Are Homeowners Better Neighbors During Housing Booms? Understanding Civic and Social Engagement by Tenure During the Housing Market Cycle

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Abstract

Research has shown that homeowners' concern with their property values may lead them to have greater civic and neighborhood social engagement than renters. However, it has not been well examined whether changing property values during the housing market cycle affect this purported social benefit of homeownership. Using 2003 to 2013 American Time Use Survey data and Cragg two-part hurdle regression analysis, we assess differences in homeowners' and renters' civic and neighborhood social engagement during the stages of the recent housing market cycle. We find that, holding other characteristics constant, homeowners were more likely than renters to volunteer but spent less time in social activities with neighbors than renters, regardless of the housing market stage. Differences in civic and social engagement by tenure did not vary in consistent or expected ways across the stages of the cycle. These findings reinforce claims that homeownership has civic benefits, but evidence is lacking that homeowners make better neighbors than renters. Our findings also suggest that policies to intervene in the housing market to promote neighborhood cohesion need not vary across the housing market cycle.

Introduction

The United States is emerging from a decade of housing market flux in which most major regions underwent three distinct periods—expansion, recession, and recovery—in residential investment from the mid-2000s through the early 2010s. Increasing housing production and demand defined the expansion period. Falling housing production and demand, and increasing foreclosures and vacancies, characterized the recession period. Declining foreclosures and vacancies and changing property ownership and tenure composition, largely through the disposition of foreclosures, punctuated the recovery period.

These stages offer an opportunity to deepen our understanding of how housing market cycles affect the social benefits of homeownership (Lindblad, Manturuk, and Quercia, 2013; Rohe and Lindblad, 2013). A common rationale for subsidizing homeownership is that it builds strong communities due to homeowners' greater civic and social engagement. Because homeowners are eager to increase their property values and are less transient, they may be more likely than renters to become involved in local affairs and to get to know their neighbors. Existing research largely confirms these suppositions (Blum and Kingston, 1984; Cox, 1982; DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999; Lindblad, Manturuk, and Quercia, 2013; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2010, 2012; McCabe, 2013; Rohe and Basolo, 1997; Rohe and Lindblad, 2013; Rohe and Stegman, 1994; Rohe, Van Zandt, and McCarthy, 2001; Rossi and Weber, 1996; Shlay, 2006). However, these studies overlook the role that changing economic conditions during the housing market cycle may play in these outcomes. It is unknown whether differences between homeowners' and renters' civic and social engagement narrow or widen during the housing market cycle, particularly during recessions when homeowners may experience declines in their property values (Rohe and Lindblad, 2013).

This research helps to fill this gap by using pooled data on civic and social engagement in U.S. metropolitan areas from the 2003 to 2013 American Time Use Surveys (ATUS). We use a two-stage Cragg hurdle analysis to test whether homeowners have greater civic and social engagement than renters across the housing market cycle and then specifically during expansion periods, when property values are rising or stable, during recessions, when property values are falling, and during recovery periods, when the market returns to equilibrium. Examining this question sheds light on whether a social justification exists for countercyclical or even procyclical policies to intervene in the housing market to promote homeownership. Might policies to shore up housing markets in times of distress help to maintain and enhance community social fabric?

In what follows, we first discuss the reasons why homeowners may have greater civic and social engagement than renters and synthesize the findings of existing research testing these claims. Then we discuss theory on how changing economic conditions during the housing market cycle may alter homeowners' engagement relative to renters. This discussion is followed by a description of the data and methodology and then a summary of the results. We conclude by highlighting key takeaways from the study and implications for further research and policymaking.

The Link Between Tenure and Civic and Social Engagement

The social benefits of homeownership have long been the focus of debate (Dietz and Haurin, 2003; Rohe and Lindblad, 2013; Rohe, Van Zandt, and McCarthy, 2001; Rossi and Weber, 1996; Shlay, 2006). One key purported social benefit of homeownership is heightened civic and social engagement, which together may lead to stronger communities that are better able to make improvements and respond to threats.

Civic Engagement

We define *civic engagement* as formal, goal-oriented participation in neighborhood, charitable, church, or government organizations or processes, such as helping out at a church soup kitchen or attending a public meeting on a development proposal. Research, most notably from Putnam (2001), has documented a dramatic drop in American civic engagement during the past decades. Putnam attributed some of the cause for this decline to suburbanization and sprawl, claiming there is a "'sprawl civic penalty' of roughly 20 percent on most measures of community involvement" and that "the direct civic penalty associated with sprawl probably accounts for something less than one-tenth of the total disengagement" (Putnam, 2001: 215). Putnam reasons that sprawl and suburbanization have eroded community life for several reasons, such as greater dependence on socially isolating automobile travel, the social homogeneity of suburban enclaves, and a lack of spatial bounding as suburbanites live, work, and shop in far-flung locations.

American suburbanization, particularly in the post-World War II era, has gone hand in hand with rising homeownership. Glaeser (2011) argued that policies that favor homeownership contribute to sprawl, because the owner-occupied housing market consists overwhelmingly of detached single-family units, whereas rentals strongly tend to be in multifamily, denser structures. Thus, assuming Putnam is correct (see Morris and Pfeiffer [2017] for a critique), suburbanization and poorer community life may be linked indirectly.

However, the literature strongly suggests that the more direct effects of homeownership on individuals' social and community lives dwarf any such sprawl civic penalty. A strong consensus exists that homeownership is positively linked to diverse measures of civic engagement (Cox, 1982; DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2012; McCabe, 2013; Rohe and Basolo, 1997; Rohe and Stegman, 1994; Rossi and Weber, 1996). The civic behavior that is most positively linked to homeownership is belonging to local or neighborhood organizations (Cox, 1982; DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2012; McCabe, 2013; Rohe and Basolo, 1997; Rohe and Stegman, 1994; Rossi and Weber, 1996). Other civic behaviors that are positively associated with homeownership include attending meetings (Cox, 1982; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Rohe and Basolo, 1997); organizing or signing petitions and communicating with public officials (Cox, 1982; Lyons and Lowery, 1989); voting (DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999; McCabe, 2013); working to solve community problems; and attending church (DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999). However, some counter evidence suggests that homeownership is negatively linked to working to solve community problems and voting (Kingston and Fries, 1994), and some research has found that

homeownership is not linked to being involved in religious organizations (Kingston and Fries, 1994; Rohe and Basolo, 1997; Rossi and Weber, 1996) or other local or neighborhood organizations (Blum and Kingston, 1984; Rohe and Stegman, 1994).

