

# Civic-Political Development in the Context of Economic Apartheid in Distressed Communities: A Theoretical Model

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## Abstract

As class status improves, engagement in civic and political activities increases. These activities are voting, volunteerism and vocal activism. However, depressed socio-economic status leaves many individuals disengaged from civic-political structures. Applying Attachment Theory, this article proposes there are five statuses of civic-political development to being an engaged citizen. These statuses correspond to fixed class categories and are 1) disengaged and detached; 2) insecure, responsive; 3) insecure, subscribing; 4) secure, subscribing; 5) secure and defining. The lower the quintile, the less engaged an individual is in the civic-political structures of society and attached to their community. Organizing communities is one way to engage individuals into the civic-political structures of their community in spite of their economic status.

## Keywords

Civic-Political Development, Distressed Communities, Community Attachment, Working Poor, Voting Practices, Social Trust

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## 1. Introduction

Class status and civic-political engagement in a democratic society are significantly correlated (Hays & Kogl, 2007; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999). As class status improves, engagement in civic and political activities increases. However, few studies have offered developmental perspectives to civic-political development (Flanagan, Levine, & Setters-ten, 2009; Oesterle et al., 2004; O'Leary, 2014; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999) and its relationship to fixed class status groups (Hays & Kogl, 2007;

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Schlozman et al., 1999). This article offers a developmental framework on civic-political engagement in the context of economic apartheid.

## 2. Literature Review

According to the work of Collier (2008) and Collins & Yeskel (2005), economic apartheid focuses on the decline of labor and civic institutions amid rising inequality, depressed real wages as well as a shrinking middle class structure to diminish political and economic safety nets and further divide citizens into class-based structures. Society in the United States sustains civic structures, cultural norms and values as well as social policies to further diminish political voice and collective efficacy (shared beliefs that the overarching political and social systems will adequately respond to one's needs) and increase class-based barriers to political responsiveness. Even in the 1990's, Richard B. Freeman (1996) noted that changes within workers' real earnings occurred concurrently with increased barriers to influencing the political process or actively participating in shared governance (pp. 117-118).

As such, economic apartheid, by omission or commission, is fostered by prevailing systems to perpetuate the organization of the U.S. political-economy at the peril of the most economically depressed persons. These assertions are rich when depressed class status intersects with race, ethnoreligious cultures, gender and age (Collier, 2008; Collins & Yeskel, 2005; Freeman, 1996; Marx, 1998). Therefore, looking at the attributes of civic-political development in the context of economic apartheid across the life span is essential.

The research of Jane Waldfogel (Smeeding & Waldfogel, 2010), in particular, warned that poverty, homelessness, unemployment and family discord would negatively and irrevocably change the economic landscape of our nation unless essential policies and programs were implemented to thwart the progression of poverty. Unfortunately, the recent recession has significantly impacted vulnerable families to the degree that a family classified as *working class* in today's society is likely to sustain that class status for two generations (Collins & Yeskel, 2005). This is regardless of the educational levels attained as higher levels of education are now concurrent with higher levels of personal debt and diminished real wages (Collins & Yeskel, 2005; Jennings, 2001; Lichter, Shanahan, & Gardner, 1999; Mechanic, 2002; Schlozman et al., 1999).

Among maturing individuals within the United States who reside in distressed communities plagued by poverty, crime and sustained estrangement from mainstream society, there is less voter turnout, fewer member associations to promote volunteerism and community attachment, and minimal civic-political activities to promote secure civic-political attachment behaviors and external/collective efficacy across the life span (Fogel, 2004; Kelly, 2013b; Kelly, 2006; Oesterle et al., 2004; Schlozman et al., 1999; Southwell & Pirch, 2003). Depressed class status, also identified as low socio-economic status, is a significant risk factor as it is influenced by the maturing individual's status in the labor market and driven by

economic and political forces (Collins & Yeskel, 2005; Freeman, 1996; Jaret, Reid, & Adelman, 2003; Mechanic, 2002). This downward trend becomes significantly disproportionate when low educational attainment (Flanagan et al., 2009; Kelly, 2002; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999) and diminished social capital (i.e. social network supports) (Browning, Feinberg, & Dietz, 2004; Hays & Kogl, 2007; Oesterle et al., 2004) are co-occurring factors along with minority status, gender and age (Martin-Combs & Bayne-Smith, 2000) as classism, racism and ageism often co-occur along parallel or intersecting paths. This makes the discussion of civic-political development in the context of economic apartheid equally profound.

