

1 Citizen Lobbyists

Citizens' political activity in local government can take three basic forms. First, they can partake in elections, voting for local officials, volunteering for political campaigns, giving campaign contributions, or running for office themselves. Second, citizens can engage the policy-making process directly, prodding officials to take desired policy actions. Toward this end, citizens can attend city council meetings, organize protests, circulate petitions, or engage in a host of other activities. Third, citizens can bypass local governments altogether and address community issues through civic organizations, working with their fellow citizens to make positive improvements to their communities outside of the formal channels of government.

This book examines the second type of activity: engaging the local policy-making process. When thinking about this form of political participation, there are four central research questions:

1. Who participates?
2. What issues do they try to influence?
3. What activities do they engage in?
4. Are they effective?

All four questions are interrelated. Who participates will influence what issues generate the most participation. Also, citizens may engage in different activities depending on the issue, and their effectiveness may be a partial function of who is participating and how they participate. Although the four research questions are interrelated, separating them is valuable because they constitute four distinct aspects of citizen participation. Despite their connections, each question focuses on a different piece of the participation puzzle, and each needs to be answered to develop a complete picture of how citizens engage policy making.

Political scientists have generally focused on the first and the last question: who participates and are they effective. I focus on the second and third questions. Citizens—with limited time to devote to

politics and an endless array of issues—need to decide which issues they will try to influence. Why do they choose to participate on issue A and not issue B? To pose the question from a different angle, what types of public policies will generate high levels of participation? This line of questioning examines the patterns of participation across local policies, observing what types of issues generate the most interest and participation from citizens.

Once citizens decide to participate, what activities do they engage in to accomplish their political goals? On a local level, citizens have many options for participation: attending public meetings, contacting officials, petitions, protests, and other activities. Which of these activities do they utilize in their participatory efforts? I also study the strategies that citizens employ. Do they engage in pressure tactics in an effort to force officials to accede to their demands or do they try to persuade officials on the merits of their position? Do they rely primarily on formal channels of participation (such as public meetings) or do they utilize informal channels to accomplish their goals?

A case study approach was chosen for this research because it allows for a thorough and deep examination of the nature of citizen engagement with the policy-making process. It allows us to develop a comprehensive picture of citizen participation, which is more than just an aggregation of individual participatory acts. The details of citizens' participatory activity and how specific activities fit together into overall strategies are important elements in understanding the dynamics of citizen engagement with policy making. Further, a case study approach creates opportunities to examine in detail the patterns of participation across policies, not just documenting which policies generate the most participation but also exploring how the characteristics of those policies influence participation patterns. The richness and depth afforded by a case study approach is particularly important given the lack of scholarly attention to the research questions addressed in this study and the absence of prior conceptualization of how citizens engage the policy-making process.

The downside to a case study approach is one cannot make reliable generalizations. The city chosen for this study—Santa Ana, California—is not a “typical” city, and it is doubtful that there is any such creature. I do not present the findings from Santa Ana as

applicable to all cities in all circumstances. I suspect that many of the findings capture the essence of participation in other cities, but verification of that argument will have to wait for further research. The goal of this research is not to make sweeping generalizations about all cities, but rather to conceptualize the nature of citizen engagement with the policy-making process. Even if the findings from Santa Ana do not apply to all cities, the evidence presented in this book will advance the research on citizen participation by developing a framework for understanding how citizens participate in policy making. It can also help us explore the implications that it has for local democratic practices more generally; we can use the findings from Santa Ana as a platform from which to examine the actual and potential impact of this form of citizen participation on the quality and extent of democratic decision making in local government.

With a population of 320,000, Santa Ana is an older suburb of Los Angeles located about thirty miles south of downtown. Santa Ana's size makes it a good venue to study citizen participation: it is small enough to allow citizens to get directly involved in policy making, but it is still large enough to have significant urban problems and thus a broad range of policies on which to participate. Santa Ana was once a largely Anglo middle-class suburb, but it is now a diverse city with a majority Latino population and economic challenges. It shares some common characteristics with other older suburbs in terms of its demographic transformation, infrastructure problems, and loss of tax revenue. However, it also has some unique features, such as an extremely high Latino population (over 75 percent) and a major problem with overcrowding.