Social Engagement

We define *social engagement* as informal social interactions that homeowners have with neighbors, such as talking across the fence, going for a walk together, and taking care of one another. These interactions may lead neighbors eventually to develop trust, shared norms, and social capital—the ability to rely on their relationships to access information or resources (Briggs, 1997; Coleman, 1988). A neighborhood's collective efficacy, or its ability to respond to threats or improve conditions such as rescuing neighbors from flooded homes after a hurricane or lobbying against threats to neighborhood character, derives in large part from residents' social capital (DeFilippis, 2001; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997). It is important to examine social engagement in tandem with civic engagement to fully assess whether homeownership leads to stronger communities.

Evidence exists for a positive association between homeownership and social engagement (Blum and Kingston, 1984; Lindblad, Manturuk, and Quercia, 2013; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2010; Rohe and Basolo, 1997), but some studies question this link (Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2012; Rohe and Basolo, 1997; Rohe and Stegman, 1994; Rossi and Weber, 1996). Measures of collective efficacy, such as talking to neighbors about problems or people's perceptions of neighbors' ability to solve problems, are most positively linked to homeownership (Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Lindblad, Manturuk, and Quercia, 2013; Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2010). Homeownership also is associated with having a higher proportion of one's social network comprised of neighbors (Blum and Kingston, 1984) and growth in social ties with neighbors over time (Rohe and Basolo, 1997). Conversely, homeowners tend to have less intense interactions with their neighbors. For example, they may know fewer people on their block by name or may consider fewer neighbors close friends (Rohe and Basolo, 1997; Rohe and Stegman, 1994). They may also have less frequent conversations with neighbors (Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia, 2012) and spend fewer evenings with neighbors (Rossi and Weber, 1996). Thus, although existing research generally has reached a consensus that an association exists between ownership and formal civic engagement, evidence on social engagement and ownership is decidedly mixed.

How Concern for Property Values and Residential Stability May Promote Civic and Social Engagement

Homeowners' (1) concern for their property values and (2) greater residential stability are thought to drive their purported greater civic and social engagement. Homeowners differ from renters in that their homes have exchange (monetary) value in addition to use value (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Home equity is the largest repository of wealth for American households, accounting for about two-thirds of middle-income households' wealth in 2010 (Mischel et al., 2012). Property values affect home equity and are influenced by local conditions, such as the strength of the economy, the quality of the schools, the presence of crime, and nearby amenities. Thus, homeowners have an

incentive to get involved in civic activities that help protect and bolster their property values, such as volunteering for a neighborhood beautification committee, attending a community long-range planning meeting, or forming a committee to protest the construction of a nearby homeless shelter (Blum and Kingston, 1984; Fischel, 2001). They also have a financial incentive to get to know their neighbors to forge shared social norms as a way of enhancing their collective efficacy (Dietz and Haurin, 2003; Lindblad, Manturuk, and Quercia, 2013; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997).

Another way that homeowners differ from renters is that their moving costs are much higher. Although renters have to cover the costs of searching for an alternative place to live, moving possessions, and potentially paying a security deposit and other fees, homeowners incur these costs plus the additional cost in time, effort, and money of selling their homes. As a result, homeowners stay in place longer than renters. For instance, from 2005 to 2010, about two-thirds of renters moved compared with less than one-fourth of homeowners (Ihrke and Faber, 2012). According to the National Association of Home Builders, typical home purchasers will remain in their home for 13 years (Emrath, 2013). Staying in place for longer has three implications for civic and social engagement. First, because homeowners cannot easily change their neighborhood, they have the incentive to become involved in community activities to maintain and improve their neighborhoods as a means of preserving and enhancing their quality of life (Cox, 1982). Second, staying in place for longer may lead homeowners to become more attached to the use values of their communities (Logan and Molotch, 1987), which include amenities and services, such as stores, parks, and transit, and informal networks for support and social control. As both a cause and an effect of these amenities, homeowners may have greater self-identification with their community. They may be more likely to form relationships with neighbors and get involved in community affairs to maintain residential stability, community conditions, and sense of self. Finally, staying in a place longer allows more time for social ties to flourish, because one has a better chance of getting to know one's neighborhood and neighbors.

The Role of the Housing Market Cycle

The recent U.S. housing market cycle, spanning from the mid-2000s through the early 2010s, provides a rare opportunity to explore the role that changing economic conditions and residential investment may play in shaping the social benefits of homeownership, particularly because the fluctuations in home prices and foreclosure rates across this recent cycle were so dramatic. Real estate economists typically define the housing market cycle as taking place in four stages, although their drivers and components are still debated (Mueller, 1995). The first stage is a recovery stage characterized by declining housing vacancies and stagnant housing construction. The second stage is an expansion stage characterized by continued declines in housing vacancies and increases in housing construction. The third and fourth stages are defined by hypersupply and eventual recession, with increasing housing vacancies and continued new housing construction in the short term—the third stage—but declines in new housing construction and increases in vacancies in the long term—the fourth stage (Mueller, 1995).

Stages of the Recent Housing Market Cycle

During the recent housing market cycle, the expansion and hypersupply stages—which we amalgamate to call the expansion stage—spanned from 2004 to 2006 in most U.S. regional housing markets, although in some places the stage began as early as 2003 and extended to as late as 2007. Falling interest rates and new mortgage products sparked rapid investment in housing. The median sales price of existing single-family homes increased from about $190,000 to $220,000 from 2004 to 2006 (JCHS, 2007). The percentage of homes that were owner-occupied reached an all-time high of 69 percent in 2004 (JCHS, 2007).

The economic recession officially spanned from late 2007 to mid-2009. However, in some regional markets, the housing downturn lasted through 2010 and 2011. This period was initially defined by rising home prices, then by growing unemployment, declining income and housing demand, and resetting mortgage loan interest rates. These conditions culminated in a recession and caused widespread disinvestment in housing, with high rates of foreclosures. About $2.5 trillion in home equity was lost in 2007 and 2008 (JCHS, 2009), and nearly 7 million households were displaced by 2014 (CoreLogic, 2014). By 2009, about 11.3 million homeowners owed more on their mortgages than what their homes were worth (*under water*); about 5 million homeowners had loan-to-value ratios that exceeded 125 percent (JCHS, 2011).

