

Getting Neighborhoods Involved

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Research Question

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of any city. For neighborhoods to have a voice in city governing, neighborhood associations are integral. Neighborhood associations are the best means for residents to learn of potential issues or problems facing their community, formulate a collective opinion, and get involved in the political process in order to protect their interests. They are also valuable partners to city governments. They can provide officials with information and advice concerning local areas, can legitimize city government in the eyes of residents, open up lines of communication between residents and officials, and can be a means for organizing and directing city resources.

Why are some neighborhood associations more civically active than others? Some cities attempt to involve their neighborhood associations in policy initiatives, grants, and various city programs. Some neighborhoods are quick to get involved and interact with the city around them while others largely avoid such contact. A neighborhood association (NA), according to Austin (1991), “is a voluntary organization consisting of membership drawn from the local neighborhood. It is a formalized mechanism through which individual residents are able to pursue collective goals.” As Austin points out, NAs can “range from loosely knit organizations to highly formalized ones with written rules and procedures (516)” and can have different levels of participation from residents. They are often involved in crime prevention, neighborhood upkeep, social activities, maintenance, preservation, and beautification of green spaces. NAs are highly effective sources of crime prevention as they can reduce opportunities for people to get away with crimes, increase the chances of criminals’ being caught, and can work to bring the community together and mend the conditions that lead to high crime rates (Kohfeld, Salert, and Schoenberg 1981). Crenson (1983) characterized individual NAs by the presence of a recognized name and boundaries. NAs are not to be confused with government created polities or privately owned (and mandatory) residential community

associations (RCAs) (Dilger 1992). Any definition would have to take these distinctions into account. The Neighborhood Center for Greater Omaha (2003) defines a neighborhood organization as “a group of neighbors who organize to help improve the quality of life in their neighborhood.” For my purposes, I will use Austin’s definition as well as Crenson’s characteristics: a recognized name and boundaries to define a neighborhood association.

An NA can be defined as being active in two different areas: within its own community or within city politics at large. Among its own constituents, an NA can perform various services such as garbage cleanup, neighborhood watches, services to the elderly (Crenson 1983), and organized social events like street carnivals, amateur theatricals, picnics, potlucks, and dances (Putnam 2000). Within the larger dimension of city politics an NA can be considered active if they engage in activities meant to substantially impact upon public policy. This includes contacting local government officials about local problems and getting involved in local citywide neighborhood based programs. My study will focus on civic activity, but will analyze data to see if internal activity at all determines the level of civic involvement.

Although my research was unable to bring up very many examples of NAs on the lowest end of the active spectrum, since most case studies focus on particularly active associations, I do have some idea of what, ideally, would categorize an inactive association. Of course, a completely inactive NA would most likely cease to exist because it would have no purpose and probably no members. Rather, a relatively inactive NA would be one that had very few active members even by NA standards, no effective involvement in external politics, would be ineffective at getting its citizens involved, and would provide a minimum of services. The active members of the association may attempt to do many of these things, but for some reason would be almost completely ineffective. Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) point out that some NAs in Birmingham and San Antonio had a tendency to arise in response to a one critical issue. After a few years, the energetic support for these groups dies out and what is left of the group remains largely outside of the public policy process.

Associations in Dayton, Portland, and St. Paul represent the other extreme of NA activism. These organizations have open access, support, and communication with city hall, have a relatively extensive staff, a mission that is ongoing rather than confined to a single issue, and are encouraged by city government to act on behalf of their residents. In these cities, “neighborhood associations have substantial authority over decisions that affect the quality of life in their communities, and they facilitate participation of rank-and-file citizens in face-to-face settings (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993, 283).” The purpose of this paper is to determine why some neighborhoods are more active than others, both within their own communities and when dealing with city government

Since the urban renewal programs of the 1950s, various organizations have been formed in an attempt to alleviate the problems of the “urban crisis.” At first these programs had nothing to do with increasing citizen participation or decentralization. It was not until the emergence of the civil rights movement that people began to demand that neighborhood groups be given some say in public policy. Segregation and inequality in urban neighborhoods was seen as part of the problem of urban decay, and many people began to see the “exercise of community power” as the best way to finding a solution (Yates 1973, 19-20). The evolution of NAs into political enterprises was suggested by the fact that many NAs provided services that are largely considered functions of government institutions, such as the production of public goods and services, and the “aggregation and articulation of public sentiment” (Crenson 1983, viii). NAs developed into what Berger and Neuhaus (1977, 2) call “mediating structures,” organizations that stand between individuals and large, alienating public institutions such as big businesses, governments, and bureaucracies. Nowadays NAs usually form in reaction to one particular “hot-button” issue, often dealing with proposed land-development projects (Logan and Rabrenovic 1990, 70). Those residents with the time, energy, and personality to pursue political action join together to combat this perceived threat (Dilger 1992, 108). In time, this original issue is joined or replaced by other land-use or public service issues as they come up. As Logan and Rabrenovic (1990) point out, local government, businesses, and real estate

developers are the most common opponents of NAs. However, local government is seen as a political ally as often as a foe, and can even be seen as both on the same issue.

Explaining why some NAs are more civically active than others is necessary because it sheds light on civic involvement theory at a different level than is usually studied. Most studies of civic involvement focus on the involvement of individual citizens, whereas this study focuses on the involvement of civic groups in civic government. NAs are often used to study the effectiveness of local politics and decentralization. Active NAs are more equipped to aid in city democracy because they play an intermediary role between citizens and government representatives. NAs are also useful in determining how effective decentralized governments operate. To prove that a decentralized government can be effective, one must first prove that the local organizations that would most likely be receiving power (the NAs) can use it effectively (or at least more effectively than would a centralized government). Therefore, active NAs are essential to those who argue in favor of decentralized governments. This study will also be useful in helping both city officials and NA leaders determine how best to involve and utilize the NAs in regards to the public policy and community service arenas

Literature Review

Most previous studies that focus on the involvement of neighborhood associations have either focused on individuals within an NA (Nachmias and Palen 1982), a huge number of NAs within various cities (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993), or upon a handful of single NA case studies. Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) interviewed public officials in five cities and surveyed over five thousand residents and leaders of more than 250 NAs within those cities. This data was then used to study the levels of participation in NAs during a two-year period. In this study they discovered a strong correlation between socioeconomic status, and race to a lesser degree, and individual political participation (81). Participants in NAs were more likely to be of higher income and socioeconomic status. Interestingly enough, while lower and middle class residents were more likely to participate if they lived in neighborhoods with strong NAs, residents of high socioeconomic status were equally likely to participate in a neighborhood with a weak NA

as they were to participate in a strong one (95). Contrary to this study, others (Hutchenson and Prather 1988) have found that as socioeconomic status increases, participation rates in NAs decrease.

