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Inequality and Involvement: Participatory Trends in the Politics of a Rural Maine Town

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**INEQUALITY AND INVOLVEMENT:
PARTICIPATORY TRENDS IN THE POLITICS OF A RURAL MAINE TOWN**

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Government Honors Thesis, 2015
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ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary research suggests that participation in most forms of political activity in the United States is stratified by socioeconomic status. People with higher socioeconomic statuses are more able and willing to participate in politics than people with lower socioeconomic statuses. This participatory inequality amplifies the political voice of the upper class relative to the lower class. However, little academic attention has been paid to analyzing the impact of socioeconomic inequality on participation in local politics. By analyzing participatory trends in the politics of the rural town of Belgrade, ME, this honors thesis fills a gap in the academic literature on participatory inequality. It argues that while pluralistic sources of political advantage, like nativity, exist in the town and slightly counterbalance the relationship between wealth and political involvement, participatory inequality is still connected to socioeconomic inequality. Even in a small town, economically marginalized people are structurally excluded from politics, which suggests that, to a large extent, democracy and pronounced socioeconomic inequality are incompatible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

W. Lloyd Warner's claim that "research is fundamentally a learning process for the scientist that does it" (Warner and Lunt 1941, 5) accurately describes my experience in Belgrade. I entered Belgrade as a novice researcher, but the people I encountered welcomed me into their homes and shared stories, jokes, and political commentary. I am not certain if my research participants know how much I learned from them and how much I appreciated their kindness. They made political science something more real, more human, than it had ever been to me before. In my list of acknowledgements, the people of Belgrade are first.

This project would also not have been possible without the comradery of Colby faculty. My thesis advisor and fellow Western New Yorker, Professor Sandy Maisel, guided me through this project from its beginning. He has been a friend and mentor throughout the process. My second reader, Professor Matthew Archibald, provided indispensable insight into quantitative methodologies and the transforming field of sociology. Professor Joseph Reisert supported me as I wrote grant proposals and continued to provide advice during my work. My interest in political participation largely stems from the conversations we share, which often begin with a simple "How are you?" and end with a discussion of social contract theory. Professor Michael Donihue allowed me to use an extensive dataset he compiled through survey work in the Belgrade Lakes Watershed and offered help, insight, and wisdom as I worked on my quantitative section. Finally, Professors Jill Gordon and Keith Peterson shaped the way I view, analyze, and study the social and political world. Ultimately, they taught me that social justice and academic inquiry are not antithetical. Rather, by studying the world, we come to realize that our freedom is contingent on the freedom of others. This human commonality can—and must be—a liberating force.

I am grateful to have friends who took an active interest in my work and prove that true education occurs not only in classrooms, but also in late night conversations, in muddy romps in the woods, and in the varieties of mischief and ruckus that come to define a college experience. Thank you, in particular, to Christopher Abbott, who read a draft of this work and offered fine insights. Finally, I am thankful for parents who supported me throughout my education, and for a grandfather, Edward Wiater (1926-2012), who taught me that justice is both an end and a means.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On a sun swept evening in June, I attended a select board meeting in the municipal office of a rural Maine town called Belgrade.¹ The town's municipal office was small with linoleum floors; a portrait of the town's oldest resident hung on a wall behind the state flag. On a nearby table, brochures on filing taxes were neatly piled next to old editions of *Maine Hunting and Trapping* magazine. Sitting in front of me, a man adjusted his glasses and thumbed through a pile of papers on his lap. The five members of the select board, dressed in shorts or jeans, sandals or work boots, recognized him—he was a regular attendee of select board meetings. When the secretary opened the floor to questions, he stood. “I’ve been living in this town for fifty years, right over on Conover Street, and each year I’ve seen taxes go up and up.” The select people looked at each other; their eye contact signaled a collective sigh. They were used to these complaints. They hear them from neighbors, in the check-out line at stores, in the post office. But he did not come to discuss taxes. “I don’t know where the money goes, but the one thing I need, and I asked my neighbors and they need it too, is a streetlight on Conover Street. I’ve talked with some contractors and they gave me estimates”—he spread his pile of papers on the table—“and this just seems to be a sensible thing to do.”

He then made his case for a streetlight. It was an ordinary encounter—no Jimmy Stewart-esque oration or dramatic disapproval from the select board—but it caught my attention. At the time of the meeting, I had spent two weeks performing field work in Belgrade. For a researcher interested in community power dynamics, the municipal office was an important field site. In it, I perused town documents, met town government officials, and, most importantly, observed people. Locals went to the office to file forms, register vehicles, and express grievances on topics ranging from leash laws to taxes. Almost inevitably encountering a neighbor or friend, they

¹ Select boards are, broadly understood, the executive branches of town governments in New England.

mixed politics with stories about Jim-up-the-road, or about bad luck at local fishing spots.

Political action converged with social action, occurring in the context of friendship and commonality. In many cases, like the man at the select board meeting, people drew support from neighbors to advance a political project. In all cases, people contributed in some way to shaping a collective political future.²

My observations at the municipal office suggested that local government in a rural community is a democratic realm in which the political and social coalesce. In addition to my observations, empirical evidence suggests that local government is more accessible to the multitudes and more responsive to the arguments they make than national and state government (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 106). Theorists depict local town meeting legislatures as intimate bottom-up, in contrast to top-down, political arrangements that allow people to decide on matters that affect communal life collaboratively (Bookchin 1999, 173-176). Studies of community power systems hold that local political influence is often tied to pluralistic sources of political advantage, like length of residency (Dahl 1961b). My work builds on this body of literature to test whether participation in local government is, like participation in national and state politics, stratified by socioeconomic status. In a larger sense, it considers how socioeconomic inequality in a rural polity impacts the democratic ideals of local government.

In the United States, socioeconomic inequality creates participatory inequality in national and state politics. The more demanding the political task—the more resources and motivation required to perform it—the more likely its participants come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. A political task that requires relatively few resources and little motivation, like voting, is stratified by socioeconomic status, but not nearly so stratified as more demanding and

² Along this line, I saw a brochure in the office entitled “Local Government in Maine: Government is People,” which aptly describes the democratic ideals of local government.

influential tasks, like writing a congressperson, working on a campaign, or donating to a campaign (Schlozman et al. 2005, 32-33; Verba and Nie 1972, 113). Even attendance at protests, often considered a “weapon of the weak” for those at or near the base of the socioeconomic hierarchy, is stratified by socioeconomic status (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 190-191; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 122-124).

Participatory inequality softens the political voice of the lower class relative to the political voice of the upper class. Consequently, politicians respond to a select group of affluent, educated, and civically active citizens. The interests of this elite constituency often conflict with the political needs of lower classes. Unlike the affluent, lower class people tend to think that government should pay more attention to social programs, like healthcare, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, that affect their material wellbeing. Issues like poverty, jobs, healthcare, and housing are more urgent and real to them (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 130-133; Schlozman et al. 2005, 43; Verba and Nie 1972, 127). These concerns are underrepresented by the political chorus of the citizenry, which sings with a “distinct upper class accent” (Schattschneider, referenced in Selfa 2012). As a result, policies disproportionately favor the preferences of the affluent. The greater the class bias in voter turnout in states across the U.S., for example, the less likely the states are to spend money on welfare programs that provide a safety net for the poor. Unequal political voice leads, then, to unrepresentational policy output, marginalizing the political needs of lower classes (Schlozman et al. 2005, 142-144; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 142). In other words, groups that face systematic disadvantage in the socioeconomic realm are similarly disadvantaged in the political realm, while socioeconomically privileged people receive special political protection.

Participatory inequality is stark: the participatory gap between rich and poor is as large as the participatory gap between whites and blacks prior to the Civil Rights Movement (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 248). Given this information, we can reasonably ask “Who rules America?” and find that power is concentrated in the hands of economic elites (Domhoff 2014). The structural exclusion of the poor from politics advances the morally dubious claim that some people—the wealthy and educated—are intrinsically worth more than others, and therefore deserve disproportional political influence. In so doing, it poses a definitional challenge to democracy, which “rests on the notion of the equal worth of each citizen” (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, 10) and requires equal opportunity for political involvement for all members of the demos (Dahl 2006, 24). To take the democratic project and its moral underpinning seriously, it is imperative to understand participatory inequality and confront the structures that facilitate it.

By focusing on local rural government in a socioeconomically unequal polity, this work fills a gap in the literature on participatory inequality. As mentioned earlier, local politics tends to be more democratic than national and state politics: it is more responsive to the multitudes, operates in a bottom-up fashion, and pluralistically distributes political advantage. If participatory trends in the local politics of a socioeconomically unequal polity favor a privileged stratum, then we are faced with the troubling reality that socioeconomic inequality creates participatory inequality at all levels of government. This finding would offer credence to claims that pronounced socioeconomic inequality is fundamentally incompatible with democracy.

I use Belgrade—a town half an hour from my academic home at Colby College—as a case study to examine this aspect of local politics. Belgrade is characterized by the communal closeness typical of rural towns. This closeness is embodied in its political system, particularly its directly democratic town meeting legislature. At the same time, Belgrade is a

socioeconomically unequal polity with distinct “haves” and “have-nots.” These features allow us to explore directly the impact of socioeconomic inequality on a localized democratic setting.

Before doing so, it is fruitful to examine the culture, socioeconomic composition, and political system of Belgrade, given that such factors shape how people view themselves, each other, and engage with and within the town as a whole. After describing the cultural, socioeconomic, and political landscape of Belgrade, I contextualize the town in two interpretative models of American democracy: the socioeconomic status model and the pluralistic model. Hypotheses for the Belgrade case are derived by combining elements of both models. I outline the methods used by this study and test these hypotheses in subsequent sections.

II. THE TOWN OF BELGRADE

Belgrade is a rural town of 3,200 full-time residents (Town of Belgrade). It is marked most immediately, at least to an outsider, by natural beauty.³ Belgrade is located in the center of the Belgrade Lakes Watershed, a series of seven lakes in Central Maine. It is home to five of these lakes (Donihue 2012, 1-7). With worn shores and water born sunrises, the lakes are an image of the rugged Maine landscape. They also demarcate the three regions of the town. North Belgrade—North Bel—is bordered by Great Pond and Salmon Lake. South Belgrade—Belgrade Depot—is bordered by Messalonskee Lake. Belgrade Lakes Village is situated along Great Pond and Long Pond. Geographic cleavages in the town create social cleavages. Residents often refer to Belgrade as “three towns in one” with each sub-region having its own social hubs and longtime families.⁴

³ This section relies heavily on a series of interviews I conducted with Belgrade residents during my field work. I elaborate on my interview methods in Section IV.

⁴ In a colorful anecdote, one native resident joked that when, in 2004, a member of a longtime North Belgrade family married a member of a longtime Depot family “it must have been an arranged marriage” to bring about unity in the town.

Locals know each other and there is a pervasive sense of friendliness in the town. A man who has lived in the town for forty years described a “congenial mood.” He joked, “People say, ‘hi.’ Some people will walk by and say, ‘that asshole? He’s still here?’ But what else is new?” Another mentioned that Belgrade is a “small enough town that you might not know everyone, but you recognize everyone and you can be talking to someone and be thinking ‘who is this guy?’ and he is thinking ‘who is this guy?’ but you are still having a conversation, which makes a small community something that has value.” For locals, these informal social encounters solidify a sense of place and deepen a sense of belonging.

Belgrade Lakes Village is the most concentrated commercial area in the town. It contains social hubs like the Sunset Grille, Day’s Store, and the post office. When I asked where to find old-time Belgradians, people told me to visit these establishments. One said that if I went on a Saturday night to the Sunset Grille, which doubles as the town bar, “the old-timers will really tell you what they think.” But, gesturing to the tape recorder I used during interviews, he warned, “Don’t go in with that tape recorder or it might end up in Great Pond.” These establishments are at the heart of social life in Belgrade. They also have political importance. The Sunset Grille, for example, functions as a discursive arena in which locals meet up, intentionally or inadvertently, to conduct what is jokingly referred to as the “Sunday morning town meeting”: lengthy, sometimes passionate, and often gossip-infused conversations about local affairs and governance.

I attended a “Sunday morning town meeting” in May. It was a quiet morning for the Sunset Grille. Jeopardy was on the TV and a small crowd sipped coffee. Patrons knew each other and conversation spilled easily from one table to the next. People did not sit down to discuss local politics. Rather, it became a point of commonality to which they gravitated. Their

conversation, which evolved into a critique of a town project to rebuild Main Street, began when one asked “guess who I saw today?” People contributed anecdotal evidence to the discourse, often prefacing sentences with “Bill told me” or “I heard down at the town office.” The setting had a Tocquevillian quality. Tocqueville holds that through voluntary associations “sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed . . . by the reciprocal action of men (*sic*) upon one another” (de Tocqueville 2000, 491). Locals transformed the Sunset Grille into a space for reciprocal action. As they laughed, told stories about old-time families, and shared political knowledge, they fused politics with identity and identity with place.

In addition to demarcating the regions of the town, Belgrade’s lakes attract wealthy full-time residents to the town and make it a popular summertime tourist attraction. The town’s population doubles during the summer as people return to summer lake homes (Kennebec Valley Council of Government 2012; Town of Belgrade). This summer population is composed of people who have the financial resources to own at least two houses and pay significant property taxes on a part-time residency. People living in the Belgrade Lakes Watershed—which includes Belgrade and neighboring towns like Sidney, Oakland, and Rome—with a primary mailing address in the watershed have an average annual income of \$97,818, while people living in the watershed with a primary residence outside the watershed—summer people—have an average income of \$136,973 (O’Keefe et al. 2014, 7). That number is likely higher in Belgrade, which has particularly high property values and attracts particularly wealthy summer residents.

Though they cannot register to vote in Belgrade, summer residents pay a majority of Belgrade’s tax base.⁵ In return for their economic contribution, town government pays attention to issues that matter to them, like conserving the lakes. In 2014, for example, the town spent

⁵ While I lack figures on the percentage of Belgrade’s tax base that are paid by summer residents, multiple sources in local government confirmed that they paid a majority of it.

approximately \$50,000 on conservation-related expenditures, which is a substantial amount given the town's limited budget and fiscal conservatism. Despite their influence, my examination of political inequality in Belgrade does not include summer residents because they cannot vote in the town, rarely attend select board meetings or town meetings, and do not tend to serve on local government boards.⁶ It focuses instead on how socioeconomic inequality among full-time residents shapes participatory trends in local politics. I turn now to describing this inequality and, perhaps more importantly, how Belgrade residents interpret it.

Socioeconomic inequality in Belgrade

To an extent, socioeconomic inequality can be measured observationally. In Belgrade, you see poverty: trailers situated in wooded alcoves; worn houses with tarps stapled over broken windows, awaiting repair before the winter. In Belgrade, you see wealth: compounds on Great Pond with motor boats tucked into boat garages; lake-side houses with the ambiance of upscale ski chalets. Belgrade Lakes Village has expensive town houses and the shoreline, especially along Great Pond, is lined with summer compounds and pricey fulltime residences. Inland, the town looks different. A local described it:

I live on the North side of Belgrade. The North side of Belgrade, if you are not on the lakes, is not exactly a high rent district. . . You can actually see some pretty nice houses, some large, modern houses. You can see some shacks and trailers and sometimes they are within a hundred yards of each other. . . It doesn't look like Belgrade Lakes.

Another noted, "I think that Belgrade is a very interesting community in that there are definitely the haves and the have-nots." One put it more bluntly: "there are people who have lots of money and there are people who don't have shit."

⁶ I exclude summer residents because there are practical limitations on their political ability in the town. Their primary addresses are not in the town, so they cannot vote in it. Town meetings are held in March, before they arrive in the town. Local government boards tend to require year-long involvement, effectively precluding the participation of summer people. Their influence is often indirect, and therefore difficult to calculate. For these practical reasons, I focus on more calculable participatory inequalities among full-time residents.