Santa Ana is also a good setting for exploring citizens' engagement with the policy-making process because of its political diversity. The politics of Santa Ana reflect both the city's status as a "suburb" and its large minority population, with a variety of different types of issues on the public agenda. Many different groups of citizens participate in Santa Ana politics on issues ranging from traffic mitigation to school overcrowding to public safety. Its politics are multi-dimensional without one overriding issue. The diversity of Santa Ana politics allows for an examination of participation in different contexts and by different groups. Its political diversity is not only a unique feature that sets it apart from many

other cities, it also contributes to the value of Santa Ana as a case study by presenting a setting where different types of issues are on the public agenda and various groups of participants are active in political life.

Citizen Engagement in Local Policy Making

Citizen engagement with the policy-making process encompasses both citizens' selection of issues on which they participate and the specific activities they perform to influence those issues. Of the many issues local governments tackle every year, only a handful will generate any participation from citizens. When citizens choose to participate on issue A rather than issue B, they determine the context in which they enter the policy-making process. Once citizens decide what issues they will try to influence, they can perform a variety of political acts to accomplish their goals, including everything from talking to officials, to speaking at public meetings, to street protests. Further, citizens can insert themselves into the policy-making process at different points in time, ranging from when an issue is first being discussed by officials to the implementation stage. They can engage policy making in a confrontational mode, attempting to influence policy through pressure, or they can try to work with officials to persuade them of the merits of their policy views. Citizens have many choices regarding how to approach political activity, and the choices they make will influence the manner in which they engage the policy-making process.

We can sort through this variation by identifying a few ideal-types of how citizens engage the policy-making process. Below are five descriptions of roles that citizens perform in relation to local policy making. These categories highlight different approaches to participation rather than discriminating between participatory activities and/or participant motives, although each approach varies along these criteria. This scheme is a conceptualization of the relationship between participants and governmental decision makers, not a classification of the participation itself. The roles are not mutually exclusive, and citizens can engage in different roles at various times. Though they do not present a stark either-or choice for citizens, this classification scheme is valuable because it highlights the different ways that citizens can engage the local

policy-making process and can provide a structure to analyses of citizens' political activity by identifying general approaches to influencing government.

1. *Citizens as Watchdogs.* Most citizens are not politically active, have little interest in public affairs, and consequently do not participate extensively (Putnam 2000; Dahl 1961). However, many citizens participate occasionally, particularly when government is proposing to do something undesirable. Here, citizens enter the policy process as watchdogs. They generally do not participate but will do so to prevent unwanted actions by local governments. Their participation is reactive; rather than setting the agenda themselves, they respond to the agenda set by government officials. Their participation is also obstructionist in that their goal is to prevent government from doing something unwanted rather than proposing a solution to a specific problem. Their obstruction may be beneficial to the community (e.g., by preventing a land use decision that will reduce the community's quality of life), but its fundamental goal is to prevent government from doing something rather than solving community problems. In most cases, government officials will disagree with the participants' views (given that they were the ones who placed the issue on the agenda to begin with), and thus citizens' strategies will focus on pressuring officials rather than persuading them.
2. *Citizens as Collaborative Problem Solvers.* Some scholars promote participation as a way to address difficult political and social issues that communities face (Boyte 2004; Mathews 1999). Rather than reacting to the government's agenda, collaborate problem solvers proactively address issues that they feel are important to the community, or ones on which they can have a positive impact. To accomplish these goals, citizens work with policy makers to develop solutions to the problems identified. Although most participation focuses on solving perceived problems, what separates this approach is that participants collaborate with policy makers rather than confront or pressure them. Much of their work may occur outside of the formal policy-making process, where they address community problems without government involvement. When they do engage the

policy-making process, their work mode is one of deliberation and collaboration with officials to develop mutually satisfactory policy. Their political activities will mostly be informal and private, working one-on-one with officials. When they do engage in public activities, they will avoid confrontation with officials to maintain good working relationships.