Thomson (2001) later used this same data to attempt an analysis at the neighborhood level, but frequently moved back and forth between units of analysis, using data gathered from the numerous individual residents to extrapolate upon the conditions of the NA's involvement in city policy. This study, of course, focused on a very large number of NAs from several cities and so did not focus as much on the social relationships within each organization, but rather focused on the "connection between public opinion results and neighborhood-level analysis" (39). Furthermore, this study only examines NAs in "four of the most participatory cities in the country" (6). The NAs in these cities make clear policy decisions for their neighborhoods, are recognized by local officials as important local players in public policy, and are relatively stable and active. Thomson focuses more on how well stable NAs can deal with "the full range of political issues our society faces" (34) rather than on why some of these organizations may be better at dealing with these issues. Although his study is similar to my own, but far more in-depth, our hypotheses differ greatly, and the NAs in my study vary more greatly than in his. He creates an interesting method for rating NA strength by first taking twenty-one different measures of NA activity and grouping them into three key elements of strength and then combining these to make a single rating for each NA. The three elements of NA strength are "core activity," "outreach," and "involvement." "Core activity" focuses on inner-group activities such as the frequency of meetings, election of officers, size of staff, and level of local fundraising. "Outreach" pertains to involvement of the NA with the people in its community and refers to the scope of newsletters and special projects. "Involvement" measures the level of attendance at meetings, events, and activities of the organizations (41-42). These measures were interesting, and I may attempt to duplicate them in some fashion. Based on this study, he concludes that despite the large impact of socioeconomic status on individual participation, demographics make little difference in levels of neighborhood participation (45). Slipping back into individual-level analysis, Thomson identifies individual income, education, age, race, home ownership, and length of residency as six characteristics

highly correlated with high participation levels. Other studies correspond with these findings. Nachmias and Palen (1982) studied the extent of participation in NAs between old-timers and newcomers to neighborhoods. They found that while membership in NAs was widespread among the old-timers and newcomers, newcomers were significantly more active than old-timers. Oropesa (1989) addressed the importance of home ownership in determining participation of individuals. Home ownership gives residents incentive to participate in city politics because they have more to lose or gain, especially with regards to land-development proposals which can negatively affect property values (438). Because many individuals lack the resources to affect these policies on an individual level, they join NAs in order to organize collective resources and increase their chances of “winning” (Hutchenson and Prather 1988, 348).

Like Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993), Crenson’s (1983) study of NA participation focused on the individuals as unit of analysis. Crenson focused on “why some neighborhoods function as politics more fully than others” (viii). For this study, surveys were made of over 1,600 residents of twenty-one NAs in Baltimore (58). He identified three attributes of individual respondents that accounted for almost all of the dissimilarities between neighborhoods: social status, ethnicity, and a “combination of family and life-cycle characteristics” that he referred to as “urbanization” (57). Crenson indexed information from individual respondents to create each of these characteristics. He focused his study on how individuals within a neighborhood react to local problems; whether they were likely to use NA established channels of communication or take matters into their own hands (155). He also looked at the makeup (political cohesion and interconnectedness) of NAs as a determinant of activism. Political cohesion within NAs, however, does not always accurately measure their city-level activism.

Crenson points out the importance of leadership in affecting political activities. If an NA’s leadership is weak or if it has isolationist tendencies government officials may not hear from them often and they may not get involved outside the community very often (270). As I am likely to be focusing my surveys at NA leaders, studies revolving around their effects on NA activism are worth looking into. Yates (1973) distinguished four leadership styles based off of the different strategies they invoke and the two

types of senses of purpose. NA leaders differ in their sense of purpose in two distinct ways: they either have a service-based orientation focused on specific problems and solutions, or a power orientation focused towards gaining political power for the neighborhood. The two strategies invoked by NA leaders are a strategy focused on government and one focused on the neighborhood. Neither the two strategies nor two purposes are mutually exclusive and it is possible for leaders to focus on both to a certain degree. Combining these, Yates created these four leadership styles: “entrepreneurs,” leaders with an orientation towards the neighborhood and service; “ombudsmen,” who are oriented towards government and service; “protestors,” who seek power and are oriented towards government action; and “community builders,” who are oriented towards neighborhood action and are seek power (90). Yates’ study shows that entrepreneurs and ombudsman are the most common leadership styles.

In 1978, Crenson did another study that was based on a case study of six urban NAs in Baltimore. The NAs were selectively chosen in order to control for certain characteristics. The NAs were predominantly white and their members were mostly within a certain income range. He conducted interviews with active association members, as well as with a random sample of community residents. Crenson made distinctions between neighborhoods with close-knit, loose-knit, and cosmopolitan social networks. Different types of NAs emerge from neighborhoods based off of these differences. Crenson found NAs formed in close-knit neighborhoods were worse at keeping residents informed and did a poor job of representing their interests to government officials. Finally, both cosmopolitan and close-knit NAs were generally organized in response to threats by external authorities (zoning regulations and NIMBYism), while loose-knit NAs formed in an attempt to motivate residents to take care of local issues like trash removal, planting trees, and repairing or repainting houses.

Location can be an important determinant of both individual and NA participation. In a study done by Hutchenson and Prather (1988), it was determined that people living nearer the center of a city are likely to be more politically active than people on the periphery. At the center, they argue, people have more incentive and receive more support for participation than those on the periphery (348). As participation in

NAs is likely to be higher the closer it is to the center of the city, Logan and Rabrenovic (1990) point out that NAs in cities are also likely to be concerned with different issues than NAs located in suburbs along the periphery. City-bound NAs are more likely to be concerned with the condition of streets, sidewalks, parks, and playgrounds, the quality of police protection, and overly congested traffic and parking while those in the suburbs are more likely to be concerned with land development issues.