During the recovery period from 2010 to 2013, a mix of lower home prices and stringent mortgage lending increased the role of investors in neighborhood housing markets. In 2004, companies bought less than 1 percent of single-family homes for sale. By 2012, this share had increased to more than 6 percent, with rates reaching more than 10 percent in Sun Belt metropolitan areas such as Phoenix and Las Vegas (Molloy and Zarutskie, 2013). These actors ranged from local mom-and-pop operations, such as individuals or family trusts, to out-of-state Wall Street corporations, such as private equity firms, hedge funds, and real estate investment trusts. Investor activity helped to bolster property values. The number of the 100 largest metropolitan areas nationwide posting annual increases in home prices grew from 73 in 2012 to 97 in 2013 (JCHS, 2013). The number of underwater homeowners declined from 11.3 million in 2009 to 6.5 million by the end of 2013 (JCHS, 2011, 2013). Home prices in many metropolitan areas, however, remained below their mid-2000 peak (JCHS, 2013).

Expectations on Civic and Social Engagement by Tenure During the Housing Market Cycle

Four potential hypotheses exist about how civic and social engagement may vary by tenure during the housing market cycle.

1. Differences in engagement may fluctuate, assuming that concern for property values is driving any difference between homeowners' and renters' civic and social engagement. This fluctuation is because the value of the assets homeowners seek to protect vary during the cycle, so concern for protecting their value also varies.

2. Differences in engagement may remain constant if the driver behind differences between homeowners' and renters' civic and social engagement is homeowners' greater residential stability, as stability does not vary as much as property values during the housing market cycle.

3. Differences in engagement may not be present if, contrary to prior research, no actual differences exist in homeowners' and renters' commitment to community despite homeowners' concern with property values or differences in residential stability.

4. Differences in engagement may manifest and fluctuate in unpredicted ways due to an unknown factor affecting civic and social engagement by tenure.

We explore these hypotheses in further detail in the following sections and summarize their expected patterns in exhibit 1.

Our preferred hypothesis is hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 assumes that homeowners may be more civically and socially engaged than renters because they seek to protect their property values by improving neighborhood quality through civic and social engagement. Property values fluctuate during the housing market cycle, as previously discussed. If homeowners' concern with their property values contributes to their civic and social engagement, then the intensity of homeowners' civic and social engagement also should vary during the housing market cycle as prices vary. Renters are not directly invested in their properties, so their civic and social engagement should occur more independently of property value dynamics. Thus, if homeowners' civic and social engagement fluctuates, but renters' engagement remains relatively constant, differences in civic and social engagement by tenure should vary during the housing market cycle.

We have two subhypotheses on how these dynamics might manifest. Our first, and preferred, prediction (hypothesis 1a) is derived from rational utility maximization behavior.[1] This theory suggests first that homeowners should be more engaged in protecting the value of their properties,

Exhibit 1

Hypotheses on Civic and Social Engagement by Tenure During the Housing Market Cycle

Hypothesis	Predicted Effect of Homeownership on Civic and Social Engagement				Influencing Factor
	Constant Effect Across the Housing Market Cycle	Additional Effects Within the Stages of the Housing Market Cycle			
		Expansion	Recession	Recovery	
1a	Positive	Positive	Negative or zero	Less negative or zero	Change in property values
1b	Positive	Negative or zero	Positive	Less positive or zero	Change in property values
2	Positive	Zero	Zero	Zero	Lower residential mobility
3	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero	None
4	Negative	Positive, negative, or zero	Positive, negative, or zero	Positive, negative, or zero	Unknown

[1] For an intellectual history and critique of this fundamental tenet of neoclassical economics, see McCormick (1997).

because they have a greater financial stake in them than renters. Prior research generally finds that homeowners maintain their dwellings better than renters (Dietz and Haurin, 2003; Galster, 1983; Gatzlaff, Green, and Ling, 1998); the most obvious reason is that homeowners reap the financial benefits of home maintenance and improvements when their properties sell, whereas renters do not. If the protection of asset values does indeed drive homeowner concern for the dwelling and its environs, the intensity of these concerns should vary as the value of the asset fluctuates.

High and rising, or at least stable, property values during the expansion stage of the recent housing market cycle should have led homeowners to feel confident in their investment and may have given them more incentive to preserve and further grow that investment by participating in local affairs and getting to know their neighbors. In short, one should work harder to protect something that is more valuable. Conversely, falling or depressed property values during the recession and recovery periods should have led homeowners to feel less incentive to protect their investment as it lost, or failed to fully regain, value. Thus, according to our preferred hypothesis, homeowners should have exhibited greater levels of civic and social engagement than renters during the expansion stage of the cycle, when property values were high and rising or stable, and similar or lower levels of engagement during the recession and recovery stages of the cycle, when property values were falling or depressed (see exhibit 1).

A second possible prediction (hypothesis 1b) is derived from the theory of satisficing behavior, which suggests that individuals may have a minimum outcome they seek to achieve but will cease efforts to maximize their returns when that minimum acceptable outcome is attained (Simon, 1955, 1956). In our case, homeowners may seek to improve their property values if they fall below a certain minimum threshold but lose interest in continuing to improve their property values once they rise above this threshold. Falling or depressed property values during the recession and recovery stages of the recent housing market cycle may have led homeowners to become more civically and socially engaged in an effort to curtail further declines and restore prior levels. However, high and rising or stable property values during the expansion period may have restored homeowners' confidence about their property values and led them to lose interest in civic and social engagement. If this hypothesis has merit, homeowners should have exhibited greater levels of civic and social engagement than renters during the recession and recovery stages of the cycle, when property values were falling or depressed, and similar or lower levels of engagement during the expansion stage of the cycle, when property values were high and rising or stable (see exhibit 1).

The second reason (hypothesis 2) why homeowners may be more civically and socially engaged than renters is that they tend to stay in place longer, which may lead them to become more attached to their communities and want to improve them through civic and social engagement. Homeowners' residential mobility is arguably less strongly linked to the housing market cycle than their concern for their property values. Homeowners historically have had lower mobility than renters, even during the recent recession (Bucks and Bricker, 2015). Thus, if homeowners' greater residential stability contributes to their civic and social engagement, some differences in civic and social engagement by tenure should remain constant during the housing market cycle. Thus, we would expect that homeowners on balance would always exhibit greater civic and social engagement than renters, regardless of the stage of the housing market cycle, and that this difference should not change much across the cycle (see hypothesis 2 in exhibit 1).

