

CHARTING THE CIVIC LANDSCAPE

THE INTERESTED BYSTANDER,
IN CHARLOTTE CONTEXT

Contributions from
UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
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Knight Foundation
Google

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Introduction & Key Findings

A TALE OF TWO CHARLOTTE

Widely regarded as a world-class international city, Charlotte boasts a demographically diverse population, well-educated residents, and a thriving economy that has, in part, stimulated and attracted both domestic and international migration, capital, and acclaim. Home to the largest population in the state, the Queen City also serves as the economic epicenter of the state, touting a robust financial services sector that anchors the global banking industry in the southern United States. Nevertheless, the Queen City is paradoxical in many ways, with social, economic and political impediments that confound equitable growth, opportunity, and prosperity for those that reside within its political jurisdiction.

Notwithstanding the confluence of sports, hospitality, entertainment, and banking industries that drives the local economy, Charlotte is home to exceptionally high levels of racialized residential and school segregation patterns and deeply embedded pockets of concentrated poverty that perpetuates a system of uneven distribution of public resources, educational attainment, and economic opportunities. In fact, Charlotte holds the dubious distinction of 50 out of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in terms of intergenerational social mobility.¹

Subsequently, pervasive intergenerational social immobility found in Charlotte further problematizes initiatives and policies by philanthropic, civic, and governmental leaders to dismantle barriers impeding access to social capital, economic prosperity, and educational opportunities for marginalized communities. In fact, a report authored by Gene Nichols and Heather Hunt claims that “no issue embodies Charlotte’s increasing problems of polarization and marginalization more explicitly, and more dramatically, than its expanding and heavily racialized concentrated poverty. Charlotte is home, in brief, to both North Carolina’s greatest wealth and economic prowess and its most crushing and expansive deprivation.”²

Further compounding the city’s paradoxical social milieu, the officer-involved shootings of African American men, most recently Jonathan Ferrell and Keith Lamont Scott, set off a political firestorm that sparked protests, demands for greater police accountability, and surfaced deeply entrenched racial tensions between law enforcement and communities of color.

The confluence of these challenges likely influences who engages in civic life, how they engage, and whether and to what degree their interests are represented.

¹ Chetty, R, and Hendren, N. (2015). “The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility: Childhood Exposure Effects and County-Level Estimates,” The Equality of Opportunity Project, Harvard University.

² Nichol, Gene R., and Heather Hunt. (2016). “Economic Hardship, Racialized Concentrated Poverty and the Challenges of Low Wage Work: Charlotte, North Carolina.”

Finance Industry and Population are Booming

Since the year 2000, the population has increased by over 48%, mostly due to an influx of college graduates starting careers.

Intergenerational Social Mobility is Dismal

Charlotte is 50 out of the 50 largest metropolitan areas for odds of moving to the highest economic quintile for those born into the lowest.

Interested Bystanders

People paying attention to the world around them, but not regularly voicing their opinions or taking action.

THE STAGE FOR ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH

Using Charlotte as a case study, this research project seeks to explore how the local landscape influences civic engagement. In particular, the population of interest are those termed “Interested Bystanders” or people who are paying attention to the issues around them, but not acting on those issues. This research builds on user research conducted on a national scale by the Google Civic Innovation Team in 2014.³

The research presented herein also considers the behaviors and motivations of Interested Bystanders in Charlotte as well as their informational and social influences and the mechanisms that connect online and offline civic behaviors.



Key Findings in Charlotte

- Forty-five percent of the Charlotte sample are Interested Bystanders (pg. 7)
- Although some Interested Bystanders volunteer locally and the majority describe civic engagement, as being actively involved and present in one’s community, there is a large distrust of and lack of attachment to their local community and government, which deters engagement. This distrust was especially evident among Latino and Black/African American respondents (pg. 14).
- IBs lack of attention to local news, also, likely contributes to their lack of connection to their community (pg. 16).
- Having an interest or passion about an issue or activity was the most common motivator for engagement followed by the political environment. Concern for those closest to them emerged as the base of those motivations (pg. 17).
- Friends and family are the most influential to Interested Bystanders’ civic participation. Social institutions such as organizations, schools, businesses are also viewed as influential (pg. 17).
- The information and encouragement that IBs received online from local institutions and organizations, allowed them to take their online actions offline (pg. 19).

³ Krontiris, K., Webb, J., Krontiris, C., and Chapman, C. (2015). Understanding America’s Interested Bystander: A Complicated Relationship with Civic Duty. <https://research.google.com/pubs/pub44180.html>

Methodology

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The research team utilized a mixed-method approach and panel structure. With distribution assistance from community partners, a preliminary survey received 1,507 responses. Over 800 of the preliminary survey respondents agreed to participate in other components of the research. These respondents constituted the panel for the remainder of the research activities, which included a mobile diary study (N=87), three additional surveys (N=370; 170 and 178, respectively), interviews (N=43), and focus groups (N=44). The first of the additional surveys fielded a conjoint analysis section, replicated from the national research, which determined the civic profiles, three of which were Interested Bystanders (see page 7 for more details). Finally, the team shared the findings at three community forums. Since the research was very responsive to the landscape, the timeline on the next page shows the project activities in relationship with influential local, state, and national-level events.

The research team utilized a mixed-methods approach, which included surveys, a mobile diary study, interviews, focus groups, and community forums.

THE SAMPLE

Due to the panel structure, each research component had a different demographic profile. The overall sample was younger than the general adult population as well as had higher female and white representation. This was particularly true of the IB population. Table 1 provides the demographic breakdown of the IBs identified in the first panel survey compared to the adult demographics of Charlotte.⁴ Additional details and demographics for each component are available in the Appendix.