Another factor important to NA involvement is stability. A stable neighborhood provides an NA with a reliable and predictable resource base (Austin 1991, 523). Using a survey sent out to the leaders of sixty NAs, Austin found that, contrary to logic, the more stable a neighborhood is, the less complex its NA is likely to be (527). The opposite would seem to be intuitive: stable neighborhoods should be grounded in complex NA organizations. Also, Austin found that the age of an NA had no significant impact on its complexity (524). This also seems counterintuitive, as one would expect complex NAs to develop over time. Families should also be a stabilizing factor as they are less likely to move, are more committed to the neighborhood, and more likely to participate (523). Austin also identified the age of neighborhoods residents as a significant determinant of both stability and individual participation (522).

Hypothesis

Why are some neighborhood associations more civically active than others? I hypothesize that the older the neighborhood, more family households, older the population, higher the class of the population, more internally active, and higher the feelings of political efficacy of the president of an NA, the more civically active the NA will be. This hypothesis is generalizable in that it can easily be applied to NAs in other cities and is not Omaha-specific.

Age of Neighborhood

The older the neighborhood, the more active its NA will be. The longer a neighborhood has been around, the older and more established its NA is likely to be, as well as its own position in the city. A stable neighborhood is also more likely to have dealt with a lot of the internal problems, such as internal division, confusion, or disorganization, which might interfere with attempts to get involved civically. It is

also possible, that many older neighborhoods might have to deal with urban planning issues more so than newer ones, as new developers attempt to replace older buildings with newer ones. In order to protect historic buildings in their areas, or at least to have more "say" in the issues concerning them, older NAs must get involved with the city. This variable was not included in any of the previous studies I investigated.

It can be demonstrated that this independent variable causes NAs to be more civically involved. It obviously demonstrates time order, in that the age of a neighborhood cannot come after civic involvement. The neighborhood always comes before the NA. It seems likely that as a neighborhood gets older, NA civic involvement will increase. The older the neighborhood, the longer its NA has been around. The longer the NA has been around, the more active it will be as it becomes more organized and as its priorities shift from internal to external. It could be argued that this co-variation is spurious because it is actually a function of location within the city. Older neighborhoods are likely to be closer to the center of a city, while newer ones are going to be further away. The inner city is more likely to be in need of redevelopment, and is more likely to be active in city politics. In a way these two variables are the same thing. Cities naturally grow outwards from the center so that the older neighborhoods will logically be in the center with newer ones towards the edges. However, if this co-variation were caused by location rather than age, then if a new neighborhood were built in the center of a city and an older one been built on the outer edge, the newer one would be more active than the older one. This is not likely. Regardless of where they are located, older neighborhoods will be the sites for redevelopment. Even if it is located in the center of the city, a newer neighborhood is not likely to be threatened with developers desiring to tear down one of its buildings in order to build something else.

Internal Activity

That an NA needs to be internally active in order to be externally active is somewhat intuitive, although none of my sources used it in their hypotheses. It would be very difficult for an NA to be externally active and not internally active as well. Although many NAs often get their start from some

external threat, they will not be able to remain externally active for long after that initial threat has been addressed. Once the original “hot button” issue has been solved, an NA will lose steam if it does not move onto something else. It is unlikely that this “something else” will be another external problem with enough gusto to keep the NA from deteriorating. Members will lose interest, and eventually an NA that solely focuses on civic problems may find itself completely dissolved. Most people do not get involved with NAs to deal solely in civic problems; they get involved to make their neighborhood a better place. For this reason, NAs usually turn to internal activities in order to keep up membership and remain active. External activities are then usually carried out only in addition to internal ones. Active internal involvement also includes active membership, elections, and cohesion within the NA itself. It would be nearly impossible to carry out effective civic involvement without these sorts of internal activities. Therefore, the more internally active an NA, the more civically active they can be.

While time order can be demonstrated fairly easily for this variable, co-variation and non-spuriousness are a bit more difficult. It is not necessarily true that an internally active NA will be externally active, but an externally active NA should be internally active. So as internal activity increases, external activity will not necessarily increase as well, because some NAs may be isolationist in that they only wish to focus on internal activities. However, among civically active NAs, the more internally active they are, the more civically active they should be. That is to say, if an NA is involved in city politics, the extent to which it is internally active will determine just how civically involved they are. The civically involved NA will need internal activity and cohesion to support its civic involvement. This variable more than the others, cannot stand on its own. Other variables must be present, because although it will not necessarily determine whether or not an NA is civically active, it will determine the extent to which a civically active NA gets involved. This variable must work in conjunction with the other variables, but it nonetheless plays a distinctive part. For instance, a neighborhood with a lot of family households is likely to be both internally and externally active. The existence of children in the neighborhood could explain both internal and external involvement. However, a neighborhood with a lot of family households that is

externally active but not very internally active will not be very successful in its civic involvements. Also, a neighborhood with a lot of children could be very internally active but could choose not to be very externally active. The existence of family households does not completely explain the co-variation between internal and external involvement.

Family Households

Another variable that was not taken into account in any of the other studies I found was the amount of family households in a neighborhood. Until they have children, people have little reason to get involved in an NA. Parents get involved in their neighborhood because they want to make it a safe and healthy environment for their children. Single adults or childless couples are less likely to get involved. They are also less likely to know other people in their neighborhood. Children in neighborhoods meet and play together a great deal more than adults. Parents meet other parents in their neighborhood through their children. Neighborhoods with more families will have NAs that are more civically involved because they will have more people desiring to be involved and to improve their city and their neighborhood for the sake of their children.

Although it is possible to explain this relationship by stating that families are more likely to live in neighborhoods with more active NAs, and that the civic involvement of an NA, therefore, comes before a high number of family households, this is unlikely. This explanation leads into a “chicken-or-the-egg” style debate. Civic involvement has to start somewhere. If civic involvement caused more families to move into a neighborhood, then someone would have had to get the NA involved in the first place. If a small number of existing families got the NA involved and this attracted more families to join the neighborhood, then it would follow that the more families living in a neighborhood the more active it will be because had there been no families in the neighborhood at all, it would not have gotten active. Otherwise, a group of single or childless couples would have had to have gotten the NA involved, in which case, the number of families would have absolutely no effect on involvement. If this were true then families would have no reason to choose a neighborhood with an active NA over one without. There would

be no co-variation. However, logically it only makes sense that an NA would be more active the more family households its neighborhood has: unless something else is at play in this relationship. Location could be causing both the number of families and the degree of civic involvement of an NA to increase. Families often choose to live in suburbs rather than the inner city in order to raise their children in a safer environment. However, if this were so then if there were a neighborhood in the inner city with a large amount of family households it would not be any more active than an inner city neighborhood with no family households. This is highly unlikely. It is the family dynamic itself that brings about increased involvement rather than location.