Another possibility (hypothesis 3) is that neither property values nor residential mobility affect homeowners' civic and social engagement. There may be no difference in civic and social engagement by tenure; strong evidence of the link between civic engagement and tenure in the existing literature makes this scenario unlikely, although it is possible that homeowners are self-selected from people who have a preexisting tendency to be civically involved, and this trait may not vary across the housing market cycle. Moreover, the ambiguous evidence for links between ownership and neighborhood social engagement suggest that no difference by tenure in terms of social engagement may be more plausible. In any event, in these cases, we would expect no difference in civic and social engagement by tenure during the housing market cycle (see hypothesis 3 in exhibit 1).

A final possibility (hypothesis 4) is that an unknown factor may lead homeowners to have less civic and social engagement than renters across the stages of the housing market cycle. Homeownership may have a positive, negative, or statistically insignificant varying effect on engagement during the housing market stages depending on what this unknown factor is. Hypothesis 4 is an exploratory hypothesis, as no strong theoretical basis currently exists for another contributing factor to differences in civic and social engagement by tenure.

Thus, the relationship between differences in civic and social engagement by tenure and the housing market cycle is potentially complex, with countervailing tendencies depending on which causal factors (financial incentives versus residential stability) are paramount in causing homeowners' observed high levels of civic and social engagement and which principle of behavioral economics (rational utility maximization versus satisficing) guides homeowners' decisionmaking. Nevertheless, we expected to find that homeowners had greater civic and social engagement than renters during the expansion stage of the cycle and lower engagement during the recession and recovery stages of the cycle due to owners' incentive to protect their monetary investment through rational utility maximization behavior, which would lead to more efforts to protect that investment when it is more valuable.

Data and Methods

We tested our preferred hypothesis against the four competing hypotheses using pooled data from the 2003 to 2013 ATUS (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek, 2013). The ATUS provides detailed, micro-level information on how a representative sample of noninstitutionalized people ages 15 and older living in the United States spend their time. The ATUS selects its respondents from the pool of people who have completed the Census Bureau's and Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The ATUS selects a stratified sample from this group (stratifying by state of residence, race and ethnicity, and household structure). Of those contacted by the CPS, 90 percent participate in that survey, an extremely high response rate. In turn, about 50 percent of those CPS respondents agree to participate in the ATUS, yielding an aggregate response rate of roughly 45 percent; this response rate is quite high by the standards of survey research, suggesting limited problems due to response bias. The valid sample size per year is approximately 13,500 individuals; thus, in our models, we observe a very large sample of more than 133,633 individuals.[2]

[2] Due to missing data, 10 percent of the observations were excluded.

The ATUS is primarily conducted by telephone, but special efforts are made to reach those who are impossible to contact by phone (about 5 percent of the sample). Surveys are conducted in English and Spanish. The ATUS generates sampling weights to reflect the fact that some groups (for example, those reporting weekend days) are oversampled.

Professional interviewers, who guide respondents in reconstructing the day prior to the interview, gather the ATUS data. The use of trained interviewers to code the activities greatly reduces possible error. Interviewers code where each activity took place (with 26 separate codes for places and travel modes), the times the activity took place, and with whom the activity was conducted (broken down into 24 types of companion). Our research particularly makes use of the "neighbors, acquaintances" category, which best reveals respondents' level of community connectedness. The interviewers also assign each activity to one of more than 460 activity types, providing a very fine-grained look at time-use patterns. These categories cover a range of civic and social activities that are underrepresented in existing research on the social benefits of homeownership. Civic activities include attending government hearings and sessions and meeting with political representatives, whereas volunteering activities include undertaking unpaid work for a formal institution, such as church or charity. The rest of the activity categories are self-explanatory. The ATUS collects reasonably rich demographic data, including variables commonly used in social science model specifications (age, race and ethnicity, sex, income, employment status, health, and so on). Also collected is housing tenure, one of our variables of interest.

Examining civic and social engagement with the ATUS data has several limitations. The first relates to variable construction. Our measures of social activities performed with neighbors include activities undertaken with acquaintances, because the ATUS combines neighbors and acquaintances together in one category. Moreover, the ATUS includes a separate category, "friends," which we exclude from our measure. The respondent determines whether a companion is categorized as a "neighbor, acquaintance" or a "friend." Thus, activities undertaken with nonneighbor acquaintances, or especially friendly neighbors, may not be included in the analysis. These factors should not introduce systemic bias into our results unless patterns of socialization with neighbors and acquaintances or the predisposition to label people as friends or neighbors and acquaintances vary based on tenure or the stage of the housing market cycle.

A second limitation relates to the fact that we are observing only a single day in the lives of participants. Obviously, many respondents may have had atypical days on the study day. However, in a sample as large as ours, it can be expected that this noise will cancel out. The size of the sample also means that we are able to capture a reasonable number of instances of participation in rare activities. However, some of the activities that we planned to observe are excluded from the following analysis, simply because they are so rare. These rare activities were instances of socially engaging with neighbors while watching sports, providing care, attending arts or entertainment events, participating in school extracurricular activities, and attending volunteering meetings.

We classified respondents as either homeowners, meaning they lived in an owner-occupied household, or renters, meaning they did not live in an owner-occupied household. Homeowners were 73 percent of our sample, which is slightly higher than the national homeownership rate during the

study period (about 65 to 69 percent; Schwartz, 2015). We accounted for the stage of the housing market cycle during which the respondent was interviewed by defining 2003 to 2006 as the expansion stage, 2007 to 2009 as the recession stage,[3] and 2010 to 2013 as the recovery stage.

We used a logit model to determine the demographic, temporal, and geographic characteristics associated with being a homeowner. Homeownership was more common among respondents who were interviewed prior to the recession; older; married and living with their spouse; a parent of children under 18; non-Hispanic White; born in the United States; higher income; employed; and living in the Midwest or South. These associations were all as expected. These estimates are not reported in the exhibits in order to conserve space but are available on request.

We assessed civic and social engagement by tenure during the housing market cycle using descriptive statistics and a two-stage Cragg hurdle model (Cragg, 1971). The Cragg model is useful in time-use research, primarily because it copes with the censoring of activity times at zero (most respondents do not participate in most activities on any given day) and because the model assumes that separate psychological processes determine, first, whether an individual decides to participate in an activity, and then second, how long he or she participates in the activity conditional on having decided to undertake it. For example, it is reasonable to assume that a person who attends community meetings frequently does not necessarily spend a longer period of time at those meetings than a person who attends them infrequently. This feature makes the Cragg technique superior to other models used for dealing with censored data, such as forms of tobit regression.

