity style more typically may fail to access resource-sharing and power-sharing arrangements (Wood 2002).<sup>17</sup> When some race- or ethnicity-based organizers have made a concerted effort to access state resources for their constituency, they have turned from an earlier community of identity to a community of interest style, as in a case of Chicago municipal and union politics (Kornblum 1974, pp. 130, 149, 159).

*Achieving diverse membership.*—The personalized style explicitly affirms diverse individuals’ personal worth and bids participants to make a broad public identify with the cause. Yet research repeatedly finds that grassroots environmental, peace, and new left groups with the personalized style end up being largely white and middle-class (Gitlin 1987; Epstein 1991; Lichterman 1995). They work tensely with minority or working-class activists pursuing the same issues with a different style, despite their adopting issues important to people of color and holding “unlearning racism” workshops (Lichterman 1996; Beamish and Luebbbers 2009). Creating personalized bonds usually goes with an individualistic social identity and a relation to words that highly educated, middle-class white people share (Lichterman 1996; Rose 2000). But class or racial discrimination alone do not account for the failure. Style is an important factor itself since people of the same class or race background often know more than one civic style, as our case examples showed.

*Opening a political public sphere.*—Compared with other scene styles, club-style volunteering suppresses actors’ ability to engage in broad-ranging political discussion, even though the same actors may have those discussions in other settings. We hypothesize that the reason is that the club-style volunteer maps induce actors not to imagine conflicts and do not require connecting action to a broader social vision. For example, NOYO-sponsored youth volunteers in the larger study went door-to-door giving out ribbons to wear and signs to put up, to show that they objected to sexual violence, but there was simply no discussion about the possible causes of, or solutions for, such violence beyond wearing ribbons (see also Eliasoph 1998; Poppendieck 1999). When one organizer in a NOYO sub-

<sup>17</sup> The concept of “civic capacity” has been used fruitfully (see Oliver 2001; Briggs 2008) to describe this ability of citizens to form alliances with and influence policy makers. Our perspective reveals patterns of civic action that may facilitate or hamper citizens’ ability to bring this capacity forth, in different ways.

committee said, “It was nice to see there were so many young people out doing things on Positive Youth Day,” another asked only, “Did it have an impact on enthusiasm?” The second adult was the one (described earlier) who had imagined getting youth volunteers to read *The Grapes of Wrath* while working with a union; in that other scene, he had sounded like a social critic. In contrast, the personalized scene style found in other studies can induce broad political discussion among a wide range of people, no matter how lacking in initial political sophistication, not only because the map helps participants see conflict but also because the bonds of this scene depend more heavily on drawing out each member’s self-expression (Lichterman 1996, pp. 97–101; 1999; Mische 2008).

*Success in mobilizing recruits for a political campaign.*—Organizing and maintaining a new political coalition is itself an important outcome, apart from the coalition’s successes or failures. Many studies suggest that compared with other styles, the personalized scene style is less fertile ground for mounting and sustaining collective political action, even when participants say they want political change. Though this style includes conflict on the “map,” these studies suggest that groups that emphasize individual-centered bonds combined with abstract principles have difficulty maintaining a cohesive, goal-oriented campaign (Gitlin 1987; Lichterman 1996, 2012; Wood 1999). In contrast, communities of interest cultivate unison and have a conflict-oriented map that emphasizes specific issues. The record suggests that they are more effective at organizing local political campaigns with concrete goals (Mark R. Warren 2001; Wood 2002; Terriquez, in press). In HJ, it was the participants who acted as a community of interest, not as a community of identity, that first assembled a broad-based campaign for housing policy reform.

#### Outcomes in Organizations with Multiple Explicit Missions: What “Style” Contributes

In case 1 we see a dominant style of collaboration. However, in organizations like those in case 2, there is no dominant scene, but multiple scenes, each possibly dominant, and fast, nimble scene-switching practices—all of which went with the organization’s mixed missions. Several missions were equally central; a few youths came to see themselves as triumphant “community of identity” advocates rather than social service clients, while others learned to switch between civic, club-style volunteering and non-civic, client-like modes of action without settling definitively into either. Very few studies systematically examine outcomes from participation in civic organizations whose missions are so equally competing with one another (but see Gordon 2009). However, a focus on style may clarify the

current literature's focus on the two following questions about such organizations.