Table 1. Demographic Comparison

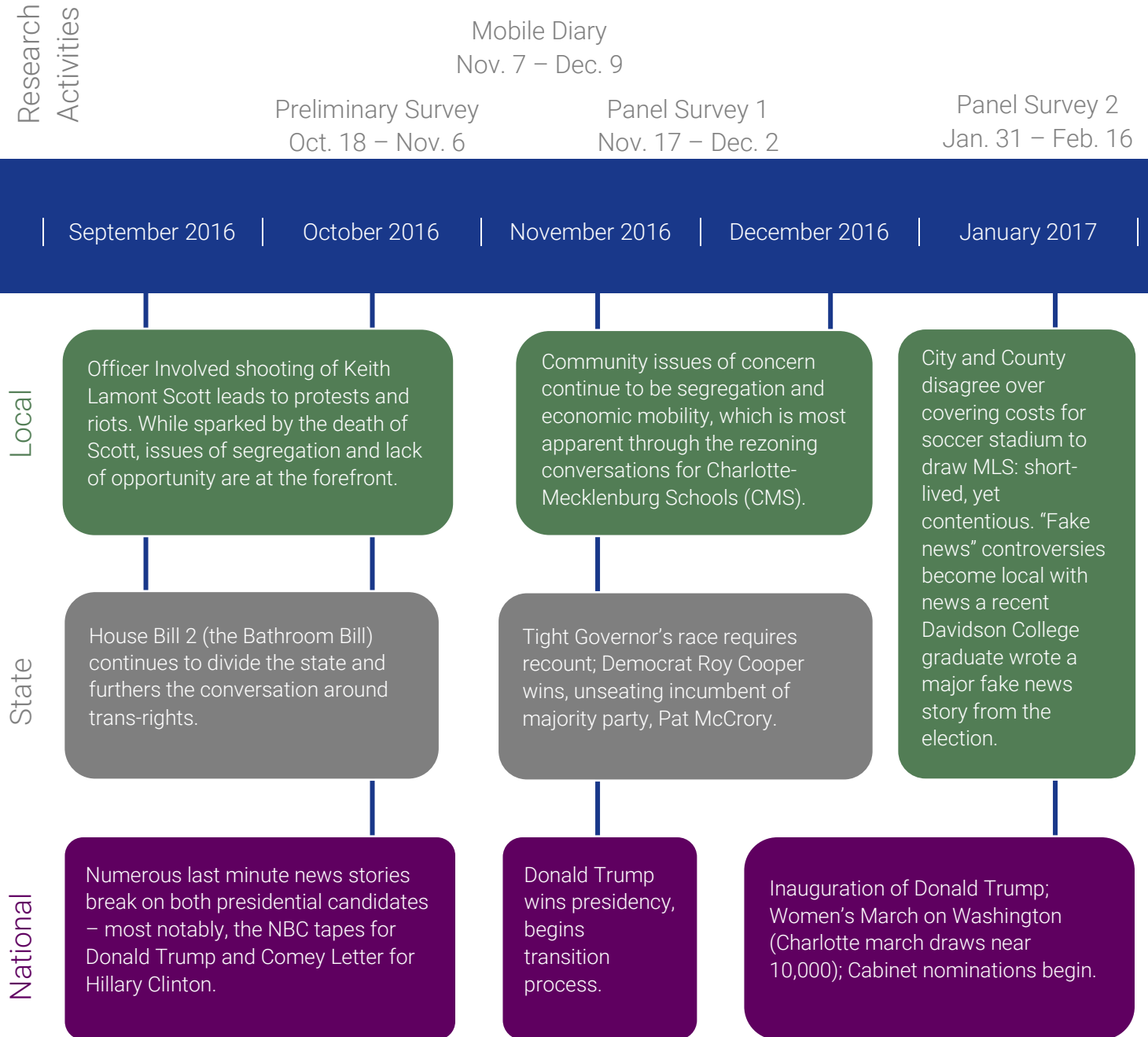
Percent	Panel 1 Survey	Charlotte ⁵
Gender		
Female	72%	52%
Male	26%	48%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	19%	31%
White	72%	47%
Hispanic	4%	13%
Age		
18-24 years old	23%	12%
25-34 years old	28%	22%
35-44 years old	15%	20%
45-54 years old	24%	18%
55-64	n/a	14%
65+	9%	14%

⁴ Since Charlotte is a city and region, for simplicity this study defined Charlotte as the county lines of Mecklenburg. Therefore, demographic data shown here are for the county.

⁵ 2016 ACS 1-Year estimates

Timeline

Research activities in relation to local, state, and national events that influenced them.



Research
Activities

Interviews
Feb. 20 – May 30

Focus Groups
Mar. 24 – Jun. 15

Panel Survey 3
May 22 – Jun.1

Community Forums
Begin June 5

February 2017

March 2017

April 2017

May 2017

June 2017

Local

Opportunity Task Force releases Leading On Opportunity Report after 2-year study of economic mobility in Charlotte. Segregation and social capital are named two crosscutting factors influencing mobility.

CMS School Board releases redistricting plan.

Final comments on school redistricting plan. Health director resigns after several issues emerged. Affordable housing and development issues have also been local topics of conversation.

State

Legislature reaches compromise to repeal House Bill 2.

Supreme Court orders North Carolina to redraw districts due to racial gerrymandering. Possibility of special election in Nov. 2017.

National

Betsy DeVos is among the most controversial of President Trump's Cabinet nominees.
Immigration Protests continue after "Muslim ban" instituted the end of January.

March for Science drew 1 million worldwide.
Republicans work to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

President Trump fires FBI Director James Comey; Former Director Robert Mueller appointed special counsel to oversee investigation into ties between Trump campaign and Russian officials.

Time & Place

When the research planning began, what was about to happen locally and nationally was unknown and, in many ways, unimaginable. In addition to the events on the timeline, there are important time and place influences that may account for some of the differences that emerged between the national and local populations.

STRUCTURES FOR GENERATIONS PAST

Social and economic structures that have been in place for generations no longer reflect the changing demographics of the region.

MAJORITY NON-WHITE

The population has grown 48% since the year 2000, with increase in numbers among all demographic groups. The rate of growth, however, has been higher among non-white populations, particularly the Hispanic population (Figure 1).

White became a minority group as of 2015 mainly due to an increase in the Hispanic population

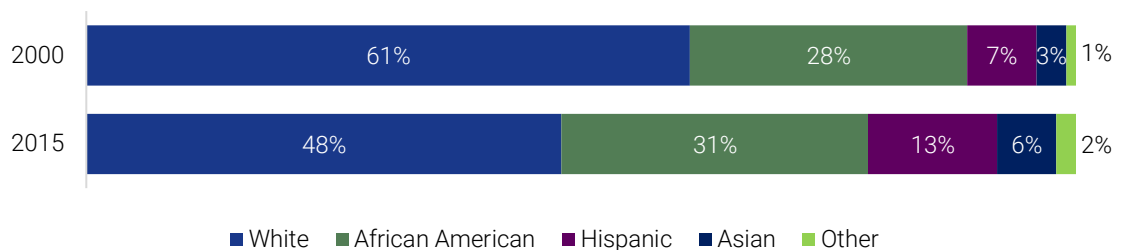


Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity in Charlotte, 2000 and 2015

EMERGING IMMIGRANT GATEWAY

In 2014, the Brookings Institution released an update to a 2004 report concerning metropolitan immigrant gateways.⁶ Charlotte is categorized as a “major-emerging gateway,” constituting eight percent of the total foreign-born population in 2014 along with the cities of Atlanta, Austin, Las Vegas, Orlando, and Phoenix. Charlotte was one of just two areas to change categories, joining major-emerging gateway cities with nearly one-quarter of a million immigrants.

THE UPSIDE OF LAST PLACE

Charlotte’s racial and socio-economic segregation largely contributed to the 50th out of 50 placing in the social mobility study described in the introduction. If Charlotte had been 46th, or even 49th, community leaders have said that chances are no action would have been taken. Instead, there has been an ongoing community conversation and attention from all sectors: government and funders refocusing, non-profits ensuring they align with new foci, and for-profits considering their role and ensuring Charlotte is still a top destination for tourists and businesses.