Age of Population

This variable works both closely in conjunction with the amount of family households and separately from it. In looking at neighborhoods with many family households, the older the adult population, the more involved they are likely to be. New parents with mostly infant children are not likely to be as involved as parents with kids old enough to travel around the neighborhood making friends on their own. Also, parents with older kids may be more likely to get involved civically because it is the city at large rather than the neighborhood that their children will be exploring (when they get their first car for instance). Parents of older kids may have more time to get involved as well. As their kids get older they become more independent, and the parents gain more free time to get involved in their NA. Independent of the family households, retirees are probably more likely to get involved than are younger single adults. Not only will the elderly likely have more time on their hands, but also many of them probably have children and grandchildren living elsewhere, and so they understand the importance of being involved in one's community. They are also more likely to get involved for personal reasons. It is the elderly, for instance, who are most likely to complain of local problems, such as noise pollution, than are younger single adults.

There is no data, nor rational explanation, to suggest that time order should be anything but apparent in this situation. A civically active NA does not attract the elderly to a neighborhood, and it is doubtful that it would attract older families to any significant degree. Co-variation can be demonstrated by

the fact that, as demonstrated above, the civic involvement of an NA should rise with the age of its population. If they were not connected in any way, then neighborhoods made up of only young single adults, or one of new parents, would be just as active as one full of retirees or older parents. It could be argued that the age of the neighborhood rather than the age of the population is at work here. Older neighborhoods, which should be more active than younger ones, often tend to house the older populations. However, this is not always the case. Among two neighborhoods of the same age, one with an older-aged population, and one with a younger one, the elder would still be more likely to be more civically involved than the other.

Higher Class

Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) found that individuals with a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to be active in an NA, however, Thomson (2001) later found that differences in social status at the NA-level had far less impact on civic participation. The higher the class of the population, the more time and money they have to spend on NA activities. People of higher class are also more likely to have connections and an interest in city politics. It follows from this that if the majority of the population of a neighborhood were of higher status then the NA itself will have more money and time to spend on civic involvement than one with a majority of lower class people. For this reason, I will reevaluate Thomson's (2001) findings. Also, although Thomson found that social status had less of an impact at the NA-level, that is not to say that it did not have any effect.

In demonstrating causality, time order is perhaps a bit questionable. Higher-class individuals could be more likely to pick neighborhoods based on the civic involvement of their NAs than are lower class individuals. It could be, then, that civic involvement causes a neighborhood to have a higher-class population. However, it is unlikely that all civically active NAs attract higher-class populations. Co-variation is more easily demonstrated. Higher status populations are unlikely to be uninvolved civically. As socioeconomic status rises, civic involvement will rise as well.

Political Efficacy of Leadership

The fact that the political efficacy of NA leadership would affect civic involvement is fairly intuitive. If the leadership of an NA does not feel that they are capable of affecting city politics, then they are not at all likely to get involved with civic issues. This could be a major roadblock to an NA becoming civically involved, because even if every other variable were present in an NA, if the leadership is afraid to get involved, then there is little chance that they will. Leaders that no longer feel they have any influence are likely to withdraw from the political arena. As far as time order goes, it is possible that getting involved civically could make the leaders of an NA feel like they have more effect on politics, but since they are unlikely to get involved in the first place if they have a low feeling of political efficacy, this is mostly a mute point. There will not be an NA that is highly civically involved but that does not feel that it has any effect on city politics. There is clear co-variation between these two variables. As feelings of political efficacy among NA leaders increases, civic involvement will increase and as it decreases, so will civic involvement.

All of the above variables combine together to describe why some NAs are more civically active than others. The perfect civic NA, according to this hypothesis, would be one in an older, internally active neighborhood, with a lot of older, high class, family households, and with leaders that feel they have a lot of “say” in city politics. This paints a pretty accurate picture of what it takes to make an involved NA and I do not think that any other variables (except maybe education) would have more effect on the civic involvement of NAs than these variables.

Methodology

Omaha, Nebraska not only provides neighborhoods representing a range of different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, but its city officials encourage NAs to interact with both the city government and each other. The city provides various grants, services, and programs intended to aid NAs in bettering their neighborhoods and their city. For this reason, and out of convenience, I used Omaha as the basis for my research survey. Using a directory of NAs compiled by the City of Omaha Planning Department, I sent a

survey (see Appendix A) to the presidents, or the highest official for whom I could find contact information, of every NA in the city. 148 surveys were sent out, and I received 44 back. I dropped two of these because they came from coalitions representing several NAs, which were already part of my sample.

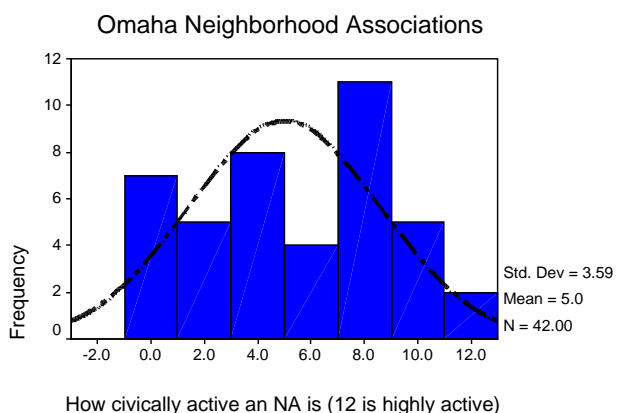
I then entered the data from the surveys into SPSS to form my variables. The codebook (Appendix B) shows the values I entered into the program as well as how they were recoded. In order to create a measure of my dependent variable, the degree of civic involvement of a NA, I created an index combining whether or not a neighborhood association contacted city officials in regards to zoning requests or other policy proposals, how many of the city or NCGO-sponsored programs the NAs participated in, and how involved the NA is with local neighborhood coalitions (if they are available). I also combined various factors into an index to measure the internal activity of a neighborhood association. This index measured how internally active an NA is by considering the status of current officers, regular elections, whether it has applied for grants, whether it has an active crime watch, how many festivals, work projects, and rallies it has and how many people attend, how often it produces a newsletter and how many people it reaches, how many regular meetings it has and how many people usually attend, and whether or not it attempts any sort of outreach effort. In order to test my hypothesis, I ran a linear regression with civic involvement as my dependent variable and the age of the neighborhood, amount of family households, age of the population, social status of the population, internal activity, and the feelings of efficacy of the president of an NA as my independent variables.

