Proposal

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Title

Effects of the Degree of Belonging on Local Public Good Provision

Justification

Social cohesion is associated with equity derived from social outcomes. These social outcomes fall under categories such as: education, well-being, health, and security (Stanley, 2003). More cohesive societies distribute social outcomes more broadly and social outcomes improve. Stanley (2003) defines social cohesion as

> "the sum over a population of individuals' willingness to cooperate with each other without coercion in the complex set of social relations needed by individuals to complete their life courses. A socially cohesive society then is a population which has sufficient social cohesion to sustain that complex set of social relations beyond at least the average life span of individuals in the population." (Stanley, 2003, p. 8)

Social cohesion as a construct is seemingly abstract by design. Abstraction allows for greater variability in application, but cedes precision of interpretation (Bernard, 1999). Jenson (1998) notes in her famous account of social cohesion that:

> "[A] lesson to take from this very limited overview of ... social cohesion is that there is no single way of even defining it. Meanings depend on the problem being addressed and who is speaking." (Jenson, 1998, p. 17)

The problem we seek to address is to understand what conditions lead to increased engagement in civic life in local communities. Given the potentially vague nature of social cohesion, I explicitly note its potential importance for policy or business. First, I differentiate this model from tenets of the Walrasian paradigm. The Walrasian approach supposes that solutions to economic problems are "constrained optimization problem[s] faced by a fully informed individual in a virtually institution-free environment" (Bowles, 2009). I wish to explore how individual *feeling within* and *attachment to* existing institutional structures affects individual behavior without the assumption of strict preferences and homogenous perspectives. Second, I want to identify whether the level to which small-scale societal attachment matters in how we contribute and engage with our society to create more holistic policy interventions and collaborative business workspaces.

The guiding research question is the following: *How do the components of social cohesion affect civic engagement and voluntary public goods provision?* Jenson (1998) identifies these components as belonging/isolation, recognition/rejection, legitimacy/illegitimacy, inclusion/exclusion, and participation/non-involvement.

The experimental procedure outlined below seeks to answer a narrower question based on a singular component, that is: *What are the effects of strong and weak feelings of group belonging*[1] *on investment in a public good?*

I am interested in percieved group belonging. Group belonging, here, is how the individuals' *feeling*[2] of their group standing and level of connectedness affects investment within the group. Naturally, it follows that feelings of group standing may be argued to be a function of social control or "social capital" (which is also a nebulous term). Given that all players are anonymous and each player is able to exhibit the same level of social control, this issue of interpration is minimized.

[1] Belonging is also referred to as *identification* (Chan et al., 2006)

[2] It is important to note that the topic of interest is not using a weighted network topology where weights represent some systemic or indexed measure of belonging and cohesion.

Design / Hypotheses

As participants enter the lab, they are sorted into two arbitrary and random groups of equal size, denoted A and B. Their natural feelings of belonging to these two groups may vary both within and between groups. The participants are instructed that they will play a game with another person. The game will be a 2×2 coordination game that will be repeated for 10 rounds with the same player. Repeated interaction is a necessary component to show cohesiveness over time. One-shot interactions may represent some "universal" behavior and thus do not constitute cohesion (Chan et al., 2006). The design of the game seeks to mimic the results of cooperative action and non-cooperative action and to induce the ex-post feelings associated with both. To illicit these feelings, I use a cooperation game. There will be two treatments of differing cooperative friction — low friction and high friction. The low friction game will be referred to as game L and the high friction game will be referred to as game H. They are as follows:

Table 1: Game L

	X	Y
X	12, 10	0, 0
Y	0, 0	3, 5

Table 2: Game H

	X	Y
X	10, 7	0, 0
Y	0, 0	7, 9

Each group will be assigned a treatment level of cooperative friction. For example, group A may be assigned the low friction treatment and group B may be assigned the high friction treatment. Since the group construction is random, there are no foreseen endogenous effects other than the L/H treatment.