The Cragg method involves the calculation of two separate models. First, a probit model is used to identify the factors that help determine whether respondents participate in a particular activity on any given day; these factors include the demographic control variables and the independent variables of interest in this study (homeownership and stage of the housing market cycle). Second, a truncated linear or exponential model is used to determine the factors that contribute to activity duration for those who engaged in the activity. We use exponential models in this research, because nearly all time uses are positively skewed for those who undertook them. Most people participate in the activities for relatively short periods of time, whereas a small number of people participate for long amounts of time, yielding a long tail to the right for the distribution.

Separate coefficients and *t*-statistics are generated for each part of the model. Because the coefficients are difficult to interpret, we generate predictions for the probability of engaging in the activity and the conditional duration of activity participation (activity time, provided the activity is engaged in) for homeowners and renters in all three time periods, holding the demographic control variables at their means. Further, we amalgamate these outcomes to produce predicted unconditional activity times, or the average amount of time per day homeowners and renters in all three periods are predicted to spend on our civic and social activities.

As has been noted, the main variables of interest in the models are whether or not a respondent was a homeowner and whether or not a respondent was interviewed in the expansion, recession, or recovery period. We interacted tenure with the stage of the housing market cycle to assess how

[3] This period, which coincides with the official duration of the recession (December 2007 through June 2009) as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research, is commonly used to study the effects of the recession on neighborhoods, housing, and social life, because it allows for geographic variability in timing of the recession.

the differential effect of homeownership varied during the housing market cycle. We compared these effects with our preferred hypothesis and four competing hypotheses to determine which hypothesis best fits the pattern from our results.

Results

In this section, we evaluate the results to determine whether they favor our preferred hypothesis—that homeowners have lower levels of engagement than renters during the recession stage of the cycle, when property values are falling. First, we use *t*-tests of differences in proportions and means to explore changes in respondents' civic and social engagement during the housing market cycle, regardless of tenure. Then, we assess results from the Cragg models to determine whether being a homeowner has a differential effect on the likelihood and extent of civic and social engagement during the stages of the housing market cycle.

Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement During the Housing Market Cycle

Civic and neighborhood social engagement was not common among the respondents during the stages of the housing market cycle (exhibit 2). Volunteering was the most commonly reported activity of the civic engagement variables. About 6 to 7 percent of the respondents volunteered on the day prior to their interview across the stages, typically for about 2 hours. Respondents' unconditional average time spent volunteering on a given day, including participants and nonparticipants in the activity, was between 8 and 9 minutes. Less than 0.5 percent of the respondents engaged in civic activities, typically for about an hour, or an unconditional average of about 0.2 minutes per day. About 4 to 5 percent of the respondents participated in social activities with their neighbors (110 conditional minutes and 4 to 7 unconditional minutes spent). The most common type of social activity was informal socializing with neighbors (2 to 3 percent of the respondents participating, an average of 2 to 3 unconditional minutes spent).

There were modest differences in respondents' civic and social engagement during the stages of the housing market cycle. Asterisks in exhibit 2 denote when the likelihood or average minutes of engagement in one stage was statistically different enough from the other two stages at the 5-percent level or higher. Respondents were more likely to volunteer during the recession stage. About 7 percent of respondents interviewed during the recession stage volunteered on the previous day compared with about 6 percent of respondents interviewed during the expansion and recovery stages. Respondents spent an average of 9 unconditional minutes volunteering during the recession stage compared with 8 unconditional minutes during the expansion and recovery stages. Respondents also were more likely to participate in social activities with neighbors and spent more time on these activities during the recovery stage. About 5 percent of respondents interviewed during the recovery stage participated in social activities with neighbors on the previous day compared with about 4 percent of respondents interviewed during the expansion and recession stages. Furthermore, participants spent more time on social activities with neighbors during the recovery stage than the expansion or recession stages (126 conditional and 7 unconditional minutes spent compared with 105 conditional and 4 unconditional minutes spent respectively). Most of the disaggregated social activities with neighbors were more intensively engaged in during the recovery stage (eating and drinking, playing sports, attending religious activities, volunteering, socializing, and traveling).

Exhibit 2

Differences in Participants' Average Daily Likelihood and Minutes of Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement During the Housing Market Cycle

Types of Engagement	Expansion			Recession			Recovery		
	Percent Engaging	Average Minutes for Participants	Average Total Minutes	Percent Engaging	Average Minutes for Participants	Average Total Minutes	Percent Engaging	Average Minutes for Participants	Average Total Minutes
Civic activities with anyone	0.2	71.5	0.2	0.2	57.1	0.1	0.2	70.1	0.1
	(0.0)	(22.1)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(17.8)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(20.2)	(0.0)
Volunteering activities with anyone	6.6	126.1*	8.4	7.1**	131.6	9.3*	6.1**	137.4*	8.4
	(0.1)	(2.7)	(0.2)	(0.2)	(3.6)	(0.3)	(0.1)	(3.2)	(0.3)
Social activities with neighbors (sum of time spent on activities below)	3.9**	105.5**	4.1**	3.9**	105.1**	4.1**	5.2**	125.9**	6.6**
	(0.1)	(3.1)	(0.2)	(0.1)	(3.9)	(0.2)	(0.1)	(3.1)	(0.2)
Eating and drinking	0.7**	61.4	0.5*	0.6**	54.4	0.4**	1.1**	62.9	0.7**
	(0.0)	(3.7)	(0.0)	(0.1)	(4.0)	(0.0)	(0.1)	(3.7)	(0.1)
Playing sports	0.4**	119.3	0.4*	0.4*	105.7	0.4*	0.6**	110.3	0.7**
	(0.0)	(11.3)	(0.1)	(0.0)	(11.6)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(6.6)	(0.1)
Shopping	0.2	53.2	0.1	0.2	54.9	0.1	0.2*	43.8	0.1
	(0.0)	(6.9)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(18.1)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(8.4)	(0.0)
Attending religious events	0.3**	114.4	0.3**	0.2**	108.8	0.3**	0.6**	125.4	0.7**
	(0.0)	(9.4)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(7.4)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(7.4)	(0.1)
Volunteering	0.4**	125.7	0.5**	0.5	141.8	0.8	0.7**	136.2	0.9**
	(0.0)	(9.4)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(13.1)	(0.1)	(0.0)	(8.2)	(0.1)
Socializing	2.4	82.5**	2.0**	2.2**	80.9**	1.8**	2.8**	103.1**	2.9**
	(0.1)	(3.5)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(4.4)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(3.5)	(0.1)
Travel	0.6**	43.4	0.3	0.7	38.3	0.3	0.9**	42.8	0.4**
	(0.0)	(4.4)	(0.0)	(0.1)	(5.6)	(0.0)	(0.1)	(5.3)	(0.0)