*Political activism, government funding, and hybrid organizations.*—When organizations that combine political activism and social service get government funding, does their political activism diminish (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Thunder Hawk 2007)? Feminist social critic-style civic action in battered women's shelters gave way to depoliticized, noncivic social service provision when the shelters got government funding (Rudrappa 2004), but in other social service nonprofits, government funding did not squeeze out political advocacy (Chaves et al. 2004; Marwell 2004; Moseley 2012). The ambiguity is partly an artifact of what different studies categorize as "political advocacy" or "social service." The notion of style helps by making finer distinctions. Recall that a handful of the paid, adult program organizers in case 2 sometimes had a social critic style. Youths were not invited to their discussions on how to connect volunteering with critical, political principles, and adults did not connect the ideas they developed while enacting a social critic scene to ideas that they developed in other NOYO scenes—those that cultivated club-style volunteering or that were about helping clients in a noncivic arena. In addition, participants did "political advocacy" once a year, going to the county board to appeal for money for NOYO organizations, again without mentioning a broader social vision. Without the concept of style, two of NOYO's styles would disappear inside the single term "political advocacy." The finer distinction would illuminate nonprofit housing advocates in Moseley's case, for instance, who started with broad visions of social change and then began competing for government funding. They continued political advocacy, but in a new form, with a new map that mainly included public officials who might fund their projects, not a public that might enact broader social change. Garrow and Hasenfeld (2014) show a similar shift from a style we would call "social critic" to a "community of interest" style: two kinds of "political advocacy," but with very different meanings and likely outcomes.

Chaves et al. (2004) demonstrate that, much to the researchers' surprise, governmental funding does not suppress potential political activity. The authors explicitly put the connection between the two in a "black box" (p. 300). The concept of style may open their box; future studies could ask if government funding promotes a community of interest style instead of one that aims at broad social change. If so, then government funding might set a process in motion that would lead to the organization's expecting to engage in a relatively short-term conflict, fighting for the organization's survival, and focusing less, if at all, on long-term, broad social transformation. If so, style would mediate between government funding and potential longer-term political goals: the "hybrid" organizations do not become "less" political per se, but, as Moseley and Garrow and Hasenfeld



show, their political activism's style possibly changes, from "social critic" to "community of interest."

In this way, our account differs from one in which individual activists in hybrid organizations consciously decide to "sell out" their political critique in exchange for external funding (Gilmore 2007). Collectivities respond to governmental funding with a whole, integrated style of coordinating action, not just single acts. As Swidler (2001) puts it, people rarely consciously string single unrelated acts together, one by one, like beads, but rather move through strings of actions that hang together as wholes. Our account also differs from the account that says that government involvement colonizes or disempowers civic actors (Habermas 1975; Kretzman and McKnight 1993). Government funding does not corner organizations into only one kind of response; different styles of responses are possible.

*Social services provision by volunteers.*—Studies of nonprofit social service agencies often ask whether social service outcomes improve when the "voluntary sector" is involved (e.g., Wuthnow 2004). Answers so far are unambiguous: service is worse when plug-in volunteers (Eliasoph 2011b, pp. 117–45) do it than when the state does it (e.g., Jensen and Phillips 2000; Grootgoed et al. 2013; Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013). In the NOYO, for example, both adult organizers and youths in the after-school homework clubs often said the plug-in adult volunteers were harmful. These adults came for short-term tutoring shifts. They rarely stayed long enough to learn about the kids' learning styles or classes or teachers—not long enough to help but long enough to distract kids. This shows why it is important to distinguish between different forms of volunteering rather than calling them all "civic" and then assuming they have the same outcomes.