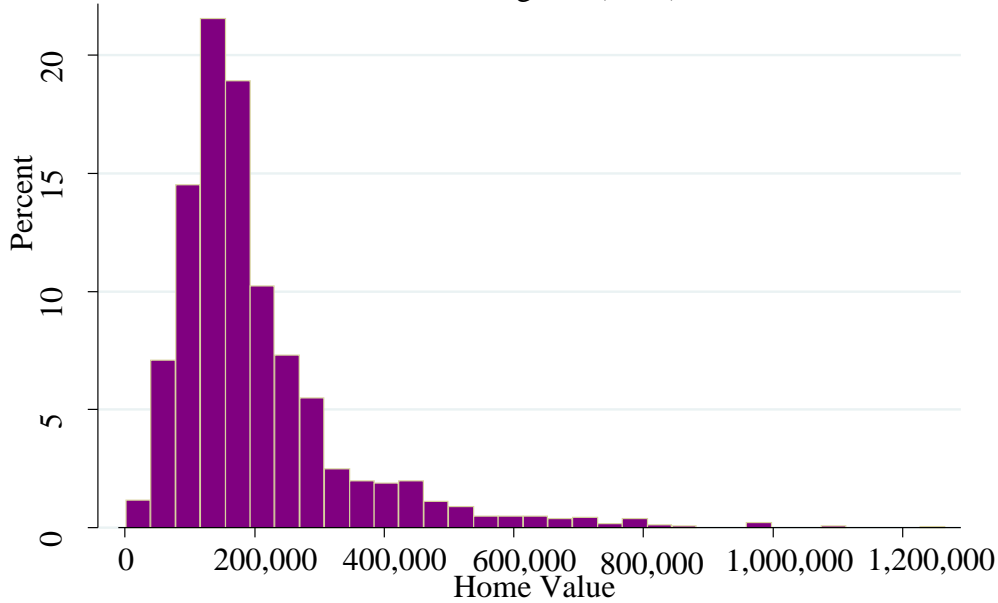
These observational data are substantiated by U.S. Census data. While 8.63% of Belgrade's full time residents make over \$150,000 a year, 15.06% live below the poverty line (Donihue 2012, 11; Town of Belgrade 2013, 73). Socioeconomic inequality obviously increases with summer residents, but the Census does not include them in its sample. This inequality, which is more pronounced in Belgrade than in any of its neighboring towns, developed over the past thirty years.⁷ Between 1979 and 2009, Belgrade's median household income increased from \$16,465 to \$58,649. When adjusted for inflation, it increased by 22% between 1999 and 2009 (Kennebec Valley Council of Government 2012). Meanwhile, the town's poverty rate fluctuated between 10.7% in 1979 and 15% in 2010 (Donihue 2012, 11; Kennebec Valley Council of Government 2012; Town of Belgrade 2013, 73) and has not shown signs of decreasing. In recent years, evidence suggests that the poverty rate has increased. The amount of state money designated to the Food Supplement program in Belgrade jumped from \$20,595 in May of 2005 to \$44,094 in May of 2014, peaking at \$48,049 in May of 2011 (Maine Department of Health and Human Services). Meanwhile, the percentage of students receiving free lunch in Belgrade Central School increased from 18.53% in 2005 to 39.87% in 2014 (Maine Department of Education).⁸ Socioeconomic inequality is also revealed in the distribution of home values in the town, displayed in Figure II.1. The mean home value in Belgrade is \$201,727. Figure II.1 shows

⁷ In Mount Vernon, 3.51% of residents make over \$150,000 yearly while 8.06% live below the poverty line. In Oakland, 6.96% make over \$150,000 while 7.65% live below the poverty line. In Sydney, 10.06% make over \$150,000 while 3.13% live below the poverty line. In Smithfield, which at 16.43%, has a higher percentage of residents living below the poverty line, only 0.49% of residents make over \$150,000 yearly (Donihue 2012, 11).

⁸ Students in a household of four are eligible for free lunch if household income is less than \$27,560. The free lunch program is not an ideal indicator of socioeconomic status at the individual level for multiple reasons. It fails to consider certain dimensions of poverty, like concentrated poverty in neighborhoods; the percentage of students receiving benefits decreases with age; some students who are eligible do not receive benefits and vice versa (Harwell and LeBeau 2010, 120-131). Trends in the distribution of free lunch benefits can still be revealing. In Belgrade, these trends clearly reveal the existence of persistent poverty or near poverty living situations despite increases in income and education at the town level.

that a wealthy few owns the most expensive houses and a majority of the population lives well below the mean. The median home value—\$164,400—reflects this reality.

Figure II.1: Distribution of home values in Belgrade (2014)



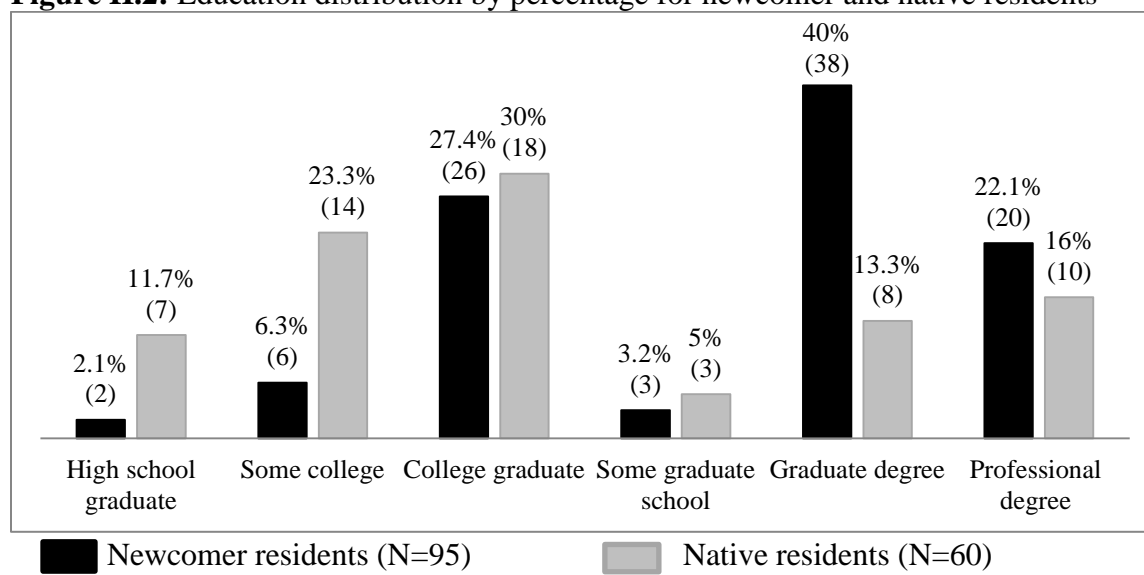
Source: author's dataset (N=2,316)⁹

In part, this socioeconomic inequality stems from new money entering the town. Native residents are predominately of a lower socioeconomic status than newcomers, which is illustrated by Figure II.2. The data used come from a survey of the Belgrade Lakes Watershed. It is not specific to Belgrade, but shows regional trends (Donihue 2014). According to it, 29.3% of native residents have a graduate or professional degree compared to 62.1% of newcomers. Newcomers are better educated and, by correlation, likely have higher socioeconomic statuses than natives.¹⁰ Though newcomers tend to have socioeconomic advantage over natives, they lack the group consciousness and connection to place shared by natives. This topic is discussed in

Section VI.

⁹ As will be explained in the methods section (Section IV), this dataset was compiled using two public documents: the Belgrade tax commitment book and the Belgrade voter registration list.

¹⁰ Householders with a masters, professional, or doctoral degree tend to have a higher household income than households without (Fry 2013). Income and education are strong indicators of socioeconomic status (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 562-567).

Figure II.2: Education distribution by percentage for newcomer and native residents

Source: Donihue 2014's dataset (N=155)

While socioeconomic inequality clearly exists in the town, perhaps even more important than its quantitative reality is the way in which it is interpreted by residents. Belgrade residents tend to interpret socioeconomic inequality in their town through the individualized ethics of what Beck calls reflexive modernization, in which collective identities dissolve while relations of inequality remain stable (Beck 1992, 86-89). Beck notices a paradoxical feature in late modern societies. Though empirical evidence suggests a class system exists, class identities have dissipated. Education, mobility, and intra-class competition reinforce each other to normalize and institutionalize individualism. Accordingly, the isolated individual is solely responsible for “the planning of one’s biography” (Beck 1992, 92-98). A comment made by a teacher I met in Belgrade, Eleanor Pollan, illustrates the individualization of socioeconomic inequality:¹¹

What I saw in the school was that kids would have free and reduced lunch and would talk about snowmobiles and four wheelers and just obviously the money was not being spent on the children . . . My feeling is that if you plead poverty and go for free food and food stamps and all and you have a cell phone that costs you \$150 a month, then your priorities are not where they should be.

¹¹ The name, Eleanor, is a pseudonym, which I explain in the methods section.

By using the individual and her or his work and spending habits as the primary unit of her social analysis, Eleanor ignores the structural context of poverty. To her, poor people's conspicuous ownership of certain material goods is evidence that poverty on paper does not correspond to poverty in reality. She does not look beyond this *prima facie* evidence to consider, first, that poor people can own certain material goods and still be poor and, second, the reality that social forces underpin and motivate certain forms of consumerism.¹² Moreover, to her, poverty is something one "pleads," like one pleads guilty to a crime. It is an admittance of wrongdoing, a deviation from norms of economic responsibility that are infused with moral value. Accordingly, "class biographies . . . become transformed into reflexive biographies which depend on the decisions of the actor" (Beck 1992, 87). The dialectic between self and society is reconfigured to remove the individual from her or his social situation. In turn, poverty becomes a product of individual deviance, of moral shortcoming and economic frivolity, rather than the consequence of categorical inequality.

When I asked Robert Conover, a low-income resident who, as a seasonal worker, regularly experiences extended periods of unemployment, if he ever sought full-time work, he answered:

Robert: No. I didn't seek it. I just went for seasonal. I never went to welfare or anything. I take care of myself. I didn't go for welfare.

Shelby: Why not? Did you ever consider it?

Robert: I didn't because if a man's gotta eat he has to go work for it. He shouldn't wait for the government or society to feed him. If you're healthy enough to work, you should get your own. That's how I feel.

¹² Warner offers insight on the social forces that motivate consumerism when he writes that among lower status groups "there is a tendency to perfect a part of the total behavior expected of an upper-class person and this part of the behavior frequently becomes for them a substitute for the whole" (Warner and Lunt 1941, 104). The conspicuous purchasing and owning of certain material goods offers status. For those who have limited access to those goods, there is status at least in purchasing some goods, at least in perfecting a part of the total behavior—that is, consumerist behavior—of the upper class.

Robert responds to my question about his employment by first clarifying that he does not receive welfare. He is aware of stereotypes that depict poor people as “dependent” on welfare and immediately establishes himself as categorically different. Rather than class peers, to Robert, welfare recipients occupy a lower place in the status hierarchy. From his perspective, he is self-sufficient and they are unwilling to take individual initiative to “get their own.” His response elevates the isolated individual as a raw social unit and deprives “class distinctions of their social identity” (Beck 1992, 100). Despite objective similarities in their income, education, and job status, he does not share a social identity with welfare recipients. Like many Americans, he views his social position as a private, rather than political, matter (Verba and Schlozman 1979, 156). This tendency negates class identity and shapes the way in which low-income people view themselves and the political world.

The individualization of socioeconomic inequality is discussed further in Section VII, in which I argue that poverty in a society with strong individualistic sociocultural ethos functions as a disciplinary power system that conditions subjects to internalize self-doubt. Along the lines of the reflexive modernization described by Beck, Robert and other low-income people interpret their socioeconomic position as a reflection of personal failure, instead of the product of structural and historical factors largely beyond their control. Rather than a source of political solidarity centered on common class identity, socioeconomic marginality becomes a source of shame and an incentive for deference. Self-doubt has political consequences, as low-income people remove themselves from the political realm, which becomes the realm of a different class.

The Belgrade political system

Belgrade has a town meeting, select board, town manager style of government. The town meeting, held on the third Saturday of March, is the legislative body, approving local laws and

tax spending (Maine Municipal Association 2005, 30-31). Participation in the town meeting has steadily declined over the past decade and the Australian ballot referendum is gradually eclipsing it, deciding most budgetary issues the Friday before town meeting. Nevertheless, the town meeting retains dedicated followers in Belgrade. One described it as “the best show in town”: a spectacle of sometimes heated political banter among locals that embodies, to borrow from a local author, “old-time democracy at its raw and raucous best” (Smith 2011, 113). A realtor described her first town meeting, which she attended in the early 1970s:

Those were the days, boy, there was lots of color to the town meeting—I guess that’s the way you would say it—old-timer people, they would be a like a dog with a bone. There would be some issue that they couldn’t let go of, or that they just felt strongly about, and might spend as much as half an hour to 45 minutes going on some tirade about what they thought should happen.

Although town meetings might be less colorful today, attendees were eager to share stories of debates, dramas, and glories at recent town meetings.

The select board is composed of five elected officials and administers decisions made by referenda and at town meetings. It has legislative powers as well, including enacting laws and ordinances and regulating the local welfare program (Maine Municipal Association 2005, 28-29). Select people are elected by the townspeople and serve three year terms. Some are retired; others work full-time in addition to being a selectperson. They tend to be long-time residents, entering town politics after extensive involvement in community groups, and many are blue-collar workers. People in the town often know members of the select board personally. When I asked residents if they knew any members of the select board, one responded: “Of course. A selectman plows my driveway.” Another said, “Yeah. A selectman is my neighbor up the road.” For this reason, controversial decisions can bring angry phone calls from neighbors and biweekly select board meetings sometimes involve heated conversations between the board and

disgruntled community members. In a small town, political controversies, even if debated with civility, can become personal. A selectperson told me: “One of my biggest critics, to be honest with you, is my neighbor. He looks at everything one-sided: ‘Oh, you shouldn’t have done that. You guys don’t care about the tax payer. You spend money like it is water.’” Another said, “you need a thick skin if you’re going to be involved, especially in small town politics. Don’t take it personally, because the guy that is pounding on you might be your buddy and you want to keep him as your buddy when the issue is over.” To borrow Mansbridge’s terminology, in small town politics, features of unitary and adversary democracy blur (Mansbridge 1980).

The town manager is hired by the select board. He or she generally has professional training in public administration and takes care of day-to-day managing of local affairs. In addition to the town manager, governing boards, ranging from the budget committee to the cemetery committee, oversee specific areas of government. Members of committees are appointed by the select board and serve as volunteers. Terms for respective boards differ in length (Maine Municipal Association 2005, 30).

Ultimately, Belgrade exists somewhere between rural insularity and modernity. It retains rural characteristics. People know each other and many share in the gossip, humor, bickering, and displays of human closeness that accompany a common history. Despite its rural characteristics, Belgrade is in a state of economic, cultural, and social transformation. An influx of wealth in the town creates socioeconomic inequality and out-of-towners are moving in, bringing new traditions, beliefs, and value systems. The Belgrade polity is not the self-sufficient partnership of Aristotle, but instead a conglomeration of different classes, status groups, and value systems, creating points of political contention that will be discussed later. The next section contextualizes the Belgrade case in a larger discourse on American democracy and

participatory inequality. To develop hypotheses for the Belgrade case, I introduce two interpretative models of American democracy: the socioeconomic status (SES) model and the pluralistic model.

III. AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND VISIONS OF ITS REALITY AND POTENTIAL

In the U.S., socioeconomically privileged people are more able and willing to participate in politics than socioeconomically disadvantaged people. The SES model holds that an individual's participation in politics is causally linked to her or his political ability and political motivation, which are both stratified by socioeconomic status. Participatory inequality, in turn, creates a political system that represents and advances the interests of the upper class at the expense of lower classes. This section describes the central tenets and workings of the SES model and then presents the pluralist critique of this model, which challenges its tendency towards structural determinism. Ultimately, hypotheses for the Belgrade case are derived by combining elements of both models.

People who are able to participate in politics often possess two political resources: money and civic skills. Money is a political resource for multiple reasons. It decreases the opportunity cost of political participation (Holzner 2007, 112); it allows for specific forms of participation, like making financial contributions to campaigns (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 515); and it places individuals in social groups that reward political participation with solidary benefits, including status, deference, and friendship (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 24). Most importantly, money facilitates the development of civic skills by expanding access to education, which increases one's political awareness and helps one express political ideas clearly (Paulsen 1991, 97; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 304-333).

In addition to education, civic skills are cultivated through involvement in voluntary associations. Voluntary associations, including advocacy groups, neighborhood groups, PTAs, political parties, religious institutions, and unions, teach members how to run meetings, speak in public, organize projects, write letters, and debate public issues (Putnam 2000, 338-339). Research shows that involvement in voluntary associations, even apolitical associations, makes people more likely to participate in politics (Verba and Nie 1972, 201; Verba and Schlozman 1979, 255). The accessibility of voluntary associations might have an equalizing effect on political participation, provided that socioeconomically marginalized people participate in them (Verba and Nie 1972, 202-203). However, like participation in politics, participation in voluntary associations is stratified by socioeconomic status (Verba and Nie 1972, 204) and, in recent years, traditionally working class associations have suffered larger declines in membership than upper class associations (Schlozman et al. 2005, 46). Civic skills are also cultivated through political engagement, by way of which people learn the routines and language of politics (Dahl 1961b, 287); but wealthier people are more politically engaged from the onset than poorer people (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 14). Socioeconomic disadvantage, then, impedes the development of civic skills.