Often, experimental studies use the strategy method (cite Selton 1967, Mitzkewitz and Nagel 1993) to elicit behavioral decisions. This method allows the agent to make contingent decisions across all possible decision nodes (Cite Brandts Charness 2011). Since the goal of the coordination game is to create good and bad histories with a player's respective group, we use the standard direct-response method where players simultaneously choose a single response. We are less interested in the mechanism behind their decision making and desire only to create a non-neutral feeling toward other group-members. This feeling will then be evaluated following game play.

Following play in the game, participants will be asked explicitly to rate their feelings of belonging to their assigned group using a Likert scale. This question will be asked alongside other group-related questions to disguise the purpose the experiment. After the feeling of belonging is elicited, participants will contribute to a within-group threshold public goods game. A threshold public goods game allows participants to choose whether or not to contribute. If enough individuals contribute and reach (or exceed) a pre-defined threshold, then the good is recieved at equal value to everyone. The actions of the other players are not known to each other during play. Each participant will be given 10 tokens (with conversion rate $C : E\$ \rightarrow \text{USD}$). If players choose to not contribute, the number of tokens will stay in a private account which has a fixed return of the direct exchange rate C.

Earnings by the participants will be based on a randomly selected round from a randomly selected task. Thus, it is in their best interest to play each round like it is the one for which they will be paid.

The combination of a self-reported measure of belonging, in the form of a timely survey question, and a reactive measure, in the form of a real-valued contribution, increase the objectivity of the belonging measurement. To create a more robust result, the groups will then be shuffled such that half of the members of A move to B and half of the members of B move to A. The experiment, in its entirety, will be replayed. We have the following six hypotheses:

H1: Participants placed in the L treatment will exhibit higher self-reported measures of belonging.[3]

H2: Participants placed in the H treatment will exhibit lower self-reported measures of belonging.

[3] **Rephrase:** If cooperative friction is higher, then participants will exhibit higher self-reported measures of belonging.

H3: Participants placed in the L treatment will exhibit higher contributions to the group public good.

H4: Participants placed in the H treatment will exhibit lower contributions to the group public good.

H5: Participants who swap groups will exhibit a reversal of behavior in the form of self-reported measure of belonging.

H6: Participants who swap groups will exhibit a reversal of behavior in the form of public goods contribution.

A survey follows. The survey elicits a more complete picture of the subjective side of social cohesion, as well as demographic information.

Previous Work and Present Outlook

We first establish that identity matters. Humans exhibit in-group bias and the identity that we hold, or that is given to us, is a major determinant of economic activity.

Our identity is neither fixed nor bounded by our individual behavior. As social beings, we form tribes or groups based around these identities. These groups exhibit norms and behavior patterns that may differ across groups but may be consistent within groups. In heterogeneous communities these defined identities are often given salience in traditional economics transactions. Individuals are sorted by others into perceived groups to simplify the others' environment and then are treated dependent on assigned or perceived group allegiance (Tajfel, 1974, 1975).

In environments of agents that are highly homogenous across a variety of dimensions[4], such as cults and other "utopian" societies, there is a system of shared beliefs. The manifestations of this are many. For example, an increase in egalitarianism may take the form of job rotations. Labor rotation minimizes comparative advantage and potential for residual claimancy, further building real (or percieved) egalitarianism. One such example is Richard B. Seymour (1998) who documents life as an original member of Compost College, a counter-culture commune founded in the 1970s. He observes:

> "The central purpose [of Compost College] is to embody the essence of compost, to dissolve together into a single organic whole . . . "

While utopias and cults may not be commonplace, corporate cultures can demonstrate many of the same principles. Van den Steen (2010) show that the homogenous culture originates and perpetuates through selection mechansims, even with employee replacement.