Analysis

This study is attempting to explain variation in the civic involvement of neighborhood associations (the distribution of which can be seen in Figure 2). If my hypothesis is correct, then my analysis should show that older neighborhoods have more civically active

Figure 2.

Histogram: Distribution of Civic Involvement



NAs; neighborhoods with older populations will be more active than those with younger populations; NAs that are more active internally will be more active civically, and NA's whose president has a high feeling of efficacy will be more active than those whose presidents have a lower feeling of efficacy.

The results of the linear regression that tests this hypothesis are shown in Table 1. According to the Adjusted R Square, the variables in my hypothesis explain 87.9 percent of the variation in civic involvement. The significance shows the chances of getting each value of the independent variables if the null hypothesis were true. A significance greater than .05, or, failing that, .1, represents too great of a chance that I could attain the same results even if the null hypothesis were true. All but two of my variables have a significance level lower than .05. Of these two, one is lower than .1.

Neither the feelings of efficacy of the president of an NA nor NAs whose households are primarily made up of families are statistically significant. Because feelings of efficacy of association presidents has a significance level higher than both .05 and .1, this part of my hypothesis is incorrect as it clearly has no effect on the civic involvement of an NA. The other variable with a significance level of greater than .05, although less than .1, is neighborhoods whose majority of households are family ones. This means that although there is a significant difference between neighborhoods whose households are primarily couples and all other neighborhood types in regards to civic involvement, neighborhoods are primarily family households are not significantly more active than any other type. Although having a majority of family households may not be significant, there is a significant negative relationship between civic involvement and neighborhoods that have a majority of couples' households. Also, because the significance level of the variable for family households is less than .1, it is not completely insignificant, and so does not necessarily disprove that part of my hypothesis.

Table 1.

Linear Regression: Age of Neighborhood, Majority of Household Type in Neighborhood, Age of Majority of Population, Social Status of Majority of Population, President's Feelings of Political Efficacy, and Amount of Internal Activity as Determinants of Civic Involvement

	Regression Coefficient (Slope)	Standardized Coefficient	t	Significance
Civic Involvement (Dependent)	-1.037			
Age of Neighborhood	.038	.436	4.035	.001
Neighborhoods in Which the Majority of Households are Made Up of Couples	-2.811	-.172	-2.070	.054
Neighborhoods in Which the Majority of Households are Made Up of Families	1.374	.157	1.764	.096
Age of Majority of Adults in Neighborhood	1.070	.250	3.266	.005
Class of Majority of Adults in Neighborhood	-.733	-.308	-3.000	.008
President's Feelings of Political Efficacy	.170	.145	1.663	.115
Internal Involvement of Neighborhood Association	.161	.299	3.220	.005

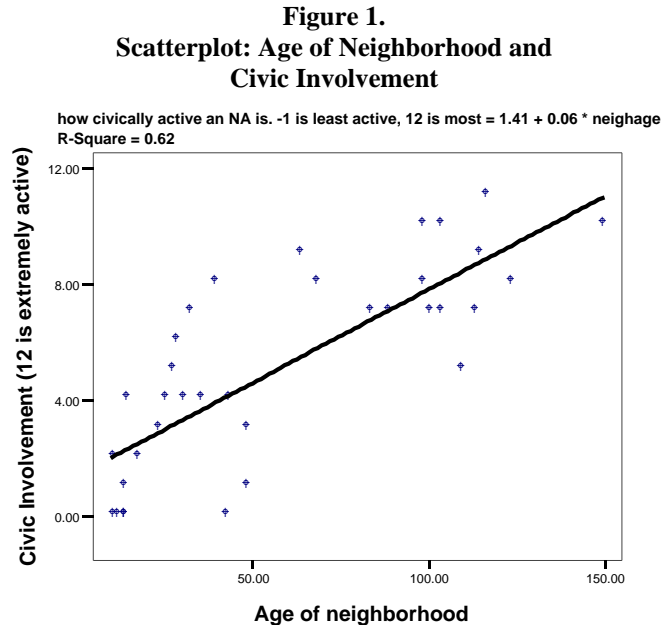
Adjusted R Square: .879

Regression Equation: $y = -1.037 + .038x - 2.811x_1 + 1.374x_2 + 1.070x_3 - .733x_4 + .170x_5 + .161x_6$

The rest of my variables are statistically significant and have a t value greater than 2, so the null hypotheses for these variables can be rejected. The age of the neighborhood not only has the lowest significance (.001) and highest t value (4.035), but it also has the highest Standardized Coefficient, which means it has the greatest impact on the dependent variable. The Standardized Coefficient measures how much of a change in the dependent variable you will get for one standard deviation increase in the independent variable. For the age of the neighborhood, one standard deviation increase in age will increase civic activity .436 units in the index. According to the Regression Coefficient, as the age of the neighborhood increases by one year, the amount of civic involvement increases by .038 units holding all other variables constant. Figure 1 shows a scatterplot of the relationship between neighborhood age and

civic involvement. There is a definite correlation between the rise in neighborhood age and the rise in civic involvement. This part of my hypothesis, then, is correct.

Another statistically significant variable is the age of the majority of adults in the neighborhood. It has a significance of .005 and a t value of 3.266. The Standardized Coefficient shows that one standard deviation increase in the age of the majority of adults in the neighborhood will yield a .250 unit increase in the civic involvement index. While not as strong a determinant as the age of the neighborhood, it is still significant and the Regression Coefficient shows that as the age of the population rises one unit, civic involvement will increase by 1.07. This part of my hypothesis is also correct.



The amount of internal involvement of an NA is about as significant as is the age of the majority of adults in the neighborhood. It has a significance of .005 and a t value of 3.220. As internal involvement increases by one unit of the internal involvement index, civic involvement will increase by .161. And a standard deviation increase in internal involvement yields a .050 increase in civic involvement. This is quite a bit weaker than the previous variables, but is still worth noting and still proves my hypothesis.

The social class of the majority of the population has a significance of .008 and a t value of -3. Interestingly, a standard deviation increase in social class will yield a .308 decrease in civic involvement and as social class increases by one unit, civic involvement actually decreases .733. This is contrary to my hypothesis that social class and civic involvement would have a positive relationship.