3. *Citizens as Lobbyists.* The third role citizens can assume is that of lobbyist. Here, citizens identify issues of importance to them, develop a set of political goals, and lobby government to accomplish them. They differ from community problem solvers in that their work mode is not necessarily collaborative or deliberative, resorting to pressure tactics as needed. Further, their focus is likely to be on more specific issues: collaborative problem solvers may tackle “big” issues, such as affordable housing or poverty, whereas citizen lobbyists will turn their attention to neighborhood issues, such as the construction of a particular low-income housing project. Unlike watchdogs, they are sometimes proactive in setting the agenda and defining issues. Citizen lobbyists engage in the same activities as conventional lobbyists, such as attempting to persuade officials, pressuring them, mobilizing other citizens, and conveying information to both the public and officials. Although they differ from conventional lobbyists in that they are not paid by a third party for their services, their engagement in the policy-making process is the same: they identify issues of importance to them, develop political goals, and engage in a variety of political activities to accomplish those goals.
4. *Citizens as Pawns.* The previous three roles have citizens taking some initiative in deciding on which issues they will participate and the types of activities in which they engage. However, we can imagine scenarios where they do the bidding of elites either within or outside of government. Rather than determining which issues to participate on, citizens would follow the lead of elected officials or interest groups who coordinate and mobilize citizens to participate. In this role, citizens’ political activity is coordinated by elites who organize rallies, start petition drives, or mobilize citizens to attend public meetings. Citizens willingly partake in this activity because they believe in the goals they are trying to achieve (i.e., they are not being misled or

manipulated), but they are not deciding the manner in which they participate. In other words, their engagement with the policy-making process is directed and coordinated by elites.

5. *Citizens as Ideological Activists*. Finally, citizens may participate to push ideological agendas. Here, citizens choose which issues to participate on according to their relevance for a larger ideological agenda. The issues may not directly influence them or have significant impact on the community, but they are important within the context of ideological battles. This approach differs from the first three in that decisions concerning what issues to participate on and how to participate are informed by a larger partisan context, rather than the specifics of the issues themselves. Of course, all participants are likely to have an ideology that informs their participation, but what distinguishes this approach is that participation is derivative of participants' ideological goals, rather than just being influenced by them. Given the nature of the issues they attempt to influence, their activity is likely to be confrontational and public. They may collaborate with sympathetic officials, but they are more prone to pressure tactics.

I assess which of these models represents citizens' engagement with the local policy-making process and argue, as the title suggests, that in Santa Ana most participants engaged the policy-making process as lobbyists. Citizens approached policy making in the same way as conventional lobbyists, engaging in a variety of political activities to accomplish specific goals. At times, participants exhibited some of the characteristics of the other roles, with occasional ideological battles and a few efforts to solve broad social or political problems. There were also one or two instances where citizen participation was directed and managed by elites. However, the dominant mode of participation was as citizen lobbyists. Participants' focus was typically on narrow neighborhood issues rather than overarching social problems, and at times, they were proactive in setting the agenda. As do lobbyists, they relied heavily on social networks and informal communication in their participatory efforts. Thus, the citizens-as-lobbyists model captures the nature of their engagement with local policy making in Santa Ana.

The Patterns and Forms of Citizens Participation

This book is divided into four parts: an introduction, one section each on the two central research questions, and a concluding chapter. Both research questions (What issues do they try to influence? and What activities do they engage in?) explore aspects of citizen engagement with local policy making and examine why citizens resemble lobbyists in their participatory activity. Below are brief summaries of the findings.

I. Patterns of Participation

Part II asks why some local issues generate significant participation whereas others do not. To address this question, I explore the validity and implications of four possible answers. My methodology in this section is primarily inductive; these four answers suggested themselves in interviews conducted with participants (described below). I assess the validity of each of these factors by drawing on the qualitative data collected from participant interviews, analysis of meeting minutes, and media information. The focus is largely exploratory: my goal is to examine whether these four propositions are feasible explanations for participation patterns in Santa Ana and to draw out the implications of these findings.

Policy Characteristics. Policies differ in how they impact citizens. Some policies have a direct impact on citizens' lives and have clear implications for how they live on a day-to-day basis. Other policies are more obscure, may have nebulous effects, and may only indirectly influence citizens' daily routines. I argue that these differences influence the likelihood that citizens will participate on an issue. The decision to participate on a given policy is not based on an abstract notion of the importance or salience of an issue, but on a more specific type of salience derivative of the nature of the policy's impact on citizens. Policies that have direct and clear effects on citizens are more likely to generate participation than those policies that do not have these characteristics. The policies that generated participation in Santa Ana were not necessarily those that were perceived as the most important in some general sense, but those that had the most direct and clear impact on citizens. In other words, the nature of a

policy's impact, rather than its extent, is the critical influence on citizens' participatory choices.

