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Civic Life in the Divided Metropolis: Social Capital, Collective Action, and Residential Income Segregation

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Abstract

Social capital is presumed to help individuals who lack financial or human capital achieve collective action through their social ties and networks of relationships. But does it help individuals overcome their socioeconomic disadvantages relative to their wealthier neighbors, or does the accumulation of social capital merely reproduce socioeconomic disparities, particularly in economically segregated places? Leveraging data from the Current Population Survey, I test whether residential income segregation is associated with larger income differences in social capital investments and collective action. I find that in more economically segregated places, wealthier residents are more likely to be members of neighborhood organizations and report working with other community members to address local issues. These results are robust to the inclusion of other potential confounders, including income inequality, racial context, and racial residential segregation. This research has implications for policy makers and stakeholders interested in building a more inclusive civic arena.

Keywords [residential segregation](#), [social capital](#), [civic engagement](#), [collective action](#), [income inequality](#)

Scholars have theorized that social capital is the “main weapon of the have-nots,” presumed to help individuals and groups who lack significant financial or human capital achieve better outcomes through their social ties and networks of relationships ([Putnam 2001](#), p. 359). Others, however, raise serious doubts about whether social capital can help individuals overcome their socioeconomic disadvantages relative to their more resource-rich neighbors, noting that investments in social capital often reproduce disparities in political voice and power ([DeFilippis 2001](#); [Wacquant 1998](#)). In this article, I approach this debate by integrating two strands in the literature—one focused on individual difference and the other on contextual influence—to test whether residential income segregation conditions the social capital investments of the rich and poor. My theoretical argument draws upon [Bourdieu’s \(1986](#), p. 46) key insight that capital accumulation is structured by macro-level constraints that shape “the chances of success for practice.” I argue that the spatial segregation of poverty and affluence limits opportunities for the poor to form social networks endowed with substantial resources and reduces their perceptions that social capital can overcome socioeconomic disadvantage. Such spatial segregation may also create a virtuous circle for the well-off, producing additional positive returns to their social capital investments. Thus, as the number of mixed-income neighborhoods declines, the information, support, and influence that flow through social networks may be further confined to a smaller number of places, thereby exacerbating the social isolation and political marginalization of the poor.

Although social capital remains a contested concept ([Woolcock 2011](#)), I hope to recover some of its utility for the study of local politics. Indeed, social capital theory has all but been abandoned by political scientists, as noted by [Hero and Orr \(2012](#), p. 311) in their review of the literature:

Unless it is modified, social capital does not fit with much of the reigning approach to urban political science—the urban political economy approach. This approach focuses on the interplay between polity and the economy at the local level and its consequences for public policy. The political arena is an important component of the urban political economy perspective. Social capital, on the other hand, is centered more in the civic arena.

And yet, while the economy plays a key role in shaping and constraining local political conflict and the policy agendas that cities pursue, the civic sector remains on the frontlines of local policy development and implementation. Government contracting with nonprofit organizations has increased dramatically, blurring the line between public and private action ([Smith and Lipsky 2009](#)). Locally elected officials have supported devolution as well, reaping political benefits for directing resources to their constituents ([Marwell 2007](#)). Many cities are now experimenting with localism and coproduction ([Fung 2009](#); [Fung and Wright 2003](#); [John 2009](#)). And as the allegiance of businesses to particular places wanes, universities, foundations, and hospitals have joined—and sometimes replaced—the downtown elite in shaping the urban agenda ([Stone 2013](#)). In turn, political opportunity structures within cities look different than they did 50 years ago: Coalitions among elites are more unstable, resources are more limited, and nonelite actors have greater access to political decision-making power ([Stone 2015](#)).

But while participatory programs may help citizens get their issues onto the public agenda ([Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993](#)), individuals with substantial social capital are often better prepared to take advantage of such decentralizing reforms ([Fung 2009](#); [Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995](#)). And although recent research illustrates how marginalized groups—led by nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations, and labor and immigrant groups—can mobilize resources to shape alternative agendas for city politics (see, for example, [Jones-Correa and Wong 2015](#)), no study to date has systematically measured income biases in social capital and collective action, or the geographic variation in such disparities.

Indeed, whether local contexts exacerbate socioeconomic differences in social capital investments has particular relevance given the substantial increase in the spatial segregation of poverty and affluence within metropolitan regions. Since 1970, the share of the population who live in the poorest and most affluent neighborhoods has doubled ([Reardon and Bischoff 2011](#)). Middle-class neighborhoods have shrunk in 27 out of the largest 30 metropolitan areas ([Fry and Taylor 2012](#)), and significant pockets of poverty now dot many inner-ring suburbs ([Kneebone and Berube 2013](#)). These trends stand in contrast to racial residential segregation, which has declined since the 1970s ([Massey, Rothwell, and Domina 2009](#)). Although some have noted that social capital tends to be organized along the same fault lines—race, ethnicity, gender, and social class—that structure other forms of social participation (see, for example, [Briggs 1997](#); [DeFilippis 2001](#); [Lin 2000](#); [Wacquant 1998](#)), there is little empirical evidence on how neatly socioeconomic disparities map onto inequalities in social capital investments and collective action, or whether residential income segregation exacerbates these gaps.

There are good reasons to suspect that residential income segregation limits opportunities for the poor to build the sorts of productive social networks that can be leveraged to gain access to better resources and influence policy makers. Studies of Chicago ([Wilson 1987](#)) and Detroit ([Cohen and Dawson 1993](#)) illustrate how concentrations of urban poverty create a vicious cycle of social isolation and political marginalization. Other research finds that residential characteristics—including racial homogeneity ([Alesina and Ferrara 2000](#); [Costa and Kahn 2003](#); [Hero 2003](#); [Putnam 2007](#)) and income inequality ([Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999](#))—shape individuals' propensities to participate in civic life. But whether there are places where typically marginalized residents are not at such a disadvantage when it comes to the cooperative networks that help individuals work together to achieve social ends is unclear.

To address these questions, I take advantage of data in the Current Population Survey (CPS) civic and volunteer supplements, collected jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics ([Flood et al. 2015](#)). I first aggregate these data by metropolitan statistical area (MSA) to examine geographic variation in income biases in social capital investments and collective action. I then estimate a series of multilevel models that take into account individual-level resource differences as well as the differences across MSAs on such factors as income segregation, poverty, income inequality, and racial segregation. In brief, I find that income biases in social capital and collective action are increasing with residential income segregation. These results are robust to the inclusion of other potential confounders, including income inequality, racial context, and racial residential segregation. These findings provide additional evidence for how income segregation negatively impacts the life outcomes of the poor and suggest that efforts to build local civic capacity must first work to bridge the income divide in civic life.

