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Together We Rise: The Role of Communication and Community Connectedness in Transgender Citizens' Civic Engagement in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influences of online communication, in-person socialization, and degree of community connectedness on transgender citizens' political participation in the United States. Drawing on the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, we find that while demographics, socioeconomic status, and political self-efficacy contributed to individuals' civic engagement and political campaign contribution, community connectedness was the single largest predictor of civic engagement and alone accounted for almost as much variance in the measurement of civic engagement as all demographics and socioeconomic status combined. At the same time, we found an unhypothesized mutually causal relationship between community connectedness and civic engagement, suggesting each reinforces the other. We also found evidence in-person communication with other transgender people was a larger predictor of political participation than online communication. Taken together, our results move us beyond the traditional sociodemographic or media-use predictors toward a more socially embedded perspective of civic engagement among marginalized groups, demonstrating the vital significance of connectedness to one's identity-based community.

In March 2016, North Carolina's then-Governor Pat McCrory signed into law HB2, which required individuals to use public facilities associated with the sex listed on their birth certificate regardless of their current gender identity. In response, the transgender community—defined here broadly as the community of "people who live their daily lives as [a] gender [other than] that which is associated with the sex they were assigned at birth"

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(Billard, 2018)—mobilized nationwide political opposition. Major institutions and even other state governments boycotted the state; the state's own attorney general refused to defend the law in court; McCrory lost his reelection campaign; and, under the new governor, HB2 was partially repealed. In August 2017, Texas Republicans tried to pass a similar "bathroom bill" targeting transgender Texans' use of public facilities. Again, the transgender community mobilized widespread opposition, defeating the bill in the state House of Representatives. In October 2018, the *New York Times* leaked a memo from the Trump administration detailing plans to legally define gender as determined by the genitalia with which one was born and as immutable from birth. Activists responded with the #WontBeErased campaign, which mobilized transgender people across the country, garnered international attention, and created the language that dominates discussions of transgender rights globally today. That same autumn, anti-transgender activists in Massachusetts placed the state's trans-inclusive nondiscrimination law on the ballot. The pro-transgender Yes on 3 campaign mobilized statewide support for the law, resulting in an overwhelming electoral victory. And elsewhere in the country, no fewer than 40 transgender candidates ran for public office in the 2018 elections, including the first transgender nominee for governor from a major party.

We are witnessing an unprecedented moment in the U.S. transgender rights movement—one characterized by Willis (2017) as "the age of trans political power." Indeed, the aforementioned events indicate rising institutional political participation among transgender Americans. In the face of multiple forms of political disenfranchisement—both directly because of their gender identities and indirectly because of the economic, social, and administrative discrimination they disproportionately face (James et al., 2016)—transgender Americans nonetheless participate actively (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). And transgender civic engagement is increasingly relevant to the American political landscape (Billard & Gross, 2020), particularly following the historic political gains achieved under the Obama administration and subsequent attacks from the Trump administration. Little is known, however, about transgender Americans' civic engagement: how politically engaged are they and what factors drive their engagement?

In the broader academic debate on civic engagement, many variables have been considered as predictors, among them gender, age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, news media consumption, and political self-efficacy (Brady et al., 1995; Burns et al., 2001; Shah, 1998; Verba et al., 1997, 1993). More recently, individuals' use of digital media, and in particular social media, has become another such variable (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Pasek et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2001). And these variables may explain transgender citizens' civic engagement as well. One under-considered factor, however, is *community* and

individuals' levels of connectedness to their communities. Some important research has demonstrated the positive impact of connection to one's *geographic* community on civic engagement (e.g., Ball-Rokeach et al., 2002; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b), but less research has focused on connectedness to one's *identity* community—to a community of people who share a common identity. Particularly for marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged populations, such connectedness may be an important source of individual political socialization and subsequent civic engagement. The present study explores this possibility, investigating the influence of transgender Americans' connectedness to the transgender community on their levels of civic participation.

Individual civic engagement in the United States

Since the first publication of Putnam's (1995) thesis that declining social capital in the U.S. has caused a collapse in the civic engagement necessary for a robust democracy, much ink has been spilled in attempts to diagnose and rectify the supposed crisis in political participation. Much of this work has focused on groups less likely to participate in institutional politics (Albanesi et al., 2007; Burns et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1997, 1993), trying to identify means of increasing their engagement. Little research has specifically addressed civic engagement among transgender citizens, though many factors associated with decreased civic engagement (e.g., being of lower socioeconomic status) are more prevalent among transgender Americans (James et al., 2016), thus suggesting these factors may predict transgender citizens' civic engagement levels.

In discussing "civic engagement" we refer specifically to what Berger (2009) called "political engagement." As he noted, though scholars of politics often use the broad term "civic engagement," they are usually more precisely interested in "people's attention to and activity in political issues and processes" (Berger, 2009, p. 336). We also acknowledge not all forms of engagement are equivalent in their demands of citizens or in citizens' individual capabilities to participate. As Brady et al. (1995, p. 282) observed, there are three types of political activities, each with different demands: (1) those that require investments of time, (2) those that require investments of money, and (3) voting. Thus, in our analyses, we consider separately those forms of political engagement that include contacting government officials, attending protests or rallies, etc. (what we will call *civic engagement*) and those that include contributing resources to political campaigns (what we will call *political campaign contribution*), which together constitute what we will call *political participation*.

