Political Science Research: Community-Engaged Research

What is Community-Engaged Research?
“"The creation and dissemination of knowledge and/or creative expression in furtherance of the mission and goals of the university and in collaboration with the community. Community-engaged scholarship (CES) addresses community needs through research and teaching in a mutually beneficial partnership” (Marquette University Community Engagement Task Force).

Why Does It Matter?
Political scientists study how people come together to solve shared problems. They might focus on political institutions—Congress, state legislatures, the United Nations—designed to produce collective action. Or, they might focus on the political attitudes and behaviors of individuals and groups to understand the causes and consequences of conflict, cooperation, participation, and deliberation. Community-engaged research brings political science expertise to these issues in the places where individuals and groups work to overcome collective action problems. At the same time, political scientists can learn about power and politics by listening to those deeply engaged in civic and political life. CES in political science covers a wide range of partnerships. Collaborations with members of Congress have put theories of deliberative democracy into practice in the hopes of improving representative government.1 Partnerships with schools have shed light on how STEM and civic education can be mutually supportive.2 Experimental studies (co-designed and implemented with community-based organizations) have shown how groups can more effectively engage underrepresented voters in the democratic process.3

Testing NeON Outreach Efforts
Background
The Neighborhood of Neighborhoods (NeON) meeting is held monthly, and is open to all residents living in the Near West Side. NWSP wanted to know what it could do to increase attendance at NeON meetings.

Interventions
In Study 1, 410 homeowners and 6,473 renters were randomly assigned to a control group or to receive a postcard invitation. In Study 2, 330 residents, who had previously provided their phone numbers to NWSP, were randomly assigned to a control group or to receive a text message. In Study 3, 367 residents, who had previously provided their phone numbers to NWSP, were randomly assigned with equal probability to one of three groups: (1) phone call invitation, (2) text message invitation and (3) control group, no invitation.

Results
• Postcards (Study 1): Postcards increased meeting attendance among both renters and homeowners, but increase was negligible (<1 percentage point).
• Text messages (Study 2): Text message invitation increased NeON attendance by about 2 percentage points.
• Phone call or Text message (Study 3): Outreach increased attendance, but there was no statistically significant difference between whether that message was delivered personally over the phone or impersonally via text message. However, no evidence of spillover effects (residents were no more likely to attend next meeting).

Lessons
• Personal invitations can increase attendance, but outreach works best when NWSP has had at least some contact with residents. NWSP organizers should continue their relational work in the community.
• Test messages are a much more cost-effective outreach method compared to postcards and are as effective as a personal phone call invitation. Invitations should be sent out for every NeON meeting.

Community-Based Organizations, Collective Efficacy and Civic Engagement
Research Background
All else equal, communities with high collective efficacy tend to be healthier than communities with low collective efficacy.4 There is also suggestive evidence that community-based organizations (CBOs) help explain variation in collective efficacy across neighborhoods. But correlation ≠ causation. Although there is some causal evidence that CBOs helped reduce crime in American cities over the long-run, what this looks like over the short-term is much more unclear; causal mechanisms are generally untested or unspecified. Moreover, this research says nothing about other important measures of neighborhood wellbeing, and is generally silent about questions of agency, voice, and influence. Indeed, CBOs can sometimes facilitate elite authority and reinforce disparities in economic and political power.5

Research Questions
1. What do CBOs do to increase collective efficacy in their neighborhoods?
2. What is the impact of their community organizing efforts?
3. Do their efforts help empower residents?

Research Methods
Over the last four years, Dr. Wichowsky and her students in the Marquette Democracy Lab have worked with the Near West Side Partners (NWSP) to evaluate the organization’s community engagement efforts. Findings are used to inform ongoing efforts and new initiatives. Research methods have included:
• Experimental studies to identify the impact of their community outreach efforts;
• Spillover studies to consider whether their short-term efforts produce longer-lasting change;
• Community surveys to assess how collective efficacy, social trust, and civic engagement vary across the Near West Side, and to gather feedback from residents on NWSP programs and initiatives;
• Focus groups with residents to discuss barriers to engagement and ways to increase residents’ influence on community planning and development;
• Case studies of other cities to identify best practices that could be adapted to the Near West Side (e.g., participatory budgeting).