Income Biases in Social Capital and Collective Action

In examining income biases in social capital, I rely upon [Bourdieu's \(1986, p. 51\)](#) conception of social capital as the resources that can be gained through “relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” [Portes \(1998, p. 121\)](#) similarly defined social capital as the “capacity for individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks of broader social structures” (see also [Coleman 1988](#); [Lin 2000](#)). Although these relationships provide resources that can be leveraged for action, social capital can take on many different forms. It can include the close-knit and intensive networks that can help people get by, or what some have called “bonding” social capital ([Putnam 2001](#)). It can play a more “bridging” role, providing the weak links ([Granovetter 1973](#)) that can help less advantaged individuals get ahead and the diffuse networks that can enable them to gain sustained access to formal institutions ([Woolcock 2011](#)). At minimum, however, social capital refers to relationships that “enable people to acquire resources” ([Van Eijk 2010, p. 57](#)). These resources might include information, social support, skills, norms, trust, influence, or capital, but it is the acquiring and exchanging of resources through social ties that gives conceptual clarity to the term.

[Putnam \(2001\)](#) argued that because social capital facilitates collective action, the benefits of generalized trust and norms of reciprocity accrue to communities as well.¹ Consistent with this logic, places endowed with greater stocks of social capital appear to be better equipped to confront their economic difficulties ([Briggs 2008](#); see also [Kawachi, Kennedy, and Glass 1999](#)).²

Yet if social capital is related to community well-being and critical for making decentralizing reforms work ([Briggs 1997](#)), local contexts also matter. For example, participation in associational activities tends to be lower in more diverse ([Alesina and Ferrara 2000](#); [Costa and Kahn 2003](#); [Hero 2003](#); [Putnam 2007](#)) and unequal ([Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999](#)) places. Much of this work, however, does not consider how the amount and types of social capital possessed by individuals vary by socioeconomic status (SES). This is somewhat surprising given Bourdieu's emphasis on power, prestige, and the ways in which social relations can reproduce inequality. Nor is there much research on how socioeconomic disparities in social capital investments differ across communities. [Small \(2010, p. 9\)](#) noted that "in their devotion to studying the consequences of social ties, many researchers have taken for granted the processes by which they arise."

Previous research suggests two processes that shape social capital disparities. The first centers on how social stratification affects perceptions of investment returns. For example, disadvantaged youth living in states with larger income gaps between the poor and middle class appear to see less value in investing in their human capital, helping to explain the negative correlation between state-level income inequality and educational attainment ([Kearney and Levine 2014](#)). Social capital investments may similarly be conditioned by perceptions of success ([Bourdieu 1986](#)). Higher SES individuals likely see more evidence of successful networking, which in turn may help to reinforce prosocial norms among the well-off. And because of their close social and geographic proximity to resource-rich networks, it takes less time, fewer resources, and not as much motivation to form useful social ties. Marginalized groups, however, have fewer opportunities to build cross-group ties, see fewer examples of socioeconomic advancement through social connection, and must expend more resources—group identity, recognition from group peers, opportunity costs—to access better networks with more information and influence ([Lin 2000](#)). A second process centers on social position. Given that individuals tend to associate with similar others, income biases in social capital investments may arise through the unintentional accumulation of resources that are embedded in social structures. Both processes predict large socioeconomic disparities in social capital accumulation.

That said, many low-income residents in resource-poor neighborhoods have rich social connections, even if they lack more formal relationships to community-based organizations (CBOs; see, for example, [Venkatesh 2009](#)).³ Poor and marginalized residents often rely on dense networks of mutual support to get by ([Saegert, Thompson, and Warren 2002](#); [Stack 1974](#)), and poor neighborhoods do not necessarily restrict the resources embedded within social networks. [Small's \(2004\)](#) qualitative study of Boston's neighborhoods suggests three sources of difference: (1) availability of resources within the neighborhood, (2) ethnic and class composition, and (3) the quality of boundaries between poor households and surrounding nonpoor ones. Scholars have largely focused on the first two sources. For example, several studies examine neighborhood differences in organizational resources ([Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993](#); [Sampson 2012](#); [Small 2004](#)). Finding that neighborhood well-being in Chicago can be explained in part by the strength of its local institutions, including the nonprofit organizations and churches that help to facilitate civic action, [Sampson \(2012, p. 371\)](#) summarized much of this literature by noting that "communities possessing a rich organizational life are ahead of the curve." Other studies that examine contextual variation focus on how racial diversity shapes racial and ethnic group differences in social capital (see, for example, [Fieldhouse and Cutts 2010](#); [Marschall and Stolle 2004](#); [Putnam 2007](#)). The literature has paid much less attention to the spatial proximities and hierarchies that structure social and civic life (but see [Sampson 2012](#)).

Nevertheless, there are several reasons to suspect that the spatial segregation of poverty and affluence perpetuates social isolation and marginalization, thereby weakening social bonds and civic capacities, particularly within poor neighborhoods. [Wilson's \(1987\)](#) seminal work on urban poverty shows how deindustrialization and the subsequent flight of middle-income residents from inner-city neighborhoods cut the poor off from more resource-rich networks. The consequences of such social isolation are profound: Individuals lacking these kinds of social connections are more likely to be disconnected from labor markets and informal "protection" networks ([Granovetter 1973](#)). Social isolation can also reinforce political disadvantages. Drawing on public opinion data from Detroit residents, [Cohen and Dawson \(1993\)](#) showed that low-income individuals living in high-poverty neighborhoods vote and participate in community meetings at lower rates than similarly poor residents living in more economically diverse neighborhoods. Thus, while dense networks of mutual support are found in many resource-poor neighborhoods, residential income segregation may shape the types of social ties that are formed and whether those social connections encourage civic involvement.

Public institutions such as schools and welfare agencies—themselves constituting a formal source of social capital ([Wacquant 1998](#))—also function very differently in the context of extreme segregation and concentrated poverty. [Wacquant \(1998, p. 35\)](#) argued,

Instead of forming a protective buffer and a panoply of mechanisms likely to prop up the most vulnerable members and tie them into the national collectivity, the public institutions of today's ghetto . . . serve to further isolate, stigmatize, and exclude them.

Several studies illustrate how geographically confined spaces of community supervision and criminal justice interaction can reduce the political and civic engagement of entire neighborhoods ([Burch 2013](#); [Lerman and Weaver 2014](#)). Residential income segregation may also produce highly segregated school districts, with struggling schools that contribute little social capital concentrated in poor neighborhoods and resource-rich schools far removed from where the poor live.

Likewise, residential income segregation may reduce the amount of social capital that gets mediated through CBOs. Because social capital is often produced by brokers who are able to stitch together nonoverlapping networks ([Burt 2004](#)), the nonprofit sector plays an important role in generating social capital (Small 2009). Yet though the nonprofit sector is an important intermediary, many organizations locate in nonpoor areas ([Allard 2008](#)), thus creating additional geographic disadvantages for low-income residents. Such spatial mismatches may become even more pronounced as poverty increasingly becomes a suburban issue ([Kneebone and Berube 2013](#)).