Most predictors of individual civic engagement can be classified into one of three categories: demographic variables, socio-economic factors, or

media use. First, a variety of demographic characteristics predict levels of civic engagement, including age, gender, and race and ethnicity. In general, those who are older are more likely to be civically engaged than those who are younger (Shah, 1998; Shah et al., 2001). Additionally, individuals belonging to racial or ethnic minorities—in particular those who are Black or Latinx—tend to be less civically engaged than their white counterparts (Verba et al., 1993). Finally, men tend to have higher levels of engagement than women where it concerns institutional politics, though women tend to be just as involved in community affairs (Burns et al., 2001; Shah et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1997). That said, research has focused on cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) men and women, and transgender experiences of gender may have different effects on civic engagement. Much research suggests cisgender women have lower levels of political participation than cisgender men largely because they are socialized at home, in schools, and through the transmission of gender roles to view institutional politics as unsuitable for women (Bennett & Bennett, 1989; Dovi, 2007; Jenkins, 2005; Jennings, 1983). From a cisgender-centric perspective, then, one might hypothesize transgender women will have higher levels of political participation than transgender men because transgender women will (presumably) have been "socialized as boys" (Koyama, 2003, p. 247), while transgender men will have been socialized as girls, prior to transitioning. Setting aside transfeminist objections to this argument (see, e.g., Koyama, 2003), and the fact it says nothing of non-binary people, the argument may also be empirically unfounded. Indeed, many transgender people actively resist socialization into the genders they were assigned at birth as children (Dietert & Dentice, 2013), while at the same time internalizing the essentialist qualities associated with different genders (Gülgöz et al., 2019), often leading them to embrace qualities stereotypically associated with their desired gender identity in childhood. Accordingly, one might alternatively hypothesize transgender women will have lower levels of civic engagement than transgender men because they will internalize social norms pertaining to the "impropriety" of women's political participation. In fact, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) found transgender women are "less likely to participate in political activism and social activities" than transgender men (p. 188).

Second, researchers have consistently found socio-economic status (SES) is a major predictor of individuals' civic engagement. Specifically, those with higher incomes (Brady et al., 1995; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006b; Verba et al., 1997, 1993) and those with higher levels of formal education (Brady et al., 1995; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006b; Shah, 1998; Shah et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1997, 1993; Zukin et al., 2006) are more likely to participate in civic life than those with lower income and less education. To explain these findings, Brady et al. (1995) proposed a *resource* model of civic engagement, which posits time, money, and civic skills are key

resources required for civic participation but are disproportionately distributed among those at different SES levels. They further demonstrated that, together, these three resources account for the mechanisms by which SES predicts civic engagement (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1997). Significantly, however, when disaggregating civic engagement by types of activities, they found SES level was more predictive of individuals contributing financial resources to political campaigns (i.e., political campaign contribution) than spending time on civic activities (i.e., civic engagement; Brady et al., 1995).

Finally, since the first publication of Putnam's (1995) thesis, in which he blamed television viewing for decreases in U.S. civic engagement levels, communication scholars have investigated the role of media consumption practices on participation in political institutions and civic life. Early research of this kind tested Putnam's claim, indeed finding overall television use was associated with lower levels of civic engagement (Shah, 1998; Shah et al., 2001). However, further analyses showed the specific television content viewed mattered, as consumption of some content *increased* civic engagement, including broadcast news (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Shah, 1998; Shah et al., 2001). More recent research has extended this line of inquiry to digital media, finding overall use of Internet and of social media are both associated with higher levels of civic engagement (Pasek et al., 2009; Shaw et al., 2020). Moreover, use of Internet (Shah et al., 2005, 2001) and of social media (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012) specifically for information-seeking purposes significantly predict individuals' political participation.

Beyond these three categories of predictors, civic engagement scholars have also identified political efficacy as a significant predictor of political participation. That is, those who have a stronger belief in their own ability to successfully participate in politics are more likely to be civically engaged (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Verba et al., 1997).

Taken together, the findings of this body of work lead us to three initial hypotheses:

H1: Transgender citizens' levels of (a) civic engagement and (b) political campaign contribution will be (i) negatively predicted by identifying as a transgender woman, (ii) positively predicted by age, (iii) negatively predicted by identifying as Black, (iv) positively predicted by education, and (v) positively predicted by income.

H2: However, consistent with the resource model, the relative predictive power of (a) education and (b) income will be greater for political campaign contribution than for civic engagement.

H3: Transgender citizens' levels of (a) civic engagement and (b) political campaign contribution will be positively predicted by their levels of political self-efficacy.

The role of community in civic engagement

Although infrequently measured explicitly, it is widely presumed issues of community influence citizens' political participation (Costa & Kahn, 2003; Delli-Carpini, 2000; Flanagan, 2003; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b; Putnam, 1995). According to Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006a), "there is a strong connection between the fabric of community life and the people's engagement" (p. 173). From Putnam's (1995) perspective, it is precisely the loss of a sense of community that has caused supposed decreases in civic engagement in the U.S. Yet, what empirical research addresses issues of community in civic engagement generally does so from a *neighborhood* perspective, considering small units of geographically co-located citizens as the basis of community networks that influence engagement (Albanesi et al., 2007; Costa & Kahn, 2003; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). For example, Costa and Kahn (2003) used census tracts to identify "neighborhood"-level units, the racial, ethnic, and financial heterogeneities of which they compared with civic engagement levels, ultimately finding levels are lower in more-heterogeneous communities.

Other research has likewise investigated issues of community at the hyper-local level, though on *social* rather than demographic dimensions. Flanagan (2003), for instance, in her study of American adolescents, found that connections to others in the community via association memberships (i.e., religious organizations, extracurricular activities, etc.) increased civic and political participation. However, community connectedness is not merely the result of organizational memberships but also of affective connections that mobilize civic participation (Albanesi et al., 2007; Zukin et al., 2006) and communicative connections that integrate community members (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2002; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006b).

Regarding the former, experiencing an affective "sense of community" has been found to increase civic engagement. For example, in their study of Italian adolescents, Albanesi et al. (2007) found sense of community was significantly related to multiple forms of civic participation. Similarly, Moreau et al. (2019) found among Latinx Americans that LGBTQ respondents who perceived their fates as individuals as being highly linked to those of other LGBTQ individuals were more civically engaged. Though experiencing this kind of "linked fate" is more singular than experiencing

a general "sense of community," it evidences the significance of perceived attached-ness to motivating civic engagement.