Further, persons identified as socio-economically at-risk are more likely to be underdeveloped civic-politically and experience alienation, suffering, feelings of aloneness and estrangement from various aspects of society to diminish connectedness, hopefulness and one's self-discovery as an engaged citizen (Cope, Currit, Flaherty, & Brown, 2016; Finn & Checkoway, 1998; Fogel, 2004; Kelly, 2013a; Kelly, 2006; Schlozman et al., 1999). Maturing individuals who may be likely to experience disengagement, social exclusion or alienation due to class status, cultural background and family violence, may be less likely to 1) experience social connectedness and community attachment; 2) be involved in civic-political activities; or 3) be able to positively evaluate the worth of their civic-political engagement (i.e. quality of life satisfaction/subjective well-being).

Civic-political development is more than one's level of volunteerism and voting practices. Civic-political development incorporates a maturing individual's social, emotional and financial participation in civic-political life to positively influence the future of the community through shared governance (Hays & Kogl, 2007; Kelly, 2013a; Kelly, 2009; Oesterle et al., 2004; Weber & Frederico, 2007). Civic-political development is a combination of social connectedness and civic-political attachment behaviors across the life span and comprises stages of development toward a secure civic-political attachment status emerging from secure or insecure attachment relationships within the environment (Kelly, 2009). Further, civic-political development constitutes a range of civic-political attachment behaviors. These behaviors are voting, volunteerism, association membership or political and community activism, and serve to strengthen one's attachment to a community and its people (Crowe, 2010; Fogel, 2004; Hardina, 2003; Kelly, 2006; Pan, Littlefield, Valladolid, Tapping, & West, 2005) and relieve anxiety and stress in what some identify as a competitive economic jungle (Weber & Frederico, 2007).

It is within a competitive economic jungle that we develop our abilities to engage in society (Weber & Frederico, 2007). It is this competitive economic jungle that is demarcated by fixed class status lines promoting economic apartheid. There are various ways of examining civic-political development in the context of economic apartheid amid a competitive economic jungle.

W. Lance Bennett (2008) and Scott Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins, (2002) assert that civic identities, how we communicate with each other in so-

ciety, and how we engage politically and civically in society are as distinct as our personalities. Their respective research offers that civic-political patterns of behaviors in competitive, political and economic environments can be characterized into specific categories—civic activities, electoral activities, and political-vocal activities, often resulting in identities such as dual activists (Keeter et al., 2002). Bennett and Keeter's body of research offers that civic identity emerges from one's civic-political activities (Kelly, 2009). Oesterle et al. (2004) offer exploring volunteerism from a Life Course Perspective, and suggest that engagement in civic activities are influenced by the trajectory between adolescence and adulthood. According to Oesterle et al. (2004), human, social and cultural capital are enhanced by civic engagement across the life span. However, none of the studies look at the development of civic identities or engagement in the context of turbulent and competitive economic environments.

The extensive work of Flanagan et al. (2009) assert that civic and political participation and feelings of responsibility for one's own environment are based on the following factors 1) socio-economic status; 2) educational attainment and intellectual competency; 3) social connectedness and access to information and a social network; 4) civic-political socialization from early childhood within a cultural context; and, 5) one's inclusion in the labor force and potential for vocational advancement. Their literature further asserts that when people are consistently involved in meaningful civic-political activities to change their environment, their life satisfaction increases. According to Flanagan's overall work, in particular, through this socialization, clear mechanisms develop that promote and sustain civic-political engagement across social and economic groups and strengthen social ties among U.S. citizens and prospective citizens (Kelly, 2013a; Kelly, 2009). Thus, participation in civic-political activities and relationships aids a maturing individual's commitment to the civic society and impacts quality of life satisfaction or subjective well-being. However, it does not speak to economic barriers.

One perspective often referred to in the work of Flanagan et al. (2009), Bennett (2008), Keeter et al. (2002) and Kelly (2006, 2009) explores the connection between civic-political engagement and economic barriers, especially when looking at issues of minority status, gender and other critical phenotypes. This is the perspective of sociopolitical development. According to the work of Watts, Griffith & Abdul-Adil (1999) and Diemer & Hsieh (2008), sociopolitical development emerges from the work of Paulo Freire (1973) and his work on critical consciousness. Sociopolitical development for these scholars is a five-stage model applying Liberation Psychology that includes awareness of resources and social order, strategies to enhance sense of self, concerns about inequality, desires to learn about social change, and social action behaviors within and across an oppressive political-economic system (Watts et al., 1999). While sociopolitical development may explain motivating behaviors to reducing inequities amid economic barriers to being engaged in society and one's consciousness of sociopolitical inequities, sociopolitical development does not fully explain the fluid