At the other end of the socioeconomic ladder, income segregation may lead to even greater social capital investments among the well-off. A substantial body of literature demonstrates that social ties are more easily formed and maintained in homogeneous communities (see, for example, [Hero 2003](#); [Putnam 2007](#)). The spatial segregation of affluence may mean that it is easier for the advantaged not only to form productive social ties but also to reap greater returns from a resource-rich network. Geographic concentrations of affluence may also restrict the amount of human and social capital, political influence, and instrumental resources that spills over onto poor and middle-class communities ([Bischoff and Reardon 2014](#)).

But while U.S. cities have become increasingly unequal places to live, particularly as housing and land-use policies continue to create segregated spaces of economic opportunity ([Hayward and Swanstrom 2011](#)), metro areas differ substantively from one another in terms of income inequality ([Berube 2014](#)) and residential income segregation ([Reardon and Bischoff 2011](#)). And although income inequality and income segregation are correlated, income inequality is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for income segregation ([Bischoff and Reardon 2014](#)). Given these cross-metropolitan differences in inequality and segregation, we might expect that

individuals with the same socioeconomic resources may be embedded in very different social structures, depending on where they live. In less economically segregated communities, the poor will likely have better access to resource-rich networks, expend fewer resources to build and sustain cross-group ties, and obtain greater returns to their social capital investments. As such, I expect residential income segregation to predict income biases in social capital investments and collective action, holding all other individual and contextual differences constant.

Data and Method

To test this hypothesis, I utilize data from the CPS civic and volunteer supplements. The CPS is a monthly survey of approximately 56,000 households and is divided into three basic parts: (1) household and demographic information, (2) labor force information, and (3) supplement information. Although the main purpose of the CPS is to produce monthly labor force estimates, supplemental inquiries cover several different topics. Through the civic engagement supplement, the U.S. Census Bureau has collected data on how often individuals engage in a number of civic and social activities. Because I am most interested in social capital's potential for collective action, I focus on two proxy measures of social capital: (1) participation in a local organization and (2) reciprocal exchange with one's neighbors. These measures focus on both formal and informal means of social interaction, with the assumption that such connections produce the kinds of social capital that make collective action more likely. These measures also help me distinguish bonding and bridging social capital. Although I lack data on the resources embedded within these networks, I presume that there are more cross-cutting social ties within local organizations than there exists between neighbors. In this way, I consider whether the poor living in poor, isolated neighborhoods are more likely to rely on their immediate neighbors for help (see, for example, [Stack 1974](#)) than participate in organizations that could possibly provide a more well-connected and politically influential base of support and advocacy (see, for example, [Green, Tigges, and Browne 1995](#)).

These measures of social capital come from the 2008 to 2011 civic supplements. I pool these data so that I have sufficient sample sizes to compare smaller geographic units. *Group membership* is a dichotomous measure of membership in a school (such as a Parent Teacher Association), religious, sport, neighborhood, or other community organization. Approximately 38% of respondents reported involvement in a local organization or church. *Reciprocal exchange* is a 5-point ordinal measure for the frequency that respondents said they do favors for their neighbors, ranging from 1 ("never" or "don't know") to 5 ("basically every day"). On average, respondents reported doing favors for their neighbors once a month.

Political scientists tend to focus on the collective dimension of social capital—the ways in which interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity make it easier for individuals to come together to pursue their common objectives.⁴ Data from the civic supplements to the CPS do not allow me to directly test whether and where social capital facilitates collective action. However, as part of the September volunteer supplement to the CPS, the Census asks respondents whether they had "ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). This measure of *collective action* comes from the 2008 to 2011 CPS volunteer supplements.⁵ On average, less than 10% of respondents reported working with others to solve a problem in their community.

As a first cut at examining geographic variation in the extent to which wealthier residents are more likely to engage in these activities than poorer residents, I begin with a simple measure of income bias that compares the participation rates of the rich with those of the poor. To ensure sufficient sample sizes per MSA and because of limited data for some of the variables used in the full statistical model (detailed below), I restrict my analysis to the 30 most populous MSAs. This sample of MSAs provides broad regional coverage and reflects the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of the metropolitan United States. MSA sample sizes range from a minimum of 2,243 (Columbus, OH) to a maximum of 23,243 (New York City) respondents per MSA ($M = 6,499$, $SD = 4,838$). I

define income bias as the ratio in average response between high- and low-income respondents. Low income is defined as those reporting a household income that places them in the bottom third of the income distribution in the MSA, and high income is defined as those reporting a household income that places them in the top third of the income distribution in the MSA. By using income percentiles for each MSA rather than the national income distribution, I account for cost-of-living differences across the country ([Wichowsky 2012](#)).

Consistent with my expectation, income bias is smallest for reciprocal exchange: On average, high- and low-income respondents reported doing favors for their neighbors at roughly the same rates ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.04$). In contrast, the wealthiest respondents in a metro area are more likely to report membership in a local group than the poorest respondents ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.14$). However, there is also substantial geographic variation in such disparities (see [Table 1](#)). For example, income bias in group membership ([Table 1](#), Column 1) is nearly 40% larger in the Kansas City metropolitan area (1.7) than in the Minneapolis metropolitan area (1.2). Income biases are the largest for my measure of collective action: On average, the most advantaged respondents in a metropolitan area are nearly two times as likely to report working with others to address neighborhood concerns than the least advantaged respondents ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.57$). Income biases in collective action also vary across the 30 MSAs. Compare Portland, Oregon, where the rich and poor report working with others to address local problems at nearly equal rates, with Cincinnati, Ohio, where the richest third of households are more than three and a half times more likely to report such community engagement than the poorest third of households.

Table 1. Income Biases in Social Capital and Collective Action.

Metropolitan Area	Group Membership	Reciprocal Exchange	Collective Action
Atlanta, GA	1.39	0.99	2.59
Baltimore, MD	1.48	1.04	2.08
Boston, MA	1.39	1.01	1.50
Chicago, IL	1.44	1.00	2.28
Cincinnati, OH	1.39	1.03	3.48
Cleveland, OH	1.54	0.98	2.37
Columbus, OH	1.30	1.05	1.34
Dallas, TX	1.41	0.97	2.18
Denver, CO	1.41	1.05	2.67
Detroit, MI	1.33	0.94	1.43
Houston, TX	1.29	0.96	1.70
Kansas City, MO	1.71	0.99	1.47
Los Angeles, CA	1.31	0.98	2.62
Miami, FL	1.26	1.06	1.71
Minneapolis–Saint Paul, MN	1.21	0.98	1.26
New York, NY	1.42	1.04	2.68
Orlando, FL	1.03	0.89	1.77
Philadelphia, PA	1.26	1.00	1.72
Phoenix, AZ	1.59	1.00	3.21
Pittsburgh, PA	1.44	0.95	1.90
Portland, OR	1.24	0.98	1.18
Riverside, CA	1.24	0.95	1.71
Sacramento, CA	1.46	1.00	1.48
San Antonio, TX	1.46	1.02	1.62
San Diego, CA	1.32	1.05	1.94
San Francisco, CA	1.53	1.01	2.00
Seattle, WA	1.24	0.99	1.87
St. Louis, MO	1.37	1.02	1.98

Tampa, FL	1.18	1.01	1.62
Washington, D.C.	1.28	1.04	2.74

Source. CPS Civic Supplements (2008–2011) (Columns 1 and 2) and CPS Volunteer Supplements (2008–2011) (Column 3) (Flood et al. 2015).