Like political ability, political motivation is structured by socioeconomic status. People who are politically motivated tend to be recruited into politics and to have a strong sense of political efficacy. In certain historical instances, political recruitment has decreased the participatory gap between privileged and marginalized groups (Zipp et al. 1982, 1149). The Civil Rights Movement, for example, strategically recruited people into politics, allowing marginalized groups to amplify their political voice vis-à-vis institutionalized racism (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 244-245). While strategic recruitment and the variety of political

recruiters, ranging from formal political parties to voluntary associations, businesses, friends, family, and neighbors, can make politics more accessible for, say, low-income people involved in politicized churches, political recruitment predominately follows a rational prospecting model. Quite simply, political recruiters want to maximize efficiency. Doing so means maximizing the probability that the person they ask to participate will participate in an effective way. The rational prospector is likely to ask someone who is already involved in politics and who possesses the resources required for effective political action, favoring people from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 463-480; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 157). As a result, wealthy people are more likely to be asked to participate in politics, which increases their political motivation and likelihood of participating (Cohen et al. 2001, 731). In turn, political recruitment, a potential tool for combating participatory inequality, instead perpetuates it.

In addition to recruitment, an individual's sense of political efficacy structures her or his political motivation. Political scientists distinguish between internal efficacy—one's confidence in her or his political knowledge—and external efficacy—one's confidence in her or his ability to cause political change. The affluent have expansive access to education and exist in a social network that informs them about politics and rewards political knowledge. Through education and intra-class socialization, affluent people develop a base of political knowledge and, with it, a sense of internal efficacy (Paulsen 1991, 107-108; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 76; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 21; Verba and Nie 1972, 126). Similarly, research shows that social experience teaches privileged people to feel control over the structural factors that shape their lives. They tend to believe that they can change features of the political system when they feel wronged by it. Through social experience, privileged people learn to expect that their political

plans will work out according to their hopes, which increases their sense of external efficacy (Cohen et al. 2001, 750; Sharp 1982, 114-115; Stephens et al. 2014, 616-618). Meanwhile, for the poor, politics remains a foreign realm. In the words of a low-income single mother interviewed by Mansbridge, politics is a game for “high society guys” (Mansbridge 1980, 119). Poor people who do not know the language and schemata of “high society guys” tend to have a lower sense of internal and external efficacy.

The socioeconomic stratification of political ability and motivation amplifies the political voices of privileged people and softens the voices of the disadvantaged. According to the SES model, inequalities in the socioeconomic realm cumulate in the political realm in the form of participatory inequality. For this reason, critics of the SES model accuse it of structural determinism. They claim that it fails to account for instances in which upper class interests lose in the face of political mobilization by lower classes—instances that suggest economic power is not reducible or equatable *a priori* to political power (Dahl 1961a, 83-84).¹³ The pluralistic model explains these instances by distinguishing between cumulative and dispersed inequalities. It holds that a socioeconomically privileged person may not necessarily be politically privileged. Pluralists argue this point by claiming, first, that skill in the deployment of political resources is more important than the net possession of these resources and, second, that important non-socioeconomic sources of political advantage exist.

To advance the first claim, Dahl argues that though some groups might have more socioeconomic resources in a given polity, marginalized groups can skillfully pool their resources to politically compensate for relative socioeconomic disadvantage (Dahl 1961b, 85-86). He refers to black and immigrant communities in New Haven, which have shown a “unity at

¹³ Dahl’s critique predates the SES model presented by Schlozman, Verba, and Brady. Nevertheless, his insights are directly applicable to models, like the SES model, which posit the existence of cumulative inequalities.

the polls” that has enabled them to influence politics despite “their low incomes, and their poverty in many other political resources” (Dahl 1961a, 83-84). By focusing on the way in which political resources are deployed—rather than the distribution of those resources—pluralists assert that no group inevitably dominates a community (Polsby 1963, 113).

Polsby, for the second claim, holds that political advantage is dispersed over 11 different categories, including access to resources, but also social standing, knowledge and expertise, popularity, and ethnic solidarity (Polsby 1963, 118-120). His claim is echoed by Mansbridge. While not a pluralist, in her analysis of democracy in a small Vermont town, Mansbridge finds that political advantage in the town is held not only by the rich, but also by long-term residents, the old, and people living in the village of the town.¹⁴ The poor, newcomers, the young, and those living outside the village are politically disadvantaged (Mansbridge 1980, 97-110). Polsby and Mansbridge show that political advantage is not exclusively tied to socioeconomic advantage; their claim connects to Weber.

Into the fray of Marxist class analysis, which defines a person’s class position by her or his place in the stratified capitalist production process, Weber introduces the concept of status groups, which are stratified by status honor. Status honor is not necessarily determined by class: “one might . . . say that ‘classes’ are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas ‘status groups’ are stratified according to the principles of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special ‘styles of life’” (italics in original, Weber 1966, 27). Claims to status honor can be founded on lifestyle, formal education, traditions, and training (Weber 1978, 305-306). Weber shows that power, in the form of status, exists outside the realm of economic power and can be produced by living a socially respectable lifestyle and performing

¹⁴ Mansbridge defines long-term residents as residents living in the town for more than twelve years (Mansbridge 1980, 306).

the routines of a group. His decoupling of social power and economic power mirrors the pluralistic decoupling of socioeconomic power and political power. For Weber, this decoupling enables us to better understand community dynamics, given that power at the community level is not predetermined by class position. For the pluralists, this decoupling allows us to understand inequalities as dispersed, given that socioeconomically privileged groups are not inevitably politically privileged.¹⁵

Many tenets of the pluralistic model are outdated. The pluralists were writing in the 1960s, before gaping economic inequality existed in the U.S., and during the Civil Rights Movement, which entailed a historically unprecedented mobilization of subaltern groups. However, the pluralistic model still offers propositions that are useful to this analysis of rural politics, particularly its decoupling of political power from socioeconomic power. Ultimately, the SES and the pluralistic model, while beginning at different conceptual points and ending at different empirical points, are not antithetical. Even Verba, who resides at the intellectual heart of the SES model, holds that it should be used as an analytic baseline from which to consider the impact of non-socioeconomic factors on participatory input (Verba and Nie 1972, 13-15). This line of thought guides my hypotheses for the Belgrade case. As a result, I expect that the SES model and the pluralistic model will coalesce in Belgrade. In line with the SES model:

Hypothesis I: In Belgrade, people with a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in politics than people with a lower socioeconomic status. The more difficult the political task, the more it will be stratified by socioeconomic status.

¹⁵ Weber connects with Warner who, in his work on Yankee City, finds that “while occupation and wealth could and did contribute greatly to the rank-status of an individual, they were but two of many factors which decided a man’s ranking in the whole community” (Warner and Lunt 1941, 82). Like Weber, Warner decouples economic class and social status.

Hypothesis Ia: People involved in civic organizations are more likely to be involved in politics than people not involved. People involved in civic organizations are likely to come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Hypothesis Ib: People involved in one political task are more likely to be involved in another political task. People involved in politics are likely to come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

At the same time, in line with the pluralistic model, two variables are likely to predict political involvement in Belgrade independently of socioeconomic status: age and nativity. Older people are more likely to participate in politics than younger people because they have better established social networks in the town and more political experience than younger people. Similarly, people who have lived in a town for a long time are more likely to be involved in local affairs than newcomers. Longtime residents are often strongly attached to their community, which can play a “limited equalizing role” in local political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 519). Because people who are locally rooted tend to be less educated than more mobile people, community attachment serves as a “slight counterbalance to the overwhelming weight of socioeconomic status” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 519). Therefore:

Hypothesis II: Age will increase the likelihood of a person participating in politics, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Hypothesis IIa: Nativity will increase the likelihood of a person participating in politics, slightly offsetting the political significance of socioeconomic status.

These hypotheses are tested in the following sections. If the SES and pluralistic model coalesce in Belgrade, we might then argue that local politics in a rural polity remains more deeply democratic than national and state politics. If the SES model is predominant and local political

exclusion exists along socioeconomic lines, we might then claim that pronounced socioeconomic inequality problematizes the practice of democracy at all levels of governance.

IV. METHODS

While most research on participatory inequality in the U.S. employs exclusively quantitative methods, I use mixed-methods. Quantitative methods aid in the examination of structural trends and can provide statistical context for qualitative claims. While people are not causally-bound objects in motion, external social facts often establish certain parameters of thought and action. Quantitative methods measure and analyze these social facts (Durkheim 1982, 50-52). At the same time, qualitative methods humanize the issue of participatory inequality to avoid reducing human experience—and the infinitely complex nexus of perception, action, and interaction that shapes that experience—to numerical experience. Qualitative methods contain an epistemological imperative to view humans not as objects of scientific inquiry, but as agents in the world—“not just as socially construct-*ed*, but as socially construct-*ing*” (Wacquant 2014, 10). These methods embed researchers in the day-to-day realities of the social world, developing an understanding of social reality from within that world.

Quantitative methods

The hypotheses presented in the previous section suggest that one’s likelihood to be politically involved in Belgrade (θ) can be predicted by her or his socioeconomic status ($x1$), civic involvement ($x2$), political involvement ($x3$), and age ($x4$). A regression model is used to test these hypotheses.¹⁶ Gender ($x5$) is included in the regression model as an additional

¹⁶ Though the hypotheses present nativity as an additional predictor variable, I cannot quantifiably operationalize it. Therefore, I test the relationship between nativity and political involvement qualitatively.

predictor variable.¹⁷ Because a dichotomous dependent variable, like voting or not voting, violates the assumptions of homoscedasticity and normality of disturbance made by linear regression equations, it is best modeled by a logistic regression equation (Allison 1999, 184-185; San Francisco State University) such that:

$$\theta = \frac{e^{(\alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_5 x_5)}}{1 + e^{(\alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_5 x_5)}}$$

whereby α represents the constant of the equation and β represents the coefficient of the predictor variables.

Political involvement (θ) is measured six ways: voting in the 2012 general election (N=1,627),¹⁸ voting in the 2014 primary election (N=306), donating money to a political campaign, political action committee, party committee, or ballot question committee between 2008 and 2014 (N=88), attending a select board meeting in the past year and a half (N=82; select board members and public officials, including the town manager and executive secretary, are excluded), speaking at the annual town meeting between 2009 and 2013 (N=53), and serving on a local government board in 2013 (N=53).¹⁹ Public records provided lists of voters, select board meeting attendees, town meeting speakers, and local government board members.²⁰ The Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices database provided a list of political

¹⁷ According to the 2010 census, Belgrade is 98.3% white (U.S. Census Bureau). As a result, I do not include race in the model.

¹⁸ Because of the two year gap between the 2012 election and the 2014 election, I developed a second dataset for the 2012 election. I eliminated from the list people who were registered to vote in 2014 but not registered to vote in 2012, assuming they were newcomers to the town. I ultimately developed a list of 2,296 residents, their home value, age (as of 2012), gender, and whether or not they voted. I removed non-registered voters from the dataset for a total of N=2,062.

¹⁹ Local government boards included are the planning board, the board of appeals, the board of assessment review, the budget committee, the dams committee, the board of parks and recreation, the cemetery committee, the transfer station and recycling committee, the long range planning committee, the road committee, the board of selectpersons, the comprehensive plan committee, the land use committee, the recreation subcommittee, the economic development subcommittee, the natural resources subcommittee, and the history and culture subcommittee.

²⁰ For tasks with a small number of yearly participants, the year range was extended to increase sample size and improve the reliability of statistical analysis.

contributions from Belgrade residents, including small donations (Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices). These political tasks were chosen because they range in nature and difficulty, allowing us to assess the impact of the predictor variables on a diversity of outcome variables. Voting and donating to political campaigns are tasks oriented towards national and state politics; attending a select board meeting, speaking at a town meeting, and serving on a local government board are oriented towards local politics. Voting is a relatively easy political action in terms of the resources and motivation required to perform it; serving on a local government is more difficult.

I turn now to independent variables. The first independent variable, socioeconomic status (x_1), is deceptively difficult to operationalize. Domhoff warns of false positives—people who, by most indicators, including education and job status, look like members of the upper class, but are not actually—and false negatives—upper class people who do not meet certain class indicators (Domhoff 2010, 8). Social scientists use a variety of methods to defend against false positives and false negatives. Some social scientists—subjectivists—gauge stratification with subjective measures of class affiliation. They define class as a psychological grouping that shapes an individual's sense of self. Others—objectivists—use objective class measures to locate an individual's place in a class hierarchy. Objective class measures include income, education, and occupational status (Kamieniecki and O'Brien 1984, 42-44). I employ an objectivist measure of socioeconomic status, using home value as a proxy.

Home value is used as a proxy for socioeconomic status for three reasons. First, obtaining data on more common indicators of socioeconomic status, like income, education, and occupational status, requires extensive survey work. Given the relatively small size of my

potential sample, I anticipated nonresponse biases would make the sample unrepresentational.²¹ Second, home value data are easily accessible in Maine. Every year, Maine towns hire a property assessor to approximate the value of homes for taxation purposes. The assessor views the property, analyzes local real estate trends, and considers whether the owner is profiting from the property by, for example, renting a duplex. If the owner disagrees with the assessed value, he or she can request a revaluation, which offers checks and balances in the process. The assessor's report is a public document (Maine Revenue Service). Third, recent studies show that publically available residential property values strongly correlate with traditional socioeconomic indicators. Home equity accounts for 21% of household net wealth in the U.S. and for approximately 50% of household net wealth for low socioeconomic status households (Coffee et al. 2013, 2-3). As a result, home value is a "powerful indicator of accumulated wealth" (Connolly et al. 2010, 383) and provides a "novel and objective" measure of socioeconomic status at the individual level (Rehm et al. 2012). Vernez Moudon et al., comparing mean property values with area-based census information, find that mean property values increase with the proportion of the population that has a college education and with median household income. The associations are significant and have correlation coefficients higher than .60 (Vernez Moudon et al. 2011, 90-91). They also find that a strong association exists between education, employment, income, and property value at the individual level (Vernez Moudon et al. 2011, 90).

To develop a dataset with home value as a socioeconomic proxy, I combined two public documents: the Belgrade tax commitment book and the Belgrade voter registration list. The

²¹ A survey of 2,053 households in the Belgrade Lakes Watershed—Belgrade and neighboring towns that share a geographic feature in the lakes—had a response rate of 18% for N=365 (Donihue 2014, 19). Belgrade in isolation has, according to the Census, 1,366 (+/-91) year-round occupied residencies. The dataset of houses I used had a smaller number, closer to 1,100. My initial sample would be smaller than Donihue's and, with an equal response rate, would offer N=245. However, I did not expect a similarly high response rate due to logistical limitations in the study, including the lack of a research team. The resulting small sample size would run the risk of being unrepresentational.

Belgrade tax commitment book, which provides the assessed values of every property in Belgrade, is a 475 page document. It contains not only the home values of fulltime residents, but also the values of nonresidential properties and part-time residential properties, including summer homes. First, I removed all summer residents—residents with primary mailing addresses outside of Belgrade—from the dataset. Next, I removed all nonresidential properties to eliminate businesses. At this point, the dataset contained the value of approximately 1,100 homes in Belgrade. To transition from the home serving as the unit of analysis to the individual, I combined the home value dataset with the town’s voter registration list.

By combining datasets, I identified multiple individuals at each residency and included renters in the dataset.²² I then pruned it of approximately 150 residents whose primary residence I could not identify. The voter registration list also provided age data (x_4). Because age data are available only for registered voters, I removed an additional 233 non-registered voters from the sample, leaving a final $N=2,083$.²³ I then recorded whether each person is involved in a leadership position in a lake association, the Friends of the Public Library non-profit, or the Fire Department ($N=43$), which serve as proxies for civic engagement (x_2). These 43 people are atypical in dedication to their respective voluntary association; nevertheless, this variable allows us to elucidate the connection between civic and political involvement in Belgrade. These data were available on the websites of each of the three civic organizations. Finally, I noted whether or not the person participated in a political action (x_3)²⁴ and her or his gender (x_5). Home value

²² The 2009-2013 American Community Survey shows there are 135 renter-occupied residencies (+/- 69) in Belgrade compared to 1,270 (+/-113) owner-occupied residencies. I assigned renters a home value at the low end of the distribution curve of home values in Belgrade (\$40,000). While this assigned home value is imperfect, the relatively small number of renters in the sample does not affect results at a statistical level.

²³ The 2010 Census shows there are approximately 2,450 people in Belgrade over the age of 18. My sample includes most of them.

²⁴ To be clear, political action is both a predictor and outcome variable. Political action is included as a predictor variable with the assumption that a person who, say, speaks at town meeting is more likely to vote, given that

and age are included in the model as deciles with a relatively even portion of the total population in each decile. Civic involvement, political involvement, and gender are included as binary variables.

A separate logistic regression is run for each of the six dependent variables. After running the regression, I calculate the odds-ratios and marginal effects of a change in the predictor variable on one's probability of performing the outcome variable. The original regression results, odds-ratios, and marginal effects are presented in Section V.

Qualitative methods

I couple quantitative analysis with qualitative work. During my fieldwork, which spanned May to August 2014, I engaged both physically—in the form of participant-observation—and discursively—in the form of interviews—in the world of Belgrade residents. Through participant-observation work, I immersed myself in the politics, culture, and society of Belgrade. I observed select board meetings, talked informally with Belgrade residents in a variety of settings, including local diners, bars, and the post office, and attended community events, including Fire Department fundraisers and potlucks. My field notes highlight interactions with people and place. While participant observation work was insightful, the majority of my qualitative data comes from 31 semi-structured interviews with Belgrade residents.