Even with homogenous groups, and certainly in heterogeneous groups, factions — or ideologies — can develop.[5] Often, they can be rivalrous in nature. These factions exist on both the micro and macro level. The development of factions enables seemingly unrelated issues to become highly coordinated *and* aligned with the factions. As factions evolve, solidarity may collapse. This is common in political parties (Fielding et al., 2012; Pew Research, 2016).

We know strength of ties matter for group development. How do they affect group provision? Costa and Kahn (2003) show that in more heterogenous communities, civic engagement is lower. Costa and Kahn (2003) are limited by the coarseness of their data. The authors note that more granularity would still leave questions regarding neighborhood selection. Controlling for group selection may illuminate the mechanisms that motivate people to contribute to their communities.

As the research review illustrates, little work has been done to parse the dimensions of social cohesion as they relate to civic engagement norms in small groups. The proposed study seeks to exploit this gap in the literature. We propose an experimental methodology.

[4] race, class, etc.

[5] One example was documented by The New York Times in 2005: "Many African-Americans who visit Africa are unsettled to find that Africans treat them – even refer to them – the same way as white tourists. The term 'obruni,' or 'white foreigner,' is applied regardless of skin color" (Lydia Polgreen, 2005).

Goals/Objectives/Outputs

Understanding how and why individuals choose to regulate their involvement in small group settings will open new doors in civic engagement research. Much of the current economic literature looks at the macro-community and neglects the differing magnitudes of a local group decisions. The proposed research demonstrates how individuals choose to regulate their civic engagement behavior conditional on perceived outcomes of others behavior and their expected returns from taking action.

Additionally, the act of performing this study will provide a valuable opportunity for undergraduate research. Upon completion of said research, the undergraduate co-PI will have an experimental undergraduate thesis. This research will allow for training in all stages of research — from identifying a research question, developing a methodology, collecting and analyzing data, and completing a write-up of the findings.

Methods

A laboratory setting allows greater customization and manipulation of the independent variables than the use of happenstance data would allow. Additionally, this increased control allows for greater potential to deduce causal inference.

We will utilize the Cleve E. Willis Economics Laboratory to perform these experiments. All of the sessions will be administered via z-Tree (Fischbacher, 2007). The subjects are undergraduate students recruit from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Significance, Outcomes, and Impacts

Understanding the behavioral relation between feelings of belonging in a local community and subsequent involvement are important for current and future policy.

One application may be to the Department of Education in varying municipalities. For example, the New York City Department of Education (henceforth NYC DOE, or DOE) issues a school survey every academic year to be taken by parents. Within the survey are two subsections focusing on this topic: *Strong Family-Community Ties* and *Parent Involvement in School*.[6] The relationship between these sections may illuminate possible interventions to increase parent involvement in schools. Education literature shows that increased parent involvement is positively associated with performance outcomes (Topor et al., 2010). Izzo et al. (1999) "suggest that enhancing parental involvement in children's schooling relates to improvements in school functioning." Understanding the connections between parent-school attachment and time or monetary contributions could inform policy designed at increasing parent involvement.

Units Involved

The research will be conducted in the Department of Resource Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The Department will provide computer and software support, and access to the Cleve E. Willis Experimental Economics Laboratory.

Cooperation

None anticipated.

[6] There are additional sections on academic rigor, trust, degree of support, collaboration, and effectiveness.

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Appendix Instructions

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in today's study.

When you came in, you signed a consent form stating that you agree to participate in today's session. Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to leave before the session is completed, you will receive your show-up fee but forfeit any additional amount you may have earned. You must be at least 18 to participate in this session.

The experiment will take about an hour and a half, during which you will make a series of decisions. The session will consist of four tasks and a survey. You will be paid in cash and in private at the end of today's session according to the instructions, which will be explained in a moment.

From now until the end of the session, please do not speak to anyone except the experimenters. If you have a question at any time, please raise your hand and someone will be with you momentarily.

Please silence your cell phones and put them away.