Note. Income bias is calculated as the ratio between high- and low-income respondents, where low (high) income is defined as having a household income that places individual in bottom (top) third of the MSA’s income distribution. CPS = Current Population Survey; MSA = metropolitan statistical area.

[Table 2](#) reports the results of an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression that explores this geographic variation in greater detail. I regress each measure of income bias on a set of relevant metro-level variables. My independent variable of interest is residential income segregation. I consider both the spatial segregation of poverty and wealth. These data come from the Pew Research Center’s report on residential income segregation for the nation’s top 30 metropolitan areas ([Fry and Taylor 2012](#)). Segregation of poverty is defined as the share of lower-income households living in a majority lower-income tract. Residents are considered lower income if they have a household income that is less than two-thirds the area median household income. Segregation of wealth is defined as the share of upper-income households living in a majority upper-income tract. Residents are considered upper income if they have a household income more than twice the area median household income. These measures are constructed using data from U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year file ([U.S. Census Bureau 2015](#)) Metropolitan areas with a greater segregation of poverty do tend to spatially isolate the wealthy ($p = .67$). Thus, I also consider a third measure reported by Pew that adds these two measures together to create a single Residential Income Segregation Index (RISI).

Table 2. Geographic Variation in Income Biases.

	RISI			Poverty Segregation			Wealth Segregation		
	Group Membership	Reciprocal Exchange	Collective Action	Group Membership	Reciprocal Exchange	Collective Action	Group Membership	Reciprocal Exchange	Collective Action
Income segregation	0.006* (0.003)	0.002* (0.001)	0.015 (0.014)	0.011** (0.005)	0.003** (0.001)	0.022 (0.023)	0.008 (0.006)	0.002 (0.002)	0.025 (0.028)
Income inequality	-0.600 (2.654)	0.209 (0.708)	-6.165 (12.228)	-0.196 (2.589)	0.312 (0.690)	-5.284 (12.269)	-0.751 (2.835)	0.176 (0.753)	-6.898 (12.392)
Racial segregation	0.003 (0.005)	0.000 (0.001)	0.007 (0.023)	0.003 (0.005)	0.000 (0.001)	0.006 (0.023)	0.005 (0.005)	0.001 (0.001)	0.010 (0.022)
% college	0.002 (0.010)	0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.048)	0.003 (0.010)	0.003 (0.003)	0.000 (0.047)	0.005 (0.011)	0.003 (0.003)	0.001 (0.048)
% non-Hispanic White	0.000 (0.004)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.017)	-0.000 (0.004)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.017)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.017)
% below poverty	-0.003 (0.030)	-0.001 (0.008)	-0.020 (0.137)	0.001 (0.028)	0.000 (0.008)	-0.005 (0.134)	0.003 (0.032)	0.001 (0.008)	-0.017 (0.139)
% foreign-born	-0.001 (0.016)	0.004 (0.004)	0.003 (0.072)	-0.002 (0.015)	0.003 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.071)	-0.005 (0.017)	0.003 (0.004)	0.000 (0.072)
Population (logged)	-0.061 (0.076)	-0.030 (0.020)	0.304 (0.351)	-0.064 (0.074)	-0.031 (0.020)	0.304 (0.353)	-0.052 (0.081)	-0.028 (0.021)	0.321 (0.352)

Constant	2.031 (1.410)	1.129** * (0.376)	-0.578 (6.499)	1.858 (1.368)	1.087** * (0.364)	-1.068 (6.482)	1.966 (1.508)	1.110** (0.401)	-0.428 (6.593)
N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30

Source. CPS Civic Supplements (2008–2011), CPS Volunteer Supplements (2008–2011), American Community Survey 2010 5-Year Estimates (U.S.

Census Bureau 2015) and Pew Research Center (Fry and Taylor 2012).

Note. Ordinary least squares regression. Standard errors in parentheses. RISI = Residential Income Segregation Index; CPS = Current Population Survey.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Income segregation correlates with several other contextual factors, including overall levels of income inequality, educational attainment, racial diversity, and population ([Bischoff and Reardon 2014](#)). These additional controls are included to help insure the results for residential income segregation are not spurious. Educational attainment is defined by the share of those 25 years or older with at least a bachelor's degree. Racial diversity is measured by the share of the population that is non-Hispanic White. I log population size to correct for the positive skew in population across MSAs. I also control for the poverty rate to account for differential social and economic needs across MSAs, as well as the share of the MSA that is foreign-born given the positive correlation between income inequality and immigration ([Card 2009](#)). These control variables come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 ACS five-year file.

Critically, I adjust for levels of racial residential segregation using the Black–White Dissimilarity Index ([Logan 2011](#)). In so doing, I isolate the contribution of *income* segregation from the geographic variation explained by *racial* residential segregation. As discussed above, trends in racial and income segregation have moved in opposite directions. Although income and racial segregation are correlated, it is unclear whether racial segregation exacerbates income biases in social capital and collective action. For example, non-Hispanic Blacks living in predominantly Black neighborhoods tend to have stronger community connections than non-Hispanic Blacks living in racially mixed neighborhoods ([Gibbons and Yang 2016](#)).

As shown in [Table 2](#), residential income segregation predicts income biases in social capital investments. Indeed, across model specifications, it is the only statistically significant covariate. These aggregate results also suggest that such income biases are shaped more by the segregation of poverty than wealth. However, while the coefficients on income segregation are all in the expected, positive direction in models predicting the upper-income skew in collective action, none reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Although these analyses suggest geographic variation in income biases in social capital investments, how much of this variation reflects compositional differences—that is, differences in individual background and resources—versus contextual differences—that is, differences in residential income segregation—is unclear. I take advantage of the large number of respondents per MSA to decompose this geographic variation and to test whether individual-level income is a stronger predictor of social capital investments and collective action in some MSAs compared with others. Because these data have a multilevel structure, with survey respondents nested within MSAs, I estimate a multilevel model. The individual-level structural model for social capital investments (or collective action) can be written as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SocialCapital}_{ij} = & \alpha_j + \beta_1 \text{LowIncome}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{HighIncome}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{IncomeMissing}_i \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Age}_i + \beta_5 \text{Age}_i^2 + \beta_6 \text{Education}_i + \beta_7 \text{Female}_i \\ & + \beta_8 \text{Black}_i + \beta_9 \text{Hispanic}_i + \beta_{10} \text{Asian}_i \\ & + \beta_{11} \text{OtherRace/Ethnicity}_i + \beta_{12} \text{Unemployed}_i \\ & + \beta_{13} \text{NotinLaborForce}_i + \beta_{14} \text{Children}_i + r_i + \mu_j, \end{aligned}$$

where $\text{SocialCapital}_{ij}$ is the measure of social capital for individual, i , living in MSA, j . Each measure of social capital is modeled as a function of individual-level covariates (income, age, education, gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, and whether the respondent has any children 18 years old or younger) and an individual-level error term, r_i . Race, ethnicity, and employment status are coded such that non-Hispanic Whites and employed respondents are the reference groups, respectively. Because income segregation could exacerbate income bias in social capital/collective by either depressing the engagement of the poor or increasing the engagement of the wealthy (or both), I measure income with two dichotomous measures (low income and high income), which are defined as before (i.e., relative to the income distribution of each MSA). The inclusion of μ_j captures unexplained contextual-level variation.