Regarding the latter, Ball-Rokeach's Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) reconceptualizes community as the communicative relationships among media, institutions, and individuals embedded within the neighborhood context that facilitate the forms of community connectedness that drive civic engagement (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2002; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2001, 2003). From this perspective, community connectedness consists not just of "sense of community," intergroup trust, or demographic heterogeneity, but rather of the forms of belonging that arise from integration with a community's communication ecology. As such, "civic engagement is built on connections to a viable neighborhood storytelling network grounded in a conducive neighborhood context" (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006b, p. 413). Indeed, empirical work by Ball-Rokeach and her collaborators has supported this (re)conceptualization, finding that, in both demographically homogenous and heterogeneous communities, communicative integration increases neighborhood belonging, which in turn facilitates civic engagement (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006b; Ognyanova et al., 2013).

While CIT and other such infrastructural perspectives could, hypothetically, be translated to the online environment where there are robust virtual "spaces" of community, looking at more dispersed communities built on individual interpersonal interaction and participation in digital networks requires a broadening of theoretical scope. Unfortunately, less empirical research on civic engagement exists in this area, requiring us to turn to more speculative hypothesizing. Helpful here is Anderson's (1983/2006) idea of "imagined communities." Anderson famously contended the nation is "an imagined political community" (Anderson, 1983/2006, p. 6) in the sense that most citizens will never know, meet, or even hear of their fellow nationals and yet nonetheless live with the idea that they are bound in communion with them. This idea originates from and is propagated through media. Below the level of the nation, however, media produce and sustain other imagined communities, whether those based on racial identity (Omi & Winant, 2015), sexuality (Gross, 2001), or some other identity facet. In an age of networked communication technologies, the media that produce and sustain imagined communities are often user-generated and shared between individuals, rather than mass distributed (e.g., Lutz & Du Toit, 2014). These communications combine with offline interpersonal ones to form a sense of community bound both geographically and non-geographically (Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011). Particularly for minority communities as small as the transgender community, as well as for minority communities more generally, which may face exclusion from the majority communities of the neighborhoods in which

they reside, communication with members of their own social identity categories both in-person and online can foster community (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). For example, among Black LGBT Americans, a sense of connectedness to LGBT communities (as well as being "out" in said communities) strongly predicts civic engagement (Dancy et al., 2019). Online communication can be particularly important for transgender people, especially those living in rural areas, who often rely on digital technologies to connect with people who share their identity in other parts of the world (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Drawing on Anderson, then, we can consider community connectedness to be a function of embeddedness in networks of communicating actors. This perspective helpfully illuminates the relationship between community connectedness and civic engagement in non-geographical, identity-based community contexts, as significant research has demonstrated both the size of individuals' online networks and the prevalence of discussion within those networks positively predict individuals' levels of civic engagement (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Shah et al., 2005). Moreover, a strong tradition of individual-level social capital research has found the more within-group personal friendship ties an individual has, the more civically engaged they are likely to be (e.g., Collins et al., 2014). Combined with findings indicating that interaction with like-minded others increases political participation (Mutz, 2002a, 2002b), the literature seems to suggest that a greater degree of embeddedness in networks of communicating actors within an imagined community leads to a greater degree of civic engagement.

Despite the (necessary) expansion of community to include both geographic and non-geographic connections with individuals holding shared identities, it remains contested whether online networks or offline networks have a greater influence on individuals' civic engagement. While survey research suggests online networks of socialization are a stronger influence on civic participation than offline networks (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011), experimental research suggests in-person discussion networks produce greater increases in engagement than those online (Min, 2007). Yet still other work suggests the two are related such that belonging to offline communities increases the likelihood of engaging in online communities, further complicating matters (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2001). In either case, there is ample evidence from CIT that communicative integration within a community increases individuals' efficacy, which in turn drives increases in civic participation (e.g., Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a), and research by Shaw et al. (2020) has shown social media use, even when it connects people to non-geographic communities, increases both local and non-local political participation. While there is little empirical research on the matter, if we extend these findings to non-

geographic communities, as well, increases in individuals' efficacy may explain the connection between community connectedness and civic engagement.

Thus, in light of these literatures, we advance the following research question and three further hypotheses:

RQ1: Will transgender citizens' levels of (a) civic engagement and (b) political campaign contribution be more strongly predicted by in-person socialization with other transgender people or by online socialization?

H4: Transgender citizens' levels of (a) civic engagement and (b) political campaign contribution will be positively predicted by their degrees of community connectedness.

H5: However, consistent with the resource model, the relative predictive power of community connectedness will be greater for civic engagement than for political campaign contribution.

H6: Political self-efficacy will mediate the relationships between transgender citizens' levels of (a) civic engagement and (b) political campaign contribution and demographics, SES variables, and community connectedness as illustrated in the hypothetical model presented in Figure 1.

Method

Data for this study came from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), thus far the largest survey of the transgender community in the U.S. (James et al., 2016). The questions in the USTS cover numerous topics, including demographics, experiences of discrimination, military service, family acceptance, and, of particular relevance to the current study, political self-efficacy, civic engagement, and socialization with other transgender individuals. Data were collected in an online-only format during the summer of 2015 and included $N = 27{,}715$ participants from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several American territories. Surveys were distributed in both English and Spanish, and accessible formats were available for those with disabilities.

All participants identified as transgender, broadly defined as including transgender men, transgender women, nonbinary individuals, and self-identified cross-dressers. Because of the relatively small size of the U.S. transgender population, which current best estimates place at 0.6% of the total U.S. population (Flores et al., 2016), true random sampling from