Using Political Science Research to Inform and Assess Community Engagement in the Near West Side
In September 2018, the Near West Side Partners (NWSP) and Marquette University received a Choice Neighborhood Planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This grant funds the development of a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization strategy, or “Transformation Plan,” as well as some “early action” community development projects. To inform plan development, Democracy Lab has been working to gather community input through surveys, focus groups, and community-wide discussions. Starting in early 2020, Democracy Lab will be working with NWSP and residents to design a participatory process for community members to develop and select grant-funded projects. Through these efforts, we are working to increase participatory democracy in the Near West Side.
Political Science Research: Public Scholarship

**What Is Public Scholarship?**
Public scholarship works are relatively short, often online publications that distill political science research for policymakers and the general public. Public scholarship articles are typically published by well-known sites with editorial oversight. These works frequently contain links to research publications on the topic written by the author or other political scientists.

**Why Does It Matter?**
Public scholarship provides research-based information that is relevant for understanding current events to individuals who are not likely to read longer political science research articles or scholarly books. In just one year, public scholarship publications from Marquette Political Science faculty, published in outlets like the Washington Post, New York Times, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, and FiveThirtyEight.com, had more than a quarter of a million online views.

**Who Produces Public Scholarship?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr. Julia Azari, Assoc. Professor</th>
<th>Public Scholarship Topics: American electoral politics, the U.S. presidency, candidate debates, polarization and political parties, populism.</th>
<th>Public Scholarship Sites: FiveThirtyEight.com, Vox, Los Angeles Times.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. H. Richard Friman, Professor</td>
<td>Public Scholarship Topics: Historical origins of the U.S. Travel Ban policy.</td>
<td>Public Scholarship Sites: Washington Post.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Susan Giaimo, Adjunct Assoc. Professor</td>
<td>Public Scholarship Topics: Global health policy.</td>
<td>Public Scholarship Sites: The Conversation.</td>
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**Examples of Political Science Public Scholarship**

*The New York Times* | *The Washington Post* | *Los Angeles Times* | *Fox* | *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*
MU Political Science “In the News”
Research expertise leads news media outlets to seek out Political Science faculty for interviews or to cite their research in stories. In some cases, the story’s topic is directly related to a faculty member’s research. In other cases, the reputation of our faculty members as experts leads to interview requests on broader topics that go beyond their specific research interests.

Why Does It Matter?
As political scientists, we believe that we have an obligation to use our research-based knowledge to improve policymakers’ (and the general public’s) understanding of important political and social issues. Our media visibility is also important to Marquette. In 2018, Dr. Paul Nolette was the featured expert in a story on the CBS Evening News, which ran again the next day on the CBS This Morning show. It is estimated that more than 11 million people saw his interview, in addition to countless more who viewed the story online. When our research is cited or we are interviewed in a news story like this, our expertise as a Marquette faculty member is on display. As a result, we look to do media events, whenever possible, at the local, state, and national levels.

Select Local and Wisconsin Media Interviews

National Media — Interviewed POSC Faculty Members or Cited Their Research (2019 Only):

USA TODAY  npr  RollingStone
The New York Times  USA TODAY  npr  RollingStone
The Washington Post  PBS NEWS Hour  npr  RollingStone
Business Insider  ABC News  U.S. News
FiveThirtyEight  CNN  Yahoo News
The Hour  SF Gate  Daily Magazine
The Christian Science Monitor  American Prospect
21 Years on the Web  CAL Matters  MPR News

Online Chats and Podcasts
MU Political Science and Public Policy

The study of public policy is an important subfield in the discipline of political science. Public policy research seeks to explain the causes and consequences of the policies produced by formal political institutions at the local, regional, and national levels. While some research centers on understanding variation in policy approaches across time or in different settings, other works examine the effectiveness of different policy approaches in addressing the problems they were designed to solve. Key policy areas studied by political scientists include fiscal and monetary, regulatory, environmental, urban, economic development, social welfare, education, health, housing, criminal justice, immigration, defense and security, and foreign relations.

Why Does It Matter?

Public policy choices affect nearly every part of our daily lives. Understanding public policy requires not only acute knowledge about the various policy areas but also a deep understanding of the political institutions that produce that policy. As a result, Political Science departments play a central role in the study of public policy across the United States and around the world.