I model the intercept, α_j , which captures the average social capital (or collective action) in an MSA, as a function of the covariates used in the aggregate analysis, including residential segregation (both racial and income), racial diversity, the share of the population that is foreign-born, poverty, population size, share of the population with a college degree, and income inequality (Gini coefficient). The model intercept can be rewritten as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \alpha_j = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} \% \text{IncomeSegregation}_j + \gamma_{02} \% \text{Non - HispanicWhite}_j \\ & + \gamma_{03} \% \text{RacialSegregation}_j + \gamma_{04} \% \text{Foreign - Born}_j + \gamma_{05} \% \text{PovertyRate}_j \\ & + \gamma_{06} \% \text{PopulationSize}(\log)_j + \gamma_{07} \% \text{College}_j + \gamma_{08} \% \text{IncomeInequality}_j. \end{aligned}$$

To test my hypothesis that income bias is increasing in income segregation, I allow the coefficients on *Low Income* and *High Income* to vary as a function of income segregation. Metro areas that are highly segregated by income also tend to be more diverse, unequal, and educated places. And as discussed above, it is important to distinguish between income and racial segregation. As such, I include the following potential confounding factors in the cross-level interaction: racial segregation, income inequality, the share of the population with a college degree, and racial diversity.⁶ For example, the coefficient on *Low Income* can be rewritten as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_1 \text{LowIncome}_{ij} = & \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} \% \text{IncomeSegregation}_j + \gamma_{12} \% \text{RacialSegregation}_j \\ & + \gamma_{13} \% \text{IncomeInequality}_j + \gamma_{14} \% \text{College}_j + \gamma_{15} \% \text{Non - HispanicWhite}_j. \end{aligned}$$

Multilevel Results

[Table 3](#) reports results from the multilevel models predicting local organizational membership, reciprocal exchange between neighbors, and collective action. Because models that only include individual-level covariates show that income is a significant predictor of social capital investments and collective action and that there is a significant metro-level variation in the relationship between income and all three dependent variables (see the supplemental appendix), I report the fully specified multilevel models in [Table 3](#), focusing on the contextual factors that appear to exacerbate these income biases.

Table 3. Geographic Variation in Income Biases, Multilevel Model Results.

	Group Members hip			Reciprocal Exchang e			Collectiv e Action		
	RISI	Poverty Segregati on	Wealth Segregati on	RISI	Poverty Segregati on	Wealth Segregati on	RISI	Poverty Segregati on	Wealth Segregati on
Income segregatio n	0.007*** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.012*** (0.004)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.007 (0.004)	-0.007 (0.005)
Income inequality	-2.275* (1.180)	-2.455** (1.230)	-1.640 (1.184)	1.748 (1.359)	1.830 (1.397)	1.594 (1.330)	-4.630* ** (1.704)	-4.224** (1.755)	-5.036** * (1.693)
Racial segregatio n	-0.014*** (0.002)	-0.014** * (0.002)	-0.014** * (0.002)	-0.004* (0.003)	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.004* (0.003)	-0.010* ** (0.004)	-0.011** * (0.004)	-0.010** * (0.004)
% college	0.020*** (0.004)	0.022*** (0.004)	0.020*** (0.004)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.018** * (0.006)	0.017*** (0.006)	0.017*** (0.006)
% non- Hispanic White	0.004*** (0.002)	0.003* (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.012* ** (0.003)	-0.011** * (0.002)	-0.011** * (0.003)
% below poverty	0.023** (0.010)	0.029*** (0.010)	0.017 (0.010)	-0.017 (0.014)	-0.012 (0.014)	-0.019 (0.014)	0.021 (0.015)	0.017 (0.015)	0.022 (0.016)
% foreign- born	-0.023*** (0.005)	-0.025** * (0.005)	-0.024** * (0.005)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.031* ** (0.008)	-0.032** * (0.008)	-0.029** * (0.008)
Populatio n (logged)	0.103*** (0.023)	0.100*** (0.023)	0.115*** (0.023)	0.010 (0.036)	0.011 (0.037)	0.013 (0.035)	-0.066* (0.035)	-0.063* (0.035)	-0.066* (0.035)
Low income	0.320 (0.652)	0.141 (0.649)	0.439 (0.660)	1.281** * (0.371)	1.249*** (0.370)	1.236*** (0.375)	-1.247 (0.967)	-1.171 (0.963)	-1.292 (0.975)
Low Income × Income Segregati on	-0.007*** (0.003)	-0.010** (0.004)	-0.011** (0.005)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.004 (0.002)	0.001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)	0.004 (0.006)	0.005 (0.007)
Low Income × Racial Segregati on	-0.000 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.008 (0.005)	-0.008 (0.005)	-0.007 (0.005)
Low Income × Inequality	-0.048 (1.489)	0.197 (1.499)	-0.433 (1.485)	-2.184* * (0.848)	-2.036** (0.855)	-2.242** * (0.845)	2.341 (2.182)	2.228 (2.191)	2.495 (2.181)
Low Income × % College	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.003)	-0.008** ** (0.002)	-0.008** * (0.002)	-0.008** * (0.002)	-0.000 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.005)
Low Income × % White	-0.004*** (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	0.008** * (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.003)