nature of *being engaged* in a competitive economic jungle beyond one's level of consciousness. Individuals' civic-political voices and governing bodies' responsiveness to these individuals and their responsiveness to each other across civic and political groups requires further exploration and elucidation as economic apartheid is the competitive economic jungle in which people develop and survive across the life span.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Guided by Attachment Theory, the proposed model asserts that secure civic-political development is essential for a maturing individual's survival in society. In applying Attachment Theory, civic-political behaviors are *fixed action patterns* of social connectedness that facilitate attachment and relationship to others in society. Attachment theory emerges from the field of ethology and assumes that human behavior—like all animals—is species-specific, with a goal to attach to another member of the species for survival and protection (Bowlby, 1982; Fonagy, 1997; Lewis, Feiring, & Rosenthal, 2000; Waters, Weinfield, & Hamilton, 2000). With attachment theory, as opposed to Liberation Psychology, the maturing child or adult instinctively attaches to another individual, group or organization (i.e. attachment figures) perceived as better able to cope with the world and who can ensure the maturing individual's survival in society (Fonagy, 1997; Perrier, Boucher, Etchegary, Sadana, & Molnar, 2010; Waters et al., 2000) no matter the uncertainty of the political-economic environment (Hewitt, 2008; Weber & Frederico, 2007).

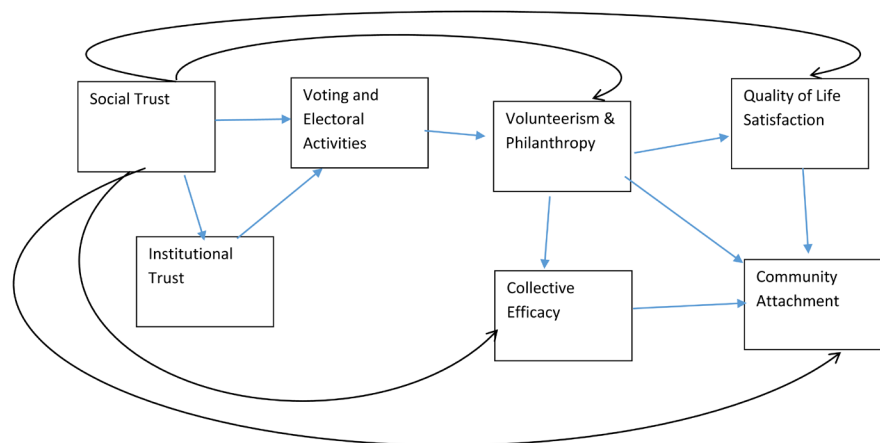
Attachment behaviors of a civic-political nature (i.e. voting, scouting, mentoring youth or families, or charity) seek to maintain proximity to a desired figure (individual, group or organization) to satisfy the maturing child or adult's need for physical and emotional security in an unpredictable society (Bowlby, 1982; Lewis et al., 2000; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Attachment is a persistent attribute. It is unaffected by the situation or moment, and maturing individuals develop adaptive internal working models (i.e. cognitive strategies) to inform their relationships with other individuals, groups or organizations through the life span (Bowlby, 1982; Fonagy, 1997; Lewis et al., 2000; Weber & Frederico, 2007). These adaptive internal working models are mental representations of the world and its civic-political contexts that are particularly salient for the individual. These models can be reconstructed over time as new information about their developing social status in the world is assimilated into the pre-existing working models (Bowlby, 1982; Fonagy, 1997; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). When the attachment relationships change, either facilitating attachment to others or hindering it, the maturing individual's internal working models restructure to adapt to these changes (Bowlby, 1982; Perrier et al., 2010; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). This includes persons identified at at-risk.

Healthy civic-political development enhances social connectedness to affect subjective well-being or quality of life satisfaction. Maladaptive perceptions and behaviors are more likely to develop and strengthen as risks increase, further

distancing the individual or group from the civic-political activities within a specific society. Thus, being civically and politically attached to a protective figure or figures aids a maturing individual's development in a competitive economic jungle, especially where fixed class status lines apply (i.e. economic apartheid).

While adaptive civic-political perceptions and behaviors help individuals make optimal daily life decisions to securely attach to other relationships in society (Hays & Kogl, 2007; Lewis et al., 2000; Perrier et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2000; Weber & Frederico, 2007), maladaptive civic-political perceptions and behaviors cause deficits in civic-political attachment relationships and perceptions of self that can result in disengagement from social systems if not disengaging or violent behaviors (Fonagy, 1997; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Maladaptive civic-political attachment relationships (e.g. criminal relationships and activities; high school dropout and delinquent relationships; and familial violence and predatory relationships) emerge within a context of economic apartheid, and are fluid relationships and exist across the life span. These adaptive and maladaptive civic-political attachments, which influence subjective well-being or quality of life satisfaction, are influenced by fixed action patterns.