I met interviewees, whom—borrowing from ethnographic tradition—I refer to as collaborators, through a rolling reputational sampling method. At the end of each interview session, I asked my collaborator to recommend other people to interview. I contacted those people, arranged interviews, and repeated the process, allowing the sample to snowball. A couple weeks into the project, I encountered a problem with this method. Given that social class often

speaking at town meeting shows an *a priori* interest in politics and some degree of political knowledge, which is easily translatable to voting.

delineates social groups, people would recommend others like them—predominantly middle class residents involved in some civic or political group—over-representing the same stratum. To find members of low-income strata, I employed a more deliberate sampling technique. I asked people to recommend or introduce me to low-income people in Belgrade, which diversified the sample, though it remained—albeit, to a lesser degree—skewed towards affluent residents.

Each interview lasted approximately an hour. Interviews took place on benches outside stores, inside living rooms, in backyards, on front porches. Some collaborators were hesitant to talk with me. In part, this hesitancy is rooted in suspicion of me as a researcher. After all, why was a privileged out-of-state student asking about poverty in Belgrade? Was I there to judge people or to misuse their narratives to create, as one collaborator accused me, “propaganda”? Developing a sense of trust was a challenge and priority during interviews. Other collaborators were eager to talk, telling long stories about Belgrade, about how the town has changed, and about fears and hopes for the future. They shared colorful anecdotes about local political dramas, usually only after the fact bashfully saying “this is anonymous, right?” I often found their political visions, connection to place, and genuine concern for the town and its people inspiring.

Interviews were loosely divided into three sections. They began with general background questions (When did you move to Belgrade? Can you tell me about your childhood in the town? What do you do for work?) and moved to more direct questions (Can you tell me about a town meeting you attended? Do you know members of the select board? Do you ever speak with them?). Interviews ended with broad questions that encouraged self-reflection (Why did you get involved? What motivates your continued involvement? Do you think you have political influence in the town? Who do you think has political influence?). I approximated the three-part interview format recommended by Seidman in which the first part of the interview, what

Seidman calls the “focused life history,” explores the background of the interviewee. The next part—“details of experience”—focuses on a particular experience as it relates to the research question. The final part—“reflection on meaning”—encourages the interviewee to construct meaning from the experience and examine that meaning (Seidman 1998, 11-14). The semi-structured nature of interviews allowed me to explore useful tangents with open-ended follow-up questions.

After performing each interview—taped with the collaborator’s permission—I transcribed it verbatim and analyzed its narrative, exploring what was said and how it was said in relation to the structural context of the speaker (Reissman 2008, 137-140). To control for potential biases, including misremembrance, I used local newspaper articles, public meeting transcripts, and other interviews to crosscheck the accuracy of responses. I do not report expressed sentiment as a finding unless two other interviewees expressed similar sentiment. Before writing, I assigned pseudonyms to collaborators and modified revealing characteristics to provide anonymity.

The next three sections test hypotheses proposed in Section III. I begin quantitatively, providing insight into larger trends in participation in Belgrade politics. I then qualitatively explore the micro-level interactions that underpin and help explain these trends.

V. WHO PARTICIPATES?

This section uses logistic regressions to explore causal links between socioeconomic status, measured by a home value proxy, voluntary association involvement,²⁵ political

²⁵ As described in the methods section, I use service on a lake association board, Fire Department, or Friends of the Public Library as a proxy for civic involvement (N=43).

involvement,²⁶ age, gender, and voting in the 2012 general election, the 2014 primary election, donating to a political cause, attending a select board meeting, speaking at an annual town meeting, and serving on a local government board in Belgrade. Table V.1 presents descriptive statistics for variables in subsequent logistic models. Separate models are run for each outcome variable for a total of six. Results of the logistic regression are displayed in Table V.2. Table V.3 displays the odds-ratios of the models and Table V.4 displays their marginal effects. Discussion follows the results.

Table V.1: Descriptive statistics for variables used in logistic analyses

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Definitions
Socioeconomic status					
Home value deciles	5.6	2.85	1	10	10% = \$83,600; 90% = \$370,000
Active civic involvement	.02	.14	0	1	1 = involved in leadership position in civic organization; 0 = not involved
Political involvement					
Voted in 2014 primary	.15	.35	0	1	1 = participated in political task as predictor variable; 0 = did not participate
Spoke at town meeting	.03	.16	0	1	
Age deciles	5.04	3.21	1	10	10% = 30 years; 90% = 75 years
Gender	.52	.50	0	1	1 = female; 0 = male
Number of cases	2,083				

Note: A separate dataset is used in the Voting 2012 model, with a total of 2,062 cases.

²⁶ Unlike the next series of regressions, I do not regress voting in 2012 on another form of political activity because I use a separate dataset for 2012 data.

Table V.2: Logistic models of political participation in Belgrade

Dependent variables:	Voting 2012	Voting 2014	Political donation	Attending select board meeting	Speaking at town meeting	Serving on local government board
Home value decile	.10*** (.02)	.03 (.02)	.23 *** (.05)	.07 (.04)	.17 ** (.06)	.15 ** (.06)
Active civic involvement	2.15 * (1.02)	1.33 *** (.34)	.96 * (.46)	1.89 *** (.39)	2.60 *** (.40)	2.76 *** (.42)
Political involvement	-	1.09 *** (.31)	1.65 *** (.37)	.64 * (.27)	1.12 *** (.32)	1.08 ** (.32)
Age decile	.21 *** (.02)	.23 *** (.03)	.23 *** (.05)	.11 * (.04)	.1 (.06)	.04 (.06)
Gender (female=1)	.11 (.11)	-.19 (.13)	-.28 (.23)	-.47 * (.24)	-.52 (.30)	-1.74 *** (.39)
Constant	-.33 * (.17)	-3.36 *** (.23)	-6.13 *** (.49)	-4.34 *** (.40)	-5.58 *** (.55)	-4.81 *** (.52)
Log likelihood	-989.25	-795.03	-308.51	-317.14	-206.53	-198.00
Chi ²	148.93	148.41	99.58	50.55	80.74	97.84
R ²	.07	.09	.14	.07	.16	.20
Number of observations	2062	2083	2083	2083	2083	2083

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$: two-tailed tests.

For Voting 2014 and Political donation, I use speaking at town meeting as the “political involvement” predictor variable. For Attending select board meeting, Speaking at town meeting, and Serving on local government board, I use voting in 2014 primary as this predictor variable.

Table V.3: Odds-ratios of logistic models

Dependent variables:	Voting 2012	Voting 2014	Political donation	Attending select board meeting	Speaking at town meeting	Serving on local government board
Home value decile	1.10*** (.02)	1.03 (.02)	1.25 *** (.06)	1.07 (.04)	1.18 ** (.07)	1.17 ** (.07)
Active civic involvement	8.58 * (8.76)	3.79 *** (1.28)	2.61 * (1.21)	6.63 *** (2.59)	13.44 *** (5.34)	15.96 *** (6.64)
Political involvement	-	3.00 *** (.93)	5.23 *** (1.93)	1.90 * (.51)	3.07 *** (.97)	2.95 ** (.96)
Age decile	1.23 *** (.03)	1.26 *** (.03)	1.26 *** (.03)	1.12 * (.05)	1.1 (.06)	1.04 (.06)
Gender (female=1)	1.11 (.12)	.83 (.11)	.75 (.18)	.63 * (.15)	.60 (.18)	.18 *** (.07)
Constant	.72 * (.19)	.04 *** (.01)	.002 *** (.001)	.01 *** (.005)	.004 *** (.002)	.008 *** (.004)
Log likelihood	-989.25	-795.03	-308.51	-317.14	-206.53	-198.00
Chi ²	148.93	148.41	99.58	50.55	80.74	97.84
R ²	.07	.09	.14	.07	.16	.20
Number of observations	2062	2083	2083	2083	2083	2083

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; * p< .05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001: two-tailed tests.

For Voting 2014 and Political donation, I use speaking at town meeting as the “political involvement” predictor variable. For Attending select board meeting, Speaking at town meeting, and Serving on local government board, I use voting in 2014 primary as a predictor variable.

Table V.4: Average marginal effects of logistic models

Dependent variables:	Voting 2012	Voting 2014	Political donation	Attending select board meeting	Speaking at town meeting	Serving on local government board
Home value decile	.015 *** (.003)	.003 (.003)	.008 *** (.002)	.002 (.002)	.004 ** (.001)	.003 ** (.001)
Active civic involvement	.333 * (.158)	.154 *** (.039)	.035 * (.017)	.068 *** (.015)	.058 *** (.010)	.060 *** (.010)
Political involvement	-	.126 *** (.036)	.060 *** (.014)	.023 * (.01)	.025 *** (.008)	.024 ** (.007)
Age decile	.032 *** (.003)	.027 *** (.003)	.008 *** (.05)	.004 * (.002)	.002 (.001)	.001 (.001)
Gender (female=1)	.017 (.017)	-.022 (.015)	-.010 (.002)	-.017 * (.009)	-.011 (.007)	-.038 *** (.009)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; * p< .05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001: two-tailed tests.

Socioeconomic Status

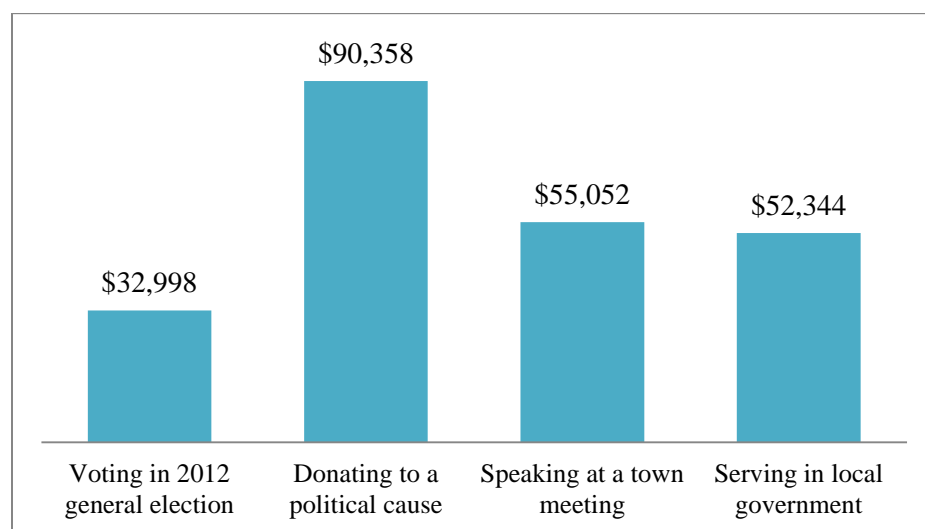
Hypothesis I states that people from higher socioeconomic strata are more likely to participate in politics in Belgrade than people from lower socioeconomic strata. My results indicate that, all else fixed, individuals with higher home values are more likely to participate in four of the six forms of political activity that are included as outcome variables than people living in lowered valued homes. Given that home value serves as a socioeconomic proxy, this finding suggests that people of a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in politics in Belgrade than people of a lower socioeconomic status. The significant positive relationship between home value and political involvement in four of the six outcome variables indicates that the SES model functions in Belgrade.

The marginal effect of home value on political action is greatest for voting in the 2012 election. In this instance, a three decile increase in home value raises one's probability of voting by approximately .045, *ceteris paribus*. This finding is slightly misleading. The marginal effect is particularly high in the 2012 election because, as discussed in the methods section, the political involvement predictor variable (x_3) is absent from the equation. When the full equation is used, the marginal effect is relatively lower. For example, the marginal effect of increasing three home value deciles on one's probability of donating to a campaign is .024, *ceteris paribus*. The marginal effect of a similar increase on one's probability of speaking at a town meeting is .016, *ceteris paribus*. This effect might seem small; however, because probability operates on a 0 to 1 scale, it is still considerable.²⁷

²⁷ The relatively small marginal effect may reflect the proxy used for socioeconomic status. While home value is a strong indicator of socioeconomic status for reasons discussed in the methods section, the marginal effect of education or income on political action is likely larger than the marginal effect of home value. Education and income have a more direct impact on one's political ability than home value, which is only indirectly related to political ability.

To explore these findings graphically, Figure V.1 displays the difference in mean home value between participants and non-participants in the four activities which show a statistically significant relationship between home value and participation.²⁸

Figure V.1: Difference in mean home value between participants and non-participants, including nonregistered voters



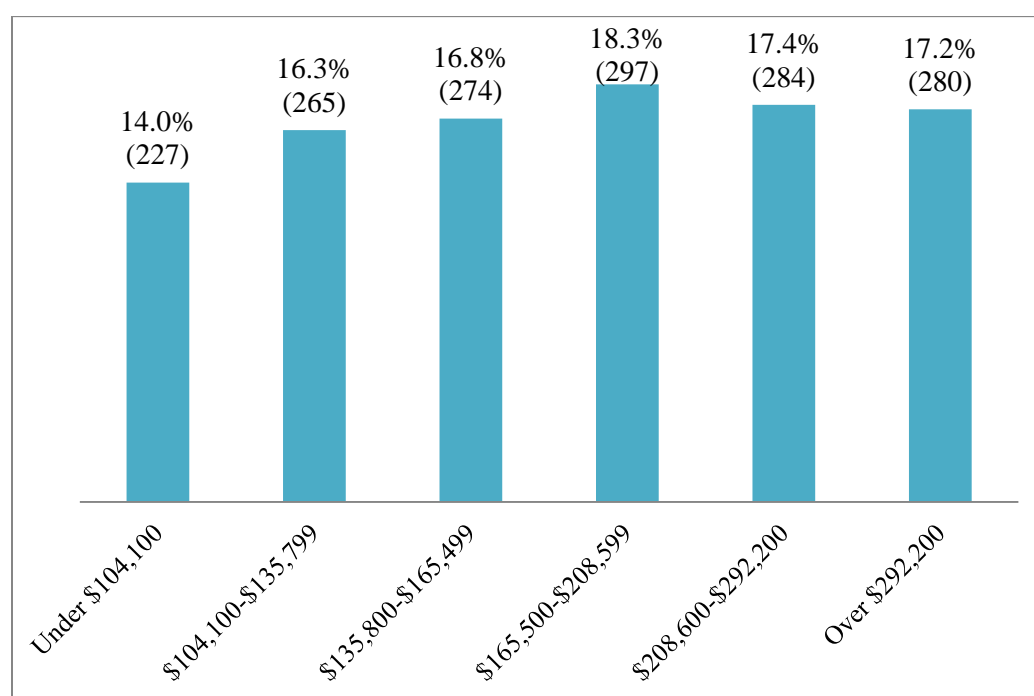
Source: author's dataset (N=2,316)

Figure V.1 shows that in all four political tasks there is a socioeconomic gap between participants and non-participants, as indicated by home value. Moreover, political tasks that require more resources and motivation—like donating to a political cause or speaking at town meeting—have a larger difference in mean home value between participants and non-participants than less demanding tasks, like voting. In line with the SES model, more difficult political activities are more stratified by socioeconomic status. For example, people who donated to political causes, on average, owned homes worth \$90,358 more than people who did not donate to political causes. In contrast, people who voted in the 2012 general election owned homes worth only \$32,998 more than people who did not vote.

²⁸ Differences of mean are calculated using a t-test with an assumption of equal variance. The differences in mean are significant at a 99% level. Unlike the logistic models, non-registered voters are included in the sample for N=2,316.

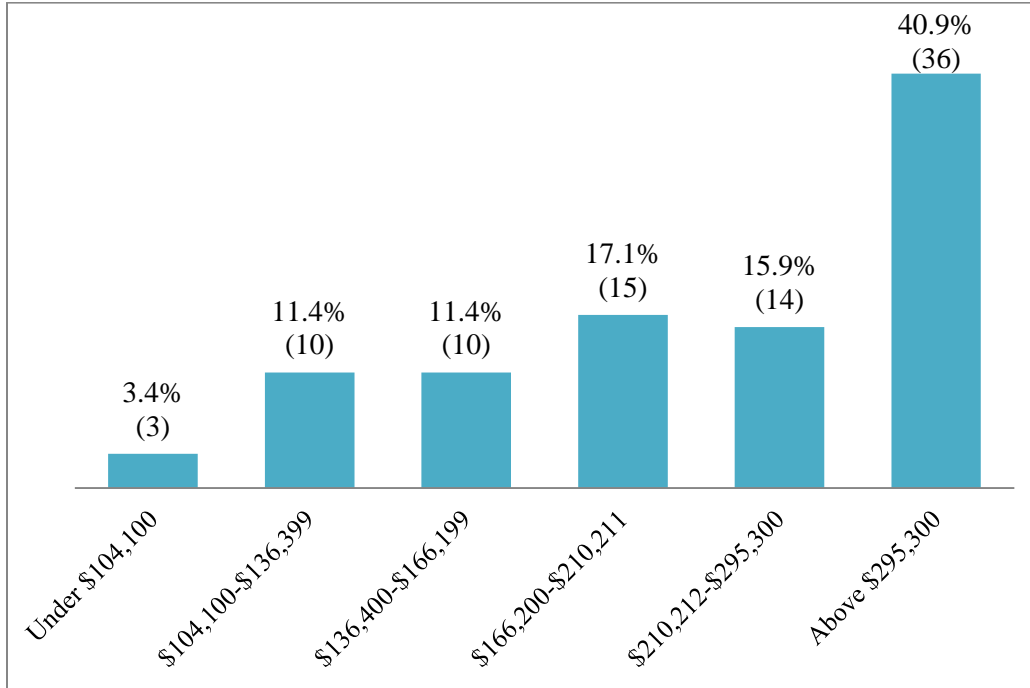
In addition to a socioeconomic gap between participants and non-participants, there is a socioeconomic gap among participants. This gap is more pronounced in certain forms of political activity than in others. I divided the sample (N=2,083) into home value sextiles with a relatively even portion of the population in each. Figures V.2, V.3, V.4, and V.5 graph the percentage of people voting in the 2012 general election, donating to political causes, speaking at town meeting, and serving on local government boards from each sextile.