During this experiment, we will talk about all decisions using Experimental Dollars ($E\$$). At the end of the experiment, the Experimental Dollars will be converted into US Dollars at the rate of

$$C : E\$ \rightarrow \text{USD}$$

If at any point you have questions please raise your hand, and one of us will come to answer you individually.

Before we begin, we ask that you do not speak to each other, or communicate in any other way during the study. We also ask that you do not discuss the procedures and details of the study with others (including your group members) outside this room.

Your name will never be revealed during the course of the study. We will use the number at your computer station as your ID number. Your group letter along with your ID number are the identifier we use when paying for your participation in the study.

At the end of the session, you will be called up one at a time and paid in cash the total amount that you earned for all periods in the session. The card with your ID number on it should be returned at that time.

For each Task you will be randomly placed in a group of 4 people. There are two groups in the room: A and B. Each group will consist of the same people for the duration of the period.

The experiment consists of a number of periods. In each period, you will be randomly matched with another participant in your group. The decisions that you and the other participant make will determine the amount earned by each of you. To determine your payment, a single round from the tasks completed today will be chosen at random to determine your payoff.

Task 1

In this task, you and another person from your randomly assigned group will separately make decisions that determine the earnings for both of you. This task has 12 rounds. In each round, you will be randomly matched with a new member of your group of four.

Recall that you will be paid for one randomly chosen round in any of the tasks today. Since we do not know which round will count, you should make each decision as if it will determine how much you will earn for this task.

Let's look at how you will make decisions. Below you will see an example.

Example.

Table 3: Example 1

	Left	*Right*
Up	2, 2	0, 3
Down	3, 0	1, 1

To submit an answer, simply click on the submit button with your mouse. When you enter an answer the computer will tell you what the your partnered answered before proceeding. Remember that your identity and choices are anonymous.

In this 2-player task, both players make a decision simultaneously. The row-player chooses between Up and Down and the column-player chooses between Left and Right. Each decision has a pair of payoff options.

Table 4: Row-player Payoffs

	Left	*Right*
Up	$\underline{2}$, 2	$\underline{0}$, 3
Down	$\underline{3}$, 0	$\underline{1}$, 1

Table 5: Column-player Payoffs

	Left	*Right*
Up	2, $\underline{2}$	0, $\underline{3}$
Down	3, $\underline{0}$	1, $\underline{1}$

If the row-player chooses Down, they can either earn 3 or 1. If the column-player chooses Left, they can earn either 2 or 0. The payoff earned is determined by the overlapping choice. Suppose row-player chooses Down again. This time column-player chooses Right.

Table 6: Example 2

	Left	*Right*
Up	2, 2	0, $\underline{3}$
Down	$\underline{3}$, 0	$\underline{1}$, $\underline{1}$

Here, the overlapping choice is Down and Right. The row-player earns 1 and the column-player earns 1. Further,

- If the row-player chooses Up and the column-player chooses Left, the payoffs are 2, 2.
- If the row-player chooses Up and the column-player chooses Right, the payoffs are 0, 3. The row-player gets 0 and the column-player gets 3.

Example. In this example, you will be given the table and associated payoffs. You will be asked to determine the payoffs for two decisions.

Table 7: Example 2

	Left	*Right*
Up	5, 5	5, 3
Down	3, 5	6, 6

Question. Suppose the row-player chooses Up and the column-player chooses Left. What is the payoff for the row-player??

Question. Suppose the column-player chooses Left and the row-player chooses Down. What is the payoff for the column-player?

Question. Suppose the row-player chooses Down and the column-player chooses Right. What is the payoff for the row-player?

Question. Suppose the column-player chooses Right and the row-player chooses Up. What is the payoff for the column-player?

