“Communities of Interest” and City Council Districting in New York, 2012-2013

John Mollenkopf with Joseph Pereira and Steven Romalewski

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Introduction

As it does each decade, a public conversation has recently welled up about the Constitutionally-required redrawing of federal, state, and city legislative boundaries. In New York City, the debate is focusing on the new boundaries that the New York City Districting Commission has proposed for the city’s 51-member City Council. A key term of interest in this debate is the concept of “communities of interest” and how best to apply it. The purpose of this report is i) to provide a brief history of how social scientists have thought about urban communities and their relevance to Council redistricting, ii) to look at developments related to the term in the theory and practice of political representation (including voting rights litigation and advocacy and practices by other jurisdictions) concerning how to define and apply the term in redistricting the New York City council, and iii) to utilize existing data to illustrate some different ways to empirically define the concept in New York City – and to highlight how data limitations constrain that process.

I. Perspectives from Social Science

Community – and the closely related term neighborhood – have long been central concepts in urban sociology and the social sciences more generally. Though one recent on-line guide to sociology noted that “the term [community] is one of the most elusive and vague in sociology and is by now largely without specific meaning” (www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Community.php), it actually does have a clear lineage. Writing in 1887 as the industrial revolution transformed Germany from an agrarian to a modern society, Ferdinand Tönnies distinguished gemeinschaft (usually translated as ‘community’) from gesellschaft (‘society’ but also ‘company’ or ‘association’). He argued that the forces of urbanization and industrialization were transforming countries of the West from ‘community’ to ‘society’ by dissolving the strong, place-bound kinship ties of village life, reinforced by the parish, school, and magistrate, and creating the looser, more market-driven or purposive relationships characteristic of modern urban economies. (A decade and a half later, Georg Simmel argued in Metropolis and Mental Life that while such changes liberated individuals from old primordial ties,
this could also lead to a certain degree of alienation or anomie.) As the 20th century proceeded and this process made itself felt in full force, sociologists and public intellectuals began to worry about the rise of “mass society” and the ability of charismatic leaders and mass communications. Writing in 1927 in *The Public and Its Problems*, for example, the great American intellectual John Dewey warned that “The local face-to-face community has been invaded by forces so vast, so remote in initiation, so far-reaching in scope and so complexly indirect in operation that they are from the standpoint of the members of local social units, unknown.”

This idea that modern urban settings would undermine traditional communal relationships and create new forms of association was taken up and refined by members of the “Chicago School” of urban sociology, led by Robert Park, who had studied with Simmel in Berlin. Drawing on new developments in anthropology and biology, they introduced a “human ecology” perspective in which the growing density, complexity, and heterogeneity of cities not only undermined traditional communities, but led to the creation of new ones, competing with each other for space, place, and resources. For them, community became a much more dynamic concept: communities would grow, evolve, and sometimes fade away.

The rise of immigrant and other communities in Chicago provided the laboratory for many important “community studies.” While the work of Park, Burgess, and their colleagues and accomplished students (such as Wirth, Frazier, and Znaniecki) drew criticism during the rise of the “new urban sociology” in the late 1960s and early 1970s for its inattention to structures of power and inequality (perhaps most famously by Manuel Castells) and the formalism of their “concentric rings” formulation, the Chicago school produced highly influential work on immigrant communities, the Jewish ghetto, the emerging managerial elite, the rise of the black metropolis, crime and juvenile delinquency, and how they all interacted. Their work also informed the work of urban activists, such as Jane Addams, foreshadowing later efforts at community organizing by Saul Alinsky – and even the young Barack Obama.

The Chicago School’s thinking also influenced a contemporary generation of sociologists and political scientists interested in the evolution of social networks and social capital and how they shaped political mobilization in urban settings, such as Robert Sampson, Claude Fischer, Robert Putnam, and Sidney Verba. For these contemporary scholars, communities were not so much given, as formations to be uncovered empirically by investigating the patterns of ties or relationships among individuals and the institutions, organizations, and social movements that might catalyze and shape their formation.