Charlotte is 13% Hispanic; the school system is 23% Hispanic

50th may be better than 49th

⁶ Singer, A. (2014). Metropolitan immigrant gateways revisited. The Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/metropolitan-immigrant-gateways-revisited-2014/>

Engagement Profiles

The time and place that this research took place, particularly the late November 2016 panel survey, greatly influenced the civic profiles that emerged, particularly the number of and attributes of the Interested Bystanders.

IDENTIFYING INTERESTED BYSTANDERS

In order to identify Interested Bystanders, the Charlotte study replicated the conjoint analysis survey fielded in the national study.⁷ Latent class analysis considered the trade-offs respondents made in eight categories of engagement: career/school involvement, civic engagement, family involvement, perception of government, issues awareness, opinions and debate, neighborhood relationships, and local involvement.

The analysis led to six profiles of engagement. Three profiles fit the criteria of Interested Bystanders, people paying attention, but not regularly voicing their opinions or taking action. The other three were civically engaged (Figure 2).

3 INTERESTED BYSTANDER PROFILES

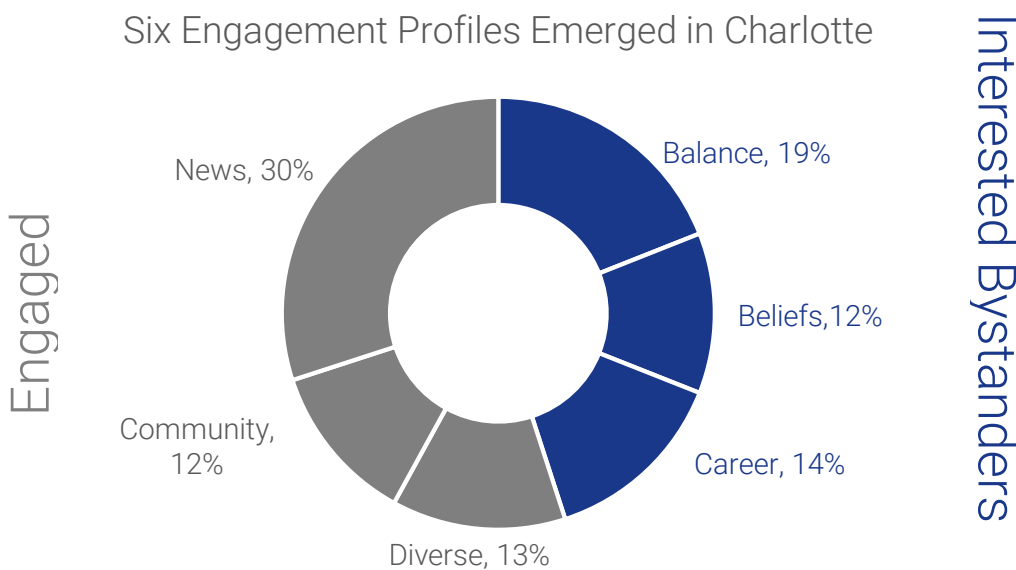


Figure 2. Six Civic Profiles in Charlotte

Figure 3 and the descriptions on the next page explore the level of engagement of each group overall and on four engagement categories in the survey: “When I have **free time**, I spend it on civic or community activities,” “I follow the **news** closely so I can take action on important issues,” “I know my **neighbors** and often interact with them,” and “I often work to help maintain **neighborhood** order or safety.” The remainder of the report focuses on the Interested Bystander population.

⁷ C. Chapman, K. Kroutiris, and J. Webb (2015). Profile CBC: using conjoint analysis for consumer profiles. In B. Orme (ed.), Proceedings of the 18th Sawtooth Software Conference, pp. 1-12. Orlando, FL, March 2015. Available at <https://research.google.com/pubs/pub44167.html>

Profile Levels of Engagement

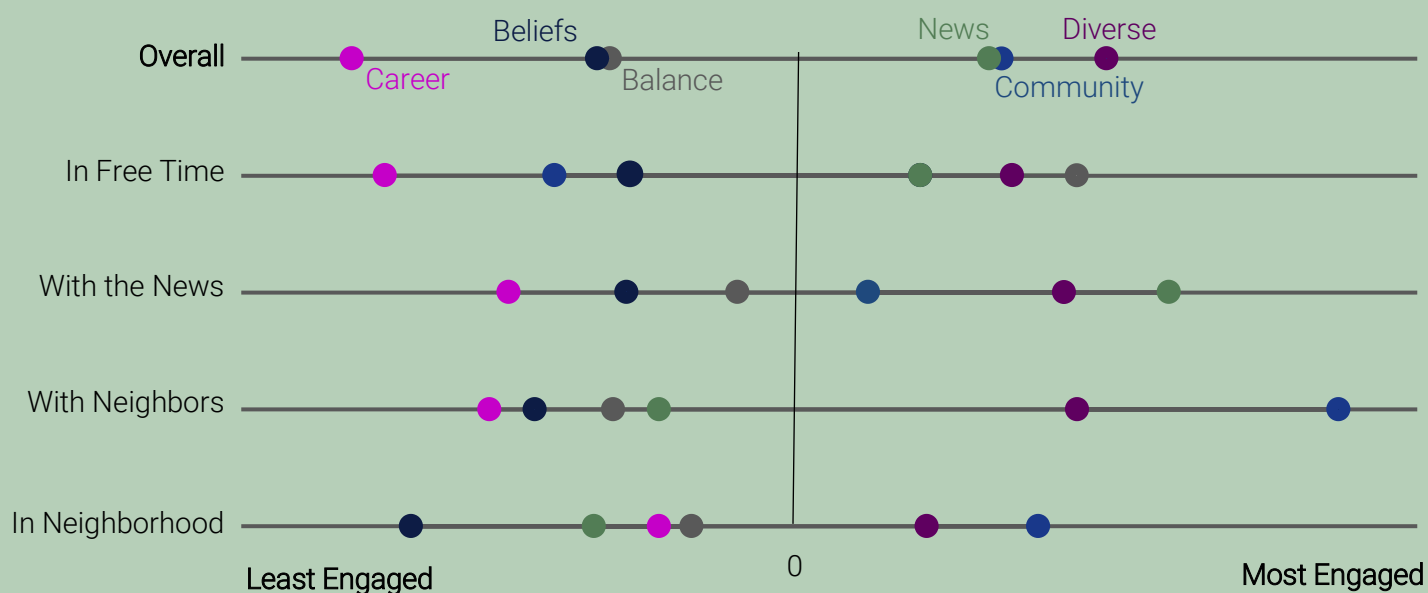


Figure 3. Levels of Engagement Overall and in Four Engagement Categories

A note on some distinguishing characteristics of each profile...