Figure V.2: Home value distribution of voters in the 2012 general election²⁹

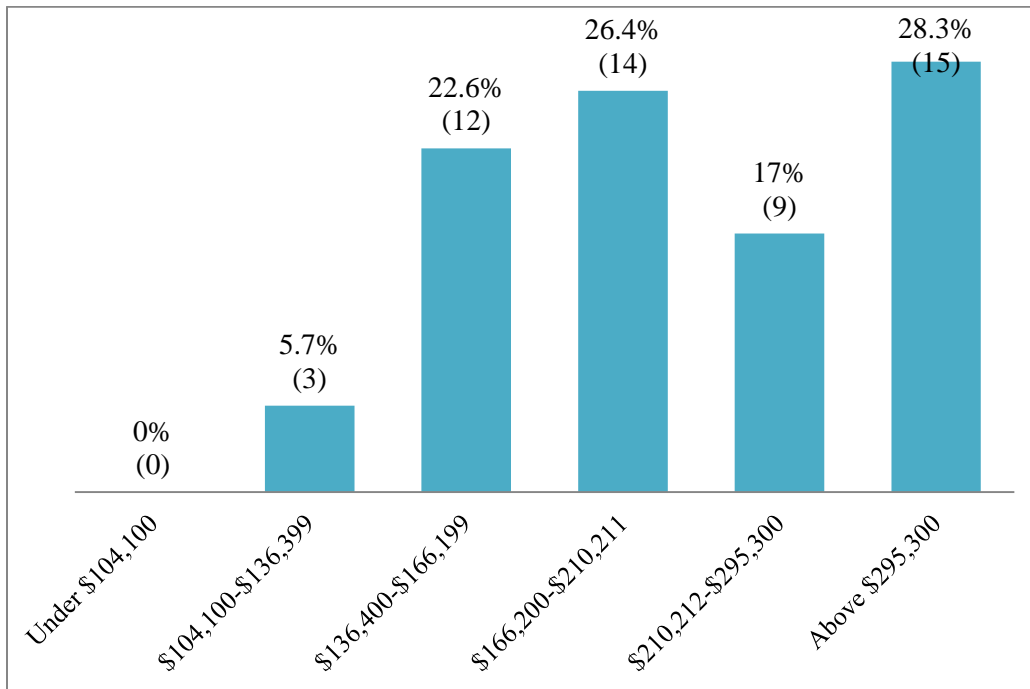


Source: author's dataset (N=1,627)

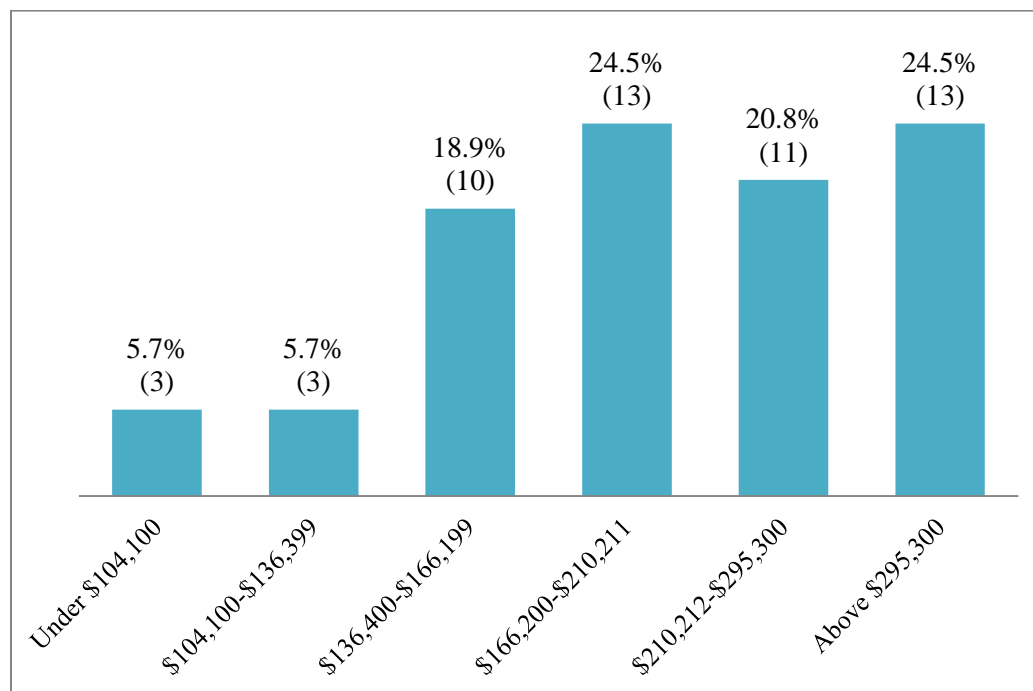
²⁹ The home value distribution is slightly different in this chart because the data come from a separate dataset.

Figure V.3: Home value distribution of political donors

Source: author's dataset (N=88)

Figure V.4: Home value distribution of speakers at town meeting

Source: author's dataset (N=53)

Figure V.5: Home value distribution of members of local government boards

Source: author's dataset (N=53)

Figure V.2 shows that the socioeconomic gap among voters in the 2012 general election is relatively small. After all, voting is a rather easy political activity and tends, nationally, to be less stratified by socioeconomic status than more difficult political tasks (Schlozman et al. 2005, 32-33). The socioeconomic gap among participants is more pronounced in Figure V.3, in which it is clear that donating to political causes is predominately a task of the affluent. A stark difference exists between the percentage of political donors from the top home value stratum—which alone accounts for 40.9% of donors—and from lower strata. This finding is also not surprising, given that wealthy people possess the discretionary income required to donate to political causes.

While socioeconomic stratification is obvious in Figure V.3, Figures V.4 and V.5 can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, both suggest that the SES model operates in Belgrade. Figure V.4 shows that only three people owning homes worth less than \$136,400 spoke at town meeting, compared to 50 people owning more expensive homes. This trend continues in Figure

V.5, which shows that a considerable majority of members of local government boards own homes worth more than \$136,400. The low turnout of the poor indicates that a degree of structural exclusion is at play in local politics. On the other hand, while political donors come primarily from the most expensive home value stratum, speakers at town meetings and members of local government boards come from a variety of home value strata. Many are not poor, but many are also not rich. The socioeconomic diversity of participants suggests that some pluralistic sources of political advantage exist in the town. Section VI, which argues that nativity slightly counterbalances the political significance of socioeconomic status, supports this claim.

The two cases in which home value does not predict political participation to a statistically significant degree, voting in the 2014 primary and attending a select board meeting, complicate but do not refute Hypothesis I. First, these forms of political activity are, to an extent, also socioeconomically stratified. In both, a home value gap exists between participants and non-participants. In the 2014 primary, voters had a mean home value \$22,234 greater than non-voters. Attendees at select board meetings had a mean home value \$36,821 greater than non-attendees. Second, I suspect that the insignificant impact of home value on the probability of participation is attributable, respectively, to disinterest from the affluent and to apolitical involvement from the non-affluent, not to organizational efforts among economically marginalized people to compensate for relative political disadvantage.

In Belgrade, it appears that affluent people were largely disinterested in the 2014 primary election, which had a considerably lower turnout rate than the 2010 midterm primary. 8,719 people from Kennebec County—in which Belgrade is located—voted in the 2014 gubernatorial primary, compared to 22,857 people in 2010. It is easy to discern the source of disinterest. In 2010, close races for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination and the Republican nomination

attracted people to the polls. In 2014, there was a conspicuous lack of high-profile, competitive races. Both gubernatorial candidates ran unopposed for their party's nomination. The candidate seeking the Democratic nomination for Congress ran unopposed, as did the Republican candidates for State Senate and U.S. Senate. The Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate also ran unopposed (Bureau of Corporations, Elections, and Commissions). Given the relatively low stakes of the primary, wealthy people felt that voting was not worth their political energies. Their disinterest explains relative socioeconomic equality in turnout. While I lack data to support this claim, I expect that if the 2014 primary had a turnout rate similar to that of the 2010 primary, it would be more stratified by socioeconomic status.

It is unsurprising that attendance at select board meeting is not significantly stratified by socioeconomic status. Attendees are often blue collar workers bidding for construction contracts from the town. They attend for apolitical business reasons, not to express grievances or to support political causes. Select board meetings are also regularly attended by members of the Fire Department, who request town funding for new equipment. These requests are ultimately proposed to the town meeting legislature. Members of the Fire Department tend to be working class, which makes home value a rather poor predictor of select board meeting attendance.

Despite the insignificant impact of home value on voting in 2014 and select board attendance, home value remains a significant predictor variable for most forms of political participation measured in this study, which suggests that the SES model operates in Belgrade. The strong turnout of non-affluent residents as speakers at town meetings and members of the local government boards suggests some pluralistic sources of political advantage exist in the town. The low turnout of poor people in most political activities, however, indicates that a degree of structural exclusion is in operation as well. The workings of the SES model in Belgrade are

ethnographically explored in Section VII, which builds on statistical analysis to examine political exclusion as a lived experience.

Civic experience

Hypothesis Ia poses two claims. First, it states that people actively involved in voluntary associations are more likely to participate in politics than people not involved, or involved to a lesser extent. My results indicate that, all else fixed, active civic engagement substantially increases the probability that a person participates in each of the six political activities. For example, people who participated in a civic organization were 3.79 times more likely to vote in the 2014 primary than people who did not, *ceteris paribus*. People who participated in civic organizations were 13.44 times more likely to speak at town meetings than people who did not.³⁰ This close association between civic and political involvement follows national trends. Nationally, people who are involved in voluntary associations are more likely to be involved in politics than people not involved (Verba and Nie 1972, 201; Verba and Schlozman 1979, 255). Interestingly, the impact of civic involvement on one's likelihood to donate to a political cause is relatively low. People involved in civic organizations were only 2.61 times more likely to donate to political causes, *ceteris paribus*. This finding suggests that political donors, who come largely from a privileged socioeconomic stratum of the town, primarily expend their civic efforts outside the town. They are not likely to be involved, or actively involved, in the local civic organizations incorporated in the proxy.

³⁰ The large impact of civic engagement on political participation reflects the proxy deployed, which includes a select group of individuals involved in leadership positions in civic organizations. These individuals are likely to have the ability and motivation required for political participation. This proxy is a weak part of my study and reveals a shortcoming in my decision to not perform survey work. Survey work could elucidate the connection between moderate participation in civic organizations and could expand the number of civic organizations included in the study to consider the marginal effect of, say, attending a local church on one's probability of being politically involved in the town. However, the strong predictive capacity of this proxy still illustrates the close association between civic and political involvement in Belgrade.

The second claim—that people involved in civic organizations will come predominantly from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds—is difficult to discern with available data. People involved in certain voluntary associations, like lake associations, tend to have privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Lake associations represent the interests of the upper-middle to upper class members of the town who own shorefront property and have stakes in its preservation. 20.3% of year-round residents involved in lake associations in the Belgrade Lakes Watershed make over \$200,000 a year and 62.1% have a graduate or professional degree. Comparatively, 2.9% of the total population of the Watershed makes over \$200,000 and 10.7% has a graduate or professional degree (Donihue 2014). In contrast, other voluntary associations, like the Fire Department, attract a working class membership. Like lake associations, these voluntary associations expose members to politics and play an important role in their politicization. Tom Carter, a native of Belgrade self-employed as a mechanic, elucidates this phenomenon.

After graduating from high school, Tom spent a year at a nearby technical college. While there, a friend recruited him into the Fire Department, in which he has remained active for the past 30 years. Tom talks about politics with firefighter friends and remarks that “everybody talks about that stuff after fire meetings.”³¹ Through informal discursive political engagement with fellow firefighters, Tom began to strengthen his political convictions, which increased his sense of internal efficacy. In addition to providing discursive capital—the “organizational infrastructure, normative values, and practices for discursive participation” (Jacobs et al. 2009, 4)—the Fire Department exposed Tom to politics directly. He attended public meetings when Fire Department members requested tax money for new equipment. In the process, he became

³¹ Tom is not unique in his experience. Nationally, there is a strong positive correlation between organizational membership and discursive political engagement (Jacobs et al. 2009, 63).

more familiar with the norms and routines of local politics, which increased his sense of external efficacy. Therefore, when the time came to speak about an issue at town meeting—a nerve-racking experience for Tom because, as he said, “I never was much of a public speaker. I wouldn’t speak in public at all and my father was never a public speaker”—he did. Afterwards, he was invited to join a local government board, on which he currently serves.

Multiple working class people involved in town politics share similar stories. For one—a recently retired electrician—the decision to run for select board was a direct result of being exposed to politics by the Fire Department. As fire chief, this collaborator regularly attended select board meetings to request new equipment for the Department. His exposure to local government piqued his political interest, and provided the skills and knowledge needed to remain involved:

I was always asking the select people for stuff and then when I got done being a fire chief I decided I wasn’t going to do anything. I was just going to be a regular citizen, you know, and have a nice day. But then I heard there was an opening on the select board. Somebody was getting done before the end of their term and I decided that that was an opportunity to try it out and see how I like it. So I said, “Wow. I’ve been on this side of the fence asking. I wonder what it will be like to be on the other side of the fence, giving.”

By exposing working class people to politics, the Fire Department and voluntary associations with similar class compositions may slightly offset the political weight of socioeconomic status. However, given that the SES model operates in Belgrade, I am hesitant to revise Hypothesis Ia. In Belgrade, people of a higher socioeconomic status, as indicated by a home value proxy, are more likely to participate in most forms of political activity than people of a lower socioeconomic status. Because civic involvement predicts political involvement if other variables are kept constant, it is likely that people involved in civic organizations come primarily from relatively privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, if political involvement

is stratified by socioeconomic status, it is likely that civic involvement is similarly stratified, which offers tentative support to Hypothesis Ia.

Political experience

Hypothesis Ib also contains two parts. First, it holds that people who participate in one form of political activity are likely to participate in another form. The results of each of the six logistic models support this claim. People who spoke at town meeting were three times more likely to vote in the 2014 primary than people who did not speak at town meeting, *ceteris paribus*. People who voted in the 2014 primary were 2.95 times more likely to serve on a local government board than non-voters, *ceteris paribus*. These results suggest that as people gain familiarity with the language and practices of politics, they become more able and willing to remain politically involved.

The second part of Hypothesis Ib, which holds that people involved in politics are likely to come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, is also supported. As established previously, people from privileged socioeconomic strata are more likely to be involved in most forms of political activity in Belgrade than people who are relatively socioeconomically disadvantaged. Socioeconomic-based asymmetries in political experience perpetuate participatory inequality. Poor people who do not feel efficacious in the political realm remove themselves from it; in turn, their political inexperience means that they lack the skills needed to participate in the future.

Age

Hypothesis II states that age will increase the likelihood of an individual participating in politics in Belgrade, and will do so independently of socioeconomic status. This claim is partially correct. All else fixed, older people are more likely to participate in four of the six measured

political activities than younger people. This finding aligns with national trends. Nationally, older people participate in politics with greater frequency than younger people. By living longer, they accumulate civic and political experience, which increases their sense of efficacy. They also tend to have more fully developed social networks, which recruit them into politics and provide solidary benefits for continued involvement (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 137). However, while there is no statistically significant relationship between age and home value in the town, nationally, people over the age of 65 have a higher median income and median net worth than younger people (Fry et al. 2011). It is likely that age does not predict political involvement *regardless* of socioeconomic status; rather, it predicts political involvement in *conjunction* with socioeconomic status, which would require revision of the hypothesis. While my logistic model treats socioeconomic status and age as distinctly separate variables, it appears the two confound in ways that the model fails to capture.