While earlier generations of social scientists had tended to equate communities with specific places, this new approach allowed for what Melvin Webber called “community without propinquity” (Webber 1963). That is to say, people could share bonds and form networks with each other without being concentrated in specific places. Certainly, many dramatic changes in communication and transportation technologies, especially the internet and smart phones, have made this far more possible over time, although community formation still seems to require some degree of actual personal interaction. These new forms of community could overlap with and cross-cut the older, more place-bound communities (adding “bridging” ties across communities to the “bonding” ties within them in the nomenclature of Robert Putnam).
Still, as Robert Sampson’s work on Chicago demonstrates (Sampson 2012), deep structures of place-based organizations and identifications persist as a kind of superstructure on top of the myriad changes in the populations making up neighborhoods and the kinds of ties they have with each other. The two levels are in a dynamic tension with each other, each being shaped by changes at the other level, but with perhaps surprising degrees of historical tenacity. (One example in New York City might be the relationship between social service agencies originally founded in the last century to serve central and East European Jewish immigrants and the more recently arrived Russian-speaking Jewish population leaving various parts of the former Soviet Union.) The evolving flows of immigrant groups into cities, in particular, drive the continual rise and evolution of new communities, providing evidence for the continued relevance of the Chicago School’s ideas.

Another major organizing force within urban ecologies of place are the spatial clustering of some key types of businesses in which a given metropolitan area specializes and the ethnic division of labor associated within these economic specializations. New York City, for example, specializes in the provision of health services through hospitals, and West Indians, African Americans, and to a lesser extent Latinos make up disproportionate shares of the nurses, orderlies, and other service staff. Many of them live in the same neighborhoods and may belong to the same or related labor organizations. They may not live directly adjacent to their places of work, and different occupational levels may concentrate in different places, but workers of similar occupations in similar industries do tend to concentrate. Despite the growing spatial separation between work and home that has arisen over the past century or more, shared places of work and shared work-related organizations or affinities help to form spatial communities made up of adults who do similar kinds of jobs.

Summing up – and necessarily over generalizing – social scientists have said that communities in urban settings require certain basic traits: first, a community is a group of people who subjectively feel a commonality with each other and belonging to a group, who interact with one another, and who share interests and values. Second, they understand the boundary between who belongs to the community, who is outside it, and what it takes to cross the boundary and become an insider. While this boundary need not be physical or visible, it often can be. Third, some set of associations, institutions, organizations, or governmental authorities often reinforce, solidify, and embed the sense of membership in or belonging to a community (or being outside it), such as church membership, organizational affiliation, or citizenship in a political jurisdiction. Fourth, communities can be multiple and overlapping; while varying from those which encompass many dimensions of life and are relatively closed (for example an ultra-orthodox religious group whose members cluster around a place of worship) to more partial communities focused on one or a few dimensions of social life, it is however important that membership in the community help to constitute a sense of individual identity and well-being.

A corollary to these four defining characteristics of urban communities is that the social networks of individuals who live within them may both be dense (bonding or strong ties within the community) and also cut across community boundaries (bridging or weak ties). Similarly, any given individual’s social networks may include different kinds of links to different communities, some more bounded and inclusive than others. Indeed, as Blokland (2003) and Van Eijk (2010) show for poor multi-ethnic neighborhoods of Rotterdam, different kinds of bonds or other ties can co-exist in a complex mix, with some having little to do with the others. This
diversity and multiplicity of communities typical of increasingly heterogeneous cities like New York is part of what makes it hard to identify and measure them. Indeed, studies that have asked sizeable numbers of neighborhood residents to draw their own neighborhood boundaries have found little consensus about exactly where they are – as well as little coincidence with officially-defined boundaries (Colton, Korbin, Chan, and Chu 2001; Wong, Bowers, Williams, and Drake 2012; Gaumer 2012).

The concept of *neighborhood* is less complicated. It is generally taken to mean a group of people living close to one another within an urban setting, sharing some central features – such as a school, perhaps a post office, or a commercial district – within a more or less clear physical boundary (although, as noted, residents may not agree on what that is). It is a spatial unit of every-day residential life (Galster 2001). While the residents of a neighborhood may have similar socio-economic or cultural characteristics, neighborhoods are often quite diverse and do not come along with the assumption that the residents make up or a building block within a community, in the sense that they interact with each other in significant ways. Neighborhood features can provide the foundation for community-building, but do not guarantee it. Neighbors can be, and often are, strangers to one another, even when they share the same spaces.