Fixed action patterns of civic-political connectedness are critical elements to development (Figure 1). *Social trust* is significant because it is a marker of one's connections with individuals within and across diverse groups, and is the belief that most people can be trusted in society (Kelly, 2009; Kwak, Shah, & Holbert, 2004). *Voting and electoral activities*, such as political volunteering, contributing to a political campaign, or recruiting members to join political parties, are adaptive and cognitive realities that one can affect change in governance through voting or other electoral activities (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Keeter et al., 2002; Southwell & Pirsch, 2003). It is significant because of its direct relationship to social trust and institutional trust. *Institutional trust* is trust in government or social institutions, their assigns or designees (Kelly, 2013a; Southwell & Pirsch, 2003), and is the belief that governing, social, political and economic systems can be trusted more often than not to respond to the needs of the individuals, their



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model. Fixed action patterns of civic political connectedness.

groups and communities. With institutional trust, people are more likely to see themselves as change agents. *Volunteerism and philanthropy* comprise participation in charitable activities, memberships in associations, and leadership roles within the community to solve community problems or change community outcomes through direct efforts as an individual or through a group (Karger, Iyiani, & Shannon, 2007; Keeter et al., 2002; Kelly, 2006; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004). This fosters collective efficacy. *Collective efficacy* speaks to shared identities, interests or beliefs that the overarching political and social systems will adequately and respectfully respond to the groups' needs and concerns (Browning et al., 2004).

*Quality of life satisfaction* is subjective well-being and is the subjective evaluation of one's life and its level of quality as affected by concrete and fluid socio-economic factors that emerge within one's life (Frisch, 1994; Harju & Bolen, 1998; Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004; Kelly, 2009; Lauder, Morgen & White, 2006). Although much has been explored about quality of life satisfaction, including its relationship to minority status (Martin-Combs & Bayne-Smith, 2000; Kelly, 2013b), substance abusers (De Maeyer, Vanderplassen, & Brockaert, 2009; Lauder et al., 2006), youth development (Park, 2004; Torney-Purta, Amadeo, & Richardson, 2003), and even college students (Haarju & Bolen, 1998), more investigations are required to better understand the concrete relationships between class status and quality of life satisfaction. This includes the fixed action patterns of social connectedness that enhance this evaluation of one's civic-political self-in-environment (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Huebner et al., 2004; Kelly, 2006). Finally, *community attachment* is an individual's attachment to a geographic community or specific social group (Crowe, 2010; Flanagan et al., 2009; Hardina, 2003; Kelly, 2006). It is significantly related to subjective well-being/quality of life satisfaction and the socio-economic factors relating to civic-political connectedness (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Finn & Checkoway, 1998; Hardina, 2003; Kelly, 2006; Perrier et al., 2010). Even if one is working class, if they live in a cohesive community they are more likely to be attached to their community and evaluate their social and physical environment positively (Crowe, 2010).

The theoretical model shows the connections between the fixed action patterns. Even in distressed communities, social trust is critical. It impacts institutional trust, voting, volunteerism, collective efficacy, community attachment and quality of life satisfaction. This is critical as it relates to the five attachment statuses of civic-political development.

#### **4. Conceptual Framework**

Emerging from the research of Bennett (2008), Keeter et al. (2002); Flanagan et al. (2009), Watts, Griffiths & Abdul-Adil (1999) and Diemer & Hsieh (2008), the conceptual framework identified as *Attachment Statuses of Civic-Political Development* suggests there are five civic-political attachment statuses across socio-economic levels that foster fixed action patterns of civic-political develop-

ment during economic periods. These civic-political attachment statuses parallel the *Stages of Sociopolitical Development* (Watts et al., 1999; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Araujo Dawson & Kelly, 2010) and incorporate the research on civic identities (Bennett, 2008; Keeter et al., 2002). However, it is embedded in attachment literature and themes (Fonagy, 1997; Hays & Kogl, 2007; Lewis, Feiring & Rosenthal, 2000; Perrier et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2000; Weber & Frederico, 2007) (Table 1—Comparison Between Developmental Models).