Policy Entrepreneurs. One influence on patterns of participation are policy entrepreneurs, citizens who promote a policy agenda or solution to a social problem. A policy entrepreneur could come up with an idea and through their promotion of it, generate interest and participation, acting as a mobilizing force. If such an incident occurs, then we can explain some of the variation in participation by reference to policy entrepreneurs: policy A received more participation than policy B because it was pushed by an entrepreneur who was able to get it on the public's agenda and mobilize other participants. The conclusion I draw from my analysis of entrepreneurs in Santa Ana is that they influence participation patterns by creating opportunities to participate. By putting an issue on the agenda, developing a strategy for addressing it, and mobilizing interested citizens, policy entrepreneurs create an opportunity to influence local policy that was previously lacking. With the opportunity presented to them, citizens are more likely to participate. Although policy entrepreneurs in Santa Ana did not generate groundswells of participation, and the issues receiving the most participation were not necessarily the focus of policy entrepreneurs, they did have a limited impact on participation patterns by shifting some activity toward the issues and agendas they promoted.

Media. Do newspapers increase citizen activity on the issues they cover? Given the importance of newspapers for informing citizens about local government, we might expect to see some relationship: newspapers familiarize citizens with a pressing local issue, prompting a few of these newly informed citizens to get involved. Of the four factors analyzed, however, this factor is the only one that lacks empirical support. The manner in which newspapers cover local events minimizes their impact on participation: they generally do not cover events until after the fact and offer sparse information on how citizens can get involved. Further, participants rely on social networks and personal experience, rather than newspapers, for information on local politics. Even though the average citizen may get most of his or her information about local politics from newspapers, active citizens have other sources of information that

reduces the importance of newspapers as an information source and as a prompt for participation.

Urban Visions. One possible explanation for participation patterns is that they reflect patterns of social conflict: the policy issues that represent major social cleavages, the fault lines in society, are the ones that generate the most participation. In other words, citizens will participate on those issues that serve as proxies for larger debates. If this argument is true, then we should see the greatest level of participation on the issues that are representative of, or have implications for, major social conflicts. The social cleavage that repeatedly emerged from participant interviews—and one that I argue is an important force in organizing participation—is the debate over “urban visions.” An urban vision is a conception of the functions and organization of the city. What purpose do cities serve? Whose needs should they meet? What should be the primary goals of city policy? Participants in Santa Ana fundamentally disagreed over these questions, which oriented many of the debates over local policy issues. The issues in Santa Ana that generated significant participation often had implications for the urban visions debate, explaining the interest in the issue and the controversy surrounding it. Not every issue generating participation was relevant to the urban visions debate, but enough of them were to conclude that a connection to this debate was a factor in generating citizen participation: citizens were more likely to participate on an issue if it had implications for the urban visions debate.

2. How Citizens Participate

When citizens try to influence policy decisions, how do they go about doing it? The goal of Part III is to analyze how citizens attempt to influence local policy. According to my analysis of citizen participation in Santa Ana, citizens utilized both formal and informal channels of influence and applied both public and private pressure on officials. Citizens typically attempted to persuade officials of the merits of their argument, primarily through personal communication with officials and comments at public meetings. If persuasion did not produce the desired result, public pressure tactics were utilized, although these were less common. Citizen participation was

multifaceted (in that citizens engaged in many activities to accomplish their political goals), but participants usually lacked well-structured strategies.

Two facets of citizen participation—the role of public meetings and the value of social networks—stood out as being particularly important for citizen efforts to influence local policy, and thus are discussed at length in Chapters 8 and 9, respectively. Public meetings are frequently attacked as useless democratic rituals that lack deliberative qualities and fail to give citizens a voice in the policy-making process. Though many of the criticisms leveled against public meetings have merit, I argue that they do have a role to play as a venue for citizen participation. They may not be very good at accomplishing their primary goal of giving citizens the opportunity to directly influence decisions made by governing bodies, but they can be used to achieve other ends, such as conveying information to officials and setting the agenda. Attending and speaking at public meetings was such a common activity among participants in Santa Ana because it helped them accomplish a variety of political goals connected to their efforts to influence local policy.