At the same time, the neighborhood is the basic unit of residential choice. Each neighborhood has a place in a metropolitan hierarchy of neighborhoods (ranged according to socio-economic characteristics, amenities, relationship to places of employment, and so on). This hierarchy evolves over time and neighborhoods may shift their relative positions, depending both on the socio-economic trajectories of residents who stay as well as the balance of people moving in and out. As almost half of all New York City residents move in any five-year period, it is almost inevitable that the specific composition of any given neighborhood will change a lot. Just as demographers distinguish between stocks and flows of larger populations, neighborhood characteristics are driven both by what is happening to the people who live there at any given point in time and any differences between those who are moving out and those who are moving in. To maintain its character (and relative position in the metropolitan hierarchy), a neighborhood must attract new residents who are more or less on a par with present residents and those who are aging out or moving away. Neighborhoods that fail this challenge may age and decline; if they become highly attractive to new kinds of people, they will gradually supplant the old residents and change the character of the neighborhood (Galster 2001; Salvo et al 2008; van Ham et al 2013).

II. Perspectives from Political Representation, Voting Rights Law, and Practice

At some basic level, the whole point of electing legislators by districts (rather than at-large) is to give political representation to subsets of people who are deemed to constitute communities. As a 1985 study aimed at state government redistricting efforts noted, “homogenous districts facilitate effective representation because community sentiments are more clearly defined and consistent policy positions are more likely. Intergroup conflict is tempered” (Boles and Dean 1985:102). Having districts encompass a group of people deemed to have common interests is thus foundational in the theory of political representation – with the debate mainly revolving around how representatives should relate to their constituencies, either as delegates – directly carrying out the wishes of constituents – or trustees – exercising their judgments about what is best for their constituents (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-representation/).
Practically from the outset, “keeping communities together” has therefore been a key goal in the practice of redistricting, although as the publication of the famous “Gerry-Mander” cartoon in the Boston Gazette in 1812 also suggests, “keeping communities apart” or “putting distant but similar communities together” have also long been important motives for those crafting districting plans. Independent of the Voting Rights Act and Supreme Court litigation, the criterion found its way into the laws of many states and localities, including the sections of the New York City Charter governing the redistricting process. In 2008, the Brennan Center, a legal advocacy organization affiliated with the New York University Law School, identified constitutional or legislative provisions regarding “community of interest” in eighteen states (www.brennancenter.org/page/-/commentary/Communities%20of%20Interest.pdf), many of which predated the concept’s rise to salience in Supreme Court litigation.

The relevant New York City Charter provision, adopted in 1989, (Chapter 2-A, Section 52), lists seven criteria, of which the first two, population size and fair minority representation, are rooted in prior Constitutional litigation. The third states that districts should be drawn to “keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other” (Chapter 2-A, Section 52, Subsection C). However, the vast majority of references to “community” in the New York City Charter are to community boards or community districts, whose powers are outlined in Chapters 68 and 70. The current community districts were established in 1975, and although the Charter revisions adopted in 1989 provide for redistricting them and mandates a report on this topic every ten years, such reports have not been forthcoming and no redistricting of the Community Districts has taken place. They therefore constitute administrative units for the purpose of gathering input about governmental decisions and policies, not units of representation.

The term “community of interest” took on a particular and different political loading in the context of constitutional litigation about the meaning of the U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965. (As Districting Commission consultant J. Gerald Hebert has ably summarized the voluminous literature on this subject for Commission members and staff, we do not recapitulate it here.) Regardless of the districting criteria set forth in state and local legislation, for example the relevant provision of the New York City Charter, the Constitution and Federal law take precedence. As set forth in the Voting Rights Act, interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court and implemented by the Voting Rights Section of the U.S. Department of Justice, the VRA requires local jurisdictions to avoid redistricting practices that might undermine the ability of protected minority groups (initially blacks, but now also including certain language minority groups such as Latinos and Asian groups) to elect candidates of their choosing. In general, this has meant that, under the right circumstances, local jurisdictions must draw districts that will enable them to do so. For example, they may not “crack” minority communities into many different districts where they cannot exert political influence, nor should they “pack” or “stack” all minority voters into one district when they might be able to influence several. However, this does not mean that local jurisdictions must draw majority-minority districts wherever it is conceivably possible.

The Supreme Court has provided complicated guidance about this matter. According to the most fundamental case in this domain, *Thornberg v. Gingles* (478 U.S. 30 1986), localities must create a district in which minorities have a significant chance of electing the candidate of their choice when they are sufficiently numerous to elect someone and vote sufficiently cohesively for
their candidates of choice. (The exact numerical thresholds to be met depend in part on whether white voters engage in racially polarized voting against the candidates preferred by members of protected minority groups.) Initially, minority voting rights advocates took it as a challenge to create districting plans that squeezed out every last possible majority-minority district even if that required combining geographically quite separate minority concentration settlements into one district.