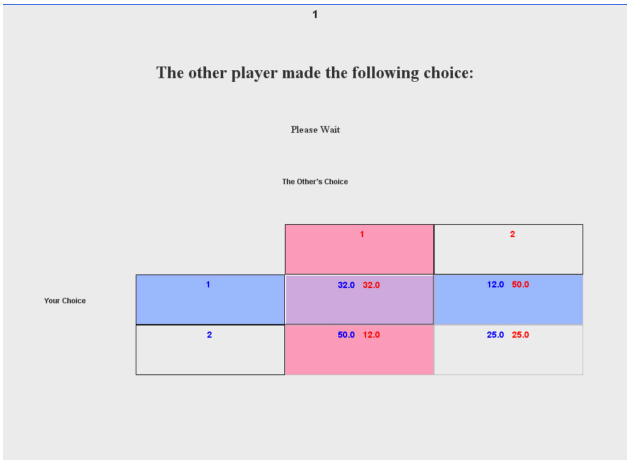

Figure 1: Decision Screen: Choices are highlighted after both subjects have made their selection.

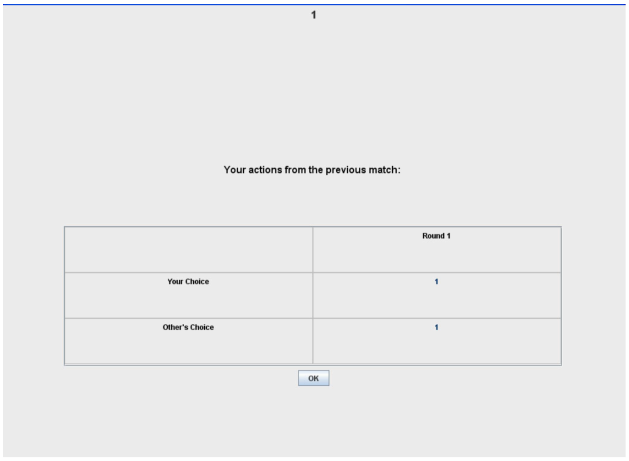

Figure 2: Feedback Screen: Choices are highlighted after both subjects have made their selection.

Survey

Once everyone answers the question on your screen, we will move on to the next part.

Question. How easy or difficult was making these decisions with your partner?

Very Easy	Easy	Difficult	Very Difficult
☐	☐	☐	☐

Question. How would you describe your sense of belonging to your group of 4?

Very weak	Somewhat weak	Uncertain	Somewhat strong	Very strong

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Question. How much do you agree with the following statement: My partners behaved similiarly to myself.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Task 2

Now, you and the other members of your same group will each have the opportunity to donate to a public fund specific your group. This task has 10 rounds. Since we do not know which round will count, you should make each decision as if it will determine how much you will earn for this task.

For every round, you will decide whether to contribute your entire endowment of \$10 Experimental Dollars (E \$) to the public account, or keep it in the private account. Your earnings are determined as follows:

Definition (Private Account)**.** You will keep all of the E \$ place in the private account.

Definition (Public Account)**.** Your earnings from the public account will depend on your decision, the decisions made by others, and chance as described below:

Case 1. When less than 3 members contribute to the public account, then each member (including yourself) recieves nothing from the public account. Any E \$ allocated to the public account is not refunded.

Case 2. When three or more members allocate to the public account, then each member (including yourself) recieves a 25% return from twice the investment value. All group members recieve the same amount from the public account, no matter how much they allocated to it. This is further illustrated in an example below.

Example. You choose to contribute your funds to the public account. Only one other group member contibutes to the public account. Then your group has *not* met the threshold and you will earn:

$$\text{Earnings} = \text{Private Account}$$

That is, your return is E \$ 0 and the amount earned from the public account is E \$ 0.

Example. You contribute to the public account. All other members contribute to the public account. Then your group's allocation to the public account is E \$ 40. You will earn:

$$\text{Earnings} = \text{Private Account} + E\$10$$

The amount in the public account, E \$ 40, is doubled (to E \$ 80) and then divided equally amongst your group:

$$\text{Public Account Return} = \frac{1}{4}(E\$80)$$

The following two examples are designed to make sure you understand the task.

Example. You have E\$10 and choose to contribute to the public account.

Question. How much is in your private account?