Social networks also played a key role in citizen participation. I argue in Chapter 9 that social networks are a political resource akin to time, money, and civic skills that facilitate participation by helping citizens achieve various political tasks. In the same way that campaign contributions enhance access to officials, free time increases the capacity to circulate petitions, and oratory skills help citizens make persuasive arguments at public meetings, social networks assist citizens in gathering information, mobilizing allies, pooling resources, and performing other political activities. In Santa Ana, participants relied heavily on social networks in their efforts to influence local policy, making these networks an important resource.

Methods

Both the City of Santa Ana and Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) were included in this study. The Santa Ana city government is organized on a council-manager basis. The city council has seven members, which includes a directly elected mayor. SAUSD, like all school districts in California, is a separate entity from the municipal government. Comprised of five members elected at large,

the school board governs a district of over 60,000 students. The district is geographically smaller than the city, containing about 85 percent of the city within its borders, with the remaining 15 percent in neighboring school districts.

Politics in Santa Ana was quite contentious in the 1990s, the time period for this study. The city council consistently had one or two members vociferously opposed to the council majority led by Mayor Dan Young and, later, his protégé Miguel Pulido. The five-member school board had one or two conservative Christian members who also consistently opposed the majority of the board. These divisions led to a great amount of conflict and personal animosity. There was also conflict between the City and the school district, leading to an inability of the two governments to cooperate effectively.

Two primary data sources inform my analyses: interviews with citizens active in Santa Ana politics and minutes of city council and school board meetings.

Participant Interviews

The data I rely on most heavily are interviews with citizens active in Santa Ana politics. Respondents were selected through a variety of means: some names were gathered through newspaper reports of citizen activities, some were culled from the minutes of city council and school board meetings, some names were given to the researcher by respondents already interviewed, and others came from a list of neighborhood contacts provided by the City of Santa Ana's Neighborhood Development office. To be considered for inclusion in the study, a citizen needed to be active in attempting to influence Santa Ana city or school district policies.

Through these methods, a list was compiled of citizens who were active in Santa Ana politics. I found contact information (mailing address, phone number, and/or e-mail) for eighty-five potential respondents. Between March and July 2001, I interviewed fifty-five of the eighty-five citizens on the list.¹ Most of the remaining twenty-nine citizens did not respond to a request to be interviewed, by either not returning phone calls or responding to a letter. The contact information for a few citizens turned out to be incorrect, and a few others were contacted but refused an interview.

Table 1.1. Organizational affiliations

| Organization | Number of affiliations* |
|--|-------------------------|
| Neighborhood associations | 41 |
| City committees | 40 |
| Nonprofits | 22 |
| Business organizations (chamber of commerce, etc.) | 14 |
| School district committees | 10 |
| PTA/PFO/school-site council | 10 |
| Political party organizations | 9 |
| Other | 12 |
| Total | 158 |

*The number of times an organizational affiliation was mentioned, not the number of respondents who had affiliations with each organization. If a respondent mentioned two different organizations in the same category, both were included. For example, many respondents belonged to more than one city committee or were active in both their own neighborhood association and Commlink (an umbrella organization of neighborhood associations). In these cases, each mention of an organizational affiliation was included. Thus, even though there were forty-one affiliations with neighborhood associations and Commlink, the actual number of respondents who were affiliated with these organizations is lower.

To get a better idea of the study population, we can look at the types of civic organizations to which they belonged. During the interview, respondents were asked to list their affiliations to civic organizations and committees (only those organizations that have a connection to local politics were included). Results are in Table 1.1. On average, respondents identified just under three organizations or committees each. Affiliations with neighborhood associations and Commlink, an umbrella group for the neighborhood associations, topped the list. They were followed by city boards, such as city advisory commissions and ad hoc committees. Rounding out the list were nonprofits, business organizations, parent–teacher associations, school district committees, and political party organizations.