There are five attachment statuses of civic-political development. The first status corresponds with the lowest economic quintile and is identified as disengaged and detached. What is significant about this status is that the individual exhibits disoriented attachment to civic-political structures. This means the individual is less likely to vote or volunteer their skills to a charitable endeavor. Research shows that individuals in the lowest quintile do not vote readily or volunteer their skills (Avery, 2015; Birch & Lodge, 2015). They lack social capital. This dynamic leaves them detached from civic-political theater and vulnerable to powerlessness. This is especially the case with poor, African American individuals who are disenfranchised and have very little attachment to the community (Kelly, 2013b). They also exhibit minimal social and institutional trust.

The second status is insecure, responsive attachment and corresponds to the lowest to moderate quintiles. In this status, the individual has insecure attachment to civic-political structures, but is irregularly responsive to civic-political influences with some dependency. This means that the individual votes irregularly, may volunteer in the community in a less than even manner, and may require prompting to engage in civic-political activities with some incentives

**Table 1.** Attachment statuses of civic-political development.

Status	<i>Attachment Statuses</i>	Range of Socio-Economic Status (lowest to highest quintile)
<b>Disengaged and Detached</b>		
1	Disoriented attachment to civic-political structures with low outcomes on fixed action patterns	Lowest quintile
<b>Insecure, Responsive Attachment</b>		
2	Insecure attachment to civic-political structures, but responsive (regularly or irregularly) to civic-political influences with some dependency	Lowest to moderate quintiles
<b>Insecure, Subscribing Attachment</b>		
3	Insecure attachment to civic-political structures but subscribing (more likely regularly) to civic-political influences	Moderate quintile
<b>Secure, Subscribing Attachment</b>		
4	Secure attachment to civic political structures, and subscribing regularly to civic-political influences	Moderate to high quintiles
<b>Secure and Defining Attachment</b>		
5	Secure attachment to civic political influences, and defining civic political influences in the lives of self and others	High moderate to high quintiles



(Avery, 2015; Miles, 2015). Individuals in this status may live in communities that are economically dependent on the environment (Birch & Lodge, 2015) and are structurally plagued with crime and lack affordable housing (Kelly, 2013a). Social trust may also be minimal.

The third status is insecure, subscribing attachment and corresponds to the moderate quintile. In this status, the individual continues to have an insecure attachment to civic-political structures, but subscribes regularly to civic-political influences. This means the individual has less than secure attachment to their community but participates in civic-political activities more regularly than previous stages. These individuals are more likely to vote in presidential and local elections, and volunteer in the community more regularly (Kelly, 2013b; Miles, 2015) with moderate social trust. In addition, the engagement these individuals may experience require prompting from external influences (i.e. media, political circulars, and personal contact) (Kelly, 2013a).

The fourth status is the secure, subscribing attachment and corresponds to moderate to high quintiles. Individuals in this status are securely attached to civic-political structures, and subscribe regularly to civic-political influences. These individuals are likely to vote in federal, state and local elections and are likely to volunteer their time within the community (Kelly, 2013a). In addition, these individuals see themselves as engaged members of the community and have an attachment to their community (Kelly, 2013b). Through their religious and community participation, they view themselves as citizens with all the privileges of citizenship. This speaks to their social trust as high.

The final status is the secure and defining attachment status that corresponds to the high moderate to high quintiles. These individuals exhibit a secure attachment to civic-political influences in their own lives and the lives of others. These individuals readily vote and participate in political volunteering. In addition, these individuals contribute to the community through volunteerism and charitable giving (Kelly, 2013a; Kelly, 2013b). Further, these individuals are attached to their varied communities (religious, social and geographic) and view themselves as agents of change. They exhibit high social trust and moderate to high institutional trust.

These five statuses help us understand the dynamic of civic-political engagement in the competitive economic jungle. Individuals from lower socio-economic quintiles are not as likely to be engaged in the civic-political structures of their communities. The impetus of change comes from outside the community rather than from within. The individuals performing the change are individuals from higher quintiles who are secure in their attachment and their citizenship. These are the individuals who are engaged and responsive to the needs of their community and distressed communities.

## 5. Conclusions

In a competitive economic jungle, people determine the level of engagement they will have with their community. Civic-political engagement is a class issue.

The higher an individual's income, the more likely they will be involved in the civic-political structures of the community. The lower the income, the more likely the individual will be insecurely attached and may be disengaged from the community. Essential to this theory is organizing members of distressed communities to affect positive change.

When individuals involve themselves in the improvement of their communities, they feel a sense of ownership of the community and increase their attachment to the community (Kelly, 2013b). They are more likely to vote and involve themselves in volunteerism regardless of their socio-economic status. Organizing the community is the optimal way to engage people in the civic-political structures of their lives. This organizing is key to dismantling the effects of economic apartheid in distressed communities.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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