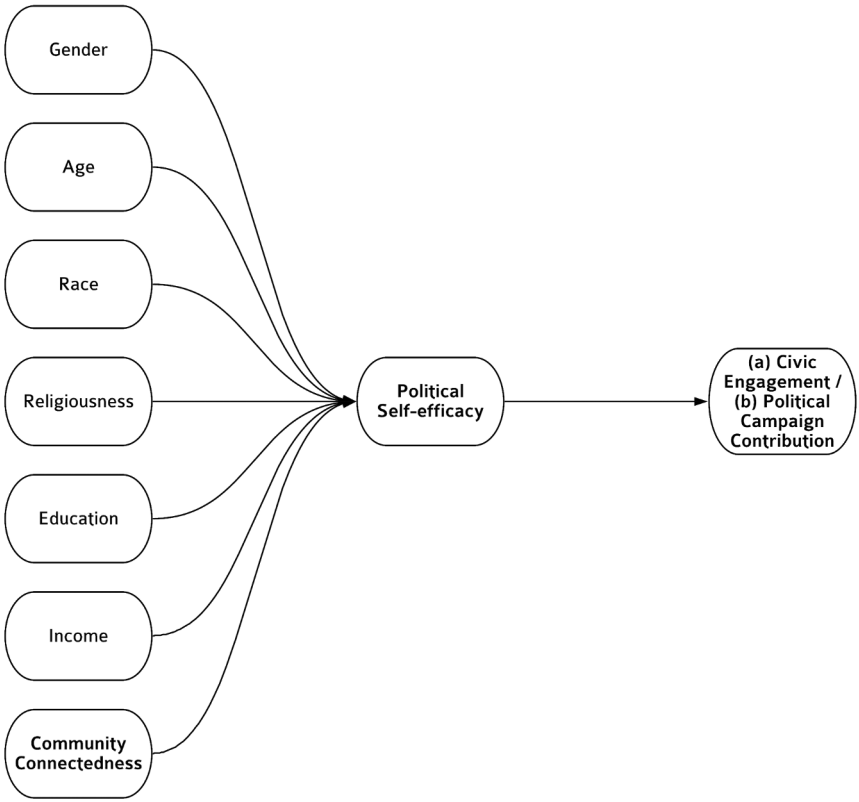

Figure 1. Hypothetical model of political self-efficacy's mediation of the relationships between (a) civic engagement/(b) political campaign contribution and demographics, SES, and community connectedness.

the general population was not possible; rather, a robust set of convenience sampling practices were employed (see James et al., 2016, pp. 25–31). Nonetheless, "outreach efforts were focused on addressing potential demographic disparities in [the] final sample" (James et al., 2016, p. 26), thus producing a sample as representative of the total transgender population as would be reasonably possible.

For the present study, only participants identified as U.S. citizens (N = 27,239) were included in analysis, as non-citizens face myriad structural barriers to civic participation that would complicate the relationships among relevant research variables and because past research has demonstrated how central citizenship is to individuals' civic participation (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1997, 1993). As an additional exclusion criterion, only participants with complete data on relevant research variables were included in analysis, resulting in a final sample of N = 23,770.

Variables

Civic engagement

The USTS included 7 items adapted from Verba et al. (1995) measuring participants' levels of civic engagement. Items consisted of a series of activities, including contacting government officials, attending protests or rallies, etc., to which participants responded either *yes* or *no* that they had participated in the last 12 months (see James et al., 2016, pp. 286–87 for all included activities, exact question wording). *Yes* responses were summed to create an index of civic engagement ranging from 0 to 7 (M = 1.80, SD = 1.57).

Political campaign contribution

The USTS included 4 further items adapted from Verba et al. (1995) regarding participants' contributions of resources to political campaigns during the 2012 election cycle, as well as a question indicating whether they voted in the election held on Tuesday, November 4, 2014. *Yes* responses were again summed to create an index of political campaign contribution ranging from 0 to 5 (M = 0.95, SD = 1.13).

Political self-efficacy

A single item from the National Annenberg Election Survey captured participants' levels of political self-efficacy. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (5) to *strongly agree* (1) with the statement "Someone like me can't really influence government decisions" (M = 3.15, SD = 1.25). Higher scores indicate a higher degree of self-efficacy.

Community connectedness

Degree of community connectedness was measured with a summative index of responses to a question about how participants socialize with other transgender people. Two of the four response options included "socializing in person" and "socializing online (such as Facebook or Twitter)."[1] Total community connectedness scores could range from 0 (if a participant selected no options) to 4 (if a participant selected all options; M = 2.07, SD = 1.17). Of all included participants, 79.6% indicated socializing with other trans people online, while 65.0% indicated socializing with other trans people in person.

[1]As Bimber (2000) noted, analyzing the role of "the Internet" writ large in civic engagement is not ideal, as it obscures significant differences in forms of digitally mediated communications. However, the use of the word "socializing" and parenthetical examples of social networking sites in the response option narrows the scope of "online" sufficiently for productive comparative analyses with "in person" socializing.

Demographics and political identities

Common demographic variables were also included in our analyses: gender identity (29.0% transgender man, 33.6% transgender woman, 34.7% non-binary individual, 2.7% cross-dresser); age (range 18 to 85, M = 31.49, SD = 13.49); race (16.9% nonwhite); religiosity (measured by a question asking if they had "been part of a spiritual/religious community" in the past year; 19.3% yes); education (mean level of some college); and household income (mean between $30,000 and $34,999). The two most common measures of political identity, affiliation with Republican or Democratic party (4.0% Republican, 79.8% Democratic) and political ideology (1 = *very conservative* to 5 = *very liberal*; M = 4.35, SD = 0.86) were included, as well. (See Appendix for full descriptive statistics.)

Statistical analyses

Hypotheses 1 through 6 and the only research question were tested in a pair of multivariate multiple regression (MMR) analyses with civic engagement and political campaign contribution as dependent variables. MMR was selected because it analyzes the statistical relationships between independent variables and *multiple* dependent variables. As noted by Dattalo (2013), MMR should be employed in favor of simple linear or ordinary least squares regressions when the dependent variables in question are conceptually linked and likely correlated, so they can be analyzed together; as two forms of a broader *political participation*, civic engagement and political campaign contribution are conceptually linked and should be correlated. MMR produces two types of analyses: multivariate and univariate. According to Quinn (2016), "Multivariate tests indicate whether the predictor variables are significant to the full set of dependent variables, taking into account the covariance between the dependent variables" (p. 591). Univariate tests, on the other hand, indicate whether the predictor variables are significant only to one dependent variable.