The regression coefficient for civic involvement shows that, if all of the independent variables were held constant, civic involvement would be -1.037. In other words, if an NA were not at all internally

active, if its president felt entirely ineffective, the majority of the population was young, single, and high class, and the neighborhood were zero years old, the NA would be 1.037 unit civically uninvolved.

Conclusion

According to my analysis, half of my hypothesis was correct. As I predicted, the age of the neighborhood, age of the majority of the population, and the degree of internal involvement are all positive determinants of civic involvement. However, the political efficacy of NA leadership does not have a significant effect upon civic involvement. The existence of primarily family households also does not have a significant impact upon civic involvement. However, neighborhoods with primarily couples' households have a significant negative effect upon civic involvement. Social class had the opposite effect from what I had expected, with neighborhoods with a majority of lower class residents being more active than those with a majority higher class. The fact that the political efficacy of NA leadership did not have a significant effect on civic involvement counters Crenson's (1983) assertion of its importance. Also, social class was predicted to be either a strong positive determinant of civic involvement (Berry, Portney, and Thomson, 1993), or else an insignificant determinant (Thomson, 2001). None of my sources predicted that there would be a significant negative correlation between the two. This is perhaps not so surprising however, as peoples in lower social classes may live in neighborhoods that are in greater need of city aid than those whose citizens are of a higher class. An interesting find in my analysis was the strength of the relationship between the age of the neighborhood and civic involvement. This variable was by far the most influential despite the fact that it was never mentioned in any of the previous studies I researched. Older neighborhoods are more likely to be civically involved than younger ones. The other two variables in my hypothesis are slightly less surprising. It is to be expected that an NA will have some level of internal involvement before it becomes civically involved, and older populations are more settled and more likely to take a stake in their neighborhood and city than are younger populations.

This study perhaps shines light on the importance of stability in civic involvement among civic groups. If newer formed groups are not very involved in city politics, even if the city government is taking

strides to get them involved, this may have nothing to do with problems with the system but simply with a lack of stability within the organization. Time could be a factor in determining the usefulness of such projects. I was limited in the scope of my study and so was unable to do as complete or as in-depth research as I would have liked. Future research could check actual census data pertaining to the demographic factors that I could only ask about in general terms in my survey. For instance, determining the actual makeup of the population of each neighborhood rather than basing data on what the respondent thinks best approximates the majority of their population. Also, adding variables such as the complexity of a NA, whether it has many different and specialized officers, or if it is made up of a loose-knit, unorganized group of people could be an important factor that I was unable to research.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer all open-ended questions as fully as possible, if you do not know the answer, or if it is not applicable to your neighborhood association, please mark "Don't Know" or "N/A". If no blank is provided then circle the correct answer or follow the directions at the end of the question. Be sure to fill out both the front and back of each page. Thank you again for taking the time to fill this survey out.

1. What is the name of your neighborhood association?

2. What year was the neighborhood you live in founded? _____

3. What year was your neighborhood association founded? _____

4. In your neighborhood, what proportion of the housing provided is single-family homes? _____

5. What is the approximate number of households in your neighborhood? _____

6. In general, would you say that the majority of adults/households in your neighborhood are (please circle only one answer from each row a through d):

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| a. UPPER CLASS | LOWER CLASS | MIDDLE CLASS | | |
| b. YOUNGER
THAN 25 | BETWEEN 25
AND 40 | BETWEEN 40
AND 50 | OLDER
THAN 50 | |
| c. COUPLES | SINGLE | FAMILIES | | |
| d. BLACK | WHITE | HISPANIC | OTHER | |
| e. BELOW
HIGH SCHOOL
EDUCATION | HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES | SOME
COLLEGE | BACHELORS
DEGREE | GRADUATE
DEGREE |

7. What position do you personally hold within your neighborhood association? (If no official position, please indicate)

- a. Prior to this position, have you held any other positions within your neighborhood association?

YES

NO

IF YES:

Please list the other positions you have held and approximately how long you held them:

8. First, I'd like to ask how satisfied you are with some of the main services the city is supposed to provide for your neighborhood. (circle one number for each row)

	Generally Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't Know
A. Quality of public schools	1	2	3	8
B. Parks and playgrounds for children in this neighborhood	1	2	3	8
C. Sports and recreation centers for teenagers in this neighborhood	1	2	3	8
D. Police protection in this neighborhood	1	2	3	8
E. Garbage collection in this neighborhood	1	2	3	8

9. Does your neighborhood association have current officers?

YES

NO

10. Has your neighborhood association had regular elections for officers during the last two years?

YES

NO

11. Does your neighborhood association have access to a neighborhood or district coalition?

YES

NO

IF YES:

Does your neighborhood association regularly send representatives to, or otherwise interact with this coalition?

YES

NO

12. How many regular meetings has your neighborhood association had in the last two years? _____

13. What is the average attendance at one of these meetings? _____

14. What is your neighborhood association's approximate annual operating budget? _____

15. Approximately, what percentage of your neighborhood association's annual budget is acquired through local fundraising?

16. How many newsletters has your organization produced in the last two years? _____

17. What percentage of the households in your neighborhood would you say an average newsletter reaches?

18. In the last two years, how many rallies has your neighborhood association sponsored? _____

19. In the last two years, how many work projects (such as neighborhood cleanups) has your neighborhood association sponsored?

20. What was the approximate attendance of all of your neighborhood association's work projects in the last two years (the sum total)?

21. In the last two years, how many festivals or block parties has your neighborhood association sponsored?

22. What was the approximate attendance of all of your neighborhood association's festivals and/or block parties in the last two years (the sum total)?

23. Has your neighborhood association conducted any of the following outreach efforts in the last two years?

FLYERING

NEWSPAPER ADDS

PHONE OUTREACH

24. Does your neighborhood association sponsor any block clubs or crime watch groups:

YES

NO

IF YES: How many active block clubs or crime watch groups are there in your neighborhood (circle one)?

1. NEARLY ALL BLOCKS HAVE BLOCK WATCH

2. SOME BLOCKS ARE ACTIVE, AND SOME ARE NOT

3. NONE OF THE BLOCKS ARE ACTIVE

25. Compared to the rest of the city, would you say that your neighborhood experiences more, less, or about the same amount of crime as other neighborhoods?

MORE

LESS

ABOUT THE SAME

26. Has your neighborhood association had to contact city officials in regards to any zoning or land use requests/development proposals in the last two years?