Table 1.1 identifies interview respondents as citizens highly active in local political life. Although respondents may be more active than the average citizen, the types of positions that respondents held were not positions that conferred extensive political power, and thus we would be remiss to conclude that respondents represent an “elite” class based on their extensive organizational affiliations. Take, for example, being an officer in a neighborhood

association. Neighborhood associations in Santa Ana do not have any formal policy-making authority and do not have the power to force residents to pay dues (although some collect voluntary dues). The only authority that an association president has is to speak on behalf of the neighborhood, and even that is curtailed if few participate in association meetings. Similarly, serving on a city advisory commission is not a prestige position. Although being a city commissioner has its benefits, such as increased access to information and some ability to frame issues and alternatives, they do not have much formal authority outside of making recommendations. Therefore, while respondents were highly active in local political life, it does not necessarily follow that they were also highly influential.

Many of them held formal positions (e.g., president, treasurer) within civic organizations, but few could draw upon extensive institutional resources to achieve political ends, and thus were relatively less powerful than many other political actors, such as union leaders and developers (who have such resources). Generally, respondents were citizens who were highly involved in local politics but could not be considered “political elites.” There were four exceptions: three former elected officials (one city councilman and two school board trustees) and the president of the Santa Ana Chamber of Commerce. The remaining fifty-one respondents were not elites, just people who were more active than the average citizen.

The respondents interviewed for this study are not meant as a representative sample of the citizenry at large. I take the population of activists as given: I am looking at the political behavior of citizens active in local politics, not all citizens. Thus, the fact that respondents may not be representative of all citizens is irrelevant: none of my arguments rest on the claim that those interviewed are a reflection of all citizens.² I do, however, claim that they are representative of active citizens. The basis for this claim is twofold. First, the multiple avenues through which I identified respondents resulted in a pool of citizens who were active in different contexts and on a variety of different issues. Second, during interviews respondents articulated a wide range of opinions, beliefs, and ideologies about politics. Included in the study were extreme conservatives, extreme liberals, and multiple shades of moderates. Further, respondents expressed a myriad of opinions on Santa Ana politics, from those who wholeheartedly supported the existing

leadership to those who were harsh critics. The diversity of political views expressed, along with the variation in political activity itself, led me to conclude that the fifty-five respondents represent the diversity of participants in Santa Ana.

Interviews were semistructured and asked participants about their activities in trying to influence city and school district policy. The interviews were focused on activities, not opinions: I wanted to know in what issues citizens participated and how they went about doing it, not what they thought about the issues or about policy debates. Of course, respondents spent a great deal of time during the interviews offering opinions on everything from electoral politics to the ethics of certain elected officials to social issues; respondents found it difficult to separate descriptions of participation from their opinions on the policies targeted by their participation. Further, at times respondents were asked to offer opinions on specific subjects (e.g., whether they think speaking at public meetings is a valuable political activity). Despite these discussions, the primary goal of the interview was to get the respondent to describe their political activity, not for them to offer opinions on local policy.

Meeting Minutes

The city council and school board hold biweekly board meetings. The Ralph Brown Act, the California law regulating local meetings, requires that all legislative decisions be conducted in public meetings (with a few exceptions for personnel issues, lawsuits, and other sensitive topics). Further, it requires that the public be given an opportunity to comment on items before the council or school board, and have an opportunity to make general comments on nonagenda items. Though televising the meetings is optional, local governments in California are required by the Brown Act to keep minutes of the meetings, which describe the proceedings, including what decisions were made and comments made by the public.

I reviewed the minutes for the school board and city council from January 1, 1990, to December 31, 2000. Most governmental decisions are of a routine nature and are made without comment from officials or the public. These routine decisions are not relevant for this study because they rarely generate any citizen participation. To eliminate routine decisions from the study, only

nonunanimous votes, or unanimous votes opposed by at least one public speaker, were included. For each one of these votes, basic information (e.g., date, a description of the issue, the ayes and nays) was collected, along with the number of public speakers. At a minimum, all the meeting minutes listed the number of speakers on each issue. In many cases, they also listed the speaker's address, their organizational affiliation (if applicable), and whether they were speaking for or against the item. Minutes also report petitions or letters received, although this information is not consistently reported.³

The city council and school board cast a total of 730 controversial votes between 1990 and 2000: 332 and 398, respectively. These figures include nonunanimous votes, unanimous votes with public speakers in opposition, and votes to table items, but does not include procedural motions (such as continuations) and closed-session votes because the public is not given an opportunity to speak on those items. Of these 730 decisions, 210 had at least one member of the public who spoke, with 2,377 speakers total. The city council also received 2,118 written communications, which are letters sent to the city clerk by those who either cannot or do not want to come to the council meeting. This number, however, is rather deceptive: for only twenty-five policies did the city clerk receive any letters, and three issues account for 94 percent of the letters.