From the early 1990s onward, however, the U.S. Supreme Court began to show much more skepticism about districting schemes that combined populations only on the basis of a shared ascriptive racial characteristic, not any actual “community of interest.” In *Shaw v. Reno* (509 U.S. 630 (1993)), the court found that such districting schemes were subject to “strict scrutiny.” Subsequent Supreme Court decisions regarding districting schemes in North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and a number of other states found their schemes unconstitutional on this basis (*Shaw v. Hunt* 116 U.S. 1895 (1996), *Miller v. Johnson* 515 U.S. 2475 (1995), *Bush v. Vera* 116 U.S. 1941 (1996)). Relying on these rulings, a federal court in New York found in *Diaz v. Silver* (978 F. Supp. 96 E.D.N.Y. (1997)) that a Latino district covering Queens, part of Manhattan, and Brooklyn should be redrawn because race had been used to the exclusion of traditional voting criteria (see also Cartagena 2008:532).

Such scrutiny may be satisfied, however, by demonstrating that geographically distant but demographically similar population groups do in fact interact in various ways, for example by traveling from one part to the other, participating in the same institutions, sharing the same publications or information sources. *Diaz v. Silver* upheld the inclusion of lower Manhattan’s traditional Chinatown in the same district as the emerging one in Brooklyn on grounds of a community of interest (as defined by language, media consumption, and travel patterns). In this fashion, the law of the land required local redistricting authorities to show due diligence that plans were motivated not just by racial categories, but by the existence of actual “communities of interest” in different parts of majority-minority districts. In drawing majority-minority districts that cobbled together geographically separated populations, districting authorities must demonstrate “due diligence” in investigating what interests they actually share. Neither the Supreme Court nor other Federal courts have, however, given clear guidance about exactly how to measure the extent or degree of such interest-communities.

In practice, redistricting commissions, voting rights activists, and scholars have provided a number of alternative ways to address this challenge. Several state redistricting commissions, notably the Citizens Redistricting Commission in California, encouraged localities to submit ideas about why places shared a community of interest. The proposition creating this new procedure defined community of interest (Article 21, section 2(d)4, California Constitution) as:

a contiguous population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation.

Examples of such shared interests are those common to an urban area, a rural area, an industrial area, or an agricultural area, and those common to areas in which the people share similar living standards, use the same transportation facilities, have similar work opportunities, or have access to the same media of communication relevant to the election process.
The proposition enacting this new section of the California constitution expressly stated that “communities of interest” could not be based on “relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates,” although the Supreme Court has determined such factors to be legitimate traditional districting criteria.

In the course of its work, the CRCC solicited submissions on this topic, defining community of interest as “a geographically connected population that shares common social and economic interests” defined in consonance with the constitutional provision above, and asked that citizens give their input directly to the Commission or submit it through a coalition of twelve nonprofit organizations funded by the James Irvine Foundation (www.redistrictingca.org). One of these organizations developed a guide for submitting COI testimony encouraging localities to consider many factors, including not only how to delineate and name the community, but also its socio-economic characteristics, lifestyle choices (this was California, after all), patterns of change, and assets (www.redistrictingca.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Greenlining-Identifying-Communities-of-Interest-2pg.pdf). Another coalition organization suggested a different set of criteria, including important places, traditions that bring residents together, and major stake holders.

Several California cities distributed briefs providing additional directions about how to define and present specific areas as “communities of interest,” including San Francisco (www.sfgov2.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=722, emphasizing common bonds and why splitting a community would frustrate efforts to get governmental support) and Sacramento (www.cityofsacramento.org/redistricting/documents/RedistrictingPrimer4-CommunitiesofInterest.pdf, giving a long list of criteria which was not “all-inclusive and may inadvertently omit some very valid communities of interest”, p. 3). None of the organizations funded by the Irvine Foundation appears to have issued a report summarizing or synthesizing submissions, nor did the CCRC, and a sampling of public comments at CCRC public hearings turned up one such effort: Equality California, a gay rights organization, submitted a statement and accompanying maps on keeping areas with many LGBT individuals together. Many other state redistricting efforts asked for similar kinds of information, but none seems to have compiled the results.