Because the final sample size for the study was so large, even very small effects would be detectable (f^2 = .01). However, the size of the sample also raised concerns that the study would be statistically overpowered, and keeping the alpha level set at the conventional .05 would be too high. We therefore followed Holbert et al.'s (2018) method for discontinuous criterion power analysis using the 'pwr' package in R (Champely et al., 2017), which indicated an appropriate alpha level of 5×10^{-36} for our regression analyses.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was also employed to test the mediation between civic engagement and political campaign contribution and their predictors by political self-efficacy posited in the hypothetical model presented in Figure 1. However, to account for potential reverse

causality in the relationship between community connectedness and civic engagement (i.e. trans people socializing with one another *through* political activism), the first SEM was a nonrecursive model in which both variables were regressed onto one another. Since reverse causality was not a concern for the relationship between community connectedness and political campaign contribution, the second SEM was a recursive model in which only community connectedness was regressed onto political campaign contribution. To set an appropriate alpha level for these analyses, we adapted Holbert et al.'s (2018) method using MacCallum et al. (1996) formula for the determination of appropriate sample size for covariance structure modeling. The calculations were performed using R code by Gnambs (2008) and indicated an appropriate alpha level of 5×10^{-5} for our SEM analyses.

Results

Hypotheses *H1a(i)–(v)* and *H1b(i)–(v)* made predictions about the influences of gender, age, race, education, and income on (a) civic engagement and (b) political campaign contribution, respectively. The results of the multivariate analyses presented in Table 1 reveal age and education, as well as political ideology, were significant predictors of the pair of political participation variables; gender and race were not significant predictors. Univariate analyses for both dependent variables reveal identical results, though income was a significant predictor of political campaign contribution, but not civic engagement. Moreover, the positive influences of age (β = 0.093 for civic engagement and β = 0.302 for political participation), education (β = 0.162 for civic engagement and β = 0.196 for political participation), and income (β = 0.076 for political participation) were in the hypothesized directions. Political ideology was also a significant positive predictor of both civic engagement (β = 0.161) and political campaign contribution (β = 0.106), and these demographic, SES, and political identity variables accounted for 11.8% of the variance for civic engagement and 21.6% of the variance for political campaign contribution. Thus, *H1a(ii), H1b(ii), H1a(iv), H1b(iv), and H1b(v)* were supported, while *H1a(i), H1b(i), H1a(iii), H1b(iii)*, and *H1a(v)* were not supported.

Consistent with the resource model posited by Brady et al. (1995), *H2a* and *H2b* predicted the relative predictive power of education and income, respectively, would be greater for political campaign contribution than for civic engagement, because the activities involved in political campaign contribution require financial resources in ways other forms of civic engagement do not. As income was a nonsignificant predictor for civic engagement but a significant predictor for political campaign contribution,

Table 1. Summary of multivariate multiple regression analyses for variables predicting civic engagement and political campaign contribution (N = 23,802).

	Multivariate analysis		Univariate analysis					
			Civic engagement			Political campaign contribution		
Variable	Wilks' λ	F(2, 23,758)	β	B (SE)	95% CI	β	B (SE)	95% CI
Block 1: Demographics, SES, Political Identities								
Gender (1 = Trans Woman)	0.999	16.303***	−0.004	−0.014 (0.020)	[−0.054, 0.026]	−0.034***	−0.082 (0.015)	[−0.111, −0.053]
Age	0.927	937.280***†	0.093***†	0.011 (0.001)	[0.009, 0.012]	0.302***†	0.025 (0.001)	[0.024, 0.026]
Race (1 = Black)	0.999	1.527	−0.010	−0.093 (0.053)	[−0.197, 0.011]	−0.003	0.019 (0.039)	[−0.094, 0.056]
Religiousness	0.991	111.725***†	0.085***†	0.338 (0.023)	[0.293, 0.383]	0.043***	0.124 (0.017)	[0.091. 0.156]
Education	0.951	616.426***†	0.162***†	0.184 (0.007)	[0.170, 0.199]	0.196***†	0.160 (0.005)	[0.150, 0.170]
Income	0.992	99.560***†	−0.009	−0.003 (0.002)	[−0.006, 0.001]	0.076***†	0.016 (0.001)	[0.014, 0.019]
Party (1 = Democrat)	0.996	47.233***	−0.013*	−0.039 (0.019)	[−0.077, −0.001]	0.053***	0.115 (0.014)	[0.088, 0.143]
Political ideology	0.972	339.956***†	0.166***†	0.304 (0.012)	[0.280, 0.328]	0.098***†	0.129 (0.009)	[0.112, 0.146]
Δ Adjusted R^2			0.118***†			0.216***†		
Block 2								
Political self-efficacy	0.970	363.090***†	0.126***†	0.158 (0.007)	[0.144, 0.172]	0.129***†	0.117 (0.005)	[0.106, 0.127]
Δ Adjusted R^2			0.026***†			0.019***†		
Block 3								
Community connectedness	0.885	1547.012***†	0.323***†	0.431 (0.008)	[0.416, 0.447]	0.090***†	0.086 (0.006)	[0.076, 0.097]
Δ Adjusted R^2			0.098***†			0.008***†		
Total Adjusted R^2			0.242***†			0.243***†		

CI = confidence interval. Cell entries are final-entry OLS coefficients.
*p < .05, ***p < .001, while †indicates significance beneath the alpha level of 5×10^{-36}.

and education was a larger predictor for political campaign contribution than for civic engagement, *H2a* and *H2b* were both supported.

The third hypothesis predicted political self-efficacy would be a positive predictor of both (*H3a*) civic engagement and (*H3b*) political campaign contribution. As shown in Table 1, political self-efficacy indeed predicted civic engagement (β = 0.126) and political campaign contribution (β = 0.129) in the expected direction, explaining a further 2.6% and 1.9% of the variance, respectively. Moreover, the size of political self-efficacy's predictive power was on par with that of age, education, and ideology. Thus, *H3a* and *H3b* were both supported.

The only research question asked whether online or in-person socialization with other transgender people would more strongly predict both (*RQ1a*) civic engagement and (*RQ1b*) political campaign contribution. As shown in Table 2, both in-person and online socialization were significant predictors of civic engagement, although the predictive power of in-person socialization (β = .155) was almost double that of online socialization (β = .085). In the model predicting political campaign contribution, on the other hand, neither online socialization nor in-person socialization was a significant predictor. However, results of the multivariate analyses presented in Table 2 reveal both in-person and online socialization were significant predictors of the pair of political participation variables, with in-person socialization the primary predictor and online socialization the secondary predictor. Thus, in-person socialization was a stronger predictor of both civic engagement and the pair of political participation variables than was online socialization.