** $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.*

Notes: n = 133,633. Survey sampling design and weights accounted for. Standard errors in parentheses. Asterisks denote when the likelihood or average minutes of engagement in one stage is statistically different enough from the other two stages at the 5-percent level or higher.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek (2013); ATUS-X Extract Builder

Effects by Tenure During the Housing Market Cycle

We next conducted the two-stage Cragg hurdle regression analysis to examine whether being a homeowner has an effect on the likelihood and duration of civic and social engagement during the housing market cycle, controlling for other factors. Statistically significant results are shaded in light gray (see exhibits 3 and 4). Estimates for controls included in the models are suppressed but listed on bottoms of exhibits 3 through 7. These estimates are available on request.

Exhibit 3

Effect of Being a Homeowner on Participants' Average Daily Likelihood of Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement During the Housing Market Cycle

Types of Engagement	Effect of Being a Homeowner on Likelihood of Engaging in Activity	Interaction Effect Model (Homeownership Separately Interacted With Recession and Recovery)			Best Fit Hypothesis (Refer to Exhibit 1)
		Effect of Being a Homeowner on Likelihood of Engaging in Activity	Additional Effect of Being a Homeowner During the Recession Period Relative to the Expansion Period	Additional Effect of Being a Homeowner During the Recovery Period Relative to the Expansion Period	
Civic activities with anyone	0.044	0.118	– 0.123	– 0.096	3
	(0.073)	(0.113)	(0.157)	(0.150)	
Volunteering activities with anyone	0.104**	0.124**	– 0.035	– 0.028	2
	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.049)	(0.042)	
Social activities with neighbors (sum of time spent on activities below)	0.013	0.006	0.061	– 0.014	3
	(0.021)	(0.032)	(0.047)	(0.041)	
Eating and drinking	– 0.035	0.015	0.070	– 0.120	3
	(0.036)	(0.058)	(0.084)	(0.076)	
Playing sports	– 0.004	– 0.074	0.185	0.063	3
	(0.051)	(0.072)	(0.120)	(0.096)	
Shopping	– 0.060	– 0.075	0.129	– 0.020	3
	(0.055)	(0.099)	(0.140)	(0.138)	
Attending religious events	0.090*	0.219**	0.008	– 0.205*	2
	(0.041)	(0.071)	(0.103)	(0.098)	
Volunteering	0.032	0.039	0.008	– 0.017	3
	(0.053)	(0.091)	(0.132)	(0.115)	
Socializing	– 0.002	0.017	0.020	– 0.049	3
	(0.025)	(0.036)	(0.053)	(0.048)	
Travel	– 0.072*	– 0.071	0.064	– 0.032	4
	(0.035)	(0.057)	(0.089)	(0.074)	

** p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01.*

Notes: n = 133,633. Survey sampling design and weights accounted for. Standard errors in parentheses. Demographic, socioeconomic, temporal, and geographic characteristics associated with homeownership controlled but estimates suppressed. Controls included stage of housing market cycle (expansion stage omitted), age, sex, household income (adjusted by household size), education, race and ethnicity, nativity status, marital status, number of children, employment status, geographic type (urban/rural), and region.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek (2013); ATUS-X Extract Builder

Exhibit 4

Effect of Being a Homeowner on Participants' Conditional Average Daily Minutes of Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement During the Housing Market Cycle

Types of Engagement	Effect of Being a Homeowner on Minutes Spent on Activity	Interaction Effect Model (Homeownership Separately Interacted With Recession and Recovery)			Best Fit Hypothesis (Refer to Exhibit 1)
		Effect of Being a Homeowner on Minutes Spent on Activity	Additional Effect of Being a Homeowner During the Recession Period Relative to the Expansion Period	Additional Effect of Being a Homeowner During the Recovery Period Relative to the Expansion Period	
Civic activities with anyone	– 0.600*	– 1.318**	1.143*	0.935	4
	(0.245)	(0.402)	(0.567)	(0.495)	
Volunteering activities with anyone	– 0.058	– 0.052	0.009	– 0.019	3
	(0.048)	(0.065)	(0.112)	(0.089)	
Social activities with neighbors (sum of time spent on activities below)	– 0.173**	– 0.189**	0.009	0.028	4
	(0.048)	(0.072)	(0.112)	(0.093)	
Eating and drinking	– 0.191**	– 0.173	– 0.054	– 0.014	4
	(0.063)	(0.131)	(0.168)	(0.153)	
Playing sports	– 0.031	0.148	– 0.088	– 0.284	3
	(0.088)	(0.145)	(0.217)	(0.171)	
Shopping	0.014	0.347	– 1.093*	– 0.237	3
	(0.204)	(0.323)	(0.435)	(0.387)	
Attending religious events	0.020	– 0.177	0.240	0.241	3
	(0.098)	(0.170)	(0.250)	(0.183)	
Volunteering	– 0.313*	0.012	– 0.509	– 0.373	4
	(0.127)	(0.185)	(0.308)	(0.209)	
Socializing	– 0.176**	– 0.291**	0.090	0.199	4
	(0.057)	(0.089)	(0.133)	(0.116)	
Travel	– 0.002	0.090	– 0.110	– 0.129	3
	(0.123)	(0.170)	(0.222)	(0.207)	

** $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.*

Notes: n = 133,633. Survey sampling design and weights accounted for. Standard errors in parentheses. Demographic, socioeconomic, temporal, and geographic characteristics associated with homeownership controlled but estimates suppressed. Controls included stage of housing market cycle (expansion stage omitted), age, sex, household income (adjusted by household size), education, race and ethnicity, nativity status, marital status, number of children, employment status, geographic type (urban/rural), and region.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek (2013); ATUS-X Extract Builder

Two observations are in order. First, homeownership was in most cases not significantly associated with propensities to engage in civic and social activities after controlling for factors associated with being a homeowner. Homeownership was, however, significantly associated with a higher propensity to volunteer (see exhibit 3). The typical homeowner had a 5- to 6-percent chance of reporting volunteering on the previous day during the stages of the housing market cycle compared with a 4- to 5-percent chance for the typical renter (predictions generated using marginal effects at the means of the control variables; see exhibit 5). Although homeowners spent less time volunteering,