Several voting rights advocacy groups have also offered guidance on this topic as well, notably the Brennan Center (Levitt 2010). How to bring communities into the process of defining districts was a core motive for the guide (Levitt 2010:forward):

For communities of all kinds to be fairly represented in our government, the redistricting process needs to recognize and be accountable to real communities. Communities can take on many different forms and can be defined, both by description and boundary, in myriad ways. But every community has some shared interest – and it should be the members of that community who decide what that is, not legislators in a back room cherry picking their constituents, trolling for donors or carving out challengers.

Yet this turns out in practice to be harder to do than to say: “defining particular communities of interest can be notoriously fuzzy, because shared interests may be either vague or specific, and because people both move locations and change their interests over time” (Levitt 2010:56). The Brennan Center guide offers a nuanced exploration about how different districting criteria (such
as compactness, recognizing existing political boundaries, or identifying communities of interest) can conflict with each other. The Brennan Center guide stresses the importance of engaging neighborhood residents in the process of delineating the communities to be represented in lieu of establishing clear, *a priori* criteria for using official or systematically collected administrative data (such as Census data or mass transit ridership) to define those communities.

The situation of Asian communities is particularly instructive in this respect. Far more than other “protected groups,” like African Americans or Hispanics, Asian populations can be highly heterogeneous. The U.S. Census, following the official OMB definition of racial categories, uses the term “Asian” to include any “person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam” (U.S. Census Bureau 2010:2). In short, the category includes people who do not share language or culture and whose ancestors may hail from countries separated by many thousands of miles and have little or nothing in common. Indeed, countries like Korea and China were invaded by a neighbor, Japan, and India and Pakistan have long been on the verge of war, creating lingering and deep animosities. Populations from the different Asian racial categories also tend to live in different places from each other in New York City and the other metropolitan areas where they have clustered; they also tend to live at much lower levels of geographic concentration than is generally true of blacks or Hispanics. Complicating matters, Asian residential patterns often overlap with those of Hispanics. (Hispanics also come from a wide variety of national origins with varying histories and cultures [Falcon 2012], but at least share an ancestral language.)

The task of showing communities of interest among Asian populations is thus inherently more challenging than for other communities brought together by common national origins (Chen and Lee 2012).

Responding to this challenge, voting rights advocates have laid out a series of practical steps for demonstrating commonalities. Leading up to the round of redistricting after the 2000 Census, the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program of New York University commissioned Queens College Urban Studies Professor Tarry Hum (2002) to summarize a series of discussions they organized on how to define Asian (and Latino) communities of interest in New York City. While using recent 2000 Census statistics as a jumping-off point for identifying Asian population concentrations, she also examined case studies of community organization around common issues, conducted community surveys, and interviewed community leaders about what defined them. While participants in the discussion had many points of view about how to define community, the consensus seemed to be that groups from quite different national and racial origins (e.g., Chinese and Latino groups in Sunset Park, Brooklyn) could indeed share a “community of interest” framed around their dealing with similar issues of neighborhood quality of life, access to economic opportunity, and need for public services (see also Hum 2010). (For a discussion of similar issues from a Latino perspective, see Falcon 2012.)

Working in Los Angeles under the direction of Professor Paul Ong, the University of California Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Multi-campus Research Program and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center published four pamphlets for the “Asian Americans Redistricting Project” in 2009 that addressed similar issues, with a particular emphasis on preparing for the post-2010 citizens redistricting effort in California. This project used LA’s “Koreatown” as an example of a community that had suffered from been divided among city, county, and state
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legislative districts and advocated the use of “demographic and social science research methods to identify and articulate communities that share common interests, views, characteristics, and risks” (Ojeda-Kimbrough, Lee, and Shek 2009:1). Drawing on Diaz v. Silver, it advocated using Census and locally-collected data to show commonalities of language, employment, housing tenure, mass transit use, and engagement with social service agencies to identify Asian communities of interest, but also highlighting how local stakeholder surveys and organizational analysis could supplement federally-collected data. (The project also issued useful documents on how to conduct stakeholder surveys, access Census data, and compile voting statistics.)

