Classes of civic engagement in the US population
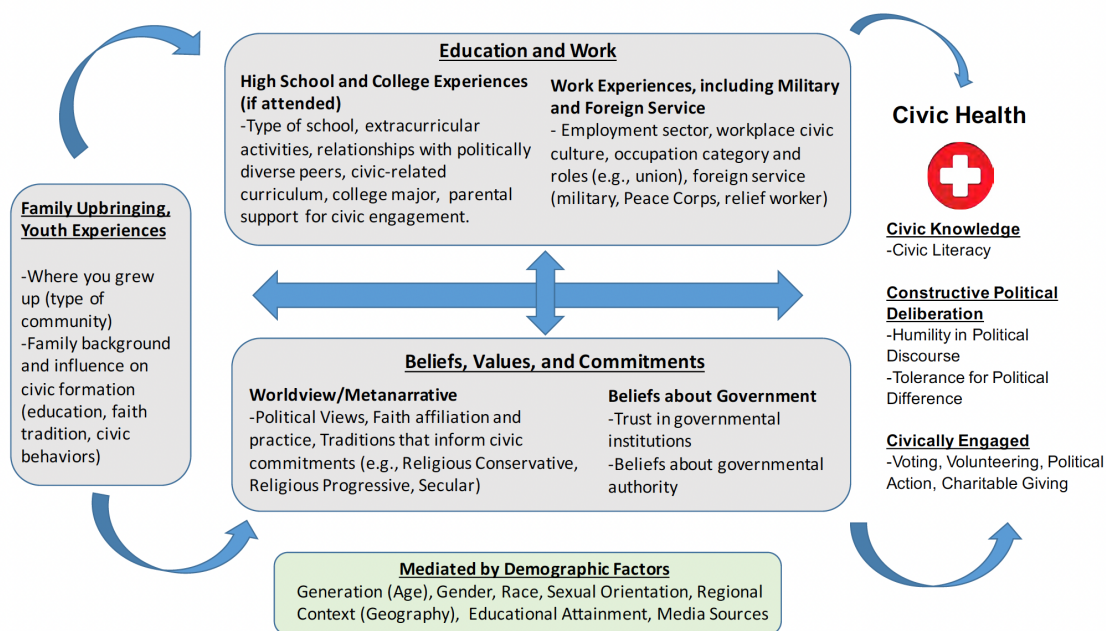
2023-05-22

Study purpose

One of the purposes of the National Survey of American Civic Health was to identify the different profiles of civic engagement among Americans. We aimed at grounding this typology on what people *do* (Weerts, Cabrera, and Mejías 2014; David J. Weerts and Alberto F. Cabrera 2018) rather than on what people say *they would like to do.*

Antecedents of individual civic health model

Methodology

The civic health survey captures indicators of the different constructs that make up the antecedents of the civic health model (Weerts, Cabrera & Van Dorn, 2022). The survey was administered to more than 5,000 Americans from spring to summer 2021. The sample matches the US census related to race/ethnicity, gender, age (over 18), and educational attainment

The 12 civic behaviors selected were the most representative of four domains of *civism*. Those dimensions are:

1. Voting behavior

2. Political advocacy

3. Volunteer behavior

4. Charitable giving behavior

These behaviors displayed the highest loading in their corresponding civic domain. They also displayed the highest levels of information and discrimination in their civic dimension.

Civic engagement in the US population

The high heterogeneity in the engagement of the 12 civic behaviors was explained by 5 classes as revealed by a latent class analysis. Each class displays a unique profile of civic engagement.

