

REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY

Policy Briefing Number 6

Title: Why do people become good citizens?

Brief Description of the Project:

- The project sought to find out what causes people to carry out a wide range of civic activities in their communities and neighbourhoods
- Peter John, Ed Fieldhouse and Hanhua Liu analysed the 2005 English Citizenship Survey to find out the types of activities people participated in and whether participation was prompted by particular values or norms. We grouped civic acts into four types: (a) *influence institutions individually* understood as when citizens attempt to influence rules, laws or policies; (b) *collective civic* which are acts of citizen co-operation also designed to influence rules, laws and policies, like signing petitions; (c) *citizen governance*, which may take place in informal and semi-formal forums, such as tenants group; and (d) *community voluntarism*, individual's efforts to benefit in their communities, such as leading a committee and befriending or mentoring people.
- The project examined five main different drivers of civic behaviour: (a) *trust* in government institutions; (b) *moral motivations*; (c) *norms* of good behaviour; (d) *feelings* about what is going on in their neighbourhood; e) *social economic status and demographics* ;
- We grouped questions in the citizenship survey according to categories above
- We tested out the links between the drivers and different forms of civic behaviour using structural equations models (SEMs)

Key Findings:

- Distrust in government institutions serves to stimulate individual

and collective civic behaviour, and community voluntarism. Less trusting individuals may have the inclination to put things right whereas trusting ones are happy to leave things as they are.

- Positive feelings about the neighbourhood are positively associated with all types of civic behaviour. A strong sense of community acts as a spur to a participation. People's perception of norms of good behaviour has a negative effect on individual civic actions such as complaining. If people think that a neighbourhood already watches after its own affairs then residents may be less inclined to complain themselves because these activities may be carried out anyway. There is no effect of norms on other forms of civic behaviour.
- There is no effect of moral motivations on any kind of civic behaviour. The effect of morals is mediated by feelings about the neighbourhood.
- Older people are more likely to participate in all kinds of civic behaviour.
- Ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in all types of civic behaviour, but ethnicity has no impact on citizen governance.

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