Once again, this kind of precision in identifying scene styles could inform future research and policy. When plug-in volunteers, with their short-term and individual-focused commitments, provide face-to-face human services, we should expect the quality of service to plummet, as research has amply documented, whether sponsored by government or nonprofits, or using only unpaid volunteers. In contrast, club-style volunteers as designated in table 2 might indeed be effective for some tasks. Studies of volunteers over the past century show that club-style volunteers with "invisible careers" (Daniels 1988; see also, e.g., Hillman 1960), dedicated to providing care over a long term, diligently working many hours per week, often with long training and frequent consultations with professionals, could be very helpful. Distinguishing between these two things that are both called "volunteering" is urgent in light of programs such as the United Kingdom's "Big Society" or the Dutch "Active Citizenship," both of which ask plug-in volunteers to do what paid social service providers once did—such as helping elderly neighbors with showers and other daily personal care (Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013).

CONCLUSION

Civic action is not a unitary thing. It comes in different styles, with different imaginations, different kinds of solidarity, and different outcomes. Civic actors have to imagine themselves acting on the same basis together. In everyday action, that basis may sometimes be the rights-bearing citizen of a nation, as in the classic understanding of liberal political theory. Yet, they may imagine acting in a community of identity, a community of interest, a “nowtopia,” or something else.

When actors mark off their commonality and make their action “civic,” they implicitly distinguish between civic and noncivic scenes at the same time. Participants imagine the balance between the two in action rather than assuming that the boundaries are preset according to the terms of political theory. The point, to synthesize recent scholarship (Bode 2006; Laville et al. 2007; Enjolras 2009; Evers 2009; Clemens and Guthrie 2011; Eliasoph 2012), is that we need an approach that examines actors’ own ways of balancing and rebalancing between civic, state, and market spheres.

The civic action approach shows how people create the civic sphere, by creating scenes and shifting between them; it helps us “see structure happen” (Lichterman 2002). The actors respond to, reproduce, or challenge their larger society’s historical balance between “market,” “state,” and “civic” arenas: this historical balance is, in important ways, a society’s social contract. The civic action approach offers a way to study ordinary citizens’ understandings of the social contract, in action, and potentially, to compare these understandings cross-nationally. In the United States, people have tended to tip the balance more toward nonstate action when they hope to fix social problems, perhaps as volunteers who “make a difference,” in the common American phrase. Historically, many European societies have tipped the balance more heavily toward state action than the United States does (Esping-Andersen 1990; Shofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001; Clemens and Guthrie 2011).

“The civic” is a product of historical processes, with moving boundaries to which civic actors respond, even as they help create them. As many commentators observe, the global spread of market relationships is refiguring the balance (e.g., Harvey 2005). This refiguring includes new mixes of state, civic, and commercial action, as states outsource or privatize social provision (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Haney 2010).<sup>18</sup> With neoliberal

<sup>18</sup> Our discussion has emphasized governmental-civic mixes, but each of our two cases is a part of larger studies that include civic-commercial hybrids (Eliasoph 2011b, pp. 51–52; Lichterman and Citroni 2010). In the housing advocacy study, there was a restaurant, sponsored by a church-based nonprofit, that served as a community center and “incubator” of entrepreneurial skills for low-income, recent immigrants from Central

scrambling of formerly taken-for-granted institutional boundaries, identifying acts, projects, organizations, or networks as plausibly “civic” becomes only more difficult and more urgent. Following civic action reveals civic actors’ contribution to the making of history’s grand path. Saved from empirical rigidity and myopia, the category of “civic” still has important work to do.

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America. The civic action approach illuminated what a focus on sectoral affiliations alone would confound: The entrepreneur-manager sometimes treated the restaurant as a social cause and made it the headquarters for a task force of city officials and arts professionals dedicated to improving the surrounding neighborhood. This volunteer-style moral uplift sometimes switched suddenly into noncivic, commercial activity, as when the manager goaded task force members to stay and spend money for lunch and tell their friends to patronize the restaurant. In the youth civic engagement cases, there were numerous rummage sales and community dinners. At rummage sales, neighbors would often buy something cheap—a dirty stuffed animal—but pay with a large bill, winking and telling the volunteer at the cash register to keep the change, implying that it was charity. People often donated things that nobody wanted, causing the volunteers more work when they had to dispose of the objects, but nobody wanted to tell donors to stop donating because the interaction was not just a market exchange but also a way of boosting volunteer spirit, and nobody wanted to discourage the well-meaning donors (of books or “ugly beads” that folks at a senior center made by hand for the youth groups to sell, e.g.).

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