In Belgrade, the marginal effect of age on political involvement is greater in national and state-oriented political activities than in those that are locally oriented. A three decile increase in age raises the probability that a person votes in the 2014 primary by .081, *ceteris paribus*. A similar three decile increase raises the probability that a person attends a select board meeting by only .012, *ceteris paribus*. The two other forms of local political activity—speaking at town meetings and serving on local government board—do not display a statistically significant relationship between age and involvement. This finding is surprising. After all, older people grew up in an era when the face-to-face political deliberations that characterize local politics were more popular. It may suggest that workplaces recruit people into local politics, bringing working-age, rather than retired, people into the fold, but I am unable to offer an explanation with certainty.

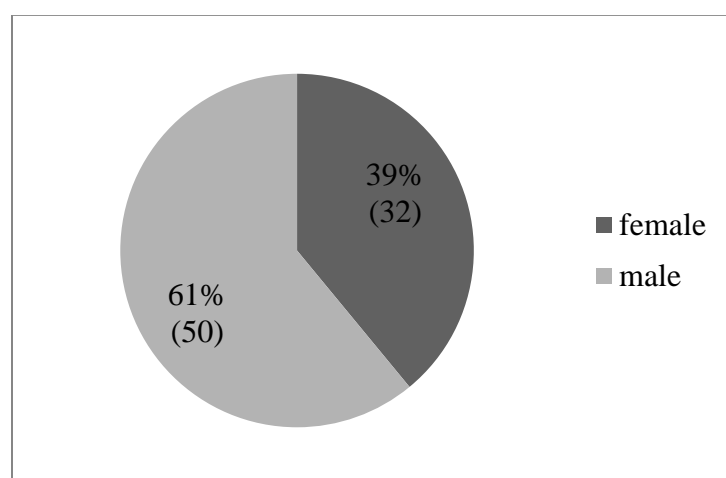
Nativity

Hypothesis IIa posits that nativity functions as a pluralistic source of political advantage in the town. This claim is qualitatively examined in the next section.

Gender

Contrary to my expectations, all else fixed, females are almost half as likely as men to attend a select board meeting and less than one-fifth as likely to serve on a local government board. Additionally, there is a pronounced gender gap among political donors, attendees at select board meetings, speakers at town meetings, and members of local government boards.³² In my sample, while 52% of voting-aged members of the town are female, 58% of political donors were men. The gender gap among political donors follows national trends, which show that men tend to donate to campaigns more often than women and also tend to donate more money (Camia 2012; Holden 2014). The gender gap in local government is more surprising. To illustrate it, I graph the gender distribution of attendees at select board meetings, speakers at town meetings, and people serving on local government boards in Figures V.6, V.7, and V.8.

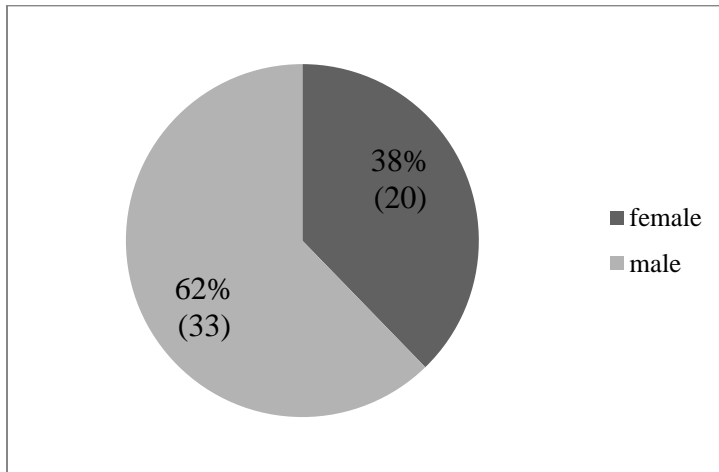
Figure V.6: Gender distribution of attendees at select board meetings



Source: author's dataset (N=82)

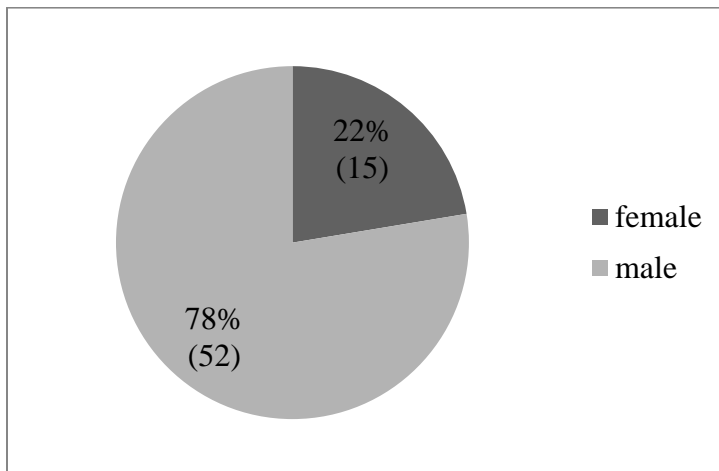
³² A majority (52%) of voters in the 2012 general election were female. 47% of voters in the 2014 primary election were female.

Figure V.7: Gender distribution of speakers at town meetings



Source: author's dataset (N=53)

Figure V.8: Gender distribution of members of local government boards



Source: author's dataset (N=53)

Figures V.6, V.7, and V.8 show, quite simply, that local politics is a realm dominated by men. In the most extreme case, 78% of people serving on local government boards in Belgrade are men. There are two interrelated explanations for the male dominance of local government. Both reflect the internalization of patriarchy and the system of deference it entails. First, women tend to lack confidence in their political knowledge while men are more self-assured (Sapiro 1988, 6). Women require a higher level of political knowledge before they attend public

meetings than men and report being more nervous about speaking in public (Mansbridge 1980, 106-107; Ondercin and Jones-White 2011, 685). Self-doubt is disadvantageous in face-to-face forms of political participation, which require political confidence. Second, town politics is historically a masculine realm. In 1980, Mansbridge encountered Vermont women who saw politics as “basically immoral and therefore inappropriate for women” (Mansbridge 1980, 105-107). While I would be surprised if a woman in Belgrade outwardly expressed such sentiment, the perception of politics as a man’s domain persists. Multiple collaborators commented on my use of the gender-neutral “selectpeople,” instead of “selectmen.” One, who was actively involved in local politics, noted: “I hate that phrase . . . It’s almost like they are emasculated.” In this comment, he assumes that to be a member of the select board is to be male; to be female is conspicuously out of the ordinary. The term “selectperson” struck another collaborator as contemptible “political correctness.” “I’m not politically correct. I never have been. When I was on [the select board], I was not a selectperson. I was a selectman.” In this case, “political correctness” discursively disrupts the norm of male dominance in local politics—in which “selectperson” implicitly signifies “selectman”—and imposes nominal equality. These views suggest that to be a man in local politics is to be unmarked and to be a female is to be marked. The masculinization of local politics has a dual effect. Sapiro writes: “women have learned to undervalue themselves, particularly in areas traditionally reserved for men. On the other hand, . . . men are greater risk takers and may feel under pressure to look competent in ‘masculine’ endeavors” (Sapiro 1988, 6). Accordingly, women are disinclined to enter the man’s domain of local politics while men feel greater pressure to do so, exacerbating the gender gap.

In Belgrade, then, socioeconomic status, civic involvement, political involvement, age, and gender predict political activity to varying degrees. Hypotheses I and Ib hold, suggesting that

the SES model functions in Belgrade. The first part Hypothesis Ia, which states that civic involvement predicts political involvement, is supported by the results. The second part, which states that people involved in civic organizations come predominantly from socioeconomically privileged strata, is tentatively supported by available data. Hypothesis II would require revision to state that age does predict political involvement independently of socioeconomic status but does so in conjunction with socioeconomic status. A new model would be needed to test this hypothesis. Hypothesis IIa is examined in the next section, which argues that native residents in Belgrade deploy a rural identity politics to challenge the encroachment of newcomers, which galvanizes political action among relatively socioeconomically disadvantaged members of the community. This politicization of rural identity slightly counterbalances the political weight of socioeconomic status, though it does not neutralize the SES model.

VI. IDENTITY POLITICS IN BELGRADE

Early in my field work, I parked outside a house in Belgrade to ask for directions. The owner pointed me up the road and, before I turned to leave, asked about my project. When I said I was studying Belgrade, he nodded, told me to wait, and turned inside. He returned with a dusty framed map of Belgrade from 1879. It showed major roads in the town, as well as property makers, indicated by the last names of owners. He gave it to me and said, “If you want to learn about Belgrade, look at the last names. Those are the folks who have been here the longest.” Looking at the map, which now hangs in my office, I saw he was right. The town is populated by descendants of these native families. Streets in the town bear their surnames: the Conovers, the Conrads, the Milehams, the Thompsons. Some members of these families are socioeconomically marginalized in the town, like my collaborators Robert Conover, who we met briefly in Section

II, and Lucy Conrad, who we meet in the next section. However, members of these families often have social status, in Weber's sense, in the town. People know them and defer to them as local experts.

In part, nativity is a source of political advantage in Belgrade for logistical reasons. Natives tend to have well established social networks in the town, some of which span generations. These social networks inform natives of political happenings in the town and recruit them to politics, providing solidary benefits for involvement (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 137). In a larger sense, an individual who feels at home in a given place is inclined to feel legitimate as a political actor in that place (Holland et al. 2007, 40), and natives feel at home. They know their place in the community and feel comfortable in the local political arena. Pete Mileham, a blue collar worker from a multi-generation Belgrade family, told me about his parents exposing him to politics when he was eight:

Pete: I remember, before we had a town office, going to people's houses to pay our taxes or to license our vehicles. That was a fun time. You knew everybody. Mrs. Thompson would always give us milk and cookies. Those were some of the good times. Those people are gone. It's not like that anymore.

Shelby: What's it like now?

Pete: It's all business. When you go to the town office, you do your business and leave.

To Pete, the political realm has become a place to do business, rather than develop human relationship. Nevertheless, he learned at a young age to see politics as a social endeavor, to conceptualize the political realm as a place of friendship and not adversary. As a result, he sees local politics as an accessible realm shared by neighbors and status equals and feels efficacious in it. He is actively involved on influential local government boards, and has been for the past decade.

In addition to their social networks and sense of place, natives share a collective political identity. Having “mixed their labor with the town” (Mansbridge 1980, 82), they see the town as an extension of themselves, blurring the interiority of identity and the exteriority of place.³³ Natives develop a solidarity network on the basis of their collective identity. This solidarity network, while it takes physical form in, for example, the Sunday Morning town meetings at the Sunset Grille where natives discuss local politics, is often a subjective status. Natives view themselves as a group distinct from newcomers. The presence of outsiders strengthens this subjective status. For example, when I asked David Thompson, who lives on a road bearing his surname, what he thinks about people moving in from out-of-state, he responded:

Do I like it? That’s a loaded question. I’m not real tickled over it but I can understand why it’s happening. The native people have sold their land and got a lot of money, which they never had, and now it’s gone forever because they can’t buy it back. If taxes keep going up, the local people aren’t going to be able to live here.

In other words, natives are selling their homes to newcomers who are financially able to live in Belgrade; their homes are gone “forever.” David’s attempt to rationalize the situation—“I can understand why it’s happening”—does not conceal his frustration. The Belgrade he knew is changing, and the forces of change come from outside. Amid these changes, he feels solidarity with other natives and is proud to self-define as a native, which he did periodically throughout the interview.³⁴

Natives discursively renew their solidarity network by labeling newcomers as “flatlanders,” “transplants,” and “people from away.” These labels suggest that to be native is to

³³ The full quotation by Mansbridge is worth including, given that it relates directly to the case I am making here. Mansbridge, describing the long-term residents of the small town in Vermont she studied, writes: “they have struggled with [the town’s] problems and have come up with solutions of which they are proud. They have mixed their labor with the town; it is theirs” (Mansbridge 1980, 82). This sense of ownness is shared by native Belgrade residents. They have seen the town grow; it is theirs.

³⁴ For example, David mentioned that he remains involved in local government because “I’m one of the only people who has lived in Belgrade all [my] life” on some of the boards.

be an unmarked member of an in-group while to be a newcomer is to be a marked member of an out-group. These labels create a sharp and largely impenetrable binary between natives and newcomers. Natives also discursively renew the native/newcomer distinction through jokes, which are shared in informal settings like the post office and Sunset Grille. John Parker, a retired mechanical engineer, grew up across the street from his current home. During my interview with him, John showed me a scrapbook of old Belgrade photographs, contrasting the photos with the segment of townscape visible from his living room window. I asked him about newcomer residents. He laughed and told me:

I remember once there was a fellow that lived across the bridge and he came into town. We had a particularly hard winter and Dave Thompson had a snowplowing contract and he had asked the town for a few hundred dollars more to help on his fuel bill because he had to go and do so much sanding. We all thought he had done a great job and had gone well beyond the contract but this fellow got up and said "Well, I don't think he did a great job. They only came and plowed my road twice all winter." One of the local guys, Chuck Howard, said, "Where do you live? What road do you live on?" and he said "I live right up here across the bridge" and Chuck said "Well, you live in Rome [a neighboring town], you damn fool." The guy got out and left.

John directly contrasts the ignorance of the newcomer with the knowledge of the "local guys." He presents an archetypal newcomer who, self-assured but out of place, tries to change the way in which the town operates. His attempt to do so is an affront to the "local guys," who share some version of what Goffman calls "privileged familiarity." Goffman uses this term to examine social performances carried out by teams, holding that privileged familiarity is a "kind of intimacy without warmth" that is automatically extended to members when they take their place on the team (Goffman 1959, 82-83). In Goffman's strict sense of the term, natives possess a privileged familiarity with the town and each other, which is automatically conferred on them by virtue of being born in the town. It is not developed organically. Consequently, non-natives can live in the town for decades and still be considered "from away." In another sense, and contrary

to Goffman's use of the term, this familiarity produces a kind of warmth, kindled by the shared memories and histories that underpin a collective identity. The town is *their* town. Natives grew with it, forging material and immaterial bonds with each other and place. When the newcomer in John's story questions a snowplowing contract carried out by a local guy, he does more than register a specific complaint. Rather, he challenges the collective wisdom of locals. They react by outing the newcomer and turning his ignorance into a public spectacle.

After telling this story, John shook his head and mentioned a "woman from New Jersey" who "said she came up here to save us from ourselves." Both newcomers claimed to know more about the town than natives but were, to John, laughably wrong. By joking about their ignorance, John pushes against the privilege of newcomers—many of whom are able to *choose* to live in Belgrade—and affirms that moving to Belgrade is not the same as being from Belgrade.³⁵ To be from Belgrade is to be born there, to see the town not only as a geographic or sociopolitical unit but also as a source of identity.

In interviews, nonnatives frequently complained about the exclusiveness of the Belgrade identity. Their frustration reflects the extent to which the Belgrade identity is not created organically, but is conferred automatically on people born in the town. A collaborator who has lived in the town for 20 years said: "In a sense, I'm not a Belgradian. I grew up in Winthrop, which is 20 miles south of here, so I'm a transplant. I'm not a real Belgrade person." Another collaborator from the nearby town of Waterville told me: "Oh my Gosh, I've been here for about 35 years now and even though I've been here for 35 years, old-timers still consider me from away because I wasn't born and bred." One from Massachusetts shared similar sentiments: "I'll

³⁵ Along this line, Ching and Creed write: "going to the country with a fully formed urban identity is not the same as being from the country." (Ching and Creed 1997, 20). To choose to live in the country does not automatically negate one's urban identity. Consequently, people who are connected to a rural area not by choice but by birth, and who have come to embrace a rural lifestyle, may treat "urbane" people with suspicion—viewing them as imposing themselves on, and inserting themselves in, the rural world while lacking genuine connection to that world.

still never be from Belgrade. It's been 50 years!" Another newcomer, who moved to the town in the early 1980s, said, "Natives are aware of the fact that I'm from away. They will never let you live that down." Despite living in the town for an extended period of time, these collaborators are outsiders. They lack the privileged familiarity shared by natives. To be from Belgrade is to have roots here, and roots develop over generations.

Underpinning the native/newcomer binary is a rural/urban binary that "underlies many of the power relations that shape the experiences of people in nearly every culture" and others the rural—marked and "rustic"—while privileging the urban—unmarked and synonymous with sophistication (Ching and Creed 1997, 2). Along the lines of the rural/urban binary, natives identify with the rural and associate newcomers with the urban. This binary is infused with class distinctions, given that natives tend to have lower socioeconomic status than newcomers. Newcomers represent not only the encroachment of the urban on the rural; they also represent the encroachment of the upper class on the space of the working class. A common attitude towards newcomers was expressed by a secretary who mentioned "it makes me very angry when people who come here—who have money—act like snobs . . . people don't accept that . . . Not everything has to be silver and crystal and whatever." This collaborator depicts newcomers both as outsiders—"people who come here"—and as "snobs" seeking to transform the town to suit their needs—"not everything has to be silver and crystal." In response to this dual urban and upper class encroachment, natives politicize rural identity to deploy "an identity politics that challenges . . . urban hegemony" (Ching and Creed 1997, 18).