Exhibit 5

Predicted Daily Likelihood of Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement for Homeowners and Renters During the Housing Market Cycle

Types of Engagement	Predicted Probability of Engaging in Activity (%)					
	Expansion		Recession		Recovery	
	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter
Civic activities with anyone	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Volunteering activities with anyone	5.8	4.5	6.1	5.1	5.1	4.2
Social activities with neighbors (sum of time spent on activities below)	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.4	4.9	5.0
Eating and drinking	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.9	1.1
Playing sports	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.5
Shopping	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3
Attending religious events	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.5
Volunteering	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.5
Socializing	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.6	2.8
Travel	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.9

Notes: n = 133,633. Survey sampling design and weights accounted for. Standard errors in parentheses. "Typical" denotes a person at the mean for all control variables except tenure. Demographic, socioeconomic, temporal, and geographic characteristics associated with homeownership controlled but estimates suppressed. Controls included stage of housing market cycle (expansion stage omitted), age, sex, household income (adjusted by household size), education, race and ethnicity, nativity status, marital status, number of children, employment status, geographic type (urban/rural), and region. Predictions are based on mariginal effects at the means. All estimates are statistically significant at the 1-percent level and higher.
Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek (2013); ATUS-X Extract Builder

when they did engage in it (see exhibit 4), in total these two effects translate into a meaningful additional amount of time spent volunteering by homeowners across the cycle (on average, about 1.25 minutes a day, or 38 minutes a month, a nontrivial amount; see exhibit 7). Homeowners also were more likely to attend religious events with neighbors (see exhibit 3) and spent much more time in total doing so, particularly in the expansion and recession phases of the cycle. These findings are consistent with evidence of the civic benefits of homeownership reported by existing research, considering that some scholars group religious activities with civic activities (DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999).

Homeownership versus renting was not associated with the propensity to participate in social activities with neighbors, but homeownership was associated with less time spent on social activities for participants (see exhibits 3 and 4). Renters on average were predicted to spend about 45 more seconds a day (24 minutes a month) on social activities with their neighbors (see exhibit 7).

Exhibit 6

Predicted Daily Conditional Minutes of Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement for Homeowners and Renters During the Housing Market Cycle

Types of Engagement	Predicted Minutes Spent on Activity					
	Expansion		Recession		Recovery	
	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter
Civic activities with anyone	40	152	40	47	48	70
Volunteering activities with anyone	153	161	157	164	164	177
Social activities with neighbors (sum of time spent on activities below)	108	130	110	132	137	161
Eating and drinking	56	67	52	65	62	75
Playing sports	107	92	104	98	106	121
Shopping	67	47	42	88	43	38
Attending religious events	111	133	108	101	124	116
Volunteering	143	141	134	220	152	218
Socializing	78	105	81	99	108	118
Travel	41	37	38	39	37	39

Notes: n = 133,633. Survey sampling design and weights accounted for. Standard errors in parentheses. "Typical" denotes a person at the mean for all control variables except tenure. Demographic, socioeconomic, temporal, and geographic characteristics associated with homeownership controlled but estimates suppressed. Controls included stage of housing market cycle (expansion stage omitted), age, sex, household income (adjusted by household size), education, race and ethnicity, nativity status, marital status, number of children, employment status, geographic type (urban/rural), and region. Predictions are based on mariginal effects at the means. All estimates are statistically significant at the 1-percent level and higher.
Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek (2013); ATUS-X Extract Builder

Homeownership was associated with a lower likelihood of engaging in travel with neighbors and less time spent socializing, volunteering, and eating and drinking with neighbors, conditional on performing these activities.[4] No other meaningful differences emerged between homeowners' and renters' civic and social engagement across the housing cycle (see exhibits 3, 4, and 7). Taken as whole, our findings on neighborhood civic engagement confirm prior research, but our findings on social time run counter to the narrative in some of the literature that homeowners are more socially engaged in their communities than renters.

[4] It is possible that the effect of homeownership on traveling is a false negative or artifact rather than a true effect. Researchers risk obtaining false positive or negative results when they model many effects. We have no expectations on what the effect of homeownership should be on traveling with neighbors, as the activity is not usually studied in existing research on the social benefits of homeownership.

Exhibit 7

Predicted Daily Unconditional Minutes of Civic and Neighborhood Social Engagement for Homeowners and Renters During the Housing Market Cycle

Types of Engagement	Predicted Minutes Spent on Activity					
	Expansion		Recession		Recovery	
	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter	Typical Homeowner	Typical Renter
Civic activities with anyone	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Volunteering activities with anyone	8.9	7.2	9.6	8.4	8.4	7.3
Social activities with neighbors (sum of time spent on activities below)	4.1	4.9	4.3	4.5	6.8	8.1
Eating and drinking	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.8
Playing sports	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.6
Shopping	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Attending religious events	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.6
Volunteering	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.2
Socializing	1.9	2.5	1.9	2.1	2.8	3.4
Travel	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3

Notes: n = 133,633. Survey sampling design and weights accounted for. Standard errors in parentheses. "Typical" denotes a person at the mean for all control variables except tenure. Demographic, socioeconomic, temporal, and geographic characteristics associated with homeownership controlled but estimates suppressed. Controls included stage of housing market cycle (expansion stage omitted), age, sex, household income (adjusted by household size), education, race and ethnicity, nativity status, marital status, number of children, employment status, geographic type (urban/rural), and region. Predictions are based on mariginal effects at the means. All estimates are statistically significant at the 1-percent level and higher.
Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Hofferth, Flood, and Sobek (2013); ATUS-X Extract Builder

Second, differences in the likelihood of civic and social engagement by tenure usually did not vary during the stages of the housing market cycle. Thus, hypothesis 3, that no difference exists in civic and social engagement by tenure during the housing market cycle, is most supported by our analysis (see exhibit 1 and the rightmost column of exhibit 3). Of the 20 interaction terms between period and tenure, 19 are insignificant in our models predicting likelihood of activity participation, and 18 of these terms were insignificant in the conditional time models. These outcomes strongly suggest that the effect of homeownership on community engagement changed little during the housing cycle.