You observe that one of the other members of your group also contributed E\$10 the public account.

Question. What are your *total* earnings?

Are there any questions? If so, please raise your hand. An experimenter will assist you in person shortly.

Part 2

This concludes the first half of the experiment. Now, we will rearrange the groups into new randomly assigned groups. Your new group letter, A or B, will appear on your screen.

Repeat Part 1 as Task 3 and 4.

Survey

Please complete the survey.[7] Following completion of the survey, we will call you up one at a time to collect your earnings for the day.

Demographic Questions

Question. What gender do you identify as?

a. Female

b. Male

c. _____ (Short Answer Space)

d. Prefer not to answer

Question. Please specify your ethnicity.

a. Caucasian

b. African-American

c. Latinx or Hispanic

d. Asian

e. Native American

f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

g. Two or More

h. Other/Unknown

i. Prefer not to say

Question. Please specify your religion.

a. Catholicism/Christianity

b. Judaism

c. Islam

d. Buddhism

e. Hinduism

f. Atheist/Agnostic

[7] https://civicyouth.org/tools-for-practice/survey-measures-of-civic-engagement/

g. Other: _____

h. Prefer not to say

Question. How would you describe your political view?

a. Very Liberal

b. Slightly Liberal

c. Slightly Conservative

d. Very Conservative

e. Prefer not to say

Experiment Questions

Question. How many people do you recognize in this room?

a. 0

b. 1

c. 2

d. 3

e. ≥ 4

Question. What were you thinking when you were making decisions today?

_____

_____

Question. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.[8]

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question. What is your opinion on the following three statements?[9]

People can generally be trusted

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐

Nowadays you can't rely on anyone

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐

[8]Source: (Perry, 1996)
[9]World Value Survey

If you are dealing with strangers, it is better to be careful before trusting them

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐

Question. For each of the statements below, please indicate whether or not the statement is Characteristic of you. If the statement is extremely uncharacteristic of you (not like you at all), choose a "1" for that question; if the statement is extremely characteristic of you (very much like you), choose a "5" for that question. And, of course, use the numbers in the middle if you fall between the extremes.

I am willing to sacrifice my immediate happiness or well-being in order to achieve future outcomes.

- ☐ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ☐ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ☐ Uncertain
- ☐ Somewhat Characteristic
- ☐ Extremely Characteristic

I think it is important to take warnings about negative outcomes seriously even if the negative outcome will not occur for many years.

- ☐ Extremely Uncharacteristic
- ☐ Somewhat Uncharacteristic
- ☐ Uncertain
- ☐ Somewhat Characteristic
- ☐ Extremely Characteristic

CIRCLE's Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (of 19)

Source: *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation Report* by Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, CIRCLE, 2002.

Civic Activity Indicators

Question. Have you ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live? If YES, was this in the last 12 months or not?

Question. Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven't you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay. IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months? Thinking about the volunteer work over the last 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?

Question. Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally? Are you an active member of this group/any of these groups, a member but not active, or have you given money only?

Question. Have you personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause — this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event?

Question. Have you personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause — this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event?

Question. And have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause?

Electoral Activity Indicators

Question. We know that most people don't vote in all elections. Usually between one- quarter to one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote. Can you tell me how often you vote in local and national elections? Always, sometimes, rarely, or never?

Question. When there is an election taking place do you generally talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, or not?

Question. Do you wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house, or aren't these things you do?

Question. In the past 12 months, did you contribute money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates?

Political Voice Indicators

Now I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not. (FOR EACH YES, PROBE: And have you done this is the last 12 months, or not?)

Question. Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to ask for assistance or to express your opinion?

Question. Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?

Question. Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air?

Question. Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?

Question. Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?

Question. Signed an e-mail petition?

Question. And have you ever signed a written petition about a political or social issue?

Question. NOT bought something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces it?

Question. Bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it?

Question. Have you worked as a canvasser — having gone door to door for a political or social group or candidate?