Michelle Richards offers insight into the politicization of rural identity in Belgrade. She moved to Belgrade from a town five minutes away when she was a teenager. Though not a

“native,” her family has lived in the area for generations and she expressed sentiments shared by natives. I asked her about newcomers and she replied:

Most people who come here are moving away from the city because they don't like the city but then they want to make Belgrade like the city. They want the water and they want the sewer and all that. Well, no. You left that when you came to Belgrade. In Belgrade, this is the way we do it. We dig a well on our property and we have our own septic system and we care about our lakes and that kind of stuff. If you moved away from the city to come to the country, then live in the country. Don't try to make it New York City. That's our biggest threat, I think.

Michelle draws a distinction between New York City, as an urban ideal, and Belgrade, as an oppositional rural ideal. To her, the two are antithetical: “if you moved away from the city to come to the country, then live in the country.” To live in the country, one must follow the procedures for rural living that are established and routinized by locals, such as digging wells on property. Instead of conforming to these procedures, she holds that newcomers “try to make it New York City,” which threatens the town's rural identity. It also threatens the identity and lifestyle of natives; therefore, it is “*our* biggest threat.” When outsiders claim to know what is best for Belgrade, they imply that natives are incapable of taking care of themselves, that they conform to the cultural stereotypes of backwards, uneducated, rural dwellers. Michelle fights that stereotype by claiming that, unlike outsiders, she knows Belgrade. Unlike outsiders, she has seen the town evolve, and has contributed to its evolution. When she says that “this is the way we do it,” she asserts her expertise as a local.

Michelle's sensitivity to Belgrade's rural identity shapes the way in which she views politics. She recalled the debate surrounding proposals for a new town municipal building in 2009. The proposed building cost \$4,150,000 and contained, in addition to the town office, a library, cultural center, and food pantry. Opponents criticized its cost, called the proposed

building the “Taj Mahal,” and questioned whether a town like Belgrade needed such a facility.

Michelle remarked:

They wanted a \$4 million town office. In the town of Belgrade? Really? And we were up in arms. We said “that’s ridiculous” and we fought it at the town meeting. . . We’re not New York City and we don’t ever want to be, so we fought it.

To Michelle, the new municipal building represents the encroachment of the urban on rural Belgrade. In response, Michelle politicizes rural identity and directs this politicized identity towards opposing the new municipal building. In this context, the proposed municipal building comes to represent the conflicting interests of natives, who seek to preserve tradition, and newcomers, who seek to modernize the town. For natives, to oppose the construction of a new municipal building is not merely an act of fiscal conservatism; it is a rejection of the urban and an assertion of tradition in the face of modernity. It is a means of saying “We’re not New York City and we don’t ever want to be” and, in so doing, of affirming rural identity. This framing of politics galvanizes political action among natives by transforming a seemingly impersonal proposal, like the construction of a new town building, into an affront to tradition, identity, and the self.

In addition to galvanizing political action, the exclusiveness of the Belgrade identity also deters newcomers, even wealthy and educated newcomers, from becoming involved in local politics. One college-educated middle class newcomer, Barry, tried to get involved in politics after living in the town for less than five years. At multiple public meetings, he raised concerns about the way in which the town’s dam committee controlled the flow of water in the lakes. Reflecting on his early and ultimately unsuccessful political involvement, he noted, self-consciously, that “I was viewed as a trouble maker and I was ruffling feathers because, first of all, I’m from away, I’m coming here, I’m telling them what to do. They’re tired of that. It’s

happened all the time.” His outsider status made providing a political critique of natives strategically difficult. Similarly, a wealthy collaborator who has lived in the town for thirty years said: “There’s a frustration with some of the short sightedness in the town—people whose mantra is either if it was good enough before it’s good enough now or an absolute fear of change.” He felt the town was unreceptive to his political visions and, though he votes in national and state elections, is not involved in local politics. Another wealthy newcomer bluntly said, “I started to participate, but I decided they were all Neanderthals and I left and I didn’t want to participate.” What natives might see as defending tradition, she saw as backwardness. Natives were not receptive to her propositions, so she avoided local politics.

In line with the first part of Hypothesis IIa, nativity is a pluralistic source of political advantage in Belgrade. The politicized rural identity in Belgrade infuses place with identity; political action, in turn, serves to reaffirm a collective identity. In line with the second part, it may offer a counterbalance to the political weight of socioeconomic status. Given that newcomer residents tend to be of a higher socioeconomic status than natives, the politicized rural identity in Belgrade slightly compensates for relative political disadvantage. It galvanizes political action among natives and deters newcomers, even wealthy and educated newcomers, from entering local politics. However, this counterbalance does not significantly disrupt the workings of the SES model in Belgrade, which remains a structural reality in the town. The next section returns to the SES model to examine how socioeconomic inequality shapes the lived experiences of low-income Belgrade residents. It argues that poverty in a nation with strong individualistic sociocultural ethos functions as a disciplinary power regime that conditions low-income people to internalize self-doubt, with clear political consequences.

VII. POLITICAL INEQUALITY AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

In June, I emailed my collaborator, Rick Hunter, to ask if he knew any low-income people in Belgrade who might be willing to talk with me about their political experiences. Rick grew up in poverty and, while now in the middle class, knows many low-income members of the community. He answered, simply, “I did contact three people and they were not willing to discuss something [politics] they feel they have no control over. They just live their lives and hope to get by.”

Poverty—as a structural condition, lived experience, and power system—creates a certain political subject. To Foucault, political subjects are created by diffuse and anonymous disciplinary power regimes (Foucault 1995, 26-27). Unlike traditional power, which is visible—concentrated, for example, in a sovereign—and targets the body through public spectacles like the scaffold, disciplinary power is “exercised through invisibility.” Rather than the powerful or even the mechanisms of power, “it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of power that is exercised over them” (Foucault 1995, 187). In particular, subjects are visible to the disciplinary gaze. They internalize this gaze—imposed upon them through a system of corrections materialized in institutions like prisons, schools, and factories—and learn to self-discipline according to the parameters of the power structure. Consequently, subjects structure their subjective disposition towards and mode of being in the world to align with the prescriptions of power. They are rewarded for docility and punished for deviance (Foucault 1995, 170-180). Power, then, operates at the micro- as well as macro-level, conditioning the way in which individuals view themselves and interact with others.

Bartky offers a feminist critique of Foucault, writing that he “treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and

women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life” (Bartky 1994, 242). She argues that in patriarchal society, a specific type of power operates over the female body. The disciplinary mechanisms of patriarchy create a female subject who looks a certain way, presents herself to the social universe in a certain way, and thinks in a certain way (Bartky 1994, 242-245). Building on Foucault’s analytic framework and Bartky’s differentiation of disciplinary power, my interviews with low-income Belgrade residents suggest that poorer people have a different relationship to the mechanisms of social power than wealthy people. In a country, like the U.S., with strong individualistic sociocultural ethos, poorer people interpret their economic position as a product of personal shortcoming, ultimately blaming themselves for their economic marginality.³⁶ This self-blaming fosters a sense of self-doubt, which has political consequences. Low-income people question their political efficacy and self-regulate by removing themselves from the political realm. In turn, the discourse of politics remains foreign to them; it is, fundamentally, the discourse of another class. Through this lens, participatory inequality is not only an issue of objective differences in political ability and motivation, but also of subjective differences in self-understanding.

As indicated in Section V, if all other variables are controlled, people with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in most forms of political activity in Belgrade than people with lower socioeconomic status. As a result, a relatively small number of poor people voted in the 2012 general election and a remarkably small number donated to political campaigns, spoke at town meetings, or served on local government boards. Political exclusion in Belgrade is not explicit. No laws prevent people from attending town meetings; people can serve

³⁶ See Verba and Schlozman 1979 for a discussion of how the individualistic ethos of American society shapes working class consciousness. Along this line, Stoneman 2014 argues that the American Dream discourse in particular functions ideologically to control working class people and justify their unfair treatment in the social, economic, and political worlds.

on local government boards without college education, and some do. Nevertheless, low-income people tend to keep quiet about political issues or see politics as irrelevant to their lives. They rarely, if ever, politicize their status as poor people. In this section, I present narratives from three low-income Belgrade residents. All three are in their 60s and come from families that have lived in the town for multiple generations. Robert Conover has a high school education, is seasonally employed, and lives in a house he built in the 1980s. Abigail Nielson left school in eighth grade, does not currently work, and lives on a homestead with her husband. Lucy Conrad left school in tenth grade, does not currently work, and lives in a trailer. We briefly encountered Robert in Section II, in which he discussed welfare. I present their narratives, in part, to offer snapshots of rural poverty—snapshots that are not universal, but still meaningful in particularity. In addition, I present these narratives to explore how poverty shapes the way in which a person views her or his political capabilities.

I met Robert on a Tuesday night. He was sitting outside his house on a fold-up chair, drinking Budweiser. Gauging by the empty cans scattered at his feet, he had been there for a while. He stood up when he saw me, and extended his hand: “You must be from Colby.” I nodded, shook his hand, and sat next to him. Sensing his discomfort with the interview format, I asked him what he did for fun when he was younger. He talked about the music he listened to and our conversation shifted towards Credence Clearwater Revival, The Who, and Bob Dylan. He began singing “Bad Moon Rising” and I joined the chorus. He smiled and, after that, started to speak more freely. He did not look down at the tape recorder. Instead, he looked at me when he expressed political frustrations.

The first issue Robert mentioned was the new recreation center in Belgrade. The recreation center, called either the Center for All Seasons or the Center for No Reasons

depending on who you ask, was a major town project in 1999. The cost of the building itself was paid by wealthy summer residents. The town has only had to pay for maintenance, which is still a hefty fee. Opposition to the project among natives was fierce. Some held that maintenance was too expensive; others, particularly in North Belgrade, complained about its location. It is located in Belgrade Lakes Village, which many North Belgrade people, including Robert, already feel receives a disproportionate amount of town resources. Class tension underpins this perception, as Belgrade Lakes Village attracts wealthier residents who live along the lakes. I asked Robert about it:

Robert: It's a lot of waste. It's politicians. Don't get me started on this subject.

Shelby: Please do. What do you think about that?

Robert: It's a place for the rich . . . The rec center is what it is and it don't mean much to me. Maybe it does to some people but it don't mean much to me.

Shelby: Did you voice these concerns to anyone in the town when the rec center was being debated?

Robert: No. I stay quiet. I'm shy. I'm bashful. I don't vote. I keep to myself.

In other words, Robert sees the Center for All Seasons as a tax-subsidized domain for wealthy people. It is “a lot of waste,” but something that he cannot change—it “is what it is.” When he says “it don't mean much to me,” he expresses alienation both from the building—“it's a place for the rich”—and from the political deliberations that preceded its construction. These deliberations are carried out by “politicians,” not by his class peers. Yet, despite his obvious political frustration, he says he is too shy to voice political concerns in a public forum.

Expanding on this theme, I asked Robert who he thinks has political influence in the town. He answered:

Robert: The Planning Board.

Shelby: Who do they represent?

Robert: The Town of Belgrade.

Shelby: You're part of the Town of Belgrade, do you think they represent you?

Robert: No.

This statement is a further expression of alienation. Robert holds that the Planning Board represents the town but does not represent him. Later, he celebrates his minority status, saying "I'm one against many," but he does not publically express his opposition to the many. He is a silent minority, but how should we understand his silence?

On the one hand, I am tempted to accept the reason he gives: he is shy. His lifestyle is also revealing. I spoke with him for two hours on a Tuesday night. By the time I left, around nine o'clock, he was drunk. A collaborator who helped arrange the interview warned me not to arrive late, or I might miss the opportunity to talk with him sober. On the other hand, I want to delve deeper than the surface. Robert has political frustrations. As the interview continued, he complained about property taxes, talked sympathetically about natives who have had to struggle "to make ends meet when it comes to taxation," and said that he thinks newcomers are changing the town, and not for the better. Yet, when I asked him about discussing these issues at a public meeting, he replied "I'm not going. I'm going to save my voice." His silence can be explained by analyzing how poverty shapes his political experience. Because he is poor, he lacks political ability. By virtue of his limited education and disengagement from civic organizations, he does not have the civic skills necessary to effectively participate in politics. In addition, he lacks political motivation. No rational prospector asks him to participate and even he does not believe he can cause political change. Robert's disinclination to participate in politics, and his seeming self-removal from the political realm, reflects his status as a poor person in this country and all

the stigmas dominant culture directs at that status—stigmas derived from framing poverty as a product of individual deviance rather than a consequence of categorical inequality, discussed in Section II. His disinclination to enter politics is the product of specific power relationships, which economically marginalize individuals and train them to blame themselves for their marginality, fostering a sense of inferiority. It might seem ironic to think of a heavy-drinking John Fogarty fan as a “disciplined” subject; but Robert is disciplined to not question social, economic, and political conditions in a public setting. He is disciplined to doubt himself.

Robert reminded me of a conversation I had with Rick Hunter. Rick, now a middle class and politically active member of Belgrade, grew up in poverty. He describes the experience: “It used to be, we had one meal a day. It was supper . . . You never took baths or showers so you would go to school and you stink. You realize it after.” He was adopted at the age of ten, which, he says, “was a big break for me.” After high school, he found a job with a plumbing company and, through self-education, eventually became a consultant at a local bank. Being poor left an impression on him:

Growing up that way was a real burden to me for a long time because I always felt I was inferior—like people were better than I was—but as you go through life and do your different career then you start, little by little, you start to realize I’m as good, if not better, than a lot of these people who put themselves up on this frickin’ pedestal. And what did they ever do to get there? Nothing. It was handed to them.

Poverty shaped the way he presented himself to the social world and evaluated his potential. He felt marked as inferior and carried this mark as a burden. He built confidence by interacting with “high power” people when working as a bank consultant. These people, he realized, “didn’t even know how to manage their money.” He subsequently began to question their claims to superiority. This questioning produced anger. He felt wronged by poverty and slighted by the undeserved privilege of the wealthy who “put themselves up on this frickin’ pedestal.” When I

asked him whether the low-income people he knows participate in local politics, he told me they do not. The poor, he said,

are in a world . . . The key is you gotta get out there and vote but they say “my vote don’t matter.” They don’t think they are anybody. . . They don’t realize the power that they really have, but there’s no way to get them together because they live in their own little world. Have you ever been in a class and thought “I’m not going to say something because I might be wrong”? Get down to that thinking and that’s where they are at.

Speaking from personal experience, Rick describes the sense of inadequacy that poverty creates.

When he says “they don’t think they are anybody,” he describes the lived experience of marginality. He echoes Freire: “Men (*sic*) who are submitted to concrete conditions of oppression . . . become alienated ‘beings for another’ of the false ‘being for himself’ on whom they depend.” Until they recognize their power of decision, the marginalized “follow the prescriptions” of the powerful (Freire 2010, 161). As a result of this dependence, they alienate themselves from their human capacity to be transcendent and self-determining beings, becoming, rather, beings for others whose sense of self-worth is determined by the powerful. The poor do not, then, “think they are anybody” because their capacity to genuinely self-determine is circumscribed by the conditions of marginality. They also do not “realize the power that they really have,” in large part because, as Beck shows, class consciousness has dissipated in modern society. The individualization of socioeconomic inequality calls into question not the systems that underpin privilege and disadvantage but the individual life decisions of poor people (Beck 1992, 92-98). The resulting stigmatization of poverty leads poor people to internalize a sense of self-doubt, rather than to politically mobilize with people who share their socioeconomic position.

Rick’s analogy for this phenomenon is poignant. Imagine being in a classroom and doubting whether you know the right answer. Then extend that doubt to other areas of your life:

your job, daily interactions, and sense of self. Foucault holds that schools discipline students by “normalizing judgment.” Through constant assessment, schools regulate the customs, habits, and productive practices of students. They structure the parameter of thought, training subjects to enact obedient techniques of the self (Foucault 1995, 178-179; Hardt and Negri 2013, 215-216). While Foucault does not consider how socioeconomic position shapes the experience of disciplinary power in the classroom, Rick suggests that poorer students are exposed to a specific type of normalized judgment. They learn to judge themselves as inferior to more affluent students, whose families are able to spend resources on books, computers, high-quality childcare, and other enrichments that provide the requisite skills for academic success (Duncan and Murnane 2014, 11). From a young age, poorer students learn to view themselves as less capable than wealthy students. Consequently, they question their inherent capabilities—their innate intelligence—not their socioeconomic circumstances, and this questioning creates a sense of self-doubt. Abigail expands on this theme.

Rick put me in touch with Abigail. He said that she was a vocal opponent of the Center for All Seasons building project in 1999. When I called, she told me that I should talk with people who “know more about politics” than she does. I insisted that I wanted to talk with her, and she eventually agreed. Her house looked self-built and an American flag was draped over the front door. Even after agreeing to talk with me, she was reluctant. She called last-minute to cancel, though she let me in when she saw I was already in her driveway. Midway through the interview, she told her husband that I was “being a pain. I’ll kick him out soon.” The comment, though meant jokingly, was unsettling. It forced me to think critically about how I appeared to collaborators. Colby College is often viewed as a dominion of privilege in Central Maine. I chose each word I said carefully. I did not want to seem out-of-touch or, worse, elitist.