Two exceptions were that, relative to renting, homeownership was associated with (1) a modestly lower likelihood of attending religious events with neighbors in the recovery period and (2) less conditional time spent shopping during the recession period. However, these effects do not fit our expectations on how homeowners' civic and social engagement should vary during the housing market cycle if changing property values influences their engagement. Specifically, hypotheses 1a

and 1b do not predict that (1) homeowners have a lower propensity to engage in religious activities during recovery periods but not recession periods relative to expansion periods, or that (2) homeownership has no constant positive effect on conditional minutes spent shopping across the stages of the housing market cycle (see exhibit 1). It also is noteworthy that homeownership was associated with more conditional time participating in civic activities during the recession. However, being a homeowner had a statistically significant negative effect on civic time during the entirety of the cycle (hypothesis 4). This finding is contrary to the main thrust of existing research.

Hypothesis 2, that homeownership has a constant, positive effect on civic and social engagement during the housing market cycle due to homeowners' greater residential stability, is fully supported by our findings on volunteering and largely supported by our findings on attending religious events, as engagement in both activities is positively associated with homeownership across the housing cycle. However, our findings show that homeownership is associated with less time eating and drinking, volunteering, and socializing with neighbors, and less time in overall social engagement with neighbors. These results best fit hypothesis 4. The reason why homeowners' intensity of participation in neighborhood social life should be less than that of renters is unclear, but in any event this finding supports some prior research that calls into question the common assertion that homeownership builds stronger communities, at least to the extent that informal socialization is an important contributor to neighborhood cohesion.

These nuances illustrate the complexity of dynamics between civic and social engagement and tenure. The fact that many of the effects for variables measuring the extent of civic and social engagement by tenure do not match to our existing theories (hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2, and 3) reveals the need for additional theory building on this topic. However, these nuances should not overshadow two notable trends: (1) homeowners were more likely than renters to volunteer but spent less time on social activities with neighbors than renters, regardless of the housing market stage; and (2) differences in civic and social engagement by tenure did not vary in consistent or expected ways across the stages of the cycle.

Discussion

This research helps to fill a gap in the literature on the social benefits of homeownership by testing whether (1) homeowners were more civically and socially engaged than renters with similar characteristics during a 10-year period, and (2) whether any differences between homeowners' and renters' civic and social engagement fluctuated during the recent housing market cycle. In this section, we discuss the key findings and suggest directions for future research and policymaking.

Like previous studies, we find that homeowners were more likely to volunteer than renters when accounting for demographic differences between homeowners and renters. Thus, it is possible that homeownership may have some sort of morally uplifting effect, influenced potentially by homeowners' greater residential stability, or that persons more likely to be engaged in volunteering are more likely to become homeowners. Even if an uplifting effect exists, it is important to note that we cannot disaggregate volunteering to see which volunteering activities specifically relate to the local community, and thus we cannot confirm that homeownership contributes to neighborhood public spiritedness.

We find little reason to believe that homeowners make better neighbors, a finding that calls into question whether homeownership really does contribute to community life and positively affect the private provision of public goods. Contrary to some existing studies, we did not find that homeownership was associated with more social engagement with neighbors. Being a homeowner actually had a negative association with the overall time spent on neighborhood social engagement across the cycle. One explanation is that social engagement is less visible than civic engagement, so homeowners may feel fewer rewards from time invested in these activities. Another explanation is that homeowners simply have less time to get to know their neighbors than renters or find less value in doing so. Overall, our findings suggest that although there may be good reasons for the large subsidies for homeownership in the United States, promoting neighborhood cohesion may not be one of them.

Finally, we found that fluctuation in property values during the housing cycle may have little effect on the social benefits of homeownership, contrary to our expectations. Our preferred hypothesis (hypothesis 1a), which predicts a greater positive effect of homeownership on engagement during expansion periods, was wholly unsupported in the analysis. Hypothesis 1b, which predicts a greater positive effect of homeownership on engagement during recession periods, also lacked support. Our results on the likelihood of civic and social engagement by tenure most closely matched hypotheses 2 and 3, which predict a constant difference, or, more usually, a constant lack of difference in engagement by tenure during the housing market cycle. Our results on the extent of civic and social engagement by tenure also support hypothesis 4, which predicts a constant negative effect of homeownership on engagement during the housing market cycle unexplained by existing theory.

Further analyzing and explaining these different patterns, particularly for activities that vary in unexpected ways during the housing market cycle, is a worthy direction for further research. Another important direction is to examine potential subgroup variation in civic and social engagement (Holupka and Newman, 2012; Newman and Holupka, 2013). For instance, broad evidence exists that the stages of the recent housing market cycle transformed low-income and minority homeowners and neighborhoods the most, which may lead these groups to exhibit different community engagement patterns (Bocian et al., 2011; Rugh and Massey, 2010; Immergluck and Law, 2014).

Exploring variation in the potential social benefits of homeowners' greater civic engagement, for which we do find some evidence, is also worthwhile. To the extent that homeowners are volunteering for organizations that benefit their neighborhoods, homeowners' civic engagement may make places more inclusive or exclusive and regions more equitable or inequitable. For example, civic engagement may contribute to exclusionary zoning or protests against mixed-income development coming into a neighborhood (Fischel, 2001). There are reasons to believe that homeowners' civic engagement may be more exclusionary during recession periods, as homeowners may try to protect their property values and quality of life from people or land uses seen to diminish these public goods. Testing the link between more exclusionary civic engagement and recessions is a pressing pursuit. Because we cannot observe the character of neighbors or neighborhoods in our data set, we cannot comment on the effects of neighborhood homogeneity on civic and social engagement or on how the housing cycle may change that engagement over time. Future research should investigate these questions.

A final direction is to explore the drivers of changes in civic and social engagement during the housing market cycle, regardless of tenure. Homeowners and renters in our study were more likely to socialize with their neighbors, and spent more time socializing with them, during the recovery stage. One possible explanation is that, in the aftermath of the economic flux and residential transition of the recession, people tried more than in the other stages to get to know newcomers on their block, such as renters moving into former foreclosures.

Overall, it is important for housing scholars, planners, and policymakers to differentiate between civic and social engagement in conveying the social benefits of homeownership. Our finding that homeownership is associated with a higher likelihood of working to improve society through volunteering does suggest that homeownership may have benefits for the society as a whole, which in turn implies that public policy to promote homeownership has merits in this regard. In contrast, policies to promote homeownership may do little to maintain neighborhoods through the exercise of informal social control or improve sense of community. We do not find compelling evidence that the degree of intervention to promote homeownership should vary during the housing market cycle.

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