High income	1.747*** (0.589)	1.690*** (0.585)	1.713*** (0.597)	0.258 (0.343)	0.274 (0.342)	0.233 (0.348)	0.129 (0.793)	0.265 (0.788)	-0.008 (0.804)
High Income × Income Segregation	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.004)	0.001 (0.005)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	0.005 (0.005)	0.011* (0.006)
High Income × Racial Segregation	0.006* (0.003)	0.006** (0.003)	0.005* (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.005 (0.004)	0.005 (0.004)	0.005 (0.004)
High Income × Inequality	-3.231** (1.348)	-3.024** (1.357)	-3.326** (1.346)	-0.805 (0.787)	-0.808 (0.793)	-0.758 (0.785)	-1.553 (1.787)	-1.669 (1.796)	-1.261 (1.790)
High Income × % College	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.008** (0.004)	0.007* (0.004)	0.009** (0.004)
High Income × % White	-0.003* (0.002)	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Age	0.003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.018** * (0.001)	0.018*** (0.001)	0.018*** (0.001)	0.062** * (0.004)	0.062*** (0.004)	0.062*** (0.004)
Age- squared	0.007*** (0.003)	0.007*** (0.003)	0.007*** (0.003)	-0.012* ** (0.001)	-0.011** * (0.001)	-0.012** * (0.001)	-0.046* ** (0.004)	-0.046** * (0.004)	-0.046** * (0.004)
Female	0.137*** (0.015)	0.137*** (0.015)	0.137*** (0.015)	0.031** * (0.009)	0.031*** (0.009)	0.031*** (0.009)	-0.071* ** (0.020)	-0.071** * (0.020)	-0.071** * (0.020)
Education	0.270*** (0.006)	0.270*** (0.006)	0.270*** (0.006)	0.016** * (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)	0.263** * (0.008)	0.263*** (0.008)	0.263*** (0.008)
Black	-0.007 (0.023)	-0.004 (0.023)	-0.009 (0.023)	-0.147* ** (0.014)	-0.147** * (0.014)	-0.148** * (0.014)	-0.030 (0.032)	-0.031 (0.032)	-0.030 (0.032)
Hispanic	-0.376*** (0.024)	-0.376** * (0.024)	-0.376** * (0.024)	-0.152* ** (0.014)	-0.151** * (0.014)	-0.152** * (0.014)	-0.584* ** (0.040)	-0.583** * (0.040)	-0.584** * (0.040)
Asian	-0.625*** (0.032)	-0.628** * (0.032)	-0.623** * (0.032)	-0.390* ** (0.018)	-0.390** * (0.018)	-0.390** * (0.018)	-0.874* ** (0.054)	-0.873** * (0.054)	-0.873** * (0.054)
Other race/ ethnicity	0.063 (0.062)	0.061 (0.062)	0.067 (0.062)	-0.127* ** (0.037)	-0.127** * (0.037)	-0.126** * (0.037)	0.162** (0.077)	0.163** (0.077)	0.161** (0.077)
Income missing	-0.294*** (0.039)	-0.294** * (0.039)	-0.297** * (0.039)	-0.119* ** (0.020)	-0.119** * (0.020)	-0.120** * (0.020)	-0.421* ** (0.048)	-0.421** * (0.048)	-0.420** * (0.048)
Unemploy ed	0.128*** (0.033)	0.127*** (0.033)	0.129*** (0.033)	0.163** * (0.019)	0.163*** (0.019)	0.164*** (0.019)	0.250** * (0.045)	0.250*** (0.045)	0.250*** (0.045)
Not in labor force	0.137*** (0.020)	0.136*** (0.020)	0.137*** (0.020)	0.151** * (0.011)	0.151*** (0.011)	0.151*** (0.011)	-0.008 (0.027)	-0.008 (0.027)	-0.008 (0.027)

Children under 18	0.644*** (0.018)	0.644*** (0.018)	0.645*** (0.018)	0.291** * (0.010)	0.291*** (0.010)	0.291*** (0.010)	0.174** * (0.024)	0.174*** (0.024)	0.174*** (0.024)
Constant	-2.913*** (0.545)	-2.818** * (0.546)	-3.123** * (0.549)	0.901 (0.697)	0.811 (0.715)	0.994 (0.682)	-0.909 (0.787)	-1.034 (0.787)	-0.828 (0.793)
State variance	0.001 (0.009)	0.001 (0.009)	0.001 (0.009)	0.003** * (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.048 (0.030)	0.050 (0.031)	0.044 (0.028)
N (MSAs)	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
n (Individuals)	87,459	87,459	87,459	77,134	77,134	77,134	135,232	135,232	135,232

Source. CPS Civic Supplements (2008–2011), CPS Volunteer Supplements (2008–2011), American Community Survey 2010 5-Year Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau 2015) and Pew Research Center (Fry and Taylor 2012). Note. Multilevel logistic regression, except Columns 4 to 6 (multilevel regression). Standard errors in parentheses. RISI = Residential Income Segregation Index; MSAs = metropolitan statistical areas; CPS = Current Population Survey. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Consider first whether an individual reports membership in a local organization. Consistent with prior research (see, for example, [Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999](#); [Putnam 2007](#)), the results suggest that homogeneous communities facilitate associational activity: The share of residents who belong to a local group is higher in more economically segregated areas and lower in more diverse, unequal, and racially segregated ones. Group membership also tends to be higher in places facing greater social needs (as measured by the area’s poverty rate) and in more educated and populous metropolitan areas.

But Columns 1 to 3 also show a deep income divide: Wealthier residents are more likely to report local group membership than middle- and low-income residents. Furthermore, the results are consistent with the expectation that residential income segregation that cuts the poor off from more resource-rich networks widens income biases in social capital investments. The cross-level interactions between *Low Income* and all three measures of income segregation are negative and statistically significant. At the same time, however, *average* local group membership tends to be higher in more economically segregated metros. To see how residential income segregation is related to the income bias in local group membership, [Figure 1](#) shows the predicted probabilities of group membership for low- and high-income respondents by the extent of income segregation in their metro areas. The top (bottom) panel shows the predicted probabilities varying poverty (wealth) segregation of an individual’s MSA. In both cases, we see wider income disparities in local group membership in more economically segregated metros. To put these differences into context, there was a 12 percentage point difference, all else equal, in the probability of local group membership between low- and high-income respondents in the CPS sample. Holding all other individual and contextual differences constant at their means, a shift from where the poor are the least to the most segregated is associated with an income gap in organizational participation that is roughly one-quarter (3 percentage points) the participation gap between rich and poor. Shifting from where the rich are the least to the most segregated is associated with an income gap that is roughly half (6 percentage points) the rich–poor difference in the probability of local group membership.

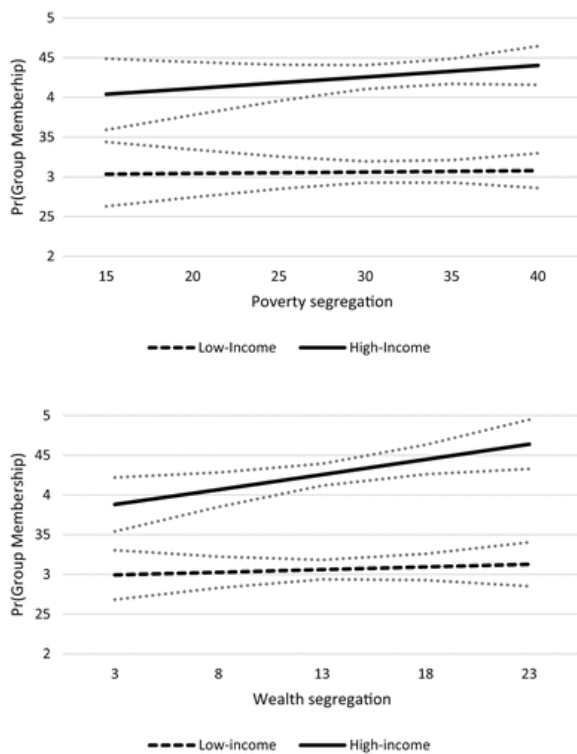


Figure 1. Income bias in associational membership and income segregation.

Note. Predicted probabilities calculated from coefficients reported in [Table 3](#) for low- and high-income respondents. All other covariates held constant at their means.