The fourth and fifth hypotheses added community connectedness to the models predicting (*H4a*) civic engagement and (*H4b*) political campaign contribution, predicting greater community connectedness would be associated with higher levels of both, though (*H5*) the relative predictive power of community connectedness would be greater for civic engagement than for political campaign contribution. These hypotheses were fully supported, as seen in Table 1. For civic engagement, community connectedness was the single largest predictor (β = .323) in the full model, roughly double the size of education, political ideology, and political self-efficacy. Moreover, community connectedness alone accounted for 9.8% of the variance in civic engagement—just under the amount of variance explained by all demographic, SES, and political identity variables combined (11.8%). In the case of political campaign contribution, however, community connectedness was a small, albeit statistically significant, predictor (β = .090) and accounted for little additional variance (0.8%). This notable difference in the predictive power of community connectedness between civic engagement and political campaign contribution is, as hypothesized, consistent with the differences in demands on individuals that these two forms of participation place.

Table 2. Summary of multivariate multiple regression analyses for variables predicting civic engagement and political campaign contribution (N = 23,802).

	Multivariate Analysis		Univariate Analysis					
			Civic Engagement			Political Campaign Contribution		
Variable	Wilks' λ	F(2, 23,791)	β	B (SE)	95% CI	β	B (SE)	95% CI
Block 1: Demographics, SES, Political Identities								
Gender (1 = Trans Woman)	0.999	17.294***	0.009	0.028 (0.021)	[−0.013, 0.070]	−0.031***	−0.073 (0.015)	[−0.102, −0.044]
Age	0.928	918.002***†	0.102***†	0.012 (0.001)	[0.010, 0.014]	0.302***†	0.025 (0.001)	[0.024, 0.026]
Race (1 = Black)	0.999	0.377	−0.005	−0.048 (0.055)	[−0.156, 0.060]	−0.001	−0.010 (0.038)	[−0.085, 0.065]
Religiousness	0.988	148.826***†	0.102***†	0.407 (0.024)	[0.360, 0.454]	0.049***	0.140 (0.017)	[0.108, 0.172]
Education	0.950	630.870***†	0.174***†	0.198 (0.007)	[0.183, 0.212]	0.199***†	0.163 (0.005)	[0.153, 0.173]
Income	0.991	105.592***†	−0.020**	−0.006 (0.002)	[−0.010, −0.002]	0.072***	0.016 (0.001)	[0.013, 0.018]
Party (1 = Democrat)	0.996	47.707***	−0.015**	−0.047 (0.020)	[−0.086, −0.007]	0.052***	0.113 (0.014)	[0.086, 0.141]
Political ideology	0.965	425.045***†	0.194***†	0.355 (0.013)	[0.330, 0.379]	0.108***†	0.142 (0.009)	[0.125, 0.159]
Δ Adjusted R^2			0.118***†			0.217***†		
Block 2								
Political self-efficacy	0.965	426.175***†	0.147***†	0.184 (0.008)	[0.169, 0.199]	0.136***†	0.123 (0.005)	[0.113, 0.133]
Δ Adjusted R^2			0.026***†			0.019***†		
Block 3								
In person	0.974	316.864***†	0.155***†	0.510 (0.020)	[0.470, 0.549]	0.039***	0.092 (0.014)	[0.064, 0.120]
Online	0.991	103.497***†	0.085***†	0.332 (0.024)	[0.285, 0.379]	0.007	0.019 (0.017)	[−0.013, 0.052]
Δ Adjusted R^2			0.036***†			0.002		
Total Adjusted R^2			0.180***†			0.237***†		

CI = confidence interval. Cell entries are final-entry OLS coefficients.
**$p < .10$, ***$p < .001$, while †indicates significance beneath the alpha level of 5×10^{-36}.

The final hypothesis predicted political self-efficacy would mediate the relationship between (*H6a*) civic engagement and (*H6b*) political campaign contribution and demographics, SES variables, and community connectedness as illustrated in the hypothetical model presented in Figure 1. To test this hypothesis, we employed structural equation modeling, developing two different models—one predicting civic engagement and another predicting political campaign contribution. As shown in Figure 2, the relationships between gender, age, religiousness, and community connectedness and civic engagement were all mediated by political self-efficacy. The relationship between age and civic engagement was also mediated by community connectedness. Significantly, gender (β = −0.337) had no direct effect on civic engagement, but rather was only mediated by political self-efficacy. Only the effects of income and education were not mediated by political self-efficacy, though education had a strong direct effect on civic engagement (β = 0.276), while race had no mediated *or* direct effect. It should also be noted the direct effect of community connectedness on civic engagement

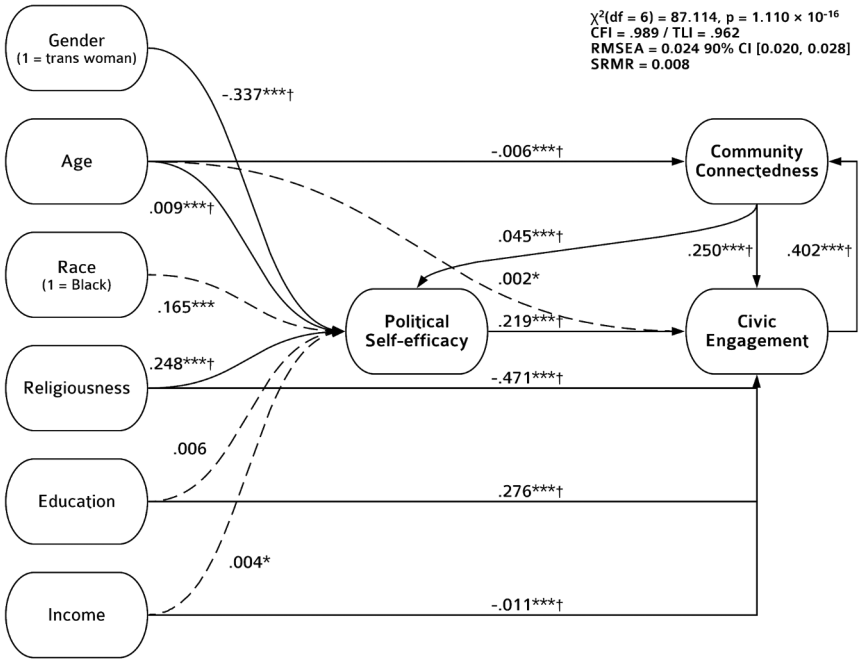

Figure 2. Structural equation model testing how political self-efficacy mediates the predictive power of demographics, SES, and community connectedness on civic engagement, as well as the mutual causal relationship between community connectedness and civic engagement. Path values are standardized beta coefficients, ***$p < .001$, while †indicates significance beneath the alpha level of 5×10^{-5}. Dashed lines represent non-significant path values.