Diverse: The diverse profile was the most engaged overall, though that was the only one of the above indicators for which they were the most engaged. They were the only group with all five types of engagement as positive and their lowest (in **Neighborhood**) was still the second highest of the profiles.

Community: The community profile was very high for interaction with their **neighbors** and the highest for their work to help maintain neighborhood order or safety. They were much less engaged in the news, by comparison.

News: The News profile was the only engaged profile (Charlotte or National) not attached to their community. They had very high engagement with the **news**, but engagement otherwise was below average. Their overall engagement may reflect the heightened volatility and easy access of the news.

Balance: The balance profile had fairly low engagement across the board, but were the most likely to indicate that they spend **free time** on civic or community activities. However, based on their other responses, their free time is fairly limited as they try to balance their career and family.

Beliefs: The beliefs profile held strong beliefs and paid attention to the news to share their opinions. However, they had the lowest engagement in their **neighborhood** as they prefer to focus their engagement with likeminded people (family, church, organizations of their choice etc.).

Career: The career group had the lowest **overall** engagement and the lowest in all categories but neighborhood. This group still pays attention, but are too focused on their career to engage much.

Balance

This Interested Bystander group values and **seeks to have balance** in their lives. They have **several priorities** including **career, education, family, and civic engagement**. They pay attention to and feel strongly about various issues especially as it relates to these priorities.

Balance-focused IBs share news stories with family and friends and engage somewhat online but are not likely to take meaningful action or engage in neighborhood activities. Due to competing obligations, they do not spend as much time as they would like on civic activities. On the occasions they do engage, they volunteer with local non-profits and with their church. They are motivated to complete these activities because they seek emotional fulfillment and/or wish to make an impact on issues that affect them, their family or community. They also believe **government means well** but **is ineffective**.

Profile 1
19% of sample

This group is
“engaged at
30,000 feet.”

-Community Forum
Participant

Seeking Balance

Andrew is a non-traditional adult student, obtaining his second Bachelor’s degree, while working full-time. He is also married with a newborn child. He tries to balance being a student, employee, husband and father, but it leaves little time to volunteer. When he does have free time, he participates in an online volunteer project that allows him to utilize his professional skills. He pays close attention to and feels strongly about geopolitical issues such as environmental protections, urban planning, sustainable development, and creating healthy neighborhoods. He has discussed issues with family and friends and does some civic activities online such as sharing interests and signing petitions but does not volunteer in the community because of time constraints.

“I like to spend time with family and I like playing sports. I volunteer in the community as well.” -Interviewee



Beliefs

This Interested Bystander group holds **strong beliefs and opinions** on certain issues. These strong beliefs might be due to events that have led to outrage throughout Charlotte and nation-wide. The officer involved shooting of Keith Lamont Scott and the repeal of House Bill 2 caused many Charlotteans to speak up and engage actively, some for the first time.

Belief-focused Interested Bystanders also **value family** and spends a lot of time with them. Like other Interested Bystanders, they spend some time on civic activities, shares opinions and pays attention to the news but do not regularly take action or engage in neighborhood activities. Their civic activities mostly includes volunteering locally with non-profits and their church. They also attend community meetings and events. They are motivated to engage civically because there are issues they feel strongly about and/or they wish to stay informed with what is happening in their community. They **do not believe that government provides useful services**.

“Getting involved with people in my church and getting food for the local food banks. That’s the extent of what I’ve been able to do with my time.” - Interviewee

Steadfast Believer

Sally is a student that has both a job on campus and as a leasing professional. She spends most of her time in class and working, but when she does have free time, she spends it at home or with her family. She hopes to pursue a career focused on human or civil rights. She has lived in North Charlotte for two years but is not aware of issues in her neighborhood nor is she involved in her neighborhood. She has strong opinions pertaining to House Bill 2, tolls lanes, and Middle Eastern relations. She discusses these topics with friends, other students, and on social media but does not act on these opinions.



Career/Education

Profile 3
14% of sample

For these Interested Bystanders **career and education** are a **high priority** but they try to balance this with other obligations. They **do not spend time on civic activities** that are not aligned with work and school because of other priorities and their lack of time. Additionally, they do not engage with neighbors or in neighborhood activities. Most times, they find ways to combine civic activities with academic and professional opportunities. They attend community meetings, organize/attend cultural events, volunteer their time, and are members of committees. They are motivated to complete these activities because it aligns with their academic, career or personal interests.

Career/Education-focused IBs **pay attention to the news** and feel strongly about some issues but **do not share opinions**. As it relates to government, they **believe government means well** and **provides effective services**.

The Career/Education-focused profile is the least engaged of the profiles that emerged. They are not categorized as apathetic, however, because they still follow the news and indicate they try to engage but have other obligations.

“Civic engagement probably comes after work and family.”

-Interviewee

“I’m very, very focused on school...I find myself not having the time or energy to put into really anything else.”

-Interviewee

Work on the Mind

Ann works in human services, enjoys reading and spending time with her fiancée and dog. She is not as engaged as she once was, and realizes she could do more, but she is always working. Her goals are to get married and start a family, but also continue working and looking for career advancement. When not at work, she is often thinking about work and her clients. She stays pretty informed on the issues, specifically the student assignment plan and feels strongly about racial justice and poverty, as it related to her work. Other than working for the government, her interaction with government is limited - - “That’s where my paycheck comes from.”



Summary of IB Profiles

Balance

Not a singular engagement; works to balance career, family, civic engagement

Beliefs, perceptions, opinions are balanced too:

- hold some strong beliefs about some issues
- sometimes shares opinions
- do not believe government is too intrusive nor all that helpful

Volunteer and voice opinions, but don't engage further because they avoid conflict

Beliefs

College educated who hold strong beliefs

Outside of their own family, they engage very little. However, they hold the strongest opinions:

- strongly believe government is too big
- follow news and share their (strong) opinions
- do not engage with neighbors or community formally or informally

Unsure if their engagement would make a difference and have other priorities

Career/ Education

Focused on career or the education required to be successful in career

Most detached of profiles:

- do not prioritize family or engagement time
- do not have neighborhood relationships
- do not believe government is too intrusive nor all that helpful

Read and discuss opinions, but don't act due to lack of time

A Note about the News Profile and News Engagement:

Though this report is focused on the findings around Interested Bystanders, the News Profile emerged as a distinctive profile among engaged respondents. Despite positive engagement overall, they had negative neighbor and neighborhood engagement. Their positive overall standing came primarily because of their strong tendency to act on the news.

The research team had limited interaction with the engaged profiles throughout this research. However, increased news consumption was a common theme across respondents. Local news consumption was limited with most local information mainly garnered offline. National news, however, was consumed daily. It was also more commonly received from new media (social media, website, phone app) than compared to traditional forms of media (paper, television, radio).