YES

NO

27. Has your neighborhood association contacted city officials in regards to any other policy proposals that may have affected your neighborhood in the last two years?

YES

NO

28. Has your neighborhood association been involved in any of the following city or NCGO-sponsored programs in the last two years (circle all that apply)?

HYPE

WEED&SEED

LIVELY OMAHA

NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDERS

BLOCK OF BUILDERS

ANY NCGO-SPONSORED INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS/WORKSHOPS

KEEP OMAHA BEAUTIFUL, INC.

URBAN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

29. Has your neighborhood association applied for either the Omaha Community Foundation Grant or Mayor Fahey's Neighborhood Association Grant in the last two years (circle one)?

1. APPLIED FOR OMAHA COMMUNITIY FOUNDATION GRANT
2. APPLIED FOR MAYOR FAHEY'S NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION GRANT
3. APPLIED FOR BOTH GRANTS
4. DID NOT APPLY FOR EITHER GRANT

30. THESE LAST FEW QUESTIONS ARE FOR NA PRESIDENTS OR LEADERSHIP ONLY EVERYONE:

Some personal questions to determine leadership style and sense of political efficacy:

1. Would you say that you are primarily concerned with service problems – getting better service delivery – or are you primarily concerned with the redistribution of political power – increased citizen participation and getting more neighborhood control?

SERVICE PROBLEMS POLITICAL CONTROL

2. As a matter of strategy and priorities, do you feel it is more important to direct your energies to reforming or changing the city government or do you feel it is more important to work at the neighborhood level to develop local capacities and resources?

CITY GOVERNMENT NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL

3. Working in this program, do you feel that you have a voice, a “say” in government?

YES NO

4. Do you feel that your work in this program has a real impact on the way government delivers services in the neighborhood?

YES NO

5. Having worked in this program, do you feel that citizens working together can “fight City Hall” – make government more responsive to the needs of the neighborhood?

YES NO

6. Having worked in this program, do you feel more hopeful that there are ways to solve problems in your neighborhood?

YES NO

Would you like to receive a copy of the completed thesis paper?

YES NO

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

- **yrfound**
 “What year was the neighborhood you live in founded?”
 Interval
 - **neighage**
 Age of neighborhood
 Compute: 2003-yrfound
 Interval
- **yrnafoun**
 “What year was your neighborhood association founded?”
 Interval
 - **naage**
 Age of NA
 Compute: 2003-yrnafoun
 Interval
- **singfam**
 “In your neighborhood, what proportion of the housing provided is single-family homes?”
 Interval
- **househol**
 “What is the approximate number of households in your neighborhood?”
 Interval
- **“In general, would you say that the majority of adults/households in your neighborhood are (please circle only one answer for each row a through d)”**
 - **socclass**
 1=lower class
 2=middle class
 3=upper class
 Ordinal
 - **socage**
 1=younger than 25
 2=25-40
 3=40-50
 4=older than 50
 Ordinal
 - **soctype**
 1=couples
 2=single
 3=families
 Nominal
 - **famdumb1**
 Dummy variable for regression
 0=single and families (2 and 3)
 1=couples (1)
 - **famdumb2**
 Dummy variable for regression

0=single and couples (2 and 1)
1=families (3)

- **socethni**
 - 1=black
 - 2=white
 - 3=Hispanic
 - 4=other
 - Nominal
- **socedu**
 - 1=Below HS education
 - 2=HS grads
 - 3=some college
 - 4=bachelors degree
 - 5=graduate level
 - Ordinal
- **class**
 - Compute socedu + socclass for overall social class/status
 - 2=low class
 - 3=mid-low class
 - 4=lower middle class
 - 5=upper middle class
 - 6=mid-high class
 - 7=high class
 - Ordinal
- “How satisfied are you with some of the main services the city is supposed to provide for your neighborhood? (circle one number for each row)”
 - **pubschoo**
 - **parks**
 - **reccente**
 - **police**
 - **garbage**
 - 0=don't know/NA
 - 1=generally satisfied
 - 1=somewhat satisfied
 - 2=very dissatisfied
 - Ordinal
 - **dissatis**
 - Calculate pubschoo + parks + reccente + poice + garbage for amount of dissatisfaction with city services (-5 is low dissatisfaction, 10 is high)
 - Interval
- **coaccess**
 - “Does your neighborhood association have access to a neighborhood or district coalition?”
 - 1=yes
 - 2=no

Nominal

- **cosend**

“If yes, does your neighborhood association regularly send representatives to, or otherwise interact with this coalition?”

1=yes
2=no
Nominal
- **cocombi2**

Combine (manually) coaccess and cosend for how involved NA is with neighborhood coalition

-1= has access but does not send reps
0=does not have access to coalition
2=has access to coalition and sends reps
Nominal/Ordinal?
- **zoning2**

“Has your neighborhood association had to contact city officials in regards to any zoning or land use requests/development proposals in the last two years?”

2=yes
0=no
Nominal
- **policy2**

“Has your neighborhood association contacted city officials in regards to any other policy proposals that may have affected your neighborhood in the last two years?”

2=yes
0=no
Nominal
- **programs**

“Has your neighborhood association been involved in any of the following city or NCGO-sponsored programs in the last two years (circle all that apply)? (See survey)”

0-8
Interval
- **civicact (DEPENDENT VARIABLE)**

Compute: zoning2+policy2+programs+cocombi2 for degree of civic involvement
Interval
- **budget**

“What is your neighborhood association’s approximate annual operating budget?”
Interval
- **curoffic**

“Does your neighborhood association have current officers?”

1=yes
2=no
Nominal

 - **curoffi2**

recode curoffic
2=yes (1)
0=all other values
Nominal

- **regelect**

“Has your neighborhood association had regular elections for officers during the last two years?”

1=yes
2=no
Nominal

 - **regelec2**

recode regelect
2=yes (1)
0=all other values
Nominal
- **meetreg**

“How many regular meetings has your neighborhood association had in the last two years?”

Interval

 - **meetreg2**

Recode meetreg for values to be added to internal index
0=0 meetings
1=1-5 meetings
2=6-12
3=13-18
4=19-23
5=24+
99=0 (n/a)
Ordinal
- **meetaten**

“What is the average attendance at one of these meetings?”

Interval

 - **meetate2**

Recode meetaten for values to be added to internal index
1=1-20
2=21-40
3=41+
99=0 (n/a)
Ordinal
- **newslett**

“How many newsletters has your organization produced in the last two years?”