Income biases also vary as a function of other contextual differences. The positive cross-level interaction between *High Income* and *Racial Segregation* in [Table 3](#) suggests that the wealthy are even more likely to join local groups in racially segregated metropolitan areas. The income gap in group membership also tends to be wider in more racially diverse places. On the contrary, this income bias is not as pronounced in more unequal MSAs. One possible explanation for this latter finding could be that places with higher levels of income inequality have more robust civic sectors. For example, though [Sampson \(2012\)](#) found that many poor neighborhoods are at an organizational disadvantage in Chicago, the poor in New York City appear to benefit from a more institutionalized nonprofit sector despite the region's deep income divides (Small 2009). I return to the question of whether the nonprofit sector helps to close income gaps by engaging residents across the socioeconomic spectrum in the conclusion.

Income, of course, is not the only individual-level predictor of group membership. Women and parents are more likely to report a local group membership. More highly educated respondents are also more likely to make social capital investments, while employed respondents, who likely have less time than the unemployed or retired, are less likely to do so.

The next three columns report the results for models predicting the extent to which respondents reported doing favors for their neighbors. While the average reciprocal exchange tends to be lower in more racially segregated regions, there is much less geographic variation in how often residents engage in this type of informal social interaction; no other contextual variable reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. And consistent with prior research (see, for example, [Briggs 1998](#); [Stack 1974](#)), it is the poor, not the rich, who are most likely to invest in social capital that helps them to get by.² Such income differences, however, do vary across the country. Reciprocal exchange among the poor tends to be lower in more educated and unequal metros. Because income inequality and educational attainment tend to be higher in more economically prosperous places, it is possible

that the poor living in these communities have fewer reasons to turn to their neighbors for help. Although the cross-level interaction between *Low income* and *Poverty segregation* is in the expected direction, it falls just short of conventional levels of statistical significance ($p = .11$). Finally, all else equal, women, parents, and those either involuntarily or voluntarily out of the labor force are more likely to report doing favors for their neighbors, while racial minorities are less likely to report doing so.

The last three columns in [Table 3](#) report the results for collective action. Beginning with the average collective action in a metro, we see that the share of residents reporting working with others to address local concerns is lower in more racially segregated, unequal, and populous metropolitan areas. On average, collective action also tends to be lower in metros with larger immigrant populations and higher in more educated and diverse ones. Consistent with resource models of political engagement (see, for example, [Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995](#)), older and more educated respondents are more likely to report working with others to address local concerns. All else equal, parents as well as the unemployed are also more likely to report collective action, while women and Hispanics are less likely to do so.

But although collective action does not appear to increase with income once we condition on other individual- and contextual-level covariates, the results reported in [Table 3](#) suggest that there is a greater upper-income skew in collective action in metros where the wealthy are more spatially isolated from other residents, as shown by the positive and statistically significant cross-level interaction between *High Income* and *Wealth Segregation*. The cross-level interactions between *High Income* and the two other measures of income segregation are also in the expected directions but are not statistically significant. Thus, it appears that income bias in collective action is most sensitive to the spatial segregation of affluence. Holding all other variables constant at their means, there is an estimated 1.1 percentage point difference in the likelihood of collective action among the rich between the least and most segregated regions. Because collective action is rare—less than 10% of the CPS sample reports working with others to address local concerns—substantive differences are smaller in magnitude. All else equal, the rich are a little more than 2 percentage points more likely to report working with others to address local concerns compared with their poorer neighbors. As shown in [Figure 2](#), a shift from the least to the most segregated region is associated with an increase in income bias that is nearly half the rich–poor gap in collective action.

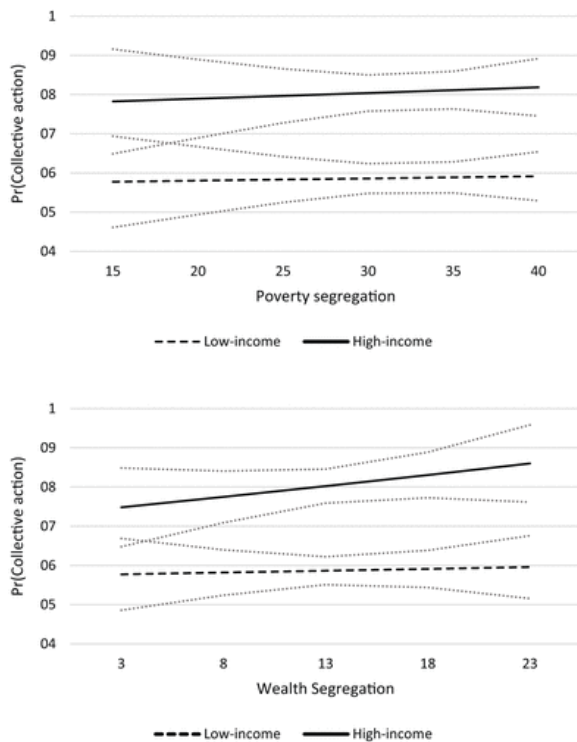


Figure 2. Income bias in collective action and income segregation.

Note. Predicted probabilities calculated from coefficients reported in [Table 3](#) for low- and high-income respondents. All other covariates held constant at their means.

One outstanding question is how the likelihood of participating in local civic life is shaped by the intersection between race and income segregation. Although income segregation, particularly the spatial isolation of the wealthy, increased quite dramatically between 1970 and 2010 ([Fry and Taylor 2012](#)), racial segregation remains persistently high, despite slight declines over the same time period ([Massey, Rothwell, and Domina 2009](#)). My previous analyses suggest that income segregation exacerbates income biases in the likelihood that individuals join local groups and work with others to address neighborhood concerns. In addition, I show that racial segregation is associated with a lower likelihood of group membership among the poor. But does income segregation also widen racial disparities in social capital and collective action? Low-income African-Americans are much more likely to live in concentrated poor neighborhoods ([Massey and Denton 1993](#); [Sharkey 2013](#)) and over the last 30 years have become more isolated from middle- and high-income African-Americans ([Bischoff and Reardon 2014](#)). Poor Black households are also more likely to experience the correlates of segregation, including older dilapidated housing stock and chronic joblessness ([Lichter, Parisi, and de Valk 2016](#)); they remain the most vulnerable to the spatial segregation of poverty and the economic and civic isolation it brings.

To consider the possibility that income segregation widens racial disparities, I reestimate the multilevel models by allowing the slope on *Black* to vary as a function of *Poverty segregation* and including the additional cross-level interactions as before (racial segregation, income inequality, racial diversity, and share of the population with a college degree).

The coefficients and standard errors for these cross-level interactions are shown in [Table 4](#). First, consider the likelihood of belonging to a local organization. All else equal, non-Hispanic Blacks are significantly less likely to report group membership than non-Hispanic Whites. This racial gap is even more pronounced in more racially segregated metropolitan areas, as shown by the negative and statistically significant cross-level interaction

between *Black* and *Racial segregation*, and less so in more unequal and less diverse metros. I find no evidence that poverty segregation is associated with a larger racial gap in local group membership.