We explore some of the reasons for the increased news consumption on the next page in the subsection titled "Missing Apathy." One additional point to this conversation is the increased use of social media for non-social purposes. Though social media was a commonly used tool in 2014, the use for politics and news skyrocketed leading up to the 2016 election. According to U.S. News,¹ there were over 1 billion tweets about the election. Politico estimates that 128 million Americans on Facebook generated 8.8 billion comments, posts, likes and shares related to the election from Ted Cruz's candidacy announcement to Election Day.

¹ Levy, G. (2016, November 8). Twitter Wins Big in 2016 Campaign. *US News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2016-11-08/more-than-1-billion-tweets-were-sent-about-the-election>

National Comparison

NEARLY HALF OF NATIONAL SAMPLE

The 2014 study by Google considered a national sample and resulted in six profiles. Similar to Charlotte, three profiles were Interested Bystanders, but a slightly higher percent, 49%, were in the three IB profiles.

Vocal Opinionators	These individuals have very strong negative beliefs about government, likely informed by large news diet and strong beliefs systems. They tend to share opinions and vote in national elections, but do not act locally.
Issues-Aware	This group is disconnected from family, community, and career. They pay close attention to the news and hold some strong beliefs, but do not prioritize acting on their beliefs.
The Absentees	As the name implies, this group is disconnected from nearly everything and everyone, though they are connected to family. They pay attention, but for their own personal knowledge. They are not enthusiastic about participating or about government.

16% of the national sample were “apathetic,” a profile category that did not emerge in Charlotte

MISSING APATHY

Sixteen percent of the national sample grouped to make an “apathetic” profile, but this profile did not emerge in Charlotte. The primary theory for why Charlotte only had Interested Bystanders and engaged profiles comes down to the purpose of this additional research – the local landscape.

As seen in the timeline, the profile exercise for the Charlotte research occurred in late November 2016, right after Donald Trump won the presidency and in the midst of the State of North Carolina not having a Governor decision. Charlotte was also still responding to the protests that followed the death of Keith Lamont Scott.

The second difference of note between Charlotte and the national sample is a higher percentage of engaged participants in Charlotte. Again, the unique and volatile local issue landscape and information ecosystems, particularly as compared to the timeframe of the national study, likely explains most of this difference. We will continue to explore this unique time and place as we dive further into the learnings around Interested Bystanders.

COMMON DETACHMENT FROM NEIGHBORHOOD

No Interested Bystanders types in the national or Charlotte sample prioritized neighborhood. They did not feel settled in their neighborhood or interact with neighbors. Further, only one group was involved locally, and in that case, it was only when something needed to be fixed. This detachment from neighbors and community also greatly separates IB from the engaged groups, which had strong connections to their neighborhood.

Interested Bystanders in Charlotte, 2016-2017

All profiles of Interested Bystanders in Charlotte have similar civic engagement behaviors, influencers of those behaviors, and motivations for those behaviors, despite having stronger inclinations towards their beliefs, their career/education, or balance among work, family, and engagement. This section describes these behaviors, influences, and motivations then explores what takes place online and what takes place offline.

Civic Behaviors

As the research team examined Interested Bystanders' civic behaviors, their behavior revealed a **common detachment from their neighborhood**.

IB's overwhelmingly described civic engagement as being actively involved and present in one's community, yet only some of their actions aligned. Participants described consuming large quantities of information, sharing this information, and voicing opinions about issues that were important to them, but on broader statewide and national issues. When IBs did actively engage in their community, they did so by volunteering, though some did not describe this as "civic," particularly when there was a religious or cultural affiliation. Volunteer activities that were associated with cultural or religious institutions were considered religious or cultural activities. IBs that volunteered for a mission trip with their church or volunteered to plan a cultural event did not consider these civic activities.

Influencers

IB's information ecosystems and local landscapes emerged as key influencers of engagement.

INFORMATION ECOSYSTEMS

IBs were more likely to get their news from new media (social media, website, phone app) than traditional forms of media (newspaper, radio, television). Further, over half got their daily news from a social networking site (53 percent). Nevertheless, only 21 percent said social networking sites were their preferred news source. During interviews and focus groups, participants were wary of social media's possible bias though admitted they at least got their initial exposure to news there.

IBs **define** civic engagement as being actively involved and present in one's community.

IBs engagement is **disconnected** from this definition - they pay attention to, share, and discuss news, but primarily national news

IBs express **distrust** in the information they receive as well as in their community and local governments.

IBs are subsequently **detached** from their neighbors, neighborhoods, and local government, likely fueling the disconnect in their engagement.

COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT (MIS-)CONNECTION

Only 13 percent of IBs reported feeling very attached to their local community. Moreover, over half said that you can't be too careful in dealing with people in your local community.

This distrust and detachment are even stronger with local government: 74 percent report you can't be too careful in dealing with local government. Based on the local issues that IBs reported paying attention to, this distrust and detachment are logical. The most mentioned local issue was crime and safety. Though some described theft and break-ins, most mentioned the distrust in police after the officer-involved shooting and disappointment, frustration, and anger in the handling of the associated protests. Further, the second most mentioned local issue was the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, which is intrinsically linked to the concerns of crime and safety, particularly when considering local government.

"Like the Black Lives Matter and like police brutality, like the issues with brutality with police. I've been paying attention to that." - Interviewee

Another local issue IBs are paying attention to is HB2/LGBT rights. Both those who opposed and supported HB2 were dissatisfied with the legislatures compromise on the repeal. Further, both sides believed that resolution took too long. Right after the bill originally passed, performers cancelled their North Carolina shows and businesses refused to move businesses to N.C. or even do business in N.C.

Development was another issue of concern to Charlotte's IBs. The rapid population growth is raising concerns about whether the improvement and expansion of infrastructure can keep up, responsibilities that rest with local government. There were also concerns about new development and the displacement of residents from their homes.

Although Interested Bystanders are paying attention to national, local and political issues and events, interview participants expressed a lack of understanding about government. Some IBs could not recall the last time they interacted with government or found it difficult to recall the last time they did so although the majority felt that all three levels of government had a large impact on their lives or affected their lives in many ways. They recalled that the government employs them, provides them with benefits, taxes and regulates them, provides them with certain rights, and passes policies and laws. Some also found it difficult to identify the various levels of government. The lack of understanding about the role and services of government keeps IBs from feeling attached or trusting of government, or from acting because they may not know the proper avenue.

*"I think ... it's ... not really publicly available... You can't just walk into courthouse and demand information, right?"
-Interviewee*

DIFFERENCES OF NOTE AMONG CHARLOTTE POPULATIONS

	African American	Latino	White
Local Issues	Treatment of racial minorities Development Crime	Immigration Development (Transportation)	Development HB2 Education
“You can’t be too careful in dealing with local government”	86%	86%	72%
Not very or not at all attached to local community	57%	71%	31%
Increased Engagement since Election	12%	0%	18%
	Distrust of government, driven by treatment of racial minorities and development that displaces African American communities, has caused a lower level of attachment and engagement.	Distrust (and fear) of government, driven by immigration policies, hinders attachment to local community and is a barrier to increasing engagement.	Though attachment and engagement is higher, White IBs still distrust local government likely stemming from concerns about development, HB2, and school rezoning.