In addition to the information gathered from meeting minutes, I also analyzed media coverage of the 730 controversial issues. Santa Ana has two major English-language newspapers, the *Los Angeles Times–Orange County Edition* and the *Orange County Register*. Both of these papers cover local politics in all thirty or so cities in Orange County, of which Santa Ana is the largest. I conducted database searches of each of these papers to find articles pertaining to policies identified as controversial city council or school board votes. I tabulated the number of articles on each decision and combined the totals with the data collected from meeting minutes.

The Benefits and Drawbacks of Citizen Lobbying Activity

Understanding how citizens engage the local policy-making process through an analysis of the patterns and forms of their participation can illuminate the benefits and drawbacks of this activity. The role

that citizens play in relation to policy making can vary, and this variation alters the impact of their participation. With an understanding of how citizens engage policy making, we can assess the implications of this participation for local democracy.

Citizen lobbyists in Santa Ana gained a variety of benefits from their political activity. First, they enhanced their political knowledge. Engagement with the policy process serves as a venue where citizens can learn the fine art of politics and gain a deeper understanding of policy making. As lobbyists, they did more than just partake in isolated activities: they also formulated strategies, mobilized other citizens, and developed a set of political goals. They were enmeshed in the policy-making process itself, which helped them gain insights into how politics works and how policy is formulated. In addition to gaining political knowledge, citizen lobbyists also had an opportunity to develop civic skills, such as public speaking, organizing public events, and networking.

Second, citizen lobbyists in Santa Ana built social capital through their activities. Lobbying government is fundamentally a group activity; citizens need to work with others to accomplish their goals, and consequently rely heavily on their social networks in their participatory efforts. Participation also serves as an incentive to form social networks beyond one's immediate circle of friends and neighbors. The development and use of social networks for political ends can have the effect of increasing the trust, respect, and norms of reciprocity that comprise social capital (Putnam 2000).

Finally, citizen engagement with the policy-making process provided a venue where they could have their voice heard. Their voice was not always heeded, and there were many cases where citizens were unsuccessful in their efforts. However, citizen lobbyists were able to express their views through their activity. Engaging the policy-making process may not always be the most effective way to express opinions, but it does provide an additional outlet to do so. There is a downside, however, to having citizens express views through participating in the policy-making process. Participants in Santa Ana were not representative of the public at large and their views did not always represent public sentiments, which distorted the messages that officials heard. Nevertheless, for citizen lobbyists, engaging the policy-making process provides a venue where they can pursue their political goals and voice their opinions.

Benefits accrued to citizens in terms of developing political skills, building social capital, and providing a venue where their voice can be heard, but there are limits to the value of this form of participation. In particular, citizen lobbying efforts in Santa Ana did not enhance government's capacity to address major social problems. Citizen lobbyists have a tendency to participate on neighborhood issues rather than issues with citywide implications. The examination of participation patterns in Part II reveals that most citizen participation was focused on narrowly defined issues, and citizen participants usually did not operate as community problem solvers. This limitation decreased their contribution to the government's problem-solving capacity. Many scholars argue that government alone cannot solve pressing social problems; they need the resources and knowledge that citizens can bring to the table (Weeks 2000; Fischer 1993; Durning 1993). These resources were not forthcoming from citizen lobbying efforts. In order for these benefits to materialize, citizens would need to engage policy making in a different way, focusing on a different set of issues and engaging in alternative activities.

This analysis of how citizens engage the local policy-making process helps us understand the functions that this type of participation can and cannot serve. The value of citizen lobbying efforts lies in the benefits that accrue to participants; as the following analysis will show, citizens gained a great deal from their participation. There were fewer benefits to the policy-making process itself. Not only were participants unrepresentative of the public at large, leading to distorted messages to officials, but they did not bring many resources to the process. The types of issues they tried to influence and the manner in which they went about influencing them did not increase governmental problem-solving capacity. With a realistic assessment of the benefits and limits of citizen attempts to influence local policy, we can better understand how this activity fits into the larger picture of local democracy and policy making.