Interval

 - **newslet2**

Recode newslett for values to be added to internal index
1=1-7
2=8-17
3=18+
0=0
99=0 (n/a)
Ordinal

- **newsreac**

“What percentage of the households in your neighborhood would you say an average newsletter reaches?”

Interval

 - **newsrea2**

Recode newsreac for values to be added to internal index

1=.1-.3

2=.4-.85

3=.9-1

99=0 (n/a)

Ordinal
- **rallies**

“In the last two years, how many rallies has your neighborhood association sponsored?”

Interval

 - **rallies2**

Recode rallies for values to be added to internal index

1=1-6

2=7+

99=0

Ordinal
- **workproj**

“In the last two years, how many work projects (such as neighborhood cleanups) has your neighborhood association sponsored?”

Interval

 - **workpro2**

Recode workproj for values to be added to internal index

1=1-10

2=11+

99=0 (n/a)

Ordinal
- **workatte**

“What was the approximate attendance of all of your neighborhood association’s work projects in the last two years (the sum total)?”

Interval

 - **workatt2**

Recode workatte for values to be added to internal index

1=1-20

2=21-100

3=101-499

4=500+

99=0

Ordinal
- **festival**

“In the last two years, how many festivals or block parties has your neighborhood association sponsored?”

Interval

○ **festiva2**

Recode festival for values to be added to internal index

1=1-5

2=6-14

3=15+

99=0 (n/a)

Ordinal

• **festatte**

“What was the approximate attendance of all of your neighborhood association’s festivals and/or block parties in the last two years (the sum total)?”

Interval

○ **festatt2**

Recode festatte for values to be added to internal index

1=1-200 (1-98 and 100-200)

2=201-900

3=1000-2999

4=3000+

99=0

Ordinal

• **outreach**

“Has your neighborhood association conducted any of the following outreach efforts in the last two years? (flyering, newspaper ads, or phone outreach)”

0=none of the provided types of efforts

1=one type

2=two types

3=all three types

Interval

• **crimewat**

“Does your neighborhood association sponsor any block clubs or crime watch groups?”

2=yes

0=no

Nominal

• **crimeact**

“If yes, how many active block clubs or crime watch groups are there in your neighborhood (circle one)?”

0=N/A, answered no to above

1=nearly all blocks active

2=some blocks active, some not

3=no blocks active

Ordinal

○ **crimecom**

combine (manually) crimewat and crimeact for involvement with crime watches

-1=has crime watch, but no blocks are active (2,3)

0=no crime watch (0,0)

1=has crime watch, and some blocks are active (2,2)

2=has crime watch and all blocks are active (2,1)

Ordinal

- **grants**

“Has your neighborhood association applied for either the Omaha Community Foundation Grant or Mayor Fahey’s Neighborhood Association Grant in the last two years (circle one)?”

1=Applied for Omaha Community Foundation Grant

2=Applied for Mayor Fahey’s NA Grant

3=Applied for both

4=Didn’t apply for either

Nominal

- **grants2**

Recode grants for values to be added to internal index

0=neither (4)

1=one (1 and 2)

2=both (3)

Nominal/Ordinal?

- **internal**

Index of curoffi2 + regelec2 + grants2 + crimecom + festatt2 + festiva2 + workatt2 + workpro2 + rallies2 + outreach + newsrea2 + newslet2 + meetate2 + meetreg2 for degree of internal involvement of NA (-1 is low involvement, 25 is high)

Interval

- **crime**

“Compared to the rest of the city, would you say that your neighborhood experiences more, less, or about the same amount of crime as other neighborhoods?”

1=more

2=about same

3=less

Ordinal

- **presconc**

“Would you say that you are primarily concerned with service problems – getting better service delivery – or are you primarily concerned with the redistribution of political power – increased citizen participation and getting more neighborhood control?”

0=NA

1=Service problems

2=Political control

Nominal

- **presfocu**

“As a matter of strategy and priorities, do you feel it is more important to direct your energies to reforming or changing the city government or do you feel it is more important to work at the neighborhood level to develop local capacities and resources?”

0=NA

1=City govt

2=Neighborhood level

Nominal

○ **leaderst**

combine presconc and presfocu for leadership style

1=entrepreneur (service and city)

2=ombudsman (service and neighborhood)

3=protestor (control and city)

4=community builders (control and neighborhood)

Ordinal

• **leaddum1**

Dummy variable for regression

0=ombudsman, protestor, and community builders (2, 3, and 4)

1=entrepreneur (1)

• **leaddum2**

Dummy variable for regression

0=entrepreneur, protestor, and community builders (1, 3, and 4)

1=ombudsman (2)

• **leaddum3**

Dummy variable for regression

0=entrepreneur, ombudsman, and community builders (1, 2, and 4)

1=protestor (3)

• **presvoic**

“Working in this program, do you feel that you have a voice, a “say” in government?”

2=yes

0=no

Nominal

• **presimpa**

“Do you feel that your work in this program has a real impact on the way government delivers services in the neighborhood?”

2=yes

0=no

Nominal

• **presresp**

“Having worked in this program, do you feel that citizens working together can “fight City Hall” – make government more responsive to the needs of the neighborhood?”

2=yes

0=no

Nominal

• **presprob**

“Having worked in this program, do you feel more hopeful that there are ways to solve problems in your neighborhood?”

2=yes

0=no

Nominal

- **preseffe**

Compute presvoic + presimpa + presresp + presprob for president's feelings of efficacy (0 is low/none, 8 is high)

Interval

- **location**

Located each NA on a map, divided Omaha into North and Southwest, and North and Southeast.

1=Northwest (North of Dodge, West of 680)

2=Southwest (South of Dodge, West of 680 [except Regency which was included here because it was closer to SW than SE])

3=Northeast (North of Dodge, East of 680)

4=Southeast (South of Dodge, East of 72nd [no NA's South of Dodge between 680 and 72nd except Regency])

Ordinal

- **locdumb1**

Dummy variable for regression

0=SW, NE, and SE (2, 3, and 4)

1=NW (1)

- **locdumb2**

Dummy variable for regression

0=NW, NE, and SE (1, 3, and 4)

1=SW (2)

- **locdumb3**

Dummy variable for regression

0=NW, SW, and SE (1, 2, and 4)

1=NE (3)

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