Motivation to Engage

LIFE GOALS ALIGN WITH MOTIVATORS

Interested Bystanders' motivations for civic engagement align with the life goals IBs described having for the next three to five years, which focused on work, family, school, and community. The close relationships that IBs have formed in these spheres of life have been strong motivators for civic engagement.

PEOPLE-MOTIVATED

When asked about their motivations for civic behavior, having an interest or passion about an issue or activity was the most common motivator followed by the political environment. In further dialogue of why they were passionate about an issue or why they were concerned about the political environment, the discussion consistently came back to concern for those closest to them. Participants expressed that they chose to act if an issue adversely influenced their family, friends and community members. Interested Bystanders mentioned issues related to the environment, immigration, racial inequality, and how it affects these groups.

IBs also acted because they wanted to make a positive impact on the individuals closest to them. By volunteering, voting, and engaging in other civic activities they sought to be examples to these individuals.

"Now, especially since I have my daughter and things will not only just affect me and my husband, but our whole family as well." - Interviewee

IBs were concerned about political nominees, governance, and policies; specifically, they were worried how these things might affect them, their family, friends, and those in their community.

REAL LIFE CONNECTORS

As many as 71 percent do not trust news posted online by people with whom they are not close. Thirty percent are even skeptical of the news posted by people with whom they are close. Despite this skepticism, family and friends connect IBs to engagement opportunities and act as civic brokers. IBs described that they have learned civic behaviors, attended events, and completed activities such as volunteering and voting with these individuals. They also acquired information that led them to action. Social institutions were also described as civic brokers. Institutions such as schools, community organizations and cultural institutions provided information and created opportunities for engagement. These institutions also leveraged individuals' experiences, expertise, and skills so that they were able to give back to the community in a meaningful way.

Though social media was a major news source, celebrities were only influential to 4 percent of respondents. Further, though public officials are heightening their online presence to better reach their constituents, public officials only influenced the civic participation of 13 percent of IBs compared to 46 percent influenced by friends. Despite the amount of time the average person now spends online, having real life relationships and connections is more influential to engagement.

63% of interviewees were motivated by an interest or passion about an issue or activity; 60% because of the political environment

"The sheer absurdity of the nominee for the secretary of education. I've got, I mean education is the lifeblood of the country and we've got family that teach and friends that teach and we've just, you know ... Straw on the camel's back scenario." - Interviewee

Online and Offline Engagement

The research team asked IBs about several civic activities including, contacting elected officials, giving, and volunteering. Participants provided information about the spaces in which they consume information and take action, broadly defined as offline or online. The findings show the navigation assistance and the information they received as it related to these activities, contributed to both online and offline engagement.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE—NAVIGATION ASSISTANCE

Contacting elected officials happens mostly online, which is also where prompts and encouraging others occurs. Yet, some still call and write letters to officials and encourage others to do so as well. Twenty-seven percent of IBs have contacted an elected official in the past three months. A somewhat similar percentage of IBs and national respondents (21 percent) have contacted an official.⁸ Since the Charlotte sample was just IBs, we would expect this percent to be smaller. However, 57 percent of the non-IBs who answered in Charlotte had contacted their officials.

Contacted an
elected official

2013 National Sample: 21%

2017 Charlotte IBs: 27%

2017 Charlotte Engaged: 57%

As we have seen throughout this study, the post-election political environment has caused increased engagement across the board. Also, since 2012, the use of online tools has increased by both lay-users and politicians. Therefore, contacting elected officials online is an easy activity, especially since many tools provide a prompt and users just need to add a name or email. Online campaigns during this time also emphasized the power of phone calls to representatives, which likely explains why we do not see a larger difference between contacting officials online and off.

Giving occurs just slightly more online than off though not much of significance emerged between the two. There are avenues to encourage people to donate and allow them to donate both online (emails, advertisements on social media with links to websites) and offline (mail, in-person at events). These resources provide IBs with outlets to contribute. Of note, however, was more IBs that donated did so actively (went to website) than passively (clicking on a link that was sent to them). This increased motivation is likely explained by the two main motivators for engagement – **passion about an issue** drives people to make donations, particularly when the **political environment** is unsatisfactory.

Smart phone apps and services such as ResistBot make it easy for users to contact officials by providing daily reminders and/or quick and simple avenues to contact representative on matters of importance.

⁸ Pew Research Center (2013). *Civic Engagement in the Digital Age*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/04/25/civic-engagement-in-the-digital-age/>.

Volunteering is mostly offline, which is where most people encourage others to volunteer. However, learning about opportunities happens both online and off. Forty-six percent of IB respondents reported volunteering in the past 3 months. Most had learned about it online or through a friend or a family member. These individuals help IBs navigate a complicated civic landscape.

Figure 4 summarizes the trends of IBs online and offline. For the most part, learning takes place online, though some learning, particularly about giving opportunities happen offline. Encouragement takes place both online and offline. Family and other influences on IBs encourage to action offline, but specific online information sharing also comes with encouragement (i.e. here is how you contact your elected official...do it for reasons x, y, and z). Finally, though there are online actions, such as contacting officials and giving, most action, or at least actions IBs identify as civic actions, occurs offline.

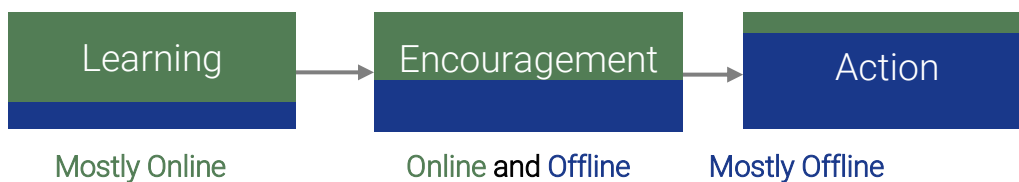


Figure 4. Online and Offline Navigation

ONLINE TO OFFLINE—LOCAL ASSISTANCE

IBs seek tools and resources that make engagement easy and centralized. Most of this seeking occurs online. The relationship between their own resource seeking and civic engagement is weak. IBs want help navigating the various activities and issues that pervade their everyday life. They seek assistance on how to contribute to or engage in their community. The relationship between online resource seeking and action strengthens when the resources and information they receive are from local institutions they trust. This moderation relationship is depicted in Figure 5.