Table 4. Race and Income Segregation.

	Group Membership	Reciprocal Exchange	Collective Action
Non-Hispanic Black	-2.983*** (0.788)	0.005 (0.471)	1.671 (1.125)
Non-Hispanic Black × Income Segregation	0.002 (0.005)	-0.008*** (0.003)	-0.003 (0.007)
Non-Hispanic Black × Racial Segregation	-0.009** (0.004)	0.004* (0.002)	0.030*** (0.005)
Non-Hispanic Black × Income Inequality	6.466*** (1.742)	-0.646 (1.033)	-5.612** (2.435)
Non-Hispanic Black × % College	0.006 (0.004)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.022*** (0.006)
Non-Hispanic Black × % Non-Hispanic White	0.005** (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.004 (0.003)

Note. Multilevel models also include the same individual- and contextual-level covariates in Table 3. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

In contrast, however, non-Hispanic Blacks living in metros where the poor are more spatially isolated are *less* likely to report doing favors for their neighbors, and are *more* likely to do so in metros where non-Hispanic Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites are more segregated from one another.⁸

Finally, though the coefficient on the cross-level interaction with *Poverty segregation* is also negative in the model predicting collective action, it fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Rather, non-Hispanic Blacks are more likely to report collective action in racially segregated metros and less likely to do so in more unequal and educated metros. Thus, although racial and income segregation are moderately correlated ($\rho = .39$), these results point to an analytical distinction between the two as they relate to racial differences in bonding social capital and collective action.

Discussion

Urban civic life presents several contrasts. New civic technologies have made it easier for residents to get informed, communicate their preferences, and hold public officials accountable. A large and growing local nonprofit sector has helped to underwrite an increase in volunteering ([Smith 2011](#)). Some scholars have even argued that cities are best positioned to rescue democracy from the sclerotic and ideologically polarized nation-state (see, for example, [Barber 2013](#); [Katz and Bradley 2013](#)). But turnout in local elections remains anemic and often results in quite uneven consideration of political interests (see, for example, [Anzia 2011](#)). Many cities continue to struggle to improve police–community relations, which as [Lerman and Weaver \(2014\)](#) demonstrated in their study of “stop-and-frisk” in New York City may also chill local citizen engagement, particularly in majority–minority neighborhoods. As [Trounstein \(2010, p. 419\)](#) noted, “We do not yet have a firm sense of how well local democracy functions, the conditions under which it functions well, or what ‘well’ means.” Although fully addressing these questions is beyond the scope of this article, I draw on social capital theory to examine geographic variation in associational membership, neighborly behavior, and collective action, and test whether residential income segregation is associated with greater income disparities in civic life.

Consistent with previous research, I find that context matters, even after taking into account important individual-level resource differences. Residential income segregation is associated with larger income divides in social capital investments and collective action. In both the aggregate and multilevel models, wealthier residents were more likely to be overrepresented in organizational life in places marked by a greater spatial segregation of poverty. And once I account for compositional and contextual differences across metros, the spatial segregation of wealth was associated with a larger rich–poor gap in local group membership. I also find that residential income segregation is associated with a higher-income skew in collective action: Wealthy respondents are even more likely to report working with others to solve neighborhood problems when their neighbors are also socioeconomically advantaged. These results are robust to the inclusion of other confounders, including racial context, income inequality, and racial residential segregation. Finally, I show that non-Hispanic Blacks report fewer reciprocal exchanges with neighbors in metros where the poor are more spatially isolated from middle- and high-income residents.

Whether such divides also have political consequence remains to be seen. For example, future research could consider whether residential income segregation—particularly the spatial isolation of affluence—is related to the willingness of wealthier residents to invest in public goods that benefit poor communities. And though I show that income biases in local group membership tend to be larger in more economically segregated metros, I have provided a bird’s-eye view of the extent to which social capital investments vary within and between metropolitan areas. Teasing out how residential income segregation shapes opportunities to build cross-cutting networks is an area for future study. Previous research on school reform efforts in Baltimore illustrates how networks that bridge class, race, and ethnic divides, particularly at the “elite level of sociopolitical organization,” are difficult to build and sustain in disadvantaged and racially segregated communities ([Orr 1999](#), p. 8). [Gibbons \(2015\)](#) found that CBOs are more territorial in racially segregated communities and thus seek to protect their turf (e.g., funding, political support) from organizations in other neighborhoods. Gibbons’s study highlights the need to study the entire ecosystem of CBOs—their connections to other organizations, neighborhoods, funders, and local politicians—to fully understand how CBOs act as “civic intermediaries” ([LeRoux 2007](#)), and whether in doing so they help to bridge socioeconomic divides by creating opportunities for the poor to share social space with more advantaged residents. Furthermore, these results point to a key role that foundations, nonprofits, and community organizers *could* play to facilitate region-wide discussions about income segregation and to build regional alliances that address the disparities between poor and affluent neighborhoods (see, for example, [Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009](#)).

My findings suggest that residential income segregation constrains the extent to which the poor can use their social capital to overcome their relative socioeconomic disadvantages. Nevertheless, I raise three additional limitations to this study. The first is that I am unable to establish a causal relationship between income segregation and income biases in social capital and collective action. Panel data that span long enough time periods to examine changes within metropolitan areas may provide greater leverage on causality. Second, these findings only speak to the 30 most populous metropolitan areas in the country. On one hand, this provides an analytic advantage given the substantial differences between large and small metro areas that may not be fully captured by the control variables; however, whether these relationships hold among small- and medium-sized metros is unknown. Finally, though the CPS measure of collective action comes closer to functional definitions of social capital ([Coleman 1988](#)), my measures of social capital investments provide little insight into the resources embedded within the network of relationships or whether such relationships help poorer residents meet their needs and achieve their interests. Until better instruments are available in large-*N* surveys, case studies may offer greater leverage on these questions. But for community activists, elected officials, and local bureaucrats interested in increasing neighborhood civic capacities, these results suggest that the growing spatial segregation of the rich and poor deserves more attention.

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Notes

1. Social capital can also be unproductive, reinforcing prejudices, constraining individual freedoms, and incentivizing free riding.
2. I reference these studies with the usual caveat distinguishing correlation from causation.
3. I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for emphasizing this point.
4. In 2011, the Current Population Survey (CPS) added a measure of social trust to the civic supplement. Future work could examine whether income biases in social trust are similarly conditioned by income segregation.
5. Although there are more volunteer supplements than civic supplements, I restrict the time frames to be consistent between the two datasets.
6. Substantive findings remain largely the same in models that exclude these additional confounding variables in the cross-level interactions (see Table A3 in the supplemental appendix).
7. This curvilinear relationship between income and reciprocal exchange is also present in models that exclude contextual covariates (see Table A2 in the supplemental appendix).
8. Although poverty segregation and racial segregation are correlated, multicollinearity is not a problem; poverty segregation remains negatively correlated with reciprocal exchange in a model that excludes racial segregation from the cross-level interaction ($p < .05$).

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