Finally, the New York City Districting Commissions active after the 1990 and 2000 Censuses and the New York City Department of City Planning both made thorough efforts to understand and define communities of interest in the city. The first Districting Commission undertook a careful review of all the studies that had historically profiled neighborhoods in New York City, concluding in part that it was much easier to identify the centers of communities (marked by such institutions as schools, post offices, churches, and commercial districts) than to delineate their boundaries. The post-2000 Districting Commission worked with the Center for Urban Research at the Graduate Center of the City University to undertake an extensive cluster and factor analysis of Census data (based on other factors than race) to understand the statistical patterns that underlay the concentrations of different kinds of population groups across the city. A key finding of this work was that many characteristics are strongly associated with a continuum of poverty through affluence, and that residential concentrations in New York—along with race and ethnicity, family form, and housing tenure—varied along this dimension.

A report authored by the chief of the Population Division of the New York City Department of City Planning and colleagues (Bahchieva, Livak, Lobo, and Salvo 2008) also used cluster analysis (that is, the grouping together of tracts with similar characteristics) to develop a typology of New York City neighborhoods in terms both of the clustering evident in 1990 and patterns of change between 1990 and 2000. This analysis drew not only on Census data, but administrative data on land and unit prices drawn from the assessor’s records. This produced an 11-fold classification that sorted neighborhoods by housing type (e.g., public housing), race and class (e.g., working class Hispanics), family form (e.g., whites in nonfamily households), and age (e.g., elderly). It then analyzed transitions across the decade. Many neighborhood types were stable, of course, but a significant number shifted from one type to another, driven mainly by the entry of immigrant groups into neighborhoods previously dominated by the native born, the aging of white neighborhoods, and racial succession in white neighborhoods on the city’s periphery. Analysis of such dynamics clearly adds an important perspective on defining communities of interest: the patterning of New York City’s neighborhoods is always in the process of change.

III. Empirical Approaches to Defining Communities of Interest in New York City in 2013

Three basic lessons can be drawn from the foregoing discussion. First, it is clear that multiple, conflicting, and subjective definitions of any specific community in New York City as well as the overall mosaic of communities will coexist at any given point in time. Moreover, there is no “objective” way to adjudicate among these competing conceptions. This stems partly from the fact that different kinds of communities do in reality overlap with each other; partly from the fact
that we have no systematic measurements of key dimensions of community (shared sense of belonging, social interactions and networks, community organizations); and partly from the fact that communities are always undergoing change. Second, the corollary is that any official designation or recognition of communities of interest is a value judgment made among alternative possible definitions for community – it is, in other words, a perhaps somewhat arbitrary selection of what should count and what does not. Given that such choices are inherently political, empowering a wide range of neighborhood residents to articulate what they think defines their communities and taking their views into account during the districting process is a valuable way to solve the subjectivity problem. In other words, process may count as much as substance.

Finally, however, we are not completely bereft of systematic data on the question of community. It may be unfortunate that the Census does not collect small area data on social ties, civic engagement, community organizations, or subjective sense of belonging, but it does collect data on a great many relevant correlates of community: racial and ethnic group membership; family form and stage in the life cycle; work, income, and reliance on public provision; housing tenure and type; and education and occupation, among others. These data may be supplemented with small area data on party registration and voting, housing values, neighborhood facilities and conditions, and even patterns of reported crime and health problems. While we cannot measure all important aspects of place-based communities, we can measure a great many. The availability of such systematically collected data provides an important baseline against which to compare claims of community that are based on unsystematic, subjective data.

The Center for Urban Research has mapped and analyzed hundreds of measures that might be taken to indicate some aspect of community of interest. Here, for the sake of concise illustration, we restrict ourselves to four clusters:

1. Race-ethnicity-nativity-religion;
2. Income-tenure-family form-poverty-reliance on social services;
3. Education-occupation; and
4. Political engagement and orientation.

These overlap, of course. Different ethno-racial groups are clustered in different parts of the occupational structure with direct consequences for the education levels required and the incomes derived. They also have distinct levels of political engagement and orientation, reflecting their interests. Nonetheless each of these dimensions is to some degree analytically distinct.