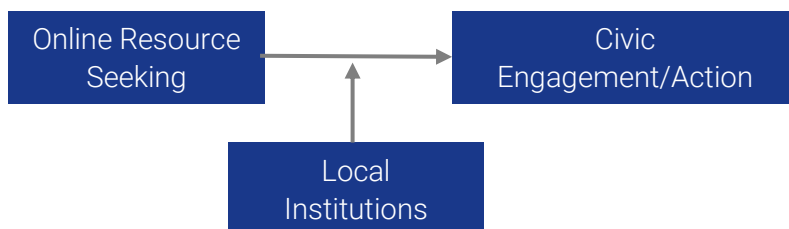


Figure 5. Local Assistance Moderation on Action

Local institutions and organizations such as schools, neighborhood groups, local polling places, and community advocacy groups use online posts and messages to provide IBs with information about local issues and activities and encourage individuals to get involved. The information and the encouragement they received online by trusted local institutions was a key contributor to IBs taking their actions offline.

“On their website at the school I was at, they were talking about how those families needed help like getting food and so I had actually gone to the food pantry in Burlington and started going every weekend.” Focus Group Participant

Increased Engagement

“I’m not going to go to X, Y, or Z. Those aren’t my things, but I’ll do **these** things. There needs to be like, a queue or a job listing of things that need to be done to accomplish the goals that say, Obama or Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren have set forth.”
-Interviewee

LESSONS FROM IBs

Many IBs expressed an interest in engaging more and suggested tools and resources focused on making engagement easy and centralized:

- **Index** that provides detailed information about an issue or topic with contact information for how you can get involved.
- **Ideas** from politicians and activists of note on how to contribute (money, time, skills, etc.) to causes that further their agenda.
- **More opportunities to engage** with various times and locations, including using skills online to contribute to a cause.
- **Transportation options** to help people get to events, especially uptown activities where parking is limited and costly.

LESSONS FROM FORMER IBs

A focus group with self-identified former IBs who activated due to the 2016 election highlighted what really got them moving – **anger, incredulity, disappointment, and fear**. The two main motivators identified for IBs (political environment and issues they were passion about) were instrumental for them. The political environment caused their emotions then their pathway into broader engagement was through issues in which they are most passionate.

The question is then why strong emotions activated some people more than others. Though these participants did not complete surveys, they seemed to have a higher sense of efficacy that they could do something and were more willing to deal with confrontation. One former IB even ran for town council despite having little knowledge of civic life prior to November 2016. She described not feeling like she could handle the politics involved with broader offices, but that the town council felt manageable.

CHARLOTTE IN FALL 2017

Charlotte has seen an increase in political engagement since this study has begun. During the protests that took place in Charlotte following the police involved shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, protestor Braxton Winston was captured with his fist raised, facing a line of police officers in riot gear. This photograph went viral. A year later, Braxton Winston was elected as an at-large Charlotte City Council member during the November general elections. Braxton’s continued involvement in protests and involvement in the community led him to the realization that “he could play or needed to play some type of leadership or change agent role in the city.”⁹

⁹ Levenson, E. (2017). Protest wins Charlotte City Council seat. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/17/us/braxton-winston-charlotte-city-council-trnd/index.html>.

Also, during the November elections Vi Lyles was elected Charlotte's first African-American female mayor. Her campaign focused on improving economic opportunity for low-income neighborhoods and increasing affordable housing options. Mayor Lyles will be working with five new council members, all of whom are under 40 years-old. They are referred to as the "council's new millennial members".¹⁰ Four of these members won their district seats in November, with Braxton Winston being one of them.

There was 20% turnout for the November 2017 election compared to 15% in the 2015 Mayoral Election.



Photo Credit: Diane Gavarkavich; Approximately 10,000 people attended the Charlotte Women's March

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research can build off the findings of this study to further examine and increase engagement amongst Interested Bystanders.

The local landscape emerged as a key influencer of engagement. Charlotte's Interested Bystanders have a lack of attachment to and trust for their local community and government. Future research can examine the correlation between Interested Bystanders' length of residency and their level of attachment and trust. Additionally, examining IB's specific geographic location or zip code and its relation to trust, attachment and behavior would be another factor to explore.

A lack of attachment and trust was especially evident for African American and Latino IBs. There is an opportunity to delve deeper into the relationship that African American and Latino populations have with their local government and community and explore how these relationships have affected their civic engagement.

Finally, the changing news landscape is the likely cause of no apathetic category emerging. Further research can help to understand if this is an election month phenomenon or sign of changing times.

¹⁰ Harrison, S. (2017). Vi Lyles, making history as new Charlotte mayor, aims to be an "instrument of change." Retrieved from <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/article188064649.html>.

Leverage Points

FOR INDIVIDUALS – WE NEED CIVIC BROKERS

Nearly half of Interested Bystander respondents believe that their friends are extremely or moderately influential to their civic participation and one-third believe the same of their family. These close relationships were moreover the underlying motivation for IBs passion for causes and dissatisfaction with the political landscape.

A community forum participant recognized these influential individuals as “civic brokers.” Through meaningful, trusting relationships, civic brokers help IBs engage by navigating a complex civic landscape. This is particularly true for the Latino population. Participants in the community forum at the Latino Advisory Board meeting consistently came back to feeling safe and motivated to engage when someone else (person or institution) they trusted was involved or with them.

To leverage the motivations that IBs have, civic brokers need to be aware of their role in creating safe spaces, providing access, and further encouraging IBs to engage. Though these civic brokers are often individuals, institutions can act as brokers if they can garner the same trust and develop the relationships of individuals. Given the fake news era, transparency is also crucial.

FOR COMMUNITY – WE NEED *LEADING ON OPPORTUNITY*

All sectors of Charlotte are regularly coming back to the determinants and crosscutting factors identified by the *Leading On Opportunity* report as contributors to economic mobility within Charlotte context. There exists the opportunity for the lessons, and momentum, of this work to be leveraged to advance civic engagement locally as well. In particular, progress in the crosscutting factors of social capital and segregation could benefit more than mobility.

As previously described, Latino and African American IBs are not as trusting nor do they feel as attached to their local community as the general IB population. Trust, particularly interracial trust, is one of the main indicators of social capital. The local landscape plays a major role in this interracial trust in Charlotte. Economic and racial segregation contributes to distrust and lack of attachment to community as well as sets-up more than physical barriers.

The good news is that the community is having these difficult conversations. Funders, nonprofits, faith communities, and for-profits are directing efforts at addressing these issues. While not perfect, the efforts can be built on and leveraged for the many other benefits of increasing social capital and decreasing segregation. Increased social capital can lead to more trust and to more relationships with civic brokers that can open up opportunities. Less segregation can increase attachment to local community and strengthen networks across all of Charlotte.

“I am the student liaison for the NASW (National Association for Social Work). Basically overall they give us great information on current events, give us great solutions and training.”