(β = 0.250) was much stronger than the mediated effect (β = 0.045), indicating that mediation is supplemental to the direct effect, but by no means the primary relationship between community connectedness and civic engagement. Most importantly, though community connectedness had a significant direct effect on civic engagement, civic engagement also had an unhypothesized significant direct effect on community connectedness (β = 0.469). This suggests the two variables are, in fact, mutually causal such that greater community connectedness leads to greater civic engagement, which in turn leads to still greater community connectedness. The overall fit of the model was good (see Figure 2).

As show in Figure 3, the relationships between gender, age, religiousness, and community connectedness and political campaign contribution were likewise all mediated by political self-efficacy. Again, gender (β = −0.339)

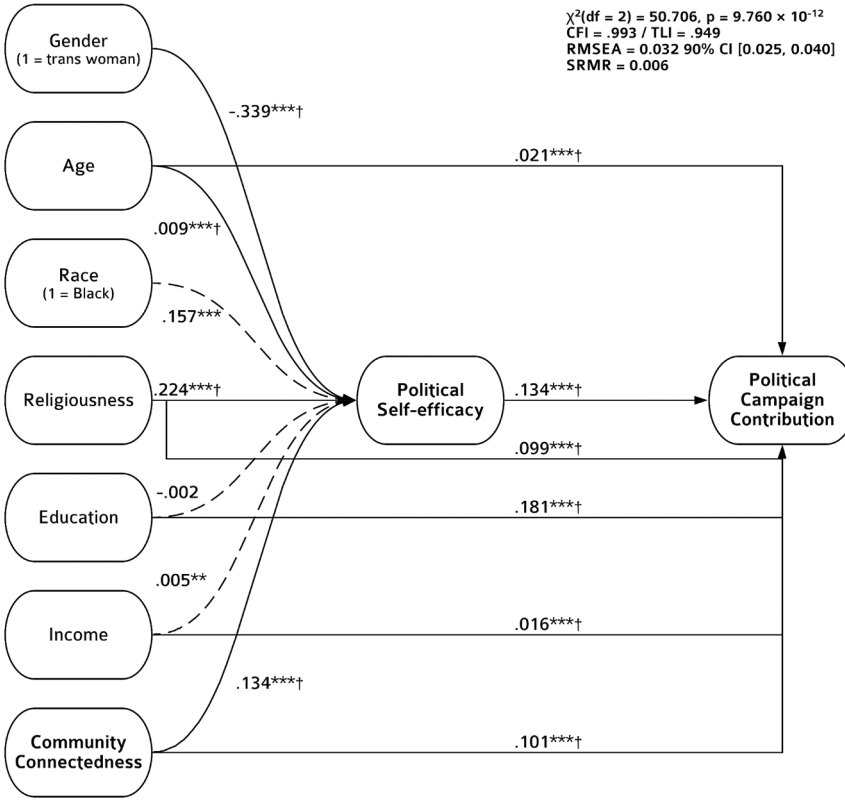

Figure 3. Structural equation model testing how political self-efficacy mediates the predictive power of demographics, SES, and community connectedness on political campaign contribution. Path values are standardized beta coefficients, ***$p < .001$, while †indicates significance beneath the alpha level of 5×10^{-5}. Dashed lines represent non-significant path values.

had no direct effect on political campaign contribution, while the effect of education (β = 0.181) was not mediated by political self-efficacy. Income also had a significant direct effect on political campaign contribution (β = −0.016), consistent with the resource model, and the direct effect of community connectedness on political campaign contribution (β = 0. 101) was *weaker* than the mediated effect (β = 0.134); in this instance, the mediation seems to be the primary means by which community connectedness influences political campaign contribution. The overall fit of this model was also good (see Figure 2).

Discussion

Civic engagement and political participation have been topics of contentious academic debate, particularly where it concerns the engagement of groups known to participate less in institutional politics. However, prior literature on civic engagement among these groups has focused on demographic variables, socio-economic factors, and individuals' associational memberships (among other predictors) at the expense of the *social contexts* in which participation occurs. The present study thus sought to introduce the notion of *community connectedness* to the study of civic engagement—beyond the forms of neighborhood belonging and associational memberships identified in past research—in order to better understand the role social relationships play in marginalized groups' participation. To do so, this study focused specifically on transgender citizens in the U.S., a marginalized group that faces disproportionate levels of exclusion from institutional politics (James et al., 2016) but that is of incredible significance to the contemporary American political landscape (Billard, 2016, 2019).

Some of this study's findings are consistent with those of prior work. Indeed, as has been found in various contexts (e.g., Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1997, 1993; Zukin et al., 2006), transgender participants' levels of civic engagement were significantly predicted by demographic and socio-economic status variables. Specifically, those who are older and those with more education were more civically engaged and contributed more time and money to political campaigns, though gender and race were nonsignificant predictors. Those with higher incomes were only more likely to contribute time and money to political campaigns. These findings are consistent with a resource model of civic engagement (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1997), which posits different forms of engagement place different resource demands on individuals, thus causing certain individuals to be more able to participate than others. Among the transgender participants in this study, MMR analyses revealed education was a significant predictor of both forms of political participation, while income was a predictor of resource contribution-based activities, but not less resource-

dependent activities, such as contacting government officials, attending protests or rallies, and so on.