Civic orientations across the US landscape

Class	Description
Lightship: Fully engaged voters	This class represents a small group of individuals who are strongly predisposed to be engaged in all 12 civic behaviors. It is the only class that participates in all forms of political action (e.g., rallies, unpaid lobbying, participate or donate to political organizations)
Tugboat: Active benevolent voters	It represents a quarter of the US population that are reliable voters and active volunteers for a variety of non-profit organizations. They also financially support non-profits and give to food drives. However, they display low propensities to be involved in political action (e.g., rallies, unpaid lobbying, participate in/donate to political organizations)
Cruise ship: Charitable passive voters	This class represents nearly one quarter of the US population. Members are reliable voters and are strongly predisposed to give to non-profit organizations. They are also prone to donate to food or clothing drives. However, they are less predisposed to volunteer to non-profit organizations, nor are they prone to engage in any kind of political action (e.g., political campaigns)
Tender boat: Voter-only citizens	It represents the largest class of citizens whose civic behavior is characterized the most by voting. Members of this class display low propensities for philantrophy, volunteerism and political action. However, they show some propensity to contribute to food or clothing drives
Submarine: Disengaged citizens	This small class displays low propensity for civic engagement. Members' predispositions to charity are confined, at most, to contributing to food or clothing drives

Figure 1 Civic orientations

Five classes of civic orientations based on the probability of engaging on 12 prosocial behaviors

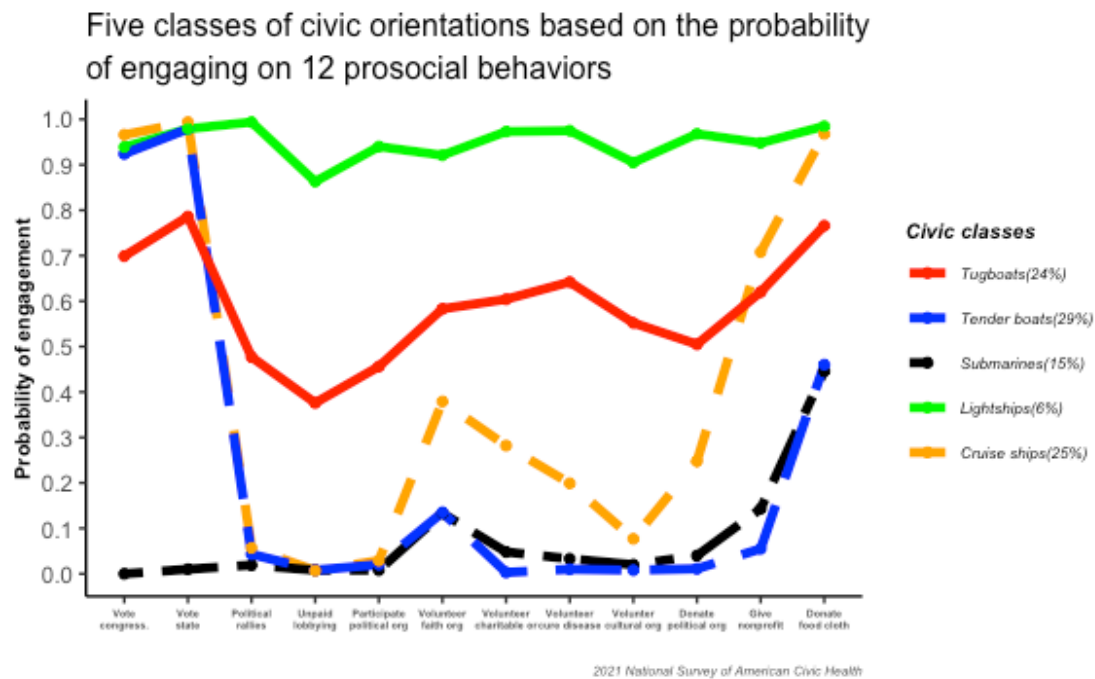2021 National Survey of American Civic Health

Figure 1: Civic classes

References

Weerts, D. J., Cabrera, A.F. & Van Dorn, K., (2022). *Antecedents of Individual Civic Health*. American Center for Political Leadership, Southeastern University, Lakeland FL.

David J. Weerts, and Alberto F. Cabrera. 2018. "Alumni Giving as Civic Expression." *Philanthropy & Education* 2 (1): 1. https://doi.org/10.2979/phileduc.2.1.01.

Weerts, David J., Alberto F. Cabrera, and Paulina Pérez Mejías. 2014. "Uncovering Categories of Civically Engaged College Students: A Latent Class Analysis." *The Review of Higher Education* 37 (2): 141–68. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2014.0008.