Conclusion

CHARLOTTE'S INTERESTED BYSTANDERS

Charlotte's Interested Bystanders comprised almost half (45%) of the Charlotte sample. Although these individuals were paying attention to, sharing information and voicing opinions about broader issues, they were not regularly taking action in their local community. When they did engage, they did so by volunteering.

COMMUNITY DISCONNECT

Charlotte's Interested Bystanders did not feel very attached to their local community. Over half reported you can't be too careful in dealing with people in their local community or in dealing with local government. Interested Bystanders were also concerned with local issues. Concerns with crime and safety, the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, HB2/LGBT rights and development has contributed to this community and government distrust. In addition, their lack of attention to local news might have aided in this community disconnect.

PEOPLE AND PLACE MATTER

Although Interested Bystanders had feelings of local distrust, Interested Bystanders were motivated to take action if the issue or the political environment affected those closest to them. They also acted because they wanted to be positive influences for these individuals. Along with being motivators for action, Interested Bystanders also saw family and friends as trusted sources of information and influential to their civic participation. Interested Bystanders learned civic behaviors from these groups, attended events, and completed activities with these individuals. They also acquired information that led to action. IBs were more likely to trust information from people they were close with than those that they were not particularly close with.

They also saw local institutions that they frequented or attended as influential to their civic engagement. Institutions provided Interested Bystanders with information about civic issues and activities and provided opportunities for engagement. These institutions also leveraged IBs talents so they were able to make meaningful contributions to the community.

ENGAGING OFFLINE REQUIRES NAVIGATION ASSISTANCE

The information and the encouragement Interested Bystanders received online by local institutions contributed to them taking their online actions offline. Online posts and messages have provided information about local issues and activities and encouraged individuals to get involved. These institutions' relationship with Interested Bystanders have allowed them to navigate a complex civic landscape and take action in their community. Civic brokers, and the social capital they bring, provide critical navigation assistance as well as encouragement and feelings of safety and belonging. As the *Leading On Opportunity* report said, "Social capital is the secret sauce." While the report was referring to economic mobility, it seems to apply here as well. Relationships influence action.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS & STRENGTHS

LIMITATIONS

The study did not have a random sample. As a result, the sample skewed younger, more female, and more white than the Charlotte population.

STRENGTHS

Focus group recruitment sought to diversify the sample. The mixed-methods approach and partnership between UNC Charlotte and JCSU also sought to elevate a wide range of community voices.

Appendix: Panel Sample

The table provides the demographic profile of each of the research components compared to the 2016 demographic profile of Charlotte.

	Preliminary Survey	Mobile Diary	Panel Survey 1	Panel Survey 2	Interviews	Focus Groups ¹¹	Panel Survey 3	Charlotte ¹²
N	1,507	87	370	170	43	44	178	n/a
Gender								
Female	68%	66%	72%	66%	54%	75%	67%	52%
Male	32%	32%	26%	23%	42%	19%	31%	48%
Race/Ethnicity								
African American	18%	21%	19%	14%	22%	43%	21%	31%
White	69%	55%	72%	78%	63%	25%	70%	47%
Hispanic	7%	11%	4%	1%	8%	25%	10%	13%
Age								
18-24	31%	46%	23%	30%	32%	n/a	32%	12%
25-34	22%	25%	28%	33%	29%	n/a	31%	22%
35-44	15%	18%	15%	16%	11%	n/a	19%	20%
45-54	14%	7%	24%	14%	21%	n/a	12%	18%
55-64	11%	2%	1%	4%	3%	n/a	2%	14%
65+	8%	1%	9%	4%	5%	n/a	4%	14%

The research components shown in the timeline are detailed below. Each survey included a gift card raffle, while all mobile diary, interview, and focus group participants received gift cards.

Preliminary Survey

The preliminary survey served as the initial tool to acquire demographic and civic engagement information from a broader group (both interested and non-interested bystanders). The survey also provided participants the opportunity to opt-in to a research panel. Panel participation entails a series of surveys with the additional ability to participate in a mobile diary study, interviews, and focus groups. The preliminary survey was completed online by 1,507 participants. The survey was distributed through social media accounts of the associated research organizations, the Knight Foundation, community partners including the City of Charlotte on the social media network NextDoor, and community partners. The preliminary survey was translated into Spanish and distributed through Spanish-language partners.

Mobile Diary

The mobile-diary study required participants to download a data collection app and answer several questions on their mobile device four times daily for a period of five weeks. A notification asked if they had done any civic activity in the past three hours. If yes, participants completed additional question about their behaviors.

¹¹ Focus group participants did not provide their age.

¹² This study defined Charlotte as the county lines of Mecklenburg. Therefore, demographic data shown here are for the county.

Panel Survey 1

The panel surveys asked more in-depth questions about participant's civic engagement. The first panel survey sought to better understand residents' engagement in civic life, democracy and politics and learn about their motivations for civic engagement. This survey also replicated the conjoint analysis survey fielded by Google to identify Interested Bystanders.

Panel Survey 2

The second panel survey focused on Interested Bystanders' information ecosystems, their social influences, and the local issue landscape where they live. The survey was distributed to two groups. The first group were those identified as Interested Bystanders in Panel Survey 1 and the second were all other Panel Survey 1 respondents.

Panel Survey 3

The third panel survey was utilized to learn more about the online and offline civic behaviors that Interested Bystanders engage in. Like the second panel survey, the survey was administered to a sample of Non-Interested Bystanders so that a comparison group could be established and additional data collected.

Interviews

The interviews focused on two primary research questions: 1) What can we learn about participant's behaviors and motivations for civic engagement; and 2) How are those civic behaviors impacted by their information ecosystems, their social influences and the local issues where they live? The questions built off the data collected in the surveys and mobile-diaries.

Focus Groups

The focus groups sought to provide further insight into the data collected in the surveys and mobile-diaries from groups less represented in these data collection methods. The focus groups were also held with panel participants. These discussions focused on Interested Bystanders' civic actions, their motivations and barriers for civic participation, the local issues they are paying attention to, and online and offline behaviors.

Community Forums

Four community forums were held to share findings and receive feedback from research panel participants and interested community members. These took place in different areas of Mecklenburg County at different times of day and week to facilitate as many participants as possible.

The first was an expert session, which presented preliminary data for feedback. The others were a presentation with discussion and drop-in events. The presentation with discussion took place at the Johnson C. Smith University Latino Advisory Board meeting, where Hispanic and Latino residents were able to add context and provide further insight about study findings. Two drop-in events also allowed participants to learn more about the findings and allowed them to offer their thoughts and reactions around the data. The information provided during these sessions helped to inform the final product.



Photo Credit: Angelique Gaines

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

“Charting the Civic Landscape: The Interested Bystander, in Charlotte Context” was funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Google. The research built on the 2015 Google study, “Understanding America’s Interested Bystander: A Complicated Relationship with Civic Duty.” The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute and Johnson C. Smith University completed the research with direction and support from Kate Krontiris of the original Google study team.