When Abigail told me that she grew up on a farm, we talked briefly about farming. I told her that I grew up in a rural area and have spent extensive time working on farms in Maine. She seemed reassured by this touch of commonality, but not convinced about my presence or motives. Despite her suspicion of me, she began to speak more openly. She told me that she dropped out of school in eighth grade. I asked her why and she answered:

the teachers just ignore you, pass you, and keep right on going . . . I was wicked, wicked shy. I didn't dare to answer a question because if I answered it and answered it wrong, I would have felt "oh my God, they will all laugh at me." So I sat back and was quiet.

Her answer reminded me of Rick's classroom analogy and Foucault's presentation of schools as disciplinary institutions. In school, her sense of self was conditioned by the gaze of her peers, who she feared would laugh at her. As a result, she "sat back and was quiet." Abigail notes that "if you were a smart kid, you were okay but if you weren't a smart kid the teachers would fluff you on by, and that's no lie." The normalized judgment of her teachers, who ignored her and kept "right on going," structured how she assessed her intellectual capacity, creating self-doubt. She views the intelligence of the "smart kids" as something fixed and biological. By extension, she views herself as innately less intelligent.³⁷ This perspective naturalizes and, therefore, depoliticizes the inequality of her social position.³⁸

After leaving school, Abigail worked in the informal sector for five years and then as a janitor at a mall in Augusta. She was laid off fifteen years ago and has not found work since. Like Robert, she is isolated in the town. I asked her if she felt connected to any part of Belgrade and she replied: "if there was any connection at all, it would be to North Belgrade because I

³⁷ It is likely, though difficult to know with certainty, that the "smart kids" Abigail mentions enjoyed some degree of socioeconomic privilege. Historically, high-income students as a group have performed better than low-income students on measures of academic success (Reardon 2013, 10). Abigail views their intelligence as something innate, rather than as a reflection of socioeconomic circumstance.

³⁸ The naturalization of inequality serves to dissuade political challenges to it. As de Beauvoir points out: "one cannot revolt against nature" (de Beauvoir 1976, 83).

don't know anybody else." She does not participate in voluntary associations and describes herself as a "home body." Because civic and social isolation often deter political participation, when I asked Abigail about her political involvement, I was not surprised to hear she was not involved. However, I pressed further, asking, as Rick suggested, about her involvement during the Center for All Seasons debate. She replied: "What do you want to know?"

Shelby: I want to know what inspired you to get involved.

Abigail: I thought it was too much money. Once the Alfonds³⁹ stop paying, then who was going to pay? Tax payers who couldn't afford it.

Shelby: How did you express your opposition?

Abigail: [laughs] Probably not very good.

Her husband, sitting nearby, interjected: "It might be a touchy subject." Abigail smiled and continued: "I had my opinion and I spoke it and that was very unusual for me because I'm usually very quiet but that really irritated me." Abigail did more than just speak her opinion. She organized a network of opposition to the recreation center, forming a coalition of friends, family, and neighbors that went door-to-door with a petition. "When I was fighting that building," she remarked, "people were coming out of the woodworks." Other interviewees expressed a sense of amazement at the following she developed. Transcripts from public meetings verify her vocal opposition, to the point that the moderator at one meeting had to remind her to wait her turn to talk. Her crusade was ultimately unsuccessful—the town approved the building. She still suspects foul play was involved in its approval, but was the only collaborator to harbor such suspicions. I asked her: why this issue?

³⁹ Harold Alfond, the wealthy owner of a successful shoe business in Maine, owed a summer compound on Great Pond in Belgrade. He and his wife, Bibby, contributed millions of dollars to charitable causes, including, but far from limited to, the Center for All Seasons (Harold Alfond Foundation).

Abigail: Why would we need that great big rec center? . . . We had a rec center that was perfectly fine . . . but because Alfond wanted his name on it, we had to have a new one. It's not any better. That's for sure.

Shelby: Was it difficult to get involved in the debate?

Abigail: It made me nervous for a long time because I'm not one to run my mouth, but then the more people I talked to, the more people behind me, it made it easier and easier to do.

In other words, although she was not initially comfortable with activism—with “running her mouth”—the support she received from people increased her sense of external efficacy. She began to feel like she could make a difference, and developed the political confidence to attempt to do so. I asked her if there has been an issue that has concerned her since the Center for All Seasons. She said there have been issues, but she has not been involved in addressing them. I asked her why and she answered: “I’m just one little voice. This town is run by the people that are rich and that can afford this: ‘Oh yeah, we gotta have this; we gotta have this.’ Well, that rec center cost us a lot of money.” She holds that this phenomenon—of rich people running the town—is not new in Belgrade. Even when she was young, “The mucks got everything and the lower class got nothing. People with money move into this town that is so beautiful and then they want everything that they left home and we pay for it.” In this statement, her social identity as a Belgrade native coalesces with her working class identity, illustrating the class dynamics that exist alongside the native/newcomer binary described in the previous section. She associates newcomers with wealth, and sees natives as belonging to a lower class. She criticizes wealthy newcomers—the “mucks,” a label which includes politicians more generally—for attempting to transform the town, which is an affront to the town’s identity and, by extension, her own identity as a native resident.

In a sense, Abigail is a rare case in Belgrade. Though socioeconomic inequality is largely individualized in Belgrade, she retains a strong sense of working class identity. As the interview continued, she said:

I've always been for the lower class—maybe it's because I am—but I hate it when people do these great big things and then all of a sudden we have to pay for it because it's not fair to the people that don't have money.

Unlike other collaborators, she identifies with a class: “I've always been for the lower class—maybe it's because I am.” Moreover, she describes a fundamental disconnection between the rich and the poor. To Abigail, the rich claim to possess a monopoly on political wisdom. They deem certain projects legitimate and force the poor to pay for them. Abigail invokes us-versus-them rhetoric: *we* are the poor and have to pay for the extravagance of the rich; *they* are the rich and are out of touch with our needs. When resisting the Center for All Seasons, she felt connected by both native and class identity to her political cause.

Through the lens of her dual native and class identity, Abigail's reaction to the Center for All Seasons can be understood as an expression of mounting frustrations. She was not only concerned about the location of the building in Belgrade Lakes Village instead of her native North Belgrade; she was also concerned about what she perceived to be a political system run by “mucks.” She was not only concerned about the cost of the building; she was also concerned about wealthy newcomers who lack a generational connection to Belgrade changing the town. She was not only concerned about the physical quality of the building itself; she was also concerned that it existed for the gratification of upper class donors. At one point, she commented: “I wouldn't mind a bit if the Alfonds helped, but why does he need his name plastered all over everything? If I was going to give something—which I have given a lot—I don't need my name on anything.” Abigail feels that the town is celebrating a visible, wealthy,

part-time resident while ignoring the contributions made by lower class natives. To her, the Center for All Seasons is not merely a new recreation center. It represents a willingness to efface “tradition,” in which “tradition” is collectively defined by lower class natives, by embracing the “new,” in which the “new” is delivered by wealthy newcomers. The Center for All Seasons brought her into the fold of politics, but not for long. Like Robert, she sees politics as a realm in which a certain class interest—that of the wealthy “mucks”—prevails. This view brings a degree of resignation. To Abigail, politics has always been and always will be the realm of the rich. She does not feel efficacious in this realm, despite the limited success of her fight against the recreation center.

Like Robert and Abigail, Lucy was hesitant to talk with me. I met her through another collaborator, Sarah. When I asked Sarah whether she knew any low-income people in Belgrade, she called Lucy on her phone. Though she was reluctant to talk with me, Sarah reassured her and, eventually, she agreed. I met Lucy at Sarah’s house. At first, her responses to my questions were short, sometimes one-liners. As the interview continued, and she became more self-assured, she told me that she helps organize potlucks in the North Belgrade Community Center, which are attended by full-time and summer residents alike. She inherited the organizing role from her mother. Despite her involvement in the North Belgrade community, Lucy has only attended one town meeting. I asked her what it was like and she said: “I am not into politics very much. The meeting seemed like a lot of arguing, but Sarah told me it’s not arguing. It’s debating. But . . . [it makes] me nervous.” In other words, to her, politics is a foreign world characterized by incivility. Lucy defers to Sarah, who assigns another name to the arguing—“debating”—but this resignification does not make her any more comfortable. Unlike Robert and Abigail, she does not

claim that the political realm belongs to a different class—to the “rich” in Robert’s case or the “mucks” in Abigail’s—instead it belongs to “louder” people who enjoy arguing.

The particular meeting Lucy attended was the meeting in which the Center for All Seasons was approved. Lucy opposed the project, claiming it was too expensive. I asked her if she spoke at the meeting. She laughed. “I am not that type of person that speaks out. I am better than I used to be.” Presumably, she was shier earlier in her life. As the interview continued, I learned that Lucy does not talk about politics with her family and does not know any of the select people. She does vote, but questions her political convictions, saying “I’m sort of wishy-washy.” In one sense, Lucy may truly be apolitical. The argumentative and divisive nature of politics disturbs many people; she may be one of them. In a larger sense, her disposition to politics reflects her class position. Lucy is poor in a country in which wealth decrees legitimacy. She feels delegitimized by politics, so she shies away from it. The loud people involved in politics come largely from a different class. They are politically confident; she is not.

Robert, Abigail, and Lucy all doubt their political capabilities. Poverty shapes the way in which they view themselves and assess their political capabilities. Within the confines of an individualistic culture that negates class identity, they internalize a sense of inferiority. They view their poverty as a testament of some degree of individual failure, rather than as a product of historical and social forces. This self-doubt has political consequences, leading them to self-regulate and remove themselves from the political realm. To Robert, Abigail, and Lucy, this realm is the realm of another class. It is foreign to them, and they do not feel efficacious in it. To them, political exclusion is not a statistical reality, but a dimension of the lived experience of marginality and the micro-practices of power that regulate it.

VIII. CONCLUSION

I met Margaret Morrison on a dewy July morning. We sat on the shore of Great Pond, pausing on occasion to wave to passing boats. Margaret grew up in poverty in Ohio and eventually became a lawyer. In my interview with her, she expressed frustration at losing part of her social world to upward mobility. At one point, she said, “My husband and I . . . are people of means and we are looked upon as ‘those rich people.’ I’ve heard people say ‘you’re one of those rich people on the hill.’ It’s like, ‘Oh God, you have no idea where I came from.’” At another, she told me that she feels like an “outsider” when she spends time in low-income neighborhoods. Margaret used to know the social routines of the people living in these neighborhoods. That was her class, group, and social universe. She is now “one of *those*,” removed from and placed hierarchically above the people she once considered her class peers.

Her experience with poverty remains embedded in her sense of self. When I asked about poverty in Belgrade, Margaret looked down and then back at me. She began, “I hang out mainly with wealthy people. I’m just not used to that. I don’t know who the poor people are.” She inhabits a different world now. That other world—that world in which she grew up—is foreign to her. Its foreignness is a testament of her class privilege; but she knows that world exists and sees fragments of it: “I don’t know who the poor people are in Belgrade. I can tell you where they live because I drive past their houses.” Yet, her knowledge of them is only in passing. After another pause, she lowered her voice and said, “The poor hide and everyone around here keeps them hidden.”

Her statement surprised me. For one, it seemed to contradict the spirit of friendliness I observed in Belgrade. However, I eventually recognized that to say that “the poor hide and everyone around here keeps them hidden” does not implicate the character of the town or the

people in it. Poor people are not “hidden” because of the actions or affective dispositions of individuals in the town. Rather, they are hidden because an unequal class system exists in the town, which marginalizes certain groups and privileges others. Despite the friendliness of townspeople, poverty in the town is a force that keeps groups socially and politically hidden.

In a larger sense, her statement surprised me because it ran contrary to my expectations of local rural politics. In the municipal office, I saw people blur the lines between the social and political. In the close bond between select people and constituents, I witnessed a political system characterized by neighborliness. Yet, even in a local political setting in which public officials plow the driveways of constituents during the winter, socioeconomic inequality creates participatory inequality. Though nativity functions as a pluralistic source of political advantage in the town, the poor are still largely excluded from politics. People of a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in politics in Belgrade than people of a lower socioeconomic status. Moreover, ethnographic evidence shows poverty in the town conditions poor people to doubt their political capabilities and, consequently, to remove themselves from politics.

My last interview in Belgrade was with a construction worker in his mid-40s. He had lived and worked in Belgrade most of his life. His hands, large and calloused, enveloped mine when we met. We talked about the town, about local politics, about native families and newcomers. Near the end of the interview, I asked him if he had any closing reflections on Belgrade. He replied: “There is a lot of knowledge in this town. A lot of it from people living here.” His comment made me think about how knowledge exists at the heart of community. In a small town, people share knowledge daily. The man at the select board meeting drew from the knowledge of his neighbors to advance a political project, even if that project was as simple as requesting a new streetlight. In conversations at the Sunset Grille, people shared knowledge

related to their common history and present. At the post office, people offered insight into new political developments in the town, insights interspersed with stories about neighbors. In these settings and many others, knowledge became a collective construction. Each individual contributed to its foundation, its edifice, and left the final structure ready for remodeling over the next cup of coffee or sandwich at the local store. In Belgrade, knowledge comes not only from people who are wealthy and have advanced degrees; it also comes from people, like Robert, Abigail, and Lucy, who lack money and education. The task of democracy is to ensure that the political voices of the latter carry significance equal to the former. In this regard, there is work left to be done in Belgrade. There is also work left to be done in the nation at large.

Political science can aid in this work. While political scientists have critiqued the undemocratic nature of our political and socioeconomic system, few have proposed or affirmed alternatives. After providing a thorough analysis of participatory inequality in the U.S., a closing chapter of *The Unheavenly Chorus* asks “What, if anything, is to be done?” (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 534-574). The authors propose a series of institutional reforms, which is a step in the right direction. However, political scientists should not only explore alternatives that operate within the structure of the state, but also alternatives that exist outside the state. Important efforts to democratize political, social, and economic spaces take form in counter publics and creative grassroots movements (Wright 2010). Given that power systems, like socioeconomic inequality, shape us at the level of subjectivity, political scientists should adopt the feminist maxim that “the personal is political” and focus on how people engage with each other in a variety of publics to develop new political situations and new understandings of the roles they can play as political actors.

While performing this work, I encourage political scientists to couple quantitative analyses of participatory inequality with ethnography, developing an understanding of the macro- and micro-practices of power that regulate marginality from those who are marginalized. As this study has demonstrated, participatory inequality is not only a matter of objective differences in political turnout along socioeconomic lines, but also an issue of subjective understandings of self, community, and world. Exclusively quantitative analyses of participatory inequality contextualize these qualitative findings, but tend to neglect the ways in which social structures shape individuals, their actions, interactions, and senses of self. As a result, they neglect important dimensions of the power relationships that underpin participatory inequality. Embedded ethnographic work can begin to elucidate these power relationships and their expression at the micro-level.

Finally, it is worth recognizing four methodological shortcomings of this study, which can be improved upon in future studies. My decision to not conduct a survey in Belgrade limited the study in certain ways. First, while home value is a reliable socioeconomic proxy, it does not have the direct impact on one's political ability that income and education have. Future studies on participatory inequality in rural polities should use indicators like income and education to explore the socioeconomic landscape of political involvement. Second, the proxy used for civic engagement was a weak part of my analysis. This proxy included people actively and visibly involved in three civic organizations. Future studies on rural politics could use survey data to test the effect of types and degrees of civic involvement on one's likelihood to be politically involved. Third, this study lacks a quantifiable measure of nativity, which could be provided by survey work and included in a regression model. This regression model could test the significance and direction of the impact of nativity on one's likelihood to participate in politics.

Fourth, the male domination of local government deserves more attention than this study provides. If this finding holds for rural polities similar to Belgrade, researchers should interview females from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds to discern how they view their political situation and capabilities, offering insight into another important dimension of participatory inequality.

The shortcomings of this study, however, do not detract from its overall findings. Political exclusion along socioeconomic lines exists both nationally and locally. The following critique of national politics made by Schlozman, Verba, and Brady applies to Belgrade: “On the playing field of democratic participation, we are not just unequal at the finish line. In what seems to be a double violation, we are not even on an equal footing at the starting line” (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 601). On the playing field of democratic participation in Belgrade, those who are socioeconomically marginalized find themselves on an unequal footing at the starting line. From the start, people like Robert, Abigail, and Lucy lack the resources required to participate effectively in politics. Their political voices, in turn, are underrepresented at all levels of government. The persistence of the SES model in a local rural political arena suggests that pronounced socioeconomic inequality and democratic governance are incompatible. This study does not provide a pathway towards remedying exclusionary political and economic systems. It does, however, provide impetus. It ultimately reminds us that the cause of democratization—the cause of creating a political system in which people genuinely share in collective governance—continues, even in local politics. This cause is, and must remain, both deeply human and humanizing.

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