Moreover, political self-efficacy was, as identified in prior work (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Verba et al., 1997), both a significant direct predictor of civic engagement and a significant mediating variable of the relationships between demographic and socio-economic status variables and civic engagement and political campaign contribution. In particular, political self-efficacy mediated the relationships between gender, age, and religiousness, and civic engagement and political campaign contribution such that identifying as a non-woman transgender person, being older, and being more religious was associated with higher levels of self-efficacy, which was in turn associated with higher levels of civic engagement and political campaign contribution. As such, political self-efficacy can be said to be both an important *direct* and *indirect* influence on transgender citizens' political participation.

More contentious within the literature has been whether social networks constituted by in-person connections or those constituted by online connections are more conducive to civic engagement. Survey research has indicated online networks are a stronger predictor of civic participation (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011), whereas experimental research has found in-person networks cause higher engagement levels than online networks (Min, 2007). The results of the present study lend further evidence to the latter perspective, at least among transgender individuals, as results indicated online socialization was a weaker predictor of civic engagement; while neither was a significant predictor of political campaign contribution, both were significant predictors of the covaried pair of political participation variables, and in-person socialization was again the stronger predictor.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is evidence indicating the primary significance of community connectedness—and specifically connectedness to one's identity-based community—to civic engagement levels. The results of this study move us beyond common sociodemographic or media use predictors, or even the resource model that this study also offered mixed support for, toward a more socially embedded perspective of civic engagement among marginalized groups. Community connectedness was the single largest predictor of civic engagement and alone accounted for almost as much variance in the measurement of civic engagement as all demographic, SES, and political identity variables combined. However, in the SEM, we found an unhypothesized mutual causal relationship between civic engagement and community connectedness. This suggests a cyclical relationship between the two in which connection to other community members increases individuals' civic engagement and engagement in civic activities, in turn, deepens individuals' community

connectedness—perhaps through forging new relationships to other community members. Consistent with our theoretical perspective on community's role in civic engagement, however, community connectedness was a less substantive predictor of political campaign contribution—which is also consistent with a resource model of civic engagement. Because campaign contributions demand more financial and temporal resources, those with higher incomes are logically more capable of engaging in these forms of participation. In contrast, resources are less central to the largely action-based activities of civic engagement, and thus community connectedness is more significant for mobilizing individuals' participation. As such, the present study builds upon the resource model of civic engagement to illuminate the *social* conditions under which civic engagement occurs among those marginalized groups with less access to the resources that drive participation. Furthermore, these results demonstrate the particular significance of interpersonal social contexts to engagement writ large, over and above the influence of individual variables or neighborhood-level community factors.

Another important contribution of this study is its illumination of the particular dynamics at play in the civic engagement of the transgender community—a population that has received insufficient attention in civic engagement research, despite their profound impact on the contemporary political environment. Our results demonstrate the strong predictive power of community connectedness for the civic engagement of transgender citizens, but also reveal a mutually causal relationship between connectedness and civic engagement. This may indicate political activity is an unlikely source of community for transgender people in the contemporary U.S., in contrast to the more social sources of community for most identity groups. Our results also show in-person socializing has a stronger effect on civic engagement than online socializing for trans people. However, data from the USTS shows trans people are much more likely to socialize with other trans people online than they are to socialize in-person. This is likely because the trans population is both small and geographically dispersed, resulting in a small number of regions in the U.S. where trans people are close enough for robust social worlds (e.g., Flores et al., 2016). Consequently, transgender civic engagement may be limited by the relative paucity of transgender social spaces. While the geographic redistribution of trans people is unlikely, CIT research suggests the communicative integration of community members increases civic engagement significantly, and so the development of an infrastructure of virtual community spaces can enhance transgender civic engagement.

Finally, the present research has interesting implication for the literature on gender disparities in civic engagement. Most research in this area has maintained women are socialized out of political participation as they are

taught to view institutional politics as unsuitable for women (Bennett & Bennett, 1989; Dovi, 2007; Jenkins, 2005; Jennings, 1983). If one were to follow the socialization argument through to its cisgender-centric conclusion, one might assume transgender women, having presumably been socialized as boys, would exhibit higher levels of civic engagement than transgender men, who would have presumably been socialized as girls. Our results reveal the opposite: transgender women exhibit *lower* levels of civic engagement than transgender men. One potential explanation is that transgender people experience gender-based socialization, learning what political norms are associated with each binary gender category, but then actualize the norms expected of their gender identity, rather than those of the gender they were assigned at birth. Of course, further research is required to test this explanation, but if true, this finding has important implications for the socialization hypothesis, as it reorients socialization away from a childhood process of gender norm internalization toward an ongoing process of gender norm enactment. These implications call for a reinvestigation of the processes of gender-based socialization in civic engagement writ large.

There are notable limitations to this study that must also be identified. First, because the data analyzed were from a secondary source, variables could not be measured in ways that would best suit the aims of the study. For instance, civic engagement and community connectedness were both measured as summative indices of activities rather than as magnitudes, which would have allowed for greater variance in measurement. Categories of activity in the measurement of community connectedness were also not entirely mutually exclusive, which would have been preferable. Additionally, education and income were measured as ordinal rather than continuous variables, and self-efficacy was assessed with only a single item. There were also potentially relevant variables that were simply not included in the original study, such as the affective dimension of community belonging, other forms of media use, rural versus urban dwelling, civic skills, political interest, and political knowledge, among others. Finally, the sample was not drawn randomly from the general population, and thus results are not generalizable to all transgender Americans. However, because of the secondary nature of the data—and because the size of the transgender population makes random sampling a near impossibility—such shortcomings are unfortunately unavoidable.

Future studies should validate the findings of this research in contexts of other marginalized populations to confirm the general significance of community connectedness beyond the U.S. transgender context. Moreover, future studies of civic engagement must include measures of community connectedness as a control variable in their studies to account for greater variance, even if their studies do not focus specifically on community as a relevant research variable. Finally, future studies of civic engagement

among the transgender population could take a qualitative approach, using interview- or observation-based methods to understand the processes and outcomes of community belonging as it relates to civic and political participation.

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