The most common way to think about community is to distinguish first by race, then by ethnicity, nativity, and religion. The most basic racial categories include whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians (New York City has comparatively few native Americans). While the Census does not (yet) consider Hispanics to be a race – and currently provides them with the option of choosing any race – in practice, many Hispanics choose to categorize themselves as an “other” race. Demographers and the person on the street tend to unite in classifying all Hispanics as a distinct group and separating them from the other racial groups. However, these four groups are clearly too broad a classification. Each of these groups is characterized by important differences relating to ethnicity or national origin, nativity (i.e. native born or immigrant), and religion. Whites can therefore be broken down into a number of major components, including
white Catholic groups (primarily Italians and Irish), Jews (further distinguished by degree of religiosity), and secular whites. Similarly, blacks may be broken down into African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and Africans; Hispanics include Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Colombians, Ecuadorans, and so on; and Asians include Chinese, Koreans, Indians, Bangladeshis, and Filipinos.

Of course, while black-white segregation remains quite high in New York City, and Hispanics and Asians also live at lower but still significant levels of spatial concentration, groups overlap and intermix and many neighborhoods in New York City have a fairly heterogeneous makeup. So neighborhoods and communities cannot be equated with racial-ethnic groups. Still, one or two groups tend to predominate in any given neighborhood. **Map 1** (in Appendix) depicts the city’s racial-ethnic communities based first on which racial group is the majority or plurality, then which ancestry or language groups are the plurality or majority within that dominant group. For reference, it also shows the proposed city council boundaries (using the final lines adopted on February 6, 2013 by the NYC Districting Commission). While the Census does not record religion, we know that different ancestry and language groups tend to cluster in different religious affiliations. The first cluster, shown on Map 1, of whites with English or Scandinavian ancestries, for example, tend to be Protestant, while those who are Irish, Italian, or speak Polish, tend to be Catholic.

A second way of looking at New York City’s communities involves household form and household income. New York City is characterized by a high degree of income segregation as well as racial segregation. Strong correlations pertain between household income and household form. Multi-income married couples have the highest incomes while single-parent families have the lowest, with people in nonfamily households or living alone (of whom there are a great many in New York, especially in Manhattan), in between. The former tend to own their housing, while most of the latter rent, with the poorest occupying public housing. **Map 2** depicts the predominant household form across Census tracts, while **Map 3** shows household income levels.

New Yorkers are also significantly stratified by educational attainment and occupation, which are in turn closely associated with earnings. While residential patterns based on these characteristics resemble the income patterns in Map 3, however, they are not identical. In other words, the correlation between education and income is not perfect: a fair number of highly educated people may not be in the upper reaches of the income distribution, while other individuals may have higher incomes than their education might suggest. The correspondence between education and occupation is stronger. Another important aspect is the sector in which the occupations are practiced, with the private sector generating more remuneration for a given level of higher education than do the nonprofit or public sectors. Maps 4 and 5 depict several polar patterns: **Map 4** depicts concentrations of highly educated people and professional occupations as well white collar and blue collar occupations. **Map 5** shows health care workers, who tend to have intermediate levels of education.

Finally, election results (mapped here by election districts as opposed to census tracts) and party registration figures are one of the few ways to determine political orientation. Maps 6, 7, and 8 show how the voting results broke down for the 2008 presidential election, the 2009 mayoral general election, and the difference between the mayoral and comptroller votes in 2009.
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(i.e. highlighting areas where a higher share of the people voted for the Democratic Comptroller candidate than for the Democratic mayoral candidate).

Map 6 shows the strongly Democratic orientation of New York City voters when it comes to state and national elections. The voter registration favors Democrats over Republicans by six to one in the city, with more voters declining to state a party than affiliating with the Republican party. Nevertheless, the McCain vote in 2008 shows that the middle class Catholic neighborhoods of Staten Island, South Brooklyn, and southern Queens are the most Republican, with some support as well on Manhattan’s Upper East Side.

Meanwhile, the other communities of the city lean strongly Democratic, particularly in black and Hispanic neighborhoods. The slight majority vote for Mayor Bloomberg in 2009, however, shows that New York City voters do not always follow their party line as much as they do in state and federal elections (see Map 7).

Finally, the difference between the two vote patterns is shown in the final map (Map 8), which highlights the difference between people voting for the Democratic candidate for Comptroller (John Liu), but the Republican candidate for Mayor (Michael Bloomberg). It suggests that the groups most likely to be counted among the ticket-splitters or “Democratic defectors” include the Jewish communities of the outer boroughs, for example Riverdale in the Bronx or Borough Park in Brooklyn, as well, to a lesser degree, as the white middle income professional neighborhoods like the Upper West Side or Park Slope.

None of these four ways of looking at communities of interest in New York City can be taken as dispositive. While there are similarities across all four, they also crosscut each other to some degree. By putting all four ways on display, it is hoped that the reader will see the diversity of ways of understanding community in New York City as well as the distinctive contributions of each way of seeing community. At the same time, we should not privilege patterns fashioned by these systematic descriptors over less systematic, more subjective ways of describing community. After all, the beauty of New York City lies in the fact that it is a beehive of separate small cells, each of which creates and sustains the social lives of their inhabitants. New York is a dense city in which many amenities and facilities can be reached on foot, offering or even requiring interaction with different kinds of people as well as birds of a feather along the way. It offers an amazing diversity of small worlds within one big one.
References


Van Eijk, Gwen (2010), Unequal Networks: Spatial Segregation, Relationships, and Inequality in the City (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press).


Appendix (Maps 1 – 8)

Maps 1 through 8 on the following pages.
MAP 1
Predominant race/ethnicity by tract

- White (English, Scandinavian)
- White (Italian, Irish, and Polish speakers)
- White (Russian, Ukranian; Polish ancestry)
- Black (African American)
- Black (Afro Caribbean)
- Hispanic (Puerto Rican)
- Hispanic (Dominican)
- Hispanic (other Latino immigrant groups)
- Asian (Chinese)
- Asian (South Asian)
- other Asian
- No population

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Source: US Census Bureau, 2007-11 American Community Survey, as analyzed by the Center for Urban Research.
MAP 2
Predominant household form by tract

Married-couple families
- 26.5% - 30%
- 30.1% - 40%
- 40.1% - 50%
- 50.1% - 60%
- 60.1% - 100%

Female-householder family, no husband
- 25.6% - 30%
- 30.1% - 40%
- 40.1% - 50%
- 50.1% - 100%

Other non-family households
- Non-family HHs not living alone

Living alone
- 27.6% - 30%
- 30.1% - 40%
- 40.1% - 50%
- 50.1% - 60%
- 60.1% - 100%

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Source: US Census Bureau, 2007-11 American Community Survey, as analyzed by the Center for Urban Research.
MAP 3

Median household income
(by tract, in 2011 $s)

- $9,502 - $25,000
- $25,000 - $50,000
- $50,000 - $75,000
- $75,000 - $125,000
- $125,000 - $250,001 or more

Council districts

- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference

- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery


NOTE: Estimates are presented regardless of statistical margins of error. The reader should therefore interpret individual tract estimates with caution; the map provides an overall representation of income patterns.
MAP 4
Predominant occupational categories by tract, for the employed population 16 years and older

Managers & Professionals
- 33.8% - 40%
- 40.1% - 50%
- 50.1% - 60%
- 60.1% - 70%
- 70.1% - 100%

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Office, Sales, White Collar Service
- 33.6% - 40%
- 40.1% - 50%
- 50.1% - 60%
- 60.1% - 100%

Blue Collar Service & Production
- 33.6% - 40%
- 40.1% - 50%
- 50.1% - 60%
- 60.1% - 100%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2007-11 American Community Survey, as analyzed by the Center for Urban Research.
MAP 5
Health care workers by tract, as a percent of employed population 16 years and older

Health care workers
- 0% - 2.5%
- 2.6% - 5%
- 5.1% - 10%
- 10.1% - 15%
- 15.1% - 37.4%
- No health care workers

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Source: US Census Bureau, 2007-11 American Community Survey
MAP 6
Percent voting for Obama (2008)
by election district

- under 20%
- 20.1% - 30%
- 30.2% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 80%
- 80.1% - 100%
- No votes recorded

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Source: NYC Board of Elections
MAP 7

Percent voting for Thompson (2009)
by election district
- under 20%
- 20.1% - 30%
- 30% - 50%
- 50.2% - 60%
- 60.1% - 80%
- 80.1% - 100%
- No votes recorded

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 8, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Source: NYC Board of Elections
MAP 8
Ticket Splitting
Voters supporting Republican mayoral candidate *and* Democratic comptroller candidate

Percentage points by which Liu vote exceeded Thompson vote, by election district in 2009 general election

- 5% or less (minimal ticket splitting)
- 5.1% - 20%
- 20.1% - 30%
- 30.1% - 45%
- 45.1% - 100% (most ticket splitting)

Council districts
- Proposed (Feb. 6, 2013)

Reference
- Airports
- Parks / open space / cemetery

Source: Vote difference calculations by Center for Urban Research